

Cheryl Anderson's Goal as Fulbright Scholar Is to Address HIV/AIDS More Effectively in America Based on What She Learned in South Africa

After conducting research at universities, churches, and orphanages in Africa and at churches in three U.S. cities, Garrett-Evangelical Old Testament scholar Cheryl Anderson has concluded that the Bible must be interpreted contextually and from the bottom up if churches and the broader religious community are going to effectively address the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

"We must deal honestly with sex, women and gays," she said during an interview about her seven months of research as a Fulbright Scholar with additional support from The Louisville Institute. "We're going to have to do that in order to conquer AIDS."

Anderson, an associate professor of Old Testament, was in Africa from January to August. She spent most of her time in South Africa at the

University

of KwaZulu-Natal, where the School of Religion and Philosophy is "the best in the world at dealing with this issue," she said. She audited classes in biblical interpretation and African theology, met with students and faculty, and immersed herself in a culture with one of the world's highest rates of HIV/AIDS. Of South Africa's 48 million citizens, 6 million are infected with the incurable disease, up from 4.5 million in 2001, she said. She also spent time in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, South Africa's three largest cities, and in neighboring Botswana and Lesotho, where HIV/AIDS rates are even higher.

"I saw the impact," she said. "My research was basically qualitative and experiential, just talking with people. There were always moments where people shared their stories. It was a sacred trust. I have a deep sense of responsibility for how I use those insights here to give people a better understanding."

Anderson began taking a harder look at HIV/AIDS in 2002. At the time, she said, she was shocked to learn the statistics about HIV/AIDS in the African American community—the fact that roughly half of all people living with the disease in the United States are black, and black women represent two-thirds of all female HIV/AIDS cases.

She presented a paper, "Lessons on Healing from Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-27): An African American Perspective," that year in Addis Abba, Ethiopia, at a

meeting of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. The Circle is a pan-African organization enabling women in religious occupations to learn from one another across national borders and faith traditions.

"I haven't

decided yet how I'm going to write up what I've learned," she said. In the coming months she plans to lecture, lead workshops and make presentations at Garrett-Evangelical, other seminaries and churches for "anybody who will listen." The tentative title of the book she will write about her findings, including recommendations for addressing the disease in the United States, is "Crying Out to the Lord: the Bible, HIV/AIDS, and African Americans."

"My goal was always to apply what I learned in South Africa to the African American context," she said. "I was going there to learn from them how we might address HIV/AIDS more effectively in the U.S."

The lessons she has begun to share most likely will stir controversy among some audiences, she said. For example, one reason for the spread of HIV/AIDS among African Americans is not talking candidly, holistically and

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Cheryl Anderson (3rd from left bottom row) with colleagues at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

How Paul and Confucius Converge



K.K. Yeo

In *Musing with Confucius and Paul: Toward a Chinese Christian Theology*, Garrett-Evangelical Professor K.K. Yeo explores how bringing the best of the Confucian tradition into the Christian story can help revive global Christianity.

In this 500-page book, Yeo offers nuanced theological reflections on the self, trust, social

identity, civil society, social harmony, inequality and political domination. He articulates how it is possible to maintain a Chinese and Christian identity at the same time.

Further, Yeo demonstrates how Paul and Confucius converge across a surprisingly broad front while examining how Christ completes or extends what is merely implicit or absent in Confucius. For example, Confucius amplifies various elements of Christian faith frequently underplayed in Western Christianity — community and virtues.

Terence C. Halliday, co-director of the Center on Law and Globalization, calls *Musing* a ‘brilliant book.’ He says it “confronts two fundamental challenges for culture and faith in the globalizing world of the 21st century: how can the Chinese honor their rich Confucian heritage yet be transformed by Jesus Christ, and how can the church universal be reformed through its encounter with a Chinese Christian theology?” The Center on Law and Globalization is a joint project of The American Bar Foundation and the University of Illinois College of Law that seeks to understand the legal and normative consequences of globalization through interdisciplinary research.

Yeo is the Harry R. Kendall Professor of New Testament at Garrett-Evangelical, an advisory faculty member of the Graduate School of Northwestern University and a visiting professor of Peking University. Previous books include *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing?* and *Chairman Mao Meets the Apostle Paul*. He earned a master of divinity at Garrett-Evangelical in 1990 and a Ph.D. at Northwestern University in cooperation with the seminary in 1992.

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biblically about sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. Another is the continuing subordinate role of women, often reinforced by long-standing and wrong-minded interpretations of the Bible.

“There’s a sense of valuing women only if they have a man,” Anderson said, “so many women remain in unhealthy situations because they don’t have socially acceptable alternatives. ... Among African American women, where the marriage rate is low, a way to show commitment to a relationship is not to use condoms. It’s easy to say they are promiscuous. That’s not what’s happening. Very rational decisions are being made.”

Anderson also hopes to teach churches how to integrate contextual Bible study into their Christian education program, something she learned to do in South Africa. Asking participants to bring their life experiences to the Bible as they read it doesn’t undermine faith, as some fear, but actually strengthens it, she said.

“It’s a different way of doing Bible study,” she said. “It wouldn’t have the harmful impact it has now if people connected their own lives and experiences with their reading of the Bible. Traditionally, people who have HIV/AIDS can be seen and can see themselves as being punished for transgressions of various sorts. These common misunderstandings of biblical texts demonstrate how the context of HIV/AIDS demands a new engagement of biblical texts if they are to empower, uplift and inspire Christian communities.”

Anderson has visited African American churches with strong HIV/AIDS ministries: two in San Francisco and one each in Chicago and Washington, D.C. After spending three or four days meeting with clergy and lay leaders at each church, she found even these progressive ministries lacked the Bible-based resources to offer biblical interpretations blending the Bible’s ancient context with a contemporary socio-economic context. She is convinced that only such open, candid, life-based interpretations will help people in the pews deal with HIV/AIDS more effectively. That, too, she plans to address.

Anderson has always thought of herself as a true African American. She grew up in diplomatic circles, living in Nigeria several years during elementary school and in Tanzania during all four years of high school. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Ivory Coast for two years immediately after college. In addition to her academic career, she is a lawyer and an ordained minister.