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## CHRISTIAN REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS Kevitalization

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WORLD

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • WILMORE, KY 40390

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### **Evangelicalism's Amazing Recovery of Early Christianity**

Thirty years ago Robert Webber wrote about "evangelical amnesia"—the lack of a sense of history in U.S. evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Such forgetfulness is not confined to evangelicals, however; William Abraham in 1995 published Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing Doctrine of the United Methodist Church (Abingdon Press).

One of the most remarkable developments of the past three decades is a recovery of the sources and insights of early Christianity. This process continues and is now coming to full flower. Four examples:

#### **Ancient-Future Christianity**



Robert E. Webber (1933-2007), a graduate of Bob Jones University, traveled a path that eventually led him into the Anglican tradition. He was

not a lone traveler, as his book Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church (1985) documented. Through his teaching at



Wheaton College and later Northern Baptist Seminary, Webber influenced hundreds of evangelical youth, awakening them to church history and especially the early liturgical tradition.

Webber's two last books are especially relevant in this connection: Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative (Baker, 2008), and Who Gets to Narrate the World? Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals (InterVarsity, 2008, 147 pp.), which gives Webber's overview of history from the standpoint of "God's narra-





The book Ancient-Future Worship (preceded by Ancient-Future Faith [Baker, 1999]), tells Webber's own narrative, his "journey toward an Ancient-Future Worship." Webber first encountered the Eastern church when he was asked by the Slavic

tive." Webber closes with "A call to narrate the world Christianly."



Gospel Mission to teach a course on Eastern theology. Webber's introduction to Eastern Christian thought through John Meyendorff's newly published Byzantine Theology "blew me away," he says. "The most decisive impact made on my heart was the para-

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### **Revitalization Consultations Scheduled** for Asbury, Edinburgh

Consultations on the dynamics of Christian revitalization are now scheduled for Asbury Theological Seminary in 2009 and Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2010, sponsored by the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements. The October 15-18, 2009, consultation will examine various historical and contemporary movements through the lens of "Pentecost and the New Humanity." "Exploring the Dialectic of Revitalization and Church" will be the focus of the May 30 – June 2 Edinburgh consultation. (See Director's Report, page 3.)

The third consultation is projected for 2011. Together the three consultations constitute a global conversation on the dynamics of church renewal, particularly as seen in current and past revivals and renewal movements. The project is being funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and will include a number of print and digital resources.

### **Inside this issue** of Revitalization

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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.

### Evangelicalism's Amazing Recovery of Early Christianity (continued from page 1) -

digm of creation - incarnation - re-creation. These three words capture the basic framework of biblical and ancient church thinking. The previous paradigm I used to interpret God's story was derived from my Western training: creation-sin-redemption, which was introduced by Augustine. . . . The same theme was continued by Calvin and was handed down to evangelicals during the Enlightenment. It still prevails today as the major way of thinking about the Bible as a whole" (p. 169).

Webber did not reject "the Western model"—in fact, he says there is "nothing wrong with" it, except that it has been "interpreted and applied" too narrowly. This model has led to a too exclusive focus on "the sacrificial view of the atonement without a strong connection to the resurrection and to the triumph of Jesus over sin, death, and the powers of evil. The exclusive preoccupation with the satisfaction theory of the cross has failed to adequately see the unity that exists between creation, the incarnation, and ultimately the restoration of all God's creation. It fosters instead an individualistic form of Christianity" (pp. 169-70).

This is the issue Webber's life and writings have attempted to address. People in the Wesleyan tradition may be struck with the parallel with John Wesley's own theological development in the 1720s and 1730s as he discovered the Eastern Christian tradition and used it as a corrective to the narrowness of Western Christianity.

#### **Canonical Theism**



A second stream is documented in Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church, edited by William J. Abraham, Jason Vickers, and Natalie Van Kirk (Eerdmans, 2008; 335 pp.). Though this book makes no



reference to Webber, parallels abound. Both proj-

ects involve a recovery of the church's early sources, an exploration of the question of their normativity for today, and a concern for broad and deep renewal.

Currently William Abraham serves as Albert Cook Outler Professor of Theology and Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. In his chapter on "The Emergence of Canonical Theism," Abraham traces a personal journey similar to Webber's. Though Abraham's roots are in Irish Methodism, not U.S. fundamentalism, the parallel is striking.

Abraham's journey eventually led him to study "the history of revivalism and the evangelization" in the church's early centuries (p. 150). This meant a reexamination of the patristic sources. As a result, he says,

the debates and intellectual developments of the early tradition were totally transformed. I came to see the life of the church in all its complexity and fragility as incredibly relevant, intellectually fecund, and spiritually nourishing. Where before I was reading ancient texts professionally and following the institutional developments sociologically or merely historically, the whole life of the church came alive as a place where folk were brought to faith, nourished in holiness, helped in the battle against evil, motivated to persevere, and energized to plumb the full depths of gospel conviction. The great fathers, teachers, and saints were no longer distant figures drowned out by my critical preoccupations and concerns; they became mentors and living inspirations of the Holy Spirit (p. 150).

Then direct contact with contemporary Orthodox Christianity through St. Seraphim's Cathedral in Dallas gave Abraham a deeper personal sense of what he was encountering in his studies. St. Seraphim's became "something of a second spiritual home for my thirsty soul and

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### E. Stanley Jones' Radical (and Relevant) **Global Vision**



New books aren't always the best books, and new voices aren't always wisest. In issues of revitalization, gospel and culture, and church and kingdom, I often find myself thinking of the remarkable vision embodied in E. Stanley

Jones' early books.

E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973), Methodist missionary to India and global Christian evangelist and statesman, in later life became known particularly as a devotional writer. He is also the person for whom Asbury Seminary's School of World Mission and Evangelism is named. It is his early work, however, that is most prophetic today.

Jones published four remarkable books in the critical period

between 1933 and 1940 when he was finding his way missiologically: Christ and Human Suffering (Abingdon, 1933), Christ's Alternative to Communism (Abingdon, 1935), The Choice Before Us (Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1937), and Is the Kingdom of God Realism? (Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1940). Jones' engagement with Hinduism and Islam, with Communism during its idealistic phase, and more generally with matters of culture, economics and international politics, led him to wrestle with issues that are central in discussions of church, mission, and culture today. The continuing relevance of his writing lies not so much in the particularities of the time but in the scope, nuanced comprehensiveness, and biblical rootedness of his vision.

Consider, for example, The Choice Before Us. Jones saw the Christian church as inescapably caught up in the global struggle between Communism and Fascism. Today perhaps we would say the global struggle is between economic and technological materialism and various world religions and ideologies, and between

### E. Stanley Jones' Radical (and Relevant) Global Vision (continued from page 2) -

"globalism" and "localism." At root however the issues are the same, perennial, and "the choice before us" is the same.

Jones put the issue as the choice between the kingdom of God and other ways. He argued that "the Kingdom of God [is the] conception" that transcends both Fascism and Communism—"something so universal that it takes in every human relationship and gives purpose and meaning to the whole, and something so intimate that it takes in one's own personal need and meets it with redemption and power by which to live" (p. 15). In an eight-page, four-column chart, Jones compares Communism, Fascism, Nazism, and Christianity. He outlines a spectrum of issues ranging from morality to economics, from family life to art. Discussing individualism versus community and cooperation, Jones argues for a conception of Christianity which fosters both community and a proper individuality.

In Chapter 3, "The Kingdom Comes with Power," Jones focuses on Pentecost and the book of Acts. He explores the social and economic implications of God's reign, arguing against a dualism between piety and economic and political life. Early Christians "naturally and normally saw that the spiritual unity could not be kept apart from economic and social unity. They refused to compartmentalize their unities. Life was one," he says (p. 55).

Jones advocated family as a central "underlying principle" of worldwide human organization, based on the fact of God as sovereign Father. He argued,

A family is based upon this principle—each one in a family gets his share of whatever there is according to his need. That principle holds every human family together. The Christian Church has fought for the maintenance of the family all through the centuries, and yet it is the most communistic of all institutions. The human family is co-operative and not competitive. The Christian Church has defended that co-operative order of the family, feeling that it had an affinity to its own principles and life, but it does not now see the inconsistency of defending at the same time the competitive order which is utterly at variance with every principle it holds. It was and is right in defending the family; it is

wrong in defending our present economic system. It must extend the family spirit into the economic and social system, for it is working for the family of God, the Kingdom of God. This larger Family would be based on "to each according to his need" as the lesser family is (p. 59).

Jones may sound like a classic socialist when he writes, "The means of production must be in the hands of all for the good of all and not in the hands of the few for the exploitation of the many"

Jones thought the same cooperative principle should function in the family, the church, and society generally.

(p. 57). The sentiment however is more populist than socialist. Jones is not arguing for socialism but for a kingdom-of-God economics that combines the dy-

namism of entrepreneurship with a commitment to civic good, or "the general welfare." This vision has significant resonances with three important currents in global economic thought and activity today: social entrepreneurship, microenterprise, and ecological economics (e.g., Herman Daly and Joshua Farley, *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications* [Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004]).

Clearly Jones was wrong in some of his criticisms of capitalism. Overall, capitalism has proved to be more resilient, creative, and beneficial than Jones expected. But Jones was right to raise the issues and mount his criticisms—and especially to point out that God's reign is not just an ideal or a future or otherworldly reality, but a present reality and agenda for both church and society, with definite economic implications.

In the early 1900s, many Christian writers advocated a social vision of the kingdom of God, often with implicit or explicit critiques of capitalism. What gives Jones' work continuing relevance however, transcending this milieu, is this: (1) Jones never lost his focus on Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, Savior and Lord; (2) he conjoined personal piety and social engagement; (3) he articu-

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### From the Director

Twenty-two plenary participants are now confirmed for the October 15-18, 2009, Revitalization Consultation on the theme, "Pentecost and the New Humanity." Thanks to a strategic grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, the Center has been able to invite key practitioners and scholars of Christian revitalization for this first consultation, which will be held on the campuses of Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary.

The event is designed to take the pulse of current Christian revitalization now occurring across the globe. Participants representing several indigenous revitalization movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Australia will be among the presenters. Major faith communities, including Roman

Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal, and indigenous Christian movements, will be represented.

Rather than being only a series of academic papers, the event will highlight interactive consultation involving shared worship, intentional table discussion, and demonstrations of revitalization practices, supplementing the key plenary addresses. Forty-two participants in addition to the plenary presenters have been invited for intentional table discussions. Our intent is to examine historical and contemporary data in revitalization movements and identify insights that will affirm and offer guidance for ministers and practitioners involved in expressions and movements of revitalization.

Worship will be designed to reflect the diverse expressions of Pentecost which are the focus of the event.

This consultation will be the first of three annual events. The second is planned for Edinburgh, Scotland, in early June, 2010, to be held in conjunction with the Centennial Conference commemorating the historic Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference.

Full details of the consultation will be provided in the next issue of *Revitalization*. We look forward to sharing news of the upcoming events, as well as plans for publication of the research produced. — *J. Steven O'Malley, Director* 

### Evangelicalism's Amazing Recovery of Early Christianity (continued from page 2)

my aching intellect" and "a point of entry for ongoing encounter with the treasures of the Eastern Orthodox tradition." This encounter "served to confirm the conviction that the church in the New Testament and patristic period was first and foremost a school and haven of salvation rather than a seminar in religious epistemology" (pp. 152-53).

Abraham sees canonical theism as "an attempt to find an expression of the faith that nourishes the soul and that provides shape and motivation for lively involvement in the life and ministry of the church" (p. 141). He and the other contributors to this volume define *canonical theism* as "the robust form of theism manifested, lived, and expressed in the canonical heritage of the church" (p. 1). The church's canonical heritage is an ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit involving "materials, persons, and practices" of abiding normativity. Some eighteen chapters spell this out, discussing Scripture and the "rule of faith," "canonical liturgies," "the canon of sacraments," "canons of persons" (saints and teachers), "the canon of images," and "canonical episcopacy." Contributors include Jason Vickers, Paul Gavrilyuk, Natalie Van Kirk, Horace Six-Means, Frederick D. Aquino, Mark E. Powell, Douglas M. Koskela, David F. Watson, Charles Gutenson, and Frederick Schmidt.

The book pictures the church's canonical heritage as a many-faceted diamond and as medicine for the church. Jason Vickers writes, "Canonical theists conceive of the canonical heritage of the church as a grand medicine chest full of prescriptions that have the power to cure all that ails human persons spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, physically, and morally" (pp. 19-20).

This useful metaphor reminds us, I think, that not all medicines (canonical elements) are the right ones for all persons or branches of the church in every situation. There is some basis here for both normativity and also variety, flexibility.

The book's discussion of "materials, persons, and practices" as "canonical" raises huge questions that can't be explored here. However Abraham and his co-authors steer clear of what might be called canonical fundamentalism as they seek to appropriate the richness of the church's early history for church renewal and theological reinvigoration today.

#### **Evangelical Ressourcement Project**



Daniel H. Williams, professor of patristics and historical theology at Baylor University, is editing a book series published by Baker Academic under the theme, "Evangelical Ressourcement: Ancient Sources for the Church's Future." This project dovetails with Webber's Ancient Evangelical Future initiative; in fact Williams was one of the four "theological editors" of the Call to an Ancient

Evangelical Future.



Books published so far in this series include D. H. Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church (Baker, 2005); D. H. Williams, ed., Tradition, Scripture, and In-





terpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church (Baker, 2006); and Ronald E. Heine, Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church (Baker, 2007). Earlier Williams had published Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A



Primer for Suspicious Protestants (Eerdmans, 1999).

#### **Ancient Christian Commentary Project**

For a decade InterVarsity Press has been publishing the *Ancient Christian Commentary* series under the general editorship of Thomas Oden (b. 1931). This "patristic commentary on Scripture" from Clement of Rome to John of Damascus comprises twenty-eight volumes. According to the InterVarsity website, all the volumes will be available by the end of 2008. An additional volume on the Apocrypha is scheduled for 2009.

Behind this series is the well-documented career of Thomas Oden, whose theological journey was from Protestant liberalism back to historic orthodoxy rather than from evangelicalism to the

### Perhaps the theological recovery of early Christianity is itself a kind of revitalization movement.

early church. Oden's three-volume systematic theology and many other books are the fruit of this journey. In addition to his writing and

editing, Oden at Drew University mentored a generation of younger scholars who will exert their own influence in coming decades. Another fruit of Oden's journey is his book *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (InterVarsity, 2007; 204 pp.)

From a revitalization standpoint, these four examples add up to a fruitful dialogue and a hopeful sign. They are in fact part of a larger picture: Abraham notes "the extraordinary efforts extended currently across the length and breadth of the church to recover vibrant and generous forms of orthodoxy" (p. 154). At Asbury Seminary, for example, Lester Ruth and Michael Pasquarello coteach a D.Min. course, Getting Pre-Modern to Go Post-Modern, which examines patristic preaching, liturgy, spirituality, and catechesis. "Pastors love it," says Pasquarello.

Such theological recovery of early Christianity perhaps itself constitutes a kind of revitalization movement. Importantly, most of these projects aim not just at academia but at broad-scale Christian renewal. The larger goal is Christian authenticity in all dimensions—comprehensive Christian formation, catechesis, and discipling. "What is ultimately at issue is the comprehensive renewal of the church," says Abraham (p. 155).

Genuine revitalization is as much a moving ahead as it is a looking back. It must come to grips with contextual-cultural issues as much in the early Christian centuries as today. But certainly renewal currents today and tomorrow need the enrichment that comes from the church's earliest sources. — *Howard A. Snyder, Tyndale Seminary* 

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### E. Stanley Jones' Radical (and Relevant) Global Vision (continued from page 3) -

lated a comprehensive vision of the kingdom of God that combined its present and future, personal and social, spiritual and physical dimensions; (4) he saw the essential link between God's kingdom and visible Christian community; and (5) he remained deeply grounded in Scripture.

Throughout history, the most dynamic Christian revitalization movements have done more than redeem individuals and renew the church. They have also (in varying degrees) transformed society. The breadth of the change revitalization brings is not solely a matter of God's sovereign activity. Nor is it just a function of the particularities of the cultural context. It is also reflects the conception of the gospel that was advocated and embodied. The degree of cultural impact and social transformation reflects, in other words, the vision and version of God's kingdom that Christians in these movements actually held.

One of Jones' profoundest insights was that the gospel involves both the Person (Jesus Christ) and the Plan (the kingdom of God). The Person without the Plan yields personal piety only; the Plan without the Person yields social reform but not its essential source and power. Jones wanted to proclaim the whole gospel for the whole world. — *Howard A. Snyder, Tyndale Seminary* 

**Bibliographic Note.** Jones later reprised some of his kingdom of God themes in *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (1972), which is still in print. David Bundy provides a fine overview of Jones' theology in his essay "The Theology of the Kingdom of God in E. Stanley Jones," which is now available at http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\_theology/theojrnl/21-25/23-04.htm. An essential new resource in understanding Jones is Katherine Reese Hendershot, *E. Stanley Jones Had a Wife: The Life and Mission of Mabel Lossing Jones* (Scarecrow Press, 2007), which is part of our Center's Revitalization Series.

# Renewing Smaller Congregations: The ABIDE Model

After nearly forty years of researching, teaching, and writing about revitalization in smaller congregations, I thought I had discovered most of the necessary ingredients.



My book *Turnaround Strategies for the Small Church*, published more than a decade ago (Abingdon, 1995), still receives strong affirmation. Now a new phase has begun.

A critical key in the transformation of the 100 "turnaround" churches studied in my book was effective pastoral leadership. Follow-up contact with these churches a decade later revealed that upwards of 75% had either "turned around again" or were again struggling for survival. Many had closed; others chose not to participate in the follow-up study. Overwhelmingly, the decline reportedly happened during one or more pastoral transitions.

This key discovery led to two projects: a new book, *Turnaround and Beyond: A Hopeful Future for Small Membership Churches* (Abingdon, December 2008) and a new model for



generating leadership teams that sustain renewal in smaller congregations.

The new model began emerging in a two-day consultation in December, 2004, at Asbury Seminary. A Lilly grant enabled sixteen persons from five denominations to attend. The goal was not to propose a program or a new solution but to prayerfully ask: "What might God be saying to us who value these hundreds of thousands of smaller congregations regarding their possible role in the kingdom over the next few decades?"

Month after month, eight of us continued meeting at various venues. Each time we employed a variation of what has become known as the "L3 Incubator" (Loving, Learning, Leading) model of leadership development. We spent time in worship and prayer. We held each other accountable for growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ. And we carefully examined research and data related to the challenges facing smaller congregations.

At one meeting about 15 months later, something happened that nearly overwhelmed us. We saw all of the pieces coming together around the John 15:1-17 passage of intimate relationship, discipleship, fruitfulness, and glorifying God. As we sought to combine all the lessons gleaned through months of work and prayer, we found the right word to describe the new offering—ABIDE.

In structure, ABIDE begins with an overnight retreat involving leadership teams (five to twelve people) from ten or more congregations which have endorsed the mission of ABIDE: "Churches Abiding in Christ, Advancing God's Mission, and Alive in God's Glory." Over the following month, each local team meets weekly to explore prepared lessons on "Seeing the

Glory of God in Your Church" and to follow the L3 pattern of time together: loving, learning, leading.

A second one-day gathering a month later is designed to review and reinforce the materials from both the first retreat and the team experiences during the previous month. Following this event, each team commits to meet eight hours a month for a year under the guidance of an experienced coach, following the L3 pattern, in order to prayerfully discern together how to be more fruitful for God's glory and their own joy as they abide in Christ. Jesus' words in John 15:5-11 are central:

Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. . . . If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. . . . I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

More information and relevant resources for revitalizing smaller congregations are available at ron.crandall@asburyseminary.edu. — Ron Crandall

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### Pagan Christianity - Viola Responds



Author Frank Viola has responded to our critique of *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices* (Barna/Tyndale House, 2008) in the last issue of *Revitalization* (Spring 2008). We are happy to publish this clarification of what he and co-author George

Barna are advocating:

- Neither George nor I believe that house church is the only legitimate form of church. We actually criticize house churches in Chapter 11 and we advocate organic church life, which isn't the same as house church.
- We definitely do not believe that just because a practice is pagan that this means it's wrong or should be jettisoned.
- I would actually agree with [the] "renewal movement view" [described in the *Revitalization* review] namely in that (1) some of the so-called restorationist groups have gone off the rails doctrinally or eventually became sectarian and elitist, and (2) God has, is, and will always use the institutional church.
- While I do believe in autonomous churches, I also believe in translocal networking and aid between churches and between extra-local workers who serve them.

• I agree completely that *Pagan Christianity* is not the last or final word on the subject. It's merely the beginning argument—one that is largely deconstructive. The sequel, *Reimagining Church*, is the first piece of the constructive argument and deals extensively with such matters as contextualization. We deliberately kept the focus of *Pagan Christianity* on the deconstructive side, [not developing] the constructive arguments. This has opened us up for criticism. For when one doesn't develop a particular argument, there are many unanswered questions left.

I attribute these misunderstandings to my failure at making these points clearer throughout the book. (When readers misunderstand me, I feel it's my responsibility not theirs.) A more extensive response can be read here: http://www.ptmin.org/answers.htm.

— Frank Viola