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Revitalization

From the Director

This fall the Center's Coordinating Committee welcomes three new members who have recently joined the Asbury Seminary faculty: Kima Pachau, Associate Professor of the History and Theology of Mission; Steve Ybarrola, Associate Professor Cultural Anthropology; and Thomas Buchan, Associate Professor of Church History (Florida).

The Center has begun forming a broad-based advisory council that will help us achieve our goal of interfacing revitalization research with local efforts in Christian renewal. Members include Philip Goff, Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis; Bill Burrows, editor of Orbis Books; and Scott Sunquist, co-author of the History of the World Christian Movement project and professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Other members of the advisory council will be introduced in future issues. We welcome their counsel as we move toward meeting the objectives of the Center.

An interactive website is being developed with features to aid both generalists and research scholars.

As valued readers, your comments and suggestions are always welcome.

—J. Steven O'Malley, Director

In This Issue

This issue of *Revitalization* highlights a current initiative to breathe new life into evangelical Christianity, particularly its U.S. versions, by reminding the movement of its roots. The *Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future* grows out of efforts by noted author Robert Webber at Northern Seminary, Lombard, Illinois, to build consensus around "ancient" biblical and theological affirmations that cut across contemporary ideas and values that have compromised American evangelicalism. Yet in mining the church's early tradition, the call indirectly affirms some aspects of postmodernity, particularly the emphasis on narrative and, to some degree, cultural diversity.

This is both a consensus and a compromise document. It went through almost forty drafts, with intense debate over particular emphases and specific wording. Some 300 people participated, and over 400 have now endorsed the document, including several people associated with Asbury Seminary. (See www.ancientfutureworship.com.)

We think this is an important document in ongoing discussions about the meaning of Christian faithfulness and of church renewal. I became fairly intensely involved in the later discussions on specific wording and emphases, especially regarding the priority of biblical authority, New Testament ecclesiology, and issues of reform and renewal. (I am thus listed as one of the four theological editors; the others are Hans Boersma, James I. Packer Professor of

Theology, Regent College; Kevin Vanhoozer, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; and D. H. Williams, Professor of Religion in Patristics and Historical Theology, Baylor University. Robert Webber of Northern Seminary and Phil Kenyon of the Grow Center at Northern Seminary are listed as co-conveners.)

Northern Seminary is hosting a conference on the *AEF Call*, December 7–9, 2006. Speakers include Martin Marty, Brian McLaren, and Frederica Mathewes-Green. More information is available at the website indicated above. The *Call* is printed in this issue of *Revitalization* without additional comment, and as a basis for further discussion—particularly regarding issues of reform and renewal.

—Howard A. Snyder

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The Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements contributes to the vitality of Christian mission and local congregations by synthesizing learnings from past and present revitalization movements worldwide. Its approach is interdisciplinary, combining biblical studies, theology, history, anthropology, and sociology.

Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future

Prologue

In every age the Holy Spirit calls the Church to examine its faithfulness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ, authoritatively recorded in Scripture and handed down through the Church. Thus, while we affirm the global strength and vitality of worldwide Evangelicalism in our day, we believe the North American expression of Evangelicalism needs to be especially sensitive to the new external and internal challenges facing God's people.

These external challenges include the current cultural milieu and the resurgence of religious and political ideologies. The internal challenges include Evangelical accommodation to civil religion, rationalism, privatism and pragmatism. In light of these challenges, we call Evangelicals to strengthen their witness through a recovery of the faith articulated by the consensus of the ancient Church and its guardians in the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, the Protestant Reformation and the Evangelical awakenings. Ancient Christians faced a world of paganism, Gnosticism and political domination. In the face of heresy and persecution, they understood history through Israel's story, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of God's Kingdom.

Today, as in the ancient era, the Church is confronted by a host of master narratives that contradict and compete with the gospel. The pressing question is: who gets to narrate the world? The Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future challenges Evangelical Christians to restore the priority of the divinely inspired biblical story of God's acts in history. The narrative of God's Kingdom holds eternal implications for the mission of the Church, its theological reflection, its public ministries of worship and spirituality and its life in the world. By engaging these themes, we believe the Church will be strengthened to address the issues of our day.

1. On the Primacy of the Biblical Narrative

We call for a return to the priority of the divinely authorized canonical story of the Triune God. This story—Creation, Incarnation, and Re-creation—was effected by Christ's recapitulation of human history and summarized by the early Church in its Rules of Faith. The gospel-formed content of these Rules served as the key to the interpretation of Scripture and its critique of contemporary culture, and thus shaped the church's pastoral ministry. Today, we call Evangelicals to turn away from modern theological methods that

reduce the gospel to mere propositions, and from contemporary pastoral ministries so compatible with culture that they camouflage God's story or empty it of its cosmic and redemptive meaning. In a world of competing stories, we call Evangelicals to recover the truth of God's word as the story of the world, and to make it the centerpiece of Evangelical life.

2. On the Church, the Continuation of God's Narrative

We call Evangelicals to take seriously the visible character of the Church. We call for a commitment to its mission in the world in fidelity to God's mission (*Missio Dei*), and for an exploration of the ecumenical implications this has for the unity, holiness catholicity, and apostolicity of the Church. Thus, we call Evangelicals to turn away from an individualism that makes the Church a mere addendum to God's redemptive plan. Individualistic Evangelicalism has contributed to the current problems of churchless Christianity, redefinitions of the Church according to business models, separatist ecclesiologies and judgmental attitudes toward the Church. Therefore, we call Evangelicals to recover their place in the community of the Church catholic.

3. On the Church's Theological Reflection on God's Narrative

We call for the Church's reflection to remain anchored in the Scriptures in continuity with the theological interpretation learned from the early Fathers. Thus, we call Evangelicals to turn away from methods that separate theological reflection from the common traditions of the Church. These modern methods compartmentalize God's story by analyzing its separate parts, while ignoring God's entire redemptive work as recapitulated in Christ. Anti-historical attitudes also disregard the common biblical and theological legacy of the ancient Church. Such disregard ignores the hermeneutical value of the Church's ecumenical creeds. This reduces God's story of the world to one of many competing theologies and impairs the unified witness of the Church to God's plan for the history of the world. Therefore, we call Evangelicals to unity in "the tradition that has been believed everywhere, always and by all," as well as to humility and charity in their various Protestant traditions.

4. On Church's Worship as Telling and Enacting God's Narrative

We call for public worship that sings, preaches and enacts God's story. We call for a renewed consideration of how God ministers to us in baptism, Eucharist, confession, the laying on of hands, marriage, healing and through the charisma of the Spirit, for these actions shape our lives and signify the meaning of the world. Thus, we call Evangelicals to turn away from forms of worship that focus on God as a mere object of the intellect or that assert the self as the source of worship. Such worship has resulted in lecture-oriented, music-driven, performance-centered and program-controlled models that do not adequately proclaim God's cosmic redemption. Therefore, we call Evangelicals to recover the historic substance of worship of Word and Table and to attend to the Christian year, which marks time according to God's saving acts.

Revitalization is the twice-yearly bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements. Center Director: J. Steven O'Malley. Editor: Howard A. Snyder. The cost is \$5.00/year. Sample copies sent free. Send correspondence or change of address to *Revitalization*, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY 40390. Email: revitalization@asburyseminary.edu. Feedback, letters to the editor, and brief articles are welcome.

5. On Spiritual Formation in the Church as Embodiment of God's Narrative

We call for a catechetical spiritual formation of the people of God that is based firmly on a Trinitarian biblical narrative. We are concerned when spirituality is separated from the story of God and baptism into the life of Christ and his Body. Spirituality, made independent from God's story, is often characterized by legalism, mere intellectual knowledge, an overly therapeutic culture, New Age Gnosticism, a dualistic rejection of this world and a narcissistic preoccupation with one's own experience. These false spiritualities are inadequate for the challenges we face in today's world. Therefore, we call Evangelicals to return to a historic spirituality like that taught and practiced in the ancient catechumenate.

6. On the Church's Embodied Life in the World

We call for a cruciform holiness and commitment to God's mission in the world. This embodied holiness affirms life, biblical morality and appropriate self-denial. It calls us to be faithful stewards of the created order and bold prophets to our contemporary culture. Thus, we call Evangelicals to intensify their prophetic voice against forms of indifference to God's gift of life, economic and political injustice, ecological insensitivity and the failure to champion the poor and marginalized. Too often we have failed to stand prophetically against the culture's captivity to racism, consumerism, political correctness, civil religion, sexism, ethical relativism, violence and the culture of death. These failures have muted the voice of Christ to the world through his Church and detract from God's story of the world, which the Church is collectively to embody. Therefore, we call the Church to recover its counter-cultural mission to the world.

Epilogue

In sum, we call Evangelicals to recover the conviction that God's story shapes the mission of the Church to bear witness to God's Kingdom and to inform the spiritual foundations of civilization. We set forth this Call as an ongoing, open-ended conversation. We are aware that we have our blind spots and weaknesses. Therefore, we encourage Evangelicals to engage this Call within educational centers, denominations and local churches through publications and conferences.

We pray that we can move with intention to proclaim a loving, transcendent, triune God who has become involved in our history. In line with Scripture, creed and tradition, it is our deepest desire to embody God's purposes in the mission of the Church through our theological reflection, our worship, our spirituality and our life in the world, all the while proclaiming that Jesus is Lord over all creation.

This Call is issued in the spirit of *sic et non*; therefore those who affix their names to this Call need not agree with all its content. Rather, its consensus is that these are issues to be discussed in the tradition of *semper reformanda* as the church faces the new challenges of our time. Over a period of seven months, more than 300 persons have participated via e-mail to write the Call. These men and women represent a broad diversity of ethnicity and denominational affiliation. The four theologians who most consistently interacted with the development of the Call have been named as Theological Editors. The Board of Reference was given the special assignment of overall approval.

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Revitalization Theory

Revitalizing the Dominant Culture: New Social Movements

From Chicago to Paris to Prague the "Revolution of 1968" marked the high tide of a cycle of contentious social activism within the world's dominant societies. It also sparked a revolution in the study of social movements. Parallel with New Religious Movement theory's emergence in the 1970s (see Michael Rynkiewich's discussion in *Revitalization* 13:1), the study of New Social Movements (NSMs) has emerged from 1960s sociological research on collective action and social change in the West. A growing body of social movement theory (SMT) offers important contributions to the study of Christian revitalization movements.

Accompanying the acceleration of systemic globalization since the 1960s, NSMs provide anti-systemic, localizing, and humanizing influences to revitalize the dominant culture (for example, Klein 1999; Barlow and Clarke 2001). NSM research emphasizes the purposefulness of contentious social action and the importance of human agency in transforming cultural consciousness and social structures (Jasper 1997). SMT's main theoretical lines are illustrated in the following summary. (For an overview of SMT, see della Porta

and Diani 1999; Giugni, McAdam and Tilly 1999; Edelman 2001).

Resource mobilization theory examines the mobilization of society's "movement sector" by "social movement entrepreneurs" exploiting opportunities to advance their causes (McCarthy 1996). This analysis assumes the continuous presence of social movement organizations (SMOs) and of grievances that may be addressed at any time. Of theoretical interest is how movements function, especially the performance of movement organizers, their ability to recruit human and material resources, their strategic use of rhetoric, media, and protest tactics, and their skill in exploiting their opponents' weaknesses.

Identity politics research explores the cultural significance of political activism. Examining movements of social groups resisting discrimination, especially women, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities, theorists foreground the communal and personal contents of social mobilization (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995). Movements, functioning as social spaces as well as means of

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Revitalization Theory cont.

action, provide activists not only with collective voices but also with venues for constructing alternative lifestyles. Activists are thus enabled to challenge their marginal status while preserving their social identities against the dominant culture. By providing spaces for activists to articulate personal experiences, theorize their discrimination, and freely express themselves, affective and expressive dimensions are added to the movement experience.

Political process theory examines historical processes through which movements arise, especially the connection between their rise and the opening of political opportunities caused by crises within social elites (Tarrow 1994). Opportunity occurs through interest among elites in changing the political structure, or conversely, through conflicts within elites that delegitimize them, or through events that weaken political control. Opportunities opening to activists are located in unpredictable historical events, but as they occur they permit movements to exploit them. Theoretical questions concern how the structure of a particular historical context offers opportunity to act and simultaneously limits or shapes action in particular ways.

New social movement theory studies activists turning to movements in order to resist the systems and elites controlling their social worlds (Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield 1994; Melucci 1996; Ray and Anderson 2000). NSMs confront power in its varied political, social, cultural, and economic forms as their central problematic—addressing its systemic influence on, for instance, personal freedoms, social identity, security, privacy, cultural diversity, and environmental and labor exploitation. Theorists point out that, beyond political impacts, movements also possess cultural meanings of great importance to groups and individuals.

These overlapping lines of SMT research converge to highlight three variables that most clearly explain a movement's emergence, development, and outcome—*political opportunity*, the historical opening and the structure of this opening in determining a movement's timing, focus, form, and ultimate magnitude; *mobilizing structures*, the creation of movement organizations to recruit resources and the development of strategies to deploy them; and *the cultural framing process*, the rhetorical framing of grievances, values, beliefs, and ideologies that legitimate and motivate collective action (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996).

SMT provides powerful theoretical tools to examine and inform

Christian revitalization movements. This is extensively explored in the first volume of the new Intercultural Studies sub-series of the Center's Revitalization Studies series (see Leffel, in publication).

— Gregory P. Leffel

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Revitalization: Explorations in World Christian Movements

The Center announces the publication of the following volumes in the new series *Revitalization: Explorations in World Christian Movements*, published by Scarecrow Press:

E. Stanley Jones Had a Wife: The Life and Mission of Mabel Lossing Jones, by Kathryn Hendershot.

In the Midst of Early Methodism: Lady Huntingdon and Her Correspondence, edited and annotated by John R. Tyson, with Boyd S. Schlenther. 331 pp.

"Live While You Preach": The Autobiography of Methodist

Revivalist and Abolitionist John Wesley Redfield (1810-1863), edited by Howard A. Snyder. 412 pp.

Living for God: Eighteenth-Century Dutch Pietist Autobiography, by Fred van Lieburg. 170 pp.

"To Be Silent . . . Would Be Criminal": The Antislavery Influence and Writings of Anthony Benezet, edited by Irv A. Brendlinger. 227 pp.

Several other volumes are currently in preparation; see the enclosed notice from Scarecrow Press.

Book Reviews

The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South

By Philip Jenkins

Oxford: Oxford University Press

2006, 193 pp. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

Jenkins has done it again. Frame a simple question, dismiss the popular answers, then blend story and statistic into a provocative account of a world beyond the border of the West.

The question: If the church of the Global South continues to eclipse the church of the North, what will the dominant church believe and what will it do? The common dichotomy of fundamentalism and liberalism will not take us far in understanding the church of the Global South. If it must be used, then the Global South church is hermeneutically and theologically conservative, and thus socially and politically liberal on issues of poverty and injustice. Get used to it.

As with *The Next Christendom*, one can quibble with Jenkins' criteria. For example, Jenkins identifies Isaiah Shembe as a prophet and the Shembe Church as a Christian church. Recent work however demonstrates that Shembe, in his present form, has replaced Christ as mediator, putting the church outside of Christianity (Moodley 2004).

Still, Jenkins continually hits the mark. Alternative hermeneutics and theologies push the Western church to ask: What is Christianity, and what is merely Western? The issue is not whether the church in the North or the South has got it right, but rather that reading the Bible with fresh eyes helps us see that the gospel is able to confirm and confront a variety of cultures, carry on its transforming work, and continue to do that anew and afresh for generations to come. No need to be surprised at the power of the Word.

— Michael Rynkiewich, *Asbury Theological Seminary*

“Live While You Preach”: The Autobiography of Methodist Revivalist and Abolitionist John Wesley Redfield, 1810-1863

Edited by Howard A. Snyder

Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press

2006, 412 pp. \$40.00

As Nathan Hatch noted in the *Democratization of American Christianity*, his now classic account of the rapid spread of sectarian expressions of Christianity in the early nineteenth century, the popularity and unique character of American religion owes much of its success to its principal promoters: a cadre of self-educated, colorful and eccentric popular evangelists. Readily adopting innovative ecclesial structures, such as the camp meeting, and benefiting from the successes of perhaps America's most eccentric popular evangelist, Lorenzo Dow, Methodism was the fastest growing and largest American denomination by 1820. As early as the 1830s,

however, Methodist growth slowed, and the movement began a process of institutionalization and a search for respectability. Hatch associates this especially with Nathan Bangs, Phoebe Palmer's New York friend and critic of her brand of perfectionism.

As “*Live While You Preach*” clearly demonstrates, the growing cultural conformity of American Methodism was contested by various figures as colorful as Dow himself. One of the most remarkable was John Wesley Redfield, author of this autobiography.

Redfield was a key figure of the formation of the Free Methodist Church, but his biography has much wider significance. It helps clarify the history of Methodism, revivalism in New England, the greater New York City area, the Burned-Over District of upstate New York, and in the spread of Burned-Over District style evangelicalism in such areas as the Northern Illinois communities of Elgin, Woodstock and Marengo, areas largely populated by immigrants from western New York.

As pictured in his autobiography, Redfield's faith was both deeply experiential and radically puritanical. Redfield lived with a sense of divine immediacy in which God's grace and judgment were experienced literally. Redfield's faith was dismissed as fanaticism by his critics, but it lived on in a zealous band of disciples including “Auntie” Coon, the Pentecost Bands (young Free Methodists deeply committed to spiritual renewal), and into the twentieth century in Coon's convert, E. E. Shelhamer. Uniting radical puritanical elements with feminism and commitments to racial justice, the tradition of Redfield survived in portions of Free Methodism for over a century.

This volume is enriched by the introduction and extensive footnotes. It should be in the libraries of all Free Methodists, students of the wider Methodist movement, scholars of American religious history, and anyone interested in the history of Antebellum New York and Northern Illinois.

— William Kostlevy, *Tabor College*

Korruption und Religion

Karl Rennstich

München: Rainer Hampp Verlag,

2005. 136 pp.

This is Karl Rennstich's second work on the theme of corruption and religion. In 1990 he published *Korruption: Eine Herausforderung für Gesellschaft und Kirche* [*Corruption: A Challenge for Society and Church*], an examination of corruption in various parts of society, though dealing only with Christian perspectives.

Korruption und Religion argues that corruption is always related in some way to power and money, is done in secret, breaks trust, and distorts the normal societal standards of duty and responsibility. The fight against corruption is the task of both church and state.

Rennstich focuses on the problem of corruption in the world's major religions. He maintains that corruption is widespread in

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Book Reviews cont.

predominantly Hindu India, even though the religion “takes a clear position against” it; the Hindu concept of *moksha* advocates “the liberation of the soul from all worldly and material connections.” Regarding Buddhism, Rennstich notes that the “Noble Eightfold Path” describes the ideal adherent as one who “stands over material things.” Yet corruption exists.

China, with its dominant Confucian influence, is also discussed. China has been plagued by corruption since ancient times, Rennstich notes, even though corruption was viewed as “a sign for the end of a dynasty.” Today corruption is “an immense social problem” in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, yet Singapore has curbed corruption through tough laws and even tougher enforcement.

Islam also has a complicated history with corruption, according to Rennstich. The Qu’ran promises a “painful punishment” for spending money contrary to Allah’s way, and yet corruption has thrived in Muslim lands. Pious Muslim critics of corruption have often suffered persecution. Judaism too has an extensive history of struggles with corruption, as demonstrated in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the early church had to confront cases such as Ananias and Sapphira and Simon the magician.

Rennstich discusses global corruption and the need for a global religious ethic. Following the lead of Hans Küng, he argues that civic and religious freedom are inseparable. The modern ideology of economic progress at all costs is a chief reason for the current pervasiveness of corruption. Rennstich stresses the connection between corruption and environmental destruction.

Rennstich relies heavily on Wilhelm Brunner, director of the

University of Vienna business school, in his further analysis. He notes the interrelationships between power and corruption, wisdom and love. Power leads to corruption; wisdom and love lead to one another. Corruption is not unavoidable, Rennstich believes; he cites historical examples, including the “Wesleyan Methodists,” where corruption has been successfully resisted. Fighting corruption “must begin in the house of religions.” The first step is probity or complete and confirmed integrity, followed by honesty and justice.

Rennstich’s survey of corruption in the various religions is informative but sometimes incomplete. In discussing Buddhism he does not document cases of corruption but merely explains Buddhist teachings. The discussion of Confucianism is long on examples but short on insights into its teachings. Still, the insight that corruption is simultaneously condemned yet present in all of the world’s religions is helpful.

This is a fine scholarly work, well nuanced and not sectarian or ideological. It provides useful insights and concrete steps toward overcoming the forces of corruption.

— Mark Russell, *Asbury Theological Seminary*

**Howard,
Do you have a filler? Perhaps a
conference announcement? Or a
website to check out?**