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Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WORLD
CHRISTIAN REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS

Revitalization

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • WILMORE, KY 40390

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Center Receives Luce Grant for Revitalization Studies

The Henry Luce Foundation of New York City has approved a four-year, \$300,000 grant to the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements. The award funds the Center's research from 2008 through 2011.

The Center will study Christian revival and the revitalization of faith communities in terms of their larger cultural contexts and in dialogue with the world church. The project will comparatively study revitalization movements across time and place. It will involve both scholars and practitioners who are intent upon understanding and extending revitalization within a spectrum of communities of faith and cultural contexts. The ecumenical nature of the project holds promise of bridging and drawing together the various

streams of church.

The principal goals of the project: (1) to build upon the strengths of existing faith communities, beginning with the Wesleyan-holiness heritage of Asbury Seminary; (2) to understand revitalization from the congregational level to the level of transnational networks; (3) to explore contemporary trends in a comparative light, using theological and socio-anthropological insights; and (4) to identify new opportunities for mutual learning and action. Three annual consultations are planned, resulting in the publication of three volumes under the general title of *Revival or Revitalization? Exploring the Cultural Dynamics of Religious Awakenings*. Other formats for disseminating information will include an interactive website.

Rainero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, Ministers at Asbury



Fr. Rainero Cantalamessa, prominent speaker and author who serves as preacher to the papal household in Rome, was the guest of Asbury Theological Seminary on February 20. Fr. Cantalamessa presented the Beeson Lectures on Preaching and participated in two days of ministry in cooperation with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lexington and Centenary United Methodist Church. Bishop Ronald Gainer of the Lexington Roman Catholic diocese assisted with the arrangements for bringing Cantalamessa to Lexington and participated in the events.

On Monday evening, February 19, Cantalamessa spoke during an ecumenical service at Centenary.

Fr. Cantalamessa, a friend of Nicky Gumbel, senior pastor of Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in London and founder of the Alpha Course, has been an advocate of Alpha in the Roman Catholic Church. His numerous books include *The Mystery of God's Word* and *Come, Creator Spirit*.

A Franciscan Capuchin priest, Cantalamessa was born in Ascoli Piceno, Italy, in 1934 and was ordained priest in 1958. For a number of years he was professor of the history of ancient Christianity and director of the Department of Religious Sciences at the Catholic

In This Issue

Center Receives Luce Grant for Revitalization Studies	1
Rainero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, Ministers at Asbury Theological Seminary	1
Response from William Abraham: Assessing the "Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future"	2
Six Key Books on Church Renewal	3
New & Notable	4

From the Director

This spring heralds a new day for the Center, with the success of our grant proposal with the Henry Luce Foundation, the development of our website, which promises to offer interactive online access to research and news (the site is revitalizationmovements.net), and some important titles forthcoming this spring in the Revitalization Studies book series.

We have been significantly assisted in the grant proposal by an external consultant who is now a member of our advisory council: Bryan Froehle of Dominican University. We also received helpful suggestions for future dissemination of our work from Philip Jenkins, who met with us during his recent visit to campus.

—J. Steven O'Malley, Director

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.

Continued on page 2

Response from William Abraham —

Assessing the “Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future”

The previous issue of *Revitalization* carried *A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future*, a 1400-word document calling contemporary North American evangelicals to a fresh articulation and living-out of their faith by reappropriating insights and practices from the earliest Christian centuries. The Call has six sections, in addition to a prologue and epilogue: (1) On the primacy of the biblical narrative, (2) On the church, the continuation of God’s narrative, (3) On the church’s theological reflection on God’s narrative, (4) On the church’s worship as telling and enacting God’s narrative, (5) On spiritual formation in the church as embodiment of God’s narrative, and (6) On the church’s embodied life in the world. (See *Revitalization* 13:2 [Fall 2006], 1–3.)

A “historic conference” on the Call was held December 7–9, 2006, and future conferences are planned. This year’s event is scheduled for Nov. 30–Dec. 1 at Northern Seminary near Chicago and will focus on the Call’s first section, “The Primacy of the Biblical Narrative.” Keynote speakers are to be Kevin Vanhoozer, Scot McKnight, and Edith Humphrey.

Discussions at the 2006 conference revealed rather wide differences of opinion, particularly with regard to ecclesiology, authority, and the relative weight that should be given to Scripture and to the traditions and creeds of the first four centuries.

Revitalization asked William J. Abraham, Professor of Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology and author of *The Logic of Evangelism*, *The Logic of Renewal*, and other books, to assess the Call. Prof. Abraham writes:

Evangelicalism is a moveable feast in the history of the church.

The recent *Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future* adds fresh garnish to the dish it brings to the table. We have had lots of dishes served up in the name of evangelicalism; this is a good addition. The recipe in the *Call* remains intact: Evangelicalism springs from a fresh encounter with Scripture through the work of the Spirit in the tradition of *semper reformanda*. The kitchen has acquired a new set of bells and smells: the crucial innovation is a fresh encounter with the consensus of the ancient church. The oral and olfactory ambience is delightful. The challenge is to cook the meal at the right temperature. I welcome these developments; the cooks have done a great job. We should all eat and digest.

The recipe has some risky small print. Constantly reworking the faith to bring it into line with Scripture is a recipe for melting the consensus of the ancient church. The *Call* has found a way to keep the print so small that we can relax this time around. I think evangelicals should shred this recipe. Moreover, I am not too sure of the gravy. The *Call* draws deep from the wells of narrative, making this a central element of the second course. Its liquid form nicely connects Scripture, the creeds, the visibility of the church, worship, spirituality, and mission. I love plenty of gravy with my meat and potatoes. The problem is that there is too much of it. We need the rigor of the rationalist somewhere on the menu; and the aversion to propositions is self-defeating. Propositions are like salt; they are essential for evaluating truth; with narrative, we can be mushy and evasive. However, salt is not a meal; nor is gravy; happily we have lots of beef.

— William J. Abraham,

Outler Professor of Wesley Studies, Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University



Rainero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, Ministers at Asbury (Continued from Page 1)

University of Milan. In 1979 he resigned his teaching responsibilities to devote full time to preaching and the following year was

appointed by Pope John Paul II to be the preacher to the papal household. As papal household apostolic preacher (a position dating back to Paul IV, 1555–1559), Cantalamessa delivers a homily every Friday in Advent and Lent in the presence of the pope, cardinals, bishops, and general superiors of religious orders. Cantalamessa is also been a member of the Roman Catholic delegation for dialogue with Pentecostal churches.

At the ecumenical worship service on Monday night hosted by Centenary UMC, Fr. Cantalamessa sat in a chair in the middle of the chancel and shared his testimony of the baptism of the Spirit and anointing for his present ministry. He particularly emphasized

the key role that the journals of John Wesley played for him in these early days of fullness. He quoted at length, and without notes, from Wesley’s journals.

Tory Baucum, Episcopal priest and assistant professor of preaching and church renewal at Asbury Seminary, who was instrumental in bringing Fr. Cantalamessa to Asbury, states: “It is our earnest hope and fervent prayer that these events will serve to catalyze the new level of friendship and collaboration that the Spirit is creating with the Christian Church worldwide. Such Spirit-generated unity is a precondition to the healing and disciplining of the nations for which the church—Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant—prays.”

At a Monday evening reception, former Asbury College president Dennis Kinlaw told Fr. Cantalamessa, “I don’t fully understand the importance of your visit to Asbury Theological Seminary, but I believe it has eschatological significance. God is preparing his people for some great moment.”

Six Key Books on Church Renewal

Why do all the blurbs on the backs of new books about church vitality sound the same? It is hard to filter out the overblown hype and find the real value.

Among all the “How I built a great church” books a few really do stand out, however. In the glut of recent books, these six are especially meaty:

Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples, by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger (Broadman and Holman, 2006; 257 pp.). Most churches are over-programmed but/or have no operational definition of discipleship and no workable process for actually making disciples. While Rainer and Geiger’s concept of discipleship is not sufficiently comprehensive (e.g., scarcely a mention of justice or the kingdom of God), the authors make their research-based case that churches with simple but effective disciple-making processes sustain growth and witness over time.

Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens (Jossey-Bass, 2005; 237 pp.) is by Neil Cole, executive director of Church Multiplication Associates which reportedly has planted over 800 churches in thirty-two states and twenty-three nations in six years. By “organic churches” Cole means comparatively small, growing, reproducing, highly relational churches that are started by going to people rather than expecting people to seek out the church. The goal is to “lower the bar of how church is done and raise the bar of what it means to be a disciple.” The book is prophetic because it convincingly makes the case for something we should already know from church and mission history—not merely that the church is not a building, but that building-focused churches generally restrict (often fatally) the church’s vitality and kingdom witness.

Australian Michael Frost (co-author with Alan Hirsch of the prophetic book *The Shaping of Things to Come*), has now published *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Hendrickson, 2006; 333 pp.). The book is full of cultural critique (including church culture) but also of promise. Frost intends his primary model—“exiles”—in the biblical sense of being redemptively *in* but not *of* the culture. His aim is to build effective missional, apostolic churches. The book has an excellent chapter on environmental abuse and practical Christian creation care (missing from most evangelical discussions of the church and mission).

Revitalization, twice-yearly bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements.

Director: J. Steven O’Malley

Editor: Howard A. Snyder.

The cost is \$6.00/year, of \$5.00 on our website. 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.

Alan Hirsch, Frost’s collaborator on *The Shaping of Things to Come* and founding director of the creative Forge Mission Training Network in Australia, has published *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Brazos Press/Baker, 2006; 295 pp.). This is a *tour de force* of church-and-mission history in which the author also draws insightfully on his own Jewish background. Like Frost, Hirsch is in conversation with today’s postmodern currents. He also makes good use of anthropological insights (for instance, in his treatment of *communitas*). As Frost says, Hirsch’s book is a “comprehensive call for the complete reorientation of the church around mission.” Though theoretically rich, it also contains a lot of practical guidance.

The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies, by Steve Fitch (Baker, 2005; 263 pp.) is the most comprehensive sustained critique of North American evangelicalism’s capitulation to consumerism and popular culture of any book I’ve seen. It feels like an updated version of Peter Berger’s 1961 *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, but it engages as well current debates about postmodernism. Its discussion of worship, leadership, community, and discipleship are especially insightful. Fitch at times overdraws the contrast between cultural and Christian values, but his prescriptions, in my view, are biblical and practical. Fitch is founding pastor of Life on the Vine Christian Community near Chicago (one of the most authentically creative congregations I’ve visited) and a professor at Northern Seminary.

If Jesus Were Mayor: How Your Local Church Can Transform Your Community, by Bob Moffitt with Karla Tesch (Monarch Books, 2006; 367 pp.), is immeasurably better than its title. This is not a frothy book, though it’s written at a more accessible level than are those of Frost, Hirsch, and Fitch. For four reasons, this is the best single book I’ve seen on building congregations that actually live for God’s kingdom in the world rather than themselves:

- (1) it is well grounded in Scripture and church history,
- (2) it gives practical approaches and methodology,
- (3) it is global in focus, and
- (4) it is full of stories and examples.

The point of the title is to help churches see “God’s big agenda” in their immediate communities rather than just themselves. That change—truly a paradigm shift for most churches—alters everything. Moffitt (who published an earlier version of this book in 2004) is the founder of the evangelical ministry Harvest International.

The best recent books on church life and renewal are progressively cumulative in content—that is, they build on the best insights of earlier work in Scripture, ecclesiology, missiology, church history, and cultural studies. For this reason they are often better than similar books published ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. If I were again a pastor, I would want the church’s key leaders to read these books.

—Howard A. Snyder

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New & Notable

Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission, by Dean Flemming (InterVarsity, 2005), 344 pp. The author, a Nazarene missionary and New Testament scholar, sees contextualization in the NT as missional, ecclesial, and transformational. The book makes a fine companion to William Webb's *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (2001), with which however it does not enter into dialogue.

Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission, by R. Larry Shelton (Paternoster, 2006), 268 pp. This thorough biblical and historical study is a timely contribution to discussions about atonement. The relational covenantal model Shelton advocates has great missional and renewal relevance.

Historical Dictionary of the Salvation Army, edited by John G. Merritt (Scarecrow, 2006), 798 pp. An important new source, with articles on James Caughey, Phoebe Palmer, and others who influenced the Army as well as key Salvationist figures, ministries, and organization.

The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative, by Christopher J. H. Wright (InterVarsity, 2006), 581 pp. Old Testament scholar and missiologist Wright here comprehensively draws together his insights from a missional reading of the Bible, giving us the best current biblical theology of mission.

Restoring Methodism: 10 Decisions for United Methodist Churches in America (Provident Publishing, 2006; 163 pp.) and *Kingdom People: The Spiritual Transformation from Casual to Complete Christian* (Issachar Resources, 2004), both by James B. Scott

and Molly Davis Scott. These new resources, drawing on Scripture, John Wesley, and early Methodism and engaging the contemporary church, are already helping bring renewal in a number of congregations. They include emphases on recovering discipline, expanding universal ministry in the church, and practical reliance on the Holy Spirit. The small-group workbook that accompanies *Kingdom People* is patterned after the Wesleyan class meeting.

Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action, by J. Matthew Sleeth, M.D. (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2006), 216 pp. Awakened by his experience as a doctor seeing the human effects of environmental degradation, Sleeth has developed practical ways to care for creation—and the biblical grounding for such stewardship. The book includes an energy audit and ways to practice stewardship “one appliance at a time.”

Transformation: How Global Churches Transform Lives and the World, by Bob Roberts, Jr. (Zondervan, 2006), 187 pp. A fairly comprehensive vision for “transformational” congregations by a Southern Baptist pastor whose vision of the kingdom of God was awakened in large measure by reading E. Stanley Jones.

The Word Made Flesh: Towards an Incarnational Missiology, by Ross Langmead (University Press of America, 2004), 353 pp. Everyone loves “incarnational ministry,” but what does it really mean? Langmead explores the new interest in incarnation as a missiological theme through examining Anabaptist, radical evangelical, liberationist, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and other perspectives.