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Rounding Out Bebbington's Evangelical Quadrilateral: An Envisioned Future for Theological Studies at McMaster Divinity College[1]

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First and foremost, I want to give my thanks and appreciation to Chairman David Huctwith, President Stanley Porter, and Vice President Academic James Dvorak for their representing of McMaster Divinity College in introducing me and installing me to the Howard and Shirley Bentall Chair in Evangelical Thought and to the position of Assistant Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology. To Wendy Porter, the worship team, and to all who have been involved in or in arranging for this service, I want to thank you also for your kindness, thoughtfulness, and efforts in helping to make this day special. To my esteemed faculty colleagues and the wonderful staff here at the College, I thank you for your continuing encouragement and support and I look forward to the many good times we for sure will share together. Closer to home, I am grateful for the many years and the many countless ways that my wife Tracy has supported and encouraged me in the various stages of our life, especially with our two sons, Ethan and Micah. My mother is also watching online, so I just want to say hello to her for all the ways she has supported me and my family behind the scenes. Finally, I trust that Howard and Shirley Bentall are smiling along with my father in heaven at the event of this occasion. I want to thank the Bentalls for their

1. Dr. Clement Y. Wen was inaugurated into the Howard and Shirley Bentall Chair in Evangelical Thought and to the position of Assistant Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at McMaster Divinity College on February 11, 2025. This article reproduces his inaugural address.

foresight and generosity so many years ago in endowing this Chair position that I have somehow by God's grace stepped into. I especially want to let the Bentalls know that I promise I will endeavour to give my all through this position to bring honour to their names in a way that brings honour to McMaster Divinity College, and ultimately, in a way that brings honour and glory to the One and Only True and Living God, who we are blessed to know, love, and serve, because of the name of Jesus.

"The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you . . . The greatest thing in all my life is loving you . . . The greatest thing in all my life is serving you."[2] One of my former theology teachers, Stanley Grenz, used to open his introductory systematic theology courses by quoting these lyrics and talking about how the songwriter Mark Pendergrass does not allow us to stop only at knowing God or at loving God (even though a lot of us would maybe want to stop there). Rather, the songwriter goes on by way of a third verse to unite our head and our heart with our hands, exhorting us also to serve God. Those who are familiar with my theological journey know that Grenz's overall influence upon me is hard to quantify. Yet this particular aspect of Grenz's formative influence on me showed itself shortly after I became a teacher of theology myself. When it came to my own week one lectures for introductory courses in systematic theology at my previous institution,[3] I consciously followed after Grenz's footsteps by quoting Pendergrass's song, even having my classes sing the song together for the purpose of setting a worshipful tone for the semester (in the spirit of what another former teacher of mine, J. I. Packer, instilled in me—the idea that "theology is for doxology").

At McMaster Divinity College, our educational philosophy of "knowing," "being," and "doing" maps well with Pendergrass's emphases. As my task today is to give a vision for the future of

2. Pendergrass, "Greatest Thing."

3. I am truly grateful for the honour and privilege of being able to be part of the China Evangelical Seminary faculty and community in Taiwan (from 2019 to 2024).

theological studies here, I want you all to know that I do not see this transformational paradigm of knowing, being, and doing as simply a cute cliché or catchy slogan. Rather, perhaps because of Grenz's influence by way of Pendergrass's song, the paradigm of knowing, being, and doing is a deeply ingrained conviction and affinity, and everything else that I am going to say today is meant to be framed by this three-fold transformational mindset. In other words, everything I will be saying today is meant to be in full continuity with what McMaster Divinity College's institutional educational philosophy is all about.

As the Howard and Shirley Bentall Chair in Evangelical Thought, everything I am about to say is also meant to push Evangelical theology forward in constructive—and when needed—critical directions that will edify the global church and its localized expressions as we look forward to this next phase of the twenty-first century. After all, as I give this speech today, we are exactly at the quarter-century mark and these next twenty-five years of Evangelical thought will set the tone for how the second half of the twenty-first century will unfold. Towards that end, my speech today is entitled: "Rounding Out Bebbington's Evangelical Quadrilateral."

Amidst the various attempts that have been made over the years to help interpret and give definition to the historical phenomenon of Evangelicalism—from its beginnings on British and American soil in the eighteenth century to its now global expression here in the twenty-first—the Evangelical Quadrilateral as put forward by the British historian David Bebbington (b. 1949) has become sort of the "go-to standard" for those looking for a quick, short-hand summary of the movement's characteristic distinctives. Bebbington first described it in his 1989 book, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*:

> There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress

> on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.[4]

The passage just quoted has been cited more times than can be counted. In the process, Bebbington's Quadrilateral has also provoked rigorous debate and discussion. What is important to notice about most of the conversation, however, is that the main players have mostly been historians of Evangelicalism who are concerned about whether the description that Bebbington offers is accurate and complete *as historical description.* Thus, as historical description, should there be five or six points instead of only four? As historical description, is Bebbington sure that the category of conversionism tells the right story?

My favourite critique, however, is the one where the American Evangelical historian Mark Noll disagrees with Bebbington's "realist" view of Evangelicalism ("realist" in the sense of believing that Evangelicalism is actually a "real thing" within history—that Evangelicalism is a "real thing" with a "real essence" which can be objectively observed, quantified, and described). Instead of being a realist, Noll self-identifies as a "nominalist" who views the word Evangelicalism as a convenient label that has been applied to a series of historical phenomena which seem similar enough to be arbitrarily grouped together as a historical movement. Noll thus sees the word "Evangelicalism" as an adjective rather than as a noun.[5]

Bebbington responded to Noll with the following two comments. First, Bebbington sees Noll's critique as being based upon a Platonic notion of realism in the sense of something's essence having correspondence to an ideal or form that has been definitively created and thereby defined by God in heaven. On this, Bebbington agrees with Noll that Evangelicalism should not be interpreted Platonically. In place of a Platonic notion of realism, Bebbington self-identifies with realism in the more Aristotelian sense—that a thing's essence is encapsulated in the historical phenomenon itself rather than being an abstract ideal

4. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2–3 (italics original).
5. Noll, "Noun or Adjective?"

which historical phenomena imperfectly participate as mere shadows.[6]

Along such lines, the second comment Bebbington makes is that, due to Evangelicalism's Aristotelian realism,

> Evangelicalism is a term for something that has existed in time and space. *It is a phenomenon to be investigated. So, the evangelical quadrilateral is a description of what has been, not a definition of what must be. The task of specifying what it must be can safely be left to theologians*.[7]

Bebbington's latter comment here serves as my cue. I come not as a historian seeking to describe what has been. Strictly speaking, that job belongs to people like Bebbington, Noll, and at McMaster Divinity College, our own Gordon Heath. I come instead as a *theologian* engaged in "the task of specifying what [Evangelicalism] must be." If we can assume that Bebbington's Evangelical Quadrilateral has faithfully described what Evangelical theology has historically been from the eighteenth century to now, my job moving forward is to show—from a theological perspective that is prescriptive rather than merely descriptive—how this Quadrilateral ought to be "rounded out," in the sense of being made "more complete," so that Evangelical expressions of Christian faith can be healthier, more full, more abundant, and more thoroughly faithful to the *evangelion* of Jesus Christ. The roundness of circles, after all, does a better job of signifying "completeness" than do quadrilaterals. If I attempt to illustrate my conceptions one day, maybe I would draw overlapping circles. In any case, in what follows, I am going to briefly be proposing five moves towards a rounded-out and thereby renewed vision for Evangelical theology.

Before I get to that, a couple more preliminary comments are in order. First, from a certain perspective, what I am doing here is incredibly unfair because Bebbington is writing as a historian, and historians are required to write about the externalities of phenomena. As a theologian, however, I am more interested in the

6. Bebbington, "Evangelical Quadrilateral," 93–94.
7. Bebbington, "Evangelical Quadrilateral," 94 (emphasis mine).

internalities that get expressed by such phenomena. Nevertheless, I believe that historical description sometimes can—and in this case—*has* become its own self-fulfilling prophecy when it comes to theology. That all said, if Bebbington ever comes across my speech today, I trust that he will understand my quandary with this and that he will be flattered by the fact that my starting point for theological reflection was his historical description. And remember, as we saw above, Bebbington himself was the one who gave permission to theologians like me to do this type of critically constructive theological work.[8]

Second, I know Bebbington's order of things from his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* book that I earlier cited was conversionism, activism, biblicism, and then crucicentrism.[9] A more logical progression, if we were to sequence these points theologically, however, would be to go from biblicism, to crucicentrism, to conversionism, and then to activism. This more logical sequence is the order that I will be working with below. I will additionally work with a fifth historical observation—first made by George Marsden before being reiterated by John Stackhouse—that Evangelicals have normally cooperated with an attitude of *transdenominationalism* to achieve Evangelical goals like conversionism through the activism of foreign missions and evangelism or through transdenominational Christian colleges and seminaries aimed at educating and equipping believers for the sake of such goals.[10] Alas, in adding this fifth point to the agenda, I will be working here to round out a pentagon instead of a quadrilateral, which is why I am proposing five moves instead of only four.

With these preliminary comments finally all mentioned, I begin now with the task of rounding out biblicism before moving on to crucicentrism, conversionism together with activism, and finally, transdenominationalism.

8. Bebbington, "Evangelical Quadrilateral," 94.

9. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2–3.

10. Marsden, "Introduction"; Stackhouse, "Evangelical Theology," 41–43, 56–59; Stackhouse, "Generic Evangelicalism," 121.

The first move is to round out biblicism. The reason for why biblicism needs to be made more complete is not because the Bible is no longer to be seen as the primary source for theology nor is it because the Bible is no longer to be seen as the "norming norm."[11] As a good and faithful Evangelical theologian, I want to make clear my unwavering conviction that the Bible does not simply contain God's word or record God's word. It does not merely witness to God's word. The Bible was not only God's word in the past. Rather, the Bible *is* God's word (full stop!). Yet Bebbington's historical description of Evangelicals as holding to "a particular regard for the Bible"—if converted to be a theological and not just historical statement—does not give us very much detail or instruction about how the Bible as God's word should both function and be handled.[12] Many examples within Evangelicalism's history thus abound of legalism and fundamentalism, or overly-literal "plain readings" of Scripture that are without proper respect for literary context and genre. Naïve proof-texting has been used to construct entire systematic programs for theology or even a monolithically "correct" "Christian" view of every issue that could be debated within contemporary (American) politics. This same kind of naïveté has often also led to things like "biblical" prescriptions for cooking, or losing weight, or alternative medicinal treatments, or economics and personal finance, or success and prosperity in the different dimensions of our lives, or of our married lives, or of our family lives, etc. (the list goes on and on).[13]

Alister McGrath's observation that the Protestant Reformers' "dangerous idea" that "individuals could interpret the Bible for themselves"[14] has led to the somewhat precarious situation of what the University of Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith has pejoratively labelled as a "pervasive interpretive pluralism."[15] Yet this does not mean that we should get rid of this

11. On the phrase "norming norm," see Dayton, "Use of Scripture," 135; Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 91.
12. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2–3.
13. See Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*, 3–54.
14. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, back cover.
15. Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*, 3–54.

"dangerous idea" through a return to something like the Roman Catholic magisterium. At the same time, what is needed for Evangelical theology if Evangelical theology is to be its best version of itself is not *simply* biblicism. What has always been needed is for our biblicism to be sur-"rounded" by a comprehensive method for theology characterized by *retrieval* and *correlation* in their most proper full-orbed senses.

Retrieval in the sense that I am using the term has to do with faithfully receiving and interpreting not only Scripture but also tradition and any other legitimate sources for theology given us by God through things like general revelation. I, of course, am not the first to say this, but contrary to common misconceptions, the Protestant notion of *sola scriptura* did not mean that Scripture was to be seen as the only legitimate source for theology so that something like the church's many centuries of storied tradition should be completely ignored and discarded. Rather, *sola scriptura* for the Reformers meant that "Scripture alone" was the only infallible authority that all theological statements and all other sources for theology must ultimately be measured by.[16] Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the other Protestant Reformers respected the confessions, creeds, and councils of the early church (especially the Nicene and Chalcedonian traditions). They also often quoted the early church fathers and, in fact, were trying to reform the whole of the church by having the church return not only to Scripture but also to the apostolic faith as embodied by the early church fathers (who, same as all other tradition or potential sources for theology, were to be measured by Scripture).

If retrieval has much to do with faithfully receiving and interpreting Scripture, tradition, and other legitimate sources for theology, then correlation has to do with the task of answering the

16. Because of this, I personally prefer the terms *suprema scriptura* or *prima scriptura* (as employed by the Anglicans, Methodists, and Pentecostals) because I think these terms more clearly carry the idea that *sola scriptura* was originally meant to convey—that Scripture is *supreme* or *primary* and that all other sources are *secondary* in a subordinate way.

questions and concerns of our contemporary situation and our particular contexts in ways that allow for the theological and ethical implications of our Christian faith to find meaningful and impactful expression. Sadly, in much of contemporary theology today, the method of retrieval has often been pitted against the method of correlation in ways that the two are seen as opposites which are unable to co-exist. This is an odd development because—if you think about it—without engaging in the task of retrieval, we really have nothing to correlate. For this reason, I see retrieval as the first task of theology and correlation as retrieval's inevitable aim. *Retrieval is for the sake of correlation* to our lives, to our ministries, to our globalized and localized cultures and ecclesial contexts, and to our contemporary social questions and ethical issues. Correlation connects what we have retrieved to our actual lived lives in a way that the mere mention of biblicism might not fully get across.

My guides for this are my former teachers, Robert E. Webber (1933–2007) and Stanley J. Grenz (1950–2005). Just over twenty-five years ago, Webber published *Ancient-Future Faith* (1999) while Grenz published *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (1993) over thirty years ago. Both books were seeking to "rethink" and "revision" Evangelicalism for a postmodern world. As pioneers of this effort, Webber and especially Grenz were unfairly criticized and profoundly misunderstood by their peers.[17] Our circumstances today are a bit different than the times in which Webber and Grenz were writing, but I look to my former teachers as acclaimed examples of what retrieval and correlation can look like when done well. Whereas Webber convincingly sought to look back to the ancient church as the way forward for Evangelicalism's future—a move of retrieval that "correlates well" with our school's up-and-coming Centre for Patristics and Early Christianity—Grenz showed himself to be a master synthesizer of the best that modern theology had to offer for renewing Evangelical theology in a world that, as far as he could tell, was quickly changing from a modern to a postmodern cultural situa-

17. See, for example, Erickson et al., eds. *Reclaiming the Center*, whose title was a play on Grenz's book *Renewing the Center*.

tion.[18] What I envision here at McMaster Divinity College is that our theological studies department will do well with stretching across the entire continuum of this historical spectrum that Webber and Grenz represented so that the traditional Evangelical emphasis upon biblicism will be rounded out towards a comprehensive theological method that faithfully features both retrieval and correlation in their richest and most authentic expressions.

The second move that needs to be made is to round out Evangelical theology when it comes to our traditional emphasis upon crucicentrism. If in my first point, I credited Webber and Grenz for their influence on me, here I credit my studies of the seventh-century father of Byzantine theology, Maximus the Confessor (580–662), and the twentieth-century German Protestant Lutheran theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014). [19] Though their respective Christologies were separated by thirteen centuries and were very different in tenor, Maximus's more cosmic rather than merely anthropological emphasis together with Pannenberg's broader perspective regarding Christ's entire incarnate existence that included not only the event of his birth but also his life and earthly ministry, cross, resurrection, ascension, session, and future return—*all of these taking place as the incarnate Son who has come in the flesh*—helped me realize that Evangelicalism's more focused emphasis solely upon the cross due to the "crucial" soteriological role that the cross plays when it comes to the atonement and forgiveness of our sins meant that

18. See Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*; Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*.

19. Maximus is described as the "Father of Byzantine Theology" in Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 37. I thank Ross Hastings and Julie Canlis for supervising my master's thesis about Maximus and John Calvin at Regent College (see Wen, "Monergistic Theme"). An article about Maximus that found its beginnings in the research of that thesis is Wen, "Maximus the Confessor." As for my initial research on Pannenberg and world Christianity, I thank David Fergusson for supervising my doctoral dissertation at the University of Edinburgh, which was later published as a monograph (see Wen, *'Open-Ended Distinctiveness'*).

the typical Evangelical version of Christology tended towards an unfortunate reductionism.

This is not in any way to say that we need to stop focusing on or talking about the cross's atoning efficacy and its relationship to the forgiveness of sins for the salvation of the world. Again, what I am proposing is a "rounding out" of Evangelicalism in the sense of making our theology "more complete." Rather than diminishing the meaning and gospel significance of the cross, I seek instead to raise the bar when it comes to more thoroughly understanding and drawing out the inherent meaning and significance of things like Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection—two examples that are maybe more salient to us since many of us within Evangelicalism rarely think of Christ's pre-incarnate existence or his Ascension or his current session at the right hand of the Father or even of his coming again.[20] The inherent meaning and significance of all these other phases also of course need to be retrieved, but within the confines of our present purposes, the obvious examples of Incarnation and Resurrection should suffice in making my point.

Traditionally speaking, Evangelical theology has typically framed the event of the Incarnation as only or primarily having taken place so that Christ could go onto the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. As such, the Incarnation's own inherent meaning and significance is hijacked by an overemphasis upon the cross. Meanwhile, the Resurrection is similarly hijacked as it is often framed as simply being confirmation of the fact that the Jesus who died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins truly was the Son of God who is our Messiah—that because of the Resurrection, we specifically are able to know that the cross was effective (after all, logically speaking, a transactional understanding of the cross on its own is often enough to coherently explain why people can be saved by way of Christ's atoning work on the cross without an actual need for Christ's Resurrection). In

20. Unless, of course, we are speaking of those within Evangelicalism who are overly preoccupied with apocalyptic speculations regarding his coming again in a way that unhelpfully overshadows everything else about theology, including even crucicentrism!

saying this, I hope I have not touched any nerves. Yet I must be honest that I hear this type of "Resurrection is confirmation of the cross" message preached on Easter Sunday all too often. My suspicion is that the Evangelical imagination simply has difficulty discerning how events like the Incarnation and the Resurrection—not to mention all the other phases of Christ's life and career—have their own distinctive value and importance in ways that go beyond a myopic focus on the cross and its efficacy.

In this regard, insofar as a more complete Christology allows for a more complete expression of Christianity—for let us remember that we do not have Christianity if we do not have Christ—what I propose we recover is a rounding out of our crucicentrism towards something that is more thoroughly Christocentric. As we do that, the broadened focus beyond the cross will allow us also to broaden our focus of salvation beyond what Bebbington has called conversionism, which brings us to our third and fourth moves.

My third move is to round out the idea of conversionism, which Bebbington describes as "the belief that lives need to be changed."[21] The obvious thing we as Evangelicals typically think of here are the dramatic testimonies people give of their conversions to Christian faith—often taking place through some sort of "crisis experience" whose exact date, time, and circumstance can be cited. Bebbington also observes, though, that within the history of Evangelicalism, conversionism can also refer to gradual processes that do not always have a clear punctiliar "I once was blind but now I see" demarcation. As an aside, conversionism can sometimes also be said to allude to the so-called "conversional piety" that Evangelicals habitually engage through spiritual practices like daily "quiet times" of Scripture reading and prayer, but these aspects of things are not always thought of as much as the idea that people need some sort of conversion experience so that they can be saved.[22] Either way, this emphasis upon conversionism pairs well with the history of revivalism that

21. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2–3.
22. On the idea of "conversional piety," see Olson, *Pocket History*, 19.

has very much served to help set the trajectory for Evangelicalism's theology and practice of ministry from the movement's very beginnings.[23]

All of this feeds into Bebbington's fourth point of activism. Since its repudiation of the social gospel movement early in the twentieth century, conservative Evangelicalism has typically been focused on fulfilling the conversionist mandate of the Great Commission through the activism of missions and evangelism. There, of course, is also a more progressive side to Evangelicalism that has focused more on social activism than on conversionism. But historically speaking, the sharp divide which we have seen and experienced in our lifetimes between conversionism and social activism within Evangelicalism did not always exist. In the nineteenth century, for example, Charles Finney's (1792–1875) career as a revivalist has been described as "one of the important reasons delaying the descent of paganism upon America."[24] Finney's famous 1830 revival in Rochester, NY, is said to have left the Rochester jail empty for years afterwards.[25] Gilbert Barnes has attributed the abolition of slavery in America to Finney's preaching.[26] Oberlin College in Ohio, where Finney taught theology before becoming president, was the world's first academic institution of higher education that was co-ed, not to mention the fact that it also became a fertile training ground for many leaders of the nineteenth-century feminist, abolitionist, and temperance movements.[27] Because of Finney's insistence upon having a professor of music on the first faculty of Oberlin, the school was also the first institution of higher education in America, if not the world, to have a music department.[28] Internationally, Finney's *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* is said to have led to "powerful awakenings" in Northern Wales between

23. See Olson, *Pocket History*, 33–37.
24. Noll, "Glimpses of Finney," 24.
25. Hamilton, "Finney," 14.
26. This is one of Barnes's theses in *Anti-Slavery Impulse*, as observed by Dayton, "Engaging the World," 17.
27. Dayton, "Engaging the World," 18.
28. Hamilton, "Finney," 14.

1839 and 1840.[29] Not only did twenty-thousand people flood into the Welsh churches as new members, the area was also completely transformed socially.[30] Meanwhile, the British Parliament member William Wilberforce (1759–1833) used his spare time to think up conversational "launchers" that he could use to turn the subject of any conversation towards the evangelistic task[31]—and yet Wilberforce also believed that God had set before him "two great objects: the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners."[32]

In a sense, my issue with Bebbington's descriptors regarding conversionism and activism has to do with his inescapable focus, as a historian, on the phenomenological externalities of historical description. Yet, if we take his Quadrilateral theologically as something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, as a theologian, when I hear the words "conversionism" and "activism," my immediate reaction is that conversionism needs a more significant end or telos while activism is a word that today has evolved to normally contain ideological connotations expressed through things like protesting (which is enough to discourage me from wanting to use this word). Even if we more generously take the word activism at face value as simply a penchant for action and activity, such a word easily devalues those Evangelicals who, in terms of life stage and circumstance, personality, calling, gifting, or disposition are naturally and perhaps even necessarily more contemplative and reflective than active.

Either way, what needs to be rounded out with activism is that our focus needs to be reoriented not to action and activity itself but rather to the underlying reasons for such activity (or perhaps even inactivity!). What that means is that the move to round out activism is by a focus upon calling and vocation instead, both corporately with regard to the church as sign, foretaste, herald,

29. Cawardine, "Welsh Evangelical Community," 464–65.

30. Cawardine, "Welsh Evangelical Community," 464–65.

31. See Pura and Lewis, "On Spiritual Symmetry," 185.

32. See Pollack, *Wilberforce*, 69. This famous quote is attributed to a journal entry Wilberforce wrote on October 28, 1787, and published later in *Letter*.

and agent of the kingdom of God in the present and individually with regard to actively engaging in what God has specifically called each of us to do in our own time, place, and situation by way of our own unique personalities and giftings and burdens—William Wilberforce being a case in point.

Both the corporate and the individual dimensions of calling are expressed in the Scripture passage that was read for us earlier in the service by Cindy Westfall: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received"—a calling that has to do with being "completely humble and gentle"; with "being patient, bearing with one another in love." It is a calling that has to do with "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" because "there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:1–6 NIV). If we read between the lines here, we have a sense of the church's corporate calling. But then, Paul goes on to speak of different "graces" that have been distributed "as Christ apportioned it" to different individuals in the form of different offices and different roles that different people are called to play for sake of "equipping the people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" and are thereby "no longer tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming," but "instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ." For "from him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work*" (Eph 4:7–16 NIV [emphasis mine]).

The phrase "as each part does its work" is important to highlight because not all of us are called to be active in the same ways. One of the bad habits we seem to have as Evangelicals is that we seem to think that whatever we ourselves are passionate about or good at is what everyone else ought to be passionate

about and good at also, particularly when it comes to things like conversionism, prayer, and social action. By reframing activism more explicitly by way of a focus upon calling and vocation, Evangelicalism can become healthier by way of a humble awareness and recognition that the all-encompassing breadth of God's calling and purposes in the world are possible to fulfill if carried out collectively as the church made up of many parts. Individual believers are in this way freed from the anxiety-inducing burden that they are not doing enough to "save the world"—at least as such "saving" is defined by the passionate yet illegitimately totalizing impositions of other peoples' sense of callings and vocations (which may be truly different than how God might have actually apportioned things). All things considered, we need not forget that the good news of Jesus Christ is that *he* is the one who *has* saved, who *is* saving, and who *will* save the world—yet in a way in which we have lovingly and graciously been invited to take part.

What that means is that the *terminus* of all that I am saying here is not conversionism—as if conversionism itself is the end goal (telos) of what our Christian faith is about for ourselves and for others. Rather, the unending telos that conversionism is meant to usher us into—the reason for why conversionism is something we as Evangelicals even care about—is because the deeper reality of things is that true and everlasting life, beginning from now in the present and extending into the eternity, is found only by way of participation in Christ, by the Spirit, to the Father. If the fourth move that I want to make is to round out activism by way of a reoriented focus upon the calling and vocation that informs our activity (and maybe even inactivity!), the third move I am wanting to make is inspired by my studies of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564), who in recent decades has been rediscovered as a trinitarian theologian par excellence for the way in which his entire theology is not only structured but also framed by an emphasis upon our being united to Christ, by the Spirit, to the Father—or another way of saying this: by way of the soteriological theme of "participa-

tion."[33] This category of participation has "flex" to accommodate more than what conversionism can in terms of not just having assurance of salvation through conversion, but also in terms of the day-in, day-out reality of continuing on in things like sanctification. Participation in Christ, by the Spirit, to the Father is also the pattern and dynamic by which we engage our calling and vocation in the church and in the world in ways that often express themselves by way of lived action. The trinitarian contours of this third move also make way for the Pentecostal and Charismatic streams of Evangelicalism to find theological expression, when applicable and appropriate.

Before we move on to the fifth and final move, the first four moves can be summarized as follows. First, I am calling for biblicism to be rounded out by way of a more comprehensive theological method of retrieval and correlation. Second, I am calling for crucicentrism to be rounded out by a more thoroughgoing Christocentrism. Third, I am calling for conversionism to be rounded out by a trinitarian participation in Christ, by the Spirit, to the Father. Fourth, I am calling for activism to be rounded out by a focus instead on calling and vocation unto the multifaceted biblical picture of shalom with God, with others, with ourselves, and with and throughout the entire creation.

As my fifth and final move, I call for transdenominationalism to be rounded out by a greater awareness, affirmation, encouragement, and support of global Evangelicalism with the aim that when we get to the middle of our twenty-first century, we will no longer need the word "global" to serve as a prefix to the word "Evangelicalism" because Evangelicalism (and Evangelical theology with it) will, at that time, be utterly unimaginable apart from the normative nature of its globally contextualized diversity.

33. As in n19 above, I again want to thank Ross Hastings and Julie Canlis for supervising my master's thesis at Regent College, a thesis which had much to do with Calvin (see Wen, "Monergistic Theme"). One of my recent articles about Calvin found its beginnings in the research I did for that thesis all those years ago (see Wen, "Anthropology").

If the twentieth century was the age of ecumenism, the twenty-first century is the century of world Christianity. At present, however, world Christianity has an identity problem that is not likely to go away. As a discipline that formalized only in the 1980s, I, of course, have no problem with world Christianity when the label refers to a field for the historical, sociological, and anthropological study of indigenous, inculturated, and contextualized Christianities around the world. We need this kind of phenomenological study, and I am thankful that we already engage in this kind of work at McMaster Divinity College.

But when the other side of the world Christianity movement has sought to underlie this phenomenological work with a proposed theology that is purposely seeking to evade normative statements out of fear that such statements would bring about a renewed cultural captivity to imperialism, the inevitable trajectory for such an unbounded theological paradigm is the loss of Christian definition and distinctiveness.[34] Yet one of the possible answers to world Christianity as "theology" is a global Evangelicalism that is not afraid to make normative statements about what Christianity is and must be, even while also promoting and fostering a rounded out transdenominationalism that simultaneously affirms, encourages, and supports diverse contextual expressions of Christian faith throughout the globe in a conscious effort to also avert the fear of cultural imperialism. After all, like the world Christianity paradigm, global Evangelicalism does not desire such an imperialism either, even as the latter still recognizes a need for certain norms.

In our current situation, the global church is still in a phase where the arguments being made are mostly efforts at legitimizing non-Western theological voices. But I imagine a day when this work of legitimization is finished. I imagine a day when Evangelical theologians from the north and the south, the east and the west, will converse as the perceived equals that we truly are, towards the common theological task of retrieval and correlation—a doxological act of calling that is by way of participa-

34. See Wen, *'Open-Ended Distinctiveness'*, 49–57, 209–46.

tion in Christ, by the Spirit, to the Father—and that is along the lines of a thoroughly Christocentric expression of Evangelical Christian faith.

Thank you, McMaster Divinity College, for the invitation and opportunity to serve here and, together, to make our mark upon Evangelical theology at large at this critical juncture of our twenty-first century. May Christ our Saviour give us everything we need to fulfill all that he has called us to do. I look forward to journeying with you on this path of knowing, loving, and serving our Lord—of knowing, being, and doing for sake of the glory and honour of our One and Only True and Living God, whom we are blessed and fortunate to know, because of the name of Jesus.

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