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# BULLETIN

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# The Challenge of Missions History

by Richard V. Pierard

The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals sponsored the colloquium "The Challenge of Missions History" at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois on March 16, 1984 as part of its series on research topics in the history of evangelical Christianity. The featured speakers were Professors Charles Weber of Wheaton College and Robert E. Frykenberg of the University of Wisconsin. Weber, who recently completed a doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago on the Baptist mission in Cameroon and is now working on the Women's Missionary Union, discussed various materials to be found in mission archives in general and the rich collection of the collection of the Graham Center in particular and explained opportunities for using them in missions history research. Among these are photographs, denominational and agency magazines, correspondence, surveys done by missionaries, and oral history interviews. Scholars can view mission organizations in terms of the domestic scenes in which they were rooted, assess how the missions functioned within the indigenous societies where they worked, and carry out comparative historical studies of mission endeavors in different cultures, various societies active among a same people, and church-colonial regime national state relations.

Professor Frykenberg, a prolific writer and leading scholar of the history of South India, examined the problems and prospects in writing the history of world missions. He underscored the general lack of understanding which most people in the North Atlantic community have about evangelical Christianity outside of the West and the consequences of this for scholarship. This factor and the enormous complexities of today's world gravitate against the possibility that we will ever again see a generalist historian of evangelicalism like Kenneth Scott Latourette or Julius Richter. He stressed the need for more ready access to primary sources and put forth

the intriguing thesis that a direct correlation exists between the antiquity of a mission organization and the quality of its archival collection. He said the older groups tend to have better archival policies and their materials are more adequately preserved and accessible than is the case with those more recently formed. This is important because agencies which are less concerned about preserving the record of their origins and development probably do very little critical thinking about their own ministry. Their work tends to be more promotional in nature and accounts of their history propagandistic, and when scholarship is directed toward this, it is more airy or theoretical and less empirical. He urged that missionary endeavors be studied as part of an indigenous culture on its own terms, as well as part of the wider history of religions and general history of mankind, and that it be done in a wholistic, interdisciplinary manner. The legacies of poor historical understanding can be seen in the suffering of Christians in Uganda and elsewhere, the Christianization of alien, pagan concepts, and the factionalism that flows from the quarreling and competition among the different mission societies.

At a banquet which followed, the ISAE co-directors, Professors Mark A. Noll of Wheaton College and Nathan O. Hatch of the University of Notre Dame, spelled out the achievements and goals of the group (currently funded by the Lilly Endowment), and President Kenneth Kantzer of Trinity College, Deerfield delineated the benefits which evangelicals may derive from the study of history. Also, ISAE has inaugurated a news letter, *Evangelical Studies Bulletin*, and will bring together the leading scholars on the life and thought of Jonathan Edwards in a national conference on October 24-26, 1984. For further information write ISAE administrator Joel Carpenter, Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187.

## Sixth Evangelical Women's Conference

by Linda Mercadante

The Evangelical Women's Caucus International is now ten years old. As the sixth plenary conference convened at Wellesley College, it was clear that this would be a time of stock-taking with an eye toward the future, as well as a time of celebration for the careful scholarship, personal support and international networking that has come out of this diverse group in the past decade.

Organized by the Greater Boston Chapter of EWCI, the five-day conference drew some 500 participants from across the United States and Canada, as well as Norway, the Philippines, Australia and Panama. The theme "Free Indeed—The Fulfillment of our Faith" was examined from a variety of angles, from the biblical and theological to the psychological and social action perspectives. But rather than begin with a didactic or exhortative message, the conference began far more effectively with a dramatic one-woman play based on the life and writings of the medieval anchoress Lady Julian of Norwich. Written by J. Janda and performed by Roberta Nobleman, the play made clear that Julian's struggle to live true to the voice of God was no easier, nor less rewarding, than our own.

Fortified by this message, the participants began the round of plenary sessions and workshops that would last for the remaining four days. But as the week progressed, it became clear that this would not be simply a repetition of the past conferences, where the necessary hard grappling with the liberating message of the Gospel was accomplished largely through educational means and personal interaction. This type of activity was of course, a significant part of the sixth plenary conference, but in addition the membership of EWCI began to ask through the week, "Where do we go from here?" The Evangelical Women's Caucus began in 1975 as an outgrowth of Evangelicals for Social Action. Since that time it has successfully grown to international proportions, has nurtured a fel-

lowship of women and men in local chapters across North America, and has been especially effective in encouraging scholarship on the issue of the biblical warrant for liberation from gender-role stereotypes, toward the goal of the free and full service of God. But this year people were asking whether it was indeed time to expand the horizons and the outreach of EWCI. The two directions proposed included, first, taking a stand on social issues grow out of or impinge upon biblical feminism, such as speaking against militarism and for peace, and second, expanding the mission to include service to disadvantaged women here or in other lands.

The themes chosen by the various plenary speakers seemed to converge on the necessity of reasserting the primary goals of EWCI, but also possibly redefining them to include a new element of "risk-taking." Ruth Schmidt, president of Agnes Scott College, urged members to expand their vision to include "macro charity." Attorney Betsy Cunningham explained that since "for many of us the choice was feminist ideology" or a repressive brand of theology until they discovered Christian feminism, we must now use this new-found freedom to serve as a global political force for peace, justice and liberty.

Charles Willie, professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, insisted that "persons who wish to be free must cease cooperating in their own oppression" and directed sights toward the suffering servant tradition, the path of courage and compassion. Kathleen Storrie, assistant professor of sociology, Saskatoon, warned of the organizational strength of the "new submission of women movement," led by such figures as Bill Gothard, while Anne Eggebroten exhorted participants to grow towards a new level of "risk-taking." These themes came to a climax at the business meeting where the group debated at length how to address the challenge.

Some members believed that the strength of the organization and the clarity of its basic intent would be lost if other goals were interposed. The social issues, they said, could be better tackled if members worked under the aegis of other groups whose primary focus was, for instance, peace or poverty. Others, however, said that it was time for EWCI to move beyond its initial methods of personal support and educational efforts, and move into making an active witness for social issues that relate to the biblical feminist mission.

The membership decided to do two things. First, to devise a new method of group decision-making, since the standard method had failed to promote sustained discussion, and second, to carefully study the issues, members' attitudes towards them, and possible actions, with a view toward some resolution at the next plenary conference.

In the meantime, participants were left with a rich assortment of biblical, theological, and practical helps, as well as the necessary encouragement and personal support, to sustain them on their journey toward the full freedom of the Gospel.

## A Christian Critique of the New Consciousness

by Douglas Groothuis

*The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture,*

by Fritjof Capra (Simon and Schuster, 1982)

*The Reenchantment of the World,*

by Morris Berman (Cornell, 1981)

*The Aquarian Conspiracy,*

by Marilyn Ferguson (J. B. Tarcher, 1980)

A new social force is struggling to reveal itself and so transform all areas of life with its potency. Evidences of influence crop up in everyday discussion, the media, literature, and academia. Those disenchanted with a secularized modernity or traditional Christianity search for a new model of the universe, society, and persons adequate to address the challenges of the age. They may turn to yoga, read books on Eastern religions, search for a guru, integrate pantheistic themes into their theology, interpret modern science as substantiating Eastern mysticism, lobby for meditation in the public schools, write scholarly or popular books on social transformation, or engage in any number of activities associated with what is called the New Consciousness or New Age movement.

To try and get to the heart of this movement, we will concentrate on the specific agendas of a scientist, a cultural historian, and a journalist each aglow with messianic expectations of personal and global transformation. A world-view revolution encounters us, they tell us. These apologists and prophets announce its arrival by proclaiming "the God within," a new, spiritual physics, an updated animism, and the evolution of consciousness. Agendas are set to revive a deadened modern mind.

Science speaks, says Fritjof Capra in *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (Simon and Schuster, 1982), and we must listen. After three centuries of simplistic, atomistic, mechanistic models of the universe developed by people like Bacon, Descartes, and Newton, we face the embarrassment and challenge of modern physics which shows us that "reality can no longer be understood in terms of these concepts" (p. 16). Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Planck, and other physicists have uncovered unnerving and entrancing enigmas at the heart of the matter. The "new paradigm" portrays a vibrant and pulsating organism instead of a dead mechanism. Capra says:

Subatomic particles . . . are not "things" but are interconnections between "things," and these "things," in turn, are interconnections between other "things," and so on. In quantum theory you never end with "things": you always deal with the interconnection. This is how modern physics reveals the basic oneness of the universe (p. 81, 82).

Our physics must be revamped, as must our whole world-view.

The old paradigm fragmented, objectified, and

reduced the natural world to a mere machine of separable, individual parts seen in isolation from the whole. God was viewed as a domineering male tyrant who exploited his creation. People viewed themselves as separate from the Lord over nature. Consequently, Western civilization exploited the environment, resulting in our present ecological, economic, and political crisis. After charting the harmful effects of this outdated model ("the Newtonian world-machine")<sup>1</sup> on ecology, medicine, economics, psychology, and politics, Capra—himself a physicist—reevaluates these fields from a "holistic paradigm" informed by the new physics, general systems theory, and Eastern mysticism (which he believes was centuries ahead of science in its unified view of the world).<sup>2</sup>

Capra sees this revolutionary world-view as transforming the world. When we view ourselves to be an interrelated part of the cosmic whole, our societal dilemmas will begin to dissolve. A New Age of incalculable human potential awaits us through the evolution of this New Consciousness.

Morris Berman offers a similar critique, but through the eyes of a cultural historian. His book, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Cornell, 1981), argues for just that—a world revived after the disenchantment (Max Weber's term) of the West since about 1600. Villainous also for Berman are thinkers like Bacon, Newton, and Descartes who reduced nature to a clockwork contraption comprehended and manipulated through discursive reason, which he calls "non participatory consciousness." This legacy of materialism and scientism must succumb to a "participatory consciousness" as experienced by alchemists, hermeticists, mystics, and certain illuminated moderns (such as Gregory Bateson). In this type of knowing, "everything in the universe is alive and interrelated, and we know the world through direct identification with it, or immersion in the phenomena (subject/object merger)" (p. 343).

Berman synthesizes ancient thought with modern thinkers such as Bateson, Reich, and Jung in order to open us to the non-discursive aspects of knowing and being. Like Capra, Berman sees our time as one of great crisis and great opportunity. "Some type of participating consciousness and a corresponding socio-political formation have to emerge if we are to survive as a species" (p. 22). If this happens we will experience "not merely a new society, but a new species, a new type of human being" (p. 298).

A new human being and a new social order are the passions of Marilyn Ferguson whose popular and influential book, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (J. B. Tarcher, 1980) charts their potential. She explores the new found powers of consciousness as seen in physics, psychology, parapsychology, holistic health, the human potential movement, and so on. But she not only records discoveries and theories, she reports a movement, an "aquarian conspiracy" of like-minded people from every area of life:

Broader than reform, deeper than revolution, this benign conspiracy for a new human agenda has triggered the most rapid cultural realignment in history . . . It is a new mind—the ascendance of a startling worldview (p. 23).

Ferguson presents a dazzling range of information—avant garde theories at "the frontiers of science," mystical experience, philosophical speculation, and sociological premonitions—in a whirlwind tour through the New Consciousness. This "conspiracy" is everywhere and the potentialities are tantalizing for "we are in the early morning of understanding our place in the universe and our spectacular latent powers." (p. 279).

Taken together, these books seem to pack quite a persuasive punch. Ferguson excites, stimulates, and challenges—impressing the average reader with the lure of the new and amazing. She showcases a growing movement in search of vital transformations that will infuse us all with hope. And the ideas seem to be catching on—her book has been translated into seven foreign languages. Hers is the manifesto of an activist, not the treatise of a scholar (although it is not without some sophistication). Capra and Berman will interest the generally well educated and more scholarly reader. Capra, as a scientist, charts the history and speculates about the implications of modern science. His book is quite popular, with excerpts published in *The Futurist* and *Science Digest*. Berman, more a philosopher and cultural historian than a scientist, emphasizes philosophical and cultural trends in the Western world.

The apologetic and prophetic voices of the New Consciousness ring out in bold, clear tones. But who is listening and why? World-view revolutions don't come out of nowhere. Our authors have crystallized and systemitized a "paradigm shift" long in the making, which can be most recently and visibly traced to the 1960s.

For all its superficial flamboyance, the counter-culture embodied more than passing fashions, mass-marketed gurus, and political disruptions. It challenged the core creed of secular humanism—technocratic materialism. This passionate protest against the modern "wasteland" was cogently codified by Theodore Roszak in *The Making of the Counter Culture* and *Where the Wasteland Ends*, in which he condemns the "single vision" (Blake) of a society stripped of the mystical, or "old gnosis" as he put it. Secularized, post-Enlightenment industrial society suffocated the spirit and immobilized the imagination. But spiritual sustenance was to be found by turning to the Romantics, tribal religions, occultism, psychedelic drugs or the adepts of the East to recharge our dying society. The emptiness and anomie of a "world without windows" (Berger) was met with a "resacralizing" (Roszak) spirit of hope.