



Pentecostal Evangelism

RICHARD J. MOUW

Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California

Evangelism, understood as the project of attempting to convince people that they ought to become Christians, is being opposed these days with a new intensity in many circles, including Christian ones. There are many of us in the Christian world who do not see this opposition as legitimate. However, it is important to take the critical questions seriously, since our evangelistic efforts will not be very effective if we are simply out of touch with the mood of the day. I propose to engage the issues here, especially as they are posed from the perspective shaped by patterns of thought that are often identified as “postmodern.”

I want to focus briefly on two motifs that seem to have some prominence in the present intellectual climate. The first is a mood of *suspicion* of a rather basic sort. The postmodern mode of thought fosters a fundamental skepticism about any theory or perspective that utilizes universal-type categories in attempting to explain or describe human reality. This mood often takes the form of a rejection of all “meta-narratives.” Postmodern thinkers insist that any use of universal categories is a disguised attempt to impose patterns of control. The meta-narrative is, in other words, nothing more than an instrument of power, whereby a privileged elite attempts to regulate the consciousness of the marginalized. Here is the way one postmodern thinker, Iban Hassan, puts the case. We live, he says, in

page 355

an antinomian moment that assumes a vast unmaking of the Western mind—what Michel Foucault might call postmodern *episteme*. I say “unmaking” though other terms are now *de riguer*: for instance, deconstruction, decentering, disappearance, demystification, discontinuity, *difference*, dispersion, etc. Such terms express...an epistemological obsession with fragments, and a corresponding ideological commitment to minorities in politics, sex and language. To think well, to feel well, to act well, to read well according to this *episteme* of unmaking, is to refuse the tyranny of wholes: totalization in human endeavor is potentially totalitarian.¹

Here is the strong assertion that power is what motivates all narratives that purport to provide some unifying features to human interaction. To reject this “tyranny of wholes” is necessarily to be caught up in “an epistemological obsession with fragments, and a corresponding ideological commitment to minorities in politics, sex and language.” This epistemological obsession is not aimed at eliminating the power-motif; rather it perpetuates it, albeit by fragmentation. Political, sexual, and linguistic minorities are encouraged to reject totalizing tyrannies in favor of the pluralistic exercise of power over their own patterns of social interaction.

The second motif I want to call attention to has already been mentioned: the celebration of *fragmentation*. If no overarching meta-narrative is trustworthy, then we are left with a plurality of narratives that are incapable of being unified or reconciled. Each of us has a particular way of viewing and describing reality. The irreducible diversity of our narratives is inescapable. Indeed, once we have been freed from “the tyranny of wholes,” it becomes the occasion for rejoicing. In her recent farewell report as president of the Society of Biblical Literature, Phyllis Tribble acknowledges the strong presence of this pattern of thought in biblical studies:

Gone are the days when the Society could define itself in rather precise and limited ways. Competing voices, tongues and the confusion of tongues have extended research almost without limits. Newer approaches, represented for example in literary, sociological, and cultural endeavors, show no signs of abating. Some members can be heard to deplore the loss of a center. Like Yeats, they see “mere anarchy loosed upon the world” and they despair, a few to the point of no longer participating. Other members rejoice in the loss of a center, seeing it as the demise of a privileged point of view. Far from despairing, they encourage the celebration of chaos. What true prophets would say in this debate I leave for the reader to ponder.²

These two motifs of postmodern thought—suspicion and fragmentation—are, of course, often couched in the technical vocabulary of rarified theoretical discussion. They are also mirrored in very practical everyday realities, and I want also to draw attention to these mirrorings.

The mood of suspicion is a powerful presence in popular culture. A few years ago I published a book about civility. It was concerned primarily with the “big”

¹Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992) 199.

²Phyllis Tribble, “Report of the President,” *Religious Studies News* 10/1 (1995) 16.

patterns of civility in contemporary life: the angry rhetoric of debates about abortion and homosexuality, tensions between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, the conflict between protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and so on. I soon became aware of the fact that many people are concerned about a more pervasive pattern of incivility. For example, a few months after my book was published I was interviewed during one week by two reporters from major newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. Each of them had heard about my book, although neither of them had read it. What surprised me was the intense interest on the part of each of these journalists in the ordinariness of incivility. They were not concerned about the major culture wars; they wanted to talk about how people behaved in parking lots, grocery store aisles, and on the freeways. They perceived, and I think rightly so, a new kind of incivility at work in the very mundane business of life. People are less willing these days to give an inch or to extend a common courtesy to a stranger. On one level we could see this, I suppose, as nothing more than a new and pervasive pattern of impoliteness in our society. My strong hunch is that the impoliteness runs deep and is grounded in a way of viewing reality on a popular level that is not unrelated to the hermeneutic of suspicion motif in the theorizings of postmodern thinkers.

The second motif, fragmentation, is also a recognizable feature of contemporary culture. The cover of the July 1990 issue of *Harper's Magazine* announced a special forum on the topic, "Whatever Became of the Public Square?" The magazine had invited five specialists on urban life to discuss what is, and what is not, happening in America's public spaces today. The editors pulled no punches in the way they stated the problem they wanted their guest experts to address. "Public life is disappearing," they insisted. Ordinary citizens no longer think of themselves as participants in an authentically *public* debate. "The marketplace of ideas is empty, because the people are at home watching a debauched public discourse: what passes for 'issues' on *Geraldo* or *Crossfire*."³

Given the specialties of the experts assembled by the *Harper's* editors—two architects, one urban planner, a sociologist, and a sculptor—it is not surprising that the discussion focused heavily on the actual physical environments of contemporary cities. The discussion was lively and illuminating, touching on a variety of fascinating topics: the New York subway system, Minneapolis's IDS Center, cathedrals, shopping malls, downtown Indianapolis (one of the best arranged urban centers in America, according to this group), public art, post offices, and parades—to name a few.

The experts did not agree among themselves about how best to construct a healthy public space. What is significant, though, is that they did seem to be united in their conviction that something is desperately wrong with public life in contemporary America. There was more than a hint in their discussion that they were convinced that our problems would not be solved by better urban planning alone.

³Ronald Fleming et al., "Whatever Became of the Public Square?" *Harper's Magazine* 28/1682 (1990) 49-60.

In her concluding comment, one of the architects said: "What we long for in the design of our public space and in the character of our public life is not fragmentation and difference but a sense of what we have in common while knowing our difference—a sense of wholeness."⁴

This comment points to an interesting phenomenon that is highly relevant to our present topic: however much intellectuals may want to celebrate our two motifs of postmodernity—suspicion and fragmentation—as philosophical themes, these same motifs are not often thought of as pleasant ones when they make their presence known in the day-to-day realities of popular culture. I want to return to this point shortly, but first I must relate these issues specifically to the contemporary antagonism toward the very idea of evangelism.

It is not difficult to see how evangelism fares from the point of view of postmodern suspicion. Postmodernism sees evangelism as a prime candidate for "unmaking." The so-called "good news" is in fact a bad message of oppression. The evangelizer, whether he or she is consciously aware of it or not, is promoting the control of the epistemological "have-nots" by providing them with a narrative that serves to reinforce their marginalization. This controlling function is not merely an accidental feature of the evangelistic enterprise. It is intrinsic to the very idea of evangelism.

Evangelism is the propagation of a meta-narrative. It is essential to the evangelistic enterprise that the message being preached is taken to be applicable to all human beings *qua* human beings. Since unifying accounts of the human condition must be unmasked, we have no

alternative but to live with, and to celebrate, the very multiplicity of narratives that evangelism seeks to dissolve.

This perspective deserves a careful response. I will not provide here the philosophical and theological details that such a response would require—although I am convinced that it is possible to do so. However, I do want to think about how we should conceive of the evangelistic task in a climate that is shaped by a propensity for suspicion and fragmentation.

I. REVERSING BABEL

It is now time for me to explain why I have chosen to use “Pentecostal Evangelism” as the title for this essay. My title is meant as an allusion to Jeffrey Stout’s important treatise in moral philosophy, published in 1988, entitled *Ethics after Babel*. In that book Stout characterizes our contemporary cultural situation as one for which the biblical image of Babel can serve as “a trope.” Stout focuses specifically on how the kind of thinking that I have associated with the motifs of suspicion and fragmentation affects our moral discourse, but his observations are also instructive for understanding our broader intellectual and cultural climate.

The Babel trope is indeed an apt image for our present mood. Interestingly, Phyllis Tribble also alluded to the Babel account in her comment that the field of biblical studies is presently characterized by “the confusion of tongues.” In Stout’s

⁴Ibid, 60.

account of our moral situation, the Babel of our moral diversity is haunted by three “specters” that are causing what he sees as “worrisome effects on how we live our lives.” The three specters are “skepticism, nihilism, and relativism.”⁵ I think it is obvious that these three “isms” are also at work in the broader, more-than-moral reaches of our private and public lives.

Now, of course, if the postmodern view of reality is the correct way of seeing things, and if we want to be honest people, we will simply have to live with some version of our contemporary confusion of tongues. Stout, for one, refuses to concede the case to the thoroughgoing skeptics, nihilists, and relativists—but he still assumes the backdrop of Babel, arguing that we can piece together a workable moral discourse by a pragmatic process of what he describes as moral *bricolage*.

I want, however, to propose a more explicitly biblical alternative to Babel. The culture of Babel takes the confusion of tongues for granted; it sees no clear alternative to the acceptance of irreducible diversity. In such an understanding of our cultural condition, evangelism can only be viewed as scandalous. But the scriptures present a remedy for Babel’s confusion. Pentecost was God’s reversal of Babel. There the confusion of tongues was transformed into mutual understanding: “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in our own native language?...[I]n our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (Acts 2:7-11).

This is a contrast that has profound importance for contemporary debates over “multiculturalism.” If we take the Pentecostal alternative to Babel seriously, we cannot allow multiculturalism simply to be defined in terms of the Babel experience. Babel represents one kind of multiculturalism. Babel is an extreme picture of an irreducible diversity, of the loss of common patterns of understanding; Babel confuses, divides, and erects barriers. Pentecost, on the

other hand, represents a very different kind of multiculturalism. The Pentecostal experience does not eliminate the diversity of tongues, but it provides us with the ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Pentecost heals, unites, and promotes understanding. In a very profound sense, then, I want to suggest, the fundamental question about the legitimacy of evangelism today is this one: Are we going to think about the very idea of evangelism against the backdrop of Babel or against the backdrop of Pentecost? What basic answer will we give to the ancient question raised by the apostle James: “Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from?” (James 4:1)?

In an important sense, of course, we are faced here with a sheer act of faith. Indeed, the mood of postmodernity highlights the reality of the basic faith choice in a very special way. The great Jesuit thinker, John Courtney Murray, recognized this fact already in the 1960s in his Yale lectures; the postmodern thinkers, he said, have forced the fundamental issues back into a “biblical mode”:

The issue is drawn. Which is the myth and which is the reality? Is the myth in Nietzsche or in the New Testament? Is it in Marx or in Moses? Is it in Sartre of

⁵Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

page 359

Paris or in Paul of Tarsus? Is God dead, as the prophet of the post-modern age proclaimed, or is he still the living God of more ancient prophecy, immortal in his being as He Who Is, deathlessly faithful to his promise to be with us all the days, even to the end of the epoch within which both the modern and the post-modern ages represent only moments in a longer dialectic of history?⁶

We can add to that: Is the myth in the picture of an ultimate Babel or is it in the reality of Pentecost? Is it in the advocacy of an epistemological apartheid or is it in the celestial anthem of Revelation 5?

You are worthy, O Lord, to take the scroll and open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you have ransomed men and women for God
from every tribe and tongue and nation
and have made them a kingdom and priests unto our God. (Rev 5:9-10).

II. POSTMODERN FAILINGS

It will be helpful, though, if the leap of faith can be an informed jump. I think it is. There are reasons why the postmodern analysis, with its deep ramifications for our understanding of the human condition, is not a compelling one—which means that there are no compelling reasons for calling into question the very idea of evangelism.

For one thing, many of the stories told by postmodernists, especially those stories that bear on an assessment of the legitimacy of evangelism, do not ring true. This point was made forcefully by J. H. Elliot in a review of several historical studies of colonialism published in *The New York Review of Books*. Contemporary writers on early missionary activity, Elliot argues, frequently distort the motives of the evangelizers. The sixteenth-century Spanish friars, for

example, were, as Elliot puts it, clearly “struggling to discover resemblances, not differences, in their pursuit of the not unworthy objective of establishing the common humanity of the human race.”⁷

One can also make a case for the thesis that the missionaries were often intensely committed to respecting important cultural differences. Susan Billington Harper, who teaches at Harvard and is conducting a major research project on the missionary movement, has demonstrated that in nineteenth-century India, Anglican missionaries often worked at cross-purposes with indigenous leaders on questions of Anglicization. In this case, though, it was the missionary leaders who wanted to respect the integrity of cultural differences, while the local worshippers argued for cultural imports. The missionaries insisted that Indian worship stay “native.” They discouraged the use of Anglican vestments, titles, and the like. The indigenous leaders on the other hand argued strongly for the adoption of British ecclesiastical practices. Many of them were converts from the lower castes and they wanted to rid themselves of what they viewed as the oppressive trappings of their cultural system.

⁶John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1964) 120.

⁷J. H. Elliot, “America Rediscovered,” *The New York Review of Books* 40/12 (1993) 38.

A second reason why the postmodern analysis fails to be a compelling one has to do with the difficulty of avoiding some kind of an appeal to a metanarrative. It is important to be clear about the fact, for example, that it is not just those of us who are pietistic evangelizers who must stand accused by thoroughgoing postmoderns on this point of dealing with the “cultural imperialism” charge. Many strong Christian opponents of evangelization are equally vulnerable to this charge. Take the views, for example, of Paul Knitter, whom many of us who advocate evangelism see as a hostile critic of our commitments. The title of his best known book, *No Other Name?*, signals his critique of traditional Christian views regarding the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Knitter advocates a genuine openness to the narratives of other religious traditions. But his openness is not without criteria. One of his key concerns in promoting interreligious dialogue—as over against evangelistic confrontation—has to do with *praxis*. It is crucial, Knitter argues, that our interreligious efforts “promote the psychological health of individuals, their sense of value, purpose, freedom...[and] the welfare, the liberation, of all peoples, integrating individual persons and nations into a larger community.” If we can do this,

then the central hopes and goals of all religions will come closer to being realized. Allah will be known and praised; Lord Krishna will act in the world; enlightenment will be furthered and deepened; God’s kingdom will be understood and promoted.⁸

Needless to say, there are many religious and cultural groups in the world who would see Knitter’s *praxis* program as based on a highly selective, and ultimately quite imperialistic, reading of what their “central hopes and goals” are all about. An obvious case in point here is the pervasive patriarchy of many cultural systems: the killing of women who are viewed as having brought dishonor to male family members and forced female circumcision are practices that are

rooted in cultural perspectives that are not necessarily favorable to the “sense of value, purpose, freedom...[and] the welfare, the liberation, of all peoples” that Knitter cherishes.

My concern here is not to criticize Knitter for wanting to improve the lot of oppressed peoples. On the contrary, I value many of the same things he values and would like to change many of the same things in the world that he wants to change. I use his formulation to emphasize three matters. First, he is indeed operating with a kind of meta-narrative that provides him with norms for criticizing the particularistic narratives of a variety of cultural perspectives. Second, Knitter’s kind of positive “accepting” approach to other religious perspectives is based on a highly selective way of defining what is valuable in other religio-cultural perspectives. Third, the difference between many “liberationist” perspectives and the viewpoints of those of us who promote evangelistic programs is not that we evangelizers believe it is legitimate to persuade people in other cultures to change their way of viewing things, while liberationists oppose such “imperialistic” efforts as such. We are both trying to bring about change. We differ over what

⁸Paul K. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994) 231.

page 361

we want to change: some of us believe that it is important to liberate human beings for both time and eternity.

A third reason why the postmodern analysis fails to be convincing is that it offers no safeguards against an ultimate incoherence. Take, for example, the account that Iban Hassan gives of the postmodern *episteme* that I quoted earlier. What is being advocated, he says, is an “ideological commitment to minorities in politics, sex and language.” This commitment has led to a widespread advocacy these days of a cognitive *apartheid*, in which we foster programs that presuppose irreducibly diverse cultures of “knowing.” A very poignant question, however, is how we identify a *bona fide* “knowing” entity in this regard: what actually counts as a genuine political, sexual, or linguistic “minority” whose right to its own way of knowing and speaking must be respected at all costs?

Let me give a technical formulation of the problem I am raising here, with the help of social scientist Barbara Frankel. We might think of a human being, she suggests, as living “within a set of Chinese boxes...a social universe composed of contexts of ever-widening extent, from the dyad to the world-system, and from microseconds to millennia.”⁹ There are an infinite number of ways in which we can combine characteristics to identify ourselves: age, gender, hair color, sexual orientation, neighborhood, city, state, nation, hemisphere, and so on. How then do we specify with any degree of precision, she asks, the appropriate context for defining, say, the cultural identity of a person or group?

Now here is a practical statement of the problem. Suppose a North American seminary wants to establish a program of study that gives appropriate attention to the concerns of Asian Christians. How do we designate the significant group or groups whose contexts would be the subject matter or focus of such a program? Suppose we choose to specialize in Korean studies. Do Koreans as such constitute an identifiable group, or must we distinguish between Korean Americans and the Christian community in Korea? If we choose North America as our focus, is it sensible to think of North American Koreans as a group with a distinct identity, or should we distinguish between first-generation Korean groups and second or third generations? What about the special concerns of Korean women? Or Korean Lutheran women? And so on.

In using this illustration I am not meaning to discourage the formation of such programs. I merely want to point out the difficulty—and indeed the degree of arbitrariness—of specifying what the cultural “group” is whose concerns will serve as the primary subject matter or focus of such a program.

The situation gets even more complicated when we leave the realm of leisurely conversations about the range of topics to be included in an academic program and deal with intense issues about granting “voice” to groups that claim status within a certain universe of discourse. How do we identify groups for the purpose of allocating privileges and benefits?

⁹Barbara Frankel, “Two Extremes on the Social Science Commitment Continuum,” in *Metatheory in Social Science*, ed. Donald W. Fiske and Richard A. Shweder (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986) 360.

page 362

Some postmodern psychologists have been arguing in recent years that the problem of identifying legitimate identities occurs even on the microlevel of the individual, and that there is no solution to it. I am thinking here, for example, of Kenneth Gergen’s book *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, where Gergen argues that each of us is simply a set of multiple selves—the parent self, the partner self, the colleague self, the Dodger-fan self—and there is no meta-narrative *within* the individual that can provide any unity to this intrapsychic diversity.¹⁰

To work consistently with such a conception is to live in a world in which all comparative judgments are arbitrary, indeed “imperialistic.” Why should my Dodger-fan self have any less status in my life than the self that senses a need to serve the poor? Why should I prefer any instinct or preference over any other one? In such a world, what is the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy self? What would keep each of us from proclaiming “We are Legion, for we are many”?

III. DIVERSITY AND PENTECOST

Of course, nothing that I have said here will convince a thoroughgoing postmodern thinker. Many postmodernists simply refuse to be disturbed by complaints that their way of viewing reality leads to inconsistencies and even to incoherence. The ability to live with such things is itself taken to be one of the positive traits of the postmodern consciousness.

And so, as I suggested earlier, we must make our choice—we must take our leap. Do we think and act against the backdrop of Babel, or do we call down the power of Pentecost? For those of us who opt for the Pentecostal model, we must proceed with a confident trust that the earth is still the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof, the world and all who dwell therein (Psalm 24:1).

The conviction that God has not abandoned the creation to chaos, that God’s design still shines—in the words of the old hymn—“in all that’s fair,” is an important impetus to the evangelistic task. However, it also provides us—or so I am convinced—with the motivation to think clearly about the issues raised in our postmodern setting, to see whether we cannot discern some hints of “fairness” even in the postmodern consciousness. Is it possible to hear positive Pentecostal yearnings even in the confusion of tongues of our present Babel?

I want to risk some meddling on this point. In an issue of *First Things*, James Nuechterlein delivered a rather comprehensive complaint about the present state of Lutheranism..

He finds the Missouri Synod Lutherans much too susceptible these days to “the sentimental evangelicalism and preoccupation with church growth that pervades contemporary conservative Protestantism.” As for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, “it has succumbed to the weaknesses of the liberal Protestant mainline at a rate faster than even the most jaded cynics anticipated at its founding in 1987.” I was especially interested in Nuechterlein’s observation that both the denominational bureaucracy and the theological seminaries of

¹⁰Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self* (New York: Basic, 1991).

the ELCA are presently “in thrall to the latest liberationist, feminist, and multiculturalist whims.”¹¹

I have no desire to defend whims, whether they are the latest ones or even very old ones. Nor do I know enough about either the Missourians or the ELCA leadership to launch an effective rebuttal to Nuechterlein’s empirical claims. But I do worry about the lack of nuance in the way he lays out his scenario. Specifically, Nuechterlein apparently does not like church-growth preoccupations as such, nor does he seem to think very highly of anything associated with liberationism, feminism, and multiculturalism. Again, I think this way of looking at the situation is much too unnuanced. I would prefer to view each of the phenomena that Nuechterlein complains about against the backdrop of Pentecost.

I have my own worries, for example, about a certain kind of devotion to church growth. There is a danger that a fascination with cross-cultural communication, church-planting methods, and the harnessing of sophisticated new technologies for the cause of the gospel will be segregated from attentiveness to fundamental questions about how we are to understand new social realities in the light of revealed truth. What we need is a church that grows in accordance with the Pentecostal model: that is, with an apostolic call to repentance and baptism into a community in which forgiveness and the empowering gift of the Spirit are received.

We must take a similarly nuanced approach, I am convinced, to the other, more “mainline,” preoccupations that Nuechterlein points to. What we need is not the negation of liberationism, feminism, and multiculturalism as such, but the negation of the liberationism, feminism, and multiculturalism of Babel. As over against these confusions, we can celebrate a church that grows because the Spirit of power is poured out on those who have been enslaved, so that both sons and daughters can now prophesy and that all who call upon the name of the Lord—from every tribe and tongue and people and nation—will be saved. In short, Pentecost brings its own version of liberationism, feminism, and multiculturalism, and it is misleading simply to reject these phenomena by associating them exclusively with the cognitive-*apartheid* preoccupations of the present celebrants of Babel. To wrestle creatively in a postmodern age with the challenges associated with justice issues, gender equality, and cultural identity is an important way of honoring the many-faceted redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ, and of the written word that is given to us as our authoritative guide for all that we do.

Because the Lamb is building his church by saving persons from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, we must reflect carefully on the way the Spirit reaches out to us in the context of our specific circumstances. Diversity is a crucial topic for Pentecostal evangelism. It is inevitable that different people will feel God’s saving touch in different ways: to meet Jesus in the desperate circumstances of skid row is a different experience from meeting him at a Full

Gospel breakfast meeting or in a hut in a jungle village. To acknowledge this kind of contextualiza-

¹¹James Nuechterlein, "Lutheran Blues," *First Things* 52 (1995) 11-12.

page 364

tion and to take full advantage of its importance in our evangelistic and pastoral programs can be an exciting way of exploring the riches of Pentecostal power.

The gospel is addressed to a rich variety of human cultural situations. It speaks to those situations out of its own many-faceted storehouse of divine truth. As the people of the Lamb, we have the privilege of gathering together in the light of that gospel, to share our diverse experiences and to learn from—and correct—each other in the light of the revealed truth of God.

I have long been fascinated by an observation made by the nineteenth-century Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, on the subject of the image of God. Bavinck suggested that in addition to the ways in which each human individual is created in the image of God, there is also a "collective" possession of the divine image. The Lord distributes different aspects of the divine likeness to different cultural groups. Each group receives, as it were, a different assignment for developing some aspect of the image of God. Only in the eschatological gathering-in of the peoples of the earth, when many tribes and tongues and nations will be displayed in their "honor and glory" (Rev 21:26) in the New Jerusalem, only then will we see the many-splendored *imago dei* in its fullness.¹²

I do have my doubts, of course, whether this holds up as a specific interpretation of the "image" passage in Genesis 1. Taken in its broader intent, it is a provocative thesis. To be sure, there is a genuine danger here of reinforcing the kind of racist ideology that finds the "separate development" of ethnic groups to be a showpiece of orthodox theology. Nic Diederichs, one of the Afrikaner architects of apartheid thought, was fond of insisting that the Creator dislikes "deadly uniformity," which is why, he said, the world contains a plurality of cultural groups.¹³

We all know—or ought to know by now—what horrible schemes have been served by such statements. Those horrors, which ought not in any way to be minimized, were often justified by the perverse use of arguments that contained important truths. This is the case with Diederichs' observation about what God does to avoid boredom; his claim that God dislikes "deadly uniformity," as it stands, would be seconded not only by Bavinck, but also by the people who have made us more conscious in recent years of cultural contextualization.

We can be grateful, I want to suggest, to the postmodernists for placing questions of diversity high on the agenda of the contemporary cultural dialogue. We human beings, in all of our cultural diversity, reflect a mysterious richness. Evangelism in the Pentecostal mode can be an important way of gathering in the splendors of this mystery into the church of Jesus Christ, drawn from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

¹²Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979).

¹³T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1975) 156-159.

IV. JOURNEYING HOME

I am using the “gathering in” image here rather than the language of imperial expansion. I must add that it is not we who are gathering others into *our* cultural “home”: we are inviting them to join us in the place where God dwells, out of the deep conviction that it is a very good thing for kindred to live together in unity in that Zion where the Lord ordains the blessing of life forevermore (Psalm 133).

This is an important time for us to rededicate ourselves to the issuing of gentle pleas for other human beings to join us as we journey toward our eternal home. Several decades ago the philosopher Martin Heidegger observed that “homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.” We are seeing his prophecy being fulfilled in our own day, not only in the very literal homelessness that is so obvious in our cities, but in the general aimlessness of the postmodern loss of a sense of identity.

I usually do not like to get my theological formulations from bumper stickers, but I saw a message on the rear end of a car a few years ago that I found compelling: “You are a child of God,” it said; “please call home.” I am convinced that the very idea of that kind of evangelistic plea is a legitimate one in our day. Even more than that, it is both urgent and exciting to invite others to join us in calling upon the name of the Lord, so that we might receive together the power and the many-faceted splendor of Pentecost.

RICHARD J. MOUW, president of Fuller Seminary, delivered this address as one of the Aus Lectures at Luther Seminary in March 1995.