

2008

Revitalization 15:1

Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements

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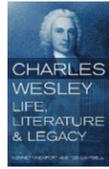


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Charles Wesley: Life, Literature, and Legacy, edited by Kenneth G. C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell. Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2007. xvi + 573 pp. (paper)

Charles Wesley's recognized place in history has been limited mainly to his role as the "Sweet Singer of Methodism." Unfortunately his success as hymn writer has overshadowed his other contributions to the Methodist movement. The main purpose of this new book is to highlight Charles' often-overlooked role in the formation and development of early Methodism. This broader picture of Charles Wesley is painted in the twenty-eight articles collected here.

One reason cited for the narrower image of Charles Wesley is the intentional misrepresentation of his life and thought by early biographers. Gareth Lloyd argues that they were more concerned with presenting Charles as a saint than giving an accurate portrayal of his life,

especially when that portrayal could be embarrassing to Methodism.

A key part of this embarrassment was Charles' relationship with the lay preachers. Two of the essays show the complexity of this issue. John Lenton maintains that overall, Charles had a better relationship with the lay preacher than John did, or at least a more personal one. Richard Heitzenrater highlights the difference between Charles' emphasis on the gifts needed for ministry and John's emphasis on needed grace—an emphasis that strained Charles' relationship with certain lay preachers. Other essays deal with Charles' place in the early Methodist and eighteenth-century context, his relationships with several key people in his life, and the current state of his works. The influence of Charles' hymns, his place in the poetic tradition, and his musical gifts are also discussed. Finally, several key aspects of his theology are highlighted. —Patrick A. Eby (*Ph.D. cand., Wesleyan and Methodist studies, Drew University*)

Letters

"I found the [last issue of *Revitalization*] fascinating, especially in view of research I've been doing on the respective roles of strategic planning and guidance through the Spirit in Paul's missionary work, and reading I've been doing on the relative importance of strategic planning and flexible response in some of the latest writing on leadership and management. As well. It's interesting to come across occasional discussions of planning in the emerging church literature, such as in Steve Chalke's recent book on *The Intelligent Church*. Somewhere in the mix, discerning the role of God's less overt providential working—and networking—also merits consideration." —Robert Banks, Australia

Center for the Study of World Christian
Revitalization Movements
204 N. Lexington Avenue
Wilmore, KY 40390
revitalization@asburyseminary.edu

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WORLD
CHRISTIAN REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS

Revitalization

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • WILMORE, KY 40390

SPRING 2008 • VOLUME 15, No. 1

From the Director

Plans are well underway for the first of three annual Revitalization Consultations funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. On October 15-18, 2009, the Center will assemble scholars and practitioners from across the globe who will explore historical and contemporary expressions of revitalization within the world Christian community.

The overall theme will be "Pentecost and the New Humanity." The event will be held at Asbury Theological Seminary. Asbury has a robust commitment to engaging the global Christian community in theological education.

Our intent in this first consultation is to examine historical and contemporary data

of revitalization movements and identify insights that will increase our understanding and offer guidance for people involved in various movements of revitalization. We recognize that historical precedents are crucial for informing contemporary expressions of ministry. We expect that the different faith communities represented in our constituency will each have their distinctive ways of offering normative interpretation of these accounts.

During the three-day consultation, plenary lectures (mostly case studies) will be followed by reflections in groups of five or six seated at round tables. The consultation will also include sessions where practitioners

of revitalization may demonstrate or discuss those practices found within their contexts. Worship times are being designed to reflect the diverse expression of revitalization which are the focus of the consultation.

The research produced by this consultation will be published in a volume that will examine the impact of revitalization expressions and movements within their historical setting, challenge prevailing assumptions and interpretations, and overcome limitations set by conventional wisdom.

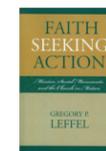
—J. Steven O'Malley, Director

New Releases in Revitalization Book Series

The Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements continues to publish books in its groundbreaking series, "Revitalization: Explorations in World Christian Movements." Many of these works report essential research for the study of particular renewal movements and new theoretical analyses. *These titles have recently been released in the Revitalization Series:*



"To Be Silent . . . Would Be Criminal": The Antislavery Influence and Writings of Anthony Benezet, by Irv Brendlinger, 2007. Significantly illuminates the rise of abolitionism.



Faith Seeking Action: Mission, Social Movements, and the Church in Motion, by Gregory P. Leffel, 2007. (First book in the Intercultural Studies Subseries.) Formulating a missio-ecclesiology informed by *missio Dei* theology and cases studies of three social movements.



German Radical Pietism, by Hans Schneider, 2007. An important study of the history and remarkable influence of radical Pietism.



The Making of an American Church: Essays Commemorating the Jubilee Year of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, edited by Robert L. Frey, 2007. Explorations in the history of the United Brethren and the Evangelical Association.



Foundation for Revival: Anthony Horneck (1641-1697), Religious Societies, and the Construction of an Anglican Pietism, by Scott Thomas Kisker, 2008. Essential material on the links between Continental Pietism and the rise of Methodism and its use of small groups.

Catholic Spirit: Wesley, Whitefield, and the Quest for Evangelical Unity in Eighteenth-Century British Methodism, by James L. Schwenk, 2008. Study of a relatively unex-

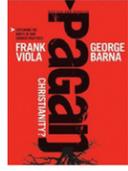
amined aspect of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Awakening.

John Wesley's Ecclesiology: A Study in Sources and Development, by Gwang Seok Oh, 2008. Important for understanding Wesley's renewal concerns and the sources that influenced his ecclesiology.

Several other volumes are currently in preparation. Overall series editor is J. Steven O'Malley. The subseries (and editors) are Early Church Studies (Meesaeng Lee Choi), Medieval and Reformation Studies (Michael Pasquarello), Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies (D. William Faupel), Pietist and Wesleyan Studies (Steve O'Malley), and Intercultural Studies (Michael Rynkiewich).

What's the Fuss about "Pagan Christianity"?

Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices, by Frank Viola and George Barna (Barna/Tyndale House, 2008; 291 pp.).



Frank Viola's 2002 book *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Church Practices* has kicked up some fuss since it was revised with the help of George Barna and recently released under the Barna/Tyndale imprint.

This is a ground-clearing book. Many Christians will be surprised—maybe shocked—to learn how much contemporary "Christian" practice has no biblical basis whatsoever.

The question is: So what? Is such development merely the appropriate fruit of gradual adaptation to changing circumstances? Or is today's church guilty of the charge Jesus leveled against the Pharisees: "You nullify the word of God by your traditions" (Mt. 15:6)?

Legitimate adaptation and contextualization, or betrayal?

Viola (and now apparently Barna) believe the answer is "betrayal." They celebrate those who have "left institutional Christianity" and have begun meeting in unstructured house churches—seen here as the only legitimate form of the church.

The authors summarize: "The DNA of the church produces certain identifiable features. Some of them are: the experience of authentic community, a familial love and devotion of its members one to another, the centrality of Jesus Christ, the native instinct to gather together without ritual, every-member functioning, the innate desire to form deep-seated relationships that are centered on Christ, and the internal drive for open-participatory gatherings. We believe that any church that obstructs these innate characteristics is unsound, and therefore, unbiblical" (p. 263). One can hardly argue with that, except for the idea that it is possible for groups to meet "without ritual."

I have considerable sympathy with the book's argument. Contemporary Christians, in my view, are not self-critical enough of the ways they do church—whether liturgical Protestants, revivalist evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics, seeker-sensitive congregations, or "emerging" churches (not to mention the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions). Most of us do not pay enough attention to what the Bible plainly teaches about the nature and practice of the church as Body of Christ. So I wish church leaders everywhere would calmly read and reflect on this book.

But that is not the end of the story. In the background here is a deeper question: *How do we view changes in church practice over time?* Legitimate development, or betrayal and maybe even apostasy?

This debate has a long history, tracing back at least to Peter's God-prompted decision to have dinner at Cornelius' house. In the Middle Ages people were anathematized, imprisoned, denounced, or burned at the stake depending on how they answered the question.

Here also the issue of *revitalization* comes in. The logic behind the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements holds that genuine renewal is not an either/or issue.

Three Approaches to Church History

Traditionally, the church's development through history has been seen in one of two ways: The "traditional orthodox" approach or the "secret history of the faithful remnant" theory.

The Traditional View. The most generally accepted view—the traditional orthodox interpretation—is that God has guided the church through history, protecting it from heresy and apostasy, as-

sisting it to adapt to changing circumstances. The development of clergy, liturgy, church buildings, and all the rest were the ways in which the church successfully adjusted as it grew and got more complex, and the way it extended its influence.

Constantinianism—the development of the church after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine—is the key test case. In the traditional orthodox view (celebrated first by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*), the success of the church under Constantine was the great triumph of the church. God's hand was in it all.

In this view, it is foolish to expect the church today to look like the New Testament church (which was essentially a network of house churches with highly flexible leadership patterns). The New Testament church was the church in embryo, the little seedling that has now wonderfully put forth branches into all the world.

The Secret History of the Faithful Remnant. The other view, unsurprisingly, is just the opposite. God has been working down through history through a mostly hidden underground church. The "institutional church" is corrupt and largely apostate. But God has an unbroken succession of the true church that has appeared from time to time in groups that the official church viewed as heretical or extreme. This true church has surfaced periodically under names like Montanists, Priscillians, Anabaptists, Waldensians, and so forth—and in networks of house churches today.

This view has been advocated by various people—notably the German Pietist Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), and today people like Gene Edwards. *Pagan Christianity* seems to assume this theory.

In this view, Constantinianism was a great tragedy—the fall of the church. The only route to fidelity is a return to the New Testament pattern, some form of restoration to the original model.

The choice here is rather clear-cut. But there is a third way, a mediating position that can be supported biblically, historically, theologically, and sociologically.

The Renewal Movement View. This view recognizes the truth in both the traditional view and the counter-view. Yes, God has been working through the "institutional church" down through history, despite its problems. Yes, the church has often been unfaithful, corrupt, and, in certain times and places, apostate. And yes, God has often worked through marginal groups—even sometimes rather extreme groups, like the "Montanists"—to enliven a "faithful remnant." And yes, many of these groups were not really heretical doctrinally, yet were shamefully persecuted and often driven underground.

The renewal-movement view holds that, despite the church's frequent unfaithfulness, God has continued to work through "institutional" Christianity. It also observes that underground "remnant" churches can themselves become corrupt, or dysfunctional (I've known some), or moribund, needing renewal.

Those of us in the Wesleyan tradition note John Wesley's insights here. Wesley was outspoken in his denunciation of the failures of the Anglican Church in his day. Yet he did not abandon it. His views on the church, drawn largely from the New Testament, church history, and contemporary groups such as the Moravians, had much in common with the "secret history" view.

But Wesley felt it was possible (and substantially *proved* it) to create a "faithful remnant" movement within the larger "institutional" church. This was British Methodism during Wesley's lifetime.

In this view, God has worked throughout history to bring new life to the church through a series of movements. This dynamic is foreshadowed already in the Bible, especially in Israel's history. It can be

documented over the centuries of the church. God has never given up on the church—even the "institutional church." Neither should we. Yet in particular times and places the church may become so unfaithful that it falls under God's judgment and may even disappear entirely.

Rethinking "Pagan Christianity"

We who find the renewal movement view convincing thus have a mixed reaction to *Pagan Christianity*. Though a valuable contribution, it is neither the last word nor the whole story.

Some specific criticisms: The book speaks of "transformation," but exactly what that means is mostly undefined. The authors paint with too broad a brush in speaking of "contemporary Christianity" and the "institutional church." Many "traditional" churches do demonstrate genuine discipleship, community, and deep spirituality, whatever their imperfections. The book holds that local churches should be "autonomous," despite what the Bible teaches about translocal networkings of the Body of Christ. And it largely ignores the contribution of Roman Catholic orders, an "institutional" form that in many notable instances faithfully embodied genuine Christianity for centuries.

Two other issues are more fundamental: First, the book's basic

Revitalization is the twice-yearly bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements. Center Director: J. Steven O'Malley. Editor: Howard A. Snyder; Associate Editor, Michael Pasquarello. The cost is \$6.00/year by mail, or \$5.00 on our website. Sample copies sent free. Send correspondence or change of address to *Revitalization*, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY 40390 or email revitalization@asburyseminary.edu. Feedback, letters to the editor, and brief articles are welcome.

Book Reviews



Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789, by W. Reginald Ward. Cambridge University Press, 2006. 226 pp.

Ward's new book redefines the prevailing understanding of the origins of modern evangelicalism. In contrast with the influential position of David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Unwin Hyman, 1989), Ward locates his discussion not with the Enlightenment but with the age of Pietism in the last three decades of the seventeenth century. He traces the roots of evangelicalism to a mix of motifs, including mysticism and theosophy, particularly Jakob Boehme, the Catholic mystics and the Quietists, the Jewish Kabala, and the spiritualist Paracelsus.

Ward shows that it was not just the Enlightenment that cleared the way for the modern age. His concern is with the intellectual as well as the practical vision of early evangelicalism. He notes that Boehme (1575-1624) provided it with a heterodox but compelling unifying view of nature and history, though his work was taken up in piecemeal fashion by groups such as English Philadelphians and German radical Pietists. Ward provides an insightful interpretation of Boehme's thought, showing how he drew together the divergent strains of Renaissance science and mysticism through the vehicle of apocalypticism. Ward notes that the quest for a prevailing worldview that Boehme represents led to an interest in the Jewish Kabala as foundational to religious wisdom in both Christianity and Judaism. The hermetic and alchemist thinking of the renaissance physician Theophrastus von Hohenheim (Paracelsus), who is credited with the discovery of pulmonary circulation within the human body, provided an appeal to a basic life force that seemed to bring together the basic concerns of sci-

entific and religious thought. It holds that *because* much church practice is pagan in origin, *therefore* such practices should be jettisoned. Viola writes, "Should we follow a model of church that is rooted in New Testament principle and example, or should we follow one that finds its origins in pagan traditions? That is the ultimate question" (p. 264). But the options are not that simple, and the "model" advocated is not as unambiguously New Testament as the authors believe.

Second, the authors do not really deal with the key issue of *contextualization*. Yes, the New Testament vision of the church should be normative. But what does that really mean in very diverse cultural contexts? When is it appropriate to adapt cultural traditions, even "pagan" ones, and use them for kingdom purposes?

Still, the cumulative weight of *Pagan Christianity* is impressive. Christians today who want to see the church be faithful to the gospel of the kingdom should ask themselves: Which of our current traditions are consistent with Scripture and help us to be faithful communities of the kingdom? And which really nullify God's Word? If churches confront that question prayerfully while seriously examining Scripture, many things may change.

—Howard A. Snyder

ence and religion for thoughtful evangelicals. Those persons included both mainline and radical Pietists.

All of these emphases were deployed by early evangelicals to counter the Aristotelian worldview shared by Protestant Orthodoxy. That dominant force in the early seventeenth century came to regard the evangelicals' emerging viewpoint, based on the heterodox sources cited above, as an "improper mixing of philosophy and theology." While these early evangelicals' worldview may be archaic by current standards, Ward laments the failure of more recent evangelicals to take seriously the task of developing a coherent worldview for their faith.

As in his earlier work, Ward here displays his interest in Reformed and radical sources of Pietism—not only the more conventional Lutheran figures but also the Reformed Pietists who contributed the important federalist theologian, Johannes Cocceius (1603-69), father of the salvation history school that has deeply influenced modern historical thinking. Early evangelicals' interest in millennial ideas, often attributed to Cocceius, provided an alternative to apocalypticism in older thinkers, including Luther, by postponing the end of history until the salvific evangelical mission could be completed.

Ward's study is groundbreaking in its argument, drawing as it does from sources with which evangelicals are not normally conversant. It complements his earlier definitive study, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Columbia, 1993). Ward's work has done much to illumine the world in which primitive Methodism was hatched. —J. Steven O'Malley

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.