

EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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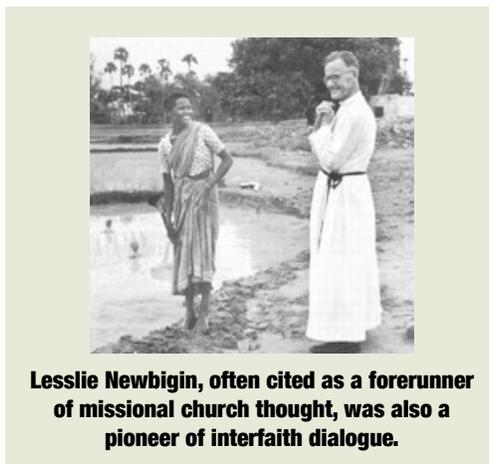
Mission and Dialogue?

Is it possible to be an Evangelical & engage in interfaith dialogue?

Why this Journal?

In this inaugural issue of the journal we seek to address the pressing need within the American Evangelical community to engage in critical theological reflection on the issue of interfaith dialogue. ~ by Cory Willson

For many American Evangelicals the topic of interfaith dialogue is confusing and suspect at best and downright dangerous or wrong at worst. On all accounts they face numerous challenges when considering if and how to enter into the realm of interfaith work. Those seeking to enter the broader interfaith conversations find themselves up against a firmly engrained relativism. This places Evangelicals in an awkward position and leads many to believe that the entire field of work needs to be completely avoided or perhaps reconfigured to look more like the already accepted mode of public discourse with other religious and ideological groups – that of the philosophic debate. Neither of these options is sufficient for Evangelical



Lesslie Newbigin, often cited as a forerunner of missional church thought, was also a pioneer of interfaith dialogue.

interactions with other religious groups. Within the American Evangelical traditions, there is a need for a robust biblical, theological, and missiological foundation to be established that will enable faithful and sustainable forms of creative and self-critical interfaith dialogue to be worked out within the community of faith.

In seeking to fulfill the biblical mandate to make disciples of all nations, there have been those within every generation who have taken up the task of pioneering avenues of interfaith

dialogue with other religious communities. From Muslim to Mormon, from Jewish to Buddhist, there have been Evangelicals who have sought to give witness to the gospel of Jesus through proclamation and demonstration, crossing cultural and religious barriers in their efforts to be faithful to the Great Commission. Against the backdrop of numerous twenty-first century violent religious conflicts, the complex forces of globalization, religious pluralism, as well as the rise of religious fundamentalism and extremism in the post 9/11 world, it is necessary that American Evangelicals think critically about how they relate to religious “others.” While it is presumptuous to assume that there should be one single foundation or approach to interfaith engagement, it is incumbent upon on the Evangelical community to grow in wisdom and discernment in this important area of witnessing to the Lordship of Christ in our pluralistic and globalized world.

In light of this need, this journal seeks to create space for Evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices and theology surrounding interfaith work, in faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus and His mission for His Church.

This inaugural issue of the journal seeks to begin a conversation on Evangelical approaches to interfaith dialogue. If interfaith dialogue is to move beyond a peripheral activity for Evangelicals, it needs to be firmly grounded in the larger mission of God. For this reason, this first issue features Dr. Douglas McConnell's paper "Missional Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue," and includes responses to his work by a group of professors and students. Reflections on the theoretical foundation advocated by McConnell as well as the implications for the practice of interfaith dialogue are included in the responses of the contributing authors.

Contributing Authors

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McConnell's Missional Approach to Interfaith Dialogue

by Cory Willson

Douglas McConnell's paper, "Missional Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue," was first presented at the "National Student Dialogue Conference" in 2007. The language and illustrations used in this paper were aimed to give college students exposure to a form of interfaith dialogue that grows out of an Evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture and to the unconditional call to fulfill the Great Commission.

Overview

Drawing on years of theological reflection and missionary experience, McConnell outlines four principles that frame his exploration of a missional approach to interfaith dialogue: indigenization, being sent, overcoming prejudice, and moving beyond appreciation. These principles serve as a distillation of incarnation theology and anthropological insights and move us to seek the thoughtful penetration of the gospel into the fabric of cultures. It has become axiomatic in missiological circles that when it comes to contextualization of the gospel, it is not a matter of *if* but *how* we contextualize. The gospel is indigenous, or at home, in every culture with which it comes into contact. Jesus sends all Christians in the same way as the Father sent Him (Jn 20:21). He who is authentically God became authentically human without diminishing His divinity or humanity. It is on this incarnational model that Christians are to follow this same mission of contextualizing the gospel into every culture in a way that is faithful to the gospel and healing to the culture.

This journey of entering into the world of others is a humbling, refining process for the one being sent with the gospel message. As Peter's encounter with Cornelius' household in Acts 10 reveals, bringing the gospel to others involves the transformation and repentance of the one being sent and not simply of the one hearing the gospel. It is in the process of entering into the world of the religious "other" that our individual myopia, sinfulness, and embedded communal biases are revealed and exposed as being ways of seeing but also distorting the beauty of Christ and His gospel. Yet this truly inclusive embrace of all people and cultures is not a lazy form of pluralism and relativism. Appreciation of the "other" and their culture is *necessary but not sufficient* for a faithful witnessing to and contextualizing of the gospel. The followers of Jesus are sent with an *inclusive* message that nevertheless calls for repentance and a turning from one set of allegiances and loyalties to the *exclusive* worship of and obedience to another. This does not involve the annihilation of the recipient's culture nor of their personhood, but rather a liberation from sin and a renewal of true humanness.

In light of this discussion and the missiological principles outlined by McConnell, we must maintain that part of our giving witness to the gospel necessarily involves interfaith dialogue. Dialogue, then, is our attempt to enter and understand the world of the other in order to accurately and faithfully contextualize and embody the gospel. Interfaith dialogue is neither a bait-n-switch evangelistic tactic, nor is it a form of 'evangelism lite.' Rather, it is a part of giving faithful witness to the gospel as well as engaging in the difficult learning and transformation involved in contextualizing the gospel.

Missional Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue: An Evangelical's view of the do's and don'ts of theological dialogue

by Dr. Douglas McConnell

In the newly planted church I attended, testimonies of God's dramatic activity abounded. It was common to hear a young woman share how Christ picked her up from the despair of drug addiction. Or for a man to testify that before he met Jesus he was a wretched drunk, but now Christ delivered him from the evils of alcohol. Yet another would share the great joy of leading someone to Christ as part of an evangelistic outreach. But as a young Christian, I never heard anyone rise to claim God's blessing on a recent interfaith dialogue.

In fact, in our little evangelical church we had standards for what was an acceptable testimony. These ranged from answered prayer to sharing your faith with the unsaved. There were simply no categories for more nuanced encounters. So a call to convicted civility was beyond our level of understanding. And anything that even appeared to allow for divergent views was quickly dismissed as a dangerous liaison.

The word "mission" was similarly defined. In those days it was understood to be the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Clearly, the goal was conversion followed by baptism and joining a local church. Of course, there were encounters with people of other religious beliefs and those who had no religious beliefs, but these were simply diversions on the road of our witness. Our goal was evangelism.

After a few years, my wife and I were sent out by our local church as missionaries. With all the fanfare due to a hero, we left for the field to reach the lost. In the early years, we did not consider any of the daily routines of life to be significant if they did not lead to evangelistic contacts. We were on a mission from God and nothing could divert us from that task.

Over the years, we came to appreciate a number of important elements of our missionary calling that escaped us in the early years. It started with a realization of God's amazing love. Even though we memorized John 3:16 long before, it dawned on us afresh that "God so loved **the world** that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him

may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16, NRSV). God loved this broken world at a level far greater than anything we could imagine.

By that time, we were working among poor migrants in the capital city of Papua New Guinea; people who struggle everyday just to have enough to eat and a place to sleep. It was a far cry from the relative affluence of our sending church. The brokenness of the world was in constant focus. Yet in those difficult conditions, God had raised up from among many different tribes a people for himself. Men and women, who like us, had experienced salvation in Christ.

The "Indigenizing" Principle

The distance between their world and ours was staggering for us, but not for God. It was at that point we realized God came to them where they were, just as he did us. While this was new to us, in reality there is nothing new about this approach. For example, the group of shepherds heard the announcement of the good news of Jesus' birth in a field where they were tending sheep (Luke 2:8-14, NRSV). In his study on the transmission of faith in Christian history, Professor Andrew Walls points to the underlying continuity in Christianity; *God accepts us as we are*. Walls refers to this as the "indigenizing" principle in church history (Known as the "indigenizing principle," it is found in Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture" In *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Orbis 2000, page 7).

To be more precise, God accepts us *as we are* solely on the ground of Christ's work, not based on who we are or anything that we are trying to become. This is the essence of the Gospel. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "... God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NRSV). While we rejoice in this amazing grace, we must consider the implications of this acceptance *as we are*. It also means that God accepts us in the context of the family, affinity groups and cultural context that make up our worlds. As we know intuitively, it is not possible to separate a person from the influences of their social relationships or their cultural setting. This means accepting not only the supportive social relationships but also "those predispositions, prejudices, suspicions, and hostilities, whether justified or not, which mark the group to which we belong" (Walls, page 7).

This collective set of assumptions which guide our lives is referred to as our worldview. Studies in anthropology reveal that worldview is a powerful force in shaping both values and behaviors (For an extensive discussion see Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian*

Witness, Orbis, 1996, chapter 4). For example, when I was a child my mother used to say, "WE don't eat like that!" This usually followed her observation of me picking up my meat or vegetables to speed things up so I could go out and play. Needless to say, after years of hearing this, I assumed that the use of the knife and fork separated the well-mannered people from those with bad manners. So you can imagine my shock when first faced with the prospect of using the fingers of my right hand to eat by my Indian hosts in a nice restaurant in Chennai!

On this more superficial level of eating, we can laugh at our own prejudices as we experience new cuisine and customs. However, there are much deeper levels of our worldview that are not so easily changed. This was vividly brought home to me in a visit to the village of Ferezai in southern Kosovo. During the siege by the Serbs, local Serbian Kosovars had painted the Serbian cross, a symbol of their Eastern Orthodox beliefs, on the doors of their houses. The troops seeing the cross would pass by allowing the residents to stay in the safety of their homes, while they focused their hostilities on driving the Albanian Kosovars from their land. After the return of the Albanian Kosovars from exile, these same houses were the target of merciless reprisals from those who had known the wrath of the Serbs.

Worldview carries not only the customs of social interactions, it also carries the symbols, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that differentiate one group from another. In short, it is the cultural map of our understanding of the world. For our purposes, it follows that any serious attempt to engage people across cultural or religious barriers should consider their worldview. Initially, a study of the worldview of a people may focus on their language, customs, and literature. However, it is difficult to truly understand others without engaging in conversation to clarify and expand our knowledge.

Being Sent

This relational approach is one of the most powerful missional insights. It is a key ingredient in the Great Commission as stated in the gospel of Matthew, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19a, NRSV). This implies going to people where they are and engaging them for the sake of the Gospel. The going is not limited to geography. My colleague Charles Kraft translates the commission in Mark 16:15 as, "Go into *everyone's world* and communicate the good news." Obedience to going requires willingness to enter the world of others. As is often pointed out, Jesus' incarnation is the ultimate example of entry into the world of others.

Finding ways to enter the worlds of others is one of the toughest challenges we face today. Globalization has made it easy to slip into the cultural world of another person at the level of a tourist. But this is hardly what is meant by the concept of going in the record of Jesus' commission of the disciples. It is better to think of it as being sent rather than as a choice to go. Being sent is more in keeping with the intent of the commission of Christ.

Of the five primary records of the commission of Christ, John 20:21 is the most helpful in focusing on the concept of being sent (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:9-18, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:6-8). "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'" (John 20:21, NRSV). The missional principle which should guide us is based on the sending of Christ. As Beasley-Murray stated it, "The sending of the Son into the world by the Father is a constant theme of this Gospel. It reflects in measure the principle of Jewish authorization 'One who is sent is as he who sends him'" (Beasley-Murray, George R.: *Word Biblical Commentary: John*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 36), S. 379). Being sent as Christ was sent requires a commitment to enter the actual world of others.

It was 22 years after first being sent as a missionary that the complexity of the challenge really hit me. I was sipping a cup of chai tea while sitting in a tea room in northern Uganda near the Sudan border. I had just finished speaking to the vocational school on the importance of education, when the School Master invited us to join the leaders for tea. The conversation was warm, the weather hot, and the atmosphere was welcoming. Despite this rather idyllic setting, I felt a strong sense of dissonance.

Since this was my first experience in a Muslim compound, I was intellectually laden by exposure to the demonization of Islam. Although it was five years before 9/11 there had been no shortage of disparaging remarks about Islam from the pulpits and pages that shaped my worldview. To make matters worse, I was reminded of the warnings from others about the negative impact of such an evil spiritual stronghold.

Processing these conflicting thoughts was a lot to ask so far from the comforts of my traditions. Yet I was attracted by the tea and open conversation about our very different worlds. We shared a mutual curiosity for our distinctive beliefs that was fed by the continuing cordial atmosphere. To my relief, as my level of understanding deepened, a sense of appreciation for their worldview replaced the anxiety. I realized that simply entering the physical space of others was not

enough. I had to move toward understanding, facilitated by the empathy fostered by relationships, in order to truly enter their world.

Overcoming Prejudice

Involvement with people of other faiths is no longer an isolated experience for any of us. Our schools, businesses, and cities are filled with people from many different backgrounds, including a wide range of religious beliefs and unbelief. As was the case in my first experience with Muslims, we tend to have presuppositions about those differences that may or may not reflect accurately the beliefs of others. Given the tendency toward negative stereotypes, it is a challenge for all of us to move from prejudice to insight.

In forming our cultural identity, we tend toward an affirmation of our uniqueness by comparing ourselves favorably toward other groups. For example, I was riding in a small bus with a group of people from a particular tribe in Papua New Guinea. In the traffic we found ourselves behind a truck carrying a group from a different tribe. The truck group were chewing betel nut mixed with lime from ground seashells. The mixture made their mouths red and required frequent spitting. To be sure, it was a nasty habit. However, the group in the bus used this custom to build a case against the truck group. It began as an attack on the habit of chewing betel nut, but turned into a long discussion on why this habit was a symbol of the inferiority of the truck group. Although studies in Melanesian peoples reveals an important tendency toward this type of negative stereotyping as a building block of worldview, it is by no means restricted to peoples of the South Pacific (J. Linikin and L. Poyer, eds, *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*. University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

On the individual level, Jesus told the parable of two men praying in the temple based on a similar view (Luke 18:9-14, NRSV). In the parable the Pharisee viewed himself as so much better than others who behaved in ways that were rejected by his sect of Judaism. After rejecting the practices of others, he extolled his own behavior as religiously acceptable. Jesus then provided the twist to the story when he noted that the tax collector who realized his own sinfulness returned home forgiven. The point being that regarding others with contempt masks our own needs and betrays the humility required by God (See 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 25:9, Isaiah 66:2, 1 Peter 5:5-7).

While this practice happens on a number of levels, studies in social networks reveal an important explanation of the process. In his

work on the formation of personal networks, Berkeley Sociologist Claude Fischer observed that,

People tend to associate with others like themselves. In that sense, networks are "inbred." As a consequence of—and as a further cause of—this inwardly turned interaction, people come to share many experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and values... in short, they develop a common culture (Claude S. Fischer, *To Dwell Among Friends*. University of Chicago Press, 1982, page 6).

In his research, Fischer observed this trend across a spectrum of geographic and cultural settings from small towns in Northern California to the tenderloin in San Francisco. What applies to individuals in the process of building social networks, also applies to the subcultural groups formed by the networks. The strength of this social phenomenon led to Fischer's subcultural theory of urbanism (Claude S. Fischer, *The Urban Experience*, 2nd edition. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Publishers, 1984). For our purposes, the theory posits that negative intergroup interaction between groups tends to reinforce negative values, while positive intergroup interaction has the opposite affect. As may be predicted, the vast majority of intergroup interaction is more in the category of neutral and does little to change the group values. However, it is most important to note that the strength of positive intergroup interaction leads to an expansion of the acceptable categories for inclusion in the subculture.

This process is part of our social experience. For example, positive intergroup interaction may be seen in the inclusion of new ethnic foods, such as Thai food, after a positive experience when friends dine out at a Thai restaurant. On a more challenging level, negative stereotypes can be reinforced when our residential neighborhoods experience changing demographics. In a study of churches in Aurora, Illinois, we found that if prejudice toward others is not confronted as part of the teaching of the church, it remained a powerful force in shaping the attitudes and actions of the members (C. Douglas McConnell, "Confronting Racism and Prejudice in Our Kind of People." In *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 4, October 1997). This was particularly difficult for churches as the ethnic makeup of the community changed dramatically over the decade of the 1990s.

Building on the strength of positive interaction, we can identify the potential of interfaith dialogue to reduce the negative stereotypes that foster prejudice. In my own experience, the first encounter with Muslim

leaders provided a positive opportunity to learn while replacing prejudice with insight. Although it was an informal dialogue, the outcome was an open exchange of the important tenets of our respective faiths. In the case of more formalized interfaith dialogue, there are even greater opportunities to build understanding through establishing guidelines that foster the free exchange of ideas.

Beyond Appreciation

If understanding was the only goal of interfaith encounters life would be so much simpler. But as an Evangelical Christian my view of interfaith encounter is not limited to creating understanding. There are also the twin issues of obedience to the commission of Christ to be a faithful witness and faithfulness to the truth of the Gospel. So an important question arises, is there a missional purpose for interfaith dialogue?

In missiological thought, we have cultivated the concept of religious encounter to identify the complexities of missional engagement. The study of this process within missiology has become a sophisticated assessment of the impact of cultural conditioning on the worldview of people groups, churches and missionaries. We have also moved toward the use of the term "mission of God" [Latin, *missio Dei*] to indicate the divine purpose as opposed to the subjectivity of mission strategies. Thus God's broader redemptive purposes are in focus rather than the more organizational approaches. Religious encounter, therefore, is a means to assess the levels of impact in an individual or group presented with the message of the Gospel.

As we consider religious encounters, there are three levels that are most often cited as significant in the mission of God corresponding to the three levels of worldview; Allegiance Encounters, Power Encounters, and Truth Encounters (The encounter model was first developed by Charles H. Kraft, "Allegiance, Truth, and Power Encounter in Christian Witness," In *Pentecost, Mission, and Ecumenism's Essays on Intercultural Theology*. J.A. B. Jongeneel, ed. Peter Lang, 1990, pages 215-230. See also, R. Daniel Shaw and Charles E. Van Engen, *Communicating God's Word in a Complex World: God's truth or hocus pocus?* Roman and Littlefield, 2003). The first level of allegiance deals with the relationships that are core to the identity of an individual or group. Anyone who has spent time with teenagers realizes that relationships are an important aspect of our identity formation. In studies of worldview, the structures that provide and support our relationships are embedded deeply in the culture. Family, friends, and even leaders, those for whom loyalty is

paramount, provide the solidarity required to sustain our identity in order to cope with the worlds we encounter. Much of our capacity to evaluate people and situations is controlled by the implicit expectations that constitute our default operating systems. Allegiance encounters, therefore, challenge the loyalties and meanings that govern our lives, in effect asking the question, "who or what controls our lives?"

The level of power encounter deals primarily with the affective level of emotions, symbols, and our experiences. Power encounter deals with the heartfelt questions of our worlds making it harder to identify and more ambiguous. In their study of folk religion, Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno demonstrate the significance of these types of encounters in dealing with those areas of explanation that often lack clear answers in formal religious systems (Hiebert, P.G., R.D. Shaw, and T. Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*. Baker Book House, 1999). Examples include the question of who we should marry, issues of success in our personal endeavors, and meanings of events that impact us personally. Kraft has taken this concept into the unseen world to identify areas in which people may find freedom from bondage, most often referred to within the framework of spiritual dynamics (Charles H. Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity: Evangelicals and the Missing Dimension*. Chosen, Baker Books, 2002).

The level of truth encounter is the most readily identifiable since it deals with the cognitive areas of belief and understanding. Truth encounters allow for the concept of unique truth claims as opposed to the relativistic approach of the comparative and explanatory value of a given belief. Truth encounters are predicated on the basis that if something is true, then it will stand up to critical enquiry over time. It is not limited to a given time and context, but rather is universal in nature.

It is this level in which we find the significance of theological dialogue. Because the traditions, texts, and structures of religious systems are accessible to scholars, dialogue at its best invites participants to question and clarify their understandings. Richard Mouw provides a useful clarification with regard to understanding truth in the context of dialogue.

"All truth is God's truth" is a venerable affirmation of the Christian tradition. And the mainstream of that tradition has never meant by this that spiritual truth is limited to what is explicitly taught in the Bible. As God's Word,

the Bible is a direct source of truth. But it also helps us test claims to truth that come to us from other sources (Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. InterVarsity Press, 1992, page 105).

If we consider theological dialogue as an opportunity to understand and test the beliefs of others as well as openly assert the biblical faith, it becomes a valid means of being faithful to the truth of the Gospel. Viewed as a truth encounter, theological dialogue finds its place as part of our missional engagement. Along with allegiance encounters that challenge our basic assumptions at the deepest level of worldview and power encounters that confront often excluded areas of the here and now, truth encounters are also an important part of our faithful witness.

Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue

Drawing on these four missiological perspectives, the following guidelines are offered for consideration as we attempt to establish a missional approach to interfaith dialogue:

1. Interfaith dialogue provides a forum in which the claims of various religious traditions, texts and structures may be interactively studied. To achieve this, all participants must be committed to understanding both the context and content of the various viewpoints.
2. Recognizing the indigenous nature of faith traditions requires an increased sensitivity to the symbols, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The goal of dialogue is to identify that which is culturally determined in order to deal with the truth claims of the participants. In so doing prejudice may be identified and at least factored into the discussion.
3. To ensure the integrity of both the dialogue and the rationale for involvement, participants should be encouraged to view the process as an important aspect in the cordial, faithful witness of their faith. This entails dealing with one another respectfully, while being honest about our faith based desires to see others come to accept our respective faiths.
4. Because relationships carry more than cognitive categories, each participant should be affirmed for who they are and what they believe, while avoiding the desire for universal affirmation of the truth of what they believe. Disagreement must be accepted as a valid response to preserve the integrity of our witness.
5. Interfaith dialogue is a process of discovery, not a competition of truth claims. As such, it allows for truth

encounters without requiring conversion. As the texts and traditions are studied respectfully, the conflicting claims must be examined as part of the growing understanding. The result will likely be a feeling of ambiguity rather than certainty with regard to the faith of others.

6. Interfaith dialogue must also be seen as a public engagement. The attitudes and behavior will inevitably be interpreted differently by insiders and outsiders, antagonists and protagonists. The manner in which the participants conduct themselves and communicate the content of the dialogue should be carefully considered in an attempt to avoid the extremes of triumphalism and accusations of heresy.

Reflections of an Evangelical Christian Missionary

Through the years I spent in the South Pacific, I witnessed wave after wave of young Mormon missionaries coming to our city. To be honest, it was a constant source of concern for me since I was often approached by members of our church who were troubled by their interaction with these young Americans. In Melanesian culture, people from the same place, known locally as *wantoks*, were seen as equivalent to family. Being from the same family or place meant that you were immediately included into the extended family with all the rights and privileges common in a collective society. At the same time, the behavior and beliefs of *wantoks* was assimilated into the culture of the group and therefore, accepted as legitimate. Since I was an American and so were the Mormon missionaries, we were seen as *wantoks*. There were many problems with this association, but none was as frustrating as trying to explain the differences between us and our “*wantoks*.”

The result of continued exposure to this type of unwanted attention was a growing distrust and disdain for what appeared at times to be an invasion of Mormons. I confess this with some degree of sadness for the many opportunities I could have taken to learn from and witness to them. One of the important lessons learned through the years of missionary service is that I should not avoid any reasonable opportunity to be a faithful witness for Christ. In participating in the Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue over the past couple of years, I have found myself able to be just that, a faithful witness for Christ.

Each person who has participated in the dialogue has been open both to learn and to witness. There are insurmountable differences that separate us. Yet there remain many opportunities to explore truths of Christ as understood by the historical Christian faith in conversation with the teachings of

Mormonism. From time to time I wonder if the divide is too great to merit our on-going discussions, but just as that thought settles in I am reminded of the progress we are making in clarifying our use of theological terms and of the real differences we have. Given that my Melanesian friends believe we are family, it is important to be able to articulate the differences with integrity. That is not to mention the countless people of other faith traditions who see no distinction between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Presbyterian Church USA.

Just as I did thirty-three years ago as a new missionary, I still believe that evangelism is central to the missionary task. I long for everyone to know the truth of the gospel, to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to know the power of the Savior who died that we might have eternal life, by doing what we could not do for ourselves as sinners in need of God’s grace, as revealed in the Bible, the written word of God, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Thankfully, I also realize that our witness depends on the power of the Holy Spirit who leads people to faith in Christ.

So as those sent by Christ, we seek to truly enter the worlds of others since God reaches people as they are. Our calling is to be faithful witnesses, taking every opportunity to share the truth of the Gospel while sincerely seeking to understand the worlds of those with whom we share our faith. In so doing, we must also reject the prejudices and false witness that comes from avoiding interaction with others. And by appropriate encounter with the beliefs, values, and religious affiliations of others, we are more likely to witness in ways that reach others at the point where they are most likely to hear the faithful witness.

Dr. Douglas McConnell is Dean of the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and Associate Professor of Leadership. Before coming to Fuller Seminary, Douglas and his wife Janna spent 15 years as missionaries in Australia and Papua New Guinea.



**THE BEGINNINGS OF
MORMON-EVANGELICAL
DIALOGUE**



Dr. Richard J. Mouw addressing an Evangelical and Latter-day Saint audience at the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, in November of 2004. Mouw was the first Evangelical to speak in the Tabernacle since Dwight L. Moody in 1871. Mouw’s address has received criticism by some Evangelicals, but among many Latter-day Saints it has proven to be a watershed in Mormon-Evangelical dialogue. Keeping the ninth commandment of “not bearing false witness against your neighbor,” has provided the trust necessary for subsequent dialogues between the two communities of faith. His speech can be read in its entirety @ beliefnet.com under the title, “We have sinned against you.”



Photography by Matthew Krabill

Overview of Responses to McConnell's Principles for Interfaith Dialogue

by Melody Wachsmuth

The respondents to McConnell's paper come from a variety of disciplines. Each person reflects on how interfaith dialogue can be done in a way that is faithful to the gospel of Jesus and His mission for His Church.

Dr. Dufault-Hunter probes the mystery of Divine vulnerability and explores the implications for our interfaith encounters. The incarnation is not just the story of salvation, but a narrative fraught with surprising possibilities as to how God engages with humankind. Can understanding how Jesus was sent liberate us from either a defensive or an insubstantial engagement with those from another faith?

“What does it mean to undertake interfaith encounter from the standpoint of a *Biblical* rather than *Christian* worldview?” **Dr. Accad's** question proposes a shift in our self-understanding as he explores the possibility of interfaith encounters “beyond appreciation.” As Jesus encountered the religious establishment from a multi-layered approach, Dr. Accad challenges us to leave the niche of our cultural identity as Evangelicals and explore the Biblical concepts of *evangelion* and *missio* in Christ.

Cory Willson argues that both a pluralist and a proselytizing approach to interfaith dialogue *objectifies* our neighbor. Willson contends that it is only under the cross that Christians can safely engage with the “other”—it is the cross that reveals our commonality and frailty as humans and therefore it is the place where God's Spirit can transform both us and the “other” in the midst of our encounter.

Carrie Graham's experience as a facilitator for an interfaith discussion group provides the foundation of her reflections regarding forming relationships and trust in interfaith dialogue. Freely and honestly entering the “other's” world is possible when we realize that it is God alone who both creates and brings to fruition the seeds of the gospel. It is this realization that allows us to be both partakers and bearers of God's transformative love within our interfaith friendships.

Interfaith Dialogue & the Narrative of Kenosis

by Erin Dufault-Hunter

Dr. Erin Dufault-Hunter is Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary.

As a missiologist, McConnell reminds us of the centrality of Jesus' Great Commission and His statement in John's Gospel, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21). In some sense, all that we do is “missional,” as the Church exists not for herself but for the good of a world loved by God. McConnell ends his article with practical guidelines and principles for interfaith dialogue as an aspect of our mission in a diverse world. As a narrative ethicist, I want to focus on the story that warrants such principles, the rich narrative implied by this text from John. It provides the theological roots for McConnell's approach to interfaith dialogue — a posture marked by both humility and self-assurance, both radical openness and solid conviction.

If we are sent into the world as Christ was sent, this begs the obvious question: *how* was Jesus sent? As John 1 notes, the One who was there when the universe was spoken into existence deigns to dwell, to make His tent among us. Emphasis on the incarnation has influenced missions and church ministries greatly, but we too often miss — or avoid — the radical vulnerability inherent in such a move from glory and greatness to human likeness and mere flesh. The Christological Hymn describes Jesus' “sent-ness” in this way,

though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied [ekenosen] Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:6-8)

Like Christ, our approach to those radically different from ourselves must echo this same “kenotic” or self-emptying form. Otherwise, we refuse to be sent as Christ was sent into the world but instead model our lives on some other god and trust in some other good. In doing so, we make ourselves vulnerable in all the ways McConnell mentions: vulnerable to learn from those who are not afraid to exchange deeply held beliefs, to risk encounters outside our comfortable context. Like Christ, we also bear others' rage and sorrow as we acknowledge the mixed legacy of our Christian past as well as the continued interracial,

interethnic, and interreligious violence that too often characterizes our present.

Some might interpret such humility or vulnerability as a mamsy-pansy, milk toast approach, and indeed much of what passes for humility is insecurity or lack of conviction wrapped in easy words like “tolerance” or popular concepts such as “relativism.” As Christians who are sent as our Lord was sent, humility means not only exposure to others' insight and correction or to their pain and experience, but it also entails knowing who — and whose — we are. Think again about that John text. Before we are sent, we are given *peace*. Christian humility means that our openness to others is only possible because of our faith and the deep-rootedness life in God affords. Peace-filled people need be neither defensive nor apologetic for who they are. Like Jesus, we leave the comforts of the Christian fold to enter into the “others” world because we are tethered to God Himself. What greater peace could we imagine?

As McConnell and Mouw note, it is the Spirit's task to convert the world; we are witnesses, not arm-breakers or embarrassed ambassadors. As Christ knew, His Father's fidelity never allows our work to be fruitless or our sometimes-dangerous exposure to others to remain mere foolishness. Such peaceful openness does not mean an unbounded or uncentered identity for, as McConnell points out, we remain children of truth. Lacking this center, we would not so much engage in *interfaith dialogue* but rather brain massage or interfaith education. Although this can be valuable, it is not what McConnell is describing here — an engagement fraught with the dangerous possibility of mutual transformation through relationship.

As Christians, we engage in interfaith dialogue out of a distinctive story, a narrative that speaks of God's deep love and engagement with Her world. We can afford to be open to others while resting in such a God. We need not be self-protective or flaccid. After all, the incarnation reminds us that God comes to us in surprising ways — in a baby, in the needy, in the stranger, even in our enemies. If we enter into interfaith dialogue sent as Christ was sent, marked by humility and peaceful trust in God's fidelity, then we will surely not only be faithful witnesses to God and God's Christ. We will almost surely experience something new about the God whose Spirit continues to woo the world, who beckons all — even us — to see and perceive the depth of God's grace and truth anew. Interfaith dialogue becomes an opportunity not only to be hospitable to others but to welcome the Christ who continues to make His home among us — sometimes emerging with delightful if disturbing surprise from the tent of our Muslim, Jewish, Mormon, or pagan neighbor. (*End*)

Pastoral Reflections on Dialogue

by Carrie Graham

It was late at night for the phone to be ringing, but when I picked up, I knew it was for a good reason. My good friend, Sara, whom I had met at an interfaith dialogue (IFD) the year before, was upset because some of my Protestant sisters and brothers had recently made an explicit conversion attempt on her Mormon soul. After multiple years of building a relationship with her, they had decided it was time to express concern for her presumably condemned eternity. Instead of adding to the sum of souls saved for Jesus, the result was this late night phone call to me, and an unwanted new sense of distance between her and her other Evangelical friends.

Dr. McConnell's *Missional Principals of Interfaith Dialogue* sheds light on why this scenario went all wrong for Sara's well-meaning Protestant friends. As God was present with Dr. McConnell as he sipped chai in Northern Uganda, God has also been present when I have sipped my Starbucks chai in Los Angeles across the table from Sara. In addition to the similarity of friendship transpiring over hot drinks, both Dr. McConnell and I also accidentally found ourselves transformed by the interfaith listening process. God spoke into a conversation that occurred by the entrance into someone else's world of faith.

The implication of God's transforming presence in an IFD is that it inspires more and more conversations to happen, not necessarily with the intent of conversion, but with the

acknowledgment that God is changing more than just the "other" people at the table. Even though Sara felt trust had been betrayed between her and other Evangelical friends, she called me, another Evangelical, to talk about it.

This begs the question, "Is protecting the trust we've built more important than seeking conversion by explicit testimony of Evangelical understanding of truth?" Perhaps the question and its assumptions are even less helpful than my answering it would be, as the question implies that we have not followed McConnell's recommendation that we enter *fully* into the world of the "other." When we do fully enter into the world of the "other", we meet our friends of other traditions where they are, and vice versa. This requires existing in tension, but it is discussed with natural compassion, rather than the ignoring or awkward references to such tensions when genuine pursuit of trust is absent.

Meeting people where they are is a beautiful reflection of how God meets us where we are, how He met us through the Incarnation, and continues to meet us today as He draws us ever closer to Him. It is additionally paramount to make sure this is not a foundation by which we presume to take on God's very essence, but rather continuously pursue lives in light of *Imago Dei*. We should not forget that as Evangelicals, we do not believe we are divine but are rather made in the Divine image. Thus, we reflect His ways and His love in our lives, but we do not presume to touch, understand, or enact the work that only He can do.

Don't get me wrong, I would love to see those other minds change. As McConnell outlines in dialogue guidelines #4 and 5, honesty about oneself is central to a successful interfaith dialogue. I wish everyone accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior, and I say so publicly

among friends who might agree or not. This disposition is not a mystery to my dialogue partners.

We are never called to water down the Gospel. We are called to water seeds that have been planted before us, or at times to plant them in the first place. And in such endeavors, we must never forget that it is only God that can create such seeds, and it is only He who compels us to nurture them (1Cor 5:3-9). Conversion belongs to God. Changing people's hearts belongs to God. We are indeed called into others' worlds to demonstrate and discuss the way God loves His children. With God's help, and only with God's help, we can do so.

Through IFD, I have been enabled to enter into other's worlds, and have my perception of my own faith challenged and sharpened in ways that could not occur in other contexts. I have seen understanding and peace grow between unlikely friends. Perhaps most significantly, God has met *me* through IFD when "the other" has entered into my world. The grace involved in this experience is transformative. We should never forget that God once met us where we were as our conversion began, and that He continues to meet us in unlikely ways and through people we might not guess He would use. Thus, it is not just others who should be wary of conversion in IFD; our God continues to draw us near to Him in new ways as we participate in conversations with those who believe differently than us.

Recently in my life, I have unequivocally stated that I am blessed by IFD. I will continue to do so. Imagine who else might one day say they have gotten closer to the love of Christ because of the many Evangelicals who have stood to say the same thing? Sara and I, late night phone calls and all, can both say that about our friendship. Thanks be to God. *(End)*

A "Supra-Religious" Encounter

by Dr. Martin Accad

Dr. Martin Accad is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and Director of the Institute of Middle East Studies at the Arab Baptist Seminary in Lebanon.

McConnell presents us here with an approach to interfaith engagement that is in the spirit of Jesus reflected in the gospels, and he does so from a profoundly theological and imminently practical missiological angle. Drawing from the wealth of mission history and from his own experience, he offers us the insight of four enduring missiological principles, coupled with six practical guidelines, to frame a dialogical approach to other religions, including Islam, in a way that is Evangelical and faithful to the way of Christ.

McConnell's most significant contribution is that he is able, through his thoughtful missiological approach, to legitimize interfaith dialogue as an acceptable vehicle for Evangelical mission. In fact, he is able to go further. Far from merely "excusing" dialogue, he is able to argue that mission is not truly Evangelical *unless* it integrates a profound dialogical engagement that manifests his four principles: (1) dialogue motivated by the fact that God himself meets us *where we are* and

accepts us *as we are*; (2) dialogue that forces our mission practice beyond *cultural tourism*, pushing us to arrive at a deep understanding of the world of those we encounter; (3) dialogue that dislodges our prejudices and gives us a humble attitude in mission, as we learn to understand and appreciate the *authentic* image of the "other", rather than easily dismiss a *caricatured* representation of them; and (4) dialogue that provides the context for the exploration of other worldviews "beyond appreciation", questioning assumed allegiances, understanding the spiritual dynamics involved, and evaluating truth claims through theological conversation.

It is this fourth principle that McConnell brings out that will ensure that dialogue is truly Evangelical. Indeed, any thoughtful dialogue with Islam that a Christian body undertakes will seek to (1) meet the dialogue partner where they are, and to understand them both (2) holistically and (3) authentically. But the question that he posits for his fourth principle is an Evangelical one *par excellence*: "Is there a missional purpose for interfaith dialogue?" Put differently, we must assert that interfaith dialogue for the purpose of *peace-building* and *understanding*, though legitimate in its own right, only moves beyond humanism in a unique Evangelical way when it poses this key question. So it is fitting that he gives this principle further elaboration by pointing out three dimensions of the interfaith encounter within a framework that has already been extensively explored by Fuller's own faculty over several decades: Kraft, Shaw, Van Engen, Hiebert, and others. *(continued on page 9)*

I want to conclude by posing a further challenge. Throughout McConnell's esteemed and timely framework for interfaith dialogue, there is still a sense that Evangelicals are called to engage in dialogue from the standpoint of one among many competing religious worldviews. These principles and guidelines are therefore imminently relevant for Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, or any other religion. But can Evangelicals not actually take the dialogical endeavor even further? What would it mean to undertake interfaith encounter from the standpoint of a *Biblical* rather than *Christian* worldview – *Evangelical* as deriving from God's *evangelion* and *missio* in Christ, rather than denominational and institutional *Evangelicalism*? This is not merely a semantic game. Looking at the model of Jesus, we find that he stood as a critic of religion, of *All* religions: "a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (NIV, John 4.23-24). His "allegiance encounters" challenged the safe assumptions of the *children of Abraham* and the righteousness of the meticulous adherents to the Law of Moses, pointing them instead to a supremely personal and relational "Father". His "power encounters" saw him clash with the principalities and powers that controlled the pious religious practices of people as well as those that held them in bondage from a true spiritual encounter with God through him. And his "truth encounters" always set him above common interpretations of the Mosaic Law in everyday life, not by making a mockery of the Law but by exercising his divine authority over the intent and purpose of legal prescriptions.

What we learn from Jesus' encounter with the religious establishment is what I like to call his "supra-religious" attitude and worldview towards all religions. That is the position that I would advocate for interfaith dialogue. While embracing McConnell's excellent framework, this is a position that will allow us to appreciate the best elements of all religions, all-the-while preserving a critical distance from all, through an evaluation of all by means of Biblical standards, to the best of our ability in imitation of Jesus' attitude and approach. (End)

Beyond Appreciation and Debate

by Cory Willson

McConnell's missional grounding of interfaith dialogue (IFD) is a significant contribution to the discussion on Evangelical approaches to religious dialogue. I believe that it is the area of moving "beyond appreciation" that we need to continue to build on his work as we carefully

consider how to think about IFD in its relation to our mission as God's people. Drawing on the field of missiology, McConnell points out three areas of encounter that surface in the contextualization process: allegiance, power, and truth encounters. While not exclusively limited to this area of truth encounter, he presents IFD as particularly rooted to this area of contextualization.

In what follows, I will briefly summarize the various forms of interfaith engagement outlined by scholars. I will proceed to argue that IFD is properly situated at the intersection of all three encounters outlined by McConnell and that maintaining this broader foundation is both proper and necessary for guiding faithful and sustainable IFD that addresses the whole person in the totality of their human and cultural situation. From this broadened base I will show this missional framework addresses two major challenges and criticisms facing Evangelicals in the public square regarding IFD.

Scholars outline at least four modes of interfaith interactions between religious groups: proclamation, dialogue of life, dialogue of action, and dialogue among experts. In *proclamation* religious claims are laid out in all their relevance for humanity and society. *Dialogue of life* refers to those human interactions that take place in our shared life in society. *Dialogue of Action* refers to collaboration on matters of the health of society such as poverty, foster care and racial reconciliation. Finally, *Dialogue of Experts* focuses on the theological and philosophical foundations of religious traditions (Stanley J, Samartha, *One Christ, Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology*; cf. Kärkkäinen, "Theologies of Religions: A Position Paper," pg 2.). Given these various forms of interfaith engagement, a form of dialogue is needed that aims at supporting Evangelical involvement in the other forms of interfaith work. Such dialogue should be guided by the principle, "before I can say 'I disagree,' I must first *prove* that I understand" (cf. Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students*, 33). Morally, this form of dialogue prevents us from breaking the ninth commandment of "bearing false witness against our neighbor" (cf. Richard Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 48-49). Missionally, it is an essential part of stepping into the theological and lived world of others.

In light of the breadth of our mission and the implications for IFD, we cannot limit the missional aspects of interfaith work to "truth encounters." During our interactions with religious "Others" we get exposed to deeper issues than mere truth claims. In dialogue, we often come to see in others the spiritual dynamics of sin and grace-denial that are also operative in our own hearts (cf. Romans 1:18-23). The great danger and tragedy is that we might very possibly 'win an argument' yet be blinded to our own sin and deaf to the Holy

Spirit's conviction. This very well could be the door to a deeper apprehension of the gospel for both partners of the dialogue. For this reason, IFD must reach beyond truth encounters to include *power* and *allegiance* encounters. It is here in the messiness of all these encounters where McConnell's missional framework is most helpful for guiding Evangelical forms of IFD that address the whole person in the midst of his or her particular cultural embeddedness.

It has become an accepted fact in much of academia that all forms of proselytizing are imperialistic power plays. What is preferred, therefore, is a form of dialogue that aims at "understanding" and "personal growth and learning." McConnell's missional framework offers a compelling response to such assertions. First, it is important to acknowledge that the pluralistic critique of proselytizing rightly identifies a common perversion in evangelism: the objectification and hence dehumanizing of the person hearing the gospel. Yet we must insist that this objectification is antithetical to the gospel. Furthermore, the pluralist aim of dialogue as "personal growth" runs the risk of the same type of objectification of the dialogue partner. For example, if I see the main goal of dialogue with you as being my personal growth, then I need to use you to improve myself. Over against this view, McConnell's framework makes room for the transformation of the Christian in the process of dialogue, but it also finds its central motive in love for God and neighbor which compels us to follow Jesus' example of entering other people's worlds as we dialogue with others about central issues in theology.

Second, the pluralist assertion that evangelism is a form of oppression and manipulation needs to be carefully considered. Richard Middleton has noted that the dialectic of "oppression and liberation" which the pluralists use as an argument against evangelism can easily be transposed into the dialectic of "powerlessness and empowerment." Christians assert that the gospel they give witness to is a narrative of liberation and not of oppression.

Furthermore, the gospel actually undermines all forms of ethnocentrism, racism, and classism as it stands with a word of both *acceptance* and *rebuke* to all people and cultures including Christians and the Church. This is the significance of McConnell's discussion on "overcoming bias" in the indigenizing process. As Lesslie Newbigin pointed out so powerfully, we do not meet the religious "other" at the height of our spiritual or moral achievements, but at the point of our deepest selves, the place of true commonness and solidarity - under the cross. It is under the cross that every person is revealed to be a precious bearer of God's image and yet a rebellious sinner in need of grace. McConnell's framework is a significant step towards a missional form of IFD that fosters humility alongside of boldness. (End)



Interfaith Praxis

An Historic Moment in Muslim-Christian Dialogue

— Dr. Martin Accad

Photograph by Matthew Krabill

Reflections on “A Common Word”

Perhaps one of the most exciting developments from the perspective of Christian-Muslim relations in contemporary history is the so-called “Common Word” initiative launched recently by The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute in Amman, Jordan. On October 13th, 2007, on the initiative of Prince Ghazi b. Muhammad, 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals from diverse Islamic schools and denominations were the signatories of a document entitled “A Common Word between Us and You”, inviting Christian leaders and people everywhere to positive engagement, on the basis of what they saw as the common ground between the two religions: Jesus’ teaching about loving God and loving neighbor. Making the initiative even more relevant for us Evangelicals, the Yale Center for Faith and Culture at Yale University, under the leadership of two prominent Evangelical and mission-minded scholars, initiated a response to the Muslim invitation, for which they managed to get endorsement by over 300 Christian scholars and leaders from across the world.

It may not be immediately obvious to an outsider, but the particularity of these recent developments is that they have suddenly propelled dialogue with Islam to a central position in the Evangelical agenda. Interestingly, it does seem that both sides were to a great extent taken by surprise by this unexpected turn of events. The Muslim initiative was by no means launched primarily with Evangelicals in mind. The “recipients” section, after listing by name numerous top Christian leaders of most denominations, ends with: “And Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere....” And indeed it has received responses from numerous Christian leaders, scholars and organizations. Neither do I think that the initiators of the Yale Response ever expected their letter to be met with such a welcome reception by the Muslim initiators of the Common Word letter. I believe it is fair to say that, in many ways, western Evangelicals and Muslims came

to a quasi-discovery of each other through this initiative and exchange, at least at the institutional level if not at the level of a good number of individuals. In fact, I want to go so far as to call this moment a *kairos* moment, an appointed time of God.

The other side of the story, however, is that this mutual discovery has also managed to split the Evangelical community into two camps. The first camp is made of those who, in their evangelistic methods, have traditionally adopted a more exclusivist and polemical approach to other religions, including in their approach to Islam. Many in that group have expressed their dismay and disbelief that Evangelicals should actually be willing to engage in dialogue with Muslims. The other is the more “inclusivist” camp, the several hundred represented by the signatories of the Yale Response. These represent the position that the Gospel proclamation needs to be primarily a positive proclamation, and therefore that it is not in conflict with the principles of dialogue. Perhaps one of the most striking elements is that on both sides of this deepening divide, there are some top caliber theologians and highly seasoned missionaries. Moreover, neither side is willing to give up evangelism and mission, and all recognize and have pointed out that Islam’s persecution of Muslim converts to Christianity under the rubric of the infamous “apostasy law” is unacceptable and needs to be addressed.

A few lines back I called the moment of encounter between Evangelical Christians and Muslims around the *Common Word* exchange a *kairos* moment. As any appointed time of God, it does not in any way violate human liberty to respond or not to respond, and therefore even such exceptional opportunities can altogether be missed by God’s people. It is this very real, even frightening, possibility that makes McConnell’s paper as welcome as the *Yale Response* itself. At this point in the history of this interfaith exchange, if we want to continue to make history by being responsive to God’s *kairos*, we are going to need a growing number of theologians, missiologists and creative practitioners of God’s ministries to continue to engage and follow up on what was begun two years ago in a way that is faithful to the spirit of Christ found in the Gospels. (End)

A Note from Dr. Richard J. Mouw

The Importance of Dialoguing About Interfaith Dialogue

In the past several years many of us at Fuller Seminary have been pushing the edges of the standard Evangelical attitudes regarding interfaith relations. This has been exciting. But it is also important that we talk among ourselves about how we understand what we are doing when we reach out in friendship to persons of other faiths in the hope of building new bridges of understanding. We cannot in any way compromise the clear biblical teaching that Jesus is the heaven-sent Savior who alone is the Way to eternal life. Nor can we abandon or water down the evangelistic mandate that Jesus has given His followers. Yet we must resist simply *speaking at* persons of other religions and refusing to learn from them. As we seek out ways of holding evangelism and dialogue together, of relating to others with conviction and civility, it is important that we talk amongst ourselves about how we go about this important task of bearing witness to Jesus in our words and actions.

Vision Statement

This journal seeks to create space for Evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices and theology surrounding interfaith work, in faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus and His mission for His Church.

Aims of this Journal

In light of our commitment to the authority of Scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ, this journal seeks to:

- Ground interfaith dialogue in the *missio dei*.
- Create space for pioneering Evangelical approaches to interfaith dialogue drawing on a robust biblical, theological, missiological and psychological foundation.
- Wrestle together publicly and as a community on the challenges, opportunities and dangers of engaging in interfaith dialogue.
- Begin to heal the divisions within Evangelicalism between "mission" and "dialogue" by articulating the missiological guidelines for dialogue.
- Foster discussion on interfaith issues between faculty, students and practitioners from Evangelical traditions from across the globe.

Upcoming: Spring 2010 Issue



Featured Article: "Theologies of Religions: A Position Paper for Edinburgh 2010," by Dr. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. In this paper, Dr. Kärkkäinen offers an overview of various Christian "Theology of Religions" and lays out his own trinitarian approach to a theology of religions.

An Historic Meeting: In anticipation of the centennial meeting of Edinburgh 2010, we will review the history and significance of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference, as well as key issues related to interfaith dialogue then and now.

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