SMT

Swedish Missiological Themes
Svensk MissionsTidskrift

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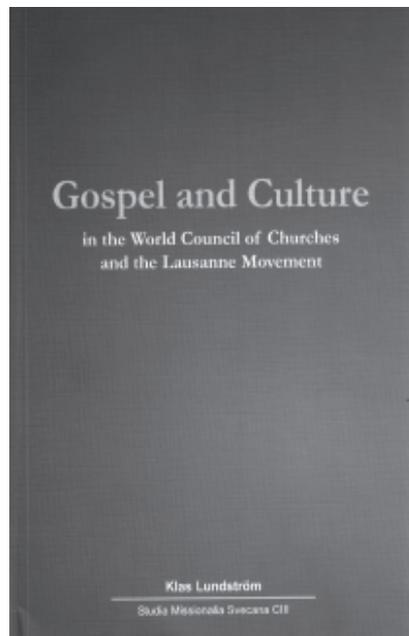
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Mission and Postmodernities

Mika Vähäkangas

The Western intellectual climate is increasingly polyphonic to the extent that even the challenging voices to the great story of Enlightenment science and rationality cannot be described by the term postmodern singularly but rather in plurality. To many an observer of the European religious developments, postmodernities appear as the most significant dimension. When discussing postmodernities among theologians, missiologists or Christians in general, they are viewed with a great variety of approaches ranging from outright rejection through hesitation to eager embrace. The approach, of course, depends to a large extent whether the person concerned abhors the postmodern rejection of grand narratives as a way to the bottomless swamp of relativism or whether (s)he is yearning for liberation from the straitjacket of Enlightenment rationalism. At any rate, postmodernities undeniably pose a challenge to missiological thinking today.

The Nordic Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research (NIME) held its annual conference in Turku/Åbo, Finland August 19-22, 2007. The theme of the conference was "Mission and Postmodernities" which, in turn, had been selected from a list of proposed research topics prepared by the *Towards 2010* working group. As the Edinburgh 1910 centenary approaches, many people involved in missiology and Christian mission have joined their efforts to ponder the state and direction of mission as the momentous occasion approaches. This year's NIME theme can be seen to link not only with that global effort, but also to continental developments. The Association Francophone Oecuménique de Missiologie (AFOM) organized a continental missiological conference, August 24-28, 2006 under the title "Europe après la Lumiére" in which the intellectual situation of the continent was discussed, and it was debated whether "après" should be understood to mean "after" in the temporal sense or in the sense of "according to". The focus tended to be very much on considering the relationship between Enlightenment and postmodernities. In NIME it was felt that it would be worthwhile to continue

the process. The meeting in Turku will, beyond doubt, serve only as one station in this process of studying Christian mission in relation to postmodernities, and more will follow both in each Nordic country and within the region as a whole.

The articles of this special issue of SMT are all papers or comments presented at the NIME conference. The first article of Prof. David Kerr from Lund University locates the process on the historical continuum from Edinburgh 1910 until today. His attempt is not to cover all the possible missiological developments of the 20th century but rather to analyze the core points visible in that conference and how they developed thereafter. In today's voices, the Global South is well represented in Kerr's article, reflecting the historical shift of demographic gravity within Christianity to the Global South.

Dr. Tuomas Martikainen from Åbo Akademi gives the discussion its sociological coordinates by introducing the major theories on religion in postmodern Europe. The picture is far from clear and differing theories compete to interpret the developments that have taken sociologists by surprise. One may well ask today whether Europe is becoming post-secular against all previous predictions. Post-secular in this context does not mean a return to the former type of organized communal and culturally monolithic religion but rather that Europe is facing a bewildering variety of religious phenomena.

Prof. Viggo Mortensen from Aarhus University comments on Martikainen's general overview by proposing a clearer view of the change might be had from outside. Europe looks different to the eyes of an outsider, and it might be seen globally as a peculiar case. Other continents have not followed the European developments. It can be seen that the rest of the world now challenges the supposedly secular Europe, most visibly through Muslim immigration. The future poses many questions for us, but one can hardly question the inevitability of change.

Secular Europe has viewed even itself in a highly selective way. The European mind has often overlooked religion or made it into an individua-listic opinion even in cases where it has not been well based. Søren Kierkegaard is beyond doubt one of the most influential thinkers in today's Europe, and probably the most influential Nordic thinker. He served as a spirited trail-blazer of thought who has provided fuel for many.

Kierkegaard's thought is multifaceted and challenging, opening ever new avenues. Kierkegaard has been interpreted as an extreme individualist to the extent that the idea of mission seems at first far-fetched in his thought. Sometimes he is even cast in the postmodern mould. Prof. Pia Søltoft from Copenhagen University analyzes in her article the way Kierkegaard viewed the possibility of influencing the religious views of another. In her analysis, Kierkegaard does not appear as an isolationist but rather as a person who believes in the possibility and need of influencing the other. Thus for him mission was a needed thing even (or perhaps especially) in Christendom where the preacher is supposed to seduce the listener to follow the truth.

Dr. Olli-Pekka Vainio from Helsinki University continues the analysis of Kierkegaard by discerning how he understood mission towards non-Christians. Vainio purports that in spite of the fact that Kierkegaard held a sincere "pagan" in a higher esteem than an untrue Christian this does not mean that he would have considered the content of faith meaningless. Thus Vainio asserts that a Kierkegaardian missionary approach can be sketched. These two articles on Kierkegaard show that unless one reads him through secular and/or relativist lenses in an anachronistic way, Kierkegaard's thought can serve as a resource of constructing today's missiological thinking. This is noteworthy because his thought is widely used elsewhere and he can thus serve as a bridge between secular isolationist individualism and Christian mission.

This mission following Kierkegaardian thought, or the celebration of alterity and difference found in postmodernities, cannot follow a colonial and Constantinian model in which the other is seen as a potentially the same. Conversion into Christianity in this view can no longer wipe away the otherness and the difference. Prof. F. LeRon Shults from Agder University sketches such a model of mission in which alterity is taken seriously. He argues that this kind of an approach can be supported both philosophically and psychologically, using these as additional dimensions to theological reasoning. According to Shults, Christian mission should not attempt to force 'sameness' but rather appreciate 'otherness'.

Dr. Jyri Komulainen largely approves Shult's views, albeit being wary of the trappings of psychology as sometimes being normative with regards to what is "healthy" and "mature". In this way he further elaborates the need

to accept otherness, including in the traditionally monolithic Nordic ecclesiastic situation.

The appreciation of otherness is a constant challenge to Christian mission attempting to convert. How can the appreciation of otherness and the pressure towards sameness be reconciled when conversion is a goal? Prof. Christine Lienemann-Perrin from University of Basle wrestles with this question balancing the tensions between the positive freedom of religion and the need to avoid unethical proselytism that deteriorates the relations between religions. Thus she proposes that reasonable missionary outreach should be tolerated as well as the right to change or leave religious affiliation. Yet this tolerance may not be misused nor should mission become a pressure to expected converts.

Rev. Atte Helminen reflects upon conversions from a practical point of view and concludes that while in the modern situation one is converted through becoming convinced of the truth of the faith, in a postmodern context one first joins the community and then gradually begins to adhere to its faith.

Among all varieties of churches Pentecostal and charismatic ones are the fastest growing, i.e. claiming more converts than the other churches. This fact begs for an explanation and makes one wonder whether it has something to do with the shift towards postmodernities. Prof. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen from Fuller Theological Seminary explores the relationship between Pentecostalism and postmodernities. Kärkkäinen points out that the experiential nature of Pentecostalism, communitarianism as well as the emphasis on salvation here and now resonate with postmodernities. However, Pentecostalism, in spite of the emphasis on the freedom in the Spirit, are in no way relativistic. After all, Pentecostalism challenges all Christians to reconsider their mission in the light of pneumatology.

Prof. Tormod Engelsviken from MF Norwegian School of Theology adds to Kärkkäinen's picture the point that makes Pentecostalism so special is its way of combining basic Christian assumptions and experientialism. Engelsviken also points out that in much of the Global South, Pentecostalism is pre- rather than postmodern.

Prof. Tinyiko Maluleke from the University of South Africa speaks on the behalf of the majority of Christians from the Global South. There postmodernities are not always very relevant but the critical distance to modernity is taken through postcolonial approaches. They share the postmodern distaste for great stories, namely the stories of colonial supremacy in its various forms. Maluleke makes a postcolonial reading of Israel's conquest of Jericho from the point of view of the indigenous woman, Rahab. In this way he points out that colonialism is not something extrinsic to Christianity, because colonial thought patterns are in the Bible as well. This provokes the question whether postcolonial mission really can exist. Maluleke wonders why Africans stick to the Bible, which has so often served as a means of oppression, and proposes several possible reasons. However, in the end he proceeds to suggest a tentative agenda which could pave the way towards postcolonial mission.

Dr. Auli Vähäkangas from Diaconia University of Applied Sciences points out that in search of postcolonial mission colonialism is still present. This is seen, for example, in the multiple cultural and ideological identities with which Tanzanian Christians juggle. In a similar way, Christian mission struggles between the Cross as the ideal and sinful crusading human mind.

In today's pluralistic Europe otherness is everywhere and Christians must be able to accept that fact. The cognizance and acceptance of this reality, however, does not automatically lead to an unchecked relativism. Rather, it challenges us to re-view our conventional patterns of thought in encountering the other in mission. The Turku/Åbo NIME conference served as a strong exhortation of that truth.

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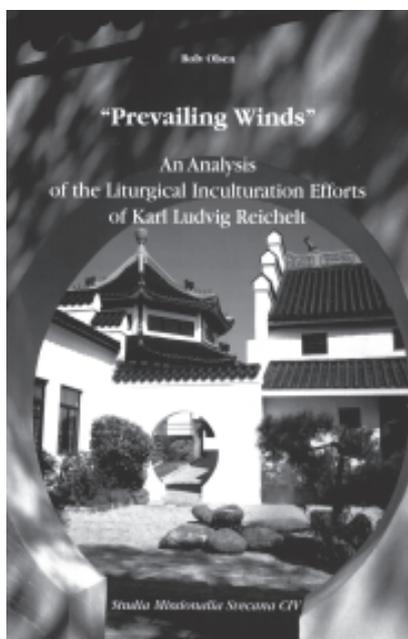
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Changes in the Religious Landscape: European Trends at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century

Tuomas Martikainen

Abstract: This article looks at European trends among religions from the perspective of the sociology of religion. It argues that the locus of religion/religiosity is shifting within the sphere of religious organisations and activity, that the position of religion/spirituality seems to be changing in society at large, and that its boundaries or limits are being questioned. This is taking place in a social environment where international interdependency is growing. It seems that the post-Westphalian order of state-religion relations is being questioned, and there is a search for a new equilibrium in state-religion relations as part of the processes of Europeanisation and globalisation.

Keywords: European Union, migration, congregations, spirituality, law

Religion is appearing increasingly on the agendas of several disciplines, whereas it was rarely mentioned just a decade or two ago.[*] Political scientists are, for example, trying to understand the increased political visibility of religion and its role in relation to different forms of political radicalism.[1] Social scientists analyse the role of religious identities and institutions, especially among new European religious minorities such as Muslims.[2] Evolutionary biologists and psychologists examine the nature of the mind and religion's role in the evolution of humankind, and so on.[3] Simultaneously, scholars in religious studies and theology are either fascinated or horrified by new spiritualities and the waning role of traditional religious institutions in the so-called post-Christian period.[4] Depending on the perspective and the interpretative frame explanations may differ, but

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[*] The author would like to thank Dr Kimmo Ketola and Dr Teemu Taira for their comments on the manuscript.
[1] E.g., AlSayyad & Castells 2002; Roy 2004; Tibi 2002.
[2] E.g., Fetzer & Soper 2005; Maréchal et al. 2003.
[3] E.g., Boyer 2001; Wilson 2002.
[4] E.g., Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Mortensen 2003.

one issue unites all of these, as well as scholars in other disciplines: religion is back on the agenda and this presents a headache for many.

The reasons for these developments are for the most part easy to identify. First, the increased presence of religious communities of immigrant origin, especially Muslim communities, seems to be challenging the traditional view of religion as a private matter and may take extraordinary forms such as religiously motivated terrorism. Related to this are reconceptualisations of state-religion relations, including considerations of the notion of "secularism" in contemporary Europe.[5] Second, the focus on "spirituality" rather than "religiosity" or "religion" is a widespread trend having an effect on both newly established and old communities, and is related to the growing importance of experiential religion as opposed to the religion of reason. Debates and scholarship concerning New Age beliefs and practices, pilgrimage and different forms of alternative expressions of the spiritual or religious centre on this topic.[6] Third, the constant expansion of the religious market in terms of new organisations and actors is viewed as a salient feature of diverse and plural societies.[7] Fourth, these developments are taking place more or less simultaneously in most European countries, albeit in different historical and contextual settings as well as with different degrees of intensity. Discussions of globalisation and transnationalism are important for an understanding of these developments, but increasingly attention is being given to various supranational organisations, especially the European Union and its institutions.[8]

Whereas the reasons for the growing attention being given to religion can easily be identified, scholarship on different central topics remains somewhat confined to specific academic settings and studies of the interrelatedness of these processes are still rare. However, two central observations seem to be at the core of these discussions. First, *the locus of religion/religiosity appears to be shifting within the sphere of religious organisations and activity*, and the debate is about the liberal versus conservative/ fundamentalist or experiential versus rational religion. Second, *the position of religion/spirituality seems to be changing in society at large and its*

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[5] E.g., Byrnes & Katzenstein 2006; Jansen (forthcoming); Koenig 2007.
[6] E.g., Heelas 1996; Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Lyon 2000; Swatos & Tomasi 2002.
[7] E.g., Baumann & Behloul 2005; Davie 2000; Fibiger 2004; Mortensen 2003; Wuthnow 2005.
[8] E.g., Beyer 1994, 2006; Byrnes & Katzenstein 2006; Koenig 2007; Kumar 2006; Levitt 2007.

boundaries or limits are being questioned in, for instance, debates on religious freedom, religion as a security threat, alternative forms of spiritual-medical practice, religion as a market commodity, and so forth. Despite the seeming distance between phenomena such as New Age beliefs and practices and the controversies over wearing headscarves, there are important linkages yet to be uncovered in a more systematic way.

The aim of this article is to identify key aspects of current trends in and debates on religion in Europe, and to suggest potentially fruitful ways to combine research in different fields of scholarship to achieve a better understanding of a possible major shift in the social position of religion. This article begins with a brief presentation of the main strands of the sociological study of modern religion, which is followed by a survey of four distinct academic areas of discussion that appear to be challenging aspects of the earlier views that have dominated European studies of religion. These raise questions relating to the growing roles of independent congregations, new forms of spirituality, immigrant religions and the legacy of European secularism. Finally, some ideas on their implications regarding the place of religion in contemporary Europe will be presented.

Interpreting Religion in the Late or Post-modern Europe

Meredith McGuire and James Spickard identify four main theoretical traditions in the sociology of religion that aim at understanding religion in the contemporary world. They are the narratives of *secularisation*, *religious reorganisation*, *religious individualisation* and the *supply side of religious markets* or *religious economies*.[9] These will serve as a point of reference in the following discussion of the new challenges facing religion in Europe, as they contain the background to and basis of many of the later observations. This presentation is by no means exhaustive, but it throws light on dominant strands of current research, despite the fact that theorising on the subject is highly creative at the moment.

Secularisation theories are replete with different emphases. Generally speaking, the theories emphasise *institutional/functional differentiation*,

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[9] McGuire & Spickard 2002. In a later work on the same topic, Spickard (2006) rightly adds fundamentalism as a fifth narrative. However, for reasons of space, I shall leave aside discussion of fundamentalism.

societalisation, *privatisation* or *individualisation* as part of the modernisation process that implies a shrinking of the space within which religious institutions and authority can operate in society. *Pluralism* and *rationalisation* are two further keywords which, it is claimed, undermine or relativise the authority of self-evident, single truths. Basically all secularisation theories claim that religion's social position has changed so that it plays a reduced role in society at large and has a more restricted sphere within which it is meaningful. How deep and far reaching these consequences are remains a somewhat open question and there are different views on the matter. Europe has been the heartland of secularisation theories that have focused especially on the dominant churches and have methodologically concentrated on large-scale quantitative surveys.[10]

The **religious reorganisation** thesis is a newer, US-based theoretical tradition that emphasises the role of independent congregations and finds its legitimacy both in the declining membership of traditional denominations and in the abundance of new charismatic, evangelical, fundamentalist and immigrant communities that have grown in number in many parts of the world. The claim is that religion is not waning, but rather that its institutional location is changing to more locally based institutions. The recent rise in *congregational studies* is a symptom of this interest and they have lately received growing interest in Europe. The paradigm has inspired research on immigrant communities as well as on different kinds of contemporary Christian movements outside the mainstream churches. Qualitative case studies are often found among these studies.[11]

Theories focusing on **religious individualisation** are based on, or inspired by, Thomas Luckmann's account of the changing social form of religion which emphasises *privatization* and *individual autonomy* in the current age, and is paraphrased as *invisible religion*. In this tradition, religion is merely changing its form and the weakening of traditional institutions is mistakenly interpreted as secularisation. Studies of new spiritualities in particular, for example those of New Age spirituality, follow this line of thought. Concepts such as *pick & choose religiosity*, *religion à la carte* and *bricolage* are typical of the vocabulary used in these studies and these theories have links

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[10] McGuire & Spickard 2002, 285-289; see also Furseth & Repstad 2006, 75-96.
[11] McGuire & Spickard 2002, 289-292; see also Ammerman 1997; Guest et al. 2004; Warner 1993, 1998.

to broader background narratives, such as *consumer culture/society* or *Erlebnisgesellschaft*. This is also the paradigm that has been substantially inspired by *post-modern* thought and its often functionalist understanding of religion sometimes seems all encompassing. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used in these studies, but interest is focused more often than not outside traditional religious institutions, even though interest in mainline churches appears to be growing currently.[12]

The **religious economies** approach, or the so-called **supply side of religious markets** or **rational choice** approach to religion, has been popular in the United States, but it is increasingly being used also in Europe. This approach takes the *competition* and *regulation* of religious organisations and markets as one of its main points of departure. It focuses on the *supply* of religious goods and entrepreneurship. Scholars following this approach also claim that secularisation theorists – their main opponents – have not focused sufficiently on the suppliers of religious goods and neglected the role of legal and other restrictions on religious vitality. There is a strong tendency in this paradigm to view practitioners of religion as *consumers* who make rational choices, based on their religious preferences, if the opportunity arises. Many studies using this approach are based on large-scale quantitative data.[13]

These main narratives or research paradigms do not completely exclude each other despite the fact that the religious economy paradigm, in particular, claims to provide an overall explanatory system. Their main focuses are often on slightly different issues and this explains their sometimes contradicting views. However, based on existing studies, it is evident that all of the above paradigms can be supported by empirical evidence, at least in specific contexts. Also the implicit or explicit way religion is defined makes a major difference to what is considered important, even though it is less often spelled out. Currently there is an ongoing and rather active debate on the limits of each of these approaches, but this issue is still far from being resolved.[14] My interpretation of the situation is that secularisation and religious economy theorists are currently trying to redefine their own positions in relation to each other, whereas the focus in religious

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[12] McGuire & Spickard 2002, 292-295; see also Featherstone 1991; Luckmann 1967, 1999; Lyon 2000; Schulze 1992; Slater 1997.
[13] McGuire & Spickard 2002, 295-299; see also Stark & Finke 2000.
[14] E.g., Bruce 1997; Stolz 2005.

reorganisation and individualisation approaches is still in a more experimental and explorative phase. Both of these approaches are also more interested in religious phenomena outside the traditional churches. Nevertheless, all four approaches are to some extent involved in a mutual exchange of ideas. In a European context it seems that the majority of researchers accept many elements of secularisation narratives, but they feel that their ability to describe, analyse or explain all current changes needs revision. Thus, the following discussion of challenges to existing interpretations takes as its implicit point of departure phenomena that have not received much attention in mainline secularisation theories.[15]

Challenges to Existing Interpretations of Religion in Europe

Sociology of religion, like the social sciences in general, has been historically concentrating on the experiences of the United States and Western Europe. For example, the debate between proponents of the religious economy and secularisation theories is often seen as a symptom of the differences between these two parts of the world and of the kind of research which is regarded as fruitful in each.[16] However, the platform for discussion becomes remarkably different if a more global approach is adopted and the same applies if the experiences of the former Soviet bloc or those of transition countries, as well as Turkey, are taken into account in Europe.[17] Thus, if we are to understand "religion in Europe" we should be careful in limiting the scope of the argument as the experiences and social, legal and political positions of religions are quite different in different parts of Europe, despite the existence of many common elements.[18] The following presentation will draw mainly on the experiences of a limited number of Western and Northern European countries. However, we must also understand that some of the developments in these countries are intrinsically related to developments taking place elsewhere in neighbouring regions and globally, and vice versa.

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[15] This is not to say that the phenomena in question would not have been noticed, but rather that they are often not seen as significant enough.

[16] McGuire & Spickard 2002.

[17] For a global view, see Beyer 1994, 2006; Norris & Inglehart 2004. For views focusing on Europe, see Byrnes & Katzenstein 2006; Davie 2000; Roudometof et al. 2005.

[18] E.g., Robbers 2005.

From State Churches to Local Congregations

The religious reorganisation thesis has not yet been fully incorporated into European discussions of the changing institutional arrangements of religious organisations. It appears that this is mainly related to the somewhat marginal role of independent congregations in most countries and to the difficulty in obtaining data on these groups which are seldom nationally organised or well documented. While the observation of the marginal position of small congregations in relation to mainstream religion in European countries is correct, this does not detract from the fact that we have witnessed and are witnessing an increasing pluralisation of the religious market across the continent. Pentecostal, evangelical, charismatic and fundamentalist Christian congregations are mushrooming. Equally rapid has been the growth new religious movements of Asian origin and various New Age groups that have played a significant role in bringing religious and spiritual diversity to local societies while transgressing and redefining the boundaries of what "religion" has customarily meant. In addition, the increase of immigrant-based communities of various faiths, such as Orthodox, Protestant and African Instituted Churches, Muslim communities and brotherhoods, as well as Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Mandaean and Voodoo communities, is by no means a minor phenomenon.[19] If this situation has no other significance for religious life in Europe, it has definitively changed the availability and presence of religious diversity on the continent to a level that has not previously been seen.

The increasing body of scholarly literature on local religious diversity reveals how rich, varied and multiple-current religious life is in European cities. Nevertheless, the absolute number of those involved usually accounts for only a few percent of national populations.[20] However, the picture starts to change when we look at the most religiously active part of the population: these minor groups form a large share of the religiously active core group in society. In Finland, for example, almost one third of those who are most religiously active are members of minority religions, even though they form less than five per cent of the population.[21] Furthermore, despite their limited

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[19] Davie 2000.
[20] E.g., Fibiger 2004; Kumar 2006; Martikainen 2004. For a list of various locally initiated projects of religious mapping, see http://www.diaspora.fi/projects.html.
[21] Niemelä 2003, 214.

direct contact with the larger population, many of the ideas promoted by new communities are rather widespread amongst the population, including the belief in reincarnation. This seems to imply that in terms of religious activity, ideas and local religious life, these communities are highly significant despite the fact that they are rarely visible in national statistics. Thus, the marginality of these groups is in part an illusion created by the focus on the level of membership and participation in a particular country, whereas belief patterns already tell a different story. If the focus were on the most religiously active segment of the population these groups would receive more serious attention in analysis of contemporary European religion.

What makes the study of these developments highly difficult, or at least time-consuming, is the difficulty of obtaining reliable data about these groups and those involved in them. Due to a common lack of national organisation, varied organisational patterns that do not always follow accord with statisticians' wishes, the communities' local focus and sometimes even their disinterest in research, the collection of data requires methods that are yet to become established parts of systematic data collection. As the plethora of different locally oriented studies of religious diversity show, a more systematic way of comparable data production has yet to emerge. Such efforts have been made in several places, but the lack of comparability of data still remains a problem. This is one of the main challenges in getting a stronger grip on the potential of change that these congregations may have in Europe.[22] For example, in the planning phase of the currently ongoing Religion in Finland Project, considerable time was put into creating a data collection system that would provide a systematic platform by which to study and survey highly different religious/spiritual entities.[23]

R. Stephen Warner has argued that in the US context new largely independent congregations are becoming part of the mainstream of American religion.[24] Such a situation seems remote from that in Europe, but the expansive growth of local congregations is still a phenomenon that should be acknowledged. These congregations form a rich and highly diverse grassroots religious plurality, the broader consequences of which are yet to be more thoroughly analysed. Despite the fact that in relation to the population as a whole the

[22] E.g., Mortensen 2006.
[23] Ketola & Martikainen 2006, see also http://www.uskonnot.fi/.
[24] Warner 1993, 1994, 1998.

rise of independent congregations is a rather limited phenomenon, among religious organisations its significance is far greater since these congregations have given rise to new working methods, new topics of discussion and have often been able to attract the most active religious participants in a given place. For instance, the massive broadening of the activities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the post-war times Finland was to a large extent inspired by imported models which were first employed by non-church actors. Thus, small-scale local activities provide an important stream of new innovations, some of which will be adopted by other organisations and become part of the mainstream.[25]

New Spiritualities and the Commodification of Religion

Related to the increase of religious diversity and to the growth of the religious and spiritual market place there has been, it is claimed, a shift toward spirituality, even a *'spiritual revolution'* to use a term coined by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead.[26] Much of the debate draws its inspiration from divergence in the use of the words 'religion/religious' and 'spiritual'. Following Heelas, "'Religion' can be defined in terms of obedience to a transcendent God and a tradition which mediates his authority; *spirituality* as experience of the divine as immanent in life."[27] The debate is based on empirical evidence regarding both the waning role of traditional churches and the many forms of religion-related activities preferring to describe themselves as spiritual. It is important to note, however, that the new spiritualities paradigm does not restrict itself to the study of new forms spiritual expressions, such as walking on fire, alternative therapies and Tarot, but also has something to say about changes among more traditional manifestations of religion. The claim is that growing interest in healing, the arts and so forth among many mainstream churches is just another form of the same phenomenon.

Whereas secularisation theorists merely view this new spirituality as confirmation of the declining role of religion in general, scholars such as Linda Woodhead take a contrary view. The rise of new spiritualities is a sign of the continued vitality of religion – now termed as 'spirituality' – as

[25] Martikainen 2004, 109-124.
[26] Heelas & Woodhead 2005.
[27] Heelas 2002, 358.

well as a symptom of a broad cultural change in Western societies. The background narratives of these changes are presented somewhat differently, but they all emphasise individualisation and individual autonomy as opposed to externally imposed beliefs and structures. There are also general tendencies which concentrate on the immanent rather than the transcendent, experience rather than reason, and self rather than community. This is the *subjective turn* of late or post-modernity in which notions such as 'life force', 'energy' and 'holism' dominate.

Contemporary Western life is characterised by consumption within a market economy. The rise of consumer society is closely related to the ideology of *consumerism*. According to Robert Bocock, consumerism "is the active ideology that the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences" that has moved to a central position in Western societies during the post-war period, but it is still seen "as a means for the fulfilment of human living, but not as the sole goal of social, cultural and economic life".[28] Additionally, the post-modern stage of consumption is characterised by differentiated markets and segmented consumption patterns. Theoretically, the market or mall is free and open to everybody. In practice, the market is segmented, consists of various sub-markets and is not equally available to everyone.

Apart from surviving traditional religious components, much of modern consciousness is rooted in the cultivation of emotions and sensations. Topics arising in the subjective experiences of life in contemporary society are picked up, reformulated and packaged in easily digestible portions and distributed on a local, regional and even global basis. The producers of such goods have often been described as *'audience'* or *'client cults'*.[29] The audience cult is a diffuse and loosely, if at all, organised group of people that might occasionally gather for a lecture, but is mainly active through, for example, the consumption of books and magazines. The shared interest can be quite diverse and incorporate many diffuse elements. The client cult is an equally loosely organised group that is united by an interest in a therapy, service, product and so forth. The central relationship is the one of consultant and client.[30]

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[28] Bocock 199, 7.
[29] Bruce 1997, 198.
[30] York 1995, 259-260.

All this seems to undermine the role of traditional religious organisations since even the word 'religion' has been discarded as something outdated and replaced with the more up-to-date 'spirituality'. Although this is already common knowledge, less attention has been given to another obvious question. If the role and locus of religion is indeed changing, does this have implications for the legal and institutional position of traditional religion in society? At first glance, this does not appear to be the case as new spiritualities seldom challenge existing institutional boundaries, but rather ignore them. However, debates, for example, about the role of alternative therapies in relation to the medical profession or whether some new spiritualities (e.g., Scientology and Wicca) can indeed be approved as legitimate religions have shown that the challenge is felt in different sectors of society. What is certain though is that the societal system, including its gatekeepers, has been forced to react.

Immigrant Governance, Ethno-religious Diversity and Politicised Identities

Despite the large scale of immigration to many European countries in the post-World War II period immigrants are still a small minority in most parts of the continent. Only in some urban areas do they form a large proportion or even a majority of the local population.[31] Nevertheless, there is no doubt that immigration has made a large impact on national and religious life both in terms of the increased presence of new religious actors and the debates it has engendered in the public sphere. Scholars focusing on local religious diversity have forcefully pointed to the increase of immigrant congregations and other religious organisations as in the previously mentioned the religious reorganisation paradigm, but beyond this there is a broad discussion about the implications of immigrant religions. Academics working on international migration, integration, ethnicity, security, the media and so forth have increasingly taken religion into account as one salient feature of immigrant populations.

Beyond religious organisations, issues of social belonging and identities have been central for some time. Identity politics have different national and regional histories based on, among other things, country-specific processes of nation-building, colonial legacy and immigration history.

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[31] Castles & Miller 2003.

However, a pan-European trend has emerged during the last decades which, especially since 9/11, has made *religious identity*, especially that of Muslims, *the* central marker of people's lives. There has been a shift in focus from class, linguistic, ethnic and racial identities to religious ones. In discussing contemporary multiculturalism, Gerd Baumann reminds us of the essentialist traits in those construction processes that reify and make it possible to speak of "*the* Muslim community" or "*the* attitudes of *the* Muslims".[32] Despite the arbitrary nature of such constructions, they can play a significant role in public debates and have implications for applied policy, as the cases of "religious profiling" terrorist suspects have shown.

The process of the increased political visibility of religion in Europe can, to a certain degree, be explained by the "maturing", permanent settlement and organisation of immigrant communities and by the growth of the second and third generations which has given rise to discussion about identity, belonging and social cohesion; but much of this increased political visibility has to be attributed to postcolonial and post-Cold War religiously motivated political violence and action in different parts of the world which have received significant global media attention. There is no doubt that religion currently is more on the political agenda than previously, at least as a phenomenon to be taken note of, even if it is not always that important in the end.[33] In Europe, this development is visible in such diverse issues as debates on the acceptability/non-acceptability of headscarves, the building of immigrant religious shrines, school education, integration and family law.[34]

Hence, religion has become a factor to be taken into consideration in immigrant governance. This has lead to the creation of a wealth of institutional arrangements in Europe which often identify themselves as interfaith, civilisational, intercultural or multicultural forums of debate and reconciliation. Another related phenomenon is the creation of 'representative' bodies that take part in government sponsored actions and negotiations which can be seen as attempts to domesticate cultural anomalies by incorporation. Thus, the governance or '*governmentalisation*' of immigrant religions is currently a major concern.[35] A mainly invisible but

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[32] Baumann 1999, 70.
[33] Haynes 2002.
[34] Jonker & Amiraux 2006.
[35] Dassetto, Ferrari & Maréchal 2007; Dean 1999.

apparently highly influential tool of religious governance is used by European police and security institutions in an effort to tame and prevent religious radicalism and terrorism, especially among Muslims. Because of the secretive nature of these activities it is only possible to speculate about their effect on intracommunity relations, organisational developments and the long-term result of "religious profiling".

A further, and still under analysed, feature of immigrant religions is the effect of the increasing *diversification of immigration*. Whereas the post-war migration was dominated by a few ethno-national groups that varied due to the historical circumstances between countries, a more recent trend is referred to by Steven Vertovec as *'super-diversity'*. The concept implies, among other things, a dramatic growth in immigrant diversity in terms of their country of origin, ethnicity, language, religion, cultural practices, values and so forth. This means that issues relating to immigrant religions will increasingly become more complex and topical.[36]

Immigration has not only touched minority religions, it has also influenced mainline churches. The internal multiculturalism in established churches has received relatively little attention in contrast to other religious groups. However, on a European level, immigrants with a Christian background form the majority of all immigrants. Phenomena, such as the migration of Poles to the UK, create major impulses within a national Catholic community that can remain to a large extent invisible because fewer new institutions and spokespersons are needed. The exotism related to immigrant religions has disproportionately directed attention away from established religions.

In sum, the settlement of immigrants and the growing number of their offspring have given rise to a number of interrelated developments in a social environment where religion is increasingly seen as significant. The politicisation of religious identities is counterbalanced by the increasing efforts of religio-cultural governance, reaching extreme forms in religious profiling and activities of the secret services. Simultaneously, immigrant communities are creating new forms of religious activity which for most can be understood as cultural and structural adaptations to new host societies, but which also challenge existing perceptions of religious activity.[37] It also

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[36] Vertovec 2007.
[37] E.g., Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000; Martikainen 2004.

appears, mainly due to growing immigration, that the full impact of these challenges is yet to be seen.

Secularism and Europe

Taking into account the strong post-Westphalian and post-Enlightenment tradition of modern state–church separation in Europe, and considering how deeply the relationship is embedded in the universalistic rhetoric of the European political experience, it is highly surprising that there has been a resurgence of state–religion debates in the recent years. Whereas state–church relations were on the agenda from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, the focus in current debates has partially shifted away from particularistic, nation-bound discussions to a broader European discussion of the place of religion in European history, identity, culture and legislation. It is now time to question the self-evident and culturally Western system of religion in Europe which Jeffrey Haynes describes in the following way:

> [N]ot least because the very idea of a prevailing state–church dichotomy is culture bound. Not only is the concept of 'church' a Christian rooted notion; the modern understanding of 'state' is also deeply rooted in post-Reformation European political experience. […] [T]he tension and the debate over church-–state relationship are uniquely Western phenomena, present in the ambivalent dialectic of 'render therefore unto Ceasar the things which be Ceasar's and unto God the things which be God's (Luke 21:25).[38]

Are we to see the creation of a post-secular Europe, as Jose Casanova asks, in the name of ethno-religious equality or is it a question of an emerging global system of religion as Peter Beyer suggests?[39]

However this development unfolds, it is apparent that discussions are directly connected to the enlargement of Europe and to the increase of the Muslim population on the continent, including Turkey's EU candidacy, that the socio-legal position of religion has been made one issue to be resolved as part of the Europeanisation process.[40] In addition, we should not forget the earlier controversies related to new religious movements in several European

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[38] Haynes 2002, 318
[39] Beyer 1994, 2006; Casanova 2006.
[40] Koenig 2007.

countries that raised many similar questions of what can, should or could be accepted. It is equally obvious that the debate is of only slight direct relevance to the new spiritualities. The apolitical nature of most new forms of spirituality, with their tendency to find support among the educated middleclass, does not usually lead to the existing boundaries of religion being challenged from a political point of view, even though the case is much more controversial when seen from the perspective of established religions.

A specific feature of the European secularist tradition helps us to understand that it is not the new spiritualities, but rather immigrant religions that have given rise to a discussion of state-religion relations. Post-Reformation developments in Christian, especially Protestant, churches emphasised interiorised and belief-oriented religiosity over and against what they perceived to be a mechanical, exterior set of practices. This division can also be defined as the difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Clearly the major thrust in new spiritualities is a focus on internal, private beliefs and welfare, but this is much less so among many immigrant religions where the ritualistic, practice-oriented side is stronger. There is obviously much evidence for a Protestantisation of religion among immigrants, but also for the continuing importance of 'exterior' practice.[41] It is the public practice of religion that has created most controversies, rather than what people believe. As this situation of immigrant religions is coupled with social problems related to integration, discrimination, social welfare and different views on gender roles the focus of immigrant religions becomes understandable.

Matthias Koenig suggests that one – hitherto little noticed – field of activity that may in fact be in the forefront of these changes is the *'transnational legal sphere'* in which the discussion of *freedom of religion* also take place. Before entering that, let Peter Beyer remind us of the two interrelated but separate meanings inherent in the debates on *religious freedom*: (1) what should be considered as religion in the first place (that might eventually lead to public recognition, status and benefits) and (2) what are boundaries of acceptable religious behaviour and influence.[42] Although European jurisprudence – including the European Court of Human Rights – has continuously ruled that national state-church/religion relations are matters of national sovereignty (including the right to define what is regarded as

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[41] Beyer 2006, Jansen (forthcoming).
[42] Beyer 2006, 285-286.

'religion'), there are ways in which legislation on religion has filtered through as part of the Europeanisation process. The *Framework Employment Directive* (2000), for example, includes measures against discrimination in the labour market on the basis of religion. Even though matters such as these do take on national characteristics in their implementation, they nevertheless result in common agendas being adopted across Europe as well as in the political debates in candidate countries for EU membership. This is an important observation, because the legal sphere has been the main medium of European integration.[43] Following Beyer, it can be said that whereas the acceptability of a certain religiously motivated action has been questioned it is unclear as to whether this has anything to do with the way 'religion' is understood in legal contexts.

According to Koenig, Europeanisation produces both convergence and divergence. The legal sphere and legal professionals play a central role in the interpretation and implementation of new regulations, but also certain religious and non-religious lobbying groups in Brussels have a more important role to play in the framing of relevant questions than national institutions. However, Member States use their creativity to accommodate the requirements of harmonisation to national political and cultural circumstances so that a degree of difference is found in their final implementation. The process itself has also led to a reframing of religion's part in the supranational mosaic of the European Union:

> Europeanization as such seems to produce national divergences. Both political actor constellations and the dynamics of European identity constructions have continuously put emphasis on historical church-state-relations. Not accidentally did the reference to a common "religious heritage" in the *Charta on Basic Rights* and in the *Draft Constitution* give rise to strong inter-governmental controversy. Under institutional conditions of a de-composition of classical statehood and national identity, church-state-relations seem to be re-interpreted as symbols of national distinctiveness. In combination with increased religious plurality, triggered notably by processes of migration, this does at least to some extent explain the intensity of contemporary struggles over publicly visible religion […]. It is not only the scope of religious authority over individuals and groups that is at issue in these contemporary struggles, but also the religious component of collective identities.[44]

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[43] Koenig 2007.
[44] Koenig 2007.

To sum up, European secularism has received new challenges that, on the one hand, aim to domesticate new religious impulses, and, on the other hand, to put religion higher on the political agenda. The supranational Europeanisation process is currently creating new institutional settings for religion that have an increasing role in national decision-making. How it will develop is currently unclear, but it seems that many national developments only become understandable when the activities of the emerging, transnational, legal professionals specialising in issues of human rights, religious freedom and anti-discrimination, are taken into account.

From 'post-Christian' to 'post-secular' Europe?

Let us now return to the two general observations made in the introduction that contemporary debates on religion seem to share two common standpoints: (1) that the locus of religion/religiosity appears to be shifting within the sphere of religious organisations and activity; and (2) that the position of religion/spirituality seems to be changing in society at large and its boundaries or limits are being questioned.

1) The religious system is currently experiencing a number of different challenges. Independent congregations, immigrants and new spiritual entrepreneurs are bringing under explored dynamics into local settings while mainline churches battle with declining membership. New spiritualities are challenging the locus of religious behaviour both inside and outside established churches.

(2) The social position of religion in society is also under pressure from a variety of directions. Immigrants are challenging the established place of religion in public life and in identity politics. New spiritualities are testing the boundaries of several sectors of society, including the medical profession. Supranational legal profession is bringing new elements to established state-religion relations.

All of this is taking place in a social environment where international interdependency is growing and the consequences of events in distant places can be rapidly felt on the other side of the planet. To sum up, the place of religion is currently under pressure due a number of different – even contradictory – developments. The same applies to the current understanding of these developments which seem, at least, to be shaking the foundations of the post-Westphalian order of state-religion relations. It is worth noting that

some of the driving forces behind current developments are outside the scope of the main actors, be they traditional religious institutions or new spiritual entities: transnational legal professionals are doing their work in supranational courts and committees, the governance of immigrant religious communities is sometimes carried out by secret services, and the regulators of the medical profession are redefining the limits of secularism. Simultaneously, the ever increasing religious and spiritual market has created a situation in which it is increasingly challenging to identify or follow the main trends. Even though some of these developments may be insignificant in the long run, others may well not be. No wonder religion is back on the agenda.

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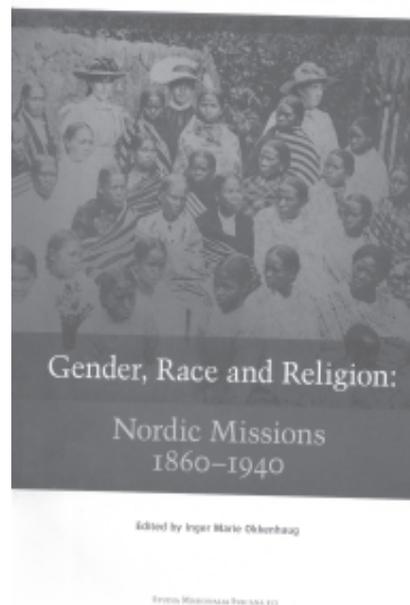
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Mission and Religious Change in Postmodernity: Reflections on Tuomas Martikainen's Viewpoints

Viggo Mortensen

Abstract: This commentary article sketches the European religious situation through making use of varied points of view. The European situation is analysed from outside by David Jenkins and Lamin Sanneh who contest the idea of Europe as an endlessly secularising continent. The Danish cartoon crisis shows that Islam has a strong presence in Europe, including the Nordic countries. Viewed from Latin America, however, the question of Islam does not appear all-encompassing. Religion is back on the European agenda, but what is to be seen is whether Christianity changes to conform with Muslim approaches to religion or whether there will be a Protestantised Euro-Islam.

Postmodernity is an elusive category. That is why the proposal for a study theme in relation to the Edinburgh 2010 celebration uses the term in plural: Mission and Postmodernities thus indicating that the notion covers many aspects. The notion of postmodernity was introduced in order to explain the societal changes in the eighties and the nineties away from a universalized western thinking grounded in rationality and objectivity towards a fluid, fluffy and ambivalent post- or late modernity. The death of grand narratives gave way to a host of smaller narratives. There is not only one philosophy or world view that can claim to be true; there are more and everybody can stake a claim to truth that might not hold for everyone but it can be true at least for the individual.

For Christian mission this could at the outset be felt as a relief. Battered by postcolonial criticism it would be nice to be able to give way to post modernity that allows everyone to propagate a wider variety of viewpoints. But with second thoughts it will be detrimental to Christian mission not to be able to answer to the truth claim of the Christian gospel. For in reality it turns out that nobody can live without any beliefs that they hold as true.

The religious marketplace in Europe

The enduring impact of postmodernism on religion is a feeling that every-thing is changing and up for grabs. Let us take Europe as an example. Obviously conflicting tendencies can be observed. The former majority religion, Christianity, is in rapid decline and suffers marginalisation. Other religions like Islam and Buddhism experience growth and acceptance. One can observe both privatization and de-privatization leading to an increased eclecticism on the background of a weakening of the traditional family structures of religious transmission. The ensuing fragmentation of the personal religious structure raises the question if it is at all possible in a modern European context to share common beliefs. The market for symbolization has been liberalized like all other markets and when the institutional governing systems of truth are weakened then the individuals are on the line. That can lead some people to move towards more structured religious communities, groups segregating and taking refuge into "bunker values" or "refuge identities". Thus individualization can paradoxically lead to the constitution or the invention of small closed community identities and strengthening of traditionalist and fundamentalist trends within the religious traditions. This also constitutes a crucial political issue for society as a whole and a challenge for democracy.

Moreover, pluralism can lead to relativisation. When more than one faith is recognized all religions are being relativised, which again leads to secularisation and indifference. Others will focus on the supply side and stress that when pluralism increases the supply, then people are given a choice and "sale" is stimulated. Religion is then no longer a matter of necessity, but a question of choice to be considered in connection with choice of life style. Sometimes people make the choice blindly or they may even take on something by tradition. At other times people will – like in other consumer cases – make an informed choice, by which the function of religion in the modern society plays an important role. Scholars of sociology have brought forward the terms that religion may take care of the "collective memory", the "common discourse" or the "social capital". But one question remains: What provides the coherence of societies? Can consumerism and entertainment fulfil that role? Religion has in many societies played the role of giving coherence and identity to a given society. The Christian church used to and can, in certain cases, still administer part of this social capital

in today's western society, but the share is declining and declining rapidly because faith does not lead to commitment and taking responsibility.

The changes in the religious landscape in twenty-first century Europe which Tuomas Martikainen describes pose great challenges to missiological thinking. Is what we are experiencing decline, revival, recycling or transformation of religion? When we study and analyze cultural diversity and religious pluralism it is possible to foresee a number of consequences for society, the individuals and the established religious institutions.

The consequences for **society** can be explored in relation to such questions as: firstly, the role of religion in the public domain, including civil religion and the legal framework concerning freedom of religion; and secondly, the governing of the relationship between church and state and the recognition of religious minorities.

The consequences for **individuals** can be explored in relation to the so called "return of religion". The reinvention of religion that is happening in contemporary Europe manifests itself in many forms: in the emergence of different forms of fundamentalisms and in a looser turn to spirituality. Individuals are often caught in between and we see a development of hybrid identities and multiple belongings.

The changes in the religious landscape have consequences for **religious institutions**. The established religious institutions in Europe, i.e. the churches, are undergoing dramatic changes as they try to accommodate new realities. A top priority is to study how they develop strategies for building interreligious relations by way of a dynamic theology of religions. New ecclesial models adapted to the changing religious and cultural landscape are tested. Christian and other religious diasporic communities contribute immensely to the new religious landscape in Europe.[1]

Megatrends and Models

The driving forces behind this development towards diversity and pluralism are well known factors:

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[1] This research program is further described in Mortensen 2007.

- Globalisation followed by localisation
- Urban industrialisation and other macro structural tendencies that lead to a pluralisation of the religious spectrum
- Secularisation followed by de-secularisation or the return of religion
- Mediatisation & marketisation and other midrange structural tendencies
- Individualisation & hybridization and other micro social consequences that turn religion into a commodity that you choose in accordance with personal preference. These developments are often referred to with such keywords as transit and bricolage.

Some will, upon this background, paint a very grim prospect at least for the majority of religion.

Sometimes we see things more clearly when a new perspective is employed. Recently the situation in Europe has been the subject of two very adept American observers of the European missiological scene. In the last issue of the leading missiological journal *International Bulletin of Missionary Research (IBMR 31/3 July 2007)* the religious situation in Europe is in focus under the heading: *Europe: Christendom Graveyard or Christian Laboratory?* The main articles have titles such as *Godless Europe?* by Philip Jenkins (2007) and *Can Europe be saved?* by Lamin Sanneh (2007). The notion of Eurabia is mentioned. Just to give you an impression here are a couple of citations:

> Will the rapid pace of dechristianization push Europe to the fringes of the Muslim world as Eurabia? Will Spain revert to Islam? Will Britain become North Pakistan, France the Islamic Republic of New Algeria, Spain the Moorish Emirate of Iberia, Germany the new Turkey? Will Brussels and Belgium become Belgistan. Will Italy and Albania merge to become a new Albanian Islamic Federation? As Libya´s president Qaddafi asserts: "There are signs that Allah will grant Islam victory in Europe without swords, without guns, without conquests. The fifty million Muslims of Europe will turn it into a Muslim continent within a few decades.[2]

A more thorough analysis and documentation is presented in Philip Jenkins' book *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Jenkins 2007) This is the third volume of his ambitious trilogy examining religion in global perspective. There was *The Next Christendom: The*

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[2] Sanneh 2007, 121.

Coming of Global Christianity (2002), followed by *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (2006). In *God's Continent,* Jenkins seeks to counter what he views as the excessively dismal, even alarmist, analysis of the future of Europe. He stresses that both Christianity and Islam face real difficulties in surviving within Europe's secular cultural ambience in somewhat historic forms. Jenkins rightly reminds us of the force of historical contingencies that can be neither anticipated nor controlled. But the conflicts we have had so far are intra-European struggles within an indisputably Christian narrative. Deists, atheists, and sceptics in that narrative are unmistakably Christian deists, atheists, and sceptics. Islam is, and understands itself to be, a militant counter narrative. It is, to use our academic jargon, the "other," and it is an "other" with no history of multicultural sympathy with the other to which it is "other."

Jenkins says European Christianity must accommodate itself to being a "creative minority." In relation to Islam, that sounds an awful lot like being a *dhimmi*, in this case joined to secularism's toleration of Christians so long as they mind their manners, which means that Christians agree that their faith is a private religious preference without public consequence. As a whole Jenkins presents us with a thought provoking overview that also should encourage reflections within religious institutions.

The Danish Case: Orientalism vs. Occidentalism

In Denmark we have gone through a specific learning experience. I am talking about the so called Mohammed or cartoon crisis that I here will see as an expression of Orientalism. An old adage within the ecumenical movement states that it is the world that is writing the agenda of the church. Today there can be no doubt that in Europe it is radical Islam which is writing the agenda of the world. Thus it should also be radical Islam that should be writing the agenda of the church. Due to several factors, and among them a tendency towards political correctness, this has up till now not been the case, but there are indications that things are changing. I am thinking of the new emphasis within the Catholic church of reciprocity and the clearer voice coming out of the German churches. The reasons for these changes are the severity of the situation. As Lamin Sanneh writes: "The Muslim challenge implies that Europe can again be a continent only if it becomes God's continent. Yet whose God that is will determine what kind

of continent Europe becomes."[3] In Denmark we have had the incident of the cartoon crisis.

The Mohammed or the cartoon crisis two years ago can be seen as classic example of what we normally term Orientalism. But it began with a murder and developed into a very severe crisis with several people killed and diplomatic relations severely hurt. To me this was a conflict that was ignited because of misunderstandings from both sides. The West displayed a blatant Orientalism and was met by equally strong expressions of Occidentalism.[4] If there is a lesson to be learned from this it can be summarized in four points: First, there is no room for double standards. Second, what is said in the corner will be shouted out from the rooftops. Third, Islam is a strong religion. Fourth, the "Umma" is in place and functioning.

The changes in the European religious scene are obvious and our American observers give us the choice: graveyard or laboratory. Although some of us can have a preference for the quietness and calm of well preserved graveyards, to me there can be no doubt. As missiologists we opt for the noisy and laborious laboratory. So this is what Europe is today: a laboratory where it is possible to experience and study what happens when a formerly mono-religious Christian continent turns multi-religious. The options are numerous and it is quite open in what direction it will go: religion can vanish; churches can disappear and be replaced by strong fundamentalist religions or by a weak religiosity that as a varnish is spread thinly like New Age religiosity already functions today.

A Brazilian Case: Syncretism vs. Fundamentalism

It is clear how much the situation in Europe is influenced by the political situation in the Middle East, the obvious threat of terror, and the so called war against terror and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is eye opening to review the situation as seen from another corner of the world. I have just

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[3] Sanneh 2007, 125.
[4] As it happened at the NIME conference the author wanted for the sake of documentation to show the original drawings in Jyllandposten September 30, 2005 in order to substantiate his interpretation of the cartoons as expression of orientalism. The Editor and the editorial board of SMT decided against printing the cartoons. They can, however, be consulted on http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/698

spent some time in Latin America and conducted lengthy travel around the vast country of Brazil with its very diverse cultures. I thus return with the head filled by a host of fresh impressions from a continent in transition. We visited dwindling catholic masses, cosy Lutheran congregations, and lively Pentecostal services with a clear message of prosperity, as well as Indian rituals of healing and purification, and candomble terroirs with lively presentations of Afro-Brazilian spirituality.

It was so refreshing to visit the continent of Latin America, because they did not talk about Islam at all. Naturally, because there are very few Muslims – as of yet. So here one can see the megatrends more clearly than in Europe where we are so immersed in the conflict in the Middle East and occupied with how to deal with Islam. Not so in Latin America.

If I should draw some consequences from this experience especially for the churches and their mission I would point to several megatrends. First, the traditional confessional churches are in a dramatic decline. Some try frenetically different things to remedy the malady using technology from media and marketing transformed through evangelical piety and spirituality. Second, some individual congregations that very consciously put all their money in one direction – nowadays mostly of an evangelical provenience – can experience a moderate success. Third, there is an overwhelming dominance of independent churches buying into a prosperity gospel. If you want to be rich - and the poor always want that – then make your investment. Fourth, the most important megatrend is growth – not in agreement – but in syncretism.

The European Case: Protestantisation vs. Islamisation

Some of the same trends can be observed in Europe. But the development in Europe raises some specific issues. Martikainen takes for his starting point in the article the often observed fact that "religion is back on the agenda". He gives good account of some of the reasons for that which are very much in line with what we have mentioned here: First, the immigration communities, especially of Muslims, challenge the privatised concept of religion. That means that new models for state-religion relations are being developed. Second, there are changes happening within the religions themselves. Experiential religion and spirituality come to the fore. Third, the marketisation of religion leads to pluralism.

The consequence is that the locus of religion is shifting and the position of religion is changing. After Martikainen's article I am left with many questions regarding the missiological consequences of the sociological data. What will a post-secular Europe look like? What role will the new immigrant Christian churches play in the European laboratory? Can the folk church structures prevail as we have known them in the Nordic countries? What future can we imagine for the confessional churches? What will win out: Protestantisation of religion or Islamisation of Christianity?

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Søren Kierkegaard on Mission in Christendom: Upbuilding Language and its Rhetoric Understood as the Fundament of Mission

Pia Søltoft

Abstract: Kierkegaard claims that one Christian can and ought to have influence upon another person's relation to faith and Christianity. Mission is in this sense a natural part of Christianity and a task for every single Christian. But the Missionary must be very careful about choosing her method of speaking. She must be aware of the power of eloquence–but also of the ethical restrictions connected to rhetoric in the realm of mission. It is fundamental for Kierkegaard that a human being is not just what she is. To be oneself, one has to gain consciousness of oneself and ones religious foundation. And this is not something that happens once and for all. It is a process in progress and in this process one human being can help the other in the right direction through communication. The sermon is a specific form or genre of such a communication and this article will, therefore, examine Kierkegaard's understanding of mission among Christians, so called Christendom, through his reflections on preaching and the connation between ethics and rhetoric in the "devotional eloquence."

Keywords: appropriation, intersubjectivity, Kierkegaard, rhetoric, sermon

Just when the Church really settled down and got it effectually made into dogma that outside the Church there is no salvation – strangely enough, just then there was a settling down. How cruel, then – the more strictly it is taken that there is no salvation outside the Church – not to become a missionary.[1]

How cruel *not to* become a missionary! These are Kierkegaard's own words in a late journal entry from 1853.

Anyway, I have to admit, that mission is not a word Kierkegaard uses very often. But that does not mean that he does not pay any attention to the

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[1] *Pap.* X5 A 102 /JP 2729 (1853).

phenomenon. On the contrary one could say. On the one hand it is fair to say that Kierkegaard nowhere in his published authorship talks about foreign mission in a more specific way, i.e. mission as being performed by a missionary who travels to a place with non-Christians trying to convert them.

But on the other hand one could also claim that the whole of his written work is Kierkegaard's attempt to be a missionary. As may be well known he did not travel much; three times to Berlin and some short trips to Jutland, but he did not have to travel to be a missionary. He considered Denmark and Christendom – i.e. Christianity understood as a part of the culture in a civilized nation – his mission-field. Through his works he attempts to upbuild and practice Christianity among people already calling them selves Christians. And, of course, this constructs a special kind of mission that has primarily to do with language and rhetoric. I shall dwell on that aspect in the following.

But there is one more feature concerning Kierkegaard and mission that it is worthwhile mentioning. Mission presupposes that one individual can have an important impact on the faith of another individual. In this more philosophical sense mission presupposes that an interaction between individuals is possible. And as Kierkegaard accentuates that mission is a natural and required part of being a Christian (I will come to this later on) he hereby confirms the notion that the one individual can have a crucial influence on the faith of another. I will begin to dig a little deeper into this intersubjective aspect of mission.

The Relation Between Self and Other in Mission

As mentioned, Kierkegaard does not talk much about mission, but the few times he does mention the word in his journals and papers he does so in a very, very positive way. In fact Kierkegaard is of the firm conviction that mission is an integral part of being a Christian. Maybe that would come as a surprise to those of you who follow the tradition for conceiving of Kierkegaard as the great spokesman for isolated subjectivity.[2] Everything in his authorship, it has been claimed, consists in choosing, winning, finding, becoming or taking over oneself – altogether something which is best done alone.

[2] Kresten Nordentoft's extensive work *Kierkegaard's psychology* from 1972 (republished by Hans Reitzels Forlag in 1995), is, however, one major exception; likewise, Arne Grøn (e.g. 1997) more recently represents an emphasis on the intersubjective aspect of the Kierkegaardian subjectivity-thinking.

This self-centeredness, of course, does not seem to make any room for mission understood as a relation between a Christian and another person about to become a Christian. Each subject seems in such an interpretation to be closed up around herself as an entity where nothing can enter. In other contexts I have called into question this monological interpretation of Kierkegaard,[3] and put an increased emphasis on the intersubjective dimension of Kierkegaardian subjectivity. Since time constraints do not allow me to demonstrate it here, in what follows I will thus presuppose that Kierkegaard in fact emphasizes that one human being not merely *can,* but *ought*, to have influence on the religious life of another person and therefore consider mission as a natural part of being Christian.

This influence between the one and the other, what I here consider mission in its more philosophical form, will most often be of a *linguistic* kind and therefore it is a natural extension of this assumption to ask about the communicative conditions for an influence of this kind. In other words, how can and must the one through speech/language seek to exercise an influence on the other?

Kierkegaard's basic presupposition is that a human being is not as such immediately what he or she is. In order to become oneself he or she must first win consciousness of him or herself. And this does not happen once and for all. It is more of a continuous process and in this process the one person can, through communication and speech, be helpful to the other. And one of the places where the one speaks to the other precisely with the purpose of influencing the other's faith is in the sermon or the edifying discourse.

As Kierkegaard no where deals with mission as a concrete relation to non-Christians (at least only in an ironical way as I shall show in a moment), but simply as a theological consequence of Christianity always in the process of *struggling* and *never in repose* and only in relation to *people who already call themselves Christians*, I will first examine Kierkegaard's conception of preaching as mission *in* Christendom and then take up his view on rhetoric to see how one person through language can influence the faith of another and thereby be a missionary.

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[3] See for example Søltoft 2000a.

But let me first give you another succulent quote from Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers to substantiate my claim about his positive view on mission:

> Where is the scripture text that substantiates the rightness, the authorization, of any such galamatias as the *established* order of Christendom? According to the New Testament, Christianity is a continuing mission, every Christian a missionary: Go out and proclaim my teaching – and nowadays we are all Christians in such a way that it never even remotely occurs to any one of us to become missionaries, except for a few unfortunate characters who grab at it as the last way out (either the foreign legion or missions) – horrible satire![4]

In this quote we clearly see that Kierkegaard considers mission a natural part of Christianity's dynamic character and that he first and foremost concerns himself with mission among those who are already Christians. And in this kind of mission the *sermon* plays an important role.

Kierkegaard on the Sermon or Mission in Christendom

Kierkegaard's various definitions of the sermon are found scattered in several places in his publications and journals. He returns repeatedly to the question of the "the pious rhetoric" and in elaborating these considerations he quite often gives his contemporary preachers a scathing criticism! Under the heading "Something about Pious Eloquence," he delivers the following little ironic prophecy: "It all adds up to this definition for a sermon: It is a discourse given by a preacher and ending with the word Amen".[5]

Kierkegaard himself gave sermons six times in all,[6] but, as you probably known, he wrote a wealth of edifying Christian or pious discourses. His considerations on the nature of preaching are numerous and varied, but it

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[4] *Pap.* X5 A 122 / JP 2731 (1853).

[5] *Pap.* VI, A 156; JP, vol. 3, 3471.

[6] His first sermon was given as a part of the instruction at the Pastoral Seminar on the 12th of January, 1841 in Holmens Church. His *Demis-prædiken* from the Pastoral Seminar was given on the 24th of February, 1844 in Trinitatis Church. On Friday, the 18th of June, 1847 he preached at the communion in Our Lady's Church and did so again on Friday the 27th of August of the same year, in the same church. Once again on the 1st of September, 1848 Kierkegaard preached at the Friday communion in Our Lady's Church. His activity as a public preacher was completed with a sermon on the 18th of May, 1851 in the Citadel's Church. He published the sermon during his final attack on the Danish Church, under the title *The Changelessness of God*, on the 3rd of September, 1855.

seems to be fundamental to his view that to preach is a form of dialogue between the speaker and the auditor. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Kierkegaard's pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis defines the sermon as the place "in which the single individual speaks as the single individual to the single individual"[7]. In this "dialogue" the two sides are *equal* and he adds:

> But to preach is really the most difficult of all arts and is essentially the art that Socrates praises, the art of being able to converse. It goes without saying that the need is not for someone in the congregation to provide an answer, or that it would be of help continually to introduce a respondent. What Socrates criticized in the Sophists, when he made the distinction that they indeed knew how to make speeches but not how to converse, was that they could talk at length about any subject but lacked the element of appropriation. Appropriation is precisely the secret of conversation.[8]

And here one could add that appropriation must also be the secret of any kind of mission in a Kierkegaardian sense. Kierkegaard thus places emphasis on the auditor and his or her appropriation of what has been said. But it does not happen at the cost of the demand to the speaker. The person who speaks, the missionary in Christendom, is linked both to his relation to the message which he communicates and to his relation with the auditor. To preach, and thereby to perform mission in Christianity, is conceived as identical to struggling with the difficulties of life and set against the background of this: "finding the occasion and feeling inclined to speak encouragement and to instruct others. But the main thing is the existence from which he goes forth to preach and to which he comes back from preaching" (*Pap* X-3, A 515; JP, vol. 3, 3514. Translation slightly modified.). Mission must take its point of departure in the existence of the one who wishes to influence the other's religious belief. Therefore Kierkegaard emphasizes that to preach is quite a risky affair.[9] But, on the other hand, Kierkegaard also emphasises that the other, the auditor, has to play an active role as he has a *choice*

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[7] SV3, vol. 6, 114; CA, p. 16.

[8] SV3, vol. 6, 115; CA, p. 16. Translation slightly modified.

[9] "That to preach from a pulpit is to accuse oneself should mean to have the courage to go beyond oneself. Thus, there is some truth in this kind of proclamation, but nevertheless what really matters is that in a stricter sense the actual preaching or proclaiming, to preach on the street and with action" (Pap. X-4, A 287). This theme of preaching on the street is repeated many times – especially in the numbers of The Moment, which Kierkegaard published during his final violent attack on the Danish People's Church and which he in fact designates as his own "true preaching" in an unchristian age!

> to will to allow oneself to be built up […] I am convinced that the person
> who will allow himself to be built up, even if he heard a perhaps mediocre
> pastor or read a perhaps mediocre devotional book, will be built up. The
> danger is that someone may be disturbed in this regard or in remaining,
> resolute in his choice […]being a good listener [is] just as great as being a
> good speaker, and perhaps at times the former is even the greater.[10]

If the sermon is understood as mission within Christendom among those
who are already Christians, and this mission ideally is considered to be
dialog between the speaker and the listener, it is clear that rhetoric must
have an essential significance for constructing the sermon and, thereby, for
its effect upon the auditor/listener.

It ought to be equally obvious that the ethical question of *what* and *how* one
person not merely can but *must* communicate to the other comes to be of
decisive importance. Kierkegaard has various considerations about this theme.
His interest in the relationship between rhetoric and ethics can be shown
from the fact that his publications and journals are positively overflowing
with references to Plato's linguistic artistry and Socrates' maieutic method in
addition to excerpts from, and considerations about, Aristotle's Rhetoric. Let
us examine Kierkegaard's notion of rhetoric a little closer to see what it does
to his understanding of the individual's ability to influence the faith of another
person and, thereby, to his concept of mission.

Kierkegaard on Rhetoric or Mission as Seduction

Like everyone else, Kierkegaard has a critical disposition towards rhetoric.
As is well known, rhetoric is the doctrine of how one forms language in
such a manner as to win auditors for oneself and the cause which they wish
to promote. It is an age-old criticism against rhetoric – as well as of mission,
I believe – that it gains *agreement* instead of *really convincing*. The criticism
is rooted in the fear of being manipulated and seduced by *empty platitudes*,
such that the auditor is completely *duped*. It is clear that when Kierkegaard
places such great emphasis on the moment of appropriation, as we heard
earlier, he cannot be interested in the auditors being passively taken in by
beautiful platitudes.

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[10] *Pap.* VI, B 129-137, pp. 218 - 228; TD, Supplement, p. 120.

The suspicion gains support from knowledge that rhetoric it is very adept at manipulating language. Rhetoric manages language in a wholly determinate manner and it is this power which lies at the bottom of the criticism. Rhetoric's conception of language stands in opposition to a nominalist conception which goes back to Augustine. He conceives of language as a series of "names" which cover the inventory of actuality like a kind of inventory list. It is clear that a conception of language of this kind does not leave much room for rhetoric. If one beautifies or embellishes the inventory list too much, then one adds something which is not found in actuality. And an addition which does not exist is pure deception.

In the dialogue *Gorgias*, Plato develops and grounds his scepticism about rhetoric. For Plato the problem is not that Gorgias can persuade his auditor about something that the auditor actually does not want to agree to, but that Gorgias himself denies being in any way committed to the "truth" that he is speaking about.

Plato's presupposition is that if the speaker himself is obliged by "the truth" it is wholly unproblematic that he uses his power of persuasion on the auditor. He thus -lures or deceives him into the good and there is no one who can have anything against that.

Plato digs deeper than the concrete conversation-situation and lets Socrates attack the reflection which precedes the conversation, namely, that the one who wants to speak to/convince the other must himself first be committed to and be able to vouch for that which he wants to convince the other about. If the speaker can do so, then the ethical problem of convincing someone else disappears. I suppose that in some sense the same presupposition must be made before any kind of missionary work.

Kierkegaard adopts Plato's positive presupposition that someone who himself believes in and lives according to the truth, which he wants to convince someone else of, not only may, but in fact *should* and *ought* to try to "lure" or "deceive" the other into the truth. A relation which can be expressed with the following radical clarity: "He who could not seduce men cannot save them either".[11] In this light mission becomes a form of seduction, but of course a very special kind of seduction.

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[11] *Pap.* IX, A 383; JP, vol. 3, 3706.

Kierkegaard's view of rhetoric is thus double when it comes to convincing the other of the truth of Christianity and being a missionary in Christendom: on the one hand, he criticizes rhetoric if it merely leads to empty platitudes, which have nothing to do with the speaker's own existence and therefore does not have the desired effect on the auditors.

On the other hand, Kierkegaard is wholly aware of the power of eloquence and is one of the few who is able to master and use this power in relation to his readers. The reason for this virtuosity in the use of rhetoric is to be sought in Kierkegaard's view of human beings and here I go back to my earlier statement about mission presupposing a certain anthropology that allows one individual to be able to influence another individual's life and faith.

Mission not just Understood as Sending but also as Ppening

The use of rhetoric presupposes an "open" human being, i.e. a conception of the human being as being under the influence of the external world and, above all, under the power of the *word*. And here it is obvious that the initial constellation of problems which concerned the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity and, in extension of this, the possibility of one human be-ing influencing and decisively affecting the life of the other human being, is seriously thematized.

Kierkegaard's use of rhetoric and his positive view on mission supports the thesis that he does not conceive of the individual as a "closed monad," but as standing in a reciprocal relation to fellow human beings, such that the one has influence over the other's self-determination and vice versa.

And if Kierkegaard represents a view of human beings of this kind, then it is clear that an individual's communication of "truths to another," which have decisive influence on the life of the other with oneself and others (that is ethical and religious truths), must assimilate the knowledge of rhetoric and the power of language, but at the same time only use it with modifications. Mission in Christendom should not nor cannot convince or convert, because the auditor is already convinced and converted – mission should therefore catch and make room for self-examination and appropriation.

Kierkegaard is, as noted, particularly interested in the process of appropriation and he "takes over" Plato's thought of "deceiving someone into the truth."[12] In the posthumously published work, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, he says, for example: "but a deception, that is indeed something rather ugly. To that I would answer: Do not be deceived by the deception. One can deceive a person out of what is true, and–to recall old Socrates–one can deceive a person into what is true."[13]

Rhetoric can thus have an ethical function for missionary activity in Christendom. Rhetoric can and *should* be used by one person, the missionary, to make the other person attentive and perhaps win him or her over to "the truth." This is not an assignment for the few, but in fact an assignment placed on every Christian. And if a Christian does not take up this assignment Kierkegaard goes as far as stating that we then end up with a sick Christianity. Listen to this last, but not least important, quote from The Journals and Papers concerning mission:

If someone were to say: But if I lived some place where everybody is a true Christian (an impossibility), then the answer must be: If this were the case (although it cannot be) – then you are *eo ipso* a missionary. But we have completely forgotten that to be a Christian means essentially to be a missionary. Christianity in repose is *eo ipso* not Christianity. As soon as anything of that sort appears, it means: become a missionary. Christianity in repose, stagnant Christianity, creates an obstruction, and this formidable obstruction is the sickness of Christianity.[14]

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[12] Søltoft 2000b, 19-39. I argue for the point of view that there is a difference between the dialectic of communication, where deception plays an essential role, and "the upbuilding" understood as a practice of communication. It is impossible here to explore this discussion in more detail.

[13] SV3, vol. 18, 104; PV, p. 53.

[14] XI1 A 489 / JP 2731 (1854).

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Kierkegaard, Mission and Postmodernism

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Abstract: This article seeks to address the question of pluralist understanding of religious truth in Kierkegaard especially from the viewpoint of Christian mission in a postmodern context. In his *Postscript*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus regards a sincere pagan as having more truth than an insincere orthodox Christian. However, Kierkegaard's account does not entail religious pluralism or relativism but contains a way of comparing religious worldviews and attitudes with each other. For Kierkegaard, what counts most is the inner relation of the individual to his or her beliefs, although the content of the beliefs is by no means unimportant.

Keywords: paganism, speculation, mission, idolatry

Søren Kierkegaard is an amusing philosopher since you can summon him to comment on every possible phenomenon known to human beings. This is possible not only because he has written and commented on numerous things but since he has written and commented on numerous things in a cryptic and obscure fashion. Some people regard this as a genius common to every work that is labeled a 'classic'. Some people regard this as haziness of thought.

To state the obvious, Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms (invented authors with differing stances on various issues) makes him the homeboy of postmodernity, which loves pluralism and ambivalence. Kierkegaard uses pseudonyms in order to inhabit different worlds, religious convictions and worldviews which can make him seem self-contradictory at times. One of the great themes in Kierkegaard's scholarship is the question about the subjective nature of truth. This theme features prominently in questions regarding missiology and evangelization. In this article I seek to address the question of pluralist understanding of religious truth in Kierkegaard especially from the viewpoint of Christian mission in a postmodern context.

The two idolaters

One of the most important and often cited passages in this respect is found in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846).

> If someone who lives in the midst of Christianity enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of God, the house of the true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting upon the image of an idol – where, then, is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God although he is worshiping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshiping an idol.[1]

It is no wonder that this passage has raised questions about how Kierkegaard actually understood Christianity in relation to paganism. This passage, and other similar utterances in the *Postscript*, appear every now and then in support of a pluralist understanding of religions. Just to give one example I cite W.T. Jones: "[According to Kierkegaard]… the belief of a Hindu that Vishnu is God, the belief of a Mohammedan that Allah is God, the belief of a Nuer that kwoth is God – even the belief of an atheist that there is no God – are all true; providing only that in each of these beliefs an objective uncertainty is embraced with passionate intensity."[2]

But is this the way we should understand our exemplary passage? Kierkegaard uses here the then emerging idea of genuine being and the feeling of dependence, Schleiermacher's *schlechtgehinnige abhängigkeits-gefühl*, (in the quote 'the passion of infinity') as the essence of religion.[3] Kierkegaard implies that a pagan who is in contact with his feeling of dependence as the essence of his innermost being is better off than an orthodox Christian who does not give due respect to the religious truths he or she is at least outwardly committed to. Now it would be easy to read this

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[1] KW XII 1, 201; SV VII 168. The references are made to *Kierkegaard's Writings* [KW]. Princeton: Princeton University Press and *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede vaerker* [SV] 1. ed. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

[2] Jones 1969, 228.

[3] Kierkegaard employs the concept of absolute dependence in *Postscript* developing it further and giving it more classical interpretation than in Schleiermacher. KW XII 326; SV VII 280-281. According to Kierkegaard, the passion of infinity is directed to actuality, or particularity, of a human being [Christ]. Thus the dependence has a fixed target in the person of Christ and it is not directed towards abstract universalities.

in a way that infers the essence of religion is not "out" but "in there". It is not what you believe but how you believe, since the religious claims do not have point of reference outside the religious language or form of life of the religious individual.

We all are familiar with the fact that there are people in this world who hold seriously erroneous views (possibly from our viewpoint) about reality, certain social mores and religion, who still lead lives which enrich the lives of their neighbors. Respectively, we know people who hold correct beliefs but do not manifest these beliefs in their lives. From this one could conclude that the real issue is not the content of the beliefs but the way of being and believing. It is not that we have objectively correct beliefs but that we have the right kind of relationship with the world.

Kierkegaard is truly employing the well-known dogmas of 19th century liberal Protestantism but we need to ask to what end Kierkegaard is invoking such a theology. In order to answer this question we need to understand who is speaking here. The pseudonym behind the *Postscript* is Johannes Climacus, a person utterly interested in religion, particularly Christianity, who while himself is not a Christian is somewhat willing to become one someday. We have here a person who observes Christianity from the outside; a sort of pagan some might say.[4] Climacus's aim is to comment on both Christianity in general and how it appears in 19th century Denmark. Climacus seeks to passionately understand what Christianity is all about but at the same time he finds himself utterly disappointed with the then existing forms of Christianity.

Thus, Climacus's aforementioned account is to be understood as a critique of contemporary forms of Christianity. In this way we understand that Kierkegaard does not ditch the content of the belief and raise the way of believing as the only decisive issue. What a person believes is not trivial but what is most important is the personal relation to the beliefs. While implying that there is "more truth" in a pagan who prays in truth than in a Christian

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[4] In fact, Climacus is a self-contradictory, or even impossible, character. Climacus knows how to become a Christian and what Christianity is all about claiming that these can be known by a Christian only. But the inwardness of Christianity can be understood through the leap (*Springet*) only, which Climacus has not done. In terms of our theme, Climacus may have considered himself in the place of the sincere pagan as he does not dare to call himself a sincere Christian but still he does far better than untrue Christians.

who prays in untruth, he is not claiming than a sincere pagan has reached the highest point of existence.[5] Kierkegaard simply says that it is better to be sincere pagan than a Christian hypocrite, yet the both are still idolaters.

In keeping with this, we could say that Kierkegaard draws here a certain hierarchy in between the lines.[6] Using Kierkegaard's concepts we can discern at least four different positions people may inhabit (of which only two actually appear in the exemplary passage, see figure 1). The lowest is a pagan who does not really believe with passion; then we have a Christian who does not believe with passion. The second best option is a pagan who believes with passion but even this is a substitute for the real thing: praying with infinite passion to the true God, i.e., being a true Christian.

	True	**Untrue**
Christian	1	3
Pagan	2	4

Figure 1

While Kierkegaard does not make this kind of table (which in fact would be totally against his nature) we have texts that point in this direction. For example, Kierkegaard considers idolatry as a "dismal substitute". The worst case, according to him, is the "disappearance of the rubric 'God'". Here Kierkegaard uses the Danish word 'Gud' for the real (Christian) God instead of 'Guden' for 'god'.[7] There is God and gods, Truth and truths. While there can be upbuilding truths of all kinds, being upbuilding does not necessarily square with being Christian.[8]

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[5] Of course, a claim like this would be utterly naive. In the purest form this would give religious warrant to sincere serial killers and maniacs. If, however, someone tries to hold on to the epistemologically pluralist reading and still criticize violence she has to give up her pluralism in order to do so.

[6] See, e.g., Evans 1999, 173.

[7] KW XII 246; SV VII 207.

[8] KW XII 259; SV VII 219.

Kierkegaard frequently juxtaposes Christianity and paganism. Further paganism is identified with 'speculation'. Now, the relation of Christianity, paganism and speculation form an interesting triad.[9] Christianity and paganism are the fundamental opposites with regard to how one relates to or seeks to relate to God. They are separated from each other by the nature of divine communication. Paganism, as Kierkegaard claims, seeks direct relation to God. It endeavors to form a relationship to a directly recognizable deity. In Christianity the nature of revelation is always indirect.[10]

	Christianity	**Paganism**	**Speculation**
The nature of communication	Indirect	Direct	Direct
The relationship between history/particularity and eternity/universality	History & eternity/ universal in particular	History/ particulars	Eternity/ universals
Goal	God	Idol	Idol

Figure 2

In the Christianity of his time "all theology has become anthropology".[11] This famous utterance of Ludwig Feuerbach had become true resulting in a re-formation of religion within immanent categories. Therefore if there is a god it has to be a god of this world. Kierkegaard, however, claims that while the world is the work of God, "only the work is directly present, not God".[12] God, being wholly transcendent, is not manifested as such in nature

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[9] The interplay of these three phenomena is found in KW XII, 375-376; SV VII, 324-326.

[10] A classical example of this in Kierkegaard's writings is a story in *Philosophical Fragments* where a king seeks to express his love to a maiden. The king cannot approach the maiden in his true form for that might frighten the maiden or cause an insincere answer on maiden's behalf (she could answer the king's proposal out of fear or out of want in order to take advantage of the king's position). Therefore, the king introduces himself in the form of a servant – on the same "level" as the maiden – so that he can be sure of her love. This is an example of what Christ does in becoming man.

[11] KW XII, 579; SV VII, 504.

[12] KW XII, 243; SV VII, 205.

to be available for our senses or reason. The nature of eternal God is incommunicable. Thus, God has to communicate with humans indirectly – ultimately in the person of Christ – where the eternal is joined with time.

Thus, "Christianity is not something merely historical".[13] Christianity is both historical and eternal. It starts from eternity reaching down to history joining them together in God-man. It communicates the nature of the eternal in the form of a particular Jewish man, which stands in opposition to both paganism and speculation. In paganism, people worship local deities while in speculation the speculator seeks to overcome all particularities in the search of pure universality.

A speculator or an adjunct professor sees in Christianity an offense, which he seeks to remove. The offense is directed against the idea of eternal fact taking the shape of a particular and historically restrained event. The removal of offense means reduction of transcendent or supernatural elements from Christianity with the help of academic sophistry or the religious slumber created by the all-encompassing and secure state church system. This, however, makes Christianity paganism. "Speculative thought makes paganism the outcome of Christianity, and to be Christian as a matter of course by being baptized changes Christendom into a baptized paganism".[14] Here speculation hurts violently both Christianity and paganism since speculation makes both Christianity and paganism what they are not.

But why is a pagan better off than the untrue Christian? Kierkegaard seems to think that the pagan has the possibility to understand the truth but the untrue Christian has become immune to it. "Superstitious belief in untruth includes the possibility that the truth can come and awaken it, but when the truth is and superstition by relating to it transforms it into untruth, then no deliverance is possible."[15]

An untrue Christian, or a corrupted form of Christianity, has gone beyond Christianity and mediated it into paganism. From the viewpoint of (presumed) objectivity one cannot come to know Christianity since the person has distanced herself from reality. The 20th century author and thinker

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[13] KW XII, 578; SV VII, 503.
[14] KW XII, 368; SV VII, 319.
[15] KW XII, 430; SV, VII 37.

C.S. Lewis makes a similar claim. The problem of modern man is his self-confidence. Popularized science, or naturalism/scientism, has locked him into a "windowless universe". He lives in a world void of mysteries in a place where everything is explained and everything that cannot be explained is reduced to something that can be explained. Pagans do not share this self-confidence and therefore they still have a remedy.[16]

Like Lewis, Kierkegaard thought highly of pagans. In the latter part of his life he brought pagans to witness against the Christianity of his time. He claims that the pagans laugh at this wannabe religion abandoning it as utter nonsense.[17]

The Warrant of Christian mission

Going back to the quote from where we started, we may still ask what Kierkegaard seeks to do with his words within our topic today? The answer is simple. If the religion, Christianity in this case, does not mean anything, why spread it? Or, if Christianity has to be mediated into something else that it is not, is it really worth proclaiming? Is it worth believing? Kierkegaard was well aware of Christian missionary work, as Dr. Søltoft demonstrates elsewhere in this journal. One could say that Kierkegaard seems to be more concerned about the mission in Denmark than in actual pagan countries (for in his view Danish Christians were to a degree pagan).

Then we might ask how Kierkegaard finds warrant for Christian mission? Dr. Søltoft comments on this notion as well, but from another point of view. Instead I raise three points which summarize the answer to the question: why choose Christianity over all the other religions of the world?

To be honest, Kierkegaard does not much engage in comparison between different religions. He, however, is aware of the existence of other religions and shows some knowledge of these belief systems, although as a child of his time his knowledge cannot be anything but limited. Yet the limitedness does not seriously challenge his basic theses, which could be summarised in a following way.

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[16] E.g., Lewis 2002, 34. Similar account is found from G.K. Chesterton's (orig. 1908) seminal work *Orthodoxy*, especially from chapters 1 and 2. The idea of windowless universe is borrowed from Chesterton.

[17] *Practise in Christianity* KW XX, 133; SV XII, 124-126.

First, all religions have doctrine. In Islam, for example, it is based on teachings of Qur'an. In Christianity, however, the "doctrine" is not a teaching as much it is a person, and the works and acts of this person (*Virksomhed*). Christian faith is about who Christ is more than what he taught (although the latter is not unimportant).[18]

Second, the person of Christ, as such, is the nexus of time and eternity, immanence and transcendence, and God and human being. Christ is the ultimate synthesis, the paradox of God-in-time. In other words, Christ is genuinely historical but not "merely historical", and thus capable of making what is historical and in time eternal.

Third, as the person of Christ forms the center of Christian faith, he gives form to the way of believing and being, or continuously becoming, a Christian. Believing in paradox as a belief policy is something that continually goes beyond the limits of immanent, secular reason.[19] In this way, Christianity is capable, through the God-man, of claiming to be in touch with God.

These three aspects give a unique element to Christian faith, making it stand out in the midst of all other religions. But 'unique' here does not have to mean 'absolutely different'. All human beings share the same universe, mysteries and questions of existence. Kierkegaard continuously plays with the idea of imaginatively constructing something from paganism that goes beyond paganism. For example, Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* was this kind of test case.[20] Therefore what Christianity claims is unique but it has resonance with other religions, faiths and worldviews. It engages with the same questions but gives unique answers which are understandable to others.[21] In a draft of *Postscript* Kierkegaard illustrates this in a following way.

> Socrates, therefore, does not have Christian faith at all; it is of course not found in paganism, but he has an analogy to it. His paradox is just the expression for the passion of inwardness with which he relates to the eternal truth, which becomes a paradox only by pertaining to an existing person, by being appropriated by an existing person. Thus it was also a paradox of

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[18] KW XII, 326; SV VII, 281.
[19] E.g. KW XII, 578.
[20] See also KW XII, 361; SV VII, 312-313.
[21] See e.g. Come 1997, 247.

faith to believe that there is a god, which still is by no means Christian faith.[22]

A Construct of Kierkegaardian Missionary Praxis

Finally, let me sketch a few theses of what a Kierkegaardian missionary praxis would look like. This account is based on what has been previously stated, but it takes the into account general aspects of Kierkegaard's theological and philosophical style. In the beginning, I hastily linked Kierkegaard to some tenets of postmodernism. Kierkegaard as an author inhabits several places at the same time. His writings are at the same time premodern, modern and postmodern (which *per se* makes him postmodern). First, he invites us to stand in other people's shoes to embrace and respect the other. Although he takes the issue of truth extremely seriously, he takes seriously the difficulty of understanding what is true as well.

Second, he understands truth as something to live by. Truth is not something you can study or teach by remaining outside of it. This entails that a person who claims to be a witness to the truth must practice what he or she preaches. In addition, truth is not a complex scientific theory. It has more to do with wisdom than intelligence. It is more being than speaking about being; doing more than thinking about doing.

Third, the human existence cannot be reduced to pure reason alone. Human beings have emotions, affects, and first and foremost – will, which often confuses our neat systems and theories. This means that a purely intellectual approach to apologetics has little or no value at all. Kierkegaard was notoriously hostile to apologetics because they meant, for him, an attempt to stand outside of things judging them objectively – which he taught to be

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[22] KW XII 50-51; SV VI B 40:26, 130. The passage continues, furthering the similarities and differences between Socrates and Christianity. "The Christian paradox is the passion of inwardness in relation to the eternal truth, which itself proclaims to be a paradox, and in turn this passion of inwardness has subjectively its most paradoxical expression in the individual's being a sinner himself – and consequently he is hindered, not only by existing, in acknowledging the eternal truth. The objective paradox, on the other hand, is formed in this way: the eternal truth, which itself proclaims itself to be the paradox, has a historical element within itself, has come into existence. Just as the Socratic paradox appeared through the eternal truth's relating itself to an existing person, similarly the Christian paradox appears through the eternal truth's having itself come into existence and now in turn relating itself to an existing person in paradoxical passion."

impossible. Yet his whole corpus of works could be considered as a complex form of apologetics, however, this issue must be left out of this essay. In practice, his understanding of missionary activity would be more actual preaching of the Gospel than attempts to demonstrate objectively, and without personal involvement, the wonderfulness of the Gospel.

Fourth, although acknowledging the plurality of truths, he does not represent a view that we could call the strong thesis of postmodernism: the view that we have no way to judge between different worldviews. He abandons absolute relativism but understands that proving things (objectively) is extremely hard and often futile. While being clearly an ontological realist, he adopts a stance close to epistemological non-realism: one can argue for and become convinced about all kinds of truths. While one may offer somewhat neutral tools of evaluation, in the end the question is one of obedience. Who is your master? Is it the Apostle or is it an adjunct professor whose speculation takes control over Christian faith?[23]

One of Kierkegaard's greatest lessons is that life and interaction between sentient beings cannot be contained within a single *a priori* theory. We come to understand life and faith by truly living in them. For Kierkegaard, Christianity or Christian mission cannot be "a doctrine" or a mere theory, because it is a practice. These, however, do not mutually exclude each other since a practice is always formed by a theory.

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[23] On this opposition see Kierkegaard's exposition in *Difference between Genius and Apostle*. KW XVIII, 104; SV XI, 105-106.

Tending to the Other in Late Modern Missions and Ecumenism

F. LeRon Shults

Abstract: This article offers a theological perspective on our "post-modern" context(s) with special attention to the implications of the turn to "alterity" (difference, otherness) for the disciplines of missiology and ecumenics. The task of participating in the transformation of late modern discourse with religious others can be facilitated by understanding the philosophical shift toward privileging the category of difference in theories (and practices) of knowledge and the shift in psychology toward theories and therapies that emphasize the differentiated and differentiating relations among persons. Finally, the implications of these developments for tending to religious others are explored in light of two case studies.

Keywords: postmodern, difference, philosophy, psychology, missions, ecumenism

One of the characteristics of our current cultural and intellectual milieu that seems particularly relevant to the disciplines of missiology and ecumenics, and the practices associated with them, is the growing fascination with "the other." The tendency to celebrate the different and suspect the same, to prefer *heteron* over *tauton*, *alter* over *idem*, the alien over the identical, may be one of the defining peculiarities of our "postmodern" context(s).

Both missions and ecumenism involve tending to religious others – others from different religions altogether or others from different traditions within one religion. The goal of such attention from a Christian perspective is redemptive fellowship – welcoming persons into the community of believers or facilitating more intimate communion among those who already strive to follow the way of Christ in the world. My focus in this article will be on ways – two ways in particular – in which this "turn to alterity" provides opportunities for understanding and facilitating the task of missions and ecumenism.

In an attempt to be faithful to the theme suggested to me for the conference I will also point along the way to theological responses to postmodernities.

Let me begin with a few words of clarification about this theme. First, the use of the plural – postmodernit*ies* – already indicates a clear awareness among NIME constituents of the significance of plurality, the ubiquity of otherness, the excess of difference in our global society. Second, in the context of this presentation I am using the word *theological* in a broad sense, not limited to systematic presentation of doctrine but to the interpretation of the world in light of the intentionality of the Creator for creaturely life together. As we speak across disciplines we may sometimes seem other, even *alien*, to one another, but all of us are theologians in this sense. Third, the term *responses* might easily be taken to imply that cultural change comes first and theologians run along afterward trying to catch up. Too true too often. In order to encourage a more proactive engagement I prefer to depict the situation, as I will explain in more detail below, in slightly different terms: as theological *participation* in *late* modernity.

It appears that there is near consensus among scholars in your disciplines that some dominant (and domineering) ways of treating religious others have been oppressive and must be dropped as missional or ecumenical strategies. Risking oversimplification we might call these strategies "colonialism" and "Constantinianism." Missiological anxiety about the "otherness" of adherents of different religions has sometimes led to strategies of forced similitude, to the founding of colonies of the "same," the failure of which often results in profound alienation. Ecumenical anxiety about the "otherness" of different Christian traditions can have a similar effect. It is easier for ecclesial politicians to enforce unity if those who are "in" can be clearly identified by their unanimous affirmation of the same formulation of doctrine. The price of this Constantinian "unity" may in fact be the alienation (or annihilation) of the different prophetic voices that call the community toward redemptive ways of tending to the other.

Of course the other extremes are equally ineffective and equally dangerous. The proper response to the excesses of missiological colonialism is not apathetic isolationism. The proper response to the excesses of ecumenical Constantinianism is not tribal anarchy. Ignoring or excluding the other does not serve the goal of redemptive fellowship any more than oppressing the other. In a global context increasingly characterized by fragmentation some may indeed be tempted toward some new totalitarian resolution. In reaction to this apparently retrogressive strategy others may be tempted to promote

an attitude of libertine dissolution. How can we tend to our tensions with religious others in ways that avoid these extremes and facilitate healthy and redemptive relations?

In our ongoing pursuit of answers to this question, it makes sense to engage (at least) two developments within what I have called the "turn to alterity." First, understanding the depth and breadth of the philosophical shift toward privileging the category of difference in theories (and practices) of knowledge may help us develop new ways of articulating and facilitating our experience of knowing and being known by religious others. Second, the psychological shift toward theories and therapies that emphasize the differentiated and differentiating relations among persons can also help us as theologians contending with the tasks of serving and sustaining redemptive fellowship. Before outlining these specific developments, let me briefly describe my understanding of the theological task within our contemporary context.

Theological Participation in Early and Late Modernities

The term *participation* is meant to interrogate the notion that theology simply responds to developments in culture. In every generation Christian theology has engaged – implicitly or explicitly, defensively or constructively – the ongoing philosophical struggle to make sense of human experience in the world. This does not mean that theology is determined by its location within particular cultural, linguistic and political structures, but it does mean that its agency is conditioned by this embeddedness. The term *response* can easily be taken to imply that *we* (the church or a church) exist quite apart from *them*, to whom we may or may not respond; this obscures the fact that our identity is mediated through our ongoing relations with and identification of others. More on this below. The engine of intellectual insight is precisely the capacity for and dialectic of distanciation within participation in one's context. In relation to our material theme, we could point to the contributions of philosophers explicitly shaped by Christian intuitions – from Søren Kierkegaard to Jean-Luc Marion – who have participated in (not merely responded to) the shift to alterity.

The term post-modern is notoriously ambiguous. Whatever else it means, it indicates a way of treating the *modern* itself as *other*. However, we must

be careful not to allow the general notion of the *post*-modern to obscure the variety of ways of tending to the otherness of the modern, indeed of the plurality of different modernit*ies* that have shaped and continue to shape our global context. Despite the intentions and hopes of some of the great philosophers of the Enlightenment, even "modernity" was never monolithic. The rise of "the modern" was characterized by a diversity of ways of engaging and participating *inter alia* in the revival of interest in (non-Aristotelian) ancient philosophy, the emergence of modern natural science and the construction of new social theories. By the eighteenth century, "modernist" ideals such as the universality of reason, the inevitability of progress, and the integrity of autonomous subjectivity had come to dominate the philosophical scene.

Broadly speaking, "post" modernity (whatever else it may be) is a response to the apparent failure of one or more of these aspects of the "modern" critique, appropriation and reconfiguration of medieval and ancient philosophy. But we can differentiate at least three basic strategies (ideal types) of engaging the otherness of the "modern," which I will call *anti*-modern, *ultra*-modern and *epi*-modern. All of these are "post" modern in some sense, "after" the critique of the modern critique (of all that is pre-modern), a critique which clearly continues to register its effect on contemporary thought. For this reason, I prefer to differentiate between *early* and *late* modern. Let us take the example of autonomous subjectivity, which has come under attack in the last century, to illustrate the three (stereo)typical ways of treating the (early) modern.

An extreme *anti*-modernist seeks to escape the modern in whatever form; it is defined by its rejection of some ideal. For example, such a person might reject not only the notion of autonomous subjectivity, but the very idea of the subject itself. The opposite extreme is the *ultra*-modern, which is still *after* the (emergence of the) modern, but is characterized by an attempt to maintain one of these ideals in its earlier formulations. Such an approach might appeal to an earlier (perhaps even pre-modern) conception of individual human subjectivity, ignoring or defending against its anti-modernist foes. What I am calling the *epi*-modern way of engaging the early modern is meant to cover the wide middle ground between these extremes (cf. Shults, 1999). The prefix *epi* can mean "after," but can also connote a relation that is upon, besides, attached to, over, around, within,

emergent out of, or beyond. Such an approach could be attentive to the problems with early modern individualistic formulations but unwilling to throw out any and all concepts of human subjectivity.

An epi-modernist approach makes it easier to distinguish between *early* and *late* modernit(ies). The extreme anti-modernist would hesitate to accept the adjective "late" because it could be taken to imply a willingness to accept or even to promote the survival of some aspect of the (early) modern. The extreme ultra-modernist might resist the adjective "late" because this implies the explanatory power of some aspect of the (early) modern is waning. Of course we cannot know precisely what new forms of philosophical reflection will emerge in the coming decades and centuries, but insofar as they participate in the ongoing reconstructive process of transmitting traditions and cultures we can anticipate that they will not simply involve a complete rejection of, nor a naïve return, to the formulations of an earlier era. Being an *epi*-modernist today simply means attending to the early modern as other without wholesale rejection or embrace; attempting to discern how we can emerge out of, build upon, and move beyond earlier formulations of the biblical tradition while remaining attached to the lived intuitions that characterize Christian life in the world.

The *anti*-modern response can render Christian faith so diffuse that the boundaries that distinguish it from other voices in culture are nearly erased; theology loses its identity. The *ultra*-modern sometimes reacts so violently to the plurality of cultural forces that boundaries are reified into impermeable walls; theology becomes isolated. Neither of these approaches allows for authentic dialogue. We need a more subtle model of the relationality between theology and culture that captures their actual differentiation as well as their real co-inherence. Such a model would support a praxis of authentic response that neither dissolves nor dissects and that refuses to settle for mere conflation or conjunction. I believe that a more balanced *epi*-modern engagement will serve ecumenists and missiologists who desire to respond re-constructively to the challenges to the early modern project at the intersection of historic Christian faith and contemporary culture.

I turn now to the material presentation in four major sections. First, I will point to some of the ways in which attention to difference has already shaped the disciplines of missions and ecumenism. The second and third major

sections outline two dimensions of the late modern turn to alterity (philosophical and psychological) which I believe have yet to be fully appreciated and appropriated in Christian theology and practice. The final section will attempt to spell out some of the implications of these shifts for "tending to the other missionally and ecumenically."

Attention to *Difference* in Missions and Ecumenism

I realize that pointing out to missiologists and ecumenists the importance and significance of tending to difference is clearly preaching to the choir. Even a cursory review of the literature in your fields indicates attention to this theme. The challenges to, as well as the opportunities for, the task of missions in a pluralist context have been explored from both scholarly and practical perspectives; we can point, for example, to Lesslie Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989) and to Richard Tiplady's *World of Difference: Global Mission at the Pic 'N' Mix Counter* (2003). In ecumenism as well, one finds a clear awareness of the importance of the way in which one views the "otherness" of the diversity of dialogue partners. In *Method in Ecumenical Theology*, G. R. Evans urges an approach in which the sense of "otherness" can remain present even as the groups grow closer, but this sense is transformed in a way that becomes "a focus of loving interest instead of hostility" (1996, 50).

Several scholars have also treated the epistemological shifts that have characterized late modern philosophy of science, exploring the implications for thinking about and performing missions in contemporary culture. For example Paul Hiebert links positivism to colonial approaches to missions, on the one hand, and "postmodern" approaches, on the other, which would reject "Christian mission as calling people to faith in Jesus Christ".[1] Hiebert commends critical realism as a way forward beyond these extremes, building on the work of Michael Polanyi (and others), and acknowledges that part of the problem for missions today is the suspicion toward Western (Christian) claims of neutrality, urging the false ideal of Enlightenment objectivity and the contextuality of all knowledge.[2]

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[1] Hiebert 1999, 116.
[2] Hiebert 1999, 359, 424.

David Bosch points to other aspects of late modern developments that shape missions, especially the challenges to optimism toward progress and individualism, after the failure of the Enlightenment project of universal instrumental reason, and emergence of more participatory and communicative models of rationality. Bosch proposes what he calls an "ecumenical missionary" paradigm that attends to the complexity of ecological and social justice concerns.[3]

The significance of pluralism and the need for more nuanced attention to difference is also evident in developments in a field that overlaps missions and ecumenism, namely, inter-religious dialogue. David Ray Griffin distinguishes between "identist pluralism" and "differential pluralism." In the first, all religions are oriented toward the *same* religious object and have essentially the *same* end. "*Differential* pluralism, by contrast, says that religions promote different ends – different salvations – perhaps by virtue of being oriented toward different religious objects, perhaps thought of as different ultimates".[4]

Mark Heim introduces a differentiated understanding of the eschatological fulfilment of religious paths, which he nevertheless links to an explicitly Christian understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. "In the divine-human communion that is salvation, the *difference* between humanity and God is not the primary obstacle to religious fulfilment, but a necessary prerequisite to the deepest relation with God… Difference – internal and external to the trinitarian life – is the condition for fidelity and fellowship".[5]

Despite this interest in and attention to difference in each of these fields, however, it seems to me that further work can and ought to be done in appropriating insights from and participating in the ongoing transformation of the epistemological and hermeneutical categories of difference and sameness. Although I will point to some examples of such participation in the disciplines of philosophical and systematic theology below, the same gentle criticism applies there as well. We are all faced with the task of more deeply engaging the turn to alterity in the ongoing process of reconstructively articulating the Gospel in late modernity. In the next two

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[3] Bosch 1999, 358-362.
[4] Griffin 2005, 24.
[5] Heim 2001, 126.

sections, I attempt to contribute to this process by pointing to the challenges and opportunities implicit in the radical refiguring of the category of difference in (relatively) recent developments in philosophical and psychology, both of which shape the conceptual space within which we struggle to understand our selves and others.

The *Philosophical* Turn to Alterity

Of all the philosophers associated with the turn to the other or the privileging of the category of difference, probably the two most well-known among theologians are Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. Derrida's notion of *différance* and his broader project of deconstruction have been met with both fascination and derision. Levinas' emphasis on the primordial relation to the other, which always resists the imperialism of the same, has also both perplexed and prodded theologians from a variety of traditions. In many ways, these would be the easiest dialogue partners for us here, but I want to introduce a couple of different voices, which have only recently excited extensive theological interest. While we might not agree with all (or any) of the proposals of these or other late modern philosophers, it is important to grasp the extent of the shift they represent and its implications for our own task of tending to others missionally and ecumenically.

To understand the turn to alterity we must recognize that it is in some sense a turn from the dominance of identity – or sameness – as a philosophical category. The source of this tension between sameness and difference in western philosophy is the list of "kinds" outlined by the stranger in Plato's *Sophist*. These five genera are "being," "rest," "change," "the same" and "the different." Not only is the different (*heteron*) listed last here, it also requires the most argumentation for its inclusion in the list, which is deduced from the fact of the difference among the other genera. In Plato's *Timaeus*, the world soul is created by the demiurge who mixes together being, the same and the different. Here too the latter is problematic. The different, which was hard to mix, had to be *forced* into *conformity* with the same (35a).

For Aristotle defining a thing involves naming its genus and identifying its differentiae within that genus. So, for example, human beings are a type of animal, but what differentiates them from other animals is reason. Therefore, we are "rational animals." Species are fixed, according Aristotle, so the

rational substance of human nature does not differ over time. In his *Metaphysics* he notes that "same" and "other" can be predicated of all existent things with regard to all other existent things; however, such attribution applies not to the substance of the things themselves but only to the relation between things (on the basis of quality or quantity, V.9). Aristotle makes a distinction between this kind of otherness (*heteron*) and an other otherness (*diaphora*), which he reserves for the predication of things that differ in substance or by accidental properties (X.3). This latter mode of difference is most important for him because it is the basis of his approach to logic and his theory of being. The highest and most valuable being is the unmoved mover – thought thinking itself – which is explicitly compared to the less valuable thinking (substance) of the human mind, which thinks the good as something *different* from itself (XII.9). Difference is explicitly devalued metaphysically and epistemologically.

The category of difference was further demoted in the Neoplatonism of the third century AD philosopher Plotinus. He accepted Plato's five kinds (*Enneads* VI.2), including his insistence that sameness and difference must be included among the primary genera. However, he is less enthusiastic about this inclusion, and tends here and elsewhere to speak of the principle of differentiation primarily in relation to quantity, relation and matter, which is the lack of quality and form (cf. *Enn*. II.4). The category of *heteron* applies to the material world of existents and even to the operation of the intellectual principle but not to the transcendent One, which contains "no otherness" (*Enn*. VI.9.8). Plotinian salvation involves putting away the otherness of the material body and reaching out for communion with the Supreme, which is beyond differentiation.

Patristic theology, missions and ecumenism (to speak anachronistically) participated in this privileging of sameness over difference. I will limit myself to one example: the Christological formulations of the council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. The single (albeit complex) sentence that is the Chalcedonian Definition uses the term *ton auton* (the same) eight times, but *diaphora* only once. The debate focused materially on how Jesus Christ could be of the *same* divine substance as the Father, the *same* human substance as the rest of us, all in the *same* identical person. Formally the goal was forcing all believers to formulate their understanding of Christ in exactly *the same* way under threat of anathema. The obsession with

sameness in Christology was reinforced by the Greek understanding of the fixity (sameness) of the human species and a doctrine of God that emphasized simplicity and impassibility (sameness) to the detriment of the *differentiation* among the trinitarian persons.

While the late modern (re)turn to alterity may appear to threaten some ancient christological formulations, it also provides a new conceptual space within which we can retrieve other resources (such as the Cappadocian fathers) as we articulate the doctrine of the incarnation in ways that tend to the significance of Jesus' differentiation from the Father and the Spirit, as well as human "others".[6]

The late modern shift toward privileging difference was not without its precursors. The seeds of such an emphasis were already evident in early modern thinkers like Locke and were watered and nourished by the emphasis on relationality in thinkers like Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard. Some 20th century philosophers have even appealed to hints in Plato himself to support their enthusiasm for the different. For example, Gilles Deleuze interprets the "surprising" ending of the *Sophist* with the concept of difference as a way of underlining the importance of the different as that which actually "pervades" the other categories. Nevertheless, he credits Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* with

> what amounts to the discovery of Difference – no longer in the form of an empirical difference between two determinations, but in the form of a transcendental Difference between the Determination as such and what it determines, no longer in the form of an external difference which separates, but in the form of an internal Difference which establishes an *a priori* relation between thought and being.[7]

Deleuze himself develops an approach that strongly privileges difference over sameness. "It is always differences which resemble one another, which are analogous, opposed or identical: difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing… Sameness is said only of that which differs".[8] He finds inspiration both in Nietzsche's eternal return and Heidegger's intuition that difference must relate different to different without

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[6] Cf. Shults, 2008.
[7] Deleuze 1994, 86.
[8] Deleuze 1994, 57.

mediation by the identical or similar. "There must be a differenciation of difference, an in-itself which is like a *differenciator*, a *Sich-unterscheidende*, by virtue of which the different is gathered all at once rather than represented on condition of a prior resemblance, identity, analogy or opposition".[9] For Deleuze this means that difference is not simply one category among many, as with Plato or Aristotle, or even Kant; rather, it is the basis of all categorical representation, generic or otherwise.

Another example of a late modern philosopher whose reflections on sameness and difference are particularly relevant for our purposes is Alain Badiou, whose works have been translated even more recently than those of Deleuze. For Badiou "infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*".[10] Against the tide of some forms of deconstruction, however, Badiou insists that recognizing the other is not a sufficient basis for ethics (or philosophy as a whole). We must also recognize the "advent of the Same," the "event of a truth" that is the "same for all." However, the same is not linked to being but to becoming. "The Same, in effect, is not what is (i.e., the infinite multiplicity of differences) but what *comes to be*".[11] In his *Being and Event* (2005), he develops a complex terminology based on Cantorian set theory, in which he suggests that we think of truths as forced by subjects, which assemble multiplicities (differences) in ways that are the same for all, in-different to differences.

More interestingly for the purposes of this conference, however, is Badiou's appeal to the first great Christian missionary St. Paul. Although Badiou is an atheist he finds inspiration in Paul's passion for the universal and his militant indifference toward differences. He even credits Paul with anticipating Heidegger's critique of onto-theology, interpreting the apostle's emphasis on the resurrection as an example of a universal commitment to a pure event that is not conscribed by being but transforms "the relations between the possible and the impossible".[12] Badiou translates Romans 3:22, "For there is no distinction [*diastole*, which means 'difference'], since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, by his grace they are justified

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[9] Deleuze 1994, 117.
[10] Badiou 2001, 25.
[11] Badiou 2001, 27.
[12] Badiou 2003, 45-47.

as a gift [*dorean*], through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus".[13] He emphasizes that this gift is without cause, without dependence on differences like Jew or Gentile, male and female, slave and free. Although Badiou rejects the material content of the resurrection, he takes Paul's "postevental" experience as an example of the constitution of a subject who can traverse differences without giving up differences, as one who practices a benevolence of "*indifference that tolerates differences*".[14]

Philosophical and systematic theologians have increasingly paid attention to the need to engage and participate in the philosophical turn to alterity in its various forms. For example, Walter Lowe explores the implications of this shift in continental philosophy for theological reflection on the qualitative difference between the finite and the infinite.[15] Oliver Davies engages a variety of late modern philosophers proposing a relational (trinitarian) ontology of compassion that links being and love.[16] In addition to Infinity and Trinity, theology (including missions and ecumenism) must also attend to divine Futurity, to the constitutive differentiating presence of the eschatological advent of Eternity in relation to the creaturely experience of time.[17] All of our disciplines are shaped by our understanding of the arrival of the reign of divine peace, which is already among us and yet is to come. This motivates our following of the great commission and our pursuit of church unity in anticipation of the eschatological fulfilment of the kingdom of God.

This philosophical turn to alterity shapes the conceptual space within which our disciplines operate. Unless, and until, we deeply engage this categorical shift our efforts will be superficial and fail to participate in the redemptive transformation of human imagination. Attending to philosophical categories may be a necessary moment within this ongoing task, but it is not sufficient. We must learn to tend not only to the role of the concept of "the other" within our constructions but also to the ways in which our conceptual constructing itself is always and already shaped by our interpreted experience of existentially relevant "others."

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[13] Badiou 2003, 77.
[14] Badiou 2003, 99.
[15] Lowe 1993.
[16] Davies 2001.
[17] Cf. Shults, 2005, Part II.

The *Psychological* Turn to Alterity

It may not be immediately evident why I am bringing psychology into the discussion at this point. The late modern shift I am about to describe is relevant for this conference, I believe, for at least two reasons. First, both missiologists and ecumenists are concerned with the transformation of human relations and so the way in which we understand the nature and functioning of human persons will shape our dialogical practices and goals. Second, and more importantly for our current purpose, focusing on the way in which our identity is mediated by and within relations to and for others can lead us to reflect on how our desire for and fear of those who are different shapes our disciplinary and cross-disciplinary endeavours with religious others. What can we learn about facilitating healthy dialogical relationships from the late modern psychological interest in difference?

The impact of the turn to alterity is particularly easy to trace in the human sciences. The most influential theological definition of the human person was formulated in the early medieval period by Boethius: a person is an individual substance of a rational nature. Although they increasingly resisted the Platonic and Aristotelian assumptions embedded in this definition, early modern anthropologists – the term psychologists would be anachronistic here – continued to approach the study of humanity by focusing on the identity of the individual. Beginning with the atomistic individual (Hobbes) or the conscious self (Locke), such theories are then faced with the problem of making sense of human social or political relations to "others."

Across the spectrum of late modern theories in psychology and practices in therapy one finds a commitment to tending to the constitutive relation with and to "others" for understanding and facilitating the health of human persons. Personhood is essentially relational; to be a self is to be finding one's identity in relation to those who are not the self – the different. The relation to the other is not external or added to an already existing "I." The ego emerges within an interpersonal context of differentiated others who identify the self, whose otherness mediates selfhood to the individual. In other words, the ego (or I) is not founded by the perdurance of the same substance, but found in ongoing dialectical relation others (the not-I). This way of tending to alterity could be illustrated in any number of psychological models, from Freudian psychoanalysis to object relations or family systems theory.

I will limit myself here to a brief overview of a model outlined by my colleague Steven Sandage. In that context Steve proposed an integration of two relatively recent psychological models for understanding the healthy formation of human relationality: differentiation of self and attachment theory.[18] The concept of the differentiation of self is most often associated with the work of Murray Bowen in family systems theory and clinical therapeutic practice.[19] It refers to the process by which one becomes (or fails to become) a distinct self while remaining connected to one's family of origin. The key characteristic of healthy differentiation is the capacity to distinguish between how one feels and what one thinks, which helps the self remain calm in the context of intimate relationships. A person who remains inappropriately enmeshed (or fused) in the triangular anxiety of a family system will usually be more emotionally reactive and find it difficult to maintain a sense of self in close relationships.

Attachment theory is derived from the work of John Bowlby.[20] Most of his early research focused on how small children become (or fail to become) attached to their parents or primary care givers. A healthily attached child experiences the parent as a secure base from which he or she is free to move about and explore, while still feeling connected. Such a child continues non-anxious play when a parent leaves the room. Children who are not securely attached normally exhibit one of two other strategies: hyperactivation or deactivation. In the former, the child expresses itself in anxious and frequently angry outbursts when separated from a parent. In the latter, the child may appear undistressed by separation but finds it difficult to maintain intimacy with parents (and others). An ambivalently attached child hyperacts. An avoidantly attached child deactivates. Neither of these strategies promotes healthy intimacy with others, and research shows that formation at this early stage is highly predictive for the strategies these children will use to deal with threats to intimacy after they become adults.

Refiguring these approaches within a broader dialectical model, Sandage argues that we should recognize the importance both of the need to self-differentiate and to be healthily attached to others. This leads him to speak of "differentiated attachment." The dialectical movement between

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[18] Shults & Sandage 2006.
[19] Bowen, 1978; Kerr and Bowen, 1988.
[20] Bowlby 1988; cf. Karen, 1994.

differentiation of self and secure attachment, between seeking and dwelling, between confidence and humility (etc.) is an intrinsic part of the generative process of spiritual transformation. Sandage suggests that differentiated attachment, understood as spiritual maturity in the Christian tradition, "entails a solid sense of dialectical identity and intentionality about intimate connection with God and sacredness in life [yet also] promotes humble ways of relating to others without the excessive stranger anxiety that prompts rigid power and control".[21] Healthy, mature relationships between the self and others are characterized by willingness to explore, resilience in conflict and an appropriate sense of boundaries.

The appeal to family systems theory seems particularly relevant here, since your disciplines are interested in healing divisions between members of the church as the family of God (ecumenism) or welcoming others into that family (missions). As Sandage emphasizes, spiritual well-being and maturity are facilitated as we learn both to dwell within rooted communities and "tolerate the ambiguity, responsibility, and differentiation of spiritual seeking".[22] So how ought we to think about religious others in ways that promote healthy differentiated attachment? How can the insights of the late modern psychological turn to alterity be appropriated in our efforts to maintain healthy Christian identity while non-anxiously engaging those who are different?

Tending to the Other Missionally and Ecumenically

Before exploring these questions in light of two case studies, let me briefly return to my introductory comments about colonialism and Constan-tinianism. I take it for granted that most readers of this journal would resist both these extremes as well as the opposite tendencies toward isolationism or anarchy. Overlaying the psychological model of differentiated attachment might help us understand why we resist these extremes and reinforce our intuition that healthy ways of tending to the religious other will only be found somewhere in the tension itself. A simplistic celebration of *the different* provides no resources for appropriate attachment. An anxious fusion to *the same*, on the other hand, hinders us from appropriate differentiation.

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[21] Shults & Sandage 2006, 269.
[22] Shults & Sandage 2006, 186.

If we differentiate in a way that severs our ties to our communal (religious) roots we will find it difficult to control our emotional reactivity when confronted with increasingly diverse late modern religious others. On the other hand, if we are ambivalently or avoidantly attached to our (religious) families of origin, it will be difficult to tolerate the ambiguity of missional or ecumenical discourse. In other words, if we fail to foster communities that promote healthy differentiated attachment our tending to religious others will be particularly susceptible to the temptation to colonize or enforce Constantinian restrictions, on the one hand, or to isolate ourselves and ignore the degenerative forces of fideistic anarchy, on the other. Let us reflect briefly on this tension in dialogue with two recent proposals.

First, a missiological case study. Richard Bauckham's *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (2003) is an excellent example of a treatment of the missional task of the church that takes seriously the need to engage the philosophical developments of "postmodernity." He tackles head on the challenge that many postmodern philosophers raise against metanarratives such as Christianity. Bauckham acknowledges and even reinforces the observation that the narrative movement of the Bible is from particularity to universality, but argues that Christianity escapes the postmodern critique because the former is not *modernist*. It is a non-modern metanarrative, which does move toward universality but does not deny particularity. The Christian story, he suggests, is neither totalizing nor imperialistic. "The universal that is the kingdom of God is no dreary uniformity or oppressive denial of difference, but the milieu in which every particular reaches its true destiny in relation to the God who is the God of all because he is the God of Jesus".[23] We might wonder whether this strategy really works since the Enlightenment critique upon which modernity itself was built was precisely a reaction to and rejection of ancient and medieval (*pre*-modern) narratives.

For our purposes here, however, Bauckham helpfully illustrates the importance of tending to contextuality, to the local *differences* that condition the missiological task. He insists that "the gospel does not come to each person only in terms of some abstracted generality of human nature, but in the realities and differences of their social and economic situations".[24]

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[23] Bauckham 2003, 110.
[24] Bauckham 2003, 53.

However, he also illustrates a tendency to oversimplify the way in which the concept of difference functions in late modern philosophy. In a somewhat indiscriminate manner he uses the term *postmodernism* to describe those who reject all metanarratives because they are "necessarily authoritative or oppressive" and those who opt instead for "particularity, diversity, localism, relativism".[25] This may apply to a few who accept the label postmodern, but certainly not to all. Both Deleuze and Badiou, for example, have a significant place for sameness as well as difference in both hermeneutics and ontology. One of the ambiguities we may need to tolerate in missional engagement with religious others is the way in which the same and the different play together in each new dialogical context.

Let us now explore briefly the dynamics of tending to the other ecumenically, using *The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* as our case study. One of the first material points of the proposal is that "in late modernity we fear unity, often with good reason…. We look with suspicion on the political and economic forces that impose homogeneity. We celebrate diversity and pluralism, sometimes as a good in its [sic] own right, because we fear the constraints of a single set of ideals." The participants immediately note, however, that Christians "proclaim unity as a gift from God".[26] They recognize that "different Christian traditions will offer different answers" to the question of what Christian unity means and ought to look like.[27]

Nevertheless, the proposal argues that the vision of church unity that guides ecumenical dialogue should remain the same as that formulated at the 1961 World Council at New Delhi. This unity, according to the official statement of the council,

> is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and

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[25] Bauckham 2003, 7.
[26] *The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* 2003, 12.
[27] *The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* 2003, 17.

> all ages, in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.[28]

The focus on sameness and oneness is explicit. One is left to wonder how difference and plurality will be tolerated in such an ecclesial utopia.

The *Princeton Proposal* itself goes on to acknowledge that it is right to celebrate diversity and difference, but warns that "diversity is easily conscripted to sinful purposes; and it is not easy to separate the diversity that should be valued from the diversity that must be deplored".[29] Indeed. Yet, is it not also true that the drive to *unity* can be sinfully conscripted, that an obsession with forcing sameness can encourage both colonialism and Constantinianism? Surely experience tells us that the health of the "family of God" can be as easily (if not more easily?) destroyed by ambivalently or avoidantly attached strategies for manipulating the other as it can by an overly hospitable attitude to the aliens among us.

Toward the end of the proposal, the authors observe that Christian individuals and groups who do *not* have an official institutional standing have greater freedom for new initiatives. They recognize themselves as fitting within this class: "precisely because we do not function in this group as official representatives of our churches we can speak more freely." The Proposal therefore emphasizes "that those unconstrained by bureaucratic roles and free from the limitations of official leadership have a distinctive call to the service of unity".[30]

There is surely some irony here. Those who have the most freedom to do what the church is allegedly called to do are those who are not officially authorized to do so. We are left to wonder what will happen to such free-thinkers once a unity of sameness is produced that must be visibly enforced by the constrained and constraining efforts of official church bureaucrats in all places and at all times. Even if such questions are not fully answered, this case study illustrates the growing attention among ecumenists to the significance of the category of the different (diversity, plurality, etc.) in late modern culture.

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[28] *The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* 2003, 21-22, emphasis added.
[29] *The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* 2003, 27-28.
[30] *The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* 2003, 51.

Conclusion

I have taken advantage of my relatively "alien" status as a systematic theologian among missiologists and ecumenists and proffered some relatively provocative claims about the philosophical and psychological dynamics of tending to religious others in these disciplines. Let me conclude with the observation that some of the fastest growing and most lively Christian communities worldwide are those that delight in otherness. Pentecostal-charismatic churches are constituted by their appreciation of and attention to the *differing* gifts and manifestations of the Spirit. Many of the "Emergent" churches that are springing up across the world are characterized by an explicit reaction against the detrimental effects of forced sameness in conservative western contexts and an explicit acceptance of Jesus' call to tend to those whose *otherness* has led to exclusion from fellowship. The church is called to make a difference in the world. Some might believe that this is possible only if we avoid attaching ourselves to the world and only if we require religious others to look and act like us. I beg to differ.

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Further Considerations on Theological Responses to Postmodernities

Jyri Komulainen

Abstract: This commentary article agrees with the basic proposals of Shults' article albeit warning against the danger of understanding his psychological approach in a normative way. One should, at the same time, be bold enough to propose that the Christian vision is plausible while maintaining a degree of epistemological modesty. This article proposes that the Scandinavian mainline churches should give more space to alterity.

Keywords: postmodern, otherness, epistemology

Shults' contribution certainly stimulates our minds. I consider it very significant that he brought into our focus the significant shift in philosophy that, without doubt, has profound ramifications also in theology, i.e. the turn towards alterity, the discovery of a radical meaning of otherness for our thinking and theologizing.

I find the basic ideas expressed in his article parallel to my own thoughts on the subject – to the extent that my comments do not represent the "otherness" in any radical sense, rather I will try to elaborate further some ideas regarding theological responses to the post-modern.

Professor Shults begins by analyzing the conceptual differentiation of the modern and the post-modern. His interpretation attempts to steer between Scylla and Charybdis emphasizing the *epi*-modernism instead of more one-sided interpretations such as anti-modernism or ultra-modernism. Subscribing to this interpretation means that Shults wishes to attend "to the early modern as other, without wholesale rejection or embrace". I sense a certain amount of moderation and negotiation between more extreme positions here. The epi-modern stance pursues to maintain openness towards the "other" without subduing it, cultivating this principle even in assessing the relationship between modernism and postmodernism.

Next, Shults provides us with a short analysis of the discovery of *différance* in philosophical discussion after centuries of prevailing fascination with "sameness" that one can find already in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Significantly, Shults discerns this philosophical heritage also in patristic theology, e.g. in the creedal formulations that emphasize the "sameness" of the Trinitarian personae. It is especially here that I find his article opening new prospects for our theologizing. It also provides evidence that there exists a vital connection between the renaissance of Trinitarian theology and post-modern thinking. In fact, one can well understand why Karl Barth with his Trinitarian emphasis is seen as the predecessor of post-modern theology.[1]

From the philosophical perspectives Professor Shults proceeds to the changing paradigms in psychology. In particular, he underlines the discovery of the intrinsically relational nature of personhood and ensuing criticism of an "atomic self". Healthy understanding and mature religiosity should be based on "differentiated attachment" which a means dialectical process involving differentiation and attachment.

I indeed have sympathy for his psychological approach. However, at the same time I feel some anxiousness that demands me to pose critical questions. Should we not be suspicious of using such words as "healthy" and "mature" with their obviously normative connotations? Should we not be cautious to introduce such psychological conceptions to our theological discussion?

First, psychology has emerged as the normative science of our time and there are many instances of how it has attempted to tame, and even to interpret, religion in its own terms; sometimes even as psychopathological phenomenon.[2] Secondly, should not our vocabulary remind us that theology engages with the profound "Otherness" which may disturb and challenge our comfortable categories such as "healthy" and "mature"? Here we should recall the devastating experiences of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible.

In his article, Professor Shults also provides us with some illuminating examples of tackling "Otherness" in mission and ecumenics. I hope my brief summary was fair enough to the complex and persuasive argumentation

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[1] See e.g. Jenson 1997, 22.
[2] For a critical assessment of espousing psychological discourse in the field of religion, see Carrette & King 2005. See also Stark & Finke 2000, 9-18.

presented to us. My own contribution will take three steps which are parallel to Professor Shults' but will highlight, I hope, further aspects of the issue.

On Plausibility of the Christian vision

First, I suggest that we as theologians learn to appreciate the way that post-modern culture rejoices difference and diversity.[3] Even though there are definitely some features in post-modern culture that we may find unacceptable in the light of Gospel, the intellectual freedom is wider than in modern settings. Secular reason of the Enlightenment, depicted as universal and irresistible, is proven to be only one ethnocentric perspective among many.[4] To put it succinctly, in post-modern settings the Christian vision of reality enjoys legitimacy and plausibility that was out of the question within the confines of the secular reason of the Enlightenment.

Post-modern culture is undoubtedly a time of fragmentation with no grand narrative providing a single meaning for an entire society. However, simultaneously there are more grand narratives available than perhaps ever before. Post-modern culture involves a myriad of narratives sharing the same space. The Christian vision of reality is only one among many. It has its own coherence and plausibility, but so do many others.

At this point, I would like to recall the IAMS conference in Malaysia in 2004 in which some of the audience participated. During the meeting, we visited *International Islamic University of Malaysia*. It was an interesting example of an academic institution that explicitly rejects an Enlightenment world view as the frame of reference in which scientific results are interpreted. The university envisages the islamization of scientific knowledge as is evident in their vision statement: "To be an international centre of educational excellence which integrates Islamic revealed knowledge and values in all disciplines and which aspires to the restoration of the Ummah's leading role in all branches of knowledge."[5] Even though this example is taken from an Asian context, given globalization of academic discussion, we may well expect to encounter similar institutions on the Western soil also.

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[3] Differences between modern and post-modern are expounded lucidly in Kirk & Vanhoozer (eds.) 1999, xiv-xv. See also Smith 2006.
[4] McGrath 2002, 58-60.
[5] http://www.iium.edu.my/about/intro.shtml (15.8.2007).

Now I should return to my main point, namely, reclaiming the status of Christian theology as a legitimate intellectual enterprise in a post-modern context. There are some interesting examples of attempts to liberate theology from the Babylonian captivity it has experienced under the Enlightenment project. Many of these endeavours seek inspiration from Alasdair MacIntyre's philosophy which highlights the tradition-mediated character of our thinking.

As the first example, I wish to mention Gavin D'Costa's theological reflections. In his book *Theology in the Public Square*, he daringly gives a blueprint of the Catholic university with clear Catholic identity permeating all faculties, even though being simultaneously open to other faiths as dialogue partners. In doing so, he invokes Alasdair MacIntyre's post-liberal vision of "rival universities" which exemplify different rationalities.[6]

The second instance is Alister E. McGrath's ample project for *Scientific Theology*, the foundations of which he has laid in three volumes respectively subtitled *Nature, Reality* and *Theory*.[7] McGrath's project aims at rehabilitating the Christian vision of creation as a legitimate frame of reference in which the scattered facts of empirical science could be interpreted. It is important to underline that McGrath's project has no relationship to so-called creationism. Instead, McGrath takes for granted that there are, indeed, many internally coherent world views that are capable of adopting the results of empirical science and providing them with wider meaning. However, there is no Archimedean point from which we could evaluate which one of these is correct. This does not mean that we could not scrutinize and critically evaluate rival meta-theories. Rejecting the Enlightenment dream of universally acceptable foundations for certain knowledge does not implicate that anything goes. The task of theologians is to construct an intellectually solid vision on the basis of Christian tradition that provides us with appropriate understanding of the world.

On the Virtue of Epistemological modesty

If my first musing regarded intellectual plausibility of Christianity as one among many competing world views, the second one has more to do with the ethical dimension of epistemology.

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[6] See D'Costa 2005, especially 25-37.
[7] See McGrath 2001; 2002; 2003.

The Enlightenment project is charged with being responsible for oppression and marginalization of the "Other". As an alternative, post-modern thinking considers modesty as an essential intellectual virtue. Epistemic violence is seen as something we should discard. Interestingly, post-modern culture thus endorses the age-old Christian virtue.

However, we should also take into account that the history of Christian churches attests to not only epistemic violence but also physical aggression in the name of God. Christians have not lived up to their ideals.

Therefore, in the context of post-colonial awareness, we need a new ecclesiology dispensing with triumphalism and imperialism. One such ecclesiological model, having obvious points of convergence with professor Shults' article, is provided in Michael Barnes' important book *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. In this ground-breaking work, Barnes attempts to rethink the theology of religions as meditation on "the meaning of the providential mystery of otherness for the life of the Church and for its practice of faith."[8]

For Barnes, dialogue is a risky open-ended process requiring "a certain passivity in the face of the other" that is intrinsic to Christian vocation.[9] Nonetheless, meditative attitude does not exclude the possibility of "an ethical 'edge' which may come distinctly political."[10] Barnes belongs to the Society of Jesus and one can discern the influence of Ignatian spirituality in the way he attempts to integrate a contemplative approach in front of alterity with critical ethical awareness.

An Ecclesiological Application in the Scandinavian Context

Thirdly, I think we should elaborate the theological theme of alterity in our particular Scandinavian contexts. There are enormous challenges that our Lutheran churches face when their age-old religious monopoly is challenged.[11] In this situation, we theologians must figure out what strategy our churches should adopt.

[8] Barnes 2002, 15.
[9] Barnes 2002, 129.
[10] Barnes 2002, 156.
[11] See e.g. the following studies of the Finnish context: Kääriäinen & Niemelä & Ketola 2003; Mikkola & Niemelä & Petterson (eds) 2006.

I do not think here only of external pressures stemming from secularism, New Age -religiosity, and other faiths such as Islam. There are also very important ecumenical challenges, such as immigrants bringing diverse new forms of Christianity.

Interestingly, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland some of the gravest challenges are internal. There are many heated issues which have also aroused interest in the secular media which is so keen of controversies. Firstly, there are conservative pastors who refuse to cooperate and concelebrate with female pastors. Some younger theologians have turned to the Swedish *Missionsprovinsen*, a schismatic diocese, in order to obtain priestly ordination. Secondly, there is the neo-charismatic Nokia Mission led by a Lutheran pastor emphasizing miracles and power of the Holy Spirit which has been successful to such an extent that the resident bishop in Tampere became alarmed. Thirdly, the issue of homosexuality widens the gap between the right and left wings in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland like it has in many other Christian churches and communities.

Personally, I have been rather anxious about the obvious Constantinianism that characterizes some reactions of the Finnish ecclesiastical hierarchy. The uniformity in ecclesiastic order seems to run over dialogue and alterity. It seems that we should ask as Professor Shults in his criticism of the *Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* (2003), "how difference and plurality will be tolerated in such an ecclesial utopia"?

In our Scandinavian churches we should take seriously such ecclesiological models that encourage us to discern God's mysterious work in the Otherness of the Other. If our churches wish to retain their credibility in a post-modern context, it should be a community that gives room for alterity. This means that we should definitely dispense with all sorts of Colonialisms and Constantinianisms in our church politics also, being thus a sign of God's family with differences.

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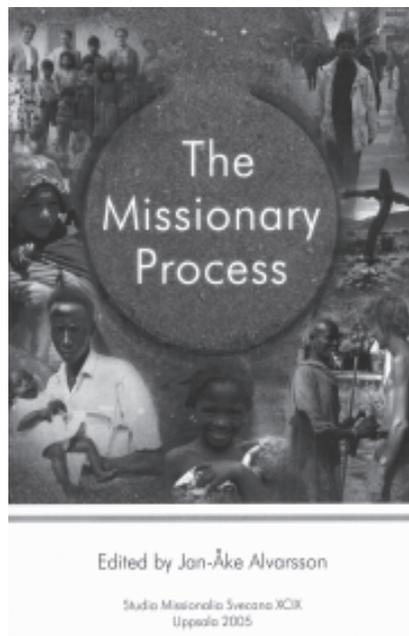
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Conversion in a Post-Modern Context

Christine Lienemann-Perrin

Abstract: This article begins by pointing out the variations in the meaning of conversion, as well as the ways of reaching beyond modernity in Europe. Thereafter the ethical implications of mission attempting to convert people are discussed. Some voices label all attempts at converting as proselytism. However, even if one needs to be clear in expecting that no coercion is involved either in converting or in trying to prevent conversions from one's religion, freedom of expression of one's faith also to members of other religious traditions must be guaranteed. After all, from theological point of view, conversion is God's act. This liberates Christians from the final responsibility so that Christians need not feel obliged to force anyone to convert.

Key Words: religious conversion; proselytism; Western / Eastern Europe

Conversion and post-modernities

Defining conversion

Let me start with some missiological remarks concerning conversion.[1] Religious conversion, from a Christian perspective, is a term embracing a very complex process. At least three dimensions or 'actors' can be discerned: the individual believer, the religious community, and God as the transcendent element in the conversion process.

Individual believer

For the believer conversion is a process in which he or she becomes an actor in the sense of (re-)turning to God. By converting, a person – or *convert* – makes a decision out of his or her own will regardless of the probably mixed or ambivalent motives that person may have. It is an extremely intimate event which touches the individual personally and holistically. It is an affair of the human being *coram Deo* including

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[1] For the following cf. Lienemann-Perrin 2004a.

repentance (*metanoia*) and implying a fundamental reorientation towards God. Mostly, this reorientation results in a deepening of one's own faith. However, sometimes it entails a person to leave her faith ('his/her God') for the sake of another faith. As a consequence, the former religious community is left for a new one. In the Old Testament Ruth, the Moabite woman, follows her mother in law, Naomi, saying to her: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). The Greek terms *epistrophé / epistrépho* are used in the New Testament in the sense of return(ing) to God and are in some cases applied to pagans converting to the faith in Christ.[2] In my article I shall begin with some remarks on conversion from the individual convert's perspective which, I believe, is exposed in a post-modern context to extremely different interpretations, ranging from a high estimation to total rejection.

Religious community

Another way to look at conversion is how collectives and their representatives perceive it. The religious community – in our case the church – is calling people inside and outside its own fold to convert.[3] The call to convert is accompanied by preaching and some religious and moral training leading to a new affirmation of the common faith as well as a change in (moral) behaviour. If the call to conversion is addressed to people of other faiths the religious instruction is concluded by baptism as the rite of integration into the community of saints, the Church.[4] Hereby, the religious community becomes a *converting* community. Converts and converters are interrelated in a communicative process; they mutually influence each other negotiating anew the revised and sometimes deeply transformed understanding of the common faith and the shape of the community.[5] After my comments on the convert, I shall refer to the converter's perspective

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[2] Act 15:3: "So, being sent on their way by the church (*sc* in Jerusalem), they (*sc* Paul and Barnabas) passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion (*epistrophén*) of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren." Cf. also Acts 15:19: "You turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God [...]." (1Thess 1:9). For further information, see Wright 2004.

[3] Old Testament: *shub* (repent; convert); NT: *metanoein* (turn / return [to God]).

[4] Similar rites of initiation and integration into a faith community are practiced in Judaism (*tevilah*), Islam (*shahada*), and other religions.

[5] The mutual influence of converts and converters leading to the contextualisation of church and theology is reflected by Walls 2004.

since tensions between competing religious communities about mission and proselytism have become a hotly debated issue in ecumenical, missiological, inter-religious and even political discourse.

Transcendence

Speaking in a theological language there is, last but not least, a third 'actor' to bear in mind: God. While human sciences would not address this dimension independently from human activities and thoughts because it cannot be proved empirically, it certainly has to be an important element in a missiological reflection on conversion. The Scriptures are expressing again and again basic reservations (preconditions) about the activities of converts and converters. They remind the community that the main converter is God. In a similar way, conversion is not the believer's self-made achievement, even if he or she is the one to take the decision. Rather God is the prime initiator, the enabler of conversion in the life of a believer. And uniquely God is in a position to judge whether a conversion is sincere or feigned (1 Cor. 4:5). No one can claim to have the ultimate knowledge which gives him or her the right to condemn a person as *not* being converted or being only partly converted. All human efforts in the conversion process are fundamentally examined and questioned by the transcendent actor. In the last section of my article I shall briefly come back to that aspect.

Defining post-modernities

Every new historical situation is urging Christian communities to re-think conversion in connection with its self-understanding. That is the reason why we need to put conversion on the agenda again in a post-modern context. Post-modernity has been identified by some social scientists as the main cultural framework leaving its mark on European and other Western societies today. What is its impact on the interpretation and shape of conversion? We recognise a shift from a 'culture of disbelief' (Stephen L. Carter) in the public sphere prevalent under the auspices of modernity towards a new religious Europe.[6] In connection to that, a change from a secular to a post-secular culture is taking place. One aspect of it is the increase of conversions

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[6] Although Carter (1994) is referring in his book to the American public sphere, 'culture of disbelief' is probably an even more appropriate description of secularised public life in many of European countries.

between different Christian denominations as well as between different religions. The Jewish journalist Jonathan A. Romain has estimated in a book published some years ago that in Britain an average of 1000 believers are converting every day from one denomination or religion to another.[7]

But what does the term post-modernity mean? The study process on issues relevant for mission and ecumenism today, which has been launched by the WCC as a step towards the mission conference in 2010, suggests using the term in plural form: 'Mission and Post-Modern*ties*'.[8] I fully agree with it. When the term was introduced into social science in the 1970s it was used in the singular presupposing that the philosophical basis of the Enlightenment had lost its prevalent role in significant aspects of social life and institutions. According to Jean-François Lyotard, knowledge 'as a key to liberation of humankind from past generations' superstitious beliefs is dissolved because it has ceased to be regarded as relevant for the whole of society in the same way. It is legitimized today only in a particular context and in limited communities by which it is approved.[9] This leads to a plurality of divergent approaches to knowledge, different value systems, truth claims, language games etc. within a given society. However, in my view, this understanding of post-modernity is not a convincing and suitable diagnosis of European society *as a whole*. It probably describes the living conditions and behaviour of a specific social segment at best, while for other segments of our society it would only partly be true, if at all. Several solutions have been proposed to cope with these deficiencies. One of them would be to speak about late-modernity instead of post-modernity bearing in mind that post-modernity has not replaced modernity completely.[10] Another would postulate the coincidence of post-modernity, modernity and pre-modernity. The proposal which is most convincing to me is to put both terms in plural and to speak about post-modernities *and* modernities. Diverse segments of our society are *looking* in different ways *beyond* modernity. That is what they have in common. But what they experience and recognise as modernity varies tremendously from one segment to another. There is much tension between divergent experiences and perceptions of modernity and post-modernity. To illustrate the problem in regard to religious pluralism in

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[7] Romain 2000, 2. In the USA 16% of the population are recorded as being converts.
[8] Cf. http://www.towards2010.org/int_vision.htm (30.10.07).
[9] Lyotard 1979; Aldén 2006, 20.
[10] Aldén 2006; Sœrensen 2007.

general and conversion in particular I shall give three examples out of many others, which could be added if time would allow it.

Beyond modernity as self-secularisation in societies of Western Europe

Modernity in the countries of Western Europe is closely linked to a threefold process of secularisation[11]: first, as the emancipation of social realms from religious institutions and norms (politics, law, ethics, the humanities, art); secondly, as the increasing loss of meaning of the (Christian) religion among the populace; and thirdly, as the shift of religion from public life to the private sphere. In connection with their specific experience of modernity Western European societies have perhaps developed the most strongly secularised continent worldwide.[12] Now, they are moving ahead – but in what direction? In many ways religion is coming back in changed forms in the midst of lasting secularism. Religions other than Christianity are gaining momentum, turning Western Europe into a religiously plural world. Personal choice in religion, subjectivity in expressing faith, and constructing private beliefs are of high value at least in parts of our society.

Beyond modernity as imposed atheism in societies of Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe, modernity is closely connected with the experience of atheism which has been imposed by the communist regimes. There, secularisation was marked by unrecompensed confiscation of church property by the state and through state-dictated banishment of the church and other religious communities from the public sphere. This led to an involuntary emigration of religious life to the private sphere as well as to a drastic decline in church membership. After the fall of the Berlin wall people were looking beyond atheist modernity in search of religion again. But their visions for the future were, and continue to be, different from those in the West. In the post-totalitarian East religious communities – or more precisely some of their leaders – tend to re-establish the status *ante* communism. Religion is again defined as being in a strong relationship with nation and culture. Many of the religious leaders – especially in the Russian Orthodox Church – would reject the post-modern model in the West as decadent, immoral, religiously pluralistic or even indifferent.

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[11] Lienemann-Perrin 2004b, 123.
[12] Martin 1993.

Beyond modernity as colonial subordination among migrants in Europe

A third type of post-modernity has become prevalent in Europe as a consequence of the increasing migration of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans. Many of them have experienced modernity intertwined with colonial subordination. Their aspirations of post-modernity include looking beyond the colonial project towards an alternative to both, (neo-)colonialism and Westernization.[13] Their visions are often nurtured by religious and cultural sources migrants brought with them from their home countries. Islam experienced as the dominant culture and religion at home turns out to become a counter-model not only to European or Western post-modernities, but also to Western types of rule of law and democracy. Similarly, non-Western forms of Hinduism, but also Asian, African or Latin American forms of Christianity, are alternative visions of post-modernity in the midst of Europe.[14]

In short: The coexistence of various, and even contradictory, post-modernities create a climate of increasing tensions in European societies today. The ways and visions beyond modernity are contentious among divergent groups within society. As religion is coming back to private life as well as to public arenas, and as religious plurality is growing, conversions from one denomination or religion to another are multiplying too.[15] In the next part we shall glance at the issue of conversion in such settings.

Conversion in a post-modern context

Converts' perspective

Not surprisingly, conversion has attracted much attention among social scientists in recent years. Scholars of psychology, sociology, religious studies, social anthropology, African and post-colonial studies have contributed to a newly established inter-disciplinary discourse on the issue.[16]

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[13] Spivak 1988; Viswanathan 1998.

[14] Gerloff 2005 on African churches in Europe, some of them are very active in missionary outreach.

[15] It is, however, very difficult to give exact figures and statistics on conversions.

[16] Among many others: Rambo 1993 (sociology of conversion), Malony/Southard 1992 (religious studies); Lamb/Bryant 1999 (religious studies); Heller 2003 (Christianity in Europe); Van der Veer 1996 (conversion to modernities); Epstein 2004 (Judaism).

Due to the high estimation and emphasis on individuality in Western societies conversion is appreciated as an expression of self-determination of the individual in questions of faith, belief and belonging (religious affiliation). Opting out of or into a particular religious community is – at least in some segments of our societies – much easier today than it has been in earlier times. Not only because the acceptance of individual religious choice has increased, but the religious laws of many European states, as well as the European Convention on Human Rights, guarantee it as a basic human right and protect individuals from interference of the state, religious communities or relatives of converts threatening them with counter-measures.[17] However, there are significant differences in Eastern and Western European countries in regard to religious state law. While in most of the countries in Western Europe religious rights are perceived primarily as *individual* rights, in Eastern Europe the same rights are regarded predominantly as *collective* rights. In the latter conversion as opting out is regarded first and foremost as an issue questioning and damaging the collective. The loss caused by those who are leaving a community is condemned and sometimes even punished severely. According to Silvio Ferrari, two religious types prevalent in Europe are responsible for the difference mentioned here: religions (parts of Christianity, mainly in Western Europe) stressing the individual aspects of the relationship between a person and God, on the one hand, and religions (Islam, Judaism, and parts of Christianity in Eastern Europe) putting more weight on the communal aspect of that relationship, on the other hand.[18]

In Western Europe religious conversion has lost its dramatic connotation.[19] Changing from one Christian denomination to another – or 'religious

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[17] Cf. the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights against Greece in the case of Kokkinaki and his wife (members of the Jehova's Witnesses), in 1993. The ECHR reversed the prison sentence and fine imposed on the Kokkinakis by the Greek court for having committed proselytism. The only country in Western Europe having a law prohibiting proselytism is Greece (Art. 13 paragraph 2 of the Greek constitution [1975]); Juillerat 2006, 64ff.

[18] Where conversion, mission and proselytism are concerned, "besteht der wichtigste Unterschied zwischen den Religionen, in denen der Glaube als eine persönliche Beziehung zu Gott verstanden wird, und jenen, die in erster Linie die Gemeinschaft betonen, die den unabdingbaren spirituellen und gesellschaftlichen Kontext für den Glauben des Einzelnen darstellt". Ferrari 2001, 131. Ferrari is Professor of Law at the University of Mailand.

[19] Short of knowledge, I am leaving out here narratives, motives and modes of conversion in Eastern Europe.

switching' (L. Rambo) – is practiced more and more and even conversion from one religion to another has become much easier, if not normal, in some cultural and intellectual milieus. As Jonathan A. Romain puts it in regard to Britain, "[...] religious traffic is heading in all directions, with Anglicans becoming Catholics, Catholics becoming Jews, Jews becoming Buddhists, Methodists becoming Muslims, and Muslims becoming Anglicans."[20] There is some evidence for this observation among the middle class and well-trained successful professionals who are highly integrated into post-modern Western society. But we have to bear in mind that this is probably not true for the majority of the population.

Let's have a look now at the changing modes of conversion which in general mirror the Western type of post-modernity described earlier in my article. We can observe a growing pluralism and individualisation of conversion models:

Selective conversion: Some elements of the former faith are left behind, while others are kept and consciously integrated into the new faith. A Christian who adopts the Muslim faith of his bride will possibly not leave behind his former faith completely but preserve it as a precious legacy, while he adds the new faith in his own – perhaps selective – way.

Conversion as extension of religious affiliation (double or multiple belonging): an already growing tradition of inter-religious dialogue and practice has lead to religious bilingualism, if not mulitlingualism. It is a breeding ground for the search for double or even multiple belonging not only in the spiritual but also in the formal sense.

Re-conversion: another reason for, and form of, conversion is the option for a New Age type of religion. During a certain period of life, usually between the 20s and 40s, people are joining a community of this type where they meet people of similar age and interests. Afterwards, especially when they are settled in terms of marriage, family and profession, they are willing to re-establish their 'old' religious affiliation.

Conversion as search for security in midst the of religious disorientation: facing post-modernities, people are confused by the plurality of values coexisting in society. In search of more stability and a clear faith based orientation they may join fundamentalist groups within Christianity, Islam or Hinduism.

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[20] Romain 2001, ix.

Conclusion: religious mobility, religious flexibility and religion in transit are new forms of conversion. The challenge for mission in this context is to re-think conversion from a new perspective. (1) Conversion is not necessarily to be conceptualised as a total, definite change in thinking and behaviour. Sensitivity has to be developed towards complex religious identities where old and new is intertwined, forming a more complex kind of existence. (2) Religious identity has to be discussed anew: is it formed by exclusion (of other religions) only? Or should it be explored more carefully as a 'both–and' choice? How does affirming one's own faith in full appreciation of the neighbour's faith work? (3) New, maybe even inter-religious, ways of common pastoral care for people ready for conversion after a crisis of faith should be explored.[21]

Converters' perspective

When I just wrote that conversions have become easier compared to former times this is true only in part. It applies only for some groups while others, and probably even a growing number of members of a religious community within European societies, are experiencing exactly the opposite. Within a significant number of religious communities conversions are regarded as creating division in our multi-faith society. In addition, new modes of conversion, as for example double belonging or selective conversion, are vehemently opposed by communities seeking an alternative to the Western type of post-modernity. Many churches in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, migrant churches from Africa, Muslim communities with an Arabic background in Germany, Hindu Communities of Indian origin living in Britain, and other groups defining religious rights primarily as collective rights are either condemning religious conversion altogether, or they accept conversion only if a person is embracing their faith and joining their fold. For some Muslim leaders, leaving Islam to join another religion is seen as a capital offence not only against God but also against the *umma*; apostasy is condemned and – at least in theory – merits the death penalty.[22]

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[21] Maurer 2006, 107f.

[22] Consider the similar attitude and practice within Latin Christianity in the Middle Ages. Even European Protestantism struggled for centuries with its own attitude until it was ready to accept and support the right to leave a religious community or to have no religious affiliation at all; cf. Stackhouse / Hainsworth 1999.

Several months ago, the Premier Christian Radio in London was broadcasting an interview with a representative of the All India Christian Council and the director of the Hindu Council UK, Jay Lakhani.[23] He was very sharp in condemning conversion and said: "Every time a person converts, that religion not only looses an ally, it has now to contend with an enemy of that religion. The converts become the most vociferous critics of the religion they leave behind. Hence any mass conversion will produce a rift in the fabric of that society. If, for example, five percent of the Christian population in this country (England) convert to Islam, we will have civil war. Conversions or proselytising activities are worrisome activities that are turning religions into divisive forces in our society and must be checked immediately."[24] Lakhani went on urging the (British) church involved in missionary work in India "to clip back its evangelising activities in India else the Hindu Christian relationship in the UK will be seriously strained".[25]

This Hindu leader is condemning mission in any form as unethical proselytism. Other religious leaders would go even further and interpret a great part of what churches regard as essential to Christian life as aggression, inducement or otherwise unfriendly attitude towards non-Christian communities. In other words: a distinction between legitimate missionary outreach and proselytism by unethical means does not work in their view, because every expression of Christian life is taken for proselytism as long as conversions towards Christianity take place.

It seems that human rights are sometimes becoming as much the problem as they are the solution in a number of current religious and cultural conflicts.[26] Some countries in Eastern Europe have experienced it after the fall of the Berlin wall and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. A veritable 'war for souls' was launched there provoking deep social and ideological conflicts. Religions which have been held down by communist regimes in the past have taken advantage of the newly guaranteed religious freedom in these countries to develop vigorous life. In addition, new religious movements from the West have entered the scene and contributed to a climate of

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[23] Lakhani leads a national network of the Hindu temple bodies and cultural organisations coordinating different schools of Hindu theology within the United Kingdom.
[24] Hindu Council UK 2007.
[25] Ibid.
[26] In the following I refer to Lienemann-Perrin 2007.

competition and strife. In this explosive atmosphere "rival religious communities have begun actively to defame and demonize each other and to gather themselves into ever more dogmatic and fundamentalist stands".[27]

Proselytism which has always been a big issue for Orthodox Churches has become one of their main concerns in Eastern Europe during the last decade. In countries where Orthodox churches are forming the majority religious leaders have urged the state to protect their churches against other Christian denominations by passing anti-proselytism laws. This happened in Russia in the 1990s when the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) vehemently opposed the very liberal religious law of 1993 with the result that a revised law was introduced four years later privileging the ROC over against all other churches and religions.[28] Some countries in Eastern Europe have, after the transition to democracy, developed a legal culture which tends to give protection to some of the religious communities and disadvantage or even oppress others.[29]

Apart from Greece, anti-proselytism laws are not deemed necessary in Western European countries – not only because the individual right to convert is given high priority, but also because the restriction of missionary outreach would not be accepted by most religious communities, if not the populace in general. However, precisely this attitude is changing nowadays as a reaction to the fact that Non-Christian religions and religious movements are also taking advantage of the religious liberty provided by Western Europe states. Recently the call to restrict missionary activities of 'other religions and sects' can be heard in civil society. Even political parties having previously shown no interest in religion are suddenly re-discovering and appreciating Europe as a 'Christian continent'. To preserve what they perceive as the historically grown, dominant culture (*Leitkultur*) they are urging the state to restrict the religious rights of other communities by modifying the law.

This is what happened in Switzerland earlier this year. With the support of two right wing political parties[30] an initiative has been launched to introduce

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[27] Witte Jr. 1999, xii.
[28] For details about the religious law of 1997 see Bryner 2005; Witte / Bourdeaux 1999.
[29] Lienemann/Reuter 2005.
[30] Swiss People's Party (*Schweizerische Volkspartei*) and the Federal Democratic Union (*Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union*).

a law 'Against the Erection of Minarets in Switzerland'. This action mirrors a hot debate going on in Switzerland about the construction of modest minarets in two small cities.[31] According to the steering committee of the initiative a strengthened and growing Muslim community would be a threat to the Christian culture of the majority living in Switzerland. The initiative committee further denies the religious meaning of minarets and claims that they are political symbols of an increasing segment of our population whose final aim is believed to introduce *sharia* law in Switzerland.[32]

The incident shows that in Switzerland, as in many other countries, the growth of non-Christian religions is observed with great suspicion and stirs up fear among opponents of religious and cultural diversity that social cohesion might soon be lost. Growing religious plurality in Europe leads to a dangerous shift in the perception of 'religion': a specific religion or pattern of religious observance is identified more and more with groups belonging to an exclusive history or to a specific class, language or culture. Religious adherence is fixed for classificatory purposes and establishes aspects of religious behaviour as invariable. If individuals or collectives develop a religious consciousness not corresponding to predefined categories they appear as deviant, dangerous, threatening and subversive.[33]

From controversy on conversion towards a shared understanding

It is not surprising that conversions are exposed to different and even conflicting interpretations depending on which side of the parties in conflict an observer stands. This creates methodological problems. From which point of view should conversions be perceived and analysed – the convert's or converter's view, the Christian perspective or that of Moslems, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists? How should different and opposing approaches to conversion be treated in inter-religious dialogue, in the ecumenical movement, in civil society? Our major concerns, however, lay in the field of missiology. I shall not have the time to elaborate on them, but I would at

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[31] Langenthal and Wangen an der Aare.
[32] So the arguments of Ulrich Schlüer, member of the Swiss parliament, in a talk show of the Swiss Television (DRS) on May 22th 2007; cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schweizer_Minarettstreit.
[33] Viswanathan 1998, xiif.

least mention some of the crucial questions: How can ethically acceptable means of missionary outreach be distinguished from unethical 'proselytism'? Should changes of religious affiliation be altogether avoided for the sake of religious peace? Should Moslems or Jews willing to become Christians be discouraged for the sake of inter-religious harmony? What are the key Christian insights regarding human rights in general and, in particular, what right do Christians have to make disciples and seek adherents among members of other faith communities? How does the implementation of the Great Commandment (Mt 28:19f) undermine the encounter with people of other faiths? And what approaches to a theology of religion are basic for the discourse on conversion? But there are questions which can legitimately be posed to people on the other side of such confrontations, too: Are not many of the accusations that Christians proselytise with unethical means ill-founded insinuations and propaganda? If, for example, Christians care for the poor, the sick, the prisoners and outcasts ignored by their fellow believers, is that really a case of inducement to conversion by unethical means?

To illustrate the problem once more I again refer to Jay Lakhani who in the broadcasted interview was claiming that doing social work among outcastes in India was a pretext for proselytism. He said: "if they (the churches) give a peace of bread with one hand and with the other hand steal the most precious thing these poor people possess, 'their souls', then this exercise is a crass atrocity committed in the name of Christianity."[34] He may be right in some cases, but wrong in others. Indeed, there are Christian agencies and missionaries misusing desperate situations of people to 'win' them for Christ. Dudley Woodberry, emeritus and professor of Islamic Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, writes in a recently published book, that God is working in "*catastrophes*, be they of natural or human causes. This has provided the occasion for the church to provide cups of cold water or milk in Christ's name where the Sahara Desert crept south, or bail out cups of cold water in that same name in South Asia where cyclones and tsunamis inundated their coastal lands. Both have given occasions for Christians to express God's love to victims who, by experiencing that love for their physical needs, also welcome it for their spiritual needs."[35] Yet, the problem is that statements like the one of Lakhani

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[34] Hindu Council UK 2007.
[35] Woodberry 2006, 12f.

are serving as an argument to ban and discriminate any form of legitimate missionary outreach.

To unconditionally adopt the adversaries' view of Christian mission would have tremendous consequences for Christian life and witness as the following table shows:

Complain:proselytism by unethical means	**Christian witness at stake**
Inducement of young people who are underage / minors	Care for children; provide education and training to minors to achieve self-reliance
Enticement of mentally and physically ill, ignorant, desperate people	Care for the disabled, sick, prisoners, naked, hungry
Luring members by material offerings	Option for the poor
Cultural arrogance	Prophetic criticism of social, cultural and spiritual evils
Disturbance of public order	Public witness of the Gospel
Aggression against other religious communities	Call to witness among all nations
Accusation against converts	**Claim of converts**
Apostasy, betrayal, harm against the own religious community	Following the call to return to God
Victim of lure, enticement	Decision out of free will

It is doubtful that a full consent will ever be reached regarding the difference between (ethical) religious witness and unethical proselytism. This endeavour seems to be extremely difficult at a global level not only due to the much greater variety of post-modernities worldwide, but also because of tremendous differences in religious law and legal practice existing among the states worldwide.[36] But it might be less difficult to struggle with the

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[36] For an astute analysis of a contentious legislation and arbitrary legal practice, cf. Owens 2006, taking Sri Lanka as a case study.

problem on a (Western) European level where state laws, legal practice and a broad, consolidated experience with the dispensation of justice do not, in general, leave citizens in doubt if an act fulfils the offence of unlawful proselytism or not. If a case of proselytism is brought to court the law provides a whole set of regulations to judge proselytising activities. In Switzerland, for example, such activities are judged either according to criminal law (*Individualstrafrecht*) prohibiting offences against body and life, somebody's honour, property and liberty, according to trade law against dishonest competition, or according to the public law prohibiting acts endangering public order and peace.[37]

Beyond the mentioned offences the distinction between both forms of communicating a religious message in the public sphere (mission by unethical means *and* reasonable missionary outreach) are left to the discourse of civil society. This is not only a great chance for religious communities in Europe to shape their relations according to their own principles and insights, but implies, too, a tremendous challenge to the ecumenical movement and inter-religious dialogue. In 2006, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican established a study group and mandated it to discuss ways 'Towards an ethical approach to conversion'. Representatives of the WCC, the Roman Catholic Church, as well as, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are working on a 'code of conduct' for Christian witness and conversion in a pluralist world. Parallel to that process, an inter-religious group including Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems, Jews and Christians has been initiated by the WCC and is discussing the same issue from a multi-faith perspective. Their outcomes remain to be seen later, but I have much hope for this ongoing process.

Towards a common understanding on conversion in a post-modern context

My conclusions are summed up in the four following points:

(1) Transition from modernity to post-modernity should be reflected in close connection with other issues and concerns, namely the preservation of human rights, the continuing development of state laws and

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[37] Juillerat 2006, 75.

responsibilities at the level of legal practice. In a time of competing and contentious post-modernities it is important for civil society to claim and defend human rights as they are codified in religious laws of constitutional states, as well as in the European Convention on Human Rights. In other words: churches together with other faith communities in Europe may not give way to culturalism or religious communalism endangering the freedom of thought, conscience and religion as it is formulated in the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950.[38]

(2) The freedom of thought, conscience and religion in Western European states implies that individuals, as well as collectives, are not to be shielded against reasonable missionary outreach by members of other religious communities. This may be felt as an unacceptable demand in view of minority religions exposed to the dominant culture of majority religions. But peaceful coexistence between religious groups of different background requires, first of all, to accept such exposure and to tolerate critical remarks about one's religion and belief from members of other religions. Such mutual acceptance has to be perceived as non negotiable. It should be emphasized as a precondition for a common understanding on conversion.

(3) The right to leave a religious community, to adopt another community or to live without any religious affiliation may not be questioned either. Nevertheless, the question remains if in European states religious minority groups should get, at least in some way, legal protection. Can the growing tension between the religious freedom of individuals and the religious rights of communities be solved somehow? Should it be anchored in religious state law? The debate is going on; consistent and consensual answers are not yet visible.

(4) In missiological debate there is much reflection about *metanoia* and returning to God while the question of how to deal with failed conversions or even apostates and apostasy is rarely raised. A look at the Scriptures

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[38] Art. 9 of the ECHR from 1950 states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

shows that it is not only recorded how Jesus invites women and men into discipleship, but also how he deals with those who have reservations to follow him or are even betraying and leaving him. According to the story of the temptation in the desert, Jesus abstains from building the Kingdom at all costs and by all means (Mt 4). Further on in his life he accepts failure in converting people rather than to use enticement, verbal aggression or coercion as means of his mission.[39] He remains silent when Judas betrays and leaves him. Jesus does not urge him to abstain from his fatal step (Mt 27). In the Gospel of John we find Jesus provoking people by his teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum (Jn 6:60-71). "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (Jn 6:60), he asked to some of the disciples present. As a consequence, many of them withdrew and no longer followed him (Jn 6:66). Instead of condemning them for leaving him, Jesus makes a significant statement: "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (Jn 6:65). Here we find no fear of losing disciples. People are given the space to make up their own minds. They are free to leave.

This brings me back to the introduction of my article: conversion is God's act. Even Jesus, as the Son of God, knows and accepts that the initiative and final decision about conversion and apostasy lay with his Father, not with him. His words express calmness, care, love and peace. May that attitude liberate Christians from the aspiration to bear the final responsibility in questions of conversion – be it their own conversion, the conversion of their fellow believers, or of believers outside their fold.

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[39] Remark Lk 9 and 10: sending of the twelve disciples and again the seventy disciples to the Gentiles.

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Conversion in a Post-Modern Context – Commenting on Prof. Christine Lienemann's Ideas

Atte Helminen

Abstract: This commentary article approaches conversion from a practical perspective, figuring out how conversion in post-modern contexts has turned from individual conviction into a process that starts with communal attachment which is followed by changes in one's worldview. This challenges the churches to re-examine the way they approach people with no Christian conviction.

Keywords: conversion, communality, pastoral care

I approach this topic from a practical perspective and through my experience as a Christian pastor, a church planter and a theologian who has tried to change the mindset of an old Seventh-day Adventist church in Helsinki to understand post-modernities and, at the same time, plant a new church with a post-modern missional understanding. It has been a life-changing experience both for me and the team I worked with. From the biblical point of view conversion is vital for the experience of a Christian. The church will die without conversions.

Christine Lienemann's article is a clear presentation on the wide issues relating to conversion issues in a post-modern context. I tend to agree with her conclusions and I am challenged by her questions.

How did I see conversion happen in the churches I worked with? It used to be that in the old Helsinki Annankatu Seventh-day Adventist church the new members usually heard the gospel and the Scriptures interpreted in such a way that made sense to them. Many of the new members had read about the Adventist interpretation of the Bible through a Bible correspondence school, through a book they had received from somewhere, or through a public meeting or a seminar they had attended. After hearing or reading

the Bible message, they would come to a decision that this is the truth as far as they can understand up to that point. After making a commitment to the message, they would be invited to take a step forward to become a member of the church community. The initial commitment of the convert is to the message, not to the community. This form of evangelism is usually a programme and a performance driven method. As long as the programmes work well, there will be new converts. When the programme no longer works or the pastor/leader leaves the conversions usually stagnate. This is an example that demonstrates a conversion experience in a modern context.

In the new church, and later it could also be seen in the old Annankatu church, the conversion process looks a little different. The new members are usually friends of the church members first. The existing members share their own experience of Jesus and through friendship the non-churchgoing person would begin to trust the experience of their friend. The non-churchgoer and the friend take a spiritual journey together seeking Jesus. The new convert first wants to find a community to belong to until he or she is interested in hearing the full message of the church and become committed to an institutionalized church. The faith of the convert usually grows through a slow process with many experiences in different creative spiritual environments. This form of evangelism is not usually programme driven and is not dependent on pastoral authority, but it is a community and a friendship driven method. This is an example that demonstrates one kind of a conversion experience in a post-modern context.

In the modern context the convert first needs to believe in order to behave and belong. In the post-modern context the believer usually wants to belong first, enjoying the atmosphere of trust, until a belief and behaviour is fully established.

This change the culture and people's behaviour often leads to problems in the religious community and in the leadership identity of the pastors, as they have been trained and equipped in a modernist way of evangelism and behaviour. The change process will also lead to religious identity issues within their own community. I agree with Lienemann on the fact that we need to re-think conversion from a new perspective and one of the discussions that needs to happen is in the area of religious identity.

We usually look at conversion in the context of changing religions or being proselytized by another Christian denomination. When I look at conversion in my own Christian culture I see a lot of wasted money, effort and time in converting people groups one's own denomination. This has to do with an identity being fixed in a certain way of behaviour. During the time of modernity the members are often classified as conservative, liberal, evangelical, or maybe just mainstream (if I take care of the church, the church will take care of me) or cultural (a person enjoys the atmosphere). What a waste if the religious community has started to convert its own people!

Looking at the person of Jesus, was he interested in making people follow his message and become converts? Did he want his followers to follow his doctrines? In John 3:16 Jesus talks to Nicodemus about what is a real conversion. In Matt.16:13-16 Jesus is testing whether his disciples understand what happens when a person is converted - "born again". Jesus is not asking about how well he preached or what the result of his teaching is. Instead he says: "who do you say that I am?" and Simon Peter answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The person of Jesus precedes the doctrines of Jesus. Jesus asked a post-modern type of a question from his disciples.

How do I appreciate my neighbour's faith while affirming my own is also a good question in Lienemann' article? A Muslim shop keeper in Finland said to a Christian customer just recently: "Jesus must be coming back soon, because so many terrible things are happening". That was quite an appreciative statement from a Muslim friend.

Another statement in Lienemann's article made me think again: "New, maybe even inter-religious, ways of common pastoral care for people ready for conversion after a crisis of faith should be explored". I have seen this practiced in a Christian context in meetings conducted in Helsinki by Billy Graham. Another place where this practice should happen more is hospital ministry. In Finland hospital chaplaincy is financed and run by the Lutheran state church. A dialogue with other Christian churches and the Lutheran church has started well. Fortunately the Lutheran hospital chaplains are trained to serve people with different religious backgrounds and traditions.

The last four principles mentioned by Lienemann "towards a common understanding on conversion in post-modern context" are all principles

that should be highlighted in ecumenical and inter-religious discussions in order to make them a common practice.

In my present role as the leader of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Finland I find the question of conversion very important as it determines the future of the church. While the Christian church is growing in many parts of the world the European church, including the Seventh-day Adventist church, is on the decline just like many other institutionalized churches.

Leonard Sweet wrote quite bluntly to the point about this: "ministry in the twenty-first century has more in common with the first century than with the modern world that is collapsing all around us."[1] He continues: "The institutional church in the next twenty years will continue more and more to look like the pink Cadillac with the huge tail fins."[2] And he points out finally: "The church's leaders have Alzheimer's disease. We still love them. We remember and pass on their stories. But they're living in another world. They're totally clueless about the world that is actually out there. The problem is that they are captaining the ship."[3]

We need to accept the new norm: "Discontinuous change has become the new continuous change, and we were never trained to deal with this kind of world! ... Discontinuous change is disruptive and unanticipated; it creates situations that challenge our assumptions." [4]

Who will be the ones finding the new converts in the post-modern context? "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Every believer has a direct connection to God through Jesus. Every Christian is a missionary with a mission.

Paul said, God did not choose the powerful or the rich to build the kingdom; rather, "God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world, that he

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[1] Sweet 2000, xvii.
[2] Sweet 2000, 2 (anonymous quote).
[3] Sweet 2000, 29 (anonymous quote).
[4] Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006, 6-7.

might put to shame the things that are strong; and God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised" (1 Cor. 1:27-28).It seems according to this text:

> that God enters the ordinariness of our confused congregations and its organizational system. God enters among people who don't get it, who are often compromised beyond hope, and there God calls forth new imagination. Christian imagination is about announcing that God does a new thing by entering into the very real places where we are formed, to transform them. This is what the Incarnation is about.[5]

God can use anybody in the work of his ministry. Just as Lienemann emphasized, conversion is always God's act. However, God works through his people who are already converted to share a verbal witness to the person who is ready to hear it.

It is more than 20 years ago that I used to attend a Christian school close by Turku. During the weekends I enjoyed hitchhiking on the Turku – Helsinki road. Once I was given a lift by an old man. The man was very nice. He was dressed up in his track suit. I even remember the car he was driving. The man kept on asking many questions and somehow I ended up sharing my personal testimony with Jesus. I must have told him my life story too. It was quite common for me to share my faith with a stranger if a person wanted to know. As the old man got to know that I was a Seventh-day Adventist, towards the end of the trip, he wanted to send his warmest greetings to some Adventists he knew. I said I would be happy to pass on the greetings and asked him who was sending their greetings. And the man said: Mikko Juva – he was the retired archbishop of the Lutheran church in Finland.

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[5] Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006, 30.

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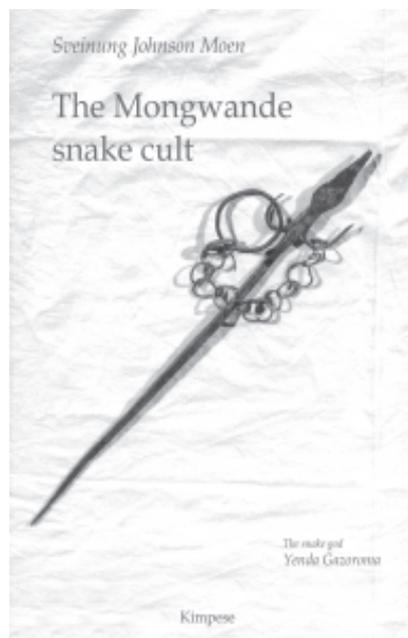
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"The Re-turn of Religion in the Third Millennium"; Pentecostalisms and Postmodernities

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Abstract: This article deals with the relationship between Pentecostalisms and postmodernities. There are many similarities and connections between them, starting from the plurality of expressions of both of them, emphasis on experience and emotions over reason, the understanding of the importance of the present situation over against the metaphysical sphere as well as communitarian emphases. However, in spite of all of these resonances, the Pentecostals approach the question about "foundations" in quite a different way from postmodern approaches. Postmodern relativism in dealing with truth claims finds no acceptance among the Pentecostals.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Charismatic spirituality, postmodernity, religious experience

In Search of an "Experientialist" Religion for the New World

The Harvard theologian Harvey Cox, once (in)famous for his failed prophecy of the diminishing role of religion in the *Secular City*, suggests a re-turn of religion in the beginning of the new millennium, a religion which has to do with *Fire from Heaven*:

> As the first days of the new millennium draw closer, the prospects for the human spirit seem both promising and chilling. For the past three centuries, two principal contenders – scientific modernity and traditional religion – have clashed over the privilege of being the ultimate source of meaning and value. Now, like tired boxers who have slugged away too long, the two have reached an exhausted stalemate. . . . People are still willing to rely on science for the limited things it has proven it can do, but they no longer believe it will answer their deepest questions. They remain vaguely intrigued with the traditional religions, but not with conventional churches. . . . Increasing numbers of people appear ready to move on, and are on the lookout for a more promising map of the life-world. . . . As both scientific modernity and conventional religion progressively lose their ability to

provide a source of spiritual meaning, two new contenders are stepping forward – "fundamentalism" and, for lack of a more precise word, "experientialism." Both present themselves as authentic links to the sacred past. Both embody efforts to reclaim what is valuable from previous ages in order to apply it to the present and future. Which of these two rivals eventually prevails will be decided in large measure by which one grasps the nature of the change we are living through. . . . Most agree that we are entering a period in which we will see the world and selves less cerebrally and more intuitively, less analytically and more immediately, less literally and more analogically. . . . Perhaps it has taken the very recent and unprecedented meeting of east and west to produce this new stage of consciousness. In any case, these thinkers find evidence for a new phase of history in virtually every field of human endeavor—in atonal and improvisational music, in the environmental movement, in new styles of painting and sculpture, in experimental architecture, and especially in poetry. I think one can also fit in pentecostalism.[1]

While observers of postmodernities – as well as life in the beginning of the new millennium – would probably be shouting "Amen" to Cox's litany, the last sentence sounds heretical at its best and incredible at its worst. Pentecostalism and postmodernities? What possibly would these two have to do with each other?

While it is of course possible that a prophet like Cox may turn out to be wrong again, before inquisition, it is only fair to hear more about his reasoning. Having established first that fundamentalisms – whether those of a Christian sort or a Muslim or Hindu or other religious type – are but "recent reactions to different forms of modernity" and yet ironically "claim to have a firm grip on absolute truth" in matters of religion (and at times of politics), what he calls "experientialism," is "more disparate and inchoate, harder to describe than fundamentalism." As an example of the latter, Cox mentions liberation theologies and feminist theologies. What is common to both fundamentalisms and experientialisms is that they can appear in more than one religion – and indeed, are doing so in the beginning of a new millennium.[2]

So, "experience" matters in the new religiosity: "Pentecostals talk about *experience* a lot. The old tent-meeting adage that 'a man with a doctrine doesn't stand a chance against a man with an experience' is still frequently

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[1] Cox 1995, 299-301.
[2] Cox 1995, 300-305 (citations in 303 and 304 respectively).

quoted [among Pentecostals]."[3] What are some other features of this new emerging "experientialism" that in Cox's view bespeak the rise of Pentecostalism? In his *Fire from Heaven,* he discusses features such as a new appreciation of affections and the mysterious/mystical, healings and deliverances, nonhierarchical structures and involvement of all (rather than those educated formally), and grassroots spirituality. Cox also mentions similar kinds of things emerging in the renewal of other religions such as documented and ably discussed in Seyed Hossein Nasr's *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations,* which defines spirituality as the something that "is open to the transcendent dimension" and where the person "experiences ultimate reality." While focusing on the most likely candidate in Islam, Sufism, the principle has a wider application as well.[4]

Before taking a closer look at potential similarities and dissimilarities between Pentecostalisms and postmodernities, a few clarifying thoughts are in order to make sure we are all using the two terms in the same way. Following that, the rest of the essay seeks some common features between Pentecostalisms and postmodernities as well as differences and differing orientations.

The Challenge of Defining Pentecostal Identity

The main title of this article is to be taken literally: it speaks of both Pentecostalisms and postmodernities in plural (the symposium organizers had already met me halfway, having suggested the topic in the form "Pentecostalism and *postmodernities*"!). While nothing like a uniform definition of Pentecostalisms exists, a helpful orientation to the myriads of movements known by that umbrella name is the terminology adopted by *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.*[5] That typology lists, first, (Classical) Pentecostal denominations such as Assemblies of God or Foursquare Gospel, owing their existence to the famous Azusa Revival; second, Charismatic movements, Pentecostal-type spiritual movements within the established churches (the largest of which is the Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal); and third, neo-Charismatic movements, some of the most notable of which are the Vineyard

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[3] Cox 1995, 312.
[4] Cited in Cox 1995, 309.
[5] While canons are still in the making, this is the typology adopted in Burgess & van der Maas, eds, 2002.

Fellowship in the USA, African Initiated Churches, and the China House Church movement, as well as an innumerable number of independent churches and groups all over the world). Number wise, the Charismatic movements (about 200 million) and neo-Charismatics (200-300 million) well outnumber Classical Pentecostals (75-125 million). Diversity is the hallmark of Pentecostalisms. The diversity arises in two dimensions: the cultural and the theologico-ecumenical. Pentecostalisms, unlike any other contemporary religious movement, Christian or non-Christian, are spread across most cultures, linguistic barriers, and social locations.[6] Related to this is the theological and ecumenical diversity, which simply means that there are several more-or-less distinct Pentecostalisms. When I use the term "Pentecostalisms" in what follows, I am mainly speaking of the first category, namely, Pentecostal churches, under whatever name they are known all over the world, and thus leave aside Charismatic movements within established churches and all independent Pentecostal-type movements. Still, speaking of Pentecostalisms in the plural is a valid and needed choice in light of the great diversity even within that oldest subgroup. How different in ethos, manifestation, and to some extent in theology are, for example, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea – the world's largest church with more than one million adherents – from the African-American (Black) Pentecostal churches of the US South from the small Pentecostal congregations in any European country, and so on.

The question of what makes Pentecostalisms – in other words, what is its identity? – is a notoriously difficult one. Unlike, say, Lutheranism or Roman Catholicism, Pentecostal identity is not based on creeds or shared history. Nor can Pentecostal identity be based on ecclesiastical structures since you can find the whole repertoire of them from most local-church autonomous models (Scandinavia) to Congregationalist (Continental Europe and England) to Presbyterian (White Pentecostals in the USA) to episcopal (Black Pentecostals in the USA and elsewhere) to other types.

If there is a common denominator, not only among (Classical) Pentecostals but also between them and, say Roman Catholic Charismatics and African Instituted Churches, it has to do with a unique spirituality. While it can be named in more than one way, it has everything to do with a Christ-centered

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[6] The diversity is well documented. For an up-to-date account, see e.g., the annual statistic lists in the January issue of *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* compiled by David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson.

charismatic spirituality with a passionate desire to "meet" with Jesus Christ as he is being perceived of as the Bearer of the "Full Gospel," i.e., Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, Baptizer with the Spirit, and the Soon-returning King.[7] Spirituality, rather than theology/creeds or sociology of religion[8], is the key to understanding Pentecostalism.[9] No one else has argued so forcefully and convincingly for the primacy of spirituality as the way to define Pentecostalisms as Walter J. Hollenweger, the most noted theological observer of the movements. Hollenweger for decades has insisted that it was the early years of the emerging Pentecostal movement that gave the movement its *prodigium*. The first decade of the movement, says Hollenweger, forms the heart, not the infancy, of Pentecostal spirituality.[10] Features such as orality of liturgy, narrativity of theology and witness, maximum participation at the level of reflection, prayer, and decision-making in a community characterized by inclusion and reconciliation, inclusion of dreams and visions into personal and public forms of worship, and a holistic understanding of the body-mind relationship reflected in the ministry of healing by prayer, were formative at the movement's inception.[11]

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[7] A definitive study of the main motifs of "Full Gospel" is Dayton 1987. For a fine account of key themes and orientations in Pentecostal spirituality, see Spittler, 2002, 1096-1102.

[8] In the past, a typical way of dismissing Pentecostals in terms of deprivation theory was the norm among the sociologists of religion, often with little or no first-hand knowledge of the movement itself. For a balanced critical discussion, see Miller 1996, 97-144.

[9] Here I cannot engage the complicated question of the theological and spiritual origins of Pentecostalism, a debated issue among specialists. Four main proposals have been set forth. (1) Some connect the origins of the modern Pentecostal movement with the work of Charles F. Parham and his students at Topeka, Kansas. (2) Non-White historians and theologians of the movement often emphasize the primary role of the Black Holiness preacher William Joseph Seymour and the Apostolic Faith Mission that arose in Los Angeles, California, in April 1906. (3) Others, who note that some of their leaders or members spoke in tongues prior to either Parham or Seymour, see themselves as constituting the earliest Pentecostal denominations, thereby claiming to be the original Pentecostals. (4) Finally, some view the origins of Pentecostalism as a sovereign work of God that can be traced to no single leader or group, but rather to a spontaneous and simultaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit around the world. For starters, see Robeck 1993, 166-80; Cerillo 1997, 29-52. Despite some differing terminology, they agree on the basic outline of the history.

[10] Hollenweger 1988, 551. So also Land 1993, 14, 47.

[11] W. J. Hollenweger, "After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism," *International Review of Missions* 75 (January 1986): 6. More recently, Hollenweger has summarized the "roots" of Pentecostalism in these terms: (1) the Black oral root; (2) the Catholic root, (3) the evangelical root, (4) the critical root, (5) the ecumenical root. Hollenweger 1996, 3-14.

[11] Hollenweger 1993, 265-88. Similarly, e.g., J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, an African Pentecostalist, defines the movement as "Christian tradition that emphasizes salvation in ...

For Hollenweger, thus, Pentecostalism represents a religious movement *sui generis, "eine neue Konfession,"* which cannot be reduced to either Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, or even to Protestantism as such.[12]

Pentecostalisms Flirting with Postmodernities?

What about Pentecostalisms' relation to postmodernities? It would be of course useless to even to begin to define postmodernities.[13] I believe we can work with a very minimal characterization of that phenomenon, such as lack of metanarratives; rediscovery of the aesthetic, nonrational, mystical, and similar "soft values"; lack of trust in institutions; search for holism in life – negatively put, eschewal of dualistic explanations – new communication patterns; and dynamic, somewhat confused understanding of the relationship between individual and communal, local and global, and so on. As good as any description of postmodernity in general is offered by Os Guinness:

> Postmodernism announces itself as a break with modernism, just as modernism did earlier with tradition. Where modernism was a manifesto of human self-confidence and self-congratulation, postmodernism is a confession of modesty, if not despair. There is not truth, only truths. There are no principles, only preferences. There is no grand reason, only reasons. There is no privileged civilization (or culture, belief, norms, and styles), only a multiplicity of cultures, beliefs, periods, and styles. . . . There is no grand narrative of human progress, only countless stories of where people and their cultures are now. There is no simple reality or any grand objectivity of universal, detached knowledge, only a ceaseless representation of everything in terms of everything else.[14]

...Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, pneumatic phenomena such as 'speaking in tongues,' prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general, perceived as standing in historic continuity with the experiences of the early church, are sought, accepted, valued, and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experiences of his Spirit." Asamoah-Gyadu 2001, 228.

[12] Ibid., 265.

[13] Personally, I find extremely helpful the way Graham Ward, who is of course also known as a major theological advocate of Radical Orthodoxy, outlines the complex and fluid relationships between contemporary theologies and postmodernities in his *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory* (2000). *,* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) as in his other main guide to the topic which he edited: *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (1997).

[14] Guinness 1994, 103-5.

In general, religion and religiosity matters to postmodern people, it's just often a different kind of religion from, say, *Kulturprotestantismus*. In the English-speaking world, a new expression of Christian spirituality and ecclesiology is emerging under the name the *Emerging Churches*, an authentically postmodern phenomenon – or perhaps, one should say: phenomena (in the plural).

Some Pentecostal theologians – and theological observers such as Cox and Hollenweger – have flirted with postmodernities. Beginning from the mid 1990s, there have been a number of experiments in hermeneutics to that effect[15] and later the discussion has expanded to other areas that Pentecostalisms and postmodernities may have in common such as the principle of embodiment and the search for holism, the importance of narrative, and so on.[16]

James K. A. Smith has recently tried to match two candidates as unlikely as ours, namely, Pentecostalism and Radical Orthodoxy! An odd courtship, indeed! Smith argues that while, on the one hand, in Pentecostalism one can discern certain parallels to Radical Orthodoxy, there are also, on the other hand, defined differences and highlighting those differences is important as well.[17] Let me do something similar and attempt a correlation of postmodernities and Pentecostalisms by suggesting – the word *suggest* has to be taken at face value here, meaning that at the moment I am asking as many questions as I am arguing for anything – some parallels and some differences. I am discerning similarities between postmodernities and Pentecostalisms with regard to the following themes: rediscovery of "primal spirituality," emphasis on "the materiality of salvation" and search for holism, as well as the cherishing of communitarianism and empowerment of all. Having discussed these and related features, in the final part of the essay, I turn my critical eyes on counter-forces and -orientations in Pentecostalisms that make any correlating with postmodernities suspect and inchoate.

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[15] See, e.g., Cargal 1993, 163-87; Byrd 1993, 203-14; Archer 1996, 63-81. For a much less enthusiastic appraisal and with some criticism, see also Kärkkäinen 1998, 76-115.

[16] An important contribution here is Johns 1995, 73-96. Lately, however, more modest and self-critical remarks have emerged such as those found in Poirier & Lewis 2006, 3-21. For a helpful theological reflection by a Roman Catholic theologian, well versed in Pentecostalism, see Del Colle 2000, 97-116.

[17] Smith 2003, 97-114.

If there is any thesis for my discussion, it would something like this: while undoubtedly there are similarities and shared orientations between postmodernities and Pentecostalisms, there are also a number of things that differentiate them from each other not only because Pentecostalism shares a different "foundation"[18] from postmodernities, but also because Pentecostalisms as an emerging and developing spirit-movement are loaded with dynamic tensions, even potential contradistinctions. At the moment, it is too early – after the first centennial – to know what Pentecostalisms as a phenomenon is in the final analysis.

In Search of Parallels between Postmodernities and Pentecostalisms

"Primal Spirituality"

If Pentecostalisms' identity could – and should – be defined in terms of spirituality rather than, say, texts or traditions, then that may be the main clue to seeking for connections with postmodernities. Indeed, that is the thrust of what has been attempted recently. According to Cox, Pentecostalism

> has succeeded because it has spoken to the spiritual emptiness of our time by reaching beyond the levels of creed and ceremony into the core of human religiousness, into what might be called 'primal spirituality,' that largely unprocessed nucleus of the psyche in which the unending struggle for a sense of purpose and significance goes on. Classical theologians have called it the 'imago dei,' the image of God in every person. Maybe the Pentecostals are referring to the same thing with different words. . . . My own conviction is that Pentecostals have touched so many people because they have indeed restored something.[19]

I welcome the way Cox approaches the core motif of Pentecostalism, namely, its "experientialist" spirituality, by employing the concept of "primal spirituality" widely employed in English-speaking religious studies. "Experience," as we all know, is a notoriously difficult and many-faceted

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[18] Teaching on the other side of the Atlantic, I am of course well aware of the raging "foundationalism" debate among postmodernists and therefore using this checkered term, I am putting it in quotes. With all postmodern attempts to exclude "foundations" from contemporary *thesaurus*, my own understanding is that while the term should be handled with care, it still has a legitimate place in the discourse.

[19] Cox 1995, 81.

concept. Any "turn to experience" in modern theology adds as much fog as it does clarity to discussion. Speaking of Pentecostalism's "turn to experience" – the movement which he regards as the "most" postmodern of all Christian expressions in the contemporary world[20] – in terms of primal spirituality includes three interrelated components: "primal speech," "primal piety," and "primal hope." "Primal speech" highlights the spiritual importance of "ecstatic utterance," *glossolalia*, speaking in tongues – an activity known throughout Christian history as well as among other religions. "In an age of bombast, hype, and doublespeak, when ultraspecialized terminologies and contrived rhetoric seem to have emptied and pulverized language, the first pentecostals learned to speak – and their successors still speak – with another voice, a language of the heart," Cox argues. "Primal piety" speaks of the spiritual importance of vision, healing, dreams, dance, and other archetypal religious expressions. What is important here is that "the reemergence of this primal spirituality came – perhaps not surprisingly – at just the point in history when both the rationalistic assumptions of modernity and the strategies religions had used to oppose them (or to accommodate to them) were all coming unraveled." "Primal hope" points to "pentecostalism's millennial outlook – its insistent that a radically new world age is about to dawn."[21]

Postmodernists, of course, gladly welcome the rediscovery of what is here called "primal spirituality." What strikes one visiting, for example, typical Emerging Churches worship services is the interesting mixture of old and new, in terms of the latest high-tech audio-visual aids combined with ancient mystical, semi-sacramental or then, highly emotional, exuberant movements, sounds, and the like. At the same time, it has to be said that of course "For many thoughtful people, all three of these qualities of the pentecostal phenomenonon – glossolalia, dreams and trances and millennialism – appear at best merely bizarre and at worst downright scary."[22]

Alongside this emphasis on experience and primal spirituality, Pentecostalisms share with postmodernities the new appreciation of the affectivity

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[20] See also Cox 1994, 3-12. Land's book from 1992 is a landmark work by a Pentecostal theologian on the importance of eschatologically loaded, charismatic, Christ-centered spirituality as the "core" of Pentecostalism.

[21] Cox 1995, 81-82.

[22] Cox 1995, 83.

of religious experience and knowledge – a feature J. K. A. Smith also finds in common between Pentecostalism and Radical Orthodoxy.[23] For any observer of Pentecostal worship services, the presence of an affective element is visible in music, dance, drama, movements, tears and laughter, and so on. Smith even argues that the adoption by Pentecostals of these kinds of features also speaks of what he calls "affective epistemology," which does not privilege only, and times not even primarily discursive, analytic argumentation but gives a fair place to intuition, emotions, and other nonrational aspects of the human being.[24]

The philosopher Smith further contends that because of an emphasis on the role of experience and its rootage in affective epistemology, Pentecostal theology – differently from Evangelical theology – resists the kinds of dualisms that postmodernists as well as Radical Orthodox advocates are also resisting.[25] This takes me to the second feature in Pentecostalism with parallels in postmodernity: the search for wholeness of salvation, embodiment, and what I call here "the materiality of salvation."

The Materiality of Salvation

In an important article titled "Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies,"[26] Miroslav Volf has argued that with all their differences, these two Christian movements share a vision of salvation in this-worldly, physical, material, embodied terms. While neither of the movements, of course, leaves behind the eschatological, future-oriented hope, relegating salvation merely to the future will not do either. True, liberationists focus their efforts on socio-political (including gender) liberation, while for Pentecostals it is more about the individual's release from sicknesses and ailments, physical or emotional. All the same, there is resistance to excluding the bodily this-worldly reality from the vision of salvation. Smith reminds us of the fact that, contrary to common assumptions about the "otherworldliness" of Pentecostalisms, the movement is also characterized by a commitment to social justice, empowerment of the powerless and a "preferential option

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[23] Smith 2003, 111.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Volf 1989, 447-467.

for the marginalized" tracing back to its roots at Azusa Street as a kind of paradigm of marginalization – a revival in an abandoned stable, led by an African-American preacher.[27]

While Volf takes Luther as his main example of what he calls traditional theologies' "spiritualist" orientation, I would like to point to the contemporary Lutheran theologian W. Pannenberg, the greatest living systematician. What amazes me in the Munich systematician's pneumatology which – alongside that of the Reformed J. Moltmann – represents a holistic, world-embracing vision, in keeping with currents in the doctrine of the Spirit, is that it completely misses the topic of healing and exorcisms as well as empowerment in terms of spiritual gifts. All good talk about the continuity between the first creation and the coming new creation is oblivious to its implications for our lives here and now as embodied creatures, in need of restoration, healing, and release.[28]

Smith sees this central feature of Pentecostalisms deriving from its "positioning of radical openness to God, and in particular, God doing something *differently* or *new,"* of which for him one of the biblical examples is the narrative of Acts 2, namely,

> Peter's courage and willingness to recognize in these "strange" phenomena the operation of the Spirit and declare it to be a work of God. . . . In postmodern terms, we might describe this as an openness to alterity or otherness. . . . Because of this, Pentecostal communities emphasize the continued ministry of the Spirit, including continuing revelation, prophecy, and the centrality of charismatic giftings in the ecclesial community. . . . Included in this ministry of the Spirit is a distinctive belief in the healing of the body as a central aspect of the work of the Atonement. This central belief is an indication of a Pentecostal deconstruction of fundamentalist dualisms. . . . The centrality of belief in physical healing is an indicator of

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[27] Smith 2003, 110. Smith makes here a reference to the Hispanic Pentecostal Liberationist Eldín Villafañe who makes an interesting connection between sacramentality and helping the poor and marginalized: "Hispanic Pentecostalism must reappropriate from its Catholic sacramental past the understanding and challenge that worshipping Jesus is also accomplished through its ministry and service to and with the poor" (p. 112). See Villafañe 1993, 218.

[28] See further, Kärkkäinen 2004, 17-35. In contrast to Pannenberg, Moltmann 1993, chap. 9, discusses widely these topics; even more broadly, Moltmann's constructive theology appears to me postmodern in many ways even though Moltmann never engages the postmodern discourse!

> this: it is a fundamental assertion of the value of embodiment and should constitute a radical critique of all dualisms, as does RO's [Radical Orthodoxy] "incarnational" ontology. By affirming that God is concerned with the health of the body, we affirm materiality, embodiment, and the sensible world.[29]

Embodiment of course stands at the heart of postmodernities and thus is a high value in postmodern Christian theologies as well.[30]

Related to the principle of the materiality of salvation is the Pentecostal insistence on the deliverance and freedom from evil, not only in the future but here already. This is of course a feature that finds resonance especially in cultures of the Global South. In the words of the Ghanaian theologian Ogbu Kalu:

> Going through life is like a spiritual warfare and religious ardor may appear very materialistic as people strive to preserve their material sustenance in the midst of the machinations of pervasive evil forces. Behind it is a strong sense of the moral and spiritual moorings of life. It is an organic worldview in which the three dimensions of space are bound together; the visible and the invisible worlds interweave. Nothing happens in the visible world that has not been predetermined in the invisible realm. The challenge for Christianity is how to witness the gospel in a highly spiritualized environment in which the recognition of the powers has not been banished in a Cartesian flight to objectivity and enlightenment. . . . The argument here is that Pentecostalism in Africa derived her coloring from the texture of the African soil and from the interior of her idiom, nurture, and growth; her fruits serve the challenges and problems of the African ecosystem more adequately than did the earlier missionary fruits.[31]

Communitarianism

One of the many things that amazes – and confuses – me about postmodernities are there checkered and in many ways confusing way of

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[29] Smith 2003, 109-10, 112.

[30] For a brief discussion, see, e.g., Cunningham, 2003, 186-201 (186 esp.). American Process theology similarly – even though as far as I can tell, independently from and at least beginning much earlier than postmodernities – insists on the importance of the principle of embodiment for a sound Christian theology: "Panentheism maintains that God is not defined as pure spirit in contrast to the physical world that s/he created; God is in some sense incarnate in this world." Clayton 2003, 209. Similarly many Feminist theologians, such as Sally McFague, have already for long time called theologians' attention to this.

[31] Kalu 2003, 122.

negotiating the relationship between persons and communities. On the one hand, postmodern mindsets are a rebuttal of modernity's "turn to individuality," if that is being understood in terms of atomistic, separated individuals as is the case in the lifestyles of contemporary urban villages. Not only have postmodern philosophies unmasked and torn apart the whole concept of "self" and thus the individual in modernity's sense, but the likeminded psychologists, sociologists, and others have also re-constructed "self" in terms of "person," which is all about relationality,[32] connections, belonging, and sharing. Certainly no man (or woman) is an island after the advent of postmodernity. That said, on the other hand, no movement is so careful to preserve, cherish, and cultivate some kind of "individuality" and uniqueness. Call it alterity, difference, or some other term. It is all about the same. Even in postmodern ghettos individuals do not want to be subsumed under any kind of collectivity that washes off differences. Be that as it may, my point in relation to the discussion at hand is simply this: postmodernity celebrates communities, communalism, belonging. Observing Pentecostalisms, especially their mission, I discern a definite cultivation and building up of communalism. Should we thus speak of a distinctive Pentecostal *koinonia*?[33]

For postmodern people and Pentecostals, communities are shaped and brought about by a shared narrative, a story that is unfolding in the life of the community. Under the apt title, "Pentecostal Story as a Hermeneutical Narrative Tradition," the Pentecostal theologian Kenneth J. Archer speaks to this effect:

> The Pentecostal community is a distinct coherent narrative tradition within Christianity. Pentecostal communities are bound together by their charismatic experiences and common story. The Pentecostal narrative tradition is one embodiment of the Christian metanarrative. Yet, because the Pentecostal community understands itself to be a restorational movement, it has argued that it is the best representation or embodiment of Christianity in the world today. This may sound triumphalist; yet, Pentecostals, like all restorational narrative traditions of Christianity, desire to be both an authentic continuation of New Testament Christianity and a faithful representation of New Testament Christianity in the present societies in which they exist. Of course, the understanding of what was and should

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[32] For a fine theological account of all of this, see Grenz 2001; for a brief, helpful discussion see also Cunningham, 2003, 186-202.
[33] See further Kärkkäinen 2007, 1-15.

> be New Testament Christianity is based upon a Pentecostal understanding. Moral reasoning, which includes biblical-theological interpretation, is contextualized in the narrative tradition of the Pentecostal community. Pentecostals will engage Scripture, do theology, and reflect upon reality from their own contextualized communities and narrative tradition.[34]

This is, indeed, what is happening all over among Pentecostal communities, whether in the "homelands" or "mission fields". It is significant that in the beginning of the third phase of International Dialogue between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics focusing on communion ecclesiology, Miroslav Volf and Peter Kuzmic of (then) Yugoslavia made the programmatic statement that Pentecostal soteriology and pneumatology point unmistakably in the direction of an *ecclesiology of the fellowship of persons*.[35]

> In the life of the community, Pentecostals have found a new sense of dignity and purpose in life. Their solidarity creates affective ties, giving them a sense of equality. These communities have functioned as social alternatives that protest against the oppressive structures of the society at large. Along with some social critics, Pentecostals have discovered that effective social change often takes place at the communal and micro-structural level, not at the macro-structural level.[36]

According to Kuzmic and Volf, the dynamic of the fellowship is concretely lived out through the charismata. "As fellowship should be the unalienable modus of the Church's existence, so the charismata should be a permanent feature of its life."[37] Consequently, worship experience with the deep desire to "meet with the Lord" stands at the heart of Pentecostal church life. Even when spiritual manifestations such as speaking in tongues, words of wisdom,

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[34] Archer 2004, 40-42. This sounds very postmodern – McIntyrean, and, indeed it is. Interestingly enough, a key resource for Archer's construal of Pentecostalism is A. McIntyre's insights into the importance of narrative and tradition(s) for community formation.

[35] Kuzmic & Volf 1985, 2. See further, Kärkkäinen 2001a, 100-121.

[36] "Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness: Final Report of the Dialogue (1990-1997)," # 43. One is reminded of the important statement by the Reformed theologian Brunner 1953, 10-11: "The Body of Christ is nothing other than a fellowship of persons. It is 'the fellowship of Jesus Christ' or 'fellowship of the Holy Ghost' where fellowship or *koinonia* signifies a common participation, togetherness, a community life. The faithful are bound to each other through their common sharing in Christ and in the Holy Ghost, but that which they have in common is precisely no 'thing,' no 'it,' but a 'he,' Christ and His Holy Spirit."

[37] Kuzmic & Volf 1985, 16.

or healings are missing, there is both openness to and expectation of those tangible signs of the presence of God in the communion of the saints.[38]

What is significant about the Pentecostal *koinonia* was well captured earlier in the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue in the Pentecostal position paper: "It may hardly be gainsaid, that the Pentecostal revivals of the present century have taken the *koinonia* of/with the Holy Spirit out of the cloistered mystical tradition of the Church, and made it the common experience of the whole people of God."[39] Pentecostal *koinonia* at its best represents a principle of democratization and reconciliation: not only is there access to God and "holy things" for all men and women, but also the access to ministry and leadership. It is not about education, status, or wealth but about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Coupled with the belief in and claim of empowerment of all Christians, men and women, young and old, rich and poor by the same Holy Spirit, Pentecostal communities have launched massive mission projects all over the world.[40] Consequently, this has led to the enthusiastic application of the "voluntary principle" which may be *the* key to the massive growth and explosion of the Pentecostal mission enterprise. As Andrew M. Lord summarizes it,

1. Mission is primarily motivated without reference to church organizations, i.e. mission is primarily a 'bottom-up' not a 'top-down' activity;
2. Mission is the domain of every believer, i.e. not limited to a particular class of person, e.g. clergy, religious;
3. Mission arises out of an experience of God, i.e. out of more than just human concern or cultural context.[41]

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[38] There is obviously a connection here with the sacramental principle of traditional churches: whereas sacramental churches consider sacraments as the preferred way of securing the divine presence, along with the preached word, for Pentecostals the emphasis is on the gifts of the Spirit. There have been attempts by some Pentecostal theologians to find commonalities between Pentecostal spirituality, especially its emphasis on *glossolalia,* speaking in tongues, as a way of "securing" the divine presence and sacraments as "signs" of the divine presence. While there are some connecting points, I also think the differences are so dramatic that at most one can only point to some common underlying motifs behind *glossolalia* and, say, the Eucharist. See further, Macchia 1993, 61-76.

[39] Ervin 1987, 8-9.

[40] For discussion of Pentecostal missiology and the Spirit's role therein, see Hollenweger, 1988, 288-306; Kärkkäinen 2000, 33-60; 1999a; 1999b, 207-25; and 2002a; 877-85.

[41] Lord 2000, 83.

Especially during the birth years of the Pentecostal movement in the United States, Pentecostal *koinonia* acted as a powerful social, political, and ecumenical critic. Men and women, white and colored, Methodists and Catholics – they all worshipped together, shared leadership, claimed the "power from on high." No wonder that not only the religious establishment but also the then liberal secular establishment, with the *Los Angeles Times* in the forefront, ridiculed and ostracized the fledgling movement as scandalous and heretical. [42] The Pentecostal belief that "the color line was washed away in the Blood of the Lamb" was such a blow against the turn-of-the-twentieth-century racist, gender-exclusive, and socio-politically conservative mindset.[43]

Talk about postmodern sounding! Talk about democratic ideals! Against institutions, against established norms, against hierarchies, against exclusions. For inclusivity, for empowerment of all, for opportunities for all.

In Search of Dynamic Tensions and Built-in Contradistinctions

The Question of "Foundations"

While some other connecting points between postmodernities and Pentecostalisms could be found and further discussed, such as the place of the aesthetic in the worship service, enough has been said of that. In this final part of the essay, I would like to turn my eye on features, orientations, and developments in Pentecostalisms and their mission work that speak against or differently from postmodernities. Since this is not a student essay written in hopes of good grades – and thus having the burden of "proving" the thesis – I would rather like to confuse the waters, already muddy enough, and attempt to set the discussion in a broader perspective.

To begin with, any parallels between Pentecostalisms and postmodernities have to be counterbalanced by a careful look at real differences. As hinted above, the differences arise out of two sets of factors: first, from the simple

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[42] This is well documented in the new study by the leading Pentecostal historian and ecumenist Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of a Global Movement* (2006).
[43] See further Hollenweger 1992, 7-17.

fact that in my understanding Pentecostalisms as a Christian movement is based on a particular "foundation," and secondly, because Pentecostalisms as a phenomenon appears as an emerging, developing reality with built-in tensions, even potential contradistinctions.

While both Pentecostalisms and postmodernities are formed by and bring about their own particular narratives, behind Pentecostalisms there is also a Big Story, the story of the Gospel. While the gospel story can be read, interpreted, and lived out in many ways and in many "colors" – as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin used to remind us and as Pentecostal mission practice is illustrating so vividly all around the world – it still is that same story. Briefly put: all similarities between postmodernities and Pentecostalisms have to be checked against this radical difference of "foundation."

Pentecostalisms as They Appear

More complicated and complex is the reflection on the implications of Pentecostalisms' built-in tensions to our topic. Let me put it bluntly and then attempt to unpack: it seems to me that against every feature of Pentecostalisms that seem to connect it with postmodernities, there is another side of Pentecostal spirituality and manifestation, just as authentic and genuine, that seems to either compromise or down right destroy the connection. Let me take one topic at a time.

While spirituality is the legitimate and appropriate way of defining Pentecostalism, it is also the fact that very soon after their birth, Pentecostal movements made a determined effort to define themselves along the lines of written texts, ecclesiastical formulae, and so forth – in other words, to make themselves look more like their respected Protestant and Evangelical counterparts. The U.S. Assemblies of God, the largest White Pentecostal denomination in North America and the biggest international Pentecostal family of churches, already defined its identity in 1914 in terms of sixteen Statements of Faith. While highlighting Pentecostal distinctives such as speaking in tongues, divine healing, and urgent eschatological expectation, the Statements also tie the Pentecostal movement into a conservative, quite literalist Bible hermeneutics, dispensational eschatology, and so on. At first the doctrinal contours, however, were looser and more fluid. Then came the need for institutional solidification and especially wider Evangelical

acceptance for a movement that came out of the margins. Consequently, in 1948 the U.S. Assemblies of God redefined some of their doctrinal statements to get in line with strictly defined Fundamentalist oriented (then) Evangelical formulations such as the "inerrancy" of Scripture.[44] In general, the location of Pentecostalism in the camp of conservative Christians, especially in the United States and many parts of Europe and as a result of aggressive missionary work also in many former mission lands, is the historical and social background for Pentecostalism's current manifestation. The alliance with Fundamentalism, however, is a complicated and in a way self-contradictory development. Among all Christians, it is the Fundamentalists who have most vocally opposed the Pentecostal claim for the continuing miraculous work of the Spirit. Similarly, the rather Fundamentalist understanding of revelation and inspiration they inherited may be at odds with a Pentecostal worldview.[45]

The alliance with conservative, at times even fundamentalist, Christianity also helps explain another built-in tension in Pentecostal theology and missiology: the principle of the freedom of the Spirit – or lack thereof – in relation to other religions. The Evangelical theologian Clark Pinnock, himself inclusivist, states the obvious: "One might expect the Pentecostals to develop a Spirit-oriented theology of mission and world religions, because of their openness to religious experience, their sensitivity to the oppressed of the Third World where they have experienced much of their growth, and their awareness of the ways of the Spirit as well as dogma."[46] This has not, however, been the case for the most part.[47] While Pentecostals have excelled in missionary activities with impressive results by any standards, their thinking about the ministry of the Spirit in the world lags behind. Not only that, but – aligning with the more conservative wing of the church – they have also been the first to raise doubts about any kind of saving role of the Spirit apart from the proclamation of the gospel. Most often Pentecostals have succumbed to the standard conservative/fundamentalist view of limiting the Spirit's saving work to the church (except for the work of the Spirit preparing one to receive the gospel). A case in point is the recent

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[44] All of this is documented and ably discussed in Robeck 2002, 922-25.
[45] For an important discussion, see Sheppard 1984, 5-34.
[46] Pinnock 1996, 274.
[47] For a helpful history of Pentecostal views of religions, see Yong 2000, 185-97, on Charismatic Christians' views, see pp. 107-206; see also Kärkkäinen 2002b, 187-98.

warning from an official of the Assemblies of God. According to this statement, a pluralistic approach to theology of religions poses a threefold problem: (1) it is contrary to Scripture; (2) it replaces the obligation for world evangelism; and (3) those who fail to fulfill the Great Commission are ultimately not living under the Lordship of Christ.[48] This is of course not to say that Pentecostals do not believe in the work of the Spirit among religions.[49] It is just to say that their reservations about work of the Spirit in the world emerge from their marriage with the conservative segment of the church rather than from their own spiritual and pneumatic heritage.[50]

When it comes to the materiality of salvation, Pentecostal spirituality, church life, and mission work gives an inchoate picture. Having aligned themselves with Fundamentalists and their dispensationalist eschatology, as well as socio-politically conservative Christians, many Pentecostals, especially White Pentecostals, have also had serious doubts about the value of investing in the world which is to disappear.[51] Fortunately, Pentecostals have not been consistent with their eschatological faith and thus over time have invested huge amounts of energy and resources in social programs, both at the individual and structural level. Yet this mixed feeling has always been there speaking against the idea of the materiality of salvation.

At the same time, the idea of the materiality of salvation in the hands of too many Pentecostals and Charismatics has also turned into gross materialistic search for financial and other benefits. The misdeeds of many Pentecostal

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[48] Carpenter 1995, 19.

[49] An exciting study task for Pentecostals – and others – would be to inquire into potential connections, if any, between the Pentecostal "primal spirituality" and spiritualities of religions, especially those of Asian cultures. It seems to me that Pentecostal pneumatology – even when its potential to pursue that question seems to be trapped in a particular fundamentalistic-conservative milieu – has striking similarities with living religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism in their resistance to modernity

's reductionistic, over-rationalistic, and at times dualistic worldview. The movement towards a post-/late-modern dynamic worldview with its willingness to reassess the canons of modernity has certainly opened up mainline Christian pneumatologies to a more holistic, dynamic reflection on the Spirit. Pentecostalism has that kind of undergirding primal spirituality as a wonderful asset. It is yet to be seen if suggestions such as those by Yong will elicit a wide-ranging resurgence of Pentecostal reflection or if that task will be left only for Charismatic and neo-Charismatic movements. See further, Kärkkäinen 2008.

[50] Some individual Pentecostal theologians serve as trail-blazers in the new understanding of this complicated issue. For starters, see Yong 2003; 2005.

[51] See Kärkkäinen 2001b, 387-404.

leaders in their greedy search of money and prestige are too well documented to deserve much reflection. Any visit to a number of Pentecostal churches not only in the USA but also all over the Global South from Africa to Asia to Latin America paints a picture with serious questions to any theologian and missiologist. Health and wealth are made the prime indicator of God's blessings, and spiritual techniques for reaching them are fine-tuned by ever new itinerant charismatic preachers. Through satellite broadcasting, Prosperity Gospel shows are being brought into our living rooms. On the other hand, Pentecostalisms also suffer from the same kind of "spiritualist" reductionism Volf sees indicative of many traditional theologies, namely, prioritizing the salvation of the "souls" to the point where the wholeness of the human being as an embodied *imago Dei* is being missed. In Pentecostal preaching and witnessing, you can hear simultaneously both voices: seeking for wholeness of salvation and emphasis on the salvation of the soul.

Finally, when it comes to the communitarian nature of Pentecostalism, a mixed picture also emerges. Pentecostalisms are no less prone to embrace the "religion of individualism" so rampant not only in the Global North but also to a growing degree in the Global South as CNN, McDonalds, and the global entertainment industry spread the good news of Western Culture even to the ends of the earth. Nor are Pentecostal communities necessarily more inclusive or welcoming. Rightly, then, does the Pentecostal theologian from Singapore, Simon Chan, lament that Pentecostalism suffers from individualism: "My relationship with God is primary, while my relationship with others is secondary."[52] Consequently, he suggests that Pentecostals need an ecclesiological pneumatology as a corrective.[53] Pentecostals also need to listen carefully to their contemporary theologians to help them rediscover the communal nature of the Holy Spirit in charisms, spiritual gifts, and empowerment. In his *Baptized in the Spirit,* with a telling subtitle, *A Global Pentecostal Theology*, Frank Macchia, having confessed that "with their individualistic understanding of Spirit baptism . . . [Pentecostals] have lacked the conceptual framework in which to understand its connection to the church's communally gifted life,"[54] he issues this important call: "The Spirit is the Spirit of communion. Spirit baptism implies communion. That's why it leads to a shared love, a shared meal, a shared mission, and the

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[52] Chan 2000, 180.
[53] Chan 2000, 196-208.
[54] Macchia 2006, 203.

proliferation/enhancement of an interactive charismatic life."[55] Even speaking in tongues, the most distinctive gift for many Pentecostals, is not unrelated to the *sanctorum communio*. Since no believer encompasses the wholeness of *charismata*, the fullness of God can only be experienced in solidarity, *koinonia* with others in the church body.[56]

Indeed, again, having aligned themselves with religiously and socially conservative forces, many Pentecostals faithfully stick with color-line, status-line, and other markers of exclusion. Certainly, White Pentecostals have become anti-ecumenical against their original vision of the unity of all Christians as a result of the pouring out of the Spirit. And even a cursory look at many Pentecostal churches betrays highly hierarchic, institutionalized, and rigid church structures.

Implications for Missions

My point in telling about all of these counter-forces is neither to blame Pentecostals – other churches are certainly in no better a place – nor to try to please everybody, both those in favor and those suspicious of Pentecostals; nor am I trying to redeem my own argument by telling my audience that I am well aware of the pros and cons when it comes to comparing postmodernities and Pentecostalisms. My point is simply twofold: First, undoubtedly, there are some parallels between postmodernities and Pentecostalisms as my discussion revealed (and which I am not repeating here). Those parallels are significant missiologically and theologically in that they point to some new developments in the cultures and religiosities of the new millennium. While it takes careful and sustained theological – and hopefully also ecclesiological – reflection to decide what we should then do in Christian mission under these changed circumstances, discerning and analyzing those trends is of urgent importance. Postmodernities and Pentecostalisms are helpful pointers to something new happening in the world. Second, although there are granted parallels, there are "foundational" differences, as my discussion again highlighted. Therefore, the main question, as to what is the relationship between postmodernities and Pentecostalisms, cannot be answered in the confines of this essay. At best, what can be done at this stage is to underline the tension-filled, inchoate picture.

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[55] Macchia 2006, 205.
[56] Macchia 1992, 65.

Going back to the larger question, namely, the implications for Christian mission for the new millennium – whatever the precise relationship between postmodernities and Pentecostalisms may be – perhaps we should take the essay title literally and speak not only in terms of ”return,” i.e., coming back, but more importantly also in terms of ”re-turn,” i.e., turning around or making another turn. When religion has re-turned into the life of the third millennium at the global level, it is not only re-appropriating old realities such as experience, mysticism, communion, healing, and so on, but also re-configuring them in a new postmodern context.

The ”turn” to the *spirit* is part of postmodernity's religiosity. For the Christian church, the turn to the *Spirit* – both ”return” and ”re-turn” – opens new vistas and new horizons. In the words of J. Moltmann, this is ”A Pentecostal Theology of Life”

> The gift and presence of the Holy Spirit constitutes the greatest and most wonderful reality that we—the human community, all living beings, and the entire earth—can experience. For present in the Holy Spirit is not just one spirit of the many good and evil spirits that exist, but the very God who creates, gives life, blesses, and redeems…

> *…The Mission of Life*

> Mission is in the original and eternal sense the *Missio Dei.* Only if our Christian mission follows and corresponds to the divine sending is it a mission with trust in God and sound faith. Only if we as people correspond to the divine mission to other people do we respect their worth and divine image and repudiate the temptation to dominate them religiously. The *Missio Dei* is nothing less than the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father through the Son into the world in order that the world can escape ruin and live. Simply put, what is brought by God through Christ into the world is life. 'I live, and you should live also' (Jn 14.19). For the Holy Spirit is the 'source of life' and brings life into the world: life in its entirety, life in its fullness—unhindered, indestructible, eternal life. The creative and life-inspiring Spirit of God brings eternal life here now, before death—not only after death—for the Spirit brings Christ into the world, and Christ is the 'resurrection and the life' in person. . . . According to the synoptic Evangelists, wherever Jesus is, life is, for there the sick are healed, the weary are comforted, the outcasts are accepted, and the demons of death are cast out. According to the book of Acts and the apostolic epistles, wherever the Holy Spirit is present, there is life, for there one finds joy for the victory of life over death and there the power of eternal life is experienced. Mission, in this divine sense, is nothing else than a movement

of life and healing which spreads comfort and courage for life and uplifts those who want to die. Jesus did not bring a new religion in the world, but a new life.[57]

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[57] Moltmann, 1996, 3, 10-11.

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Pentecostalism, Postmodernities and Premodernity – A Response to Kärkkäinen

Tormod Engelsviken

Abstract: This commentary article points out that worldwide Pentecostal/ charismatic phenomenon has to be labelled in part as pre- rather than post-modern. This is because in many countries of the Global South, where Pentecostalism/charismatic movements grow robustly, there has not been a thorough modernisation, rather people move directly from pre-modernity into Pentecostal/charismatic churches. Furthermore, the Pentecostal allegiance to conservative theology is not accidental as Kärkkäinen argues but is rather based on the "foundations" of Pentecostalism.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, charismatic movement, post-modern

In this article I will focus on three areas where I will express my support of Kärkkäinen's points of view, and then go on to three more critical remarks. My comments are not based on extensive research in contemporary Pentecostal theology. My view of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement have in large been formed by my own doctoral dissertation from 1981,[1] my research on the origins and development of Ethiopian Pentecostalism, and a study of the missional Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Malaysia.[2]

Firstly, I appreciate greatly the overarching perspective of the return and re-turn of religion in the 21st century. The change in the cultural climate in Europe, which has long been a stronghold of an enlightenment attitude to religion and an exception to the global situation (Grace Davie), can be seen in the growth of a new religious consciousness.

To take Norway as a typical example, the new interest in religion can be seen at least in two ways: firstly, in a renewal of the church in line with the patterns of "emerging churches" and "missional churches", both within

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[1] Engelsviken 1981.
[2] So far the results of the research in Malaysia can be found in Norwegian in Engelsviken 2004.

the voluntary organisations of the Lutheran state – church resulting in the formation of vital independent congregations in larger cities like Oslo, Bergen and Stavanger – and among the free churches, particularly those of a Pentecostal and charismatic orientation.[3] These churches break with the established patterns of liturgy, worship and other traditional forms but remain conservative as far as doctrine in concerned. They belong both in the "charismatic" and the "evangelical" camp.

Although this recent development can give some hope for a renewal of the Christian church, the dominant feature of the new religious interest is, secondly, the widespread (half the population?) occupation with alternative, new religiosity, often inspired by Eastern religions, with emphasis on "energies", "God within", "non-dualistic holism", "anti-dogmatism" etc. This can be exemplified by the enormous interest and debate caused by the announcement that the Norwegian princess Märtha will start a new school called "Astarte Education", where the students will be taught to communicate with angels, whom she understands as "beings of light" and "love supports". The debate has revealed a peculiar phenomenon that I believe is typical of the Western world: an official, politically and scientifically rationalistic disdain and even a ridicule of old and new religiosity as superstition, folly etc., on the one hand, while more and more people relate to and practise this new religiosity in their private lives, on the other. The distinction between "high" or doctrinally correct religion, and "low" or more animistic folk religion is well known within the world's large religions, but I think we discern a similar duality within post-modern Western society between an official enlightenment rationalism that still lingers in the academic and media world on the one hand, and a popular experiential religion, both of Christian and non-Christian character, on the other.

This brings us to the second point where I agree with Prof. Kärkkäinen, that Pentecostalisms are an expression of "experientialism" (Cox) where there is a place for affections, mystical experiences, healing, exorcism etc. Like Kärkkäinen, I believe that the common denominator of Pentecostalisms is a unique spirituality. Steven J. Land's[4] emphasis on the more affective

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[3] See e.g. interesting articles by Graham Cray, Ove Conrad Hassen and Halvor Nordhaug in Hesselberg, 2006; the chapter by the charismatic pastor of Storsalen in Oslo, Trond Løberg (2004); and the forthcoming book by the Pentecostal Truls Åkerlund (2007).
[4] Land 1993.

"orthopathy", in addition to the more traditional "orthodoxy" and liberation theological "orthopraxy", has shown that Pentecostal spirituality is a significant contribution *sui generis* to world Christianity. To Kärkkäinen's "Christ-centred charismatic spirituality" as described in his paper, I would, however, add that in my research, particularly of the charismatic movement in the 1970s, I found that charismatic spirituality was more Trinitarian than exclusively Christocentric or pneumatocentric. A characteristic feature of the charismatic experience (baptism in the Spirit) was a new awareness of God as the loving Father, Christ as the living present Lord, and the Holy Spirit as power for ministry and new life (the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit).[5]

This brings me to the third point where I appreciate Kärkkäinen's emphasis, namely that differences between Pentecostalisms and postmodernities arise out of the fact that Pentecostalism as a Christian movement is based on a particular "foundation". I would argue that Pentecostal spirituality is very different from many post-modern spiritualities in that it is firmly anchored in the historical facts of Biblical revelation Biblical narrative. Although it is open for contemporary experiences of divine intervention these seldom overrule the classical understanding of Christianity based on the Bible. In my understanding the uniqueness of Pentecostalism is not only a spirituality in the form of "experientialism" but experience combined with, or interpreted through, doctrine or Christian theory. In my research I found that there were several basic theological assumptions and tenets that undergird the Pentecostal experience, and experience and theology mutually reinforce one another. It is this *combination* that seems to give Pentecostals their strong conviction and in turn contribute to the missionary fervour and power of Pentecostalism.[6] This is in some ways a confirmation of Glifford Geertz's classical emphasis on the mutual reinforcing relationship between world view and lifestyle (ethos).[7]

Let me then turn to the three critical comments: Firstly, while I agree that there are some similarities between Pentecostalisms and postmodernities, and Kärkkäinen has ably outlined them, I miss a discussion of whether, for instance, what is called "primal spirituality" is not an expression of Pentecostalism as a *pre-modern* religious movement. Especially in the

[5] Engelsviken 1981, 44-52.
[6] See Engelsviken 1981, 300-320; Engelsviken 2004, 83-91.
[7] Geertz 1966.

Global South, there has not been an extended time of modernity. Some societies have almost directly moved from pre- to postmodernity. From my own research in Ethiopia in the 1970s I noticed that students from village based traditional African culture and religion were directly confronted with the "modern" scientific world view at university. It caused great problems for them, and for many the alternatives became either communism or Pentecostalism. In Pentecostalism they could take with them their basic religious outlook, with consciousness of the reality of the spiritual world and spiritual experiences, and at the same time be able to absorb, and to a certain extent, integrate the results of the "modern" world which they encountered in the university, yet without buying into the worldview assumptions of the Western modernity in the wake of Enlightenment. Western modernity with all its assumptions was never generally accepted in the cultures of the Global South, so neither church nor society has gone through the "modern" period.[8]

The sociologist Bernice Martin has in a very interesting article argued that in Latin America we see "accelerated transition from pre- to postmodernity with a population facing major structural changes in the economy, the political sphere and in culture: changes that entail a paradoxical and bewildering combination of beneficent novel possibilities and massive new strains." In this situation "Pentecostalism operates as one, perhaps the most successful, among several cultural and institutional prophylactics acting against the obviously dystopic features of the transition to postmodernity".[9] Like Kärkkäinen, she also points out some of the inner tensions and contradictions in the Pentecostal movement, but contrary to many sociologists she does not see the authoritarian form of Pentecostalism as an escape from the burden of choice in the post-modern world, but rather as an effective positive antidote against some of the economic, social and cultural evils of the post-modern society.

Another aspect of the "pre-modern" (not in any negative sense) character of Pentecostalism is the emphasis on the spiritual warfare or spiritual conflict. Kärkkäinen hints at the role of exorcism and deliverance in Pentecostalism, but I think this also needs to be emphasized in a slightly

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[8] See e.g. critique of Western dualistic theology influenced by Enlightenment thinking in Yung 1997, 43-55.
[9] Martin 1998, 122, 127.

different direction. While Pentecostalism in Africa, for instance, shares many aspects of the African worldview with belief in spiritual forces, Pentecostalism, more than other churches, also engages in opposing the forces that are believed to be of an evil or demonic kind in different ways through deliverance ministries, exorcism etc. This is also the case with the charismatic movements within the mainline churches.

This brings me to the second critical point. While Pentecostalism shares in a certain "holism" with post-modern religiosity, it also contains an outspoken dualism in its view of spiritual conflict. I am therefore somewhat critical of Kärkkäinen's critique of the Pentecostal movement for its lack of the freedom of the Spirit in relation to other religions and doubtful about the claim that there is not "any kind of saving role of the Spirit apart from the proclamation of the Gospel". I am not convinced that this is caused by the fact that Pentecostals have "succumbed to the standard conservative/fundamentalist view of limiting the Spirit's saving work to the church." I rather think it has to do with the insistence that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and is inextricably related to him, and the fact that the spirits that are at large in the world and in the practice of other religions often turn out to be evil spirits, to be renounced rather than sought. Again I believe that it primarily is the "foundation" of Pentecostalism, as well as experience, that guides them in this matter.[10]

My final comment, which is not really a critical one, relates to Kärkkäinen's comparison between Pentecostal emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit and the traditional sacramental churches' consideration of the sacraments as the preferred way of securing the divine presence, along with the preached word. I do not dispute that gifts have been seen and used in this way, and with a certain Biblical justification, cf**.** 1 Cor. 14:24-25, but I would argue that in recent years worship or praise has been given some of the same function. In contemporary charismatic and Pentecostal worship singing and praise are seen as securing the presence of God in an almost tangible way. This phenomenon may be worthy of further study.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have a great potential as instruments of God's mission in the

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[10] To the question of "spiritual conflict" in the mission of the church, see Moreau et al., 2002. A shorter report from the same Lausanne Movement consultation in 2000 is Engelsviken 2001.

post-modern world both because of its perceived "similarities" and "differences" with postmodernity. Kärkkäinen has pointed out some of these without being unaware of the need to critique some of the excesses of Pentecostalism, as for instance the preaching of prosperity. The Pentecostal movement has, as Kärkkäinen says, been able to transcend most cultural, linguistic and social barriers, and I believe one of the reasons for this is its ability to meet in a holistic way the religious needs of humans, in terms of ideas, values and affections, whether these humans are pre-modern, modern or post-modern.

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Postcolonial Mission:
Oxymoron or New Paradigm?

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke

Abstract: Rahab is the perfect metaphor of the land to be colonised, too perfect to be historically true. However, through that metaphor we can see how the colonised is made into a thing. Postcolony is not a reality where colonialism is not present but rather a further development of colonialist domination where the postcolonial African subjects and their rulers are bound together by powerlessness and violence. Mission has been deeply complicit in colonial oppression to the extent that one needs to wonder why Africans stick to Christianity. This complicity needs to be seriously addressed and therefore Christian mission must be redefined in order not to make postcolonial mission into an oxymoron.

Keywords: mission, postcolonial, colonialism

The art of the colonial approach

Who is a slave if not the person who, everywhere and always, possesses life, property, and body as if they were alien things? … In such case, the slave's body, life and work may be attacked. The violence thus perpetrated is not supposed to affect the slave directly, as something real and present. Thus, 'slave is a forename we must give to a man or woman, whose body can be degraded, whose life can be mutilated and whose work and resources can be squandered – with impunity. To someone who is slave we can also give the forename 'thing'. By thing we understand the contrary of the substantive – that is something that somewhere is *nothing*. But the thing, like slave, is also that on which a person arrogates the right to exercise her or his will. As such, the thing does not determine itself at all. It is something that belongs to a person who happens, by chronology or by force, to be the first to take possession of and enjoy it.[1]

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[1] Mbembe 2001, 181.

As Israel approaches the Promised Land, they are faced with the worrying reality that the land is not empty.[2] Even they must have hoped for an empty land, never occupied and never owned before. But alas – there are humans in it – or are there? This is the other side of the exodus – the unseemly side of the exodus. The various narratives of Israel's approach to the Promised Land contained in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Deutronomy, Joshua and numbers are as fascinating as they are disturbing. They contain, in many ways what I have called, the colonial approach (to the about-to-be colonised) and aspects of its art.

Most of these stories describe the prelude to the invasion in terms of acts of military intelligence and espionage – the sending in of spies. In Numbers we have the story of the men who having been sent as spies come back with conflicting assessments of the land – one group feeling the land is ready for the taking, the other group telling stories of a land occupied by giants before whom they 'looked like grasshoppers'. The approach story which fascinates me most is the one in Joshua – the story of the Rahab of Jericho.

> …[T]he narrator tells us that Joshua sent two spies to view the land and 'they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there" (Joshua 2:1). Beyond entering the house of a prostitute and spending a night with her, they do no further spying in the land. Rahab is the only land they enter and spy.[3]

Several things catch the eye about Rahab. First, she is introduced as a prostitute (and it is curious that the spies choose her as the initial point of contact). Being a prostitute, she is lowly, wild and 'asking for it', needing to be tamed – just like the land she represents. She is there for the taking – that is the essence of her profession and mission of her existence.[4] Second, like the prostitute in the Hollywood film 'pretty woman', – where Richard Gere plays the client and Julia Roberts the prostitute – she meets the ultimate client, the noble conqueror, the good invader, and does the unthinkable. Third, momentarily, she behaves like a human being – goes soft (fall in

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[2] We are aware that Old Testament scholars are not convinced of the historicity of either the Exodus or Israel's enslavement in Egypt. However these epic events have become powerful myths beyond the Jewish and Christian cultures. They have also become influential analytical tools in both empire making and resistance against colonialism. In this sense, these events have become 'true'.

[3] Dube 2000, 77

[4] Dube 2000, 77

love?) and asks for guarantees and commitments beyond sheer monetary payment from her clients. We can only assume that in order to be able to extract such a higher form of payment from her clients, she herself had offered and dedicated herself to them at a higher level. So she asks her clients to 'Swear to me by the Lord that you will deal kindly with my family' and they in turn promise her, 'our life for yours'. Fourth, there seems to be a swift and seamless change of allegiance from her gods to the Lord of her clients. 'The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below', she declares. The visit of the two spies thus also has missionary consequences.

Fifth, she wants her life and that of members of her family to be safe, but she clearly has no faith in the capacity of her people and culture to provide that safety. She seems to have come to the conclusion that there is neither safety nor salvation in her own culture, gods and people. Indeed her people, culture and gods do not feature at all in this transaction. Sixth, she goes further and translates her mistrust of her own into open betrayal when she lies to the messengers of her king who come to enquire about the spies. She takes the side of the enemy over against her own people. Seventh, she clearly regards the strangers and the power they represent as superior to hers and that of her people. Eighth, as if this is not enough, she confesses with her own mouth that she knows 'that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you' (Josh 2:9). She surrenders her land even as she surrendered herself to the two invaders. Ninth, in the process, she loses her voice as it becomes fused with that of her invaders. She 'speaks as if she has been reading Deuteronomy'.[5]

A 'Thing' Called Rahab

What is going on here? The story of Rahab could be an illustrative – even archetypal – story of imperialism, conquest, occupation and the beginnings of colonisation. She is a metaphor for the land about to be conquered, the land whose colonisation is about to begin even as it is predestined. Her complicity with her invaders and conquerors; her awe for and submission to them, as well as her hasty and eager 'settlement deal' with them is mind-

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[5] Dube 2000, 77-78; Fewell and Gunn 1993.

boggling. Surely, she cannot be real. With Rahab we come face to face with the logic of imperialism and the onset of colonisation. She is a figment of the imagination of the coloniser – she is simply too good to be true! It is a case of 'Rahab is dead! Long live Rahab'.

The coloniser needs, co-opts, creates and recreates Rahab in order to justify conquest. Her behaviour, her actions and words, are all loaded with the logic of imperialism and the fantasy of colonialism. The deal she strikes with her invaders – as with all the deals between the conqueror and the vanquished – is a most hollow one. To save her life she sells her soul, her land and her people. She is therefore not equal to her invaders who only have to promise to spare her life and that of her family. Furthermore, we have noted that Rahab is without religion, without culture, without history, without soul and without self consciousness. Her invaders are human; she is 'a thing that is, but only insofar as it is nothing'.[6] Yet her invaders con her into thinking otherwise. With the invaders presence, she thinks that she graduates from nothingness into being something. And yet it is the very deal with her invaders which seals her fate as a 'thing' and a 'non-I'. She is of course 'a thing of value' insofar as she is a tool of and for imperialism and colonisation. Rahab 'possesses life, property, and body as if they were alien things'. She, her land and her people can therefore be invaded with impunity. Like Africa and Orientalism[7], Rahab is an *invention*[8] an *idea*[9] and an imagined myth of the coloniser. Indeed, the 'true story' may be that after invading her, after getting every little bit of information that they could from her, they killed her. Of what more 'use' could she ever be for them in the future (other than identify them as the men who spent a night with her)? Her very insistence on closing a humane deal with them at the end of the transaction was another way of asking to be killed.

In at least two senses, Rahab is dead. She is, quite literally, the figment of the imagination and the consequence of the pen of the imperialist and the coloniser. She is dead, she does not exist. Secondly, the encounter with the two spying invaders quite literally sounds the death knell for Rahab – it is the beginning of her death. In these two senses, at least, she is dead. But

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[6] Mbembe 2001, 187.
[7] Said 1978.
[8] Mudimbe 1988.
[9] Mudimbe 1994.

once the gaze of the spying invaders fixes onto her, naming her; and once she encounters their invasion, 'there are so many (possible) deaths (for her, she is so spoiled for choice so that she)… no longer knows which one to die'[10]. A new set of 'ways of dying'[11] – including becoming half-dead or half-alive - opens itself up to Rahab as she is irrevocably thrust 'to a place where life and death are so entangled that it is no longer possible to distinguish them'[12]. That place is called colony/postcolony. From now on, Rahab (like Africa) 'exists only as an absent object, an absence that those who try to decipher can only accentuate' until we too 'must speak of [Rahab] only as a chimera on which we all work blindly, a nightmare we produce and from which we make a living – and which we sometimes enjoy, but which sometimes deeply repels us, to the point that we may evince towards it the kind of disgust we feel on seeing a cadaver'.[13]

Once invented, idealised, textualised and violated into a thing; what becomes of Rahab? Once they invent, violate and occupy, can she ever regain a voice? Can she unlearn? Can she break free from 'thingness'? Or is she locked into a future whose possibilities are powerfully framed? Will her history, that of her land and her people ever be tell-able without reference to the invasion, its impact, its shadow and its legacies? What will become of her children, her people, her culture, her land and her gods? But the same set and type of question should and can be asked of the invaders. What happens to them after encountering Rahab and after returning violently to the land of her people? Do they remain the same? Can they remain the same?

On Colony and Postcolony

Colonial sovereignty rests on three forms of violence: founding violence, the violence of legitimation, and the third is violence meant to establish and demonstrate authority. What I have described above as the colonial approach involves the rituals which inaugurate the first form of violence and establish the basis and logic of all subsequent forms of violence. In reality the violence which will erupt and engulf will leave no stone unturned. Building on the violence inherent in their own culture, Rahab and her

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[10] Mbembe 2001, 197.
[11] Mda 1995.
[12] Mbembe 2001, 197.
[13] Mbembe 2001, 197.

children will be caught up in the logic of violence, appropriating it, succumbing to it and wielding it.

To ask the above questions, and the several hinted to above, is to begin to address the complex subjects of colony and postcolony. It has become a cliché in postcolonial studies to say that (cultural) texts are a central means in the imposition, legitimising, maintenance of, and in the resistance against imperialism and colonialism. Postcolonial studies are therefore the study of 'texts' and contexts through which colonialism is imposed, maintained and resisted. It may be helpful here to dispense with the distinction between postcolonial and post-modern theory, albeit summarily.

> ... [T]hey have certain affinities. Both are clearly products of discomfort over modernistic thinking, which fostered an excessive reverence for reason, a spurious belief in objective truth, savage control over the environment, and less critical respect for such institutions as the nation state. More important, both are offshoots of the crumbling of Western political and cultural hegemony and its imperialistic tendencies. Sadly it is here that the alliance ends. Postmodernism is still seen as Eurocentric in its conceptual and aesthetic thrust. It is found wanting from a third world perspective on several fronts: its lack of a theory of resistance; its failure to cultivate a transformative agenda due to its detached attitudes; its revalidation of the local and its celebration of difference, which are liable to lead to further alienation of subalterns …[14]

Although I would nuance some of the issues differently, I think Sugirtharajah makes the major points well and for the sake of space I will comment no further at this point. The postcolony does not denote that the colony is no more; rather postcolonial studies are a study of the interface, interaction and dialectic between postcolony and colony. Postcolony does not mean 'after colonialism' but rather 'since colonialism'. Since the publication of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1967) and Said's *Orientalism* (1978), postcolonial theory has covered a lot of ground – especially in relation to literature studies and in seeking a better understanding of the colony, its hold on the vanquished as well as the forms of resistance employed. But little has been done in terms of hardnosed analysis of the postcolony as the material space where colonial and postcolonial strivings compete, coalesce, multiply, clash, mutate, reinvent, connive and materialise.

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[14] Sugirtharajah 1998, 15.

In his book, *On the Postcolony,* with Cameroon as a case study, Achille Mbembe lays down the gauntlet in terms of analysis of the postcolony. The suggestion here is that postcolonial studies are concerned not merely and only with texts in conventional terms, but with a meticulous and comprehensive appreciation and understanding of the logic and meaning of the postcolony itself; its organisation, signs, imaginaries, architecture, texts, texture, pulse, flow, glory, failure and hopes. The postcolony, like the colony, is the ultimate text and gaining an understanding of its condition, its possibilities, and its 'raw life' is crucial. For Mbembe the postcolony 'identifies a specifically given historical trajectory – that of societies recently [or currently] emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves'.[15]

Africa in postcolonial perspective

Until now, postcolonial scholars have tended to locate the postcolonial in the contested space between the colony and the postcolony. The object of the postcolonial project has been to make that in-between space more equitable if not to conquer it altogether. From that space the postcolonised would not only contest imposed identities and rationalities, but would carve a new identity for themselves. The contested in-between space has been cast mainly in terms of discourse, violence, identity and rationality.

In insisting that the notion of postcolony is an important departure, Mbembe breaks new ground. Many studies on African countries and on African reality tend to assume African states as banana republics, African people as swarming masses and African meaning-making as ignorance and savagery. The macro scheme under which such studies as rae done is the seemingly benign categories of *developed* and *developing* world culled from the world of current and dominant economist taxonomy. Viewed through the prism of this schema, Africa and African countries are seen as a series of 'young democracies', 'failed democracies', lacking 'good governance', no 'market economy', immature or non-existent 'civil society', failing to make the transition to democracy' and not adhering to the 'rule of law'. From my point of view, in order to properly consider Africa and African countries it is necessary to critically delve 'into Western history and the theories that

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[15] Mbembe 2001, 102.

claim to interpret it'[16]. Since the 15th century, its is difficult to mount a 'distinctive historicity' of African societies, …not embedded in times and rhythms heavily conditioned by European domination'[17]. This is not to say that the conditioning was ever only one way. The *othering* of Africa is not merely about Africa, it is also about the West.

> Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world. …Africa still constitutes one of the metaphors through which the West represents the origin of its own norms, develops a self-image, and integrates this image into the set of signifiers asserting what it supposes to be its identity.[18]

I regard the notion of postcolony as a very helpful lens through which to study African countries and societies. Indeed, it is not enough that postcolonial studies tend to be focused on empire, colony and globalisation and conducted mainly at the level of issues, methods, discourses, hegemonies and ideologies with no focused attention on the postcolony itself as logical, coherent, meaningful albeit tragic entity. A more concerted focus on the reality of the postcolony is perhaps the next important phase in the evolution of postcolonial studies. It is of course not going to be possible to study the 'postcolony' without reference to the colony, the violence of the latter to the former, as well as their continued entanglement. In the case of many African countries, it may be more fruitful to regard them as postcolonies rather than as developing countries, emerging democracies or failed democracies. To use these terms is to fail to note the most potent organising principle in the make-up of these countries, namely, the struggle to emerge from, make a break with or overcome colonisation.

Achille Mbembe's study of his native Cameroon as a postcolony yields some interesting if also frightening results. Some scholars have been stunned and repelled by the face of Africa revealed here. Some have even accused him of Afro-pessimism. But I think they misunderstand him. I personally do not think that Mbembe's succeeds in many of the lofty objectives he sets bout for the book; repeating as he does much of the work done on the logic of colonialism and slavery, and pretending at times that postcolonial

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[16] Mbembe 2001, 9.
[17] Mbembe 2001, 9.
[18] Mbembe 2001, 2.

and other literature has not already covered much of the ground presented in his book. But postcolonial theory cannot proceed from an a-geographical and neutral space somewhere in the skies between Europe and Africa. There is no better place to locate and test postcolonial theory than in the streets of the postcolony.

Mbembe's book contains extreme descriptions of both the colony and the postcolony whose 'missions' he does not entirely resolve. What Mbembe succeeds in doing is in providing a thick analytical description of the postcolony at a level seldom reached even in non-fiction writing.

Rattling the Nest of Postcolonial Studies

What irks Mbembe is the tendency even in postcolonial scholarship to

> …problematise everything in terms of how identities are 'invented', 'hybrid', 'fluid' and 'negotiated'. On the pretext of avoiding single-factor explanations of domination, these disciplines have reduced the complex phenomena of the state and power to ''discourses' and 'representations', forgetting that discourses and representations have materiality. The discovery of the subaltern subject and the stress on his/her inventiveness have taken the form of an endless invocation of notions of 'hegemony', 'moral economy', 'agency' and 'resistance. …Thus on the basis of dichotomies that hardly exist, everything is considered said once it has been shown that the subjects of action, subjected to power and law – colonized people, women, peasants, workers (in short the dominated) – have a rich and complex consciousness, that they are capable of challenging their oppression; and that power, far from being total, is endlessly contested, deflated, and re-appropriated by its targets. …all struggles have become struggles of representation.[19]

In an earlier work, my colleague Nadar and I raised similar issues in response to several (biblical) hermeneutical expeditions – of a postcolonial nature - in South Africa, meant to give voice to, and an understanding of, the poor and the marginalised.[20] We argued then that many of these discourses and hermeneutical moves say more about the social location and agendas of their authors than they actually do about the poor. We cautioned against the haste and certitude with which 'the poor' and 'the ordinary' are identified, defined and declared 'intelligent readers of the Bible'.

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[19] Mbembe 2002, 5.
[20] Maluleke & Nadar 2004.

Mbembe posits an approach to studying the subject of the postcolony which postulates that postcolonial practices are 'not simply matters of discourse and language', not merely representations and not merely domination and resistance. Postcolonial practices involve 'doing, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling touching' – acts that are meaningful. In this way, he hopes to urge us to a situation where instead of knowing 'nearly everything that African states, societies and economies are not' we may begin to discover and describe 'what they actually are'. Looking for a way to break away from the tired and in some ways self-serving discourse laced with binary notions of resistance vs. domination; Mbembe suggests other ways of understanding African societies. For him, the postcolony is an 'intimate tyranny' where the dominant and the dominated are on the same side even as they are often in conflict. They are bound together in both powerlessness and violence even as the dominated remain summarily and arbitrarily dispensable. The excesses of the postcolonial subject, the laughter, the gossip mongering, the going underground, the black market economy, the carnivals where postcolonial subjects jest, caricature, dance, sing, march and wave to their own amusement, and to the amusement of the president, are all part of the conviviality between ruler and ruled which are stuck together more intimately than ever before in the postcolony.

Postcolonial Mission: Oxymoron or New Paradigm?

> When the white man first came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. He said 'let us pray to God'. We closed our eyes and joined him in prayer. When we opened our eyes at the end of the prayer, we saw that we now had the Bible and he had the land.

The saying is attributed to President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and even Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. Muslim evangelists in Africa apparently also like to invoke it. But it could have been said by any observant person whose country was colonised by the Christian West. Indeed it is often attributed to all sorts of people and presented in all sorts of guises. African writers of fiction and non-fiction have, in many different ways, made the same point. The above statement speaks to the scandal and paradoxical hurdle that faces any would be postcolonial evangelist and/or missionary. The paradox is at once epistemological and practical. The hurdle is tall and firm – one that cannot

be brushed aside. No amount of mission historical revision[21] will displace the overwhelming evidence that Christian mission was variously complicit in imperialism, conquest and colonization. It was Christian theology and Christian texts that formed both the backdrop and the ideological framework for the colonial project. To speak of the complicity of Christian mission in the colonial project is therefore not merely to speak of missionaries- what they did or did not do – a mistake made often. Missionaries were after all only one driver of Christian mission in Africa. But there is no need to treat the role of missionaries with analytical kid's gloves either.

Missionaries are never an innocent factor in mission. But when we speak of the complicity of Christian mission we are not merely talking of a historical phase or epoch once here and now gone. We are speaking of a continuing reality deeply rooted in the practices of the churches of the colony and the postcolony. The scandal is that the Bible and the Christian faith were employed in the facilitation of conquest – 'he had the land, we had the Bible'. The disturbing paradox is hidden in the seemingly innocent words that conclude the story – 'he had the land and *we had the Bible'*. In what way do the Africans 'have the Bible'? Or is it the case of the Bible 'having' the Africans? What does it mean to 'have the Bible' as a consequence of losing the land? The story is cleverly told in the passive – a device to provoke thought or evidence that it was not safe to tell the story when and where it was first told?

Who Bewitched Gabriel Setiloane and How? Six Possibilities

The late African theologian, Gabriel Setiloane, was once asked, why, since he spent his life writing and announcing that African Religion was sufficient for the salvation needs of Africans, had he nevertheless himself remained a Christian in the Methodist Church? His answer was that he himself could not explain this paradox other than to say that he was most probably bewitched by the 'Christian thing'. But what is it that bewitches Africans about the Bible and the Christian faith (in spite of what they say, do and wish)?

The swapping of Bible with land was no passive and neutral matter. It was a matter of violent conquest. The acquisition of the land, the giving of the Bible, the losing of the land, and the 'having' of the Bible were all mediated

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[21] E.g. Sanneh 2003.

through violence and conquest. The problem, as some South African Black theologians have observed, is that in time the Africans who had lost the land no longer knew how to lose the Bible. Desmond Tutu is supposed to have said, after telling the same story, that in getting the Bible and losing the land, Africans had had the better deal. But why has it been so difficult for Africans to lose the Bible after they had already lost the land? Why have they remained Christian?

The first obvious possibility is that it is the glue of violence that keeps Africans stuck to the Bible. Their relationship with the Bible has been established in violence, it could be both the fear of and the dream of violence that keeps Africans attached. In the same ways that no political leader of the so-called developing world can stand up today and denounce Western democracy if he wants to continue to receive aid and to have the possibility of trade with the West, perhaps Africans will for similar reasons not lose the Bible and their Christian faith. 'Re-membering' the violent roots of their relations with the Bible, Africans may be afraid that letting go of the Bible may unleash the same kind of violence if not worse. This is not mere superstition. It remains a factor of world politics that Christian countries provide aid to Christian countries and form particular trade and diplomatic relations with fellow Christian countries – at least on paper. Muslim countries do the same – at least on paper. The American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan were accompanied both by 'embedded journalists' and 'embedded missionaries' all aiming to begin the Christianization of these countries.

But there is another possibility. Having drunk from the bowl of violent religion, and still reeling from the fist of violent imperialism, mesmerised by the continued magnificence of colonial power right in the heart of the postcolony (and in the hearts of postcolonial subjects); civilised by years of coercive and violent disciplining; Africans now know the bitter-sweet taste of the proverbial 'forbidden fruit' of violent power and, clinging to the Bible and Christianity, each group and each individual now imagine an imperialist and prosperous future for themselves, soon to be unleashed. In this fantasy, Western Christianity and the Bible offer veritable tools: the exodus motif as prelude to invasion and conquest, the prayer of Jabez, the great commission and the violent death of the innocent Son of God. While African countries may not have the military and economic wherewithal to realise imperialist and prosperity dreams, it does not stop them dreaming

and above all it does not stop them enacting, caricaturing and pretending these things in the violence mired within the structures, processes and relations inside their own national borders.

The third possibility is that realising that 'Jesus loves Africans and the Bible tells them so', Africans, like the Ethiopian eunuch of the book of acts have believed, been baptised, and are now 'on their way rejoicing'. In short, they have been genuinely and thoroughly attracted to the beauty and the power of the Christian faith. They have since made both the book and the faith their own. 'The Bible is an African book', we have heard it said often. Indeed, African (American) Biblical scholars have been at work to discover Africa in the Bible even as the Bible has been discovered anew in Africa. In the Bible they have found a 'wonderful treasure, the gift of God without measure' and hence they are, 'on their way rejoicing'.[22] Do the swelling numbers of Christians in the South in general, and in Africa in particular, attest to this?[23] Is the rise of the African Instituted Churches - some of which are now becoming a missionary presence in Europe[24] - not an indication of the extent to which Africans have genuinely 'taken Jesus as their personal saviour'? To what do we ascribe the falling 'fires from heaven'[25] and the outpouring of the spirit in many African countries, something that has led to the explosion of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches on the continent? Is this not proof that Christianity – which was never really (not originally) a Western religion – has now, truly become an African religion?[26]

The fourth alternative is the worrisome suggestion that the Bible and all that it stands for does in fact pose as a *substitute* for everything Africans have lost. Having lost so much; has the Bible/the church/Christianity remained one of the few tangible things that Africans of the postcolony can now own, mould, eat and have? It is said that people who have lost everything after a war, an act of violence or a natural disaster are known to salvage one or two things to which they transfer the value of all the things they have lost. Stories are told about car accident survivors who in the

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[22] Schaaf 2003.
[23] Jenkins 2003.
[24] ter Haar 1998.
[25] Cox 1995.
[26] Bediako 1996.

delirium of the accident aftermath, even with the own intestines hanging out, will refuse to go into the ambulance until they have retrieved their handbag or purse from the accident rubble. It could be a teddy bear, a doll, a handbag, a purse or a even a mobile phone – once found, they will cling to it and hold onto it for dear life. This is because after a disaster, the teddy bear, doll or handbag salvaged is no longer just a teddy bear or a handbag. It is their car, their house, their room, their home, their family and their history. It becomes the connection between who and what they once were and who and what they are about to become. So they will cling to it as if their life depended on it. Do they imagine that the salvaged thing will inspire the acquisition of things lost? Could it be that, the Bible and Christianity have become the teddy bear in the hands of African subjects in a make-believe rubble of a country sometimes called an emerging democracy, but one which should in all honesty be called a postcolony? With the Bible having been the medium of exchange, could it be that Africans fantasize about the day when they will (again) trade it in for what they have lost in the initial 'accident'?

Fifthly, although this is an uncomfortable subject; it could be the violence at the heart of Christian religion and the Bible that makes it so difficult to lose. This could be what bewitches. With the story of Rahab we have alluded to the search and seizure of gold, legitimated by god. The same god who freed the Israelites from Egyptian tyranny sanctions their violent take over of another land. The 'promised land' of 'milk and honey' is full of idol worshippers who 'prostitute themselves before their gods' and is therefore ready for taking. Whether the stories of exodus and conquest are historical or not they remain 'true' stories in the minds of many. Indeed, we have seen the very idea of chosen people mutate from the Bible into Kipling's white man's burden. The establishment of monotheism in the Old Testament is a violent epic. One (tribal god) could not, in a region teeming with gods, be elevated to the level of becoming the only god who is god without blood-letting. It is the military and masculine (and some would even say, sexual) nature of the violence of the biblical god that bewitches. Can monotheism be sustained without violence? As if these questions were not enough, there is the story of the sanctioned and salvific violent death of God's son. The violence with which Jesus died has been sanitized through centuries of theologising. Its brutality has become diminished in the minds of many. Perhaps that is why, apart from its alleged anti-semitism, the *Passion of*

Christ drew the most criticism for its overly violent portrayal of the death of Jesus. His death could in fact have been even more violent. Death on the cross must take a person to the highest threshold of pain. At some stage the body must have lost control of its functions. It is a very violent death. But it is also the violence that saves. Could it be that the reason Africans have been unable to lose the Bible is that they have found the violence in the Bible and in Christianity to be a confirmation of their experiences at the receiving end of colonialism? Worse still, have they come to regard violence as a means of and path to salvation?

The sixth possibility is a complex blend and critique of all the previous three possibilities that would explain Setiloane's bewitchment. Taking from South African Black Theology discourse, let me state in question form and also in more familiar postcolonial speak: Is it possible for Africans to use the Bible to get their land back and get their land back without losing the Bible? Is it possible for the Asian Christian subaltern? Is it possible for the Christianised American Indian? Can the Bible be the common thread and the Achilles' heel of colonialism? Archbishop Desmond Tutu clearly believes that the Bible can be used to get the land back and that the land can be gotten back without losing the Bible. For him the seeds for the destruction of Apartheid lay in the Bible. He might even say what happened in the recent history of South Africa vindicates his belief. Indeed the Bible and Christianity have been powerful media in the hands of subjects of both the colony and the postcolony. The Bible has provided a common language between the coloniser and the colonised, the ruling classes and the rulers. Through it, the poor, the voiceless and those who represent them have managed to occasionally get through to the rich. But it has also strengthened and cemented relations between the rich and those poor trying to break out of poverty. But what kind of an ally is the Bible? 'The Bible is not innocent', Black theologians have pointed out. Firstly, the fact that it was 'used' in conquest will always haunt us even if we pretend otherwise. Secondly, as demonstrated by our brief consideration of the story of Rahab, the Bible is not innocent in its contents and in its agendas. In other words, like Christendom, the Bible is no automatic and ready-made ally. Like a weapon, it can kill the devout user, the owner and the devil alike. The question of reading and how we do it then becomes very important. Yet, even reading is not everything. There is life before and after reading the Bible. There will therefore always be a gap between reading and implementing. For this

reason, none of the six possible explanations for the bewitchment of Setiloane can be discounted.

More on the difficulties of postcolonial mission: Why the postcolonial subjects cannot do mission?

The questions which confront us in this section force us to explore the chances and possibility of Rahab becoming a missionary for the religion of her invaders, Kenyatta becoming an evangelist for the missionaries who used the Bible to take the land, and Setiloane becoming an apologist for the 'Christian thing' which bewitched him. Convinced that the Bible is the better deal, we can very easily see Tutu becoming a missionary and an evangelist. But even for Tutu, engaging in and conceptualising Christian mission is not going to be easy. These are the difficulties we face as we imagine mission in post-colonial perspective. Can the Rahabs, Kenyattas and Setiloanes and other postcolonial subjects conceptualise and partake in mission? What then does it take for Rahab to become a missionary? What will it take for Kenyatta to become an ardent missionary practitioner? While he admits that he remains a Christian in spite of his better judgement, Setiloane would clearly be a very reluctant Christian missionary, if at all.

It is difficult to consider Rahab participating in the mission of the God of the invading spies. First, she holds a frightful concept of god and the people god has chosen. From Josh 2:9-11 we realise that she has a rather scary picture of their God. She confesses to fear of this terrible god; 'All who live in this country are melting in fear' of the god of the strangers. Mission does not flow from dread for God or does it? Mission is not going about giving people a fright, or is it? Secondly, the question is whether she will ever be able to overcome the stigma of her invented history – that of a prostitute to such an extent that she uses it in mission. Can she ever be taken seriously? Will she survive when those who see her attempting to do mission will remind her of her past? Thirdly, can she survive and overcome her invasion and her reduction into a 'thing'? How does a 'thing' become the subject and not an 'object' of mission? Can she find it in herself to project herself as subject rather than object of mission? Fourthly, having summarily abandoned her gods in favour of the god of the invaders – how does she account for and deal with her history prior to the invasion? Does

her life starts on the night of the encounter and if so into what kind of a missionary will this make her?

Fifthly, having abandoned her gods and her people so hastily and in fear of the new god, can she be trusted to stick with this new god when new gods arrive? Sixthly, clearly believing the invaders, their arsenal, their methods and their god to be superior can she ever overcome her feeling of inferiority in order to become engaged in mission? As long as she is inferior she cannot engage in what others have called 'reverse-mission'. Seventhly, having given up her own voice in favour of speaking in the voice and language of her invaders, can she develop her own voice? Eighthly, can she survive the brutalization she and subsequently her people and land suffered at the hands of the invaders? Will she be forever scarred so that she regards violence as the only way to do mission and the only legitimate precursor to mission? Ninthly, having sold out on her people, culture and religion can she ever be taken seriously in mission?

Rahab cannot do mission as long as: she views god as terrible and violent; she is unable to overcome the stigma of her tainted/invented past; she cannot find a new sense of worth and humanity after having been reduced into a 'thing'; she has no history other than the one which starts on the night of the encounter; her relationship with the new god is utilitarian and tenuous; she believes that she herself, her culture, her beliefs, her people are not merely different from, but inferior to, that of her invaders; she has given up and substituted her own voice for that of the invaders; she is too brutalized.

Of course nothing stops Rahab from trying to engage in mission. It may be a matter of 'survival', 'integrity' or self-rehabilitation for her. But her every effort and her every project of mission is likely to cause more problems than solutions as her inferiority, brutalization, disconnectedness, warped concept of God, lack of own voice, etc. will undermine even her best efforts. Maybe there are many Rahabs who do engage in mission, anyway.

Let us assume for the time being that Jomo Kenyatta does indeed hold copyrights to the little story about the exchange of land and Bible. What kind of missionary would Kenyatta make? What kind of mission theology would inform his activity? Let us remind ourselves that Kenyatta believes that the Bible was the very medium of 'exchange'. After having been 'caught

out' in prayer, will he go back to that place in order to pray? If he prays will he pray to the same God as that of the 'white man'? When he looks at the Bible will it not remind him of the land lost? Kenyatta is likely to 'walk out' of Christianity in anger and disgust. It will be difficult for him to take local Christians seriously. He might form an army in order to fight until he has the land back. If Kenyatta ever decides to continue on the path of mission, he will probably try to use the Bible to get the land back. We do not know. All we know is that Kenyatta is not the best material for Christian mission. But were he to persist in mission, his prayers would be different and his reading of the Bible would be different too.

From the way he answers the question posed to him as to why he stays Christian even though he thinks that the religion of his ancestors is as good if not better, Setiloane essentially says that he is a nominal Christian, a passenger Christian, bewitched but not persuaded, intrigued but not convinced, mesmerised but not taken.[27] So he keeps up the pretence in umbrage to the bewitching pull of Christianity. What kind of a missionary would Setiloane make if any? It is very difficult to imagine him as one. But Setiloane was a reverend. Reading from the Bible every Sunday, leading the congregation in song and prayer as per the Methodist worship book and conjuring up a Christian sermon must have been hard for him. Hardest for him would have been to charge his congregants with the great commission – to go out there and disciple the nations. Whatever else his involvement in the Methodist Church meant it was most probably not missionary in character and emphasis. Were he to engage in mission it would be one that respects the local religion, perhaps seeking cooperation and dialogue rather than conversion and proselytization. But he might have had a few harsh words for Christian mission methods. I think he would also seek to analyse the nature of his and other people's fascination and bewitchment with Christianity – maybe that too is part of mission.

Tutu is supposed to have responded to the Bible and Lands story by saying that in getting the Bible, Africans had received the better deal. This is indeed a strange if not provocative response –especially when told to the victims of the Bible-Land swap. But how does Tutu reach his position. What has he found in the Bible that makes him say this? Several people who have studied

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[27] Setiloane 1976.

Tutu's life and work indicate the importance of the *imago Dei* in his theology. Is this how he dealt with the stigma and inferiority? On the basis of the *imago Dei* Tutu has insisted that all the people of the earth are not only equal, but together form what he calls 'the rainbow people of God'. He therefore has emphasised the need for healing and reconciliation. But to do this, Tutu has to read the Bible and understand his history in a particular way. This is perhaps what postcolonial Biblical scholarship has been trying to unearth and understand.

Christian Postcolonial Scholarship: Towards a Non-Conclusion

The theoretical terrain which we have sketched above makes postcolonial mission a very difficult one indeed. In the postcolony, religion, especially Christianity, is part of the problem. Christian mission, as experienced by many Africans since the 15th century has been part of the colonisation. The Bible is the colonial text *par excellence*. Indeed Christianity is, in many places, the colonial religion. None of the conventional arguments used to defend Christian entanglement in the colonial project will suffice. The latest attempt, and certainly the most spirited of our times, is Lamin Sanneh's, which praises the virtues of the vernacular Bible and the role of the missionaries in the translation.[28] Yet even the vernacular Bible has been shown to be a "colonial cultural bomb"[29] far worse than the novels which the Africans write in the borrowed language of English (cf. wa Thiongo).

However, we can take courage from several theological traditions in Africa which, whilst acknowledging the difficulties of postcolonial mission, have nevertheless suggested ways and methods through and in which mission can be done in postcolonial perspective.

African theology

The postcolonial leanings in African theology lie mainly in the insistence that there must be and there is continuity between the African life before Christianity and after. African theology thus refused to accept a history of

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[28] Sanneh 1989.
[29] Dube 1999.

African religiosity that starts only with the arrival of Christianity. Furthermore, African theologians also insisted on a re-reading of the entire Christian story so that it became an African story too. One of the most radical attempts at Africanising Christianity, while at the same time debunking colonial Christianity, is captured in Setiloane's poem "I am an African". The poem is cast in the form of an African believer being quizzed about his faith. When asked about Jesus, the African answers:

> The White Man brought Him.
> He was pale, and not the Sunburnt Son of the Desert.
> As a child He came
> A wee babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.
> Ah, if only He had been like little Moses, lying
> Sun-scorched on the banks of the River of God,
> We would have recognised Him.
>
> He eludes us still this Jesus, Son of Man…
>
> And yet for us it is when he is on the cross,
> this Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands
> and open side, like a beast at a sacrifice;
> When He is stripped naked like us,
> Browned and sweating water and blood in the heat of the sun,
> Yet silent,
> That we cannot resist Him.
>
> How like us he is, this Jesus of Nazareth,
> Beaten, tortured, imprisoned, spat upon, truncheoned,
> Denied by his own and chased like a thief in the night,
> Despised, and rejected like a dog that has fleas…[30]

The poem of Setiloane is rich with metaphor and it contains many theological suggestions. He insists that Jesus has eluded Africans for long. He also seems to be suggesting that the 'White Man' brought a sanitized Jesus. Then he answers the question of his bewitchment inadvertently. "It is when he is on the cross … like a beast at a sacrifice" that Africans cannot resist him. It is because he is like us that we cannot resist him.

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[30] Setiloane 1970, 9.

South African Black Theology

Some of the earliest postcolonial readings came from the South African Black theology, with scholars like Itumeleng Mosala offering different and liberating readings of selected Biblical passages such as the Book of Esther. More substantially, Black theology established and secured the terrain in which, and from which, postcolonial readings would be conducted. Like no other theological strand, Black theology inaugurated the project of 'using the Bible to get the land back', by means of a materialistic approach to the Bible and a Black consciousness ideology. The methodology suggested included avoiding collusion with 'ruling class' texts, reading against the grain, reading behind the text, and reading the silences. In this way the story of Esther, for example, could be exposed as patriarchal rather than a feminist narrative. Additionally, Black theology succeeded in marking out not only the Bible but also Christianity and the church as sites of struggle as opposed to innocent spaces and instruments of devotion.

Explicitly postcolonial African theology

In Africa, the explicit usage of postcolonial theory as part and parcel to contest colonial Christianity is recent and not very widespread. Scholars who own up to and actually use postcolonial theory are few. Part of the reason is that eminently usable, and in that sense eminently 'African' (Fanon), postcolonial theory emanates disciplines other than religion and/ or theology, notably psychology and literature. This may have made the many postcolonial theories inaccessible. There could well have been a sense of suspicion against postcolonial theory among established liberation theologians operating within the modes of Black theology and Womanist theology. They may simply wonder what could postcolonial theories accomplish which we cannot accomplish with our home-grown theologies. Part of the reason for suspicion may be sheer fatigue as newer and newer theories are being discovered and developed while there is no qualitative improvement in the lives of the Black, women and the poorest of the poor.

Musa Dube is among the African theologians who have explicitly made use of postcolonial approach. She is able to explore the limits of white feminist theory for African women theologians. By insisting on reading the imperialist leanings of a text, she is able to distinguish not only between

men and women but also between colonised and colonising women. Furthermore, after exposing a variety of white male and feminist theologians' approaches to biblical interpretation (social scientific readings, historical-critical readings, literary-critical readings and narrative readings), Dube is able to demonstrate their shortcomings for her needs as an African woman theologian and a believer. She insists that it is not enough to 'depatriarchalise' if we do not also 'decolonise' texts before reclaiming them, otherwise we may perpetuate the colonial intentions of the texts.[31]

Oxymoron or new paradigm? A tentative agenda

1.   Postcolonial mission is an oxymoron if we mean by it that a violated and desolate Rahab, an angry and desperate Kenyatta, and a bewitched Setiloane should simply be grafted into imperial Christian mission without dealing with the roots of violence, anger and bewitchment. Unless, and until, Rahab, Kenyatta and Setiloane participate in mission there can be no postcolonial mission.

2.   Postcolonial mission starts with and entails the rehabilitation and reconceptualisation of Christian mission. It is not, therefore, enough to define Christian mission as *missio Dei*, we need to explore the nature of the *Deus* in question. Similarly, it is not sufficient to declare mission as being at the heart of what the church is, if we do not examine both our notions/ theologies of the church and the nature of our churches on the ground.

3.   From an African point of view, postcolonial mission builds on the established efforts of Black, African and African women's theologies. Postcolonial mission cannot proceed without first learning the lessons of Africa's theological output for the past sixty years. In that sense postcolonial mission denotes something new in relation to the new initiatives that have been coming from the South.

4.   Postcolonial mission should, of course, not be an oxymoron when one considers the state of human beings, their land, culture, religion and religiosity in both the postcolony and the colony. For this reason African Christian theologians have spoken for a long about the need for re-evangelisation (*la nouvelle évangélisation*) of Africa – because the first evangelisation has been too colonial, violent and imperialistic in its approach.

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[31] Dube 2000.

5.   Postcolonial mission will do battle at several levels; the plight of women, imperialism, stubborn colonies and the tragic postcolonies of our material and imagined worlds. Postcolonial mission entails an honest consideration of the colonies that persist, the interface between the colony and the postcolony, and an equally honest analysis of the postcolonial condition.

6.   Postcolonial mission will be as concerned with land as it is with people, with earth as it is with heaven. Rahab, her land and her people must not be allowed to become mere metaphors.

7.   Postcolonial mission takes violence seriously – especially the violence in and of mission. It will therefore challenge both Christian theology and praxis to debunk and expose violence – banal and embedded – and to seek alternative ways of doing mission.

8.   Postcolonial mission takes place in the midst of the so-called 'knowledge economies', 'globalisation' and the 'information highway'. These developments will be considered with a keen eye for new forms of imperialism, new forms of false and violent deals between modern day Rahabs and modern day invaders. Above all, postcolonial mission will not hesitate to be critical of the project of economic growth carried out without regard to the earth and the poor.

9.   Postcolonial mission entails the transition/translation of 'mission is' into 'mission as'. It means realisation that it is centred in Jesus Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit and that it can be carried out in many modes. At the end of his *magnum opus*, David Bosch suggests thirteen elements of what he calls the emerging missionary paradigm: i) church with others, ii) *missio Dei*, iii) mediating salvation, iv) quest for justice, v) evangelism, vi) contextualization, vii) liberation, viii) inculturation, ix) common witness, x) ministry by the whole people of God, xi) witness to peoples of other faiths, xii) theology, and xiii) action in hope.[32]

10.   The transition to postcolonial mission will also entail a change of mode from the imperative to the subjunctive – 'mission in bold humility'.[33]

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[32] Bosch 1991.
[33] See Saayman & Kritzinger (eds.) 1996.

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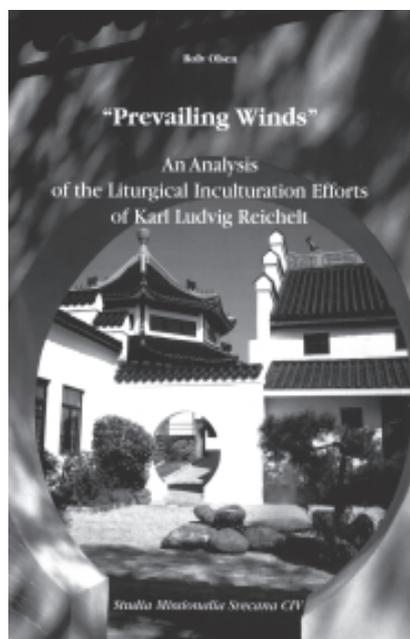
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Comments on "Postcolonial Mission: Oxymoron or Paradigm Shift" – A Response to Maluleke

Auli Vähäkangas

Abstract: This comment article approaches the question from the point of view of construction of Christian identities. Colonial approach in mission imposed identities from outside. In postcolonial mission, people are given space to construct their Christian identities even though colonialism is present and they struggle in between contrasting sets of cultural values. Ideally, this kind of mission is mission of the Cross, but the self-seeking human mind perverts it into crusading. However, the fact that Christians are unable to fulfil the ideal is not a reason for abandoning it.

Keywords: mission, postcolonial, cross, identity

While preparing this comment I have had a memory in my mind. This memory is from my second meeting with Prof. Maluleke. He came to a meeting in Arusha, Northern Tanzania in 2001-2002 and wanted also to visit our campus at Makumira University College. We first visited offices and lecture halls and later went to have a cup of coffee in our home. While entering our home we visited our small farm around it. When Tinyiko looked at the goats he said: "This is such a different world, nobody has goats on our campus".

Difficulties in conceptualising mission in postcolonial perspective

New Testament professor Musa Dube from the University of Botswana points out how studies on imperialism show that three main factors have repeatedly motivated and justified imperialism: God, glory, and gold.[1] While we discuss postcolonial mission we always face a danger that imperialism is still part of that in one way or another. The postcolonial situation is not something where imperialism would not be working any longer. Rather,

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[1] Dube 2000, 47. Dube refers to Mazrui 1990, 29.

"postcolonial" as a term refers to imperialism as a continuing reality in global relations. Even if classical colonialism is no longer there, colonial domination in the church and societies has found new forms and expressions.

Our question is whose imperialism dominates in postcolonial mission and in which way does it work? Letty Russell writes: "Countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America may describe their circumstances as postcolonial, but in reality the world looks very much neo-colonial as modern global capitalism and US imperialism manage to control the life and death of people across the globe."[2]

Attempts at mission in postcolonial perspective

Among some earlier attempts towards postcolonial mission are Kosuke Koyama's ideas on the crucified mind.[3] Koyama makes a difference between the colonial crusading mind and the postcolonial crucified mind. Koyama's theology is based on the theology of the cross, concentrating on Christ crucified. Koyama criticizes such resourcefulness which is like an over-developed lunch-box and too colonial minded. In a lunch box, everything is ready, nicely wrapped separately, just like much of Western mission and its theology. Koyama stresses that resourcefulness has to be contextualized and crucified in order to be useful. Here he refers to the moratorium debate of his time and stresses the need of it.[4]

Mission organizations and individuals involved in mission search many times for God, gold and glory but the way of the cross is not followed. We use rhetoric of liberation and talk of great ideas about partnership etc. but at the same time there is the reality of oppression and well-intending paternalism.

In her article "God, Gold, Glory and Gender: A Postcolonial view of mission", Letty M. Russell stresses that in a discussion of postcolonial mission it is necessary to include gender as a part of the analysis.[5] Now I recall a lecture of Professor Maluleke on masculine identity in Africa which I had a chance to listen to in July 2007. Russell refers only to female identity

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[2] Russell 2004, 39.
[3] Koyama 1976.
[4] Koyama 1976, 5.
[5] Russell 2004, 40.

when she talks of gender.[6] What Maluleke stressed is how men are left out of the religious discussion of gender. This observation is very important. We should not ignore the men in debating the gender-dimension of postcolonial mission. It is not enough just to judge men but rather something positive needs to be created. In Gaborone, Maluleke mapped out a new model for African men: the model of love, following the example of Joseph who loved Mary so much that protected the child that was not his.[7]

One challenge which I have faced continuously in the life of Tanzanian Christians is the search for a new postcolonial Christian identity. Three cultural and ideological identities: Christian (*kikristo*), traditional *(kinyeji)* and modern (*kisasa*) influence the life of today's Christians in Tanzania. This complexity of personal, social and cultural identities confuses people because many of the pastors still reflect the colonial mindset. They tend to condemn many dimensions of African traditional thinking and values. People in postcolonial church communities still have their history, family background, traditions and values from colonial and pre-colonial times. Postcolonial identity does not mean the lack of colonialism but rather an attempt to proceed beyond.

Construction of identity is a personal and communal process which cannot be done from outside. Colonial mission expressed many times that the old African traditions and values should be left behind. The postcolonial church community has to contextualize and to find its own identity. Colonial mission violated its objects' identity. The postcolonial mission should not violate people's identities but give tools to new types of identity construction in new situations where elements from local tradition, Christian faith and modern influences may all contribute to a person's new postcolonial Christian identity. A good example of such an approach is the model of love following the example of Joseph as described by Prof. Maluleke.

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[6] Russell 2004, 40; Maluleke 2007.
[7] Maluleke 2007.

The challenges we face

I come back to the title of Maluleke's article: "Postcolonial Mission: Oxymoron or Paradigm Shift?" I like the wording of the title. Postcolonial mission is really not a simple thing to analyze or even to understand.

Why should we see postcolonial mission as an oxymoron? Should we consider mission essentially a colonial enterprise? Yes and no. Postcolonial mission is an oxymoron just like realized utopia. Utopia, by definition, is not there. Ideally, Christian mission is guided by the Cross and is not colonial. The crucified mind does not crusade.

In Christian mission, we often see ourselves as the champions of the crucified mentality. Yet, in reality, as sinful humans we seek glor, and sometimes also gold in the name of God. In this way, we place ourselves above the others, attempting to create a situation of domination.

A solution to this would be to reject the concept and practice of Christian mission altogether, at least from the West. However, losing sight of utopia is not a desirable goal, either. Christian mission is ideally mission of the Cross, and even if the reality is different, that is not a reason to abandon the ideal. Our weakness expressed in power relations and the power of God realized in weakness are a continuing tension in Christian life and mission. A good slogan to a healthy postcolonial mission would be: Both genders to the glory of God.

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