

AN “ECUMENICAL” RESPONSE TO THE “EVANGELICAL” RELIGIOSITY—RECONSIDERING THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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We face an urgent need to build relationships between the independent, freshly emerging faces of Christianity and the historic expressions of the Christian tradition. My conviction is that there is no ecumenical challenge more important for the health of the whole global church and the strength of its witness within the world in the 21st Century. But in the present agendas of ecumenical institutions, this concern at best languishes on periphery.

—Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, “The Future of Ecumenism
in the 21st century,” (October 21, 2005).

Introduction

The forthcoming centenary of the World Missionary Conference (Edinburgh, 1910) is not the only, but certainly one proper occasion for us to reconsider the nature of the Christian mission. Initiatives are underway to mark the moment with celebrations, theological reflections and calls for renewal of our commitment to the mission—however it is conceived.¹

For us Asian Christians of ecumenical inclination (or simply, Asian “ecumenicals”), it is a matter of common sense that Edinburgh 1910, despite all its good intentions and outcomes (most notably the ecumenical movement and WCC), manifested the Eurocentric, ecclesiocentric, and androcentric views and agendas of the Western churches of the day. Christian communities in Asia have come a long way of (political and ecclesial) independence, liberation and de-colonization from the West (and Japan), as well as of indigenization and contextualization since the time of Edinburgh. Many of us have thus had little doubt that the centenary of the conference, if given any prominence at all, will be furnished by very different priorities and will give voice to very different perspectives from those of the 1910 conference. Indeed, Edinburgh 1910 should, for Asian Christians, not simply be a cause of joy and celebration, but also, and actually has been, an object of criticism and repentance.

As we approach the centenary, however, it has been increasingly clear that this represents only one side of the picture. On the other side, there has been a whole group of churches and movements which have remained unhappy about the ecumenical endeavor of WCC and its friends, who claim to be in the direct descent from Edinburgh. As the “mission” in the traditional sense, which is closely associated with the notion of “church planting” and “church growth” (as in Edinburgh), has given way to ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and social commitment, these churches and movements, in opposition to the “mainline” churches, have started seeking to keep alive, rejuvenate, and intensify the original “missionary” impulses of Edinburgh 1910. While such a development had not been taken seriously by “mainline” churches, many of us have been caught off guard by the news—even though it had been known among experts that it would come—that those who would carry on such a renewed passion for world Christianization, i.e., Evangelicals and Pentecostals (or simply, “evangelicals”), now outnumbered “mainline” Protestants,² and that, in terms of statistics, they are the ones who hold

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¹ Cf. The most prominent among them is Edinburgh 2010 (<http://www.edinburgh2010.org/>).

² It is an exaggeration, in my judgement, to state that “evangelicals” outnumbered “ecumenicals” if we take into account Roman Catholics. Some are fond of arguing today that “ecumenicals” are minority, since WCC

the future of Christianity.³

It is not my intention here to discuss the Edinburgh conference or its centenary. Rather, I would like to highlight this historical moment wherein we “ecumenicals” have come to realize that the path we have been following and intend to continue to follow is not the path many other Christians have chosen. What is important at such a historical juncture is that these two paths have begun to merge again. Implications of this belated encounter between “ecumenicals” and “evangelicals” are enormous, but I would like to limit myself to addressing only one aspect, i.e., what we “ecumenicals” (especially theologians) could learn from, or what prepares us better for, such an encounter. Before moving on, let us take a closer look at this encounter.

Emerging New Partnership

Evangelicals and Pentecostals have long been treated as “problems” rather than serious dialogue partners by Christians with the ecumenical conviction. A prevalent attitude among “ecumenicals” is to dismiss them as “reactionary,” “fundamentalist,” “superstitious,” “other-worldly” (or “too worldly”), etc., or more concisely, anti-ecumenical, anti-social and anti-academic. The reason for such dismissal is simple: these are, after all, people who do not believe in dialogue. Since dialogue is possible only with those who recognize its value and legitimacy, those who question them must be excluded from the discussion table. Thus, “evangelicals” stayed outside the scope of “ecumenical” radar for long, and not a great number of scholars and church leaders had seriously considered the coming impact of the immense popularity of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. In the meantime, these two have rapidly grown, and eventually, have come to constitute the second largest group after Roman Catholicism worldwide (and the largest in the USA). The “problems” thus entered the center stage of history, demanding us to treat them as partners of the equal footing.

This new reality, which has made the word “mainline” of Protestant communities only rhetorical or at best historical, has finally convinced the leaders of ecumenism that they must reach out to “evangelicals” more decisively. Thus, what has previously been unthinkable has come to take place: in Asia, CCA and FABC have initiated collaboration with the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, while WCC, together with the Vatican, has committed itself to the Global Christian Forum, which has marked a new era of ecumenical movement.⁴

“Evangelicals” in Transition

As much as there is a resistance on the “evangelical” side to collaborate with “ecumenicals,” there may well be some hesitation or doubt on our side to accept the new relationship with “evangelicals.” Here two points should be noted.

First of all, in terms of principle, we must affirm that statistics do not give the final word. Initiating official contact with “evangelicals” is indeed a very positive development, but the ultimate goal of this should not be the re-establishment of the majority. If ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and social action spring from the very essence of the gospel, we must not compromise them in our openness to and dialogue with people who are skeptical of them.

Secondly and more importantly, we must refresh and update our perception of

represents only a quarter of the world’s Christian population. This is a tricky assertion, however, because Roman Catholics, the single largest Christian group, have been endorsing ecumenism and have stayed in close collaboration with WCC, and thus, can fairly be identified as “ecumenicals.” Since the Catholic population is larger than the rest of Christians all combined, anyone can claim to hold the majority if they place Roman Catholics on their side. We need to be careful about this.

³ See, for example, Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴ WCC has also been engaged in the Joint Consultive Group WCC-Pentecostals (JCGP) since 2000, even though a greater participation of Pentecostal communities in the group has been hoped for.

“evangelicals” because considering Evangelicals and Pentecostals as anti-ecumenical, anti-social and anti-academic is becoming a history.

As for ecumenism, the significant presence and involvement of “evangelicals” in the Global Christian Forum cannot be ignored. The Forum is not operating on the same ground as WCC’s ecumenical movement, yet it is an important sign that “evangelicals” are now serious about bringing all Christians together and deepening fellowship among them for the unity and common witness. It should also be noted that there is a greater openness to ecumenical endeavor among Pentecostals in the global South, even though some of their mother churches in North America still tend to be anti-ecumenical.⁵ Even in the USA, the cradle of much of today’s Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, experts have started pointing out that some commonly held views about “evangelicals” (such as being hostile to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue) are simply stereotypes and must be exorcised.⁶ The most recent survey by the Pew Forum demonstrates, for example, that the 53% of American “evangelicals” believe that there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of one’s own religion, and 57% of them hold that many religions, other than one’s own, can lead to eternal life.

In terms of social action, now that the Christian demography is shifting to the global South, it is all too natural that “evangelicals” become keenly aware of the social implications of the gospel in face of the pressing issues of the world. World Evangelical Alliance, to take one example, has adopted a statement at the general assembly in 2001, in which it declares: “As a global Christian community seeking to live in obedience to Scripture, we recognise the challenge of poverty across God’s world. We welcome the international initiative to halve world poverty by 2015, and pledge ourselves to do all we can, through our organisations and churches, to back this with prayerful, practical action in our nations and communities.”⁷

This enabled WEA to launch, together with Micah Network, Micah Challenge which is a global campaign to mobilize Christians for the achievement of the UN Millenium Development Goals by 2015. “For many Christians, churches, and Christian organisations, engagement in political advocacy with poor communities will be a new step built upon a new understanding of Christ’s mission for the church. Micah Challenge is encouraging these Christians to explore and embrace ‘integral mission.’”⁸ Indeed, for many of them, it is a “new,” yet important step which also enables us to envision a common witness between “evangelicals” and “ecumenicals.”⁹

⁵ Cf. “The Southern Church and Global Christianity: An Interview with Wonsuk Ma,” *Asian Christian Review* 1:3 (2007), 3-10. In addition, in such countries like South Korea or South Africa, some Pentecostal churches have joined the National Council of Churches, and some others in countries like Chile are members of WCC.

⁶ A monumental sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, is now engaged in a two-year research project exploring evangelical intelligentsia, which aims at presenting a fairer image of “evangelicals.”

⁷ The statement continues: “We believe...if the poverty targets are to be met:

-There needs to be a commitment to achieve growing justice in world trade in the light of globalisation; this must recognise the role of trade, particularly in arms, that fuels conflict and causes widespread poverty and suffering

-It is vital that a new deal on international debt is agreed by the G7 leaders as a matter of urgency and carried through by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank

...we urge governments and financial institutions of both North and South to act decisively, transparently and with integrity to combat corruption... taking the necessary steps to break the chains of debt and give a new start to the world’s poorest nations” (<http://www.micahchallenge.org/english/knowit/Overview/>).

⁸ As to this “integral mission,” they also state as follows: “Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ...”

⁹ For Pentecostal engagements with the society, see, for instance, Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamanori,

Finally, with regard to academic inquiry, although many “evangelicals” still uphold the literal interpretation of the Bible, many of their scholars are more open to the critical approach to the Scripture.¹⁰ Furthermore, some “evangelical” theologians are even aware of and keenly interested in the influence of colonialism on theology, and are not afraid of exploring the path of “contextual” theology.¹¹

When such a transformation is occurring on the “evangelical” side, it is not so hard for us “ecumenicals” to envision a real and further rapprochement and genuine dialogue and cooperation between two streams.

A Lack of the “Spiritual” in the “Ecumenical” Approach

Is there anything, then, that we “ecumenicals” should change on our part, which might prepare us better for the encounter with “evangelicals”? The answer, I believe, is Yes, and although it may first appear to be a rather “personal” issue, it is actually of vital importance for the entire “ecumenical” community at this moment, which may also account (at least partially) for the “evangelical” expansion on the one hand, and our decline or stagnation on the other.

Let me begin with a personal, subjective observation. In my experiences, what often strikes me about “evangelical” Christians is their joy and pride of being Christians. They are utterly content about their religion and their personal relationship with God, and are ready to talk about it and share their experiences with others.

Instead, “ecumenicals,” if not all of them, seem to be somewhat shy in this area. While it is understandable that they are often put off by an “evangelical” talk, which seems to connect every little thing with God, Christ and one’s own salvation, it is equally understandable if “evangelicals” are not impressed by “ecumenicals” for not finding anything particularly Christian in their “socially-oriented” approach. In fact, apart from the formal profession of faith and mission statement of their social enterprise, what sets “ecumenicals” apart from secular activists? Why are they Christians, instead of, or rather than, Buddhists or Muslims? Why should anyone join their churches? Who is Jesus Christ for them? How is God related to and how God intervenes their day-to-day life? Why God matters at all at this present moment of their life? Certainly, “ecumenicals” too, have their own answers to these questions, but the “evangelical” readiness to give clear-cut responses to these questions based on their strong sense of identity and mission poses a challenge to us.

Besides, “ecumenicals” (and especially academics) often seem to be unhappy, embarrassed, frustrated, and even cynical about their own religion (and its community). It is not that they believe less, or put less trust in God; but it is just that they have a more nuanced understanding of religion, and a more modest expectation and expression of it. With a sharp sense of distinction between what is human and contingent on the one hand and what is beyond on the other, they learned not to trust so facilely what is often deemed as “divine.” Thus, their aversion towards a simplistic reading of the Bible, blind and worldly pursuit of “supernaturals,” individualistic approach to salvation, and the sense of superiority over other religions and secular world is fairly justifiable. Yet, even though “ecumenicals” may have every reason to resist what they (often stereotypically) consider to be the “evangelical”

Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁰ See, for example, Craig L. Blomberg, “Where should Twenty-First-Century Evangelical Biblical Scholarship Be Heading?” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11.2 (2001), 162-172; Grant R. Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:2 (1999), 193-210.

¹¹ See, for example, Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

religiosity, they too have to be able to articulate who they are and what sustains them in positive and distinctly religious terms. In sum, they too, need to tell their “joy of being Christians.”

Further, in order to articulate, they have to have the substance to articulate. This should include, in my opinion, other than one’s fellowship with others in Christ and the social living out of the gospel, the experience of and confidence in one’s personal relationship with God, or what I would call the “personal intimacy with the divine.” This seems to be a weak point of some (or perhaps many) “ecumenicals,” as in their communities it is usually left to each individual and not publicly talked about, while the emphasis is put on the socially conceived gospel, church, Reign and salvation.

One learned observer, Joseph Driskill, in speaking of “mainline” Protestants, laments their “general inability to use theological discourse to describe an experiential or personal relationship with God.”¹² “The lack of attention by mainline Protestants” to such dimension of Christian life, continues Driskill, “resulted in the loss of contact with spiritual practices, including various forms of prayer and spiritual disciplines...[and thus] in recent decades many Protestants found they had no avenue of access that opened believers to an experiential relationship with God.”¹³

I have to quickly add two notes. First, I (or Driskill) do not intend to promote a sort of individualistic, introverted and other-worldly piety and to replace or weaken a socially conceived spirituality. It is a shared understanding among “ecumenicals” particularly in Asia that such a concept of spirituality is dangerous or even damaging to our Christian witness. This is why in Asian theological discourse (and in the so-called Third World theology in general), the understanding of ‘spirituality’ as a private and interior matter has been repeatedly challenged and refuted in favor of a spirituality involving social and even political dimensions of life. Here, I am simply pointing out the lack of explicitly (so-called) “spiritual” language and perspective in the “ecumenical” approach, most notably among “mainline” Protestants (but also, to some extent, among liberal Catholics). This seems to contribute to a rather “secular” or often formal and impersonal outlook of “ecumenical” religiosity, which, in terms of its religious integrity, may become a weakness compared to the “evangelical” approach (especially now that they are taking up their social responsibility!).

Second, neither do I intend here to recommend certain concrete spiritual practices, even though such is a legitimate option.¹⁴ Having a private prayer time would be important, but is not the point of this paper. The issue of the lack of the “spiritual” goes much deeper as it is not so much a matter of how “pious” we should become in order to match the “evangelical” religiosity, but rather how we see and articulate our life, including our faith, perception, theology, prayer life, social activity, etc. within the all-encompassing vision of God’s reaching out to creation. Let us then consider what is behind this weakness or lack in the “ecumenical” approach.

The Theology-Spirituality Split

Here, we need to consider the word “spirituality.” The definition of this word is actually open to debate, but most broadly, it can be defined as “life under the influence of the Spirit” (which is, by the way, a distinctly Christian term and concept in its origin, the New Testament, although it later came to be used outside Christian context as well). Therefore, not simply “internal/personal” nor just “social/communal,” it is a very broad and inclusive concept. It almost means the entirety of the Christian life.

¹² Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology, History and Practice* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ In fact, Driskill’s book was written with the intention to restore the Protestant spiritual exercises.

How, then, could the “entirety of the Christian life” start slipping out of our language and perspective? The issue could perhaps be framed variously, but I would suggest here the split between theology and spirituality, and a progressive impoverishment of both in history.

According to some experts, the split between theology and spirituality has deep roots. Sandra Schneiders claims that seeds were already sown in the Middle Ages, “as philosophy began to rival Scripture in supplying the categories for systematic theology.”¹⁵ Prior to this period, spirituality was at the very center of theological concerns.¹⁶ As the theological system highly develops and becomes divided into specialized units, the “premedieval unity” of theology and spirituality has been lost. “[F]rom being a dimension of all theology spirituality began to appear as a subordinate branch of theology.”¹⁷

In a similar vein, Randy Maddox argues from a more sociological point of view that theology was originally a “practical discipline” in that its major task was to respond to the daily religious needs and questions of believers. As universities arose, however, and the center of theological activity moved from monasteries to universities, it has become a more systematic and technical “science” which aims at the production of comprehensive textbooks for higher education and a logical presentation of Christian doctrine. Thus, the “practical” became a characteristic of only certain branches of theology (such as moral or spiritual theology) rather than of the nature of theology as a whole.¹⁸

Such a medieval tendency has developed into either the marginalization (especially in Roman Catholicism) or the disappearance (mainly in Protestantism) of the interest in spirituality in academic reflections in post-Reformation theology.

After the Reformation, “spirituality” is increasingly understood in Roman Catholicism as a matter of “interior life” which is of exclusive concern of “elites” or “professionals” like nuns and monks. Theology which deals with such dimension is called “spiritual theology,” which is a branch of theology secondary to systematic theology or biblical studies. These latter, in turn, have become more and more “objective” and rational, regarding spirituality as merely “subjective,” “private,” and “emotional.”¹⁹

In Protestantism, Luther’s emphasis on justification by faith alone made any efforts by Christians to become more Christ-like appear to be a denial of the work of God’s grace in justification. Mirroring the Roman Catholic understanding, spirituality as such efforts has been de-emphasized and progressively disappeared. Although the concern for “spiritual growth” has emerged again and again in Protestantism (as Pietism, Methodism, etc.), it has never become the mainstream, especially in theology in which Protestant Orthodoxy has gained its prominence over against Pietistic tendencies.²⁰

Thus, we have been left with a theology that is objective, rational, juridical and descriptive, and a spirituality which is either non-existent (“mainline” Protestantism) or reduced to private, internal affairs (Roman Catholicism).

¹⁵ Sandra M. Schneiders, “Spirituality in the Academy,” in Bradley C. Hanson, ed., *Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 25.

¹⁶ For example, “patristic theology would today be called biblical theology or more likely biblical spirituality,” argues Schneiders. “It consists principally in an exegetically based interpretation of Scripture for the purpose of understanding and living the faith and/or a biblically elaborated theological exploration of spiritual experience” (ibid., 24-25).

¹⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸ See Randy L. Maddox, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), 650-672.

¹⁹ Schneiders, 25.

²⁰ Driskill, 22-24. In a similar vein, Bengt Hoffman argues that Lutheran Orthodoxy, in its suppression of Pietist concern, has ignored and neglected mystical aspects of Luther’s theology, which are very prominent in his writings. See Hoffman, “Lutheran Spirituality,” in Kenneth J. Collins, ed., *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 122-137.

Seen in such a historical context, it becomes clear that the critique of the poor conception of spirituality as individualistic piety lacking a social dimension is fair, but remains incomplete if it is not matched by a critique of theology which has lost sight of its own matrix, the life under the Spirit. “Put as bluntly as possible,” says Mark McIntosh, “theology without spirituality becomes ever more methodologically refined but unable to know or speak of the very mysteries at the heart of Christianity, and spirituality without theology becomes rootless, easily hijacked by individualistic consumerism.”²¹ And this is how the perspective of the “life under the Spirit” has been lost in our theology, while “spirituality,” which comes to mean a pious prayer life of individuals, has been marginalized in our (“ecumenical”) understanding and practice of religion.

Against this background, the Evangelical and Pentecostal reactions to “mainline” religiosity (or the flourishing of conservative revivals and charismatic renewals after the Second Vatican Council in Catholicism) are, in a way, not only understandable but also perhaps even healthy. They are pointing what is lacking in us if we are to be holistic, or to live, perceive and articulate our life under the Spirit.

Reconsidering Theo-logy

Thus, the restoration of spiritual practices and/or the cultivation of personal intimacy with the divine would be quite relevant and beneficial, yet what is even more vital is to retrieve a deep consciousness that theology (which informs our preaching and provides conceptual framework for our Christian praxis) forms a part of and is embedded in our life under the Spirit.

Too often, theology allows itself to be philosophy, psychology or social science, especially in “ecumenical” theological discourse. There is nothing wrong about that, it is even essential that these disciplines inform theology; but in such a maneuver theology tends to miss the most fundamental point. This point is actually what has been lost for centuries, and could re-orient theology at this historical moment of “ecumenical-evangelical” encounter.

Theology is usually considered a *logos* (speech, account, reason) about *theos* (God). Yet, there is another understanding of theology, namely, *theology as God’s own speech*.²² Restoration of this idea would serve our re-situating of theology within the comprehensive vision of God’s reaching out to the creation.

If God manifested God’s own self in Christ and continues to do so through his body, the church, then we must understand that the church’s reflection and speech about God (along with its worship, proclamation, sacraments, social service, prayer, art, etc.) is an extension of God’s self-revelation (which does not, however, eliminate room for human actions and mistakes). More precisely, it is a locus where God reveals God’s self.

That theology is God’s own speech does not mean, of course, theo-logians becoming divine oracles whose words automatically assume divine authority. Rather, theo-logians are de-throned and de-centered in their own theologizing, leaving theo-logy, or theo-logians themselves, as a locus of divine self-manifestation. God comes and goes like a wind (John 3:8). God reveals God’s self anywhere, anytime and however God wishes. Theo-logians have no control over it. All what they could do is to best prepare themselves as the altar, try to listen and wait for God’s words, and do their best with all their intellectual and spiritual resources to give shape to God’s words that become incarnate through them.

²¹ Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 10.

²² According to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. sixth century), for example, uses *theologia* not to designate a human science, but the divine discourse itself, particularly the divine discourse of the Holy Scriptures... Today this usage no longer prevails, and theology refers primarily to the human study of God” (Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1 [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991], 5-6).

Once this reversal of perception occurs and God returns to be the center and do-er of all, even in our believing, praying, theologizing, taking actions, etc., solutions would more easily and naturally come forth with regard to the lack of the “spiritual” in our religiosity. What is necessary, therefore, and what is reminded by an “evangelical” centered-ness on the divine, is not so much a particular spiritual practice or intense religious emotion, but a truly spiritual perspective which gathers all aspects of Christian life under one gaze. In this simple but all-pervasive consciousness that our God who reveal God’s own self reaches out to everything through manifold ways, we will probably be able to recognize, feel and articulate better and clearer what is the “spiritual” in various forms and moments of our life under the Spirit.

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21. St. Century. Basic research program working papers. Series: humanities. This study researches some of the most recent theories (elaborated by historians and social scientists) applied to the practice of historical research. The object of this research includes ideas, concepts, notions, methods of scholarly analysis of past social reality, as well as the emergence of new interdisciplinary fields, mutual borrowings and interventions. In this connection, the opposite process – the historization of some very disparate disciplinary discourses – is briefly addressed. It includes especially historical aspects of anthropology and sociology in the coming century.

Annotated bibliography For the Ecumenical Workshop. Marked with § are highly recommended. Gnosticism and Early “Primitive” Christianity Brakke, David. A New New Testament: A Bible for the 21 st Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts, Boston, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. [In addition to the canonized bible, this text includes texts that were wellknown and circulated among Christians at the same the canonized texts circulated¼ several have been historically classified as “gnostic,” but seen in this context, they are part of the original Christian world.] www.gnosis.org. [includes all the modern translations of Nag Hammadi documents plus many other ancient writings¼] The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination . The paper traces the emergence of the concept of “World Christianity” to designate a new academic discipline beyond ecumenical and missiological discussions. It then elaborates the implications of “World Christianity” for the History of Christianity in contrast to Church History and for the study of Christianity as a “world religion.” The paper argues for an expansion of the “cartography” and “topography” of Church History to take into account the contributions of ecclesiastically marginalized groups and neglected charismatic/pentecostal activities. Furthermore, it is urged that in the study o