

An urgent plea for a real ecumenism of the Spirit

Revisiting Evangelicalism and Ecumenism within Pentecostal-Charismatic Theological Education

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The 20th century has seen millions of lives affected by the worldwide Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal. It has been referred to as the 'century of the Holy Spirit'.¹ Men and women came from various different ecclesiastical backgrounds, yet all believed that God 'moves sovereignly by the power of His Holy Spirit in the lives of human beings, bringing new life, or revival'.²

Henry Brash Bonsall (1905-1990), the founder of Birmingham Bible Institute (later renamed Birmingham Christian College), was such a man for whom the 'presence and power of the Spirit was all important'.³ At first a Presbyterian minister, he later joined a Pentecostal Church, yet the scope of his vision about teaching and training in preparation for revival can best be understood in terms of 'serving the whole Christian church in all denominations'.⁴ An interdenominational bridge was built between evangelical doctrine and charismatic experience, between the *It is written* and the *There is power*.

One of the great weaknesses of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements during the last century, however, has been their disregard for the ministry of unity of the Holy Spirit. More divisions and separations have devastated the Christian church and affected its credibility than ever before. We are in need of an evangelical, charismatic *ecumenism of the Spirit* in theological education for the 21st century. If the Pentecostal movement⁵ is a movement of the Spirit, how does the Spirit move in Pentecostal-Charismatic theological education and training for the sake of unity within the Body of Christ?

If theology is best understood as a lifelong learning and conversation within the fellowship of the Spirit, what kind of a *spiritual* journey would such an *academic* journey be? Theological education in the 21st century needs to enable students to move from indoctrination (told what to think) to education (learning how to think), from system-thinking (theology as a finished product) to creative thinking (theology as an ongoing dynamic enterprise), from systematic theol-

ogy (formulating propositional truth) to historical theology (critical understanding of our heritage), from a 'God-in-the-box' theology (reducing God's revelation to manageable, predetermined categories) to an innovative, constructive and prophetic theology (serving the needs of today's church in today's world, by allowing for change and responding to new challenges), from a monopoly of the Spirit (a spirit of chauvinism advocating uniformity) to an ecumenism of the Spirit (a spirit of diversity advocating unity).

We need to rethink how we use words such as 'Evangelical', 'Ecumenical', 'Pentecostal' or 'Charismatic', all of which – though familiar – have been used or rejected by different segments of the Christian church, at different times, in different places, and for different reasons. Words have a history, which is certainly also true for theological terminology.

1. Revisiting Evangelicalism

One way of defining 'evangelical' has been simply by taking its basic root meaning, coming from the Greek *euangelion*, or 'good news'. By this definition, all that is required to be an evangelical is that one believes in the gospel, or the Good News. However, it goes without saying that this is contingent on what one means by 'gospel'. Another way to define 'evangelical' has been according to geography. In Europe, historically 'Evangelical' was a follower of Luther (*evangelisch*),⁶ as opposed to 'Reformed' which implied following after Calvin. In Latin America, *evangélico* means Protestant, as opposed to the majority Catholic population (i.e. *all* Protestants, whether liberal or conservative, are *evangélicos*). An even more expansive definition includes Pentecostals in this equation. Thirdly, 'evangelical' was coined as a moderate counter-term to fundamentalism.⁷ Ironically, although 'evangelical' was supposed to differentiate itself from fundamentalism, often in the media today 'evangelical' is taken to mean 'fundamentalist' (or at least 'conservative'). A fourth way to define 'evangelical' is in opposition to the word 'ecumenical', where the word 'ecumenical' has come to mean 'liberal' or 'compromising one's faith'. However, this begs again the question of what 'ecumenical' really means, for whom and where. A fifth usage of the word 'evangelical' can be found in the contemporary Catholic understanding of mission, as they emphasize what some call the 'evangelical mission of the Catholic Church'.⁸

Evangelicalism as such is a modern phenomenon going back essentially to 19th and 20th century Protestant history. Historical links explain why some would define

themselves as Pentecostal Evangelicals. But not all Pentecostals are Evangelicals, just as not all Evangelicals are Pentecostals.⁹ Many early Pentecostals, like Leonard Steiner who in 1947 convened the first World Pentecostal Conference in Zürich, have seen themselves as 'fundamentalist with a plus' (i.e. baptism of the Holy Spirit).¹⁰ But how much evangelical can a Pentecostal be without giving up what is unique about him for the benefit of the whole church? When Roger Olson describes some general characteristics of conservative Evangelicalism, they are also largely descriptive of European Pentecostalism.¹¹

a. Beyond fundamentalism: caught between Calvinism and Dispensationalism

One of the most crucial problems with evangelical theology is that it has allowed itself to be trapped by its own distinctive theological systems. Modern Evangelicalism cannot be understood apart from Protestant fundamentalism. That is where its roots can be found, but is it where its future lies? Doing theology through unilateral, cultural lenses will always bring a special concern for salvaging one's restricted worldview, instead of engaging the world, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in a proactive and constructive way. We may want to pay attention to Ben Witherington III's lucid observation: 'Those who do theology while constantly looking longingly into the rearview mirror are going to crash sooner or later.'¹²

During much of the 20th century dispensationalism has been very influential, not only in North America, but also in European Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. It would seem that in the 21st c. Calvinism is now playing a similar role. Both are systems of thought which developed a set of principles for the 'proper' understanding of Scripture and therefore of salvation history. Both have developed a basic hermeneutical pattern of interpretation with its respective theological presuppositions. They share very different views on the church and eschatology, but both claim to be faithful to biblical Christianity and/or Reformed theology. But can we escape preconceived dogmatic schemes? Can we develop an approach to the Christian faith and theological education with a high view of Scripture, yet non-fundamentalist in outlook?¹³

The fundamentalist mindset is no longer limited to its historical starting point – North-American Protestant Christianity, more specifically dispensationalism – but wherever it is found, it conveys the same mentality and shares the same characteristics. The complexity of modernity has produced fears and anxieties. The challenges of postmodernist pluralism have generated insecurities which go beyond merely the issue of mere faithfulness to scriptural evidence and the gospel. Moving beyond fundamentalism means that it must be possible to be evangelical without remaining attached to a dualistic worldview plagued by narrow-mindedness, isolationism, authoritarianism, and reductionism. A view of reality which is kept alive by a permanent polemical tone, ultimately will not allow for real dialogue.¹⁴

b. Beyond the Bebbington quadrilateral

In seeking the essentials of evangelical belief, most roads today lead back to David Bebbington's 'quadrilateral of prior-

ities that is the basis of Evangelicalism', which many others use as a basis for a common understanding:¹⁵ **biblicism**, **crucicentrism**, **conversionism** and **activism**. *Biblicism* is a belief in the Bible's divine inspiration, truth and ultimate authority. This led Evangelicals to encourage the devotional use of the Bible. *Crucicentrism* is a belief in the atoning death of Christ for sinners. *Conversionism* is the belief that one becomes a Christian by repentance of sin and acceptance by God through faith alone, not works. Finally, *activism* refers to the dedication and energy of Evangelicals in their quest to convert others, but frequently also involves social engagement.¹⁶

The present author believes that there is evidence for a Pentecostal Quadrilateral:¹⁷ **experience**, **resurrection**, **baptism** and **community**. *Experience* is the belief that the actual 'receiving of the Spirit' and its accompanying life transformation takes precedence over any doctrinal formulation or statement of faith. *Resurrection* is a belief that Christ's overcoming death is what is most significant for the believer's faith and life, since it is resurrection power – not the death of Christ on a cross as such – which establishes both the *now* of divine righteousness in his life and the *then* of his eschatological hope. *Baptism* is the belief that a conscious identification with Jesus and his followers – expressing what it means to become a new person 'in Christ' – is best demonstrated by a requested physical immersion into water. Finally, *community* refers to the involvement of God's people with God's worldwide project of a new society characterised by kingdom ethics, i.e. justice, compassion and equality.

In order to better understand how Pentecostal spirituality is different from Evangelical spirituality, we consider in particular how and why evangelical crucicentrism is replaced by what one might call 'moving beyond the cross'. In his classical presentation *The Cross of Christ*,¹⁸ John Stott, who is considered one of the most influential clergymen in the Church of England during the twentieth century, establishes the centrality of the cross for the Christian faith. This central focus on the crucifixion has brought about a cross-centred theology leading to a cross-centred life. This seems to be backed up by Paul's writing to the Corinthian Church: 'We preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1:23);¹⁹ 'For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.' (1 Cor. 2:2).

John Stott reminds us that 'it is often asserted that in the book of Acts the apostle's emphasis was on the resurrection rather than the death of Jesus', but believes that 'although they emphasised it, it would be an exaggeration to call their message an exclusively resurrection gospel.'²⁰ Is however such a statement supported by the apostolic witness?

There is no Christian redemption story without a suffering Jewish Messiah dying so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled,²¹ or without making clear that 'the ultimate purpose for which Jesus gave up his life in obedience to God was the redemption of God's people, of which Jewish and Gentile believers . . . now form part . . . , that those belonging to God's people might practice the righteousness God desired and demanded . . . with the help of the Holy Spirit.'²²

It must be said that this was not only the goal of Christ's death, but also of his incarnation, his ministry, and his resurrection. To isolate the cross from the resurrection has had a number of most unfortunate consequences, as has been rightly pointed out by Michael Green, Senior Research Fellow

at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, in his book, *The Empty Cross of Jesus*. I agree with him when he says that with such a separation, 'the way is paved for a powerless orthodoxy'.²³ You may get the doctrine right, but not necessarily life transformation; the creed affirmed, yet no divine encounter secured.

The early disciples believed indeed that Jesus had died, but such 'belief' resulted in a most severe crisis until they realized that 'God raised him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for him to be held in its power' (Acts 2:24); 'Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through his power' (1 Cor. 6:14).

As a result of his resurrection, Jesus is alive as Lord and has been given the power to bring about the promised redemption. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes in a resurrected Messiah: first for the Jew, then for the non-Jew/Gentile (cf. Rom. 1:16).

Salvation through Jesus does not result *directly* from Jesus' death, nor *automatically* from his resurrection, but by following him as members of his new community of God's new people.

It is a personal life-changing encounter with the living God (cf. Paul in Ephesus was 'solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ', Acts 20:21), producing something radically and completely NEW: a new association with Christ:

- a **new faith** (identification with Christ = confession),
- a **new mind** (repentance towards God, turning from one's own way to Christ's way)
- a **new life-style** (righteousness of Christ = sanctification), and
- a **new family** (incorporation into the body of Christ = baptism).

In order to understand how God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ . . . so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18, 21), we need to contemplate the twofold reality of an empty cross and an empty tomb.

And he died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf. (2Cor. 5:15)

He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. 4:25).

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9).

A fresh look at the apostle Paul's baptismal theology makes it clear that the theme of 'death' and 'burial' underlines the radical changes inherent to a life bound to freedom. There is an old life which is no longer in existence and a former identity which is no more relevant since they belong to the past. There is a new life which is graciously given and a new identity freely received by association with the resurrection of Jesus which belong to both present and future.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that as **Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too**

might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *him* in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him (Rom. 6:3-8).

Christian identity is centred on the resurrection work of the Spirit, first of all in Christ and then in the believer's life. It is all about moving from a 'because of sin' dead end street to a 'because of righteousness' start of a new life journey. Resurrection power is at the heart of the Easter message, which in turn gives meaning and purpose to the Christian faith.

But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. **But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you** (Rom. 8:9-11).

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain (1 Cor. 15:14).

Paul's single ambition:

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death; (Philp. 3:10-11)

'To be an evangelical Christian, rightly says John Stott, is not just to subscribe to a formula, however orthodox . . . The evangelical faith reaches beyond belief to behaviour.'²⁴ Theological education today can help redefine 'being evangelical' simply as being 'Good News people' of the reconciliation available in Jesus Christ, who are enabled to distinguish between essentials and *adiaphora* (i.e. things that don't matter as much) for the sake of unity, to learn the lessons from history (including from Evangelicalism) with greater appreciation, in order to better take possession of a new future without being trapped by any glorious past.

2. Revisiting Ecumenism

At its root meaning, the *oikumene* is the whole household or community of God. Pentecostalism has greatly affected almost every Christian tradition all over the world and has become inherently a grass-root level ecumenical movement in its own right.

Pentecostalism is, however, a divided world itself in which one is very likely to associate with a particular group and therefore disqualify for fellowship altogether another group; we are all likely, in somebody's eyes, to be connected with the *wrong* people for the *right* reasons, or vice-versa.

Ecumenism has become for many Evangelicals and Pentecostals synonymous of the World Council of Churches out of Geneva (founded in 1948) and of 'liberalism', a term which is used to describe an attitude of compromises *a propos* the essentials of the Christian faith. At the very threshold of the 3rd millennium, the feeling of Orthodox scholar Constantine

Cavarnos, that “ecumenistic Orthodoxy” . . . is a *betrayal* of the Holy Orthodox Church, a *negation* of its essence²⁵ is shared in a similar way by many church leaders and their flocks when it comes to their own Christian traditions, including conservative Protestantism and Pentecostalism.

There are many misunderstandings about what the word ‘ecumenism’ actually means and about what the World Council of Churches actually is. Pro- and anti-ecumenical positions usually back two contrasting approaches to one’s understanding of the Christian church. One places its emphasis on the *exclusiveness* of the church in light of one’s own tradition. Here one defines the church and its life by what it is not and looks at the other with suspicion, noting almost exclusively what is believed to be wrong in his faith and practice. The other approach considers the *inclusiveness* of the Christian church in light of his own tradition. It rejoices in all truth found outside its own tradition and looks at the other to see what is right and true in another’s belief despite real differences, and seeks also to work constructively on what is believed to be untrue there.²⁶

What is true ecumenism and what is pseudo ecumenism? According to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin (1909-98), ‘the word “ecumenical” . . . properly speaking refers to the task of the whole church to bring the Gospel to the whole world.’²⁷ He believes that it is important to recover the correct meaning of the words being used. He deplores also that many bodies call themselves *interdenominational* when they actually mean *undenominational*, because they do not allow for real participation and are not seriously interested in the particular witness of the separate confessions.²⁸

What kind of ecumenical commitment can be drawn from the prayer of Jesus in the Gospel according to John (17:21-22)? How can both unity and legitimate diversity in the church be accounted for when dealing with the relations with other Christian churches like the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church? Just as the views on unity are many, so are the opinions on how the Holy Spirit is likely to bring the church(es) together. The historical reasons behind the divisions within Christianity are manifold, some of which are the result of political and cultural factors, some the result of real doctrinal differences. What kind of theological education is needed to help all Christians grow out and beyond such divisions? How can the Church experience full communion, the *koinonia* of the Spirit, which reflects the life eternal from God above, truly faith, hope and love?

Pentecostal-Charismatic theological education needs to help learners-students-disciples in understanding the distinctive ecumenical contribution of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements to the church at large. In order to be able to share its benefits, it will need, first of all, to recognize that . . .

- in each Christian community the Holy Spirit has been active even during the centuries of separation;
- the missionary movement has been one of the earliest stimuli for collaboration in the history of ecumenism;
- missionary outreach is one of the central dimensions of the pilgrimage toward unity;
- the complex and often tension filled journey toward the unity for which Christ prayed demands responsiveness to the Holy Spirit;

- the accomplishment of the ecumenical task requires the power of the Holy Spirit;
- comparing two Christian communities by emphasizing the achievements of one and the weaknesses of the other is not an expression of God’s grace and mercy.

a. Ecumenical church history: Facing theological, cultural, political and ecclesiastical tensions

The study of Church history is also the study of the history of ecumenism. Such study has to start with an honest look at the development of Christian divisions from New Testament times onwards, as much as to the impulses toward ecumenical reconciliation over the centuries.²⁹

i. Judaism v. Christianity: alienation from the Jewish roots of the Christian faith

The fully Jewish character of early Christianity has been long overlooked. The Jewishness of the Messiah Jesus, his Jewish apostles and community of Jewish believers have been widely perceived – wrongly so! – as a relatively small chapter in church history, closing shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It is commonly believed that Christianity became quickly a Gentile (non-Jewish) majority movement. Its attitude towards its Jewish roots has definitively not been a positive one for most of its history. Sad to say, the drama of Christian anti-Judaism – a story of hostility and rejection – is well documented.³⁰ The often marginalised modern Messianic Jewish movement is instrumental in raising anew vital questions that have long been omitted. Is it possible to acknowledge the legitimacy of a Jewish identity for Jewish followers of Jesus? Is it possible to accept that both Jewish history and Jewish theology can positively challenge and nurture the faith of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus alike? Is it possible to overcome a negative reading of Mosaic Law that leads to its becoming *terra incognita* of Christian theology? Is it possible for the Torah to be relevant for a Judaeo-Christian faith (righteousness) and lifestyle (holiness)?³¹

ii. Eastern v. Western Christianity: alienation between the Latin West and the Byzantine East

The so-called Great Schism is often dated at 1054, but differences between the two were many and separation was gradual. Their approaches to liturgy, spirituality, theology, church order were dissimilar, but most historians would now admit that it is not the debate around the *filioque*³² nor Patriarch Cerularius’ excommunication by Cardinal Humbert, but the sacrilegious cruelty of the fourth crusade of 1204 that gave it its final blow.³³ In countries where the majority of its population is – at least sociologically – Catholic or Protestant, western Europe is still viewed as being synonymous with western Christianity. This was never true, however, for European nations like Greece, Romania or Bulgaria, and it is certainly challenged by today’s rapidly growing migration movements from eastern to western Europe. It is most interesting how Michael Harper, now Dean of the Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of the United Kingdom and Ireland, argues that ‘the original roots of Christianity in Britain are more Eastern than Western, and the sources of the Celtic Church

were more Byzantine than Roman'.³⁴ Overcoming today the rupture of East and West within the Christian church is a challenge raised by a deep longing for Christian unity and renewed experience of the Holy Spirit, but also by the construction of Europe which is bringing East and West together in a new way.

iii. Catholic v. Protestant Christianity: alienation within the Latin Church of the West

When 16th c. European Catholicism gave birth to Protestantism, it was but the beginning of ecclesiastical and theological developments that would bring forward a multiplication of new traditions and spiritualities. By way of reformation(s), revival(s) and renewal(s), it allowed more and more separate paths to define the faithful, individually and corporatively. It seems more and more difficult to resist the swinging pendulum of truth as it goes back and forth between e.g. authority and autonomy, austerity and liberty, dependence and independence, separation and integration, clergy and laity, Scripture and tradition, Word and Spirit, law and grace, sovereignty and freewill, symbolism and literalism, liberalism and conservatism. If to be Protestant, for example, can be 'translated' by Lutheran, Reform, Anglican, Methodist, Mennonite, Quaker, Baptist or Pentecostal, one should not be too easily tempted to believe that Protestant pluralism is now facing a monolithic Catholicism. There are, besides Roman Catholics (with various different spiritualities and liturgical rites), Eastern Catholics, Old Catholics, Anglo Catholics, and various independent Catholics. If true ecumenism is not likely to result in a single 'Super-Church' organisation, can it help build bridges where there are none between Christians of all horizons? Theological education should be a constructive ecumenical education, helping to replace clichés by understanding, condemnation by commendation, and disdain by respect. Pentecostal-Charismatic theological education in particular can help us to realize that where the Holy Spirit is at work there is a degree of tension, and that not all tension is bad.³⁵

b. Ecumenical theology: Overcoming divisions with a spirituality of dialogue

Are we willing in the 21st century to engage in 'a kind of Christian activity in which each of the different confessions is invited to participate, bringing the full truth of that confession as its people understand it without compromise or dilution'?³⁶ In the past, the concern for truth has often led to a pretended monopoly of truth, a fabricated ownership of truth, thus a fictional golden age of Christianity. For Newbigin, here is the question which we finally have to face: 'Is the truth ultimately in the Name of Jesus and there alone, or is the truth only to be known by adding something else in the Name of Jesus?'³⁷ If indeed only Christ can be seen as the Absolute, what guiding principles will bring about 'a more authentic sharing of diverse gifts in a Christ-given unity'?³⁸

Helpful guidelines can be found in various Christian traditions and should be seriously reflected upon. Not least among them are those found in John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (May They Be One, 1995) in which he delineated four among the various dimensions of dialogue in the Chris-

tian community as ecumenically paramount:

- Dialogue of charity: demonstration of mutual love
- Dialogue of conversion: openness to being changed by a receptivity to new dimensions of understanding
- Dialogue of truth: discerning and speaking the truth
- Dialogue of salvation: participation in the saving mission of the Church in the world³⁹

i. Grass-root level v. institutional level

Having been for almost 15 years an active member of the theological commission of the Council of Christian Churches of Hamburg, Germany, I realize that one could easily aim at mere institutional interchanges. I know, however, how important it is to remind ourselves that 'ecumenical life is not something that comes from the summit but will always come from the grassroots'.⁴⁰ A real *ecumenism of the Spirit* demands openness and responsiveness of the people of God to the ministry of unity of the Holy Spirit. To grow in Christ is also to come close in Christ in mutual appreciation, respect and love.⁴¹ Such Spirit-led inner transformation (change of heart!) and community encounter (caring exploration!) needs an ongoing process of ecumenical formation.

ii. Unity v. uniformity

It is a great temptation to look at the Christian faith with our preconceptions and oversimplifications. We may think that because people look alike they are the same, that because they talk the same way they think the same way. We like to think that it is easier to be bound together by the allegiance to a perceived uniformity. Are we aware how much syncretistic thinking in our pluralistic world is affecting our own theology and therefore our ministry as educators? Theological education needs to help us look positively at Christian unity, producing a faith lifestyle which is different because it looks positively at diversity, rather than a frail manufactured ideology despite diversity. In plain English, it should help us to learn to agree how we can best disagree.

iii. Reconciliation v. separation

The experiential world-view of Pentecostals has not only opened wide the gates for a renewed understanding of Spirit-Baptism, signs and wonders. It has also opened wide the gates for various streams going in many different directions, causing many hurtful divisions and dramatic separations. We urgently need to rediscover the gospel message, not any longer as an individualistic salvation message guaranteeing one's ticket to heaven, but as life-changing reconciliation with the Creator affecting all of one's relationships. This always leads to a divine appointment since God himself 'gave us the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5:18, NASB). Theological education can help face the challenge, how to be agents of reconciliation rather than agents of one's culture and/or tradition. It can provide the necessary resources in order to build bridges rather than to build walls of partitions. To cultivate a sense of belonging together 'in Christ' (acceptance), rather than highlighting boundary lines of differences (rejection) are our choice to make as we conceive the curriculum of our theological schools and training centres for our common future.

Jesus Christ is God's Reconciler par excellence. Unity in

the church will be experienced only in proportion to its being an agent of reconciliation, reshaping Christians who practise 'reconciliation as an action word'.⁴² As early as 1969 Fr. John Meyendorff, Professor of Church History & Patristics at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary (1959-1992), had commented on this problem:

The future of true ecumenism lies in asking together true questions instead of avoiding them; in seeking the unity God wants, instead of settling for substitutes; in invoking the Spirit of God, which is not the Spirit of the world. Councils, assemblies, conferences and consultations provide the opportunities for doing so and should not therefore be altogether discarded. However, they will not create unity because unity 'in Christ' is not man-made; it is given in the Church and can be only there discovered and accepted.⁴³

If the unity of Christians is not, in the end, a human task, but a work of the Spirit, it is however our responsibility to yield to the Spirit. Obedience to Christ here means actively 'being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit' (Ephesians 4:3) with the clearly outlined objective to have us – followers of Jesus – 'all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13).⁴⁴ If Christian education has to do with helping students understand the broader picture of church and society, it becomes no option to help them get involved in that broader picture. Such determination will 'strengthen the ecumenism of the Spirit moving in us for the transformation of women and men, society and creation in God's great purpose of reconciling and gathering in all things in Christ Jesus'.⁴⁵

Those who believe that we need to make ourselves available to the ministry of unity of the Holy Spirit will most certainly want to equip a new generation of men and women with such a renewed mind (Romans 12:20, *Gk. nous*), i.e. a new capacity to think and judge things, providing the foundation for a new mentality, for a true *ecumenism of the Spirit*.

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Notes

- 1 Vinsan Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), ix.
- 2 Ruth N.B. McGavin, *Running for Revival: The Life and Times of Henry Brash Bonsall* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1999), 203.
- 3 *Ibid*, 261.
- 4 *Ibid*, 241.
- 5 In this article I am always using the words 'Pentecostal' and 'Pentecostalism' in a generic sense as referring to a great many different Pentecostal and Charismatic movements around the world, and not limited to Classical Pentecostal denominations only, such as Assemblies of God, Apostolic Church, Elim, New Testament Church of God.
- 6 In today's usage of the German language, one distinguishes between *evangelisch* (referring to the pluralistic Protestantism found in Lutheran and Reformed Churches) and *evangelikal* (referring to conservative Protestantism, mostly found in free churches, comparable to Evangelicalism in the Anglo-Saxon

world).

- 7 In the first half of the twentieth century, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy erupted, polarizing opposing camps.
- 8 Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus, Ann Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist Press), 90.
- 9 Sebastien Fath, *Du ghetto au réseau : Le protestantisme évangélique en France (1800-2005)* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2005), 300-302.
- 10 Leonard Steiner, *Mit Folgenden Zeichen: Eine Darstellung der Pfingstbewegung* (Basel: Verlag Mission für das volle Evangelium, 1954), 169-182.
- 11 Olson, 'Postconservative Evangelical Theology and the Theological Pilgrimage of Clark Pinnock', in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2003), 18. 'A conservative evangelical places such value on the *status quo* that he or she is closed-minded with regard to theological creativity and innovation even when they are fueled by faithful exegesis and believing reflection on God's word . . . 'Fundamentalism' is being replaced with the label 'conservative evangelicalism' while retaining fundamentalistic habits of heart and mind. When a person proclaims himself or herself a 'conservative evangelical', more often than not it indicates commitment to strict biblical inerrancy, a fairly literalist hermeneutic, a passionate commitment to a perceived 'golden age' of Protestant orthodoxy to be rediscovered and preserved, and a suspicion of all new proposals in theology, biblical interpretation, spirituality, mission and worship.'
- 12 Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 249.
- 13 James Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism: Biblical Foundations for Evangelical Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 156-162.
- 14 Wolfgang Beinert, 'Der «Katholische» Fundamentalismus und die Freiheitsbotschaft der Kirche' in *«Katholischer» Fundamentalismus: Haretische Gruppen in der Kirche?* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1991), 67-71.
- 15 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992). He is a historian from the University of Stirling in Scotland.
- 16 The Evangelical 'quadrilateral of priorities' is:
 1. **Biblicism**, a particular regard for the Bible (e.g. all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages);
 2. **Crucicentrism**, an emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross;
 3. **Conversionism**, a belief that lives need to be changed;
 4. **Activism**, the expression of the Gospel in deed.
- 17 The Pentecostal quadrilateral suggested by the present author is:
 1. **Experience** (living relationship with God);
 2. **Resurrection** (life transformation) = receiving God's gift of eternal life;
 3. **Baptism** (life commitment) = give oneself as a gift to God [to be the people of God];
 4. **Community** (family life) = fellowship, solidarity, sharing life [to live as the people of God].
- 18 John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 23-56. Incidentally, the French translation of this book interpreted Stott's *exclusively* by *essentially*, suggesting therefore that the apostolic message was not fundamentally a resurrection message.

- 19 All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible Update translation.
- 20 Ibid., 41, 43-44.
- 21 David A. Brondos, *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the apostle's story of redemption* (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2006), 55.
- 22 Idem, 74.
- 23 Michael Green, *The Empty Cross of Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), 13, 16.
- 24 John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 135.
- 25 Constantine Cavarnos, *Victories of Orthodoxy: Homilies in which are discussed in a forthright and analytical manner Iconoclasm, Orthodox Mysticism, the False Union of Florence, the Calendar Change, Traditional Iconography, Sacred Music, and Ecumenism; and the stand of the Orthodox Church regarding these* (Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1997), 81.
- 26 Peter Bouteneff, 'Orthodox Ecumenism: A Contradiction in Terms?' in *In Communion*, issue 9 (July 1997). Also: <http://incommunion.org/articles/resources/ecumenical-movement/bouteneff-on-ecumenism>.
- 27 J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, 'Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective' (1962), 9. Unpublished document. Cf. <http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/62mep.pdf>.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Gros et al., 9-34.
- 30 Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 442-443.
- 31 David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past* (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), 126. Cf. Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
- 32 The filioque refers to the phrase 'and the Son' added by the Latin Church to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, in referring to the Holy Spirit's procession within the Trinity.
- 33 Gros, 16.
- 34 Michael Harper, *A Faith Fulfilled: Why Are Christians Across Great Britain Embracing Orthodoxy?* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1999), 56. Harper describes his personal journey from Anglicanism to Orthodoxy.
- 35 Philip Zampino, 'An Ecumenical Bridge', *Life In Jesus Community* (2002), in http://www.lifeinjesus.org/art_bridge.html.
- 36 Newbigin, 9. This is his definition of the word 'interdenominational'.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Lesslie Newbigin, quoted in Gros, 71.
- 39 Gros, 114-115.
- 40 Jean-Arnold de Clermont, a French Protestant who is president of the Conference of European Churches, quoted in 'European pan-church assembly seeks a fresh unity impetus', *Ecumenical News International*, 7 September 2007.
- 41 Gros, 91.
- 42 The expression is taken from Samuel and Dalineta Hines' workbook section in: Samuel Georges Hines and Curtis Paul DeYong, *Beyond Rhetoric: Reconciliation as a Way of Life* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000), 147ff. Cf. Ronald Habermas and Klaus Issler, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice of Christian Educational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992) 33-57.
- 43 Quoted in: Vladimir Vuka_inovi_, 'Toward New Ecumenism', *Iskon* 4, 24; http://www.iskon.co.yu/4/ekumenizam_e.html.
- 44 Cf. Alessandro Iovino, 'The Pentecostal movement and ecumenism of the Spirit', paper presented at the 2007 International Conference of CESNUR, Centre for Studies on New Religions: *Globalization, Immigration, and Change in Religious Movements*, Bordeaux, France, 7-9 June 2007.
- 45 'Living in the Unity of the Spirit', Latin American Pentecostal Consultation, Peru, 14 - 19 November 1994. Cf. <http://www.pctii.org/wcc/unity94.html>.

Mountain Ascetics and Rituals in *Shugendō*: An Example of Japanese Folk Religion

KEYWORDS: Syncretistic, worldview, rituals, animistic, nature, supernatural power, Yamabushi, Buddhism, Shinto, Shamanism, ancestral spirits, demons, deity, fertility, death, family line, priests, pilgrimage, divination, magic rites, exorcism, fasting, asceticism, training, festivals, divine revelation, Scripture, incarnation, Holy Spirit, churches, repentance, prayer, faith

Shuma Iwai

This paper examines the Japanese folk religion *Shugendō*, which is still alive in Japan, from a Christian perspective. Since several other religions have influenced *Shugendō*, it is considered a syncretistic religion. This paper investigates

Shugendō's structure, especially its worldview, yamabushi, and rituals, by comparing and contrasting it with Christianity. The paper is followed by a discussion of how to biblically evaluate and transform the beliefs and practices of the folk religion, so that its followers can transform to Christianity without syncretism in the Japanese context.

Introduction

There is an animistic worldview in Japan. Japanese folk religions depend on it.¹ Japanese people believe that there are gods in nature, such as a god of the mountains, a god of water, and a god of fire. *Shugendō* is one of the Japanese folk religions that has influenced the way the Japanese people live and believe. The first missionary to Japan, Francis