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ACADEME

Reports from seminary classrooms, special events, and TSF chapters)

TEACHING EVANGELISM AT PERKINS: A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID WATSON by Mark Lau Branson

Professor David Watson, an Associate Editor for TSF Bulletin, is an Assistant Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology (a United Methodist Seminary in Dallas). Having visited his classes and benefited from many conversations, I intend here to present some of the content and methods of his teaching. Creative, scholarly, and personable, Watson should be an excellent resource person as Christians of various persuasions seek to proclaim the Good News.

Prophetic and Personal Evangelism

Let's begin with Watson's definition of evangelism: "discerning, defining, and interpreting the gospel for communication to as many as possible, as often as possible, and in as many ways as possible." This differs from the church growth school. Watson believes that selecting an audience according to immediate responsiveness creates a situation in which "results start becoming the criteria." In comparing two evangelical authors, Watson says, "it's a very subtle difference, but Peter Wagner will affirm that we should evangelize so that people *shall* respond, John Stott will say that we should evangelize so that people *may* respond."

Personal evangelism concerns an individual sharing out of one's own experience and convictions. *Prophetic* evangelism is an announcement about the Kingdom of God, the activity of God, in our world. On the prophetic mode,

Suppose we would take the analogy of

journalism. When people pick up a newspaper, they want to see the news. They also want the right to leave the newspaper on the doormat if they wish. But if they do open it up, they want to see the news. They don't want to hear what the editor's grandmother did last week. They don't want to hear about the party in the print shop. Nor do they want to hear how well the printing press is running these days. Which, as an analogy, is exactly what the church puts out. For example, *Sojourners* and the *National Catholic Reporter* do prophetic evangelism. It says, "Those of us who belong to Christ have been given privileged knowledge. We don't expect others necessarily to agree with this. But we are under divine command to make sure they hear it." Ultimately, I believe it is the local congregation that needs to do this. The local congregations have what I call the hermeneutic of the people. In other words, the gospel must not only be interpreted through Scripture, tradition and reason. Ultimately, we have to do what Christ did, and what Wesley followed, throw it out toward many people and see what happens.

These are eschatological announcements. These are signs of the new age. We expect these signs. These signs must be interpreted according to the message of Jesus Christ. Watson cites Jesus' Nazareth sermon (Luke 4:18ff) as a New Testament example. Alfred Krass' *Five Lanterns at Sundown* (Eerdmans) is the best recent statement of this type of evangelism. Watson gave some examples:

While I was doing graduate work, I was pastoring a small church in a rural town — a very genteel town, very picturesque. For lots of reasons, some of which were my own initiative, we found ourselves in the throes of planning the first fully integrated Easter sunrise service in the town's history. I went to my church and asked, "Can we have it in our church?" All sorts of reasons would be given concerning why it should not be in the church. The way that I approached this in the church was not to say, "Ethically this is the thing we should do." I did not say, "You'll be a racist if you don't." What I said was, "The ministers of your town have prayerfully felt the call of God to worship together this Easter. Never mind next Easter or last Easter — *this* Easter. This we feel is a message that these churches need to give to the town. Now if you prayerfully feel we should not, you have three months to tell us. But you must do so prayerfully as we have done prayerfully." They didn't have any objections.

Here is another example: We were having a study group on evangelism. Halfway through a session, someone said, "Look, we have a thousand dollars in our church fund for a new

carpet. How can we hold this money when there are people starving?" Others also saw the inconsistency with the gospel. "Let's start a new fund for the poor. When we reach the same amount we will buy a new carpet." But in an open church meeting they agreed to do the opposite. "Let's give away our carpet fund and then start a new fund for the carpet." That's what they did. Now, evangelistically they made certain this word got out through the conference newspaper. In announcing this, the Journalist wrote, "If every church in this conference had proportionately done the same, an immediate gift of five and one-half million dollars would have gone to feed the poor." In other words, what might have just been a generous gesture, becomes a means of proclaiming the New Age of Jesus Christ.

Just suppose every church, once a week, was given this task. Find out somewhere, something that God has done in this past week, and make sure everyone in the city hears about it. Now if they did that once a week, obviously you would have some trite things. I have had comments like "O, Lord, help me find a parking space." But once the congregation starts to wrestle, the Spirit starts to move. You get away from people finding parking spaces to more weighty issues. For example, young executives need to hear today that the rat-race they are involved in is not going to be an eternal criteria of existence. The new age of Jesus Christ is a reality — it's just that we have not seen it yet. Christ is still waiting to inherit his Kingdom. We're the ones who know that.

Watson speaks of six essentials for one calling others to personal commitment:

One: God is God. Two: humans are estranged from God. Three: God in Christ has offered forgiveness and reconciliation. Four: in his resurrection, Christ has begun a new age. Five: that new age will come to completion in the Kingdom. Six: therefore one should repent and turn back to God.

We must also be doing personal evangelism. The personal is to call another to the commitment to Jesus Christ.

Watson uses Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and Cullman's *Christ and Time* in formulating this approach. Most frequently, he says, the essential teachings about the New Age and the Kingdom are omitted.

Of course, we are teaching something that is incomplete. The Kingdom is not yet in its fullness. That was Christ's parting word to us. Also, it is self-evident in history. How do you present the gospel of really good news to a survivor of Auschwitz? However you ra-

tionalize Auschwitz, you need to ask, "Where was God?" We have to regard our gospel as that which promises the completion of that which is not yet. If we were presenting something complete, how would we explain Auschwitz and the entire theodicy problem? In other words, the urgency of our message is in one sense that, although our atonement was accomplished for us at Calvary, the fact is that this is not yet fulfilled, and it is a persistent source of suffering to our God. The urgency and the expectancy are necessary for evangelism. Of course evangelism does not have the entire depth of the gospel. It is to be the cutting edge, the headlines. Some essentials need to be in the headlines. And that takes a skilled evangelist.

Classes, Wesley Style

The approaches of John Wesley are adapted by Watson for the classroom.

The class meeting had a hymn and a prayer and a Bible reading. In the seminary classroom, I had sharing for a different reason. This was to show how people could talk about their belief and their own convictions, in the personal form of evangelism. At the beginning of the process, the people who were really ready to do this volunteered. What happened later was very interesting. People who would never have thought of doing this began to share. We had one very moving testimony from a woman student who got up and said, "I came to know Christ when I finally discovered that the Scriptures also applied to me. My daughter turned to me in church and said, 'Mother, does that mean us?'" This was a student who had been very much of an activist. This personal conviction deepened her faith.

During my visit, the third person to share during class said, "I don't believe this! I figured most of you had testimonies, but I never thought I'd get to hear them!" The approach is appreciated by students from different cultures, which is important for Watson because Perkins not only has a significant number of Blacks and Hispanics, but also several international students.

This approach to evangelism has Wesleyan theology as a basis.

The Wesleyan concept of grace, prevenient grace, is also what he calls "conscience." In other words, prevenient grace is not just the way that vites us. Prevenient grace gives us the freedom to respond in either way. Now teachings about total depravity and irresistible grace imply that we do not ultimately have a choice. Wesley said that by prevenient grace we are given that choice. But, the choice is not that we *will* do those things pleasing in God's sight. The choice is *whether or not we will resist* the grace of God that enables us to do things that are pleas-

ing in his sight. In other words, the dynamic is not that we achieve our goodness. The dynamic is that we are given the freedom to resist God's grace to make us pleasing in His sight. This means that the class meeting has a catechetical format. It was catechetical precisely on the ground that they were together to learn obedience. The format is precisely picked up by Alcoholics Anonymous, and Overeaters Anonymous. In other words, people who know what they are up against in themselves can help each other to do what they know they should do.

These groups are not primarily sharing groups or discussion groups, but accountability groups.

Wesley started out by dividing the societies into bands like the Moravians did. The Moravians used the bands for mutual confession. The leader of the band was picked by the band and often changed. The classes were not groups that were formed and then given a leader. The classes were groups that were assigned to leaders who were already picked. The class leader was the crucial figure. In each meeting, the format was that each class leader would ask each person in turn, "How has it been with you?" The preamble was the only requirement, and that was that we agreed to "flee from the wrath to come." But, if you have that desire, you would evidence that in the way that you live. You will refrain from the evil, you will do as much good as you can, and you will affirm and avail yourself in service of God.

At Perkins, the groups draw up a short covenant. In the sharing, they simply talk about how they have failed in relationship to that covenant. Many students on the campus are part of the covenant groups. Also, students in my classes are part of the covenant groups during the term. I would present a suggested basic covenant, based on Wesley's "instituted means of grace." These include daily prayer, daily Bible study, regular worship, frequent sacraments, regular fellowship, fasting. Often the one on fasting was translated into some other concept about how one cares physically for one's body. Some groups will add items like study time or a covenant for helping each other. It cannot get too long because you have to get around to everyone with every clause during the meeting. The group may decide to hit only part of the clauses in a particular week. The size of the groups can reach as high as seven, but once they reach eight they are divided into groups of four. Especially as a group becomes more accustomed to working together, there is much more freedom to focus attention on those areas which are most beneficial. If one par-

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ticular difficulty arises with a member, and initial conversation indicates that a need is deeper than can be handled at a catechetical setting, the leader will then offer the opportunity for a couple of them to discuss the concern more completely after the meeting. The covenant meeting is an accountability time, not a sharing and support group. A sharing group cannot operate well without some basic form of covenant. The level in our group never goes into an enquiring one. Simple accountability is all that is part of the covenant. We have very few withdraw. The only need is that such withdrawals be very clearly communicated.

The role of the class meeting was primarily the maintenance of a basic commitment.

The purpose of the class meeting was not to help you grow, it was to help you hang on. There is a difference. The idea of human growth, coming out of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, misses another very important dynamic question. That is, alongside the doctrine of sanctification he continues to maintain a very specific doctrine of justification. You do not grow in grace unless you are maintaining that minute-by-minute relationship with God through your justified grace. If you are maintaining that relationship you will grow.

Evangelism and World Mission

Watson has been actively integrating this theology and practice of evangelism to concerns within and beyond his own Anglo culture.

The people that I find that I can communicate in the most easy and friendly way are in fact international students. They are already talking about a "fourth world theology." "We are dissatisfied with what liberation has come up with because justification is omitted. We are dissatisfied with what the West has come up with. Clearly the Eastern Bloc is out of the question. Why don't we just make a fresh start." The message I heard both from Pattaya and Melbourne, the dichotomy between the personal and the social, is a Western squabble that goes back to the Reformation. "Before you people come and lay this agenda on us again, why don't you do some homework?"

So, in early April (6-9) Perkins is hosting a conference on "Evangelism and Social Ethics." The list of familiar names include Richard Mouw, Don Shriver, Nancy Hardesty, Albert Outler and Paul Ramsey. Those desiring further information can write to Professor David Watson, Perkins School of Theology, SMU, Dallas, TX 75275.

BREAD FOR THE WORLD

BFW is seeking qualified volunteers for both its Intern Program and Summer Organizing Project. The Intern Program places volunteers in the New York and Washington, D.C. offices for varying lengths of time and with a variety of responsibilities. The Summer Organizing Project is a ten-week internship which includes basic training in organizing skills and eight weeks of organizing within a specific geographical region. For more information on either program, contact Sharon Pauling, Bread for the World, 32 Union Square East, New York, NY 10003.

INQUIRY

(Questions, proposals, discussions, and research reports on theological and biblical issues)

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY: TOWARDS AN EVALUATION OF THE ROGERS AND MCKIM PROPOSAL

By John D. Woodbridge, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. A review article on a review article by Mark Lau Branson.

In an article appearing this spring in The Trinity Journal, published by Trinity Theological Divinity School, professor John Woodbridge critiques The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim (Harper and Row, 1980). (TSF Bulletin published reviews by Gerald Sheppard and Robert Johnston in November, 1980). This report will survey that review article (same 80 pages including notes) and provide excerpts of Woodbridge's work. In our April issue, Donald McKim will reply to the entire article.

TSF members will no doubt gain understanding concerning the intertwined doctrinal issues of inspiration, revelation, and biblical authority. Equally important for the student are the lessons available here concerning historical methodology. As researchers and writers, students can benefit from these exchanges on the study of history. Commentary and examples in the book and in these articles will provide a list of methodological pointers which can help readers acquire guidelines and procedures for writing about historical theology.

Evangelical scholars value "the historical position of the church" and therefore they study scholars throughout church history in order to more responsibly discern contemporary doctrinal formulations. As Woodbridge states,

they have struggled with the problem of determining whether or not a development in doctrine is a healthy clarification of the biblical data or a dangerous departure from evangelical orthodoxy. If a doctrine has a long history of acceptance by their church, or by "the church," Protestants along with Roman Catholics generally give it serious consideration.

In contrast to some modern day evangelical scholars, Rogers and McKim challenge the assumption that the contemporary concept of "inerrancy" has been the traditional position of the church. They seek in this volume to substantiate the view that the infallibility of Scripture has traditionally been and should be seen in regard to faith and practice but not as infalli-

ble (as measured by modern standards) when passages touch on geography, history, or science. Woodbridge commends Rogers and McKim for: (1) their valuing of historical research an important area of research too often overlooked, and their willingness to receive criticism so that their contribution serves as an opening presentation which will encourage further work.

Then Woodbridge lists nine methodological problems: (1) "The Overly Generous Title of the Volume." Since they are dealing only with a particular strand of Reformed thought, the title should not convey that they are writing about a general broad Christian theme of inspiration. (2) "The Apologetic Caution of the Study." Woodbridge would prefer that historians have "a modicum of objectivity," and he believes Rogers and McKim are overwhelmed by their agenda of proving their case. (3) "The Arbitrary Selection of Data." In selecting those sources chosen as representative of church tradition, Rogers and McKim fail to provide methodological reasoning for the choices, and ignore contrary evidences. (4) "The Doubtful Documentation." Woodbridge contends that Rogers and McKim too often relied on secondary sources and misinterpreted both secondary and primary materials. (5) "The Limiting Optic of the Authors' Concerns." Philosophical and theological concerns relating to "biblical authority" are only included when incidentally discussed as the narrower concepts of inerrancy and infallibility are discussed. (6) "The Propensity for Facile Labeling." An outdated historical method of grouping individuals without regard to contexts and centuries leads Rogers and McKim to inaccurately use the label "scholastic." (7) "The Inappropriate 'Historical Disjunctions'." Logical disjunctions help one sort out contradictory propositions. Woodbridge writes that Rogers and McKim relied too frequently on false historical disjunctions:

A partial listing of the authors' more important "historical disjunctions" would include these: . . . because a thinker speaks of God accommodating himself to us in the words of Scripture, it is assumed that he or she does not believe in complete biblical infallibility; . . . because a thinker engages in the critical study of biblical texts, it is assumed that he or she does not uphold complete biblical infallibility; because a thinker stresses the fact that the authority of the Scriptures is made known to an individual through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, it is assumed that he or she does not also believe in complete biblical infallibility.

(8) "The Dated Models of Conceptualization." Citing "recent developments" in the study of history (social history of ideas, history of peoples, history of the book trade), Woodbridge criticizes the tendency to see a religious leader (e.g., Luther) as representative for those who follow (e.g., Lutherans). (9) "The Bibliographical Insensitivity." Woodbridge cites omissions in studied literature which cause the work to be unbalanced.

Next, Woodbridge moves through the historical sequence to offer corrections to the Rogers/McKim interpretations. I will discuss seven of those sections.

(A) **The Patristic Period.** In the footnote, Woodbridge refers to Professor Bromley's comment, "If the Fathers did not give any particular emphasis to the term 'inerrancy,' they undoubtedly expressed the content denoted by the word." Though differences existed during this formative period, Woodbridge states that "common traits of agreement did apparently exist among many Christians concerning biblical infallibility." He goes on to cite Professor Bruce Vawter: "It would be pointless to call into question that biblical inerrancy in a rather absolut