



# SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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*Southwestern Journal of Theology* (ISSN 0038-4828) is published at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas 76122. Printed by Branch-Smith Printing Inc., Fort Worth, Texas 76101. For the contents of back issues and ordering information please see [www.BaptistTheology.org/journal.cfm](http://www.BaptistTheology.org/journal.cfm).

## *Editorial*

### *Missiology: Reclaiming First Principles*

The churches that embrace the Great Commission of Jesus Christ must repeatedly return to the source of their message and power in order to reclaim their first principles. The tendency is to drift away from the biblical foundation upon which missionary efforts have been and must be built. When the modern missions movement began in the late eighteenth century in the Northamptonshire Baptist Association, whence it spread to many Christian denominations, these pioneers were faced with vehement opposition, theological and practical, on many fronts, internal and external. Opposition to the fulfillment of the Great Commission has reappeared through the years, in ways hauntingly familiar to those earlier missionaries, including from within the movement itself.

Andrew Fuller, the theologian behind the rise of the modern missions movement, was adamant that propagating orthodox theology must remain a foremost concern and that Scripture is the only source for that theology. In a sermon before the association in 1796, appealing to Hebrews 5:12–14, he delineated three necessary presuppositions: First, “*all Divine knowledge is to be derived from the oracles of God.*”<sup>1</sup> Fuller denied the idea that divine truth could be found anywhere other than in the Word of God. As Keith E. Eitel and Dietmar W. Schulze demonstrate in their respective essays in this volume, Fuller’s first axiom must be reclaimed at this critical juncture in missionary history. Eitel, dean of the school of evangelism and missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, warns against “evangelical agnosticism,” a hermeneutic that subtly undermines the clarity of biblical revelation. In a creative essay suffused with Scripture, Schulze, a German missiologist now serving with Eitel, demonstrates that the divinely inspired Bible rather than human culture must be the authoritative source for identifying principles of church planting.

In his second necessary presupposition, Fuller—who presided over the Particular Baptist missionary society that sent the famous William Carey—taught that, “*the oracles of God include a system of Divine truth.*” The biblical system distinguishes “first principles” from the “deep things

<sup>1</sup>Andrew Fuller, “The Nature and Importance of an Intimate Knowledge of Divine Truth” (1596), in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: With a Memoir of His Life*, ed. Joseph Belcher, 3 vols. (1845; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 160.

of God.” The deep things of God are “beyond the reach of a slight and cursory observation” and thus require “close and repeated attention.”<sup>2</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, a highly esteemed missiologist from the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, issues what may be the most important call to missionaries since Fuller wrote. Hesselgrave’s essay, “Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error?” challenges missionaries and strategists to refocus their attention upon orthodox doctrine. A biblically based doctrinal seriousness once distinguished evangelicals, but in the rush to embrace ecumenism, it is being lost. Like Fuller, Hesselgrave believes that evangelical Christians should pay “close and repeated attention” to biblical theology and its practical implications.

In his third and final presupposition, Reverend Fuller, our premiere missionary theologian and missionary strategist, argued that, “*Christians should not rest satisfied in having attained to a knowledge of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, but should go on unto perfection; not only so as to obtain satisfaction for themselves, but that they may be able to teach others.*”<sup>3</sup> In 1796, Fuller wrote that Christian teachers should resort only to Scripture for their knowledge, perfect that doctrinal knowledge, and then teach it to others. In 2008, Michael A.G. Haykin and Malcolm B. Yarnell III drive home this third and final necessary presupposition for properly fulfilling the Great Commission. A consummate historian and prolific author, Haykin, professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, discusses the hymns of Charles Wesley. He demonstrates that the Trinity is integral to Christian missionary efforts in reaching those deceived by Islam. Yarnell, a systematic theologian at Southwestern Seminary, contends that the Bible is the *sine qua non* of missionary preaching and teaching. Expositing the oft-misinterpreted Mars Hills Sermon of the Apostle Paul, he identifies dangerous tendencies set loose by certain missiologists who have been influential both internationally and in the emergent and emerging movements in the United States.

It is the prayer of the President and Faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary that this issue will help foster a desire among church-planting missionaries, missiologists, and missionary strategists to fulfill the Great Commission according to the inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and perspicuous Word of God, rather than according to non-biblical ideals garnered from fallible, fallen human culture.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

## ***Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error? Future Mission in Historical Perspective***

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No other missionary gathering impacted twentieth century missions as did the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910. No single error was as significant as the “Edinburgh error.” Currently, missionary conferences of various kinds and with a variety of agendas are routine, but special Edinburgh centennials are scheduled for Edinburgh (again), Tokyo, Cape Town and elsewhere in 2010. Will organizers of these and numerous other missionary conferences on the drawing boards correct the “error of Edinburgh”? How important is it that they do?

### **The Edinburgh Error and its Reflections in the Ecumenical Movement of the Twentieth Century**

It was a momentous occasion. Kenneth Scott Latourette’s “Great Century of Missions” had given way to the twentieth century. The missionary baton was passing from British to American hands. Edinburgh attracted 1200 delegates representing the missionary arms of most of the great denominations. For the first time non-Western churches were represented by a contingent of outstanding leaders. Darwinism, Higher Criticism, the Social Gospel and much else constituted very real problems. Nevertheless, possibilities for churches and missions seemed endless, if only.

#### **The Fateful Decision of 1910**

Chairman John R. Mott, Secretary J.H. Oldham and other Edinburgh organizers decided to confine the Edinburgh agenda to strategy and policy issues—missionary training, missions and governments, the message in mission contexts, the church on the mission field, and so on. Most, if not all, of the mission agencies invited to send delegates were considered to be evangelical, so “No signing of any theological agreement

was required at Edinburgh,” says Lutheran missiologist James Scherer.<sup>1</sup> As a procedural matter, leaders “insisted that the divisive issue of doctrine not intrude into the proceedings,” writes Stanford’s Robert McAfee Brown, a specialist on Catholic-Protestant dialogue.<sup>2</sup> As for the nature of Christian mission itself, participating churches and missions were free to define mission within their separate communions and without reference to any external standard, including the Great Commission itself.

Unknowingly Edinburgh organizers had set a pattern for the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. Bishop Stephen Neill rightly says that Edinburgh 1910 was “the starting-point of the modern ecumenical movement in all its forms.”<sup>3</sup> Justice Anderson indicates that Edinburgh was “the training ground for many of the future leaders of the missionary-ecumenical movement.”<sup>4</sup> James Scherer observes that Edinburgh

launched a movement for missionary cooperation and consultation *without prior doctrinal consensus*. . . . Corporate prayers revealed that this consensus had behind it a genuine spiritual substance. It did not need to be put to the test of doctrinal definition. Delegates were ready to accept one another in good faith. . . . There was no precedent for it in the annals of Christian assembly. From the time of Edinburgh, *it became an accepted method of doing together the business of the kingdom* (italics mine).<sup>5</sup>

Headed by Mott, a Continuation Committee established by Edinburgh in 1910 accomplished the formation of the International Missionary Council (IMC) at Lake Mohonk, New York, in 1921. Charles Brent, a missionary bishop in the Philippines and one of the planners of Edinburgh, realized that ecclesiastical and theological issues could not be postponed forever and therefore took a leading role in organizing the Committee on Faith and Order. Edinburgh gave rise to the Committee on Life and Work as well. Ultimately these two streams united to form the World Council of

<sup>1</sup>James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 15.

<sup>2</sup>Robert McAfee Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution: An Interpretation of the Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (San Francisco: Doubleday, 1967), 32.

<sup>3</sup>Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 554.

<sup>4</sup>Justice Anderson, “The World Missionary Conference: Edinburgh 1910,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 1029.

<sup>5</sup>James A. Scherer, “Ecumenical Mandates for Mission,” in *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission: The Ecumenical Conservative Encounter*, ed. Norman A. Horner (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 22–23.

Churches (WCC) in 1948. But it was not until 1961 that the IMC joined together with the WCC by becoming its Division of World Mission and Evangelism.

It is very doubtful that Mott, Oldham and their 1910 collaborators would have been happy to see mission agencies surrender their independence to the WCC. However, at the time of the formation of the IMC in 1921 they themselves had allowed for the involvement of some churches as is apparent in an official IMC document that states, “the only bodies entitled to determine missionary policy are the missionary societies and boards, or the churches which they represent and the churches in the mission field.”<sup>6</sup> Aside from this, the IMC basically followed the precedent set at Edinburgh: namely, instead of thinking in terms of doctrine or a statement of faith, they thought in terms of “functions” or purposes.

They established eight specific “functions” for the organization and proceeded to lay them out in what today might be called a “purpose statement.”<sup>7</sup> It was with these functions in mind that plans were laid for a meeting of the IMC in Jerusalem in 1928—plans that not only made provision for more church representatives but also for a larger agenda including such topics as religious education, secularism, industrialization, racism, and rural problems. Though estranged earlier as a result of the First World War, German leaders had been reassured at Lake Mohonk and looked forward to the projected conference in Jerusalem. Nevertheless they soon took exception to the emphasis being given to social redemption as over against individual conversion in the preparation stage. Ultimately, they boycotted the conference altogether.<sup>8</sup>

From the time of Edinburgh the modern ecumenical movement has been characterized more by organizational togetherness than by theological consensus. Despite a rather significant conservative presence and some laudatory accomplishments, this was true, not only of the World Council of Churches itself, but also of the International Missionary Council right up to the time of its incorporation into the WCC in 1961. As for the WCC, at its inauguration in 1948 it described itself as “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.” That statement was good as far as it went, of course, but it proved to be notoriously deficient when it came to defining Christian beliefs and even more deficient when it came to dispelling unchristian heresies. In response to the insistence of Eastern Orthodox leaders and as the price of their

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 367.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 368–69.



participation in the WCC, the vague phrase “according to the Scriptures” was added to the confessional statement in 1961. However, the change had little, if any, practical significance.

### **Distinctly Missionary Outcomes of Edinburgh**

Good men, even great men like John R. Mott, J.H. Oldham and their colleagues, make mistakes. When they do the consequences are great as well. But did these illustrious planners of Edinburgh actually make a mistake? As we would expect, not all will agree that they did. After all, participation was confined to delegates of mission agencies that were basically evangelical. Organizers probably thought that made further screening of delegates and their beliefs unnecessary and therefore considered themselves free to concentrate on mission-related strategies and endeavors alone. In the end, the conference did produce practical helps to missions that demonstrated the value of mutual consultation and cooperation. And, in any event, some would say that Edinburgh and its leaders should not be faulted for weaknesses and errors that occurred subsequently.

It is easy to understand why, at certain times and under certain circumstances, missions people might find it expedient and even necessary to meet together among themselves in order to take up a very limited agenda. Certainly, it is not my intention to impugn the motives of Edinburgh’s illustrious planners, nor is it my intention to blame Edinburgh for subsequent failings of the ecumenical movement that emerged from its deliberations and actions. Nevertheless, speaking generally, only on very rare occasions and with more precautions than were evident in 1910 should representatives of mission agencies assume the prerogative of ruling consideration of divine revelation out of order with a view to pursuing their own objectives, however noble. And Edinburgh 1910 was not one of those occasions. If anything, given the circumstances of that time both within and without the church, planners should not only have refused to rule out doctrinal discussion, they should have insisted on including doctrinal discussion both when planning the conference and when guiding conference proceedings.

As we have seen, Latourette, Neill, Anderson, and Scherer, along with other historians, maintain that Edinburgh 1910 was not only the starting-point of the modern ecumenical movement, but that it also established those precedents that were to characterize that movement for many years to come. That is one reason why this particular mistake was so momentous. Among its deleterious outcomes I will mention four that have been of special consequence to Christian missions.



1. When coupled with a narrow focus on the nonchristian world, the decision to rule out doctrinal matters was deleterious in two ways. First, it bypassed serious issues faced by Protestant missions in Latin America. The subsequent record of severe persecution of Protestant believers and pastors—and missionaries as well—at the hands of Catholic authorities shows that omission to have been unwarranted and unwise. Second, in spite of the focus on what we would call unreached peoples, the plight of vast numbers of aboriginals in Latin America, most of whom lived outside the sphere of any kind of Christian influence, was overlooked. Through succeeding years the ecumenical record, in its dealings with the Catholic Church on the one hand, and in its outreach among the unevangelized on the other, has not been exemplary to say the least.
2. Indecisiveness as to the nature and meaning of the Christian mission was to be reflected later in continuing vacillation and confusion in the IMC and WCC as to what the church's mission really is as well as to the precise relationship between church and mission. At one point it was proposed that "mission is church;" at another point that "church is mission." In 1968, delegates at Uppsala proposed to "let the world establish the agenda," while at the same time turning a deaf ear to the question, "What about the two billion?" (Those whom, it was reckoned by advocates of Church Growth, had not yet heard the gospel). Themes of still other conferences often had a hopeful ring but attendant discussions and understandings were much less hopeful. The theme at Bangkok in 1973 was "Salvation Today," but in the end "salvation" turned out to mean "humanization." Ten years later the theme at Vancouver was, "Jesus Christ—the Life of the World," but not one major speaker even made reference to it. Speakers focused, rather, on "world affairs in ecumenical perspective."<sup>9</sup> If the "ecumenical perspective" on mission were to be boiled down to a single sentence it might well be, "Mission is everything the church does in the world," or the more nuanced, "Mission is everything the church is sent to do in the world." But both definitions run afoul of Stephen

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Arthur F. Glasser, "World Council of Churches Assemblies," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 1026.

Neill's oft-quoted dictum, "When mission is everything, mission is nothing."

3. When it comes to the matter of training future leaders, the theological precedents set by Edinburgh proved to be anything but helpful. In the late 1950s, for example, the International Missionary Council established the Theological Education Fund (TEF), with a view to raising the level of theological education in the Third World. Among other endeavors, the TEF brought some of the younger churches' brightest scholars to Western institutions of higher learning so they could pursue graduate studies. In the 1970s especially, those scholars were encouraged to evolve theologies and programs designed specifically for their respective constituencies and cultures. As a result, a number of "contextualized theologies" were either added to the list of existing sub-orthodox theologies or somehow combined with them, including Liberation Theology (in various forms such as Minjung Theology in Korea), Black Theology, Theology of Ontology and Time, Third Eye Theology, Theology of the Pain of God, Water-Buffalo Theology, and Yin-Yang Theology, to name a few. Careful analysis of these theologies in the light of Scripture will show that any gains in cultural sensitivity were overshadowed by a loss of biblical authenticity.
4. Often repeated in twentieth century mission enclaves, the Edinburgh error was ultimately reflected in the virtual abandonment of missions on the part of mainline Protestant denominations in America. At the beginning of the century mainline denominations supplied eighty percent of the North American missionary force. At its end, they supplied no more than six percent of it!<sup>10</sup> If good news was to be found, it was in the fact that the more conservative leaders of younger churches on former mission fields often resisted the defections of their clerical counterparts in Europe and America when it came to such matters as consecrating gay marriage and ordaining gays to Christian ministry.

<sup>10</sup>A. Scott Moreau, "Putting the Survey in Perspective," in *Mission Handbook: U.S. and Canadian Christian Ministries Overseas*, 18<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. idem ([n.p.]: EMIS, 2000), 4, 34. Cf. David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 317–26.

### **Corrective Attempts by Theological Conservatives in the Twentieth Century**

Hopefully the author will be forgiven for omitting the Pentecostal movement from consideration at this point, even though it emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century (1901) and has had an incalculable impact on world missions. However, that movement began as a restorationist and millenarian movement, not as a missionary movement. In addition, it has so many branches and expressions throughout Protestantism and even within Catholicism that it requires separate treatment. The two twentieth century conservative Protestant movements that responded most directly to the error of Edinburgh were, first, the fundamentalists and, later, the evangelicals. It is with them that we will be concerned here.

#### **The Reactions of Fundamentalists and Independents to Edinburgh Precedents and the Inroads of Theological Liberalism**

A number of factors inside and outside the church and its missions combined in the early 1900s to elicit a fundamentalist response that was at once theological, missiological and organizational.

It would be a stretch to say that early twentieth century fundamentalists were responding to Edinburgh alone or even primarily when, between 1910 and 1915, scholars from both Europe and America produced the well-known twelve-volume work, *The Fundamentals*. It would probably be more correct to say that those scholars were reacting to the larger incursion of a theological liberalism and modernism that denied the authenticity and complete authority of the Bible as well as various historic doctrines of the Christian faith—doctrines that give substance to the Christian gospel and direction to the Christian mission. The Fundamentals provided grist for the mills of those Bible schools and seminaries that produced the bulk of missionaries throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. In retrospect, therefore, it seems most unfortunate that organizers of the most representative missionary conference of all of history up to its time—Edinburgh 1910—avoided an opportunity to reinforce the authority of the Scriptures and reinvigorate the doctrinal verities that comprise the true gospel, confute its rivals and motivate its dissemination.

A fundamentalist reaction that was distinctly missionary took organized form in 1917 when a considerable number of independent “faith mission” leaders, including Henry W. Frost (China Inland Mission), Orson R. Palmer (African Inland Mission), and Frank W. Lange (Central America Mission), formed the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America (IFMA, now CrossGlobal Link). At least two aspects of that event are of major importance here. First, this was the

very first association of such missions to be formed in North America and the prominence accorded mainline denominational mission agencies at Edinburgh was a factor in precipitating it. Second, in the view of its organizers, they were defending the Christian faith in the face of defections from it. In one preparatory meeting, for example, it was noted the mission boards represented differed from other agencies:

particularly in the uncompromising adherence of those present to five specific beliefs: the deity of Christ, the vicarious atonement of Christ, man's fallen condition, the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, and the premillennial return of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, when it came time to organize, they affirmed the historic Christian faith by formulating a nine-article Confession of Faith, the first article of which had to do with the verbal inspiration, inerrancy and complete authority of the Bible.<sup>12</sup>

A very similar but much later and more iconoclastic and separatist fundamentalist reaction to Edinburgh, and the ecumenical movement to which it gave rise, was expressed in the formation of The Associated Missions of the International Council of Christian Churches (TAM) by Carl R. McIntire and others in 1948. It is instructive in this regard that a year or so after the inauguration of the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association (EFMA, now The Mission Exchange) in 1945, its leaders proposed that a close relationship be established between their organization and the IFMA. The response of the IFMA in its annual meeting in 1946 gives quite clear indication of the posture of the IFMA in its earlier days. Members voted decisively to maintain independence of any denomination-related organization. The record makes it clear that they "did not want to enter into a relationship which might hinder fellowship with the other fundamental missions, such as members of The Associated Missions of the International Council of Christian Churches."<sup>13</sup>

Still, in the forefront of missionary as well as church affairs in the 1950–60s, the fortunes of fundamentalism outside the IFMA, and within TAM especially, gradually receded. The *Mission Handbook 2004–2006: U.S. and Canadian Protestant Ministries Overseas* does not even include TAM in its listings. As for the IFMA, it ultimately formed an alliance with the EFMA that, while allowing for independent action and assembly, tended to promote commonality in agendas, publications, programs and posture.

<sup>11</sup>Edwin L. Frizen Jr., *75 Years of IFMA, 1917–1992: The Nondenominational Missions Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), 108.

<sup>12</sup>In the original autographs.

<sup>13</sup>Frizen, *75 Years of IFMA*, 250.

Apart from its presence in the IFMA and fundamentalist Pentecostal groupings, by the turn of the century the voice of fundamentalism tended to be muted, owing to a variety of factors, but especially its dividedness. It is ironic that while the term “fundamentalist” is often used pejoratively, Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the future of church and mission belongs to those who hold to the “fundamentals of the faith” whatever their organizational and ecclesiastical ties might be!

### **Evangelical Responses to Ecumenism and Fundamentalism**

In the 1940s a group of conservative leaders headed by Harold John Ockenga carved out a niche in church and mission for “evangelicals,”<sup>14</sup> who encouraged theological reform, social responsibility and ecclesiastical openness while eschewing the defensive posture of fundamentalism. In 1942 these leaders formed the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) with a seven-point Statement of Faith very similar to that of the IFMA in its affirmation of the authority of Scripture and orthodox doctrines. Three years later the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) was formed under the aegis of the NAE in order to facilitate missionary concerns. Though these two associations were, and are, open to organizations and/or individuals on the basis of a faith commitment, both tend to appeal primarily to evangelical denominations and their missionary agencies.

As evangelicals moved into the 1950s and beyond, tensions developed in three areas not only between evangelicals and ecumenists on the left and evangelicals and fundamentalists on the right, but also between evangelicals themselves. All three have had serious implications for Christian missions.

First, for long years cooperative evangelism was a most decisive issue at home and overseas. The question was a simple one: Does the preaching of a biblical gospel justify cooperation with liberal clerics, who do not subscribe to the historic creeds of the church? Some said, “Yes.” Some said, “No.” Due largely to the popularity and reputation of Billy Graham and the passage of time, the controversy gradually receded into the background and the inclusive position came to prevail. However, it cannot be said that the controversy has been resolved to the satisfaction of either all evangelicals or most fundamentalists.

Second, other questions that divided evangelicals early on had to do with the nature of biblical authority and the importance of “evangelical theology.” Some conservatives held to the inerrancy of the autographs of Scripture; others, to infallibility and the idea that the Bible is inerrant, not necessarily in its full extent, but only in that which it affirms. In line with

<sup>14</sup>Ockenga coined the term, “new evangelicals.”

the former view, the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) subscribed to a single, simple statement on biblical inerrancy that, in effect, placed all agendas and deliberations under the authority of the written Word of God and fostered a body of literature of incalculable benefit both to church and mission. Later on, however, ETS found it necessary to add a Trinitarian plank to its faith statement in order to differentiate its position from that of certain cults. More recently, ETS leaders have found that enlarged statement itself to be inadequate when dealing with the challenge of open theism.

As for evangelical missions themselves, writing concerning a Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission, which convened in Wheaton in April 1966, Norman Horner writes,

The appearance of false doctrines has again "evoked a confessional act from the Christian community in witness to the true faith" (Hughes). Something had to be done to affirm what evangelicals truly believe the Bible teaches, providing an antidote to "ecumenical theology" and creating a true focus for missionary service.<sup>15</sup>

The Wheaton enclave was followed by a much larger and more internationally representative World Congress on Evangelism held in Berlin in October of the same year. Its theme, "One Race, One Gospel, One Task," gave indication of a conservative understanding of both the Christian mission and the Christian message, but its importance is better measured in terms of the Lausanne Movement to which it gave rise.

Berlin 1966 was followed almost a decade later by a watershed event that brought into clear focus a third area of significant division among evangelicals, namely, that of social (or socio-political) concerns as they relate to the mission of the church. I make reference here to the First International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974 (most often referred to as Lausanne I). It was attended by 2430 invited participants (not delegates) and 570 observers, including some Roman Catholic and WCC representatives. The plenary program featured seven papers on "biblical foundations" and five on "strategy issues."

But of special importance to our present discussion were challenges by Ralph A. Winter and John R.W. Stott. Winter presaged "The Gospel for Every Person and a Church for Every People by A.D. 2000 and Beyond" movement for world evangelization. Stott presaged a pronounced shift in the direction of increased socio-political concern on the part of

<sup>15</sup>Norman A. Horner, "Introduction," in *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission: The Ecumenical-Conservative Encounter*, ed. idem (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 12–13.

a sizeable segment of evangelicals.<sup>16</sup> Before the Congress ended, some 2200 participants had signed “The Lausanne Covenant”—a 3000-word declaration that affirmed the infallibility (but not inerrancy) of Scripture and the primacy of evangelism. But it left the precise relationship between evangelism/mission on the one hand, and social action on the other hand, as an issue to be resolved later. Subsequently, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE), which grew out of Lausanne I, has sponsored a variety of conferences and meetings. Some have considered this issue but none has brought closure to it.

### **The Point at which Conservative Mission Forces Have Now Arrived**

At present the status of the overall conservative response to the Edinburgh error is not at all clear. The fundamentalist movement is very much alive, but at times seems to be altogether too divided, apparently keeping it isolated and insulated from playing a major role. The evangelical movement is very much alive and, in some ways even robust, but displays weaknesses in four areas that Edinburgh 1910 failed to address. These four areas have to do with Roman Catholicism, the authority of Scripture, doctrinal orthodoxy, and the nature and meaning of mission.

#### **Concerning Roman Catholicism**

Over recent decades, relationships between Evangelicals and Catholics have first ameliorated and more recently soured. Evangelicals and Catholics Together, among other groupings, has been pursuing the initiatives of Vatican II and seeking rapprochement on the conversion issue and other matters. Some evangelicals have been re-thinking the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith and even questioning the need for the Reformation. Not long ago the evangelical world was stunned when the president of ETS, Francis Beckwith, resigned from that position and joined the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, on the Catholic side, Pope Benedict has taken a hardened stance toward Protestants by declaring that Vatican II has been widely misinterpreted when it comes to the

<sup>16</sup>Taking Jesus’ words, “As the Father hath sent me so send I you” (John 20:21), to mean that Jesus’ mission (Luke 4:18–19) is a model for our own, Stott made social action and evangelism to be more or less equal partners in Christian mission with a “certain priority” being given to evangelism. See John R.W. Stott, *The Christian Mission in the Modern World: What the Church Should Be Doing Now* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975), 27; and, Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 146–47.

<sup>17</sup>Gregory Tomlin, “ETS President Resigns, Returns to Catholicism” (Baptist Press, 9 May 2007).



matter of unity. He has also re-affirmed the traditional Roman position maintaining that the Church of Rome is the only true church.<sup>18</sup>

### Concerning the Authority of Scripture

Recent history makes it apparent that evangelicals are now divided, not so much on the authority of the Scripture per se, but on the nature of that authority. There has been a decided shift among scholars away from inerrancy and in the direction of infallibility, with attendant changes in the way the Bible is translated, interpreted and communicated. We have already noted the direction taken by the LCWE back in 1974. Much later, certain evangelical scholars focused on the inspiration and authority of Scripture and relevant issues in a meeting held at Wheaton College in 2001. Some papers reflected a shift in the direction of liberal scholarship significant enough to cause one scholar to urge his fellows not to forfeit their soul to academic respectability.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately for missions, the ETS now strikes an uncertain note on the issue.

### Concerning Orthodox Doctrine

After reviewing relevant statements of faith articulated between 1950 and 2000, Thomas C. Oden and J.I. Packer found consensus on what they termed a “Biblio-Christo-centric” definition of evangelicalism.<sup>20</sup> A more somber assessment of a larger range of evangelical productions and activities, however, has led one British commentator to point to a “battle” in the United Kingdom over “what an evangelical is.”<sup>21</sup> This more closely approximates the assessment of evangelicalism made by the American scholar, Richard Pierard. Over a decade before the study by Oden and Packer, he had already concluded that it had become

increasingly clear that the term [evangelical] now encompassed so complex a sociological reality that it was losing its descriptive power. . . . They [evangelicals] could no longer be distinguished

<sup>18</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church,” (Vatican, 29 June 2007) [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20070629\\_responsa-quaestiones\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html) (Accessed 16 October 2008)..

<sup>19</sup>*Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 170.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas C. Oden and J.I. Packer, *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

<sup>21</sup>Madison Trammel, “Cross Purposes: Biggest Christian Conference Splits amid Growing Atonement Debate,” *Christianity Today* 51 (July 2007): 16.

from people in the “mainline,” “liberal” or “ecumenical” churches.<sup>22</sup>

Pierard’s assessment is exemplified in the approach of the influential Emergent leader Brian McLaren. Building on the work of Stanley Grenz and others, McLaren identifies himself as being “missional” and then proceeds to define missional as being a “generous third way” between the conservative “personal Savior” gospel and liberal versions of it.<sup>23</sup> Whether at Edinburgh in 1910 or in missionary conferences today, if one adopts this understanding of what it means to be “missional,” it would be impossible for mission leaders to “rule out” theological and doctrinal discussion at all, because in discussing such things as the meaning of mission and the contextualization of the missionary message *they are actually doing theology and determining doctrine!*

### **Concerning the Nature and Meaning of Mission**

Any fair evaluation of theologically conservative missions overall must take into account the fact that, since the rise of the evangelical movement in the middle of the twentieth century, conservative missions in general have come into their own as far as numbers of volunteers, expenditure of money, breadth of undertakings, depth of research and wealth of missiological proposals. At the same time there is an underside to the story not sufficiently noted or discussed. Generally speaking, the agendas of conservative missionary conferences at every level tend to be crammed with issues and programs having to do with leadership, education, strategy, justice, poverty, environment and the like to the diminution of theology and doctrine. If Bishop Neill’s words, “When mission is everything, mission is nothing,” applied to ecumenical missions of a somewhat more distant past, they certainly apply to conservative missions—especially evangelical missions—of the more recent past. As we approached the end of the twentieth century, the astute missions historian, Ralph Winter, re-affirmed the clear priority he had given to world evangelization at Lausanne I, in

<sup>22</sup>Richard V. Pierard, “Evangelicalism,” in *The New 20<sup>th</sup> Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. J.D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 313.

<sup>23</sup>Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post-Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 105. Building on David Bosch, Lesslie Newbigin and others, McLaren further defines “missional” in terms of making theology a “discipline within Christian missions.” He explains what he means by saying, “Theology is the church on a mission reflecting on its message, its identity, its meaning.” Ibid.

a piece entitled “The Meaning of Mission,” by including the following observation,

About the only people who still think of mission as having to do with preaching the gospel where Christ is not named, with being a testimony to the very last tribe and nation and tongue on this earth, are the often confused people in the pew.<sup>24</sup>

However, within a few short years Winter himself has added to that confusion by promoting a “new direction” in mission, which in important respects reflects the enlarged view taken by John Stott at Lausanne, but is more extreme.<sup>25</sup> More than this, Winter is in agreement with the decision of Edinburgh 1910 planners to exclude discussions on doctrine and the nature and meaning of the Great Commission from the agendas of future mission conferences in order to facilitate mission!<sup>26</sup>

In sum, there are obvious parallels between ecumenism at the beginning of the twentieth century and evangelicalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century. One hundred years ago, the curtain had fallen on the nineteenth century—Latourette’s “Great Century of Missions,” a British century. Now, the curtain has been drawn on the twentieth century—an American century that included Winter’s “Unbelievable Years” of Christian expansion.<sup>27</sup> Though very different in form, the opportunities and challenges faced today are similar to those faced by John Mott and his colleagues a century ago. Like them, today’s leaders stand at a fork in the road. They cannot go back. They must go on. The crucial question is, Which way will they go?

<sup>24</sup>Ralph D. Winter, “The Meaning of ‘Mission’: Understanding this Term is Crucial to Completion of the Missionary Task,” *Missions Frontiers Bulletin* (March–April 1998): 15.

<sup>25</sup>Ralph D. Winter, “Planetary Events and the Mission of the Church” (Donald McClure Lectureship, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 3–4 October 2005); Ralph D. Winter, “The Future of Evangelicals in Mission,” in *Missions: God’s Initiative in the World*, ed. Ed Stetzer and David J. Hesselgrave (Nashville: B&H Academic, forthcoming). Like Stott, Winter now takes the mission of Jesus to be a model for our own. Noting that Jesus’ mission was to “destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8), Winter proposes that we join Jesus in that “kingdom mission” by undertaking enterprises designed to ameliorate the human condition. His particular concern is for the “eradication of disease-bearing microbes.” However, his approach makes it possible to define Christian mission as inclusive of any good ameliorative enterprise that any sincere Christian leader may reasonably choose and passionately embrace.

<sup>26</sup>Ralph D. Winter, letter to author, 3 September 2007.

<sup>27</sup>Ralph D. Winter, *The Twenty-Five Unbelievable Years: 1945–1969* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1970).

## **Urgent Appeals from Two of the Twentieth Century's Leading Conservative Scholars**

Which way? In order to answer that question, it is entirely appropriate that we ponder the proposals of two of the twentieth century's most eminent conservative scholars—two men who lived the history we have reviewed and pointed churches and missions in the right way. I refer to Donald A. McGavran and Carl F.H. Henry, two Christian scholars who are generally regarded as among the twentieth century's very best in their respective fields of missiology and theology. The fact that they traveled very different ecclesiastical routes only to arrive at basically the same conclusion serves to underscore the critical importance of their appeals. (The reader should kindly overlook the necessarily personal nature of much of what follows.) In any case, it is well that we devote a comparatively large space to them because they speak with a degree of acumen and wisdom that few could ever command.

### **The Appeal of an Eminent Missiologist—Donald A. McGavran**

Donald McGavran was born in India of missionary parentage. He served in India as a Disciples of Christ missionary from 1924 to 1957, when he returned home to establish the Institute of Church Growth, to found the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, and to inaugurate the Church Growth Movement. It was McGavran who made the much-heralded appeal to WCC conferees at Uppsala in 1968 to return to Great Commission mission and strategy by attempting to reach “the two billion” without the gospel. The disheartening response at Uppsala was a major factor—though certainly not the only one—leading to the unabashed and uncompromising position of his sunset years.

From the time of my tenure at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1965, until his homegoing and my retirement in 1991, Dr. McGavran was an esteemed mentor and friend. From 1988 to 1990, however, his letters (including some unpublished manuscripts) increased in number, length and urgency, because though we “speak in somewhat different terms we share the same fundamental concern for the future of missions.” This “fundamental concern” must account for the increased frequency of his letters despite the fact that, at an earlier period, I had expressed fear that his philosophy of church growth was derived too much from the social sciences and too little from biblical theology.

Late in life McGavran had several inter-related concerns. The burden of one of his letters and its accompanying essay was that churches and missions devote entirely too much effort to achieve structural unity at the expense of biblical mission. The burden of another letter and essay had to

do with the “lion” that threatens the future of missions. McGavran’s “lion” was the “conviction that mission is primarily helpful activities to brother men [sic.] irrespective of what they believe.” Put another way, the “lion” is the idea that “mission is primarily helping those great groupings of mankind who are less fortunate than we are.”

A third burden was that, in academic settings, the determination of mission agendas is overly dependent upon the presence of missiologists who do not hold to beliefs that are absolutely foundational to Christian mission—beliefs such as the lostness of humankind, the uniqueness of Christ and the gospel, the necessity of conversion to Christ, and so on. It was in hope of rectifying this state of affairs that McGavran wrote,

I want to lay before you, David, a very important item. . . . I think that the evangelical professors of missions need to establish a nationwide organization called openly and courageously “The American Society of Christian Missiology.” . . . What is needed in America and indeed around the world is a society of missiology that says quite frankly that the purpose of missiology is to carry out the Great Commission. Anything other than that may be a good thing to do, but it is not missiology.<sup>28</sup>

It was this appeal that eventuated in the formation of the Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS), with its stand on historic Christian doctrine and its related agendas and productions.

McGavran should not be misunderstood. It is my best understanding that he did not oppose educational, medical and ameliorative ministries. Rather, he supported them. He himself was an educational missionary. In fact, he once told me that he had been in India for years before he realized that there was a door open to the salvation of Indians other than the door of education. But he believed that, like all good Christians everywhere, missionaries should carry on these ministries because they are *Christians*, not because they are *missionaries* as such.

Likewise, McGavran was not opposed to academic associations of mission professors and professionals that include those of diverse theological positions and that welcome any discussion relevant to their discipline. He himself was a member of several such associations. What he advocated was the formation of one missiological society whose members could agree that “the heart of missiology is preaching the gospel with the intent to win people away from the worship of stones, idols, ideas, power, sex, money

<sup>28</sup>Donald A. McGavran, letter to author, 7 April 1988.

and success to the worship of the true and living God as portrayed in the gospel.”<sup>29</sup>

In short, and in McGavran’s own terms, he believed that *Christian* mission is “Great Commission mission.” Christian mission is “reaching the ‘two billion’ who have not yet heard the gospel.” Christian mission is “discipling the *ethne*.”

### **The Appeal of an Eminent Theologian—Carl F.H. Henry**

Carl Henry was the founding editor of *Christianity Today*, chairman of the 1966 World Congress of Evangelism in Berlin, and author of over 35 books, including a monumental six-volume work on divine revelation. One of his fellow theologians, Timothy George, hailed him as the leading evangelical theologian of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Another, Kenneth Kantzer, considered him to be the ablest defender of evangelical doctrine of his time.<sup>31</sup> Not widely known, but of special importance in this context, is the fact that his widow, Helga Bender Henry, is the daughter of a pioneer missionary to the Cameroons.

Not long before his final illness and homegoing, Dr. Henry brought multiple copies of one of his final writings, *Towards a Recovery of Christian Belief*, to a small gathering of fellow faculty members at Trinity. Speaking briefly concerning the significance he attached to that particular work, he offered us as many copies as we could put to good purpose. I still regret coming away with but four copies. After reading the book I realized that I could have profitably distributed at least fourteen or even forty or more. Although widely known for many theological tomes, this comparatively small volume that he commended to us that day makes it clear that one of Henry’s final concerns had to do with the preservation of the Christian faith itself. With reference to it, J.I. Packer says, “Learned, lucid, wise, and powerful, this is Henry at his best.”<sup>32</sup> In the words of his publisher, “According to Carl Henry, many popular defenders of the faith have traded their intellectual birthright for a mess of pseudo-intellectual pottage. . . . Christians must once again stand on the rock of divine revelation, defending it against all comers. Only then will we begin to experience a recovery of Christian belief.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Carl F.H. Henry, *Towards a Recovery of Christian Belief: The Rutherford Lectures* (Wheaton: Crossway 1990), backcover.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Henry closes his book with words pregnant with significance for our generation of Christian and missionary leaders and for generations of leaders yet to come.

The Christian belief system, which the Christian knows to be grounded in divine revelation, is relevant to all of life. For unbelieving multitudes in our times, the recent modern defection from God known in His self-revelation has turned the whole of life into a shambles. Ours is the first society in modern history to have ventured to erect a civilization on godless foundations; it may well be the last. . . . Echoing from Creation to Calvary to Consummation, God's eternal Word invites a parched humanity to the well that never runs dry, to the Water of Life that alone truly and fully quenches the thirst of stricken pilgrims.<sup>34</sup>

### **Twenty-first Century Mission—What We Should Be Doing Now to Correct the Edinburgh Error**

Before concluding this essay it is well that I remind readers that we are occupied here with but one aspect of the much larger picture of world missions. We are dealing with an early twentieth century error—the sidelining of biblical truth and doctrine—that desperately needs correction, but we know that much that happened then and is happening now is right and deservedly needs to be affirmed. We have looked at a certain weakness that has plagued Protestant missions for many years, but we know that there have been certain strengths even within ecumenical circles, which need to be recognized and reinforced. We have been concerned with three major missionary movements within Protestantism, but we have not been able to give space to a Pentecostal movement we know to be one of the most powerful and pervasive missionary forces of them all.

Perhaps even more significant than all of this is the fact that, while we have concentrated here on Western, primarily North American, missions, it is more than likely that the younger churches and their missions hold the key to the future. The center of Christian gravity is now shifting from the global North and West to the global South and East.<sup>35</sup> Overall, the churches of the South and East tend to be more dedicated to the authority and truths of Scripture than those of the West and North.<sup>36</sup> The significance of these facts can hardly be overstated. It has been the Anglican leaders of

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 113–14.

<sup>35</sup>Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup>Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).



Africa who have mounted the most significant protest to the lapses of faith and order in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, for example. So, if they can avoid falling prey to the Edinburgh error, the churches and missions of the global South and East may well constitute our brightest hope for the future of Christian missions.

So, how do they, and how do we, correct the Edinburgh error? I would suggest two primary ways of doing it, both of which are partly positive and partly negative. One has to do with the way we *think* about the Christian mission—with our frame of mind or mindset as concerns doctrine. The other has to do with the way we go about *doing* the business of Christian missions—with our *modus operandi* or method. All that follows is, of course, necessarily sketchy and suggestive, but for the sake of future missions it seems to me that we simply must correct the Edinburgh error with reference, first to theology, and then, to methodology.

### **Correct the Edinburgh error by changing the prevailing missionary mindset**

The Edinburgh leaders did not entertain an antipathy with respect to theology and doctrine. They simply assumed that, since those mission agencies invited to send delegates to the conference were basically evangelical, doctrinal concerns could be cared for at that point and had no need of inclusion in conference proceedings. They also assumed that, since participation would be limited to missionary personnel, ecclesiastical concerns could be avoided as well. In effect, theological, doctrinal and ecclesiastical questions could be ruled out in order to get on with the “business of missions.”

Long experience leads me to believe that, while the avoidance of doctrinal issues at Edinburgh was altogether intentional, the comparative absence of serious doctrinal discussion in missionary conferences of more recent times has been largely unintentional. Quite literally, the relative absence of doctrinal discussions is the product of a certain “mindset” that has several components.

1. Numerous missionary leaders seem to feel that, once they have subscribed to an orthodox statement of faith, they can “bank it,” “bank on it” and get on with pressing practical issues. This assumption is not usually thought through very seriously, however. For example, leaders who think that way would often be the first to inquire as to how many people who hold to the creeds of the church actually have a “personal and practical” relationship with Christ. Yet they seem to believe that their own status as “true believers” somehow

confers legitimacy on their particular ways and means of doing Christian mission. Given that mindset, “their vision” is all too readily transmuted into a “divine vision” quite apart from a thoroughgoing examination of their vision in the light of divine revelation. In similar fashion, they often tend to give more attention to their own mission statements than they do to historic creedal statements that articulate core doctrines of divine revelation.

2. Also pervasive and persuasive among missions people generally is the oft-repeated assertion, “Missions must change if they are to have a future.” Guru status is almost automatically conferred on any leader or teacher who repeats that particular missionary mantra frequently and fervently. Very recently, a faithful missionary friend quipped, “It has almost come to the point where we missionaries must contact headquarters every morning to enquire as to who we are and what we are to do today.” Of course, cultures do change. That is not only true, it is a fundamental characteristic of culture. And, as cultures change, missions must likewise change. True, again. But although change is necessary to carry out Christian mission, change itself is not the essence of Christian mission. The essence of mission is to be found in the nature and attributes of the Triune God and in the Word that he has revealed to us. The essence of mission is not to be found in *change* and *changing*, it is rather to be found in that which is both *unchanging* and *unchangeable!*
3. Another notion that is currently popular in mission circles is the idea that this is a “time for risking.” That is true also. But the kind of “risk” that is ordinarily in view is not the kind of risk undertaken by the likes of William Carey, David Brainerd, Adoniram Judson, John Patteson and the Auca martyrs. It is more the kind of risk undertaken when one employs this or that innovative approach or monetary investment or missionary method or gospel contextualization with the understanding that there is a good chance that it may not work out, that it may fail. Some time ago I wrote an article showing how one contemporary approach to the contextualization of the gospel actually involves the denial of certain cardinal teachings intrinsic to the gospel including teachings such as the Virgin Birth and the blood atonement. Imagine my surprise when one

evangelical critic replied to the effect that that is exactly the kind of risk that must be taken if we hope to communicate the gospel effectively to postmoderns!<sup>37</sup> Well, risks there are, and more risks there will be. But to risk the gospel itself in order to communicate the gospel? That kind of risk is inadmissible and should be unthinkable!

4. Finally, not to be overlooked is a pronounced tendency on the part of Christians generally, but perhaps missions people especially, to resort to a selective use of Scripture. Illustrations of this are numerous and some of them are egregious. By way of illustration, I will point to one that is particularly pertinent in this context. It has to do with the familiar passage in Titus 1:5–9 where missionary Titus is commissioned by Paul to appoint elders in the fledgling churches of Crete. Experience leads me to believe that in schools, churches and missions alike significantly more emphasis is placed on those qualifications for eldership stated in verses 6–8 as compared to those stated in verse 9. In fact, upon reflection I find myself guilty of this. Over many years of teaching church planting and development I have often dealt with qualifications for leadership such as “husband of one wife,” “above reproach,” “self-controlled” and so on. Only in recent years, however, has it occurred to me that Paul himself placed great importance on the ability to “give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (vs. 9). In fact, it is this qualification that Paul elaborates in subsequent verses. We ordinarily do not emphasize it, but the elders and pastors of even those early fledgling churches of culturally depraved Crete were required to be “pastor-apologists.” Paul himself was a “missionary-apologist” and many of the apologists of the early centuries were “missionary-apologists” as well! Why should it be different today when those who “contradict sound doctrine” continue to multiply at home and abroad?

<sup>37</sup>For an excellent defense of Christian orthodoxy against such ways of thinking, see John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

## **Correct the Edinburgh Error by “Doing Kingdom Business” in God’s Way**

Not only must the Edinburgh error as it pertained to theology and doctrine be corrected. The Edinburgh error as it pertained to methodology and strategy must be corrected too. As noted previously, James Scherer writes that Edinburgh

launched a movement for missionary cooperation and consultation without prior doctrinal consensus. . . . It did not need to be put to the test of doctrinal definition. Delegates were ready to accept one another in good faith. . . . From the time of Edinburgh, it became an accepted method of doing together the business of the kingdom.<sup>38</sup>

As history shows, the problem with this is not so much to be found in the phrase “ready to accept one another” as it is to be found in the phrase “did not need to be put to the test of doctrinal definition.” Consultation and cooperation in kingdom business that is based on trust among children of the kingdom are to be commended. But consultation and cooperation in kingdom business that are based on the revelation of the King is what has been commanded!

Only a knowledge of, and a commitment to, the revealed truth of God will sustain the church and its missions in the years ahead. The most crucial challenges of this century and until our Lord returns will not have to do first and foremost with our innovative strategies but with our basic beliefs—with what those beliefs really are and with how deeply they are actually held. The response of church and mission leaders to the challenges of postmodernism and globalization must be the exact opposite of the Edinburgh response. We must give first consideration to Christian doctrine, not only when planning for centennials of Edinburgh in 2010, but also when planning other missionary gatherings; when researching, writing and teaching missiology; and when preparing and publishing missionary materials of whatever kind. No individual or collective vision, calling, interest, or enthusiasm—not even heartfelt compassion—can be allowed to preempt the primacy of complete biblical authority and core Christian truths. No postponement of theological and doctrinal deliberation should be contemplated except in the most unusual circumstances. Biblical mission and world evangelization are now at stake and will be for the foreseeable future!

In light of the foregoing, conservative missionary leaders should take special care that the participants, programs and procedures of future mission

<sup>38</sup>Scherer, “Ecumenical Mandates for Mission,” 22–23.

conferences be more concerned with delineating and expediting biblical mission than with simply demonstrating collegiality, mutual acceptance and good will. Practical steps in this direction might well include some combination of the following:

1. Review and reaffirm the “faith once delivered to the saints.” Mission books, study series, consultations and conferences—many of them best-selling, award-winning, celebrity-led and promising world change—now flood the market. Included propositions and proposals are usually Bible-related but often extra-biblical and sometimes unbiblical. Not all merit, but all demand, Scriptural evaluation. Of course, all of them cannot be dealt with at once, so what are we to do? I suggest that we periodically remember, reconsider and renew those teachings that necessitated and nurtured mission in the first place, and that we do so not just by reiterating them but also by showing how they relate to mission in our twenty-first century pagan and post-modern cultures. In his insightful analysis of the Emergent Church Movement, for example, D.A. Carson summarizes our responsibility in this regard by citing 1 Peter 1:12–21. He enjoins continued confidence in revealed truth on the part of all true Christians by noting that truth is:

“Stabilized by constant review (1:12–15),”

“Established on historical witness (1:16–18),” and

“Grounded in biblical revelation (1:19–21).”<sup>39</sup>

We do well to remember that the first words Luke employed in describing the church of Pentecost were, “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42). The last admonition of Paul to Timothy was that he be “a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1 Tim 4:6). The apostles’ doctrine—sound doctrine—is unchangeable but it is not static. It had to be encoded in words, but it must not be entombed in them. Confessional statements, such as those of IFMA (CrossGlobal Link) and EFMA (The Mission Exchange), should be constantly revisited

<sup>39</sup>D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 230–33.

and reaffirmed. Either they are all-important or they are not important at all.

2. Distinguish carefully between theological/doctrinal and practical/strategic issues. There is an inter-relationship between all aspects of Christian mission, of course. No aspect exists in isolation. But some missionary proposals are primarily theological with practical implications. Others are primarily practical with theological ramifications. Priority should ordinarily be given to the former, but both types must be considered.

The importance of this can hardly be over-estimated. Take, by way of example, the relationship between evangelism and social concern to which reference has been made. Most theological conservatives can be expected to agree that, in an ultimate sense, the battle in which we are engaged is a battle for the soul, not the stomach, of humankind. However, some will immediately add, "Yes, but the way to the soul is through the stomach!" Others will say, "Yes, but the stomach is important. You cannot expect a person with an empty stomach to listen to the gospel." Still others will respond, "Yes, but the stomach and the soul cannot be separated in that way. We are dealing with whole persons. To deal with the stomach is to deal with the soul."

Expressed in this fashion the differences may seem to be trite. But they are not. What we have here is an admixture of considerations that are at once theological and practical, doctrinal and strategic. To explore them in depth here would take us far afield. But it should be clear that theological and practical distinctions are of the essence and that precedence must be given to biblical theology and doctrine if we hope to reach a conclusion that is truly Christian. After all, people of good will of all religions and no religion can and do address the human need for food, clothing, shelter, health, education, justice and so on. But Christians—and Christians only—can be expected to preach the gospel, win men and women of all nations to Jesus Christ, and establish churches that will worship and witness until Christ returns. And only so long as, and to the extent that, they embrace the truth of divine revelation!

3. Encourage group discussion and group evaluation of the theological/doctrinal validity of proposals having to do with missionary practice and strategy. This suggestion flows logically from the previous one. We cannot but be appreciative of the creativity, ingenuity and energy that contribute to the thinking and doing of Christian mission these days. But that is not the end of the matter. It is obvious that some of the products of that creativity are superior to others. Some are biblically valid. Some are not. And, one way or the other, that determination should be made by groups of qualified evaluators, not just by interested individuals.

Three types of proposals and attendant problems almost literally cry out for group discussion and evaluation. First comes those proposals designed to deal with the exclusive claims of the Christian faith: those doctrines having to do with the lostness of humankind, the fate of the unevangelized, the necessity of conversion, the significance of John 14:6, and so on. It is to be remembered that, though old, issues such as these are nevertheless new to every generation of Christians. And they often come in formulations that appear to be new and enticing, as in the case of a “new” type of universalism that agrees that Christ is the only way to God in accordance with John 14:6 but goes on to say that, in one way or another, all or almost all people, will ultimately be saved through Him. To return to Edinburgh for a moment, there is reason to believe that, if a Social Gospel that had been around for several decades had been given serious consideration in that conference, its outcroppings at Jerusalem 1928 and subsequent ecumenical conferences would have been easier to deal with. Admittedly, complete agreement on such issues is not easy to come by. But that only underscores the importance of continued dialogue; it does not militate against it.

Second comes that large number of strategy proposals and programs of somewhat newer vintage that merit examination and evaluation—proposals such as concept fulfillment, exorcising territorial spirits, prayer walking, redemptive analogies, business as mission, churchless Christianity, C1–C6 Missions to Muslims, church-planting movements, and the eradication of poverty, to name but a few. Our missions stand to benefit significantly when such



proposals are subjected to careful scrutiny in the light of Scripture, especially when this is done as soon as they see the light of day and by church and missions leaders acting in concert with one another. Of course, evaluations of varied extensiveness and value at times do appear in conference agendas and in missionary literature as well. But what is needed is a process of evaluation that is more standardized and thoroughgoing. As things stand now a process such as this seems difficult to attain. Nevertheless it should be encouraged and attempted.

Third comes those common missionary clichés used to engender missionary interest and promote missionary causes of various kinds. Most of them are half-truths based on a selective use of Scripture. I refer to propositions such as “We are all missionaries,” “The mission field has now come to us,” “Your mission field is right next door,” “No one should hear the gospel twice before all have heard it once,” and “Inasmuch as you have done it to these, you have done it to me.” Let us admit that there is a sense in which most or all of these clichés contain a kernel of truth. Nevertheless, they certainly are not the whole truth and they can be counterproductive in the long run. The “inasmuch” passage in Matthew 25:40, for example, has served as a most powerful incentive to undertake a great variety of commendable Christian undertakings from digging wells to feeding the hungry to adopting orphans. However, the usual interpretation is highly questionable at best. Closer examination will show that this passage has to do with the final judgment when the world’s peoples are to be judged on the basis of their response to Christ’s ambassadors.<sup>40</sup> It is entirely possible to undermine both biblical theology and Christian mission by the ways we advocate the latter.

4. Schedule Bible study and prayer for prime times in mission gatherings of all kinds. How well some of us recall the Consultation on World Evangelization held in Pattaya, Thailand in 1980. Midway through the consultation an ecumenical leader, who had been attending a concurrent conference in Melbourne, Australia, stopped by to convey a greeting. To our embarrassment he reported that one of the most rewarding aspects of the Melbourne conference had

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 303–05.

been times of Bible study and prayer. For all the emphasis on the authority of Scripture and the power of prayer at Pattaya, the agenda itself had been packed with so many strategy sessions that Bible study and prayer sessions had been consigned to inopportune times and consequently were poorly attended. Whether in international conference halls or in local churches, we conservative Christians would do well to listen—really listen—to our own affirmations and exhortations!

5. Invite theologians, apologists and pastors to participate in our mission conferences and consultations, and to contribute to missionary research and publications. There can be little doubt that Edinburgh benefited in some ways by virtue of the fact that participation was confined to those who were actually engaged in missionary endeavors and who best understood missionary life and work. There can be little doubt that the International Missionary Council and its conferences became bogged down at times because of the presence of church leaders who introduced ecclesiastical issues not germane to missions per se. Churches are churches. Missions are missions. They are not the same. But they are complementary and inseparable.

The church and its representatives, institutions and expressions can make tremendous contributions to the way we think and do mission, especially in this time of rapid globalization. In the past, for example, counter-cult ministries have tended to be a ministry apart, but with the incursion of Eastern religions in the West counter-cult experts and cross-cultural mission specialists have come ever closer together to the benefit of both groups.<sup>41</sup> Of inestimable value in the future will be the productions of the Gospel Coalition recently organized by Bible scholars and theologians such as D.A. Carson, John Piper and Tim Keller. One of their initial productions is a comprehensive confessional statement of those core evangelical beliefs that comprise the biblical gospel.<sup>42</sup> Again, thinking in terms of Christian apologetics, the worldwide ministry of Ravi

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Irving Hexham, Stephen Rost, and John W. Morehead II, eds., *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004).

<sup>42</sup>Collin Hansen, "Tethered to the Center: The Gospel Coalition is Committed to Core Evangelical Beliefs and Wide-Ranging Cultural Engagement," *Christianity Today* 51 (7 Oct 2007): 71.

Zacharias demonstrates both the need for, and the potential of, giving a larger place to polemics and apologetics when thinking and doing the work of missions. Missions will do well to incorporate the insights of scholars such as Norman Geisler, Chad Meister, Douglas Groothuis, Gary Habermas, and others, who have made significant contributions to mission thinking and soon will be inaugurating the *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics*.<sup>43</sup>

What I am advocating here is not new, of course. Conversations and cooperation between missionaries and specialists in theology, medicine, arts, science, sports and other disciplines have been longstanding and rewarding. What I am especially interested in here is an increased participation of theologians, Bible scholars and apologists in missionary gatherings and a heightened infusion of theological, biblical and apologetic understandings into the missionary enterprise in a day when these are so desperately needed and, all too often, so conspicuously absent. At this juncture in history, Christian missions stand in need of interdisciplinary cooperation and the very best insights that the church and its institutions can provide in order to raise up Christian leaders around the world who will be able to instruct in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it. Either all of us will serve together in Christian missions in the future or some of us will not be in the will of God.

### Conclusion

In conclusion I would suggest that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the error of Edinburgh is still being repeated too often and by too many. Assuredly, that will not ultimately doom God's plan for the evangelization of the world. But it will greatly diminish our part in that plan in this twenty-first century just as surely as it did in the case of some of our well-meaning forebears in the twentieth century. We would do well to listen to the likes of McGavran and Henry. In the end, they did not resort to terms such as "fundamentalism," "evangelicalism," "conservatism" and "orthodoxy"—good and serviceable as those terms may be. They simply but earnestly urged us to be confessedly, consistently and

<sup>43</sup>As a precursor of things to come, see *Reasons for Faith: Making a Case for the Christian Faith*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).

uncompromisingly Christian. And, after all, what are we if not Christian? What do we believe if not Christian beliefs? What kind of behavior do we enjoin if not Christian behavior? What kind of unity do we seek if not Christian unity? What kind of mission do we undertake if not Christian mission? And what kind of people do we seek to persuade the peoples of the world to become? What kind, indeed, if not truly and biblically Christian?

## *Evangelical Agnosticism: Crafting A Different Gospel*

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It [the International Committee of the World Missionary Conference] should from the beginning be precluded from handling matters which are concerned with the doctrinal or ecclesiastical differences of the various denominations. This being assured, it would be desirable that it should be as widely representative as possible. Yet it should be a purely consultative and advisory association, exercising no authority but such as would accrue to it through the intrinsic value of the services that it may be able to render.<sup>1</sup>

There had been dramatic, lengthy, and unifying discussions surrounding the development of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh that summer of 1910. Each delegate or representative sensed a moving together around a common cause spurred onward by apparent opportunities unsurpassed in Christian history. Commissions formed studies of matters arising from a century of Protestant missionary work during the height of the colonialist era. There was a palpable desire to see the historic branches of Christianity coalesce around the cause and causes of God's grand commission to His church, which He had left in the world to complete the task. The apparent urgency of these pragmatic realities seemed to overwhelm beliefs, thus distinctions between the various Christian groups were diminished.

Delegates discussed extensively two paths to unity. One contingency of delegates advocated forming organic unions on various levels by emphasizing only the common core of Christian beliefs as they then were willing to itemize, but not define, as a cluster of convictions. Instead they would form a kind of ideological commonwealth and agree to "recognize

<sup>1</sup>World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission VIII: Co-Operation and the Promotion of Unity* (Edinburgh: World Missionary Conference, 1910), 147.

the ministry, ordinances, and discipline of the others, and members might be freely transferred from one to the other.” The other contingency wanted to hold the idea of unity in creative tension by maintaining distinctive denominational beliefs and independence, essentially opting to try to cooperate in missionary activities while holding dearly their own distinct beliefs. The second group reasoned that “recognition of the ordinances and ministry of all the bodies comprising it [a federated union] is impossible without such disloyal compromise.”<sup>2</sup>

The delegates concluded that the best way to retain the enthusiasm of cooperation generated by one of the most significant gathering of believers in Christian history was to take an intermediary step. Rather than form a continuing organization tasked with finding organic ways of maintaining cooperation, the conference opted to form a continuation committee to study how union can best hold together and move ahead in seizing the day for missionary advance. The drama of the resolution’s climax was evident according to one eyewitness account.

Then—

“The motion has been moved and seconded: those in favour of it say Aye!”

A roar: “Aye!” short as the monosyllable itself, but with a volume like a Handel chorus.

“Contrary, No!”

A silence, as voluminous as the former sound.

“The motion is carried unanimously.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it was felt that the momentum amassed during those days in Scotland’s United Free Church Assembly Hall was too much to turn back. The 1910 meeting “led to the establishment of the International Missionary Conference .”<sup>4</sup> However, “it was not until 1961 that the IMC joined together with the WCC (World Council of Churches) by becoming its Division of World Mission and Evangelism.”<sup>5</sup>

Was there an idealistic sentiment that won the day at the 1910 World Missionary Conference? Was union without defined doctrinal moorings a workable idea? A century later Christians world-wide are in the midst of posing similar, and in some instances, the exact same questions. Global

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 134–36.

<sup>3</sup>W.H.T. Gairdner, *Echoes From Edinburgh, 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), 209.

<sup>4</sup>Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 271; World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission VIII Co-Operation and the Promotion of Unity*, 147.

<sup>5</sup>See the article by David J. Hesselgrave above, 123.

enthusiasm for completing the task of world missions at such a momentous juncture in history was and is real enough to tempt participants to move past the biblical and theological foundations required prior even to engaging the task. While unity centered pragmatism at nearly all costs eventually won the day in 1910, is it time now to rethink our theological identities and test the security of our tether to biblical truth? Unity for the sake of missions is possible and perhaps even a realistic aim within the framework of oneness of mind about what is spiritually true and revealed by God as being so. Yet, is it possible, given fallen human nature, to expect that the very reasons to do missions will not be affected by theological crosscurrents, which in time will erode a biblical basis for missions?

Now, nearly 100 years later, perhaps we can glean from the past and consider the present in light of an emerging future. The purpose of this article is to summarize selected trends that impact missionary theology, contextualization methods, and practices today. It will note major shifts in our understanding of truth, theology, and missiology, as well as attempt to analyze contextualization problems now faced. Finally, a way forward is proposed as contemporary Christians encounter a similar emerging sense of urgency and opportunity for fulfilling the Great Commission. We should also recognize the possibility that in our urgency to unify with other Christians and become relevant to a non-Christian world, which seems so “agnostic” or skeptical about absolute religious truth claims, we may have adopted inappropriate theological methods. Some methods may help us succeed in being relevant while also doing precisely what Paul warned the Galatians against so long ago when they countenanced, and perhaps helped create, “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6).

### Milestones Ahead

In 2010 other missions related meetings are scheduled to commemorate moments past and present. Edinburgh and Cape Town will be the sites for meetings scheduled and designed to look back at the 1910 event, as well as push forward with a reinvigorated missions momentum.<sup>6</sup> The faces of Christians are different today than a century ago. They are much more majority-world oriented, and less Western. They are more passionate in their spiritual service, and less formal. Also, they are more globally connected, and less isolationist.<sup>7</sup> How do we interpret the Bible,

<sup>6</sup>“Edinburgh 2010,” <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/> (Accessed 28 February 2008); “The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization—Cape Town 2010,” <http://www.lausanne.org/cape-town-2010/cape-town-2010.html> (Accessed 28 February 2008).

<sup>7</sup>See the analyses provided in Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming Global Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and idem, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University



an ancient yet always refreshing text, in a broadband era? Does it have relevance to life even now, two millennia after its most recent records? How do we pose questions, seek solutions, and exhibit salt and light in the midst of global crises using an ancient truth source? The descriptions of how planners are shaping agendas for these two meetings reflect current thought on these kinds of issues.

Two different meetings to commemorate one historic reality indicate that there have been changes in the creative tensions that were designed to hold Christians together in 1910. In 1948 the World Council of Churches (WCC) tied together sentiments flowing from the 1910 sessions. Yet, in the 1960s Evangelicals raised concerns regarding various emphases of Christendom's global movements. Eventually, their concerns led to the formation of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism (LCWE). Its first meeting was held in 1974. Concerns over the imbalances within the WCC toward social aspects of the gospel generated a desire to swing the pendulum back and reignite Christians of common concerns around the cause of global evangelism. Now both traditions have matured and entered a new century poised for further development. Each tradition is posing questions for the post-modern world from different convictional assumptions. Consider these explanations from both the Edinburgh and Lausanne plans for 2010:

[Edinburgh 2010] will explore the theological meaning of religious plurality reflecting on how it bears on Christian soteriology and missiology and address questions of conversion, proselytisation, dialogue and encounter. . . . Studies undertaken under this commission will as much as possible be conducted together with or in consultation with representatives of other faiths.<sup>8</sup>

[Lausanne 2010:] The claim that Jesus is the truth must be demonstrated in the Christian praxis of attending to human pain and meeting human needs. The truth-claim of Christ as Lord cannot be reduced to a set of dogmatic statements that one defends. Jesus cannot be reduced to a dogma. The belief proposition that in the person of Jesus we see the incarnation of Truth is manifested in the praxis of good works. We in the church do not need to be apologetic in making truth-claims concerning Jesus Christ, seeing that all religions distinguish

Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup>"2. Christian mission among other faiths," <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/study-themes/2-christian-mission-among-other-faiths.html> (Accessed 28 February 2008).

themselves on the basis of their distinctive truth-claims. We maintain that we do not need to relinquish our truth-claims in order to enter into dialogue with people of other faiths.<sup>9</sup>

Although they stem from differing traditions of stated conviction, the two traditions now reflect similar concerns and evidence post-modern skepticism regarding the nature of religious truth, the Bible as the uniquely true source of that truth, and the methodologies for mining that truth.

So here we are, at this juncture in history, needing a guiding word from God while toying with the tensions of cultural relativism. The choice is between absolute truth or relative truths. This is the choice before us. And yet another way is surfacing, according to the evidence above. A middle way is emerging. This middle way makes the odd claim, on the one hand, that the Bible is true Truth, Christ is uniquely the only way of salvation, and His Church is tasked to engage the world with the only true message of this salvation, while affirming simultaneously, on the other hand, pluralism and cultural relativism. The middle way makes an odd attempt to hold these contradictory beliefs together. How did we arrive at this place? World affairs, philosophical assumptions, and globalizing realities have shifted like tectonic plates causing eruptions of major proportions that have left their imprint on human religious sensitivities, including Christian ones. They are reflected in the planning for the 2010 events. Perhaps it is best to propose a different way than that offered by either Edinburgh or Lausanne.

### **Building Blocks**

It is difficult to specify single causes for ideological trends in general and much less so for philosophical or theological ones. There is a confluence of happenings as the academy's ideas are translated out onto the streets and embodied in activities in the flow of human events. A couple of global wars (three, if you include the Cold War), numerous lesser military conflicts, and genocidal crises, as well as new diseases, famines, and natural disasters all flow together to make humanity realize the tentativeness of existence. In one sense, such things make us seek. When humans look for meaning or purpose to existence, they are left with limited logical possibilities.

If humanity is alone in the universe, part of a closed system, then the law of the jungle reigns with no hope for meaning of any lasting

<sup>9</sup>“The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization—Limuru Pointers: Following Jesus in Our Broken World,” <http://www.lausanne.org/issue-theology/limuru-pointers.html> (Accessed 28 February 2008). This session was not specifically stated as being a design group for the Cape Town 2010 event, but it was a gathering of the Theology Work Group, which naturally informs and feeds the Lausanne community's thinking.

consequence, just power. Or, perhaps there is a cyclical aspect to human existence, which then only delays the same conclusion of our aloneness in the face of an impersonal supra-existence that virtually never ceases. With such a paradigm, we are left asking, again, where is relevant hope? But, there is yet another likelihood, namely that there is a Creator.<sup>10</sup> Hope is embedded in the realization that this Creator has made Himself known, revealed His nature, persons, and character in various ways through nature, or existence itself, as well as through special events. Those events are authenticated by a combination of proposals with corresponding validations. It is a rich and profound proposal that God became man, that the Creator allowed Himself to experience human existence. The proposal is only words, however, unless there are acts of validation. The historical evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for example, make His claims more than mere words.<sup>11</sup> The consummate act of validation in time as humans now experience it will be the return of Christ. At that time, all arguments will cease, all philosophers will be silenced, and all armies and governments will disband in the face of His triumphant return.

These lines of thought are the building blocks of biblical hope. They are reasonable realities but not derived from inductive human reason that constructs truths out of human experiences, or at least when and where they have been so they are usually corrupted. Instead, it is a form of deduction or faith-based reaction to God's revelation that guides and curbs human reason to make the building blocks reasonable and foundational to theistic Christian knowledge. It is deduction, because God first proposes His existence, and humanity then supposes, or has faith, in agreement with God's reality.<sup>12</sup> Special revelation is God breaking into human existence and making Himself manifest in living form by the life of Jesus Christ, which is made known today by the Scriptures. These are in complementary relationship. The substance of reality is formed by God and known through His revelation. Humans learn to believe their way toward greater or increased levels of understanding His true truth in the interplay of human experience subordinated to Scripture. Doctrinal formation or theology is

<sup>10</sup>Certainly there are numerous assumptions made here. Suffice it to say at this point that argumentation is available to substantiate said assumptions. One well reasoned presentation is Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction To World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998). One might add the concept of annihilation to this string of possibilities but in one sense it is a variation of the first model.

<sup>11</sup>C.S. Lewis comes to mind as one source to correlate the case for the uniqueness of Christ's claims. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: With a New Introduction, of the Three Books, The Case for Christianity, Christian Behavior, and Beyond Personality* (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

<sup>12</sup>Romans 1:18–32 and 1 Corinthians 15:1–32 provide bases for this set of convictions.

the result. His truth is static and unchanging in keeping with His nature, but human understanding is progressive in that God's Holy Spirit illuminates the text of written revelation. The gospel message, Christ's commission to "go," to be gospel bearers: all draw their significance from this divine drama lived out within the framework of His revelation.

Why then does Paul warn of "a different Gospel"? Perhaps because dangers persist that methods could emerge and shift emphasis to uncritical prioritization of experience, revered traditions or even fallen human wisdom. The egalitarian model of truth is evidence of idolatry, "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." Here is precisely where Christians that take the words of Christ seriously and desire to engage the world with the good news of the gospel sometimes go awry. Subtly, perhaps without notice, well meaning Christians can and often do, shift from a faith response in relation to God's truth to relying on human experience as the dominant (or even more pernicious is viewing it as equal) element in interpreting and responding to God's premises. How is the gospel defined, communicated, and made relevant to others, especially those of cultures other than our own? What roles do experience and reflection play in the drama?

Trends in theological formation have emerged, especially during the decade of the 1990s, which seem to evidence this subtle but dangerous shift that allows human experience to drive or set the conditions for the conversations God has with humans and the response of human minds to His revelation. By inserting human experience into the primary seat, we may have in one sense functionally presumed for ourselves the role of the Creator and abdicated the status of creation. Stan Grenz, noting changes or shifts between the modern and postmodern modes of thinking suggested that, "Whatever may eventually characterize the postmodern mind, it will be an *outlook toward ourselves and the world* chastened by the realism thrust upon us by the experiences of a century of failure and unmet expectations."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Stanley Grenz and Roger E Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & The World In A Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 314 (emphasis mine). Grenz and Olson trace the shifts in twentieth century theology from a classic balance between the transcendent and the immanent views of God in relation to creation to an imbalance toward transcendence via the works of Karl Barth and others influenced by Neo-Orthodoxy. With closure of the modern ways of thinking and the groping toward new meaning, postmoderns, the authors suggest, will need to overcome pessimism of the contemporary scene and strike a balance for relevant Christian thought by pulling the pendulum back toward immanence. Looking "toward ourselves" is a curious but telling twist of phrase.

## A Look Back

The most immediate taproot of today's religious skepticism and shift toward anthropocentric theological methods is the strain of thought already noticed in the 1970s.

Without persuasive epistemic credentials, Christianity will be assimilated to the historical approach prevalent in the modern intellectual world where all events are set in the context of developmental contingency and any claim to finality and absolute uniqueness is leveled.<sup>14</sup>

Yet this view is too rationalistic, modern, and tethered for postmodern temperaments. Grenz, after critiquing modern thought forms similar to those that Carl F.H. Henry espoused above, said, "Whatever else it may prove to be, postmodernity is the questioning of these theses. Postmodern thinkers have given up the assumptions that reason has no limitations, that knowledge is inherently good and that we can solve all our problems. . . . The watchword of postmodernity is holism—the desire to put back together what modernity has torn asunder."<sup>15</sup> Against the tide of modernity, Grenz built a reactionary system for theological thought heavily influenced by Wolfhart Pannenberg, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and George A. Lindbeck, resulting in a non-foundational approach to Christian theology. Grenz described the contours of this new evangelical approach to theologizing, as summarized here:

1. The *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation failed, due to the Enlightenment use of reason that led to the text being an "object of the scholar's exegetical and systematizing prowess. The postmodern situation has laid bare the foundationalist presuppositions laying behind this modernist program."
2. By relying on the work of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, then, becomes the "norming norm in theology," allowing the text to become "the instrumentality of the Spirit".
3. The "Spirit performs the illocutionary act of addressing us."

<sup>14</sup>Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976), 1:213.

<sup>15</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 15.

4. Believers are challenged and undergo a transforming of “our present on the basis of the past and in accordance with a vision of the future.”
5. Theologizing, then, intends “to assist the people of God in hearing the Spirit’s voice speaking through the text, so that we can live as God’s people—as inhabitants of God’s eschatological world—in the present.”
6. In relation to church tradition, these theological dynamics shift “confessions of faith” to the role of a “witness to the fact that Christians in every generation read the text through the lenses provided by a particular hermeneutical context. And tradition indicates that luminaries of the past have an ongoing role in the contemporary theological conversation.”<sup>16</sup>

People are connected and interconnected. The ways they relate to one another form into cultures or sets of connectedness. As individuals experience revelation they do so in communities or subcultures that relate to surrounding cultures. Believing communities provide a traditional “trajectory” or pathway to hermeneutical “reference points” that guide our theological understanding. The communal discovery of truth provides a corrective as together we theologize and engage in an “authentic ‘performance’ of the Christian faith as it is ‘scored’ [as in a symphony] in Scripture.” Cultures within which the community of the faithful exist and discover truth through their traditions provide “meaning-making” structures. “A theology that is culturally relevant seeks to articulate Christian beliefs in a manner that is understandable to the people within the wider society in which the church ministers.” Grenz leaves the reader with the clear impression that the truth of Scripture is somehow not true until or unless it is mixed with individual experiences, formed by hermeneutical traditions, and related to the meaning structures within a culture. He thereby appears to make God’s true truth contingent upon human experience, rendering it a “theology from below.”<sup>17</sup>

Henry’s foresight has become reality through Grenz’s sophisticated set of philosophical and linguistic assumptions. Theological discourse has shifted from the pursuit of God’s truth to the projection of human experiences. The prevailing tone of postmodern thought translated into Christian theology is skeptical or agnostic about God’s ability to reveal Himself in retrievable and comprehensible ways. This elaborate system

<sup>16</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 206–08.

<sup>17</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, “How Do We Know What to Believe?” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 28–31.

seems to reflect a type of “neo-Barthianism” in that revelation is shifted from the explicit rendering of the text itself to the contexts of human experiences.<sup>18</sup>

### A Look Out

Since the contexts into which the gospel pushes out are numerous and vastly different, missionaries usually encounter the friction of gospel communication as a front line action. Missionary models and methods undergo shifts and transformations as theological methodologies change and sometimes vice versa. The two are integrally interdependent. As theological inquiry goes, so goes missiological methods, particularly contextualization processes designed to make the gospel relevant in new settings.

David J. Bosch, South African missiologist, published a piece that is proving to be a vital link between modern and post-modern forms of missiology. There is a fundamental element in his missiological technique that bears on this discussion. In the final segment of his work, he laid out the contours of “an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm.” He portrayed the interplay of context and text as a dynamic living reality. Crossing cultural lines with static forms of theology already applied to prior contexts is a moot process, he concluded, because it was not true that applied “Western theology had universal validity.”<sup>19</sup> Bosch argued for a contextualization model that viewed things quite differently. “Contextualization, on the other hand, suggests the experimental and contingent nature of all theology. Contextual theologians therefore, rightly, refrain from writing ‘systematic theologies’ where everything fits into an all-encompassing and eternally valid system.” Yet, likely in anticipation of the error of relativism, he cautioned against an “infinite number of contextual and often mutually exclusive theologies.”<sup>20</sup> Somewhere in between these opposite poles is where relevant, contingent theologizing happened for Bosch. He crafted a term for making absolute relevant and contingent

<sup>18</sup>Karl Barth’s shift of revelation’s location from the text to the moment of “encounter” when it only then becomes revelation within subjective humanity is a significant parallel in this discussion. See an interesting recent analysis of Barth’s exegetical method. Ross McGowan Wright, “Karl Barth’s Academic Lectures on Ephesians, Göttingen, 1921–1922: An Original Translation, Annotation, and Analysis” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 2006), 51. Herein the author notes Barth’s own impressions of his exegetical method as “nothing more than the application of Kierkegaard’s ‘infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity,’ the ‘relentless, elastic application of the dialectical method’ until the Word is revealed in the words.”

<sup>19</sup>David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 427.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.



theologies. These would be “contextualism,” or “universalizing one’s own theological position, making it applicable to everybody and demanding that others submit to it. . . . A new imperialism in theology then simply replaces the old.”<sup>21</sup>

At least seventeen years have passed since Bosch noticed these trends and issued this caution. Unfortunately, the methodological ideal is apparently undermined by his theological assumptions. The ideal would be a vital living theology that relates well to a given context full of rich biblical meaning and performing a prophetic function in the given context. Yet, when beginning with a skeptical approach to the biblical text—whereby one presupposes that the original meanings the inspired authors had when writing would be either irretrievable or not meaningful in the multifaceted settings of believers today—starts the process off in an avalanche of experientialism. The modern hearer tends to ignore the spade work required to delve into the original languages, historical analyses and cultural settings of the past in order to acquire the original meanings and then apply them to a myriad of new lifestyles in our post-modern world. If those original meanings are abandoned or ignored, then the default is to project human cultural values and experiences into the place of biblical meanings. Then there is another oddity that manifests itself: Contemporary hearers end up viewing their own cultural systems as absolute and submit Scripture to their own designer theologies or customized theologies. Thus, a mirroring affect takes place: We hold a mirror up to our own experience and absolutize what we see.

Dean Flemming continues along the same line, holding the two extremes and respective cautions in tension. He accepts the epistemological skepticism inherent in both Grenz and Bosch when he claims, “*All* theology is *contextual* theology, from the creeds of the early church to the modern ‘Four Spiritual Laws.’ All theologizing is done from a particular location and perspective whether we are conscious of it or not. Contextualized theology is not just desirable; it is the only way theology can be done.” Yet, he also acknowledges, “Theological reflection that is context or culture-driven rather than rooted in Scripture runs a high risk of moving beyond the limits of acceptable diversity.”<sup>22</sup> Flemming again sees the problems, but adopts a methodology that begins with the assumption that original meanings of Scripture are always tainted and cannot be objectively understood or transferred to the modern or postmodern contexts. Abandoning a basic hermeneutical principle, that words effectively convey truth, seems to lead

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 428.

<sup>22</sup>Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 298, 304.

to the very polar opposite reality that Bosch and Flemming themselves caution us to avoid.

The nexus of the problem is apparently in that foundational presupposition that original biblical truths are locked in history woven into a web of doubt. This casts aspersions on the idea that true truth is somehow universally valid. D.A. Carson laments this predicament when he characterizes Grenz's theological method as playing to postmodern epistemological entrapments. "Moreover, all human articulation is necessarily within the bounds of some culture or other, and can thus truly be said to be a social construct. But to run from this fair observation to the insistence that it is improper to talk about objective truth, or about human knowledge of truth, is merely a reflection of being hoodwinked by that one untenable antithesis." In noting the mirroring affect mentioned above, he continues and concludes with a pithy question, "How can the grammar of discourse of the community properly ground the grammar of discourse of the community?"<sup>23</sup> Hence, here is the contradiction in terms stated clearly: Without retrievable objective biblical truth the grammar or experiential values of the given community assert themselves over the whole conversation and mirror communal values as absolute.

Missiological methods have followed this discussion and evangelicals have attempted to bridge the breach. One that provided a great deal of balancing influence was offered by Paul G. Hiebert. In one of his final writings he attempted to shape the contours of a missionary mediatory role in crafting global theology that bears relevance on local levels yet is true to a metatheology, a theology transcending any given culture. He knew that the contextualization debates led to numerous and often extreme localized theologies. Yet, he noted, "without external objective criteria to determine whether accurate communication has taken place, the gospel becomes whatever people believe it to be. Moreover, this view denies the importance of our common humanity and history and of a divine cosmic story. It reduces everything to momentary personal experiences that, in the end, are transient and meaningless." Here Hiebert notes the relativistic dangers of not anchoring theology in the true truth of the Bible. However, then even Hiebert yielded, to some extent, to the prevailing epistemological trends, when he noted that a "requisite in a metatheology is to differentiate between God's revelation as recorded in Scripture and

<sup>23</sup>D.A. Carson, "Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's *Renewing the Center*," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, eds. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 47, 51. Carson's use of the grammar analogy is a reference to George Lindbeck's linguistic analogies for theological methodology and for discovering religious language to determine religious truths.

human understandings expressed in theologies.”<sup>24</sup> I would not conclude that Hiebert here concedes that no true truth is available, but he does show evidence that a quest for a metatheology requires a wedge between external objective biblical truth and mere interpretations. If the original textual meaning is what the inspired authors stated as truth, and applied to their respective contexts, then the old distinction between meaning and application that homiliticians have always advocated when exegeting the Bible and then applying its meaning to a contemporary setting has even more significance when searching for a way forward beyond the need to be relevant at the expense of undermining the idea of retrievable and absolute biblical truth.<sup>25</sup>

### A Look Forward

Before a viable biblical form of contextualization is possible, one must construct a platform for thinking theologically based on the given forms of theology stated in the text. Theological certitude is suspect in our brave new postmodern world. Relativism reigns as absolute, as contradictory as that may sound. David F. Wells notes that the affirmation of true truth as “a profession about objective truth of God and his self-disclosure in the space-time world has become most awkward in academia because of its continuing attachment to Enlightenment habits.” Attaching theological inquiry to any framework, philosophical or otherwise, that is not embedded in and determined by the text of Scripture itself undermines any objectively true foundations for theological confession. When severed from the text, “it finds its subject matter anywhere along a line that runs from Eastern spirituality to radical politics to feminist ideology to environmental concerns. . . . At a single stroke, confession is eviscerated and reflection reduced mainly to thought about one’s self.”<sup>26</sup>

So how do we approach the biblical text in such a way as to guard against the encroachments of our own space-time experiences that tend to force some sort of reading of ourselves into the biblical text rather than the biblical text informing, shaping, and transforming us? The grounding element is a hermeneutical spiral whereby we approach the text recognizing Christ’s lordship over us and seeking to know and understand Him as the living Word more perfectly through the written Word and be conformed

<sup>24</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, “The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing,” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 293, 306.

<sup>25</sup>Grant R. Osborne, “Preaching the Gospels: Methodology and Contextualization,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (March 1984): 34.

<sup>26</sup>David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 100–101.

to Him. Our pre-understandings ought always to be subjected to the critiquing authority of the text. If such are in contradiction to the text, the believer is tethered to the text and bound by conscience to submit to the teaching of the text.<sup>27</sup>

Three key elements drive the balance between the human and divine conjunction in the hermeneutical process that keeps Scripture dominant in the dynamic drama. First, because the text is dominant, then the grammar, history, and cultural settings, and contexts are essential to determining the original meanings and implications of the text. Without this, one will by default resort to reading into the text experiential pre-understandings and actually invert the process, subtly making human experience dominant and all the while calling the resultant interpretation “biblical.” Second, the principle of scriptural harmony aids in safeguarding against the same undesirable outcome just stated. This forces us to again tether ourselves to the text by requiring our interpretations to square with the larger teachings of the text by comparing and contrasting a particular passage with parallel themes or contexts elsewhere in Scripture. Obscure passages should yield to more lucid ones to clarify meaning. Finally, scriptural truth is universally applicable and pragmatically true. Specific applications may vary in differing times and places, but the universal core of truth is transferrable or exportable to other cultures and times. We must “unshell” these truths from their “immediate settings” and “reapply them.”<sup>28</sup> In the final analysis, if the interpreter’s

exegetical procedure is challenged, he defends it from his hermeneutic; if his hermeneutic is challenged, he defends it from his doctrine of biblical authority; if his doctrine of biblical authority is challenged, he defends it from biblical texts by exegesis, synthesis, and application. At no point does he decline to accept challenges to his present view of things, but at every point he meets them by renewed theological exegesis of relevant passages in light of the questions that have been asked.<sup>29</sup>

As believers connect to one another and blend into Christian communities and local churches, they compare and contrast interpretations of the text, banter thoughts and reflections around, analyze and synthesize theological thought into core affirmations that clarify and magnify the

<sup>27</sup>J.I. Packer, “Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 348–49. Cf. the contextualization model established by Osborne, “Preaching the Gospels,” 34.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 349.

text of Scripture itself. They then hold each other mutually accountable for the implications and applications that would derive from the text as relevant for their particular context. Some church traditions are more prone to biblical fidelity than others. Free Church traditions lend themselves more openly to affirm belief and the lordship of Christ with an open heart freely disposed to adhere to His will than do some that require hierarchies of interpretation as more authoritative than others. The Free Church tradition of Pilgrim Marpeck, for example, exhibits a biblically dominant theological process. Malcolm Yarnell concludes, “At the theological headwaters of the believers’ church movement stands his theological method. Its foundation is a complete yieldedness to Christ in covenantal discipleship. The ground principles are Christocentrism, the coinherent work of the Word and the Spirit, fidelity to the biblical order against human invention, and a covenantal community interpreting and living out the Word.”<sup>30</sup> How then would these, or similar convictions, work themselves out as contextualization of Christian thought designed to convey biblical meaning to settings other than those of the original hearers and to engage multifaceted cross-cultural settings?

### **Biblically Balanced Contextualization**

Simply stated, a biblical fidelity will tether the interpreter to the text, keeping it dominant in the entire contextualization process so that the text criticizes prophetically any given culture rather than the culture domineering and letting the interpreter’s personal or cultural value system usurp the procedures and blatantly or subtly shifting the mirrored experience into the place of what the Bible actually says. The latter methodology results in culture, or human experience, criticizing the Bible and reading conclusions into Scripture to justify cultural conditioning. Osborne suggests three practical stages to be followed carefully for a biblically balanced contextualization process:

1. The connection between meaning and significance—i.e., the necessity of delineating the original meaning of the text and then its application to the present context.
2. The determination of cultural and supracultural elements in the text.

<sup>30</sup>Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 106. Yarnell cogently compares and contrasts the Free Church traditions to those that would be hierarchical in nature and finds the latter lacking the appropriate groundwork to construct a biblical theological method.

3. The separation between form and content, with the contextualization occurring at the former level.<sup>31</sup>

This approach, when connected to the concept of a hermeneutical spiral, as stated by Packer above, provides necessary safeguards to vouchsafe the Bible's original meanings and to allow the careful cultural observer to apply it to modern issues and cultural settings. As Osborne notes, "Divine revelation thus is perceived as both static and dynamic, both propositional and relational. The dictates of Scripture are allowed to challenge and then transform the receptor culture."<sup>32</sup>

In one sense, all believers should be moving gradually toward a unified meaning as determined by the text itself and simultaneously diversifying applications to individualized and unique contexts. The net effect is what Hesselgrave terms a "prophetic accommodational" form of contextualization.<sup>33</sup> Scripture, though ancient, still speaks with the prophetic voice of days of old and does so as it relates to our modern issues and contexts.

### Conclusion

Ancient mariners hugged continental coastlines to avoid drifting out into deep waters that were not navigable given their technological capabilities. The astrolabe changed that. It enabled them to determine their position on the face of the earth in relation to the fixed position of star formations at night. Once they determined their position, they could maneuver themselves to the points of interest on their horizons. Used properly they would not be lost at sea again.

2010 will be a monumental year in that it marks a century of missiological practice that has evolved since the 1910 Edinburgh conference, where theological convictions were sacrificed on the modernistic altar of cooperative unity. This form of theological "DNA" would only be valid in so far as a general form of theological conviction could be held in common,

<sup>31</sup>Osborne, "Preaching the Gospels," 34.

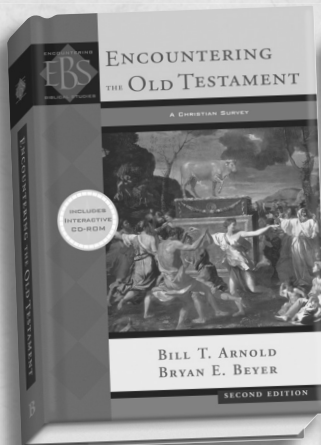
<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>33</sup>David J. Hesselgrave, "The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration, and Communication," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (1985): 450. Hesselgrave detailed his views of contextualization in "Contextualization and Revelational Epistemology," in *Hermeneutics and Inerrancy*, eds. Earl Radmacher and Robert Preuss (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 693–738; and later in concert with Edward Rømmen, in Hesselgrave and Rømmen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989). Of particular help is the latter book's treatment of the connection between theological presuppositions and the working out of contextualization models. Underlying this framework is also the hermeneutical backgrounds to said theological methods and ultimately underlying philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of revelation and religious knowledge.

which was not the case even then. In the century since, more shifts and eruptions have transpired in theological inquiry, and Christian churches have dotted the face of the globe. Where are we located? How can we determine true truth in a sea of relativity? Perhaps it is best to come full circle and fix our gaze on the inerrant truth, a “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and then engage the text by “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). So, like the astrolabe for those of old, we should reorient ourselves and move on through these times with confidence in God’s Word. Otherwise, we may find ourselves adrift, continuing to raise doubts about the veracity of God’s Word, or more pernicious yet, affirming His Word while practicing forms of theological inquiry that undermine it and shift the basis of absolute truth to fickle fluid human experiences and preferences. Such skepticism turns even evangelicals into “agnostics” of sorts, in that they functionally cannot know true truth. The cataclysmic effect of biblical doubt is the formation of yet a different gospel. Paul’s warning to the Galatians rings true in this increasingly postmodern world.



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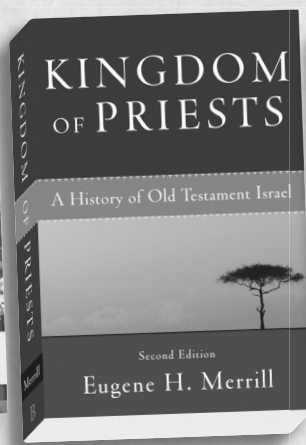
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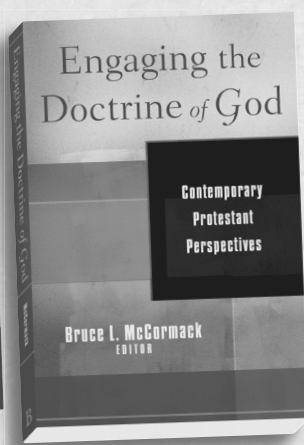
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# *Mortar and Stones: Biblical Principles for Planting and Building Strong Churches in any Culture*

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## **1. Mortar**

Which mortar holds the living stones (1 Pet 2:5) of churches in different countries together? The answer to this question will help plant and build strong churches in challenging contexts. The ecclesiological question is a question for missions.

The first mortar that is described in the Bible was certainly not used to build a church, but the opposite. Genesis 11 describes the construction project of the Tower of Babylon. In verse 3 the mortar for the bricks is mentioned; it is *נחל* or, in English, asphalt/bitumen. This is very interesting at least in three ways. First: *λιθοι ζωντες* means “living stones,” not bricks. A stone is created; a brick is made. When God took dust he created man (Gen 2:7). When man takes dust he makes culture. The tower of Babylon was built of man-made bricks, a symbol for culture. Asphalt was the material which gave culture stability. Second: “Asphalt is one of the world’s oldest building materials.”<sup>1</sup> Third: It is assumed that asphalt or bitumen is based on dead organic substances.<sup>2</sup> Since Noah used pitch before the flood and the tower of Babylon was built with asphalt some time after the flood, it seems from the biblical perspective that the flood is not the only explanation for this substance. It is not the topic of this article to discuss

<sup>1</sup>Mike Sonnenberg, *Asphalt through the Ages*, Summer 2000, [http://www.asphaltinstitute.org/ai\\_pages/FAQs/PDFs/History/Asphalt\\_Thru\\_The\\_Ages\\_Summer\\_2000.pdf](http://www.asphaltinstitute.org/ai_pages/FAQs/PDFs/History/Asphalt_Thru_The_Ages_Summer_2000.pdf) (Accessed 15 February 2008).

<sup>2</sup>Single component polyurethane-modified bitumen compositions, US Patent Issued on October 3, 1989; <http://www.patentstorm.us/patents/4871792-description.html> (Accessed 15 February 2008).

young earth versus old earth theories. But it seems that both sides assume that asphalt was not created.<sup>3</sup>

To make the point: oil, coal and bitumen have something to do with dead forests and animals. The mortar of the tower of Babylon was the product of death. Death moreover is a consequence of sin.<sup>4</sup> This mortar was a product of the fallen world and was used to try to raise fallen humanity by itself (Gen 11:4) so that culture could triumph over the Creator. The Bible makes it clear that this attempt failed (Gen 11:8). Of course this text lends itself not to a ban of bitumen, but to the illustration of a principle.

The material was one thing but most important was the attitude of the builders. They wanted to worship themselves and refused to honor God (Gen 11:4)—this is evil (Rom 1:21). Asphalt or bitumen may be helpful to seal the church roof or build the parking lot in front of the church building. There is probably no church building around the world without any plastic—an oil product—inside. But such mortar is not able to connect the living stones in order to build strong churches.

The term “church” refers in this article not to a building, even if a building can be a symbol for the church (1 Cor 3:9–13). In the thirteenth century William Durand “found a lesson in the church’s mortar, composed of lime (fervent love), sand (earthly toil), and water (the Spirit, which unites the other two ingredients): ‘As stones of the wall would have no stability without mortar, so man cannot be set in the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem without love, which the Holy Spirit brings.’”<sup>5</sup>

The church is a living organism that the gates of Hades will not overcome (Matt 16:18). This organism is able to hear (Matt 18:17), knows fear (Acts 5:11), can pray (Acts 12:5), gathers together (Acts 15:30), can be strengthened in faith and grow in number (Acts 16:5), has a shepherd (Acts 20:28), has servants (Rom 16:1), meets in homes (Rom 16:5), has an inside and an outside (1 Cor 5:12). More characteristics can be added and

<sup>3</sup>A young earth explanation for oil, coal and bitumen is given by Schönknecht and Scherer with reference to Shevens’s model. Gerhard Schönknecht and Siegfried Scherer, “Too much coal for a young earth?” <http://www.answeringgenesis.org/tj/v11/i3/coal.asp> (Accessed 16 February 2008): “If, however, Scheven’s model of Carboniferous floating forests is applied, the following estimates of pre-Flood biomass result: Bituminous and sub-bituminous coals could have originated from the floating forests which might have covered 2% of the pre-Flood surface of the Earth.” This article was later criticized; <http://articlesuniverse.com/Article/The-Floating-Forest-Theory-Sinks/1043> (Accessed 16 February 2008). Today Scherer is supporting the old earth model; <http://www.siegfriedscherer.de> (Accessed 16 February 2008).

<sup>4</sup>“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 6:23). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New King James Version (NKJV).

<sup>5</sup>“Magnificent Medieval Cathedrals; The Bible in Stone,” <http://chi.gospelcom.net/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glmpls117.shtml> (Accessed 19 February 2008).

found in various ecclesiological works but it should be sufficient to show that that church is a very dynamic organism, if it is a church according to the New Testament.

The living stones must somehow hold together and form a spiritual building. The question of this article is: What holds the living stones together? The unfinished project of the tower of Babylon reminds church planters and builders of two dangers: wrong material and wrong attitude. The church planter needs wisdom to find out which material he should use to build a church and which material he must not take. This can be difficult in an unfamiliar context when culture and worldview are not only different but in some ways opposite to biblical principles.<sup>6</sup> The church planter needs to be aware of proper worship as well. Who will be honored with this church: man, culture, or God?

## 2. The Church Connection

The New Testament explains the principle of mortar without, however, using the word. What does the church connection according to the New Testament look like?

So rid yourselves of all wickedness, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, desire the unadulterated spiritual milk, so that you may grow by it in [your] salvation, since you have tasted that the Lord is good. Coming to Him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen and valuable to God—you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:1–5 HCSB).

This text is about the stability and strength of the church. The church has to get rid of that which is destroying its unity and stability and this is sin, described in verse one. It gets stability and strength not through black, sticky pitch but through unadulterated spiritual milk (v. 2). Since the house is spiritual (v. 5) the mortar is spiritual, too. Since the foundation, the cornerstone, was rejected (v. 7) the stones will face hostility in this world too (John 15:19).

The spiritual house of the church cannot be built with sin or the product of sin, that is, with worldly materials. This truth is the red flag when the cultural context is used to provide a connection in order to unite a church. Race, nationality, gender, caste, social status, preferences and so on cannot hold the spiritual stones together and build a house that is

<sup>6</sup>See 3.2 below..

stronger than the gates of Hades. The worldly context is determined to die. Some of these worldly characteristics will experience resurrection, but then it will be a spiritual version of it (1 Cor 15:50–57).

“Church” in the New Testament is described also as a body with different limbs (1 Cor 12:12–26; Rom 12:3–5; Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). The connection between the limbs is named in Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 2:19 with the Greek word *συμβιβάζομενον*, “to hold together,” or “to instruct.” This word contains the Greek word for “walk” (*βαίνω*), so it can also be translated as “walking together.”<sup>7</sup> Church members hold together if they walk together. Here we see the topic of discipleship introduced. The opposite of walking together is disconnection or walking in different directions.

The church is a spiritual house, which is built with disciples of Jesus Christ. Since these disciples are still made of flesh and blood, which is part of this world, it is important to understand how this aspect is part of the church, too. The critical question is: Which worldly aspects can be integrated in the church and which aspects have to stay outside?

In the following section different worldly and spiritual connection factors will be identified and analyzed. To know and understand these factors will be helpful in building a strong church in any context.

### 3. Connection Components

Empirical techniques can observe and describe only what is referred as the “world”. A biblical understanding of the world after the Fall is that which is going to die (Isa 24; Rev 21:1). When talking about the church it is obvious that another aspect must be considered—eternal life (Rom 6:23). To describe the New Testament notion of church properly, it has to be described as in the world but not of the world (John 15:19). We are strangers in the world (1 Pet 2:11), walking on earth but dwelling in heaven (Eph 2:1–10).<sup>8</sup>

Through repentance and baptism a believer becomes part of the church (Acts 2:38). Baptism is dying to a dying world while participating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 6:4).<sup>9</sup> The identity of the believer is in Christ and in Him and through Him and under his Lordship he lives in the world.

<sup>7</sup>Gerhard Delling, “*συμβιβάζω*,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Vol. 7, ed. Rudolf Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964), 763–65.

<sup>8</sup>Michael Pocock, Gailyn van Rheenen, Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 168.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article VII, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp> (Accessed 19 February 2008).

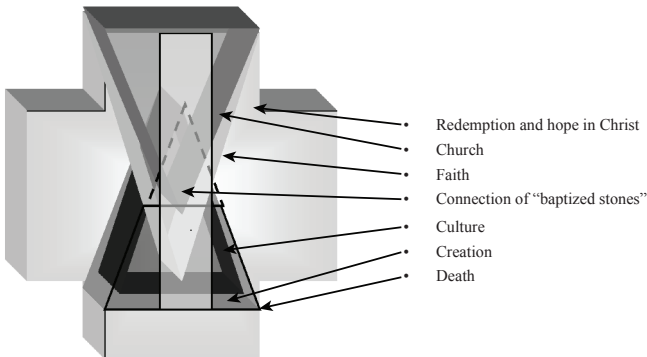
Unlike the New Testament, the history of the church is filled with examples of baptism without repentance. The application “baptism” to paganism describes the integration of non-Christian elements into the Christian church. For instance, “Gregory the Great advised Augustine of Canterbury to convert temples into churches and to substitute events on the Christian calendar in the place of their festivals.”<sup>10</sup> Things and places cannot repent but the people who are connected with them can. Since “no one puts new wine into old wineskins” (Matt 9:17 [HCSB]) the baptism of paganism must be questioned.

Especially for Baptists baptizing people without requiring personal repentance is a severe misunderstanding of Acts 2:38.<sup>11</sup> The baptism of Russia from the ninth and eleventh centuries, especially under Vladimir I in 988 AD should not provide the model for twenty-first century mission.<sup>12</sup>

Of course it is not easy to find out which parts of this world can be used in the church. Relabeling culture, including non-Christian religion, is simple but not sound theology.

Repenting before baptism, and ridding oneself of wickedness after it, is an essential part of the New Testament teaching of the church so that baptism is a reminder of separation from sin and of a new identity in Christ. What should such a cleansed connection of living stones or baptized stones look like?

The concept of church connection may be simplified with this illustration:<sup>13</sup>



<sup>10</sup>Scott Moreau, Gary Corwin, Gary McGee, *Introducing World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 109

<sup>11</sup>See *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article VII.

<sup>12</sup>A History of the Russian church, <http://www.3saints.com/russchurchhistory.html#1> (Accessed 18 February 2008).

<sup>13</sup>This illustration and the following explanations are based on a thesis which was published in: Dietmar Schulze, “Baptisten,” in *Nordost Indien—Eine Mitgliederstudie, Baptismus-Studien 11* (Kassel: Oncken, 2006), 67–78.



This illustration contains two major spheres. The first sphere is all that stands under the paradigm of death, especially creation and the culture. This is the world after the Fall and under the paradigm of death. The crop can only grow if the seed died. This endangered creation is waiting. “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.” (Rom 8:19). Culture has a variety of meanings but is limited to time and space. Culture is not eternal.

The second sphere extends beyond death. It is part of the new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Rev 21:5) and is called faith and church. Creation and culture are threatened by death; nevertheless parts of the church and faith are threatened by death, too. Local churches may be forced to close and faith without works is dead (Jas 2:17). But in the end everything is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He has conquered death (John 1:14; John 3:16; Phil 2:6–11; Col 1:15–20).

We will have to look closer at the different components of these two spheres in order to understand the connection of baptized stones.

### 3.1. Creation

The word “creation” refers to the Creator. “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” (Col 1:16–17).

Creation is both the habitat and life itself. Creation is seed and earth. Creation is an expression of the divine design which brought order to the unshaped (Gen 1:2), but even the unshaped was created *ex nihilo*. Creation is chromosome as well as continent, quarks and quasars, water and wind, human being and animal, and tree and flower. Creation is coast and mainland, mountain range and marshland, nation group and family. Since the topic of creation and science is often discussed it must be sufficient to refer to two clear and short statements:

We affirm that Genesis 1–11 is factual, as is the rest of the book. We deny that the teachings of Genesis 1–11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, Article XXII, [http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_2.pdf](http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_2.pdf) (Accessed 21 February 2008).



Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation.<sup>15</sup>

What is the application for the study of the connection of the living stones in the church? Creation is so diverse that every part is unique. This variety gives every individual part its individual purpose. Creation has a specific fingerprint. For instance, African Christians and German Christians have different ways to worship. The diversity of the creatures can be a challenge for a group but it reflects the creativity of the creator. We were not made with a cookie-cutter! A stonewall made out of stones of different sizes has more stability than a wall built with same-size bricks, if both walls were built without mortar. This principle of created diversity can be found in ecosystems. Monocultures are much more endangered. The church is the most diverse organization of human beings on earth with more people groups than any other organization. According to global research from the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention there are 11,578 people groups in the world. In February 2008 there were at least 8,238 (71%) people groups with an evangelical church.<sup>16</sup> Since every person is unique, every local church has diversity, even if all church members were siblings.

### 3.2. Culture

The word “culture” comes from the Latin word *colere*, which means “to cultivate.” It is the work of and with creation. Today this word has so many meanings that it has become a terminological Goliath. According to Princeton University there are seven major meanings of “culture.”<sup>17</sup>

1. Civilization; a particular society at a particular time and place.
2. The tastes in art and manners that are favored by a social group.
3. Acculturation; all the knowledge and values shared by a society.
4. Biological culture; the growing of microorganisms in a nutrient medium.
5. Polish, refinement, cultivation, finish; a highly developed state of perfection; having a flawless or impeccable quality.

<sup>15</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article II.

<sup>16</sup><http://www.peoplegroups.org/Downloads/2008-02%20GSEC%20Country%20Analysis.pdf> (Accessed 21 February 2008).

<sup>17</sup><http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=culture> (Accessed 21 February, 2008).

6. The attitudes and behavior that are characteristic of a particular social group or organization.
7. The raising of plants or animals.

As we use it here, culture appears under a double aspect: On the one hand, it is the sum of human works; on the other hand, it is the human work itself. Culture has something to do with shaping, designing, arranging and constructing.<sup>18</sup> Culture is an anthropological term and it depends on the anthropology by which culture is explained. To understand one culture it is sometimes helpful to compare one culture with another. This cross-cultural comparison involves searching for similarities and differences. Cultures have factors in common that can be found everywhere. They have to meet the needs for food, give shelter and protection against forces of nature, and make use of technologies and economics. Cultures institutionalize male and female role behavior, building social groups like the family, meeting the need for reciprocity, and the balancing of social imbalances. Cultures have to find solutions for retaliation and justice. They display artistic expression through dance, poetry, music, and shapes. Religion can be found in every culture. Culture is often assumed to give answers as to how life really should be.<sup>19</sup> Since cultures find different solutions to these common issues a diversity of cultures can be found. In the age of globalization<sup>20</sup> we have a reduction of diversity through global economics, politics and value systems.

Since this article is about biblical principles for church planting the Bible must be examined in order to learn about culture. The word “culture” itself cannot be found in most English translations, only in a culturally “relevant” translation like the New Living Bible.<sup>21</sup> If we understand culture in the Latin meaning of *colere*, then, of course, the first biblical text is about dominion over animals (Gen 1:28) and plants (Gen 1:29). Many topics are related to this mandate but most important is good leadership. If culture is studied with this text the concept of leadership is the key to understanding it: Who is the leader? How is leading done? How is leading accepted?

<sup>18</sup>Cf. W.E. Mühlmann, *Kultur, Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed., vol. 4 (1960), col. 95.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>A good introduction to globalization and its missiological implications can be found in Pocock et al., *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 21–44.

<sup>21</sup>Isa 13:19: “Babylon, the most glorious of kingdoms, the flower of Chaldean culture, will be devastated like Sodom and Gomorrah when God destroyed them” (NLT, 1996). Rom 1:14: “For I have a great sense of obligation to people in our culture and to people in other cultures, to the educated and uneducated alike” (NLT, 1996). Subsequent revisions of the NLT do not use the word “culture” in these places.

The interconnection between culture and leadership was analyzed by Edgar H. Schein. He defines culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.<sup>22</sup>

After the Fall the Bible gives us two examples of dominion: Dominion over animals, which honored God, is represented in Abel. Dominion over plants, which did not honor God, is represented in Cain. Genesis 4 makes it clear that it is not about a certain part of culture, such that herding is better than farming, and it is not about certain methods of herding or doing agriculture. It is about worship and the relationship between creator and creation. What did Cain do wrong? Hebrews 11:4 gives the answer: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks." Honor and dishonor are determined by the presence or absence of faith.

The descendants of Cain "invented" other forms of culture. Genesis 4:19–21 describes them as polygamists, nomads, musicians, and craftsmen in bronze and iron. These new forms of culture brought new problems and demonstrated that culture is not neutral. If these descendants refused to honor God, like their ancestor Cain, then their culture was not pleasing to God. On the other hand, the people of Israel later adopted some of these cultural expressions to honor God (Jos 6:19; Ps 150).

The building of the Tower of Babylon describes culture in a negative way. And it introduces us to the relationship between culture and religion. The culture of the builders was supposed to serve as their religion. Because of this, believers have to be aware that culture may impact religion. And if this religion does not worship the God of the Bible, nor accept that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), then such a culture cannot simply be adapted to the church.

If religion worships something other than the true God, it will be punished. Revelation 19 describes the worship of the Lamb and the worship of the beast and the eternal consequences of both. Therefore, culture does not simply face death and renewal from generation to generation. It faces eternal punishment if it does not worship Christ. Death and sin concern culture and religion equally.

<sup>22</sup>Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture & Leadership*, 1997, <http://www.tnellen.com/ed/tc/schein.html> (Accessed 25 February 2008).

Being embodied, culture is always part of the church until Jesus Christ's return. The main question for the correct use of culture in the church is the question of worship (Rom 12:1–2; 1 Tim 1:17): Does this or that cultural expression honor God? For instance, consider the cultural expression of leadership. If the leadership of a woman is accepted in a certain culture, the church cannot adapt this part of culture to the office of the pastor and the elder. Why? In the same letter in which Paul wrote about honoring God (1 Tim 1:17), he talked about the issue of female leadership in the church. "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim 2:12, HCSB). The church is honoring God when its leadership is according to God's word. It is not about Paul's personal opinion, but about the order which was installed by God: "For Adam was created first, then Eve" (v. 13).<sup>23</sup>

The church has great freedom to integrate culture and church, but there is a God-given limitation: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Cor 10:23). One of the mission strategies the apostle Paul used is described in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. It is obvious that Paul was aware of the different target groups, of cultural and religious settings so he adjusted his approach:

For although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win more people. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law to win those under the law. To those who are outside the law, like one outside the law—not being outside God's law, but under the law of Christ—to win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, that I may become a partner in its benefits (HCSB).

As Paul was under the law of Christ (v. 21) the church has to be under the law of Christ. This includes the way the church adapts culture. "Paul did not suggest that he lived as though there was no law by which he was compelled, but rather under the law in Christ."<sup>24</sup> To reach people in a specific cultural setting does not require that their worldview must

<sup>23</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article VI. Cf. William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 1104.

<sup>24</sup>Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1983), 150.

be shared. “Churches and seminaries have failed to adequately address the underlying worldviews of their members and students, often allowing competing ideas to coexist.”<sup>25</sup> To strengthen the church it will be necessary to address this issue and teach our church members a biblical worldview.

### 3.3. Death

Creation and thus culture are threatened by death. This threat leads to two different responses: “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor 7:10).

Death is everywhere on this earth. Even solar systems and galaxies are threatened (Rev 21:4).<sup>26</sup> Death was and is one of the constant factors which determine human life. There will be finite life as long there is death. Death is the end of a life long process that is perceived individually very differently in its duration and strength.<sup>27</sup> Some may ignore it as long as possible. The wise will realize it as soon as possible. “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12). The threat of death does require a response by the living ones, and not only in a funeral celebration.

The subjective experience of the presence of death and dying varies in the course of the life of a human being. Certain life stages and situations intensify the consciousness that life will not always be the same. Such life stages are crises, confrontations with sorrow, and illness, as well as fear, adolescence, menopause, etc. These experiences refer to the restricted number of our days and loss of life, and they can lead to more intense quarrels with death in turn.

Presumably, every living being reacts against this threat to life. The human being responds through protection and defense mechanisms that are innate or learned. Eating, drinking, and sleeping, for instance, are important defense mechanisms. The longing for permanence is shown in habits and traditions as something reliable. The desire for descendants also expresses a hope for continuity of life. Finally, there is the search for eternity and the hope for redemption from the power of death. On the one hand, this is institutionalized in religions, and on the other, it is part of individual religiosity.

<sup>25</sup>Ronnie Fox, “The World Around Us,” in *Pursuing The Mission Of God In Church Planting* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2007), 10.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Giles Sparrow, *The Stargazer’s Handbook, An Atlas Of The Night Sky* (London: Quercus, 2007), 154. “Nearby cannibal galaxy NGC 5128 is still clearly scarred by the struggle with its last victim—a dark gash across the centre of this elliptical ball of stars is all that remains of the spiral arms from a galaxy that has now been absorbed.”

<sup>27</sup>As long as the process of cell renewal is working the dying of cells is mostly not recognized by a person, but it is at least part of life.

People live under the influence of death and search for answers to this question of their existence. Their answers cannot easily be assigned to those protection mechanisms that are mentioned above. For instance, where is the boundary between religiosity and traditionalism? When is someone motivated by fear of death and by the will to live? It is questionable whether a human being can be conscious of his or her stratified motives in life. But it is helpful to study the answers that people give to the questioning of life. If someone is a church member and does not possess an answer, he or she has probably not understood the meaning of baptism: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

### 3.4. Church

The Bible distinguishes between the group and the individual but both also refer to one another. The tribes of Israel have their origin in the forefathers and are called by their names. First and Second Kings show how the king was responsible for the welfare of his nation. Paul treated the church as a body that consists of many members (1 Cor 12:12–26; Rom 12:3–5; Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). In the first place, please note that the church of Jesus Christ is an organism and not an organization. Hands, ears, and eyes are very lively. They have a function and do not belong to the body as useless appendages. In a Christian community it is necessary to ensure that each individual is treated as an indispensable link in a chain. Only when the smallest element is firm will the chain not break.<sup>28</sup>

It is part of Baptist identity to look at churches in the New Testament and learn from them. Most important is the relationship to Jesus Christ. Jesus invites men and women to follow him. Church means discipleship (Matt 28:19). Jesus Christ’s call for discipleship is described in Mark 8:34. Come to Jesus, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him. Malcolm Yarnell refers to this verse and explains: “At the center of everything stands the Master whom free churches follow.”<sup>29</sup> In his book, he explains the foundation of the church and makes it clear that Baptists should not be identified by their five classical doctrines alone, but by their theological method.<sup>30</sup>

The church is influenced by other connection components. For example a factor is the life context of the “Third World.” It has been said that

<sup>28</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben* (Munich: Kaiser, 1973), 80. In English: *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1954).

<sup>29</sup>Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 24.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

churches in the majority world had to find their indigenized expression of being a church according to the three or four self-principles.<sup>31</sup> It is an expression of independence that churches formerly planted by Western missionaries are now self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-theologizing. But it is questionable whether the word “self” is appropriate for a church which is supposed to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and associated with other churches. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the support between churches (2 Cor 8). These churches were located in different countries. In the New Testament self-control has a positive meaning (Titus 1:18), but other word-links with “self” have a negative meaning, like self-indulgence (Matt 23:25), self-seeking (Rom 2:8), self-imposed religion (Col 2:23), self-willed (Titus 1:7), and self-condemned (Titus 3:11). The Three-Self system was first introduced by John L. Nevius (1829–1893), a Presbyterian missionary to China.<sup>32</sup> Later it was very much influenced by the Communist ideology of China, especially in 1951 during a time of denunciation. The three-self system was used to draw the line between China and imperialism.<sup>33</sup> In light of this, it seems better to speak about indigenous churches rather than “three-self” churches.

The church can shape its environment, receive from its environment, improve its environment, or destroy its environment. In Scripture, the church influences both creation and culture; it has the obligation to seek the peace of the city (Jer 29:7), to pray for society and the government (1 Tim 2:1–2), and to be submissive to rulers and authorities (Titus 3:1).

In addition, culture and creation stand in eschatological relation to the church. The cultural variety evident between nations is shaped by the factors of creation. This variety will play a role in eternity (Rev 5:9–10; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). The city of Jerusalem is part of worldly culture now, but a renewed version of it will be the eternal dwelling place for God’s people (Rev 21:9–27).

Creation is waiting for the task of the church to be completed (Rom 8:19). The churches are the communities of the children of God and are the hope for a world that suffers transience. Its message is well known: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

<sup>31</sup>Moreau, *Introducing World Missions*, 12.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. John Mark Terry, “Indigenous Churches,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 484.

<sup>33</sup>Bob Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter, China and Christianity* (London: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1988), 228–33.



### 3.5. Faith

Faith is the most important component in the church's mortar. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Rom 1:16–17). Without faith there would be no church, but there can be faith even outside a church. This is not to be understood in the meaning of Vatican II, when it was recognized that those who have not yet heard the gospel have a relationship to the "people of God" in some fashion.<sup>34</sup> "For there is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord."<sup>35</sup> Rather, it is to be understood in the meaning of the work of salvation of Jesus Christ in a single person that can begin outside of a church but will finally lead to a church. Evangelism and mission are the proclamation of the gospel outside the church walls in order to invite people to become followers of Jesus Christ and members of His church. Salvation is by grace through faith (Rom 3:28). Faith must precede baptism.

Faith is something that must not stay hidden. As "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" the disciples of Jesus are supposed to proclaim the gospel in this world (Matt 5:13–14). Faith is shown in a confession of faith, otherwise it is questionable (Rom 10:10). Faith is also very much related to the topic of death. In 1 Corinthians 15:12–14 it is written: "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty."

Faith cannot be measured empirically. However, "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:17). "And by their fruits you will know them" (Matt 7:20). Faith renews and leaves behind its traces. Since many Baptists consider the Anabaptists as their forefathers, Friesen's description of Anabaptists may refer to Baptists too. "In Anabaptism, community is faith active in love as a life of obedience to God."<sup>36</sup> A strong church evidences faith active in love as a life of obedience to God.

### 3.6. Redemption and Hope in Christ

God is the Creator and Sustainer of life (Gen 1–2; Pss 8, 104; John 1; Col 1). God is awesome and infinitely greater than His creation (Deut 7:21, 10:17; Neh 1:5; Pss 48:1, 77:13; Titus 2:13). God knows numbers

<sup>34</sup>Moreau, *Introducing World Missions*, 150.

<sup>35</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article IV.

<sup>36</sup>John J. Friesen, "Review and discussion, Recent Studies on Anabaptist Spirituality," *Vision* 1 (2000): 88, <http://www.mennovision.org/friesen.pdf> (Accessed 27 February 2008).

which no information system could handle. He is aware of the actual numbers of hair of all people (Matt 10:30) and the number of all the stars (Ps 147:4). Since these numbers change, God has not only the most up-to-date numbers, he knows all numbers of every moment in history, present and future. He even names all the stars. It is commonly assumed that there are one billion galaxies with one billion stars each. The numbers that are given by scientists are 70 sextillion stars or 70,000 million million million, or 7 followed by 22 zeros. And this is “only” the number of visible stars within range of modern telescopes.<sup>37</sup> There are more stars than there are vocabularies in all the languages on this earth. From just the numerical perspective, God is great!<sup>38</sup> God is exalted and supreme. We agree that the goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.<sup>39</sup>

And He is the God who came and comes near to his creation with His kingdom (Luke 10:9, 10:11, 21:31; Heb 7:19; Jas 4:8). He brought and brings hope and redemption in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). This God gives hope for a life without death. Even if death is a constant factor of life it is not the final frame. God is from eternity to eternity. But death itself is going to die (Rev 20:14).

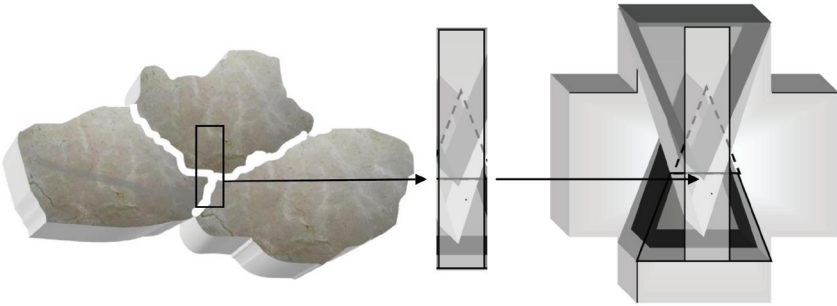
God sets the final frame of reference. It would be presumptuous to illustrate the diverse ways in which God works even if we would focus “only” on the church. No creature would be able to provide such an analysis. God is always bigger than our biggest unit, criteria, and context. Since He builds the church and invented its “mortar,” we will never fully understand the connection of the living stones. But in His Word He gives us enough information as well as a commission to participate in the planting and building of strong churches in different cultures. And Jesus Christ gives the church His promise: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18).

<sup>37</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2003/TECH/space/07/22/stars.survey> (Accessed 27 February 2008).

<sup>38</sup>Cf. *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article II.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 17.

**Churches in a Complex Context**



We have seen how the living stones hold together. Members of churches support their church in a certain relationship. The church in turn takes care of its members. A member is not influenced only by his or her church, but also by personal faith, creation, culture, death, and of course by God himself. These different fields overlap with every member in a characteristic kind and manner. Members with similar features form a feature group since they have more possibilities to connect. These connection possibilities define the church mortar. It is most important to understand which components of their connection guarantee the greatest strength. A distinction is to be made between the two groups of primary and secondary connection. The secondary connection is threatened by death and therefore much weaker. If a church puts too much emphasis on this connection it will be in trouble. The mortar of Babylon will not survive.

Strong connection



Weakened connection



This connection is weakened because the link in the middle emphasized the secondary connection more than the primary connection. According to Bonhoeffer, if the smallest element is weak the chain will break.<sup>40</sup>

A survey among Baptists in Northeast India in the year 2001 asked: “What is a Baptist?” The most important answer concerned a “personal relationship with Jesus.”<sup>41</sup> If a church is built out of stones that have a per-

<sup>40</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 80.

<sup>41</sup>Schulze, *Baptisten in Nordost Indien*, 177.

sonal relationship with Jesus it can be a strong church. In the 2001 survey the church members were asked to place fifteen statements about Baptists in the right order. In first place was a relationship with Jesus. But what was last? It was the answer: "To enjoy material blessing." These Baptists in Northeast India could not identify with wealth as part of being a Baptist. In a world that seems to be ruled by money we must resist baptizing fallen culture. Instead, we must inculcate a God-honoring culture. This is not an option.

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt 6:24). Money is both an instrument and a challenge for missions and evangelism. "Money is a two-edged sword—it can either empower or hinder missionary effort."<sup>42</sup> It seems that the question of wise stewardship is an important one for our day, a day in which culture is attempting to supplant Christ in His churches.

May the Lord grant wisdom to the churches as we use perishing things wisely in order to build eternal structures: the churches of Jesus Christ.

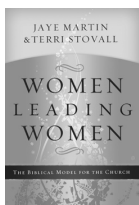
<sup>42</sup>Pocock, *The Changing Face of World Missions*, 279.

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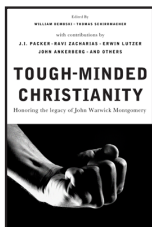
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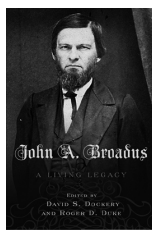
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While contemporary occidental perceptions of Islam are derived from a variety of media, earlier eras were far more limited as to the number of sources about this religion. In the eighteenth-century, for example, European print culture was the major—and for many, the sole—medium that shaped Western thinking about Muslims and their beliefs. And in the British Isles, one book in particular stands out as key to understanding the way Islam was viewed by the British of this era, namely, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet* (1697) by Humphrey Prideaux (1648–1724), Dean of Norwich for the last twenty-two years of his life. Viewed as a clear and learned author,<sup>2</sup> Prideaux's work went through seven editions in twenty years and became a standard interpretation during the early Enlightenment of Muhammad (c. 570–632) and the religion he founded.<sup>3</sup>

Prideaux had intended that this work be part of a much larger volume tracing the decline of Eastern Christendom in the three centuries following the rise of Islam and the way in which bitter theological divisions had rent the churches of the East and had consequently contributed to their ruin at the hands of Muslims.<sup>4</sup> In the 1690s, though, there appeared a number of Deist works rooted in a rationalistic temper of mind that was critical of all religious arguments based on divine revelation. Prideaux reckoned that the deleterious impact of these works would not have been as great

<sup>1</sup>This paper was initially given as an address at “A Thousand Tongues to Sing’: A Symposium Celebrating the Theology and Hymns of Charles Wesley,” held at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, on 10–11 March 2008.

<sup>2</sup>James Darling, *Cyclopaedia Bibliographica* (London: James Darling, 1854), 2450.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Almond, “Western Images of Islam, 1700–1900,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49 (2003): 412–13.

<sup>4</sup>Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: William Rogers, 1697), v–xi.

if it had not been attended by a “giddy Humour” that especially gripped younger church leaders in England of “following whatsoever hath gotten into fashion and vogue.”<sup>5</sup> Lest he give these opponents of Christianity ammunition for their attacks, Prideaux decided to make his biography of Muhammad part of an overall response to Deism, in which he would show, by way of Muhammad’s beliefs and life, the marks of a fraudulent religion and why such marks were not a part of the Christian Faith.<sup>6</sup>

Prideaux’s work would be remembered and prized in the following century not so much for his refutation of the Deists as for his polemical portrayal of Muhammad as an “impostor,” though it was recognized that there were definite flaws in his biographical account.<sup>7</sup> One eighteenth-century reader who was especially critical of his study of the prophetic founder of Islam was his French contemporary, Henri Comte de Boulainvilliers (1658–1722), whose own life of Muhammad was published posthumously in 1730. Boulainvilliers was prepared to admit that Prideaux was “a very judicious historian,” but he took issue with his presentation of Muhammad as “an impostor, as ignorant as contemptible.”<sup>8</sup> Rather, Boulainvilliers believed that the origins of Islam lay in noble, though misguided, motives: “the intellectual love of an invisible object,” namely God, and “a zeal to procure him some sort of new adoration, an ardour to combat tenets . . . thought erroneous, and above all, an imagination heated with rapid ideas.”<sup>9</sup> Although such a sympathetic portrayal would become more common in the West in the latter half of the nineteenth century,<sup>10</sup> in the eighteenth century it was, as Boulainvilliers’ anonymous English translator admitted, “new and surprizing [*sic*], . . . and even contrary to all that we have hitherto been taught concerning” Muhammad.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly John Wesley (1703–1791) found it so when he read the work in November of 1767. The novelty of Boulainvilliers’ life of the prophet of Islam led Wesley to suspect that he was reading, not history, but a “romance,” that is, sheer fiction at best. Comparison with Prideaux’s standard life only confirmed the Methodist preacher in his opinion.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., ii.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., xvi–xix. The subtitle of this work, which announces an appendix, is noteworthy in this regard: *With A Discourse Annexed, for the Vindicating of Christianity from this Charge; Offered to the Consideration of the Deists of the Present Age.*

<sup>7</sup>Almond, “Western Images of Islam, 1700–1900,” 413.

<sup>8</sup>Henri Boulainvilliers, *The Life of Mahomet* (London: W. Hinchliffe, 1731), 169. The French original of this book had been published the preceding year. For a brief note on Boulainvilliers, see “Boulainvilliers, Henri,” *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1910), 4:318.

<sup>9</sup>Boulainvilliers, *Life of Mahomet*, 170. Ibid., 224, 244.

<sup>10</sup>Almond, “Western Images of Islam, 1700–1900,” 412–24.

<sup>11</sup>Boulainvilliers, *Life of Mahomet*, ii.



I went to Canterbury. Here I met with the Life of Mahomet, wrote, I suppose, by the Count de Boulainvilliers. Whoever the author is, he is a very pert, shallow, self-conceited coxcomb, remarkable for nothing but his immense assurance and thorough contempt of Christianity. And the book is a dull, ill-digested romance, supported by no authorities at all; whereas Dean Prideaux (a writer of ten times his sense) cites his authorities for everything he advances.<sup>12</sup>

### **For the Mahometans**

Implicit agreement with Prideaux's portrayal of Muhammad is also found in a little-known hymn by Charles Wesley (1707–1788) that well reveals the hymn writer's marvelous ability to convert rich Christian doctrine into hymnody and prayer. Entitled *For the Mahometans*, it employs fundamental truths of Christian orthodoxy to impart to the singer a prayerful response to what is termed "the dire apostasy" of Islam. It contains a particularly compelling example of one way in which Christians have responded to Muslims in the centuries-old encounter between their two religions, even though certain phrases of the hymn do not fall within the bounds of current political correctness.

Sun of unclouded righteousness,  
 With healing in thy wings arise,  
 A sad benighted world to bless,  
 Which now in sin and error lies,  
 Wrapt in Egyptian night profound;  
 With chains of hellish darkness bound.

The smoke of the infernal cave,  
 Which half the Christian world o'erspread,  
 Disperse, thou heavenly Light, and save  
 The souls by that Imposter led,  
 That Arab thief, as Satan bold,  
 Who quite destroy'd thy Asian fold.

O might the blood of sprinkling cry  
 For those who spurn the sprinkled blood!  
 Assert thy glorious Deity,  
 Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God!

<sup>12</sup>John Wesley, journal entry for 23 November 1767, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 32 vols. ed. W. Reginald Ward and R.P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 22:113–14.

The Unitarian fiend expel,  
And chase his doctrine back to hell.

Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
Thou Three in One, and One in Three!  
Resume thy own, for ages lost,  
Finish the dire apostasy;  
Thy universal claim maintain,  
And Lord of the creation reign!<sup>13</sup>

The original appearance of this hymn was in Charles Wesley's 1758 volume *Hymns of Intercession for all Mankind*. Taken out of context it would be easy to see in the hymn an apologetic purpose with the goal of refuting Islam. However, the textual context in which the hymn was first published speaks of a somewhat different aim in Wesley's mind, namely, prayer desirous of the salvation of Muhammad's followers. His brother John also understood the hymn in this light, for he included it, along with four others from the 1758 hymnal, in a sub-section entitled "For Believers Interceding for the World" in what became the standard Methodist hymnal, *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780).<sup>14</sup> Alongside this hymn for Muslims in the latter hymnal, there are also hymns *For the Heathens* and *For the Jews*—three categories of people mentioned in one of the Collects for Good Friday from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, which both the Wesleys would have known well and of which Charles was particularly fond:

O merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live: Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, and James Dale (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 7:608.

<sup>14</sup>This hymnal was the product of much careful thought and arranging by John Wesley. See Beckerlegge, "Introduction," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:22–30.

<sup>15</sup>*The Book of Common Prayer* (London: Everyman Publishers, 1999), 161–62; J.R. Watson, *The English Hymn. A Critical and Historical Study* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 220. For Charles Wesley's love of the Anglican prayerbook, see *Charles Wesley: A*

This clear textual link to *The Book of Common Prayer* is further confirmation that the hymn *For the Mahometans* is first and foremost concerned with prayer for the salvation of Muslims. In what follows, a stanza by stanza analysis of the hymn is undertaken to bring out the riches of this particular hymnic text.

### “Sun of Unclouded Righteousness”

Sun of unclouded righteousness,  
 With healing in thy wings arise,  
 A sad benighted world to bless,  
 Which now in sin and error lies,  
 Wrapt in Egyptian night profound;  
 With chains of hellish darkness bound.

The hymn begins with a reference to Malachi 4:2 and its promise of the advent of the Messiah, the “Sun of righteousness,” who will bring blessing to a world that is enchained in the “hellish darkness” of sin and doctrinal error. The Old Testament image from Malachi 4 was a favourite one with Wesley.<sup>16</sup> In one of his earliest hymns, which was written around the time of the first anniversary of his conversion and which has been transmitted as *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, what was originally the second stanza of eighteen ran thus:

On this glad day the glorious Sun  
 Of Righteousness arose,  
 On my benighted soul He shone,  
 And fill'd it with repose.<sup>17</sup>

The phrase “Sun of Righteousness” naturally brings to mind the contrast of light and darkness. Here it is the hymnwriter’s own “benighted soul” that has been illuminated with light. In *For the Mahometans* the

*Reader*, ed. John R. Tyson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 33–34; cf. Watson, *English Hymn*, 233–43.

<sup>16</sup>For the various hymns that contain references to this verse, see *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:819; John Lawson, *The Wesley Hymns: As a Guide to Scriptural Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 214; *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, 3 vols. ed. S.T. Kimbrough Jr. and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992), 3:228, 276. See also Charles Wesley, “For a Minister of Christ,” Redemption Hymn XVII, Stanza 9, in *Charles Wesley*, ed. Tyson, 228; “Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies,” Stanza 1, in *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns*, ed. J.R. Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169.

<sup>17</sup>For this stanza and the other seventeen stanzas, see *Charles Wesley*, ed. Tyson, 108–09. For the date of the hymn’s composition, see *idem*, 107.

hymnwriter and singer look forward to a similar work being done in a “sad benighted world,” by which is clearly meant the Muslim nations, one of them, Egypt, being specifically mentioned.

The vivid image of being “wrapped in Egyptian night profound” recalls the way that one of the ten plagues, the plague of “thick darkness,” mentioned in Exodus 10:21–22, came “over the land of Egypt.” According to the KJV rendering of the Exodus passage, it was a darkness that was palpable—it could be “felt.” In the hymn the term “wrapped” well captures the horror of being so surrounded by darkness. By contrast, the One who brings healing and blessing is “unclouded,” without a particle of darkness.

### “That Imposter”

The smoke of the infernal cave,  
Which half the Christian world o’erspread,  
Disperse, thou heavenly Light, and save  
The souls by that Imposter led,  
That Arab thief, as Satan bold,  
Who quite destroy’d thy Asian fold.

In his life of Muhammad Prideaux had written that Muhammad “used to withdraw himself into a Solitary Cave near Mecca,” where, according to Prideaux’s rendering, he concocted his religious beliefs,<sup>18</sup> an assertion that is reflected in the first line of the second stanza. Picking up the theme of darkness from the first stanza, Wesley now likens Muhammad’s teaching to “smoke,” which, spreading out from that cave near Mecca, went on to engulf half of the Christian world of that era. From the Arabian Peninsula, Islam, with seemingly invincible military might, had decimated the Byzantine Empire. Within eighty years of the death of Muhammad key centers of Ancient Christianity had fallen before the onslaught of Islam: Damascus was conquered in 635, Jerusalem fell in 638, Alexandria was taken in 642, Carthage in 698, and by 708 the entirety of what once had been Christian North Africa was in the hands of Muslim rulers. And so, Wesley noted, Muhammad’s beliefs “quite destroy’d [Christ’s] Asian fold.”

Prideaux argued that the downfall of those Western Asian churches had been due to internal decay and the fact that they had turned Christ’s “Holy Religion into a Firebrand of Hell for Contention, Strife, and Violence among them.”<sup>19</sup> The hymn makes no allusion to this perspective, though John Wesley did state around the very time that his brother’s hymn was written: “blind and bitter zeal, and . . . endless thirst after vain jangling

<sup>18</sup>Prideaux, *True Nature of Imposture Fully Display’d*, 14.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, viii.

and strife of words . . . have reigned for many ages in the Greek Church, and well-nigh banished true religion from among them.”<sup>20</sup> Both John and Charles had a deep appreciation for the theological riches of Eastern Orthodoxy, but that did not blind John—not presumably Charles—to the significant problems of the churches of that communion.<sup>21</sup>

Noteworthy is the way Charles described Muhammad in this stanza. The founder of Islam is “that Imposter,” the way he was frequently described by eighteenth-century occidental authors, an epithet made popular by Prideaux. He is “that Arab thief,” as bold as Satan in his attacks on Christianity. Charles’ brother John had a similar opinion of the devastation caused by Muhammad and his followers. Ten years before his reading of Boulainvilliers’ biography of Muhammad, the elder Wesley stated that prior to the Deists of his day no opponent of the Christian Faith had hurt Christianity as much as Muhammad.<sup>22</sup> As for the latter’s followers, Wesley was blunt: they have “no knowledge or love of God.” It should not be surprising then to find that their history had been so bloody, for, Wesley averred,

ever since the religion of Mahomet appeared in the world, the espousers of it . . . have been as wolves and tigers to all other nations, rending and tearing all that fell into their merciless paws, and grinding them with their iron teeth; . . . many countries, which were once as the garden of God, are now a desolate wilderness<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, despite this past history and the way that Muslims had wrought such destruction upon the Eastern churches, Charles Wesley can

<sup>20</sup>John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 14 vols., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London, 1830), 9:217.

<sup>21</sup>Tore Meistad has argued that the Wesleys’ “soteriology and cosmology reveal that their deepest roots” are in the soil of Eastern Orthodoxy rather than that of the Latin Fathers. Tore Meistad, “The Missiology of Charles Wesley and its Links to the Eastern Church,” in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 205–31. Cf. Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991).

<sup>22</sup>John Wesley to Augustus Montague Toplady, 9 December 1758, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols., ed. John Telford (1931; reprint, London: Epworth Press, 1960), 4:48.

<sup>23</sup>John Wesley, *Doctrine of Original Sin*, 216. It needs to be noted that on occasion John Wesley can view Islam in a more positive light. Tony Richie, “John Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 58 (2003): 79–99.

pray that Christ, the “heavenly Light,” would dispel their darkness and save their souls.

**“For Those Who Spurn the Sprinkled Blood!”**

O might the blood of sprinkling cry  
 For those who spurn the sprinkled blood!  
 Assert thy glorious Deity,  
 Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God!  
 The Unitarian fiend expel,  
 And chase his doctrine back to hell.

Jesus Christ is mentioned in the Qur’an some twenty-five times, where he is honoured as One who was virgin-born, a prophet, and miracle-worker. But the Qur’an explicitly rejects his crucifixion, and by extension, his resurrection.<sup>24</sup> It would be for this reason, among others, that John Wesley, who was quite conversant with the Qur’an, rejected it as divine revelation. In his words, the book contained “the most gross and impious absurdities.”<sup>25</sup> How much of the Muslim holy book Charles had read is not known, but as this third stanza makes clear he is very aware of the Muslim denial of the crucifixion. The Muslims, for whose salvation he is praying, are “those who spurn the sprinkled blood.”

As John Tyson has observed, the “most common word in Charles Wesley’s redemption hymns is blood.”<sup>26</sup> Its biblical associations with death and sacrifice make it well suited to express the heart of Wesley’s soteriology: the salvation of sinners is rooted in Christ’s shedding of his blood on the cross,<sup>27</sup> his dying in the stead of all of humanity. More specifically, Tyson has shown that Wesley’s use of the phrase “sprinkled blood,” which is dependent in large measure on verses from the Book of Hebrews, sought to communicate the idea of spiritual cleansing and reconciliation to God.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Qur’an 4:157–8. Yet, there are two other texts, Qur’an 3:54–5 and 19:27–34, which imply that Christ died. For further discussion of the Christology of the Qur’an, see F.P. Cotterell, “The Christology of Islam,” in *Christ the Lord*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 290–95; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965).

<sup>25</sup>John Wesley, *Doctrine of Original Sin*, 216.

<sup>26</sup>John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1987), 115. Cf. Wesley’s various uses of the term “blood” *Ibid.*, 115–55.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Wesley, “Passion Alone Hath Purchas’d our Peace,” Hymn XIX, Stanza 2, in *idem*, *Gloria Patri, etc., Or Hymns to the Trinity* (London, 1746), 9.

<sup>28</sup>Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 123–27.

So, for example, using this image to stress the idea of reconciliation, Wesley could write:

Jehovah's co-eternal Son  
 Did in our flesh appear beneath,  
 He laid his life a ransom down,  
 For every man he tasted death,  
 To justify us by His blood,  
 And bring the sprinkled world to God.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, in a poem based on Mark 15:34 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"), Wesley declared:

Casting a dying look  
 Thy God thou couldst not find,  
 Because thy Spirit had forsook  
 Our whole apostate kind,  
 Nor could our fallen race  
 Rise and return to God,  
 Or e'er retrieve thy Spirit's grace,  
 But thro' thy sprinkled blood.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, in using this imagery in *For the Mahometans* Wesley was praying that, despite the fact that Muslims reject the crucified Christ, his atoning work—"the blood of sprinkling"—might prove efficacious and save some of them. But this will only happen, Wesley went on to assert, if God acts with divine power:

Assert thy glorious Deity,  
 Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God!

Here Wesley purposely touches on another fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam: the nature of God. One of the central themes of the Qur'an is that "God is only one God, He is far above having a son."<sup>31</sup> Hence, readers of the Qur'an are admonished by Mohammad: "believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of 'a Trinity'."<sup>32</sup> But, Trinitarianism is central to Christianity, a fact that Wesley celebrated again

<sup>29</sup>Charles Wesley, "Short Hymn on Romans 1:16," in *Charles Wesley*, ed. Tyson, 474.

<sup>30</sup>*The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, 2:69.

<sup>31</sup>Qur'an 4:171. All quotations of the Qur'an are from *The Qur'an*, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup>Qur'an 4:171. Cf. Qur'an 5:72-73 and 5:116-17. The latter includes Mary in the Trinity.



and again in his hymnody, for in the words of John Tyson, the “doctrine of the Trinity pervaded Charles Wesley’s theology.”<sup>33</sup>

Wesley thus encouraged those who sang his hymns to worship the

Coequal Coeternal Three  
Thy Glorious Triune Deity  
Let all Eternally proclaim.<sup>34</sup>

Though in this world the triunity of God far exceeded humanity’s ability to explain—“inexplicably Three and One,” as Wesley said<sup>35</sup>—yet the Methodist hymnwriter delighted in orthodox Trinitarian declarations such as:

Thou are the co-eternal Son,  
In substance with thy Father one,  
In person differing we proclaim,  
In power and majesty the same.<sup>36</sup>

Or this:

Three uncompounded Persons One,  
One undivided God we proclaim:  
In essence, nature, substance one.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, he was confident that in the world to come,

There, there we shall see  
The Substance Divine,  
And fashion’d like Thee  
Transcendantly shine,  
Thy Personal Essence

<sup>33</sup>Charles Wesley, ed. Tyson, 47. For a fuller study, see A.M. Allchin, “The Trinity in the Teaching of Charles Wesley: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Orthodoxy?” *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 4 (1997): 69–84.

<sup>34</sup>Charles Wesley, Hymn XVIII, Stanza 2, in *Gloria Patri, etc.*, 9.

<sup>35</sup>Charles Wesley, Hymn XV, in *ibid.*, 8. Cf. “One Inexplicably Three, One in Simplest Unity,” Stanza 3, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:393. Cf. Hymn 255, Stanza 1, in *ibid.*, 396.

<sup>36</sup>Hymn 245, Stanza 2, in *ibid.*, 387.

<sup>37</sup>Hymn 255, Stanza 2, in *ibid.*, 397. Cf. Hymn 248, Stanza 2, in *ibid.*, 389:

“A mystical plurality  
We in the Godhead own,  
Adoring One in Persons Three,  
And Three in nature One.”

Be bold to explain,  
 And wrapt in thy Presence  
 Eternally reign.<sup>38</sup>

Wesley's commitment to the Trinity was also rooted in his consciousness that redemption was a Trinitarian affair:

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
 Whom one all-perfect God we own,  
 Restorer of thine image lost,  
 Thy various offices make known;  
 Display, our fallen souls to raise,  
 Thy whole economy of grace.

Jehovah in Three Persons, come,  
 And draw, and sprinkle us, and seal<sup>39</sup>

Little wonder then that Wesley regarded the denial of the Trinity, which robbed God of his glory and undermined the economy of redemption, as a “doctrine [from] hell.”

One final point about this third stanza that needs to be noted ties it to the larger historical context in which the hymn was written. By terming Islamic theology “Unitarian,” Wesley was linking it to one of the major theological challenges of his day, namely the rise and expansion of Socinianism or Unitarianism among both Anglicans and Dissenters. In fact, around the same time when Charles would have been writing this hymn or even preparing it for publication, his brother was engaged in writing one of his major works, *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757), a detailed response to John Taylor (1694–1761), pastor of the Presbyterian work in Norwich, in that day one of the leading towns in England.<sup>40</sup> A well-known Hebraist, Taylor also became infamous for being, as his latest biographer G.T. Eddy has put it, a “radical champion of freedom of thought on theological questions.”<sup>41</sup> In particular, Taylor's *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* (1740) was viewed as a powerful attack on

<sup>38</sup>Hymn XIX, Stanza 4, in *Gloria Patri, etc.*, 10. For a similar thought, see John Wesley, Hymn 324, Stanzas 5–6, in *Works of John Wesley*, 7:481.

<sup>39</sup>Hymn 253, Stanzas 1–2, in *ibid.*, 394.

<sup>40</sup>For a critical overview and analysis of Wesley's work, see Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, 2 vols., trans. Denis Inman (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 2:80–97.

<sup>41</sup>G.T. Eddy, *Dr Taylor of Norwich: Wesley's Arch-heretic* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003), 40.

confessional Christianity on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>42</sup> Proof of this is found in the fact that among those who published a response to it, in addition to John Wesley, was Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the most important American theologian of the eighteenth century. Imbued with the optimistic confidence in human reason that was typical of so many in his day, Taylor also deprecated what he called “Athanasianism,” that is, Nicene Trinitarianism, because of what he believed to be its denial of God’s unity.<sup>43</sup> Eddy thinks Taylor was probably closest to Arianism in his theological convictions,<sup>44</sup> but John Wesley thought otherwise and regarded Taylor as a Unitarian.

When Charles refers to Muhammad as a “Unitarian fiend,” then, he is making vivid for his contemporaries the deep concern that Christians ought to have about the theological perspectives of Islam. It is noteworthy that John Wesley could tell the future hymnwriter Augustus Montague Toplady (1740–1778) in December of 1758—the year in which Charles Wesley published *For the Mahometans*—that “no single person since Mahomet has given such a wound to Christianity as Dr. Taylor.”<sup>45</sup>

### “Lord of the Creation Reign”

Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
 Thou Three in One, and One in Three!  
 Resume thy own, for ages lost,  
 Finish the dire apostasy;  
 Thy universal claim maintain,  
 And Lord of the creation reign!

Over against Islam’s Unitarianism, Wesley’s Christian faith, as we have seen, affirms that there is within the Godhead a Triunity. Wesley now calls on this Triune Being to bring an end to the rule of Islam. He has one parting remark about the religion founded by Muhammad: it is a “dire apostasy.” This is an interpretation that views Islam as an heretical departure from Christianity, which is a perspective that stretches back to one of the earliest Christian respondents to Islam, namely the theologian John of Damascus (c.655/675–c.749), who included it in his *On Heresies*.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 20:245 n. 47.

<sup>43</sup>Eddy, *Dr Taylor of Norwich*, 40.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 40, 150–52.

<sup>45</sup>John Wesley to Augustus Montague Toplady, 9 December 1758, in *Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 4:48.

<sup>46</sup>For the section of this work dealing with Islam, see John of Damascus, *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase Jr. (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958),

The hymn ends, though, on a positive stress on the universality of the Christian faith: the Triune God is the Creator of all that exists and thus has a right to reign as creation's Lord. This includes all of humanity and thus, in the context of this hymn, there is here an implicit challenge for missions to the Muslims.<sup>47</sup>

Rightly understood, this hymn is a prayer for the salvation of the Muslims, but it ends with an implicit call to action—namely missionary outreach to the Muslim nations. In this respect it is similar to another hymn that was included in the volume of hymns in which *For the Mahomtans* was published. This one was entitled *For the Heathens*:

Lord over all, if thou hast made,  
 Hast ransomed every soul of man,  
 Why is the grace so long delayed,  
 Why unfulfilled the saving plan?  
 The bliss for Adam's race designed,  
 When will it reach to all mankind?

Art thou the God of the Jews alone,  
 And not the God of Gentiles too?  
 To Gentiles make thy goodness known,  
 Thy judgments to the nations show;  
 Awaken them by the gospel call—  
 Light of the world, illumine all!<sup>48</sup>

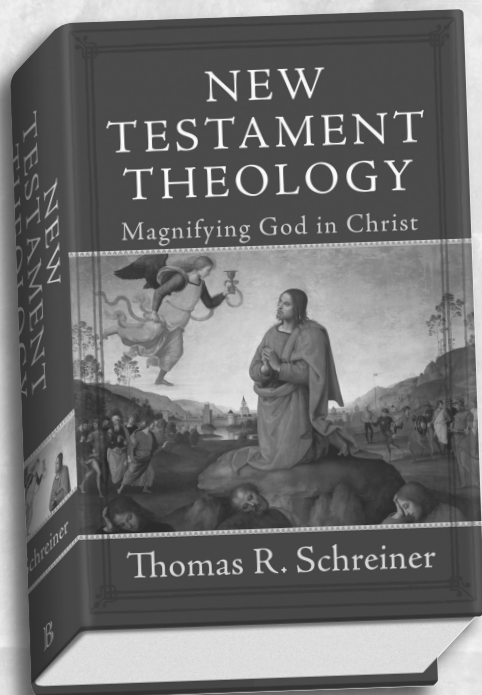
153–60. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972). For a general study of the life and thought of John of Damascus, see Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>47</sup>Tore Meistad noted, "Most of Charles Wesley's hymns included implicit challenges for missions." Tore Meistad, "The Missiology of Charles Wesley: An Introduction," *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 5 (1998): 39.

<sup>48</sup>John Wesley, "For the Heathens," Stanzas 1–2, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:609.

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## *Shall We “Build Bridges” or “Pull Down Strongholds”?*

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Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshippers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might

grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them (Acts 17:16–34 NKJV).

It is quite common today to read this particular passage, first, as an apology for natural theology, then second, as a paradigm for cross-cultural encounter. First, because Paul cites a pagan poet or two, it is assumed that Paul is thereby inviting Christians to look for general revelation within the philosophical and religious speculations of other religions and cultures. Second, because Paul engages with the philosophers of Athens, it is assumed that he has established herein a paradigm for trying to make the gospel relevant to a culture unfamiliar with or hostile to Scripture. Specifically, some missiologists argue that Paul is encouraging Christians today to preserve the worldviews of other cultures as avenues of gospel relevancy.

In the exegesis that follows, I argue to the contrary. Paul’s use of a pagan poet or two does not establish an apostolic principle that other religions should be searched for helpful statements that we can then identify as authoritative general revelation. Paul’s use of a pagan poet or two does not mean that all cultures are neutral conveyers of gospel relevancy. Acts 17:16–34, which contains Paul’s famous Areopagus or Mars Hill speech, is neither an excuse to find general revelation in other religions, nor is it a paradigm for finding relevancy in culture rather than Scripture. The Areopagus sermon is a confrontational, biblical, and evangelistic proclamation of the good news that every man in every culture must hear.

### **The Contextualization Continuum**

In an important but largely neglected missiological text, David Hes-



selgrave and Edward Rommen argue that not all systems of contextualization are helpful. Indeed, there is a “Contextualization Continuum” that stretches from orthodoxy and apostolic contextualization on the one hand to liberalism and syncretistic contextualization on the other. And the key to whether a missionary or church planter will be orthodox and apostolic or whether a missionary or church planter will be liberal and syncretistic depends on their focus on Scripture or on culture. “[T]he closer one gets to classical orthodoxy the greater the weight given to the biblical revelation, and the closer one gets to classical liberalism the greater the weight given to human reason and culture.”<sup>1</sup>

Of course, some missiologists, missionaries, church planters, and pastors would argue they are not liberal but orthodox, even generously orthodox, yet they consider cultural exegesis just as important. But Hesselgrave’s definition concerns not only what one says about the Bible, but how one treats the Bible. The key words are “the weight given to.” If you give greater weight to the culture than you do to Scripture, then you are truly acting as a liberal, even if you say you are orthodox. Moreover, Hesselgrave’s definition regards a continuum. There are not only the extremes of orthodoxy and liberalism; there are the intermediate positions of neo-orthodoxy and neo-liberalism. And like the neo-orthodox Karl Barth or the neo-liberal Paul Tillich, today’s proponents of these intermediate theological positions claim to give great weight to Scripture but also give great weight to culture.

### **Postmodern Applications of the Contextualization Continuum**

Although Hesselgrave did not address the work of Brian McLaren and the “emergent” movement or the diverging work of Mark Driscoll and the “emerging” movement, his continuum may provide an excellent means of analysis regarding these movements. If the emergent movement is shaped by a liberal outlook that is moving toward syncretism, the emerging movement may be shaped by a postliberalism that tries to avoid syncretism but still struggles to be considered orthodox.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the problem with applying Hesselgrave’s analysis to subsequent events is that Anglo-American missiology has begun to embrace various forms of that pop-philosophy known as postmodernism. Modernism and liberalism dared to speak of metanarratives that were true for all cultures, but postmodernism and postliberalism reject metanarratives in favor of speaking about multiple truths dependent upon the individual or his community. John MacArthur

<sup>1</sup>David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 148.

<sup>2</sup>Collin Hansen, “Pastor Provocateur,” *Christianity Today* (September 2007). Driscoll refers to his church, Mars Hill, as “theologically conservative and culturally liberal.”

has issued a clarion call for the identification of McLaren’s “new” kind of Christianity as deceptive.<sup>3</sup>

MacArthur strikes me as fundamentally correct in his concerns regarding McLaren. For instance, in his chapter on incarnationism, McLaren argues for a new openness toward other religions while he continually puts down traditional orthodoxy, separatism, and even compares the modern missionary movement started by the Northamptonshire Baptists to Taliban-like Islamic radicalism.<sup>4</sup> McLaren believes there is “good wheat” (cf. Matt 13:24–30) in other religions, and that Christians should be willing to see the evil in their own religion as they learn from other religions.<sup>5</sup> He argues that inter-religious dialogue should be primarily about apologetics, that it should lead missionaries to a “new place,” and that “the ‘old, old story’ may not be the ‘true, true story.’”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, he says we can re-discover the gospel through encountering these other religions, apparently believing Christians have somehow lost the gospel. He then throws in this example of syncretizing dark with light, falsehood with truth:

I must add, though, that I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish context.<sup>7</sup>

McLaren comes to the bizarre conclusion that people may be “Buddhist followers of Jesus” or “Jewish or Hindu followers of Jesus.” Women who wear the Islamic veil are just expressing their love for the same God in a different way. Moreover, he is convinced that not all Christians are disciples of Christ, for Christianity has something “rotten” of which we need to “repent.”<sup>8</sup> McLaren’s missiology should offend both Christians and non-Christians, for it rings not of authenticity but of duplicity. At the same time, such missiology fails openly to proclaim itself as Christianity, even as it undermines the visible churches established by Christ.

Behind the views of McLaren and the emergent movement in evan-

<sup>3</sup>John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/calvinist + anabaptist/anglican + methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 247–53.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 254–55.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 258–61.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 264–68.

gicalism are a number of unorthodox theological assumptions. However, what sticks out the most is the idea that Scripture somehow lacks the clarity and sufficiency that the churches require today. Because Christians have disagreed over the interpretation of, for instance, ecclesiological passages in Scripture, it is claimed that we must put aside discordant interpretations as *adiaphora* (i.e. indifferent). If traditional Christian churches are to be made relevant, they must strive to come closer to the culture in which they are placed. Combining the experientialism common to evangelical piety with a broad view of general revelation, emergent evangelical Christians primarily ask, “What is God doing in this context?”<sup>9</sup> Out of such questions being answered by the culture, they hope to “reinvent” even “reverse convert” Christianity. “We need a conversion of sorts, a reverse conversion, to the themes, rhythms, and interests of post-secular Western culture.”<sup>10</sup> The emergent movement embraces secularism as it collapses the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The implication is that if churches are going to be “relevant,” they must engage in social surveys and restructure their worship so as not to appear exclusivist.

### The Intellectuals Behind the New Movements

The intellectuals or substantive thinkers behind the emergent and emerging movements are some prominent missiologists. One may consider here, for instance, David Bosch<sup>11</sup> and Dean Flemming,<sup>12</sup> both of whom are appropriated by all sectors of the Emergent and Emerging movements. What is striking about these two highly-educated missiologists in particular are (1) their demonstrable concern to create new paradigms for missionary contextualization, and (2) their demonstrable dependencies upon the old ecumenical and liberal theological movements. Bosch was known as a “bridge person,” for desiring to bring together the old ecumenical and

<sup>9</sup>Will Samson, “The End of Reinvention: Mission Beyond Market Adoption,” in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 159.

<sup>10</sup>Barry Taylor, “Converting Christianity: The End and Beginning of Faith,” in *ibid.*, 168–69.

<sup>11</sup>Bosch is highly appreciated by McLaren, and Driscoll cites Bosch first among the works of noted missiologists that he consulted in his own development of the emerging church model (“Church Model 3.0”). McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 247, 255–56; Mark Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church,” *Criswell Theological Review*, new series, 3 (2006): 88.

<sup>12</sup>Stetzer, who is a leading contributor to Driscoll’s movement, echoes Flemming’s approach to Acts 17 and cites Flemming’s work approvingly. Ed Stetzer, “The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches,” in *The Mission of Today’s Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 77; *idem*, “Why is Cultural Relevance a Big Deal?” [http://www.theresurgence.com/es\\_blog\\_2007-01-29\\_why\\_is\\_cultural\\_relevance\\_a\\_big\\_deal](http://www.theresurgence.com/es_blog_2007-01-29_why_is_cultural_relevance_a_big_deal) (Accessed 2 March 2008).

evangelical movements in order to transform missions.<sup>13</sup> Leaning heavily upon the liberal historical critical method of treating Scripture, Bosch undermined the authority of the biblical text. His express purpose was to prepare missionaries to drop the old paradigms of missiology and prepare for a new, transforming paradigm.<sup>14</sup>

Dean Flemming, however, is a different case. Flemming is a lecturer in New Testament and Intercultural Communication at European Nazarene College in Büsingen, Germany. As a Nazarene, he possesses some claim to have developed within the bosom of evangelicalism. And yet, in spite of such credentials, Flemming’s work, though perhaps more orthodox by degrees than Bosch’s, is still influenced heavily by theological liberalism. Specifically, while expressing some disagreement, Flemming appropriates the exegetical conclusions of Martin Dibelius.

Dibelius, it will be remembered, was a leading figure in German biblical theology in the early twentieth century. Indeed, he was considered something of a father, alongside his junior colleague, Rudolf Bultmann, in the *Formgeschichte* movement that did so much theological damage to many seminaries and their students only a few decades ago, for instance at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in the 1960s. *Formgeschichte*, the form critical study of the historical sources behind the biblical text, encouraged skepticism toward the historical reliability of the gospel reports about Jesus. Dibelius not only pioneered in this movement regarding the gospels, with suppositions from “paradigms” to “myths,” but also regarding similar developments leading into the book of Acts.<sup>15</sup>

Bosch and Flemming both employ the conceptual language of “contextualization” in their works. For instance, Flemming states that he is concerned to “free” and “enable” the gospel so that it may “come to life in new settings.” He believes that Paul employed the pagan poets as “bridges” to his audience in a classic example of “apologetics” and “pre-evangelism.” He argues that Paul, and, therefore, Christians should take the “risk” to find “common ground” and engage in “building bridges” through discovering “general revelation” through dialogue with other worldviews. He says that, like Paul, we must use “convergences” between the ideas of various religions, and that we must “highlight . . . points of contact and agreement.” While we should not syncretize, Flemming believes that Paul’s speech at

<sup>13</sup>Gerald H. Anderson, “In Memoriam: David J. Bosch, 1929–1992,” in David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

<sup>14</sup>Bosch interjects both form criticism and redaction criticism between the reader and the biblical text. Elevating the modern missionary to apostolic status, he argues, “What they did for their time, we have to do for ours.” Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 21.

<sup>15</sup>Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 243–51.

Mars Hill was intended by Luke to serve as “a model of missionary preaching.” In this model, there must be a balance between “an ‘identificational’ approach that proclaims the gospel in culturally relevant forms on the one hand and a ‘transformational’ approach that resists compromising the gospel’s integrity in a pluralistic culture on the other.” He argues for a middle ground between “both contextual relevance and courageous fidelity to the transforming word of salvation.”<sup>16</sup>

In light of such statements, we must be careful not to place hurriedly Flemming and his emerging followers on the liberal and syncretistic end of Hesselgrave’s contextualization continuum. They are too concerned to renounce syncretism to be counted as liberal. Conversely, we must be careful not to assume naively that Flemming and his emerging followers therefore deserve to be placed on the orthodox and apostolic end of the continuum. Their concern to “make” the gospel relevant to postmodern culture may indicate a less-than-orthodox view of the power of Scripture proclamation. Rather, Flemming and the emerging movement, as well as such missiological methodologies as the Camel Method, seem to fall somewhere in between. If their authors’ words are to be trusted, these missiologists are not syncretists. However, it is yet to be seen if they may be classified as orthodox. Exactly where they fall in the remaining categories of neo-orthodoxy or neo-liberalism, or perhaps in some new category, is an issue best left to further research.

### A Convergence Interpretation of the Mars Hill Speech

Instead, let us examine the text of the Mars Hill speech of Paul in Acts 17. Before hearing my exposition, let us hear the alternative and (from what I can tell from my students) the currently dominant interpretation of the speech. Our text, according to Flemming, is the “platform” created by Paul and incorporated by Luke for cross-cultural missions as convergence. It provides for the use and critique of what should be regarded as general revelation.<sup>17</sup> In this, he echoes Dibelius, who said, “Luke wrote this speech as an example of a typical sermon to Gentiles and put it in the setting of Athens.”<sup>18</sup> The speech is, moreover, “the climax of the book,” and “the focal point” of the movement into Greek culture with the Christian religion.<sup>19</sup>

Dibelius claimed, “What we have before us is a *hellenistic* speech

<sup>16</sup>Dean Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul’s Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication,” *Missiology: An International Review* 30 (2002): 199–208.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Greeven (London: SCM Press, 1956), 73.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 26, 76.

about the true knowledge of God.”<sup>20</sup> This idea is what attracts Flemming to Dibelius in the first place, for contextualization as Flemming defines it demands a “convergence” of biblical and non-biblical worldviews. Dibelius indeed enables a convergence exposition by Flemming, but at what cost? After all, in order to make this a Hellenistic speech, Dibelius progressively isolated the speech from the Old Testament, from the New Testament, from the writings of Paul, even from the context in which it was placed in the book of Acts.<sup>21</sup> In other words, Dibelius expositied the speech apart from its canonical context and inspirational authority, and thereby turned it into Hellenistic philosophy with only a veneer of Christianity devoid of honest evangelism.

Recognizing that the Hellenistic claim of Dibelius had its detractors—detractors with whom Flemming does not agree—Flemming opted for a view that would only slightly modify Dibelius’s *Formgeschichte* conclusion. Dibelius allowed Flemming to see the speech as a Hellenistic construct, even as Flemming tried to maintain orthodoxy. Unfortunately, Flemming seemed to ignore the fact that liberalism is an inappropriate theological foundation for apostolic contextualization. Yet, Flemming marches forward, mixing liberal exegesis with evangelical theology. As a result, he concludes:

While it is true that the speech’s theology is firmly rooted in the Old Testament and Judaism, Paul is able to clothe biblical revelation in the language and categories of his Greek listeners. He takes advantage of the convergences between the Jewish Scriptures and Hellenistic thought in order to construct apologetic bridges to his listeners. Paul views Greek philosophy as an appropriate conversation partner in his attempt to contextualize the Jewish Christian gospel for his educated contemporaries.<sup>22</sup>

Incorporating a form of biblical exegesis that usually leads to syncretism, Flemming argued that the Areopagus speech was primarily about finding convergences between the Hellenistic worldview and the Hebrew worldview. Flemming recognized some negative statements made by Paul about Greek religion, but he stressed the convergences rather than the corrections.<sup>23</sup> Flemming thus appropriated the acidic critical work of Dibel-

<sup>20</sup>His italics. *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 56–77.

<sup>22</sup>Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens,” 203.

<sup>23</sup>In a later work, Flemming spent more time detailing the problems with Greek religion, but he still argued that Paul’s speech was primarily positive. “Although distressed about the idolatry he finds in Athens, Paul refuses to flatly condemn the pagans or their



ius even while trying to remain orthodox. Why? Because liberal exegesis, which evidences a high view of philosophy and a low view of Scripture, allowed him to employ Paul's speech as a paradigm for cross-cultural engagement. Unfortunately, Flemming thus made three critical mistakes: First, he incorporated a hostile form of exegesis from which to construct a theology of contextualization. Second, he downplayed the confrontational aspects of Paul's sermon in order to stress convergences. Finally, he even asserted that gospel preaching could occur without reference to the cross.<sup>24</sup>

### **A Contextual Interpretation of the Areopagus Sermon**

Paul's speech upon Mars Hill must be read contextually, not only within the culture of ancient Athens, but especially within the seventeenth chapter of Acts, the book of Acts, the context of Paul's thought, the context of the New Testament, and the context of the Old Testament. When approached in this way, the speech can no longer be seen as an attempt to build bridges through pre-evangelistic apologetics; rather, Paul was attempting to proclaim the Word evangelistically with confrontational power. The text clearly teaches the confrontational nature of the sermon, the biblical nature of the sermon, and the evangelistic nature of the sermon. Because my European ancestors worshiped false gods, I am so glad that Paul did not cater to European culture, but proclaimed the truth of our evil ways without compromise. Surely, we should be careful to present the same courtesy of forthright speech as we proclaim the gospel to other cultures.

#### **1. The Directly Confrontational Nature of the Sermon**

First, contextually, we must see that the sermon was not delivered in an attempt to hold a genteel, detached, and ambiguous apologetical dialogue. It was a confrontational sermon that called into judgment the false beliefs of the Athenians, demanding either conversion or divine judgment. The direct and confrontational nature of Paul's sermon may be seen in the context of the passage, the explicit contradictions of Greek philosophy made by Paul, and some implicit contradictions.

**The Context.** The account begins by noting that Paul's spirit was provoked (*paroxuneto*) as he looked at a city filled with idols. This was not a man who spoke dispassionately, for his spirit was prompted to paroxysms,

religious and philosophical systems. Instead, he recognizes that the Athenians, their past, and even their religious yearnings, have been touched by the grace of God."Therefore, our missiological "attitude" should be "to recognize the signs of grace wherever they are found." Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 83.

<sup>24</sup>Flemming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens," 206.



spasms, fits, convulsions of concern, over the false worship of the Athenians. Paul was so provoked that when he came to speak to the Areopagus itself, he let the men of the Athenian academy know they were ignorant people (*agnoountes*) (vv. 23, 30). Imagine, if you will, standing before an august gathering of the finest academics in the world at the Sorbonne, or Cambridge University, or Harvard University, or right here at Southwestern Seminary. Would you have the courage to call such a faculty, “ignorant”? This sermon was not intended to generate a feel-good moment; nor was it a detached and dispassionate dialogue; this sermon by Paul was a convictional confrontation with the admitted ignorance of the purported intelligentsia of the ancient hedonistic world. Yet his accusation of ignorance was not made out of a sense of personal superiority but out of sorrow over their coming judgment.

And the cause of the convulsions in the apostle’s spirit was the false worship of the idols (*eidolon*). The city was filled with thousands of them; some commentators say there were more idols than inhabitants. Scripture views idols, not as “points of contact,” but as “points of separation,” for behind idols lie false gods, also known as demons. Revelation 9:20 places in parallel the worship of “demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood.” In 1 Corinthians 10:19–21, Paul queries, “What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons.” Paul could never see demons as compatible with Christianity: “What communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? . . . ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.’”

And it is here, with regard to the demonic, that Paul became utterly confrontational. Within Middle Stoicism, which was popular when Paul was in Athens, Poseidonius taught that the demons (*daimonion*), who were believed to inhabit the air, functioned as intermediaries between gods and men.<sup>25</sup> And Augustine felt it necessary to devote two books in his magisterial *De Civitas Dei* to contradicting this still popular belief some four centuries later.<sup>26</sup> When Paul heard the philosophers refer to Jesus and the resurrection as *daimonion*, it became necessary to deliver a direct response.

<sup>25</sup>Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Greece and Rome* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1946), 422–23.

<sup>26</sup>Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (reprint; New York: Modern Library, 1993), books viii–ix.

The philosophers were utterly confused: *ton Iesoun* (“Jesus”) and *ten anastasin* (“the resurrection”) are not demons. With forthrightness, Paul came before the assembly, and the first thing he said to the academic court was, “I perceive that you are very religious,” *deisidaimonesterous*, for they venerate demons. This is where the King James Version shows some superiority. There, *deisidaimonesterous*, literally “pious toward demons,” is translated as a negative “superstitious” rather than a positive “very religious.”<sup>27</sup> Our Lord is not a demon, Paul argued, and His resurrection is not a female demon. Attempts to turn Paul’s direct speech into a friendly commendation of pagan religiosity are based more upon ambiguous sentimentality than contextual translation.

**Explicit Contradictions.** The effort to turn this speech into a non-confrontational dialogue primarily seeking religious convergences between the Hellenistic and Christian worldviews fails before the very context of the speech. It also fails when the explicit content of the speech is considered. In addition to the remarks regarding the idols and the demons, there are five negative comments explicitly made by Paul about Hellenistic religion. Consider these explicit contradictions of Hellenism:

- v. 24: God does not dwell in the Athenians’ man-made temples.
- v. 25: God does not need the Athenians’ man-made sacrifices.
- v. 29: God’s nature is not composed of the elements of the world. This is an implicit refutation, by the way, of the Stoic philosophy that God is to be identified with the world-soul or with one of the beginning elements of the world, such as the “designing fire.”<sup>28</sup>
- v. 29: God’s nature may not be represented by human art (*technes*), the work of human hands.
- v. 29: God’s nature may not be discerned or perceived by the human imagination (*enthumeseos*). The attempts of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, as well as similar attempts by

<sup>27</sup>Foerster maintains the negative and positive senses occurred in the Greek world, but then inexplicably limits the Lukan use to the positive sense. Foerster, “*deisidaimon, deisidaimonia*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 20. Marshall gives credence to both views. I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 285.

<sup>28</sup>Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1:387–88. Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 307.

Platonists and Aristotelians are thereby declared futile. The Epicurean philosophers equated truth with mentally derived images (*eidola*) of beauty.<sup>29</sup> Paul contradicted both the Stoics and the Epicureans as he stood in their midst.

**Implicit Contradictions.** Finally, at least five other references of the speech to Greek philosophical religion are implicitly confrontational. Consider the following five implicit condemnations of Hellenistic religion. First, the Greeks tended to speak of the gods (*theoi*), in the plural, a fact that Jews and Christians found unacceptable. Even when Greek philosophers used the singular *theos*, they did not consider themselves monotheistic, but used the term to indicate either the highest god (Zeus), or the nexus of the gods, or an impersonal principle. Apparently, no prominent Greek writer ever considered *theos* to be a unique and personal God.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Paul set out to undermine their beliefs with the very first words of the body of his speech: *ho theos*, literally, “the God,” who made the world and everything in it; He is the one and only God (v. 24).

The second implicit condemnation in Paul’s sermon concerns the times (*kairous*) and boundaries (*horothesias*) of the nations (v. 26). The ancient world considered certain gods to be identified with certain nations. It was in the conflict between the gods that the temporal rise and fall, and the physical expansion and constriction of the nations were determined. And at Mount Olympiad, the Greeks even erected a statue to *kairos* (“time”) as a god.<sup>31</sup> Against such nonsense, Paul claimed that it was God who determined (*horisas*) the bounds of our nations, not the national gods and not even time itself.

Above, we noted the Middle Stoics considered demons to be air-born intermediaries between men and the gods. This brings us to the third implicit condemnation of Greek religion. Against the Middle Stoics, Paul posited a direct origin between God and men. He even cited one of their poets, Aratus, against them in the process: “For we are also His offspring (*genos*)” (v. 28). *Genos* indicates a father-son connection between God and men. In other words, Paul was saying there is no need for a demon, who has nothing in common with man nor with God, to mediate between the two. In quoting a Stoic poet, Paul undermined Stoicism itself. In a previous statement in verse 28, perhaps derived from Epimenides’ poem where Minos addresses Zeus, Paul also undermined the idea that there is any airspace between God and man that requires a demonic intermediary: “He

<sup>29</sup>Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1:402.

<sup>30</sup>Hermann Kleinknecht, “*theos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 65–79.

<sup>31</sup>Gerhard Delling, “*kairos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:457.

is not far from us, for in Him we live and move and have our being.”<sup>32</sup> The transcendence of God is not overcome by demons residing in the air but by God’s own immanence.

Please note that there is no indication that Paul taught that the statements of either Aratus or Epimenides should be considered general revelation; rather, he utilized pagan philosophers as counterfactual illustrations in a confrontational sermon against yet other pagan philosophers. The pagan poets have no religious authority for Paul; only the Word, the gospel of Christ, has such authority for Paul. Those seeking a theology of general revelation should turn to Romans, where general revelation is limited to the basic ideas that God exists, that God is powerful, and that God is going to judge. By no means should Paul’s statements be taken out of their original context.

The fourth implicit condemnation concerns the refutation of the Stoic philosophy that an impersonal fate determines all things, even God, as opposed to Scripture’s presentation of the God who personally guides history. Several times in the speech, Paul refers to the doctrine of providence. God has created all men from one man (v. 26). God has “determined” (*horisas*—aorist active participle, indicating a completed activity) the preappointed times and boundaries of human nations (v. 26). God has “ordained” (*horisen*—aorist active indicative, indicating a completed activity) the redemptive activity of the man Jesus (v. 31). The Epicureans denied there was such a thing as providence, for the gods are unconcerned with human history; man’s only purpose is to avoid pain before he dies and ceases to exist.<sup>33</sup> The Stoics affirmed there was such a thing as “fate,” but even the gods and the world-soul are subject to determinism; the wise man was counseled to resign to this impersonal fate.<sup>34</sup> Against both the Epicureans and the Stoics, Paul advocated the biblical worldview that God is personal, that God personally guides history, and that God calls for a personal response of repentance rather than impersonal resignation.

The fifth implicit contradiction of the Hellenistic worldview concerned the doctrine of immortality. The Epicureans tried to free men from the fear of death by rejecting human immortality and denying that the soul would be judged. Rather, the Epicureans said the soul was materially derived from atoms and returns to such at death.<sup>35</sup> The beliefs of Stoics

<sup>32</sup>F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 338.

<sup>33</sup>Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1:404–407; Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, 1:302–4.

<sup>34</sup>Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1:389–90, 394–95; Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, 1:305–307.

<sup>35</sup>Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1:404.

with regard to immortality exhibited more variety. The Middle Stoics also denied immortality, while Later Stoics such as Marcus Aurelius taught a limited immortality or reabsorption by the world-soul.<sup>36</sup> Against all the philosophers, Paul taught that the soul continues to exist, for it was created personally by God, continues to live in closeness to Him, and will be judged by Him. The only hope, Paul said, is in the resurrection available through the death of Jesus Christ (vv. 18, 31). And it was here, with regard to the resurrection that the philosophers really had difficulty with Paul.

The speech delivered by Paul was honestly confrontational, as the context indicates, as Paul himself made explicit, and as Paul implicitly argued in his debate with Greek philosophy and religion. The speech was also supremely biblical.

## 2. The Biblical Nature of the Sermon

In arguing that the sermon delivered by Paul is biblical, I am not arguing that every word comes from the Old Testament, but that the worldview was biblical as well as the mode of argumentation. I am not arguing he never used Greek terms, for he was active in translation. He most certainly did use Greek terms, but—and this is absolutely critical—Paul was always careful to define Greek terms with biblical meaning. Moreover, it is highly probable that the apostle followed an expository method of Bible proclamation,<sup>37</sup> perhaps by focusing on two texts he would have known by heart. This understanding runs counter to the presentations made by Flemming and other scholars, who argue that Paul’s speech is defined by Greek rhetoric with regard to rhetorical style and therefore meaning.<sup>38</sup>

Dibelius asserted that the motif of the sermon was philosophical in character rather than historical.<sup>39</sup> But the content of the sermon begins with creation, progresses through the history of national cultures, and ends with judgment. Unlike the Greek philosophers, who typically possessed a cyclical view of time, Paul advocated a linear view of time. Moreover, time did not bind God but was bound by God, for He personally created the world and time, directed its history, intervened in it personally, and will bring it to a final conclusion. The biblical view of the world is that of

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 1:421, 437.

<sup>37</sup>Ellis concludes that Paul was not much of a rhetorician. “His speech on the Areopagus was apparently exceptional, but here also its substance, as B. Gärtner showed, was the exposition and application of Old Testament texts.” E. Earle Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 147–58.

<sup>38</sup>Dean Zwick, “The Exordium of the Areopagus Speech, Acts 17:22, 23,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 94–103; Karl Olav Sandnes, “Paul and Socrates: The Aim of Paul’s Areopagus Speech,” *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 13–26; Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 74–75.

<sup>39</sup>Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 33–39.

divine history. The intellectual content of the sermon, therefore, seems to contradict Dibelius directly.

We may delineate ten progressive aspects within Paul's biblical worldview as propounded in this speech. Of great interest to the expository preacher is the fact that all ten of these truths may be successively found, indicatively or prophetically, to have been drawn from two Old Testament passages: Genesis 1–2 and Isaiah 66. It appears that it was Paul's intent to progress carefully through the biblical texts, boldly expositing the Word of God. Restricting himself to a translation and exposition of his Bible, even while employing illustrative material from the Greek context, enabled Paul to present the gospel of Jesus Christ with authority and assurance.

**Paul's Exposition of Genesis 1–2 in Acts 17:24–28.** Paul begins by teaching that God made the world and everything in it (Acts 17:24). While Paul uses the Greek term *kosmos* ("world"), much abused by the philosophers, he carefully explains its meaning in biblical terms by reference to "heaven and earth." The point is that God is creator and not created, and that as Lord of heaven and earth, He is creator of everything in the cosmos. This is the consistent message of Scripture, beginning with Genesis 1:1. Paul begins here because he understands that divine creation is fundamental to a proper understanding of all that is. Second, God did not depart from the world and remain aloof. Rather, God maintains His personal interaction with the world, because He is Lord over the world. He continues in His role as "Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). Again, this is the message that begins in Genesis 1:1, but does not end there.

Third, Paul notes that this God gives life to all things (Acts 17:25). Nothing comes into existence or continues in existence apart from His personal power in creating and sustaining it. The first chapter of Genesis again delivers this profound and non-negotiable Christian truth in the six days of creation. And Paul, expounding thereupon, teaches that God has given "life" and "breath" to all. The paralleling of "life" and "breath" introduces the twofold nature of man in Genesis 1–2. This man is comprised of a body formed by God, into which the very Spirit of God has breathed a living soul (Gen 2:7). Fourth, God made Adam, "the one" (Acts 17:26). This message was garnered from Paul's reading of Genesis 1–2, as well. The one was given the very image of God (Gen 1:26–27), and the one was made a living soul through the breath of the very Spirit of God (Gen 2:7). In this way, God may be said to have created man as His own *genos* ("offspring"): by His image and by His breath, God created the one to have a personal relationship with God.

Fifth, bringing the first part of his sermon to the academics gathered at Mars Hill to a close, Paul addressed the genesis of the nations as well



as their providential progress (Acts 17:28). Paul taught that God guides the history of all human nations that He brought forth from this one man Adam, whom He created. This God continued to care providentially for mankind as Adam’s descendants, the various nations, went out to fill the earth. The genesis of all cultures in the creative action of God introduces the concept of a universal deity responsible for the times and boundaries of all nations, contradicting the ethnocentric idea that every nation possesses (or is possessed by) its own deity. Paul is not so much interested in the progress of individual cultures, but in their inhabitants’ universal responsibility to know and submit to this one God, who rules them all.

**Paul’s Exposition of Isaiah 66:14–24 in Acts 17:27–31.** Turning from Genesis, Paul then takes up the proleptic Great Commission found in the prophet Isaiah (66:14–24). Here, Paul introduces the Fall and its relationship-breaking consequences. Paul then uses this as an opportunity to introduce the hope of Jesus Christ. There are five discernable connections between the Isaiah passage and Paul’s Areopagus sermon.

First, due to our sinfulness, a sinfulness that began with Adam and which we each make our own, our relationship with God has been severed. Robbed of God’s revelation of Himself, man suffers from searching in the darkness for God, groping after Him, hoping to find Him, but we are never able to reach Him on our own (Acts 17:27). The very existence of idolatry in the midst of the people called Israel is an indication that they are seeking their own worship of God (Isa 66:17). Yet God, by His providence, continues to draw the hearts of men to Himself.

Second, the fall of mankind into sin has introduced not only a break in the relationship between God and man, but it has a grave consequence for man’s future. Because men in their religious cultures have decided to worship idols rather than the true God, there is a judgment coming upon mankind. “The Lord will judge all flesh,” Isaiah prophesied (Isa 66:16–17). And Paul, echoing the biblical text, proclaims, “He has appointed a day on which He will judge” (Acts 17:31).

Third, this judgment will come harshly and permanently upon every man unless he knows “Jesus” as His mediator, for this one “Man” is also the judge (Acts 17:18, 31). The *daimonion* cannot mediate for human beings, who lay under divine judgment; only this man can mediate for us. Isaiah 66:18 tells us that God will judge both the “works” and the “thoughts” of man, so Paul warns that the artistic works of man and the inventive thoughts of man will bring judgment (Acts 17:29).

Fourth, our only assurance against the impending judgment comes about through the fact that God has raised this man Jesus from the dead. The “assurance” of which Paul speaks in verse 31 has two parts to it: first,



there is death (*nekron*); second, there is resurrection (*anastasin*). As Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 15, the gospel includes both the death of Christ on the cross and the resurrection of Christ from this death. As Isaiah prophesied, there is hope to “escape” and see God’s “glory” (Isa 66:19). It is through his death for our sins that all men of every culture may be reconciled to God. It is through his resurrection from death that we may be raised into eternal life. Finally, it is here, with the climax of history in the gospel of Jesus Christ that a decision is demanded. This brings us to our final point regarding the nature of Paul’s speech.

### 3. The Evangelistic Nature of the Sermon

Proponents of the convergence interpretation of the sermon have argued that Paul was trying to speak with *insinuatō*, in an obscure manner, avoiding outright or significantly delaying evangelism.<sup>40</sup> It has also been argued that by using the term *dielegomai* in verse 17, Luke was indicating that the intent of Paul’s speech was to dally in philosophical dialogue alone.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the original Mars Hill sermon, it is said, was not intended to be a Christian sermon.<sup>42</sup> I would argue to the contrary that the use of *dielegomai* may not indicate ambiguous dialogue, but open Christian proclamation. After all, in Acts 17:2–3, Paul “dialogued” in the synagogue while explicitly referring to Scripture, and with a view to convincing the listeners of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Similar instances of the evangelistic use of *dielegomai* may be found in Acts 18:4, 9; 19:8–9; 20:7, 9. Moreover, elsewhere in the passage, we are told that Paul was both proclaiming (*katangelo*) and “preaching,” literally “evangelizing” (*euangelizeto*).

Dibelius also argued that the speech addressed the Greeks in a Greek way as “a matter of thinking” rather than biblically as “a matter of the will.”<sup>43</sup> And yet, if this is so, there is the problem of Paul’s call to repentance (*metanoein*), which is most certainly an act of the will. Against these various attempts to turn Paul into a philosopher rather than recognizing he was a passionate preacher of the gospel calling sinners to repentance and faith, we cite Kenneth Gangel. In response to the question, “Did Paul preach the gospel in Athens?” Gangel said, “Verses 31 and 32 firmly testify to evangelical witness.”<sup>44</sup> Paul’s speech was not intended to be a dry dialogue or an incomplete philosophical apology. As a result of his appeal to the will,

<sup>40</sup>Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 74–75; Sandnes, “Paul and Socrates,” 19.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, 21.

<sup>42</sup>Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 27.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>44</sup>Kenneth O. Gangel, “Paul’s Areopagus Speech,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 (1970): 312.

Paul’s audience was split into fragments by His invitation to repent and believe in the gospel. Some mocked him; some wanted to hear more; and a few, including Dionysius and Damaris, “joined him and believed” (vs. 33). The fact that people believed and joined with Paul in a local Christian church indicates that Paul was most certainly preaching evangelistically.

All of the necessary factors for a confrontational, biblical, evangelistic presentation of the gospel are present in this passage: divine sovereignty, human lostness, the death and resurrection of Christ, the coming judgment, a call to repent, and a willingness to believe. Moreover, the subsequent joining of some with Paul indicates that a church actually came into existence. At Athens, Paul openly confronted the deceptions of the Athenian culture, proclaimed biblical truth, issued an evangelistic appeal, and gathered a local church. The church that Paul planted in the ancient city of Athens was not built upon cultural relevancy, but upon biblical fidelity and honest evangelism.

### **Five Applications to the Postmodern Context**

Perhaps there are some lessons that could be learned as a result of the difficulties we are experiencing in discerning a proper interpretation and subsequent application of Paul’s Mars Hill sermon. These lessons relate especially to the problematic language of the emergent and emerging movement, as well as a proper understanding of general revelation.

1. To speak of “enabling” the gospel or of “making” it “relevant” appears to imply a low view of Scripture. It appears to assume either that grace actually resides in us rather than in Scripture, or in the culture rather than in Scripture. Scripture understands the Word of God to be living and powerful and effective by reason of its relationship to God (Heb 4:12–13). The Christian is called to proclaim that Word and trust God to work in the act of proclamation itself by reason of His own power, not by reason of ours. We must remember that he has graciously made us necessary instruments of evangelism, but we are still mere instruments, not originating causes. God’s Word enables us to preach His Word; God’s Spirit enables the hearer to believe His Word. Let us humbly admit that relevancy is determined by God’s Word and not by man’s culture, nor by the preacher. Our focus, therefore, should be upon translating the Word for proclamation and not upon trying to make it culturally relevant.

2. Culture is never a neutral category. Culture may be summarily defined as a pattern of social interaction in human thought and deed. Because culture is human, culture is fallen, too. While we recognize that God directs the times and bounds of human cultures, he allows man freedom to obey or disobey him. In his sinfulness, man often exalts evil in his culture, just as the Greeks did with the idols and demons or false gods; just as my own ancestors did. Realistically, therefore, our pattern should never be culture, but the cross. We are not called to be disciples of culture who survey society in order to discover truth or even rediscover the gospel. Rather, we are called through proclamation to become disciples of Christ who proclaim Scripture to save the lost from the cultures in which they are headed to hell. To pursue cultural convergences without discrimination invites the concurrent dangers of forsaking the cross, of embracing human sin, and of fostering deception. We must remember that the doctrine of holiness, or separation, is not only a characteristic of God, it is also a divine command.
3. Culture is simply not a reliable source of general revelation beyond what has already been defined by Scripture. In Romans 1, Paul lays out the leading truths about general revelation: God exists; God is powerful; God will hold us accountable. There may be a few other items that Scripture defines as general revelation. However, we must limit ourselves to defining as general revelation only what Scripture defines as such. The Pauline command, “not to think beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6), should be the motto of every Christian theologian. We can be sure that Paul was not thinking of the Koran or the Bhagad Vita, or Sigmund Freud or Burrhus Frederic Skinner, or Joan Osborne or Salvador Dali when he was developing a doctrine of general revelation. We ought not brazenly claim apostolic authority for ourselves by trying to expand the concept of general revelation beyond what is written in Scripture.
4. Cross-cultural communication of the gospel is commanded in the Great Commission. It is here that we must applaud the emerging movement, for it displays a zeal for the proclamation of the gospel across cultural boundaries, a zeal similar to that long displayed in the Southern Baptist Convention itself. Let us never forget that evangelism is the

sole reason why God left us here on this planet. We must go to the nations; we must make disciples; we must baptize them; and we must teach them all that Christ commands. Like Paul in Athens, we must evangelize people in the synagogue, in the marketplace, and in the academy, wherever we can find lost people (vv. 17, 19). And all of this comes out of and is empowered in God’s Word, which is crystal clear, sovereignly sufficient, and powerfully proactive.

5. Finally, let us remember that in evangelism, we must build bridges of honest communication through proper translation of Scripture; however, like Paul we must also burn bridges of deception resident within all human cultures. Yes, let us build bridges to God by translating His Word while simultaneously we also destroy demonic deceptions by applying His Word. Or, perhaps to introduce Pauline language into the question: While we are busy building bridges by translating the Word into other languages, should we not also be busy about “pulling down strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4b–5)? Christians of European cultural ancestry should be thankful that Paul was faithful to confront the culture of our ancestors with the evils in our worldview. In turn, let us be sure both to affirm humanity in other cultures and to present faithfully to them the saving gospel from the Bible, which stands in judgment over all human cultures.

## *Book Reviews*

### **Biblical Studies**

***Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey.* + CD-ROM. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. By Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering Biblical Studies.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. 446 pages. Hardcover, \$44.99.**

This highly colorful, visually-pleasing New Testament survey is part of the excellent Encountering Biblical Studies series, of which Walter A. Elwell is the general editor as well as the New Testament editor. Elwell is Emeritus Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College. Coauthor Robert W. Yarbrough is Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity International University. Their excellent book comes with a bonus that should become the standard for survey texts: a helpful CD-ROM, which contains the electronic text of the entire book, additional pictures, thirteen video clips, interactive quizzes, hot-key definitions, and high-definition 3-D maps.

The book is well organized. Written for college students as well as laity, it is certainly attention-getting. Every other page contains at least one colorful picture, map, chart, or highlighted text box. This layout is, no doubt, beneficial for the expectations of today's visually-oriented college student; however, this layout does limit how much can be said in the text.

Clearly coming from a conservative evangelical perspective, the writers present an excellent survey of the New Testament. The material is accurate and well researched. Two purposeful choices stand out. First, they give an overview of the Gospels (37–151) prior to presenting an introduction to modern critical approaches to the text (153–90). This unusual order correctly highlights the importance and authority of the text over the interpreter (13). Second, they unfortunately avoid going into what they call the “technical discussion” of many critical issues (298), such as the debates over authorship of the writings (78–79, 89, 109–110, 258, 371). Although this reviewer agrees with the writers that the evidence against the traditional New Testament authors is not compelling, students ought to be able to see the evidence as well as arguments for and against it.

Refreshing for a New Testament survey, there is a good emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of the inspiration of the Bible

(26–27). For instance, in delineating why the Gospels were written, the writers note that certainly God was involved in the process (76).

This book will work well as a text for a college New Testament survey class. Icons clearly delineate the focus of each section of text: from primary source quotations to focus boxes highlighting key issues. Chapters begin with a clear outline and stated objections, and they conclude with summary statements, review questions, study questions, and suggestions for further reading—all helpful to encourage further study for the reader.

Yet, as good as this book is, it could be better. First, endnotes impede learning. Footnotes are more helpful. Second, there is inadequate description of such important areas as New Testament inspiration and canonization (25–27). Third, the review questions are often too general—with more than one answer possible (e.g., 150) but only one answer supplied (407). Fourth, references to Patristics and other ancient writers ought to include specific citations (88, 98, 109, 118, 376). Fifth, many pictures of objects, such as statues and coins, do not give their provenance—neither where they were found nor where they reside today (78–79, 101, 113, 197–98, 200, 213, 218, 224, 227–28, 300, 312), and some pictures are captionless (38–39). Sixth, some text boxes need Scripture references to help in verification of the material and for further study (93, 103, 124, 202). Seventh, the maps are 2-D rather than 3-D. Topographical markings would help the maps to look less commercial or cartoonish and more scholarly. These maps—although colorful—seem imprecise, like computer maps that come with cheap Bible study software. Interestingly, the maps on the CD-ROM are much better than the ones in the book.

Even with some room for improvement, *Encountering the New Testament* makes a fine college textbook as well as an excellent text for lay people to learn more about the New Testament.

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***Fortress Introduction to the Prophets.* By Rodney R. Hutton. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. 114 pages. Softcover, \$16.00.**

This small work marks Hutton's entry into the nature and scope of Israel's prophets. The author earned his PhD from the Claremont Graduate School. His topic of "Declaratory Formulae" among Israel's writing prophets was heavily influenced by Gerhard Von Rad. Hutton's clear desire is for this work to be used as an introduction that will spark "the reader to (examine) the critical issues that concern Israel's prophetic texts in their broad scope" (viii). In the introduction the author asks five preliminary

questions, which he notes, surprisingly, are “fundamentally insoluble” (4). Possibly his guiding question is his first, which seeks to ascertain the extent to which the prophetic books provide a witness of the real phenomena of prophecy in Israel. The author is interested in adducing the social location of the prophets as well as their legal and historical relationship to the prophetic corpus. Hutton ends the first chapter with a cursory overview of how the prophetic corpus is viewed by the traditions of Judaism (“Prophets as Guardians of the Torah”), Christianity (“Prophets as the Foretellers of Christ”), and Liberal Protestantism (“Prophets as Bearer’s of Israel’s Truth”). He ends this chapter with a cautionary caveat regarding the anti-Semitic complicity of the academy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The second chapter inaugurates Hutton’s search for the elusive origins of Israelite prophecy. This chapter is simultaneously refreshing and disconcerting for the reader. While Hutton diligently seeks the source of Israelite prophecy, he unfortunately turns to Mari for the genesis of this institution. It would have been more fruitful to examine the origins of Israelite prophecy within the corpus of the biblical text itself. Abruptly, Hutton turns from his quest for origins to the topic of Amos of Tekoa. A cursory glance at Amos research in the last decade will show that the works produced on this prophet and the book that bears his name are legion. It is unfortunate that in a book on the origins of Israelite prophecy Amos gets only four pages. Hutton also curiously discusses the social and critical issues of the book. Helpfully, the author does find hope in the preaching of Amos in regards to the “fallen tent of David” (Amos 9:11–15).

The remainder of the book is exclusively reserved for the other pre-exilic prophets. Hosea is given a full eight pages of material divided up by four general topics. Standard elements such as “historical context,” “social aspects of Israel’s offense,” “priests and the lack of knowledge,” and “Hosea’s visions of restoration,” are dealt with in very terse fashion.

Not surprisingly, Hutton divides the investigation of Isaiah up into two similar chapters. In chapter four he undertakes the investigation of what he calls “Isaiah of Jerusalem.” The fifth chapter is a vignette of Isaiah and the Assyrian crisis which befell Judah. Refreshingly, the author does not do scholastic surgery on this grand and majestic major prophet. Throughout both chapters four and five Hutton consistently understands Isaiah to be the author of the book that bears his name.

The sixth chapter is devoted to Micah of Moresheth. In elucidating the themes of Micah the author once again helpfully turns to the theme of “restoration.” Chapter seven is given over to what the author entitles “Prophets in the Interim.” Quickly Hutton gives the historical background



to Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk followed by the very briefest exploration of theology within each book.

In chapters eight through twelve the author focuses solely on the book of Jeremiah. Hutton minutely examines Jeremiah and the reforms of Josiah and in so doing rightly argues for an early date for the book. The ninth chapter provides the reader with a structural overview of Jeremiah. Diverse elements such as the role of Jeremiah, Baruch, and the scroll of 605 B.C. are examined for their relevance in compositional understanding. The final chapter is given over to ascertaining the “portrait” of Jeremiah. Hutton here breaks with a majority of the guild and finds that Jeremiah should be identified as a prophet of Judah.

In reading this book there are four criticisms that must be made. First, there are few references to the exilic and postexilic prophets. It could be that Hutton could not do the exilic and postexilic prophets justice in the page constraints of his book. However, if this were the case then the author should have perhaps renamed the work to reflect only the preexilic prophets. Second, in an introductory text such as this, one expects either footnotes or endnotes to guide the reader. Unfortunately neither footnotes nor endnotes are given and the reader is left to the short bibliography to ascertain further reading on diverse subjects in the book. Third, a perusal of Hutton’s bibliography shows that while it contains a good many works, there are some major items that were omitted. Fourth, while the book strives to be an introduction to the (writing) prophets of Israel, the majority of its research is on Jeremiah (five out of twelve chapters). This book should not be recommended to seminary students nor pastors. However, it might serve as an ancillary to a more thorough introduction to the prophets.

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***Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study.* Edited by Darrell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. 286 pages. Softcover, \$22.99.**

This present volume completes an excellent informal trilogy of books by Darrell L. Bock, Research Professor in New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. In 2002 Bock wrote *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* as an insightful overview of the background and critical studies of the canonical Gospels (reviewed in *SWJT* 45 [Summer 2003]: 70–71). In the same year he published *Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospel (JAS)*, in which he examined the canonical portrait of Jesus in a micro (textual examination) and macro

(theological portrait based on Gospel themes) basis (reviewed in *SWJT* 46 [Spring 2004]:85). The coauthor of *Jesus in Context* is Gregory J. Herrick, a researcher and writer for the Biblical Studies Foundation.

*Jesus in Context* is a Gospels background reader: a compilation of ancient writings dating both before and after the composition of the canonical Gospels. Other New Testament readers are usually compilations of material arranged by author, such as *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, by C.K. Barrett. In *Readings from the First-Century World*, Elwell and Yarbrough arrange their readings by topic or by the corresponding New Testament book, and their reader covers the entire New Testament. It is designed to be read from cover to cover in conjunction with the New Testament, as is Bock and Herrick's book (and *JAS*). However, *Jesus in Context* is unique in covering the Gospels only and in organizing the readings according to the chronological events in the Synoptic Gospels as well as John.

Although this is an interesting read, it is also designed as a reference book. Two handy cross-reference guides at the beginning of the book tie each extra-biblical reading with the Gospel passage to which it is pertinent as well as the section of *JAS* to which it relates (7–12).

So what is the purpose of a reader: just another required reading book for a seminary class? Hardly! The editors cleverly describe it as “a poor man's Strack-Billerbeck” (15), the monumental six-volume 1928 German commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash. Reading the English translation of this background material to the world of the New Testament gives one a better understanding of the cultural world (e.g., taxes, marriage, and death), religious world (e.g., tithing, fasting, prayer, and alms giving), and sometimes the diversity of opinions present in Jesus' day (13–14).

This is an enlightening and entertaining read. The Mishnah forbade Jews from clapping hands, slapping their thighs, and stomping their feet on the Sabbath (190, m. Besah 5.2). Obviously they never sang, “If you're happy and you know it clap your hands!” Sadly, rabbi Aqiba taught divorce is permissible if one finds a prettier woman (85, m. Gittin 9.10). The Mishnah said a Jew may not cut through the Temple as a shortcut, nor may he spit in the Temple (151, m. Berakot 9.5). Rabbi Hillel allowed one to pray for the sick on the Sabbath, but rabbi Shammai forbade it (81, t. Sabbat 16.22).

This reader is full of sources for teachings of Second Temple Judaism that one has heard but probably never read the specific source. The idea that the Jews added laws to “make a fence around the Torah” (161) is mentioned in Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Pisha 6. One understands why Jesus waited until the fourth day to raise Lazarus from the dead (John

11:6, 17) after reading Leviticus Rabbah 18.1, which mentions the Jewish belief that the soul hangs around the body of the deceased for three days only, attempting to return, but it is gone by the fourth day due to the body being no longer recognizable (231).

This reviewer found only one mistake: it says “Stephen” was stoned to death in AD 62, and it should say, “James, the brother of Jesus” (28). In addition, here are some improvements that would help the book: (1) put the date of each writing by its title; (2) add footnotes of some important differences in the way to translate some of the writings, such as when Eusebius quoted Aristion saying Mark was Peter’s “interpreter” (29); (3) be more specific about the origin of patristic citations, since the previous quotation from Aristion came to Eusebius via Papias; and (4) since there are so many citations from the Talmud, it would help to explain in detail to the reader how the Talmud came to be, and how and why a rabbi was able to add a new point to a discussion (e.g., 45–47, 49–50, 110–17); otherwise, the long lists of continual additions may be confusing.

This book is a valuable source tool. It will benefit pastors, students, and lay people desiring more firsthand knowledge of the background of the New Testament.

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***Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation.* By Wayne Grudem, Leland Ryken, C. John Collins, Vern S. Poythress, and Bruce Winter. Wheaton: Crossway, 2005. 157 pages. Softcover, \$14.99.**

All five contributors to this book were members of the Translation Oversight Committee in 2001 for the production of the English Standard Version Bible (ESV), an excellent, recent, and essentially literal (EL) Bible translation. They presented the articles in this book as formal papers at the 2004 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society.

The five scholars offer their articles in this book “to encourage the ongoing, careful reflection on methodology and issues in Bible translation—that necessarily work, which the Christian church is called to undertake, with fear and trembling before our sovereign, holy God, for the sake of the gospel and the truth of God’s Word” (7). Their articles are excellent and certainly add clarity to the important field of Bible translation. However, with the exception of Winter’s article, which seems out of place with the thrust of the other four articles, a more accurately stated purpose for this book would be: a defense of EL Bible translation against the practice of dynamic equivalence (DE) Bible translation (also called

functional equivalence), a thought-for-thought translation. Winter, on the other hand, examined Paul's plain, unrhetorical writing style in the Corinthian letters (150).

As with any collection of articles, there is the expected repetition, but this book has just a few: (1) redundant definitions of terms (20–21, 58); and (2) similar charts (22, 82). Otherwise, each writer approaches a different facet of the topic that makes a helpful apologetic for the EL translation of the Bible (22).

In clear apologetic form, Ryken gives reasoned responses to five common misunderstandings people have about EL translations. He is right on target with his answers. However, in responding to the charge of naiveté, leveled against EL translators, Ryken seems to have missed the most basic one. This straw man argument claims EL proponents believe good translation *only* goes word by word from the Hebrew or Greek in order to find an equivalent word in English (or in whatever the receptor language is) (60–70). Grudem actually answers this charge in his essay (20). However, every decent translator knows there is not always a word-for-word, nor a syntax-to-syntax, correspondence from one language to another. Ryken then turns around and calls the DE translators “naïve” (63–70)—good points, but perhaps the name calling could end!

Poythress' article is the most tedious, but necessarily so, since it deals with the history of translation theory and a critique of the prevailing theory: DE. Although he rightly takes issue with Eugene Nida and his DE theory (122–34), he does so respectfully and is complimentary of parts of Nida's work (131–34).

Most articles such as these bounce around through the Bible as they cite examples of mistranslations by the other side; however, Collins does a service by limiting his study to 1 John (94–105). This focus allows him to examine not only how translations handle individual verses, but also to study how translations deal with word repetitions and word ambiguities—important aspects often ignored in this translation debate.

Interestingly, there are conservative scholars on both sides of the EL versus DE debate even though it seems proponents of plenary-verbal inspiration would favor the EL approach, as does this reviewer. Although somewhat short, this book helps further the case for EL Bible translation and is clear enough even for the uninitiated to understand and appreciate the issues. For articles promoting DE translation, read *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, edited by Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth.

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### Theological Studies

*A Definitive Look at Oneness Theology: Defending the Tri-Unity of God.*  
By Edward L. Dalcour. Lanham: University Press of America, 2005. 217  
pages. Paperback, \$37.50.

In this book, Edward Dalcour attempts to present and refute the arguments of those who hold to the view of God he calls “Oneness theology,” the modalistic approach to understanding the divine nature which is characteristic of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI). Put simply, it is the belief that the Father, Son and Spirit are three manifestations, not persons, of the one true God. Dalcour’s approach to the subject is by means of an examination of the biblical text: “Hence, in this book, we will analyze Oneness theology on the basis of biblical truth. . . . [O]ur focus will be on the sole infallible standard that defines true Christianity from a professing one: the Scriptural teaching concerning the Person, nature and finished work of Jesus Christ” (2). He begins with a brief discussion of the tenets of oneness theology and then moves to a more detailed examination and critique of the specific arguments employed by oneness proponents. It is this section which forms the bulk of Dalcour’s work. He concludes with supporting historical and theological arguments for the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

While the book does reflect a significant amount of thought on the issues at hand, it suffers from several weaknesses. Four are particularly noteworthy: first, the book is written in a strongly polemical style; second, the arguments presented are not fully developed; third, the breadth of research is rather limited; and fourth, the editorial work is lacking in attention to detail.

The information presented in the book is both interesting and important for Christian study. Unfortunately, Dalcour’s polemical style detracts from the seriousness of the work by removing any pretext of objectivity from the study. For example, Dalcour correctly notes that a mere claim of allegiance to Jesus does not constitute a faith that is consistent with historic Christian theology, but in doing so, he intimates that adherents to oneness theology do not base their faith on the Bible, which is patently false. For example, after noting that oneness adherents claim Jesus is Lord, he writes, “it is not the mere name ‘Jesus’ itself that has salvific value, for there were many who were named ‘Jesus’ (that is, Joshua) in the first century, but in contradistinction, it is *only* the Jesus of biblical revelation who can truly save those who are enslaved to sin. It is *this* Jesus who *alone* can forgive sins, and it is *this* Jesus who *alone* can grant eternal life!” (2–3). While some oneness proponents do admittedly place too much emphasis upon the name

“Jesus,” to critique them on the basis of the commonality of the name Joshua is to create a straw man. Clearly oneness proponents mean to refer to the Jesus of the biblical gospels and not just anyone named, “Jesus!” They just understand his nature in a different way from traditional orthodox Christianity. The polemical tone leads to a lack of precision in his analysis of Oneness theology. He argues, “By denying the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit, Oneness believers deny the Holy Spirit all together” (41). This is both unpersuasive and unfair. Similar arguments are made throughout the book. In the chapter on early church history, Dalcour expends valuable space demonstrating that the early apologists relied on the Bible as their rule of faith. His point is unclear, but he seems to be implying that the early monarchians did not use the Bible. This, again, is false at best and misleading at worst.

In many cases Dalcour’s response to oneness arguments amounts to little more than scriptural quotation. He seems to expect his readers to agree automatically with his reading of the passages, as opposed to the oneness interpretation (e.g., his use of Rom 8:3 on page 44). Only brief explanations of his interpretation are given, with little justification or substantiation. Dalcour seems to think the orthodox view of the Trinity is self-evident, as can be seen in his use of rhetorical questions: “If these passages do not teach that the Holy Spirit is a Person, then what would a passage look like that did?” (50); “If Jesus was the Holy Spirit Himself, as to His divine nature, and they are not differentiated, why then, did the biblical authors spend so much ink distinguishing Jesus from the Holy Spirit in the same context (esp. John chaps. 14–16)?” (52). This approach to argumentation is rarely convincing to the skeptic. If Dalcour’s desire is to convince avowed modalists of the error of their ways, it is doubtful that he will have been very successful.

Dalcour relies too heavily upon David K. Bernard’s work as representative of the *Oneness* position. He therefore spends the majority of time responding to him and does not explore possible avenues a proponent of oneness theology might take, even if not taken by Bernard. The work reads almost like an extended book review of Bernard’s work. Dalcour also tends to rely upon somewhat dated research (e.g., he quotes B.B. Warfield authoritatively on numerous occasions without considering modern discussions of the biblical passages under investigation), and rarely consults discussions of key texts in the journals. The antiquated citations leave the reader wondering if the arguments presented are still generally accepted in the scholarly community.

The book is fraught with typographical and grammatical errors. Several errors were found in each chapter. While this may be as much the fault of the editor and publisher as the author, it still detracts from the merit of



the study. In addition, there are several points at which the author fails to make the fine distinctions among theological positions one would expect from a scholarly work. For example, there are many places where Dalcour lumps Arianism and Modalism together for purposes of refutation. While there are some similarities in basic philosophy behind the two heresies, they are clearly different and should be treated as such. In the chapter on Modalism and the early church, Dalcour fails to explain the natures of both Gnosticism and Monarchianism, yet refers to both in rather general terms. The reader is left to piece the puzzle together for himself. This lack of sophistication is both frustrating and troublesome.

To some extent, Dalcour's brevity can be attributed to the scope of his project. He simply tried to do too much in a limited space. Perhaps Dalcour's effort would have been better served if he had limited himself to an examination and evaluation of the claims of Oneness theology. The chapters which focused on these issues (chapters. 2–4; "Examining the Oneness Claim that Jesus is the Father," "Examining the Oneness Claim that Jesus is the Spirit," and "The Preexistence of the Son") were by far the best and left the reader wanting more. Dalcour engaged in a measure of in-depth study of the Greek text of the New Testament, and made some insightful observations, but the exegetical work was far too brief. It is unfortunate that he was unable to expand these sections. The information in the other chapters (Oneness objections to the doctrine of the Trinity, UCPI baptismal formula, Modalism in the early church, and the Tri-Unity of God) seemed either redundant or only secondarily relevant.

Despite its shortcomings, the book is not without value. While it cannot stand alone as a *definitive* refutation of Oneness theology, it can serve as a good starting point for scholarly examination of the issues at hand. It is probably most valuable, though, for the busy pastor who wishes to learn more about Oneness theology and the errors inherent in the system. For those who do not have time to conduct the exegetical work necessary to refute Oneness claims, but who wish to be theologically informed or to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity with theologians in the United Pentecostal tradition, Dalcour has provided a valuable resource.

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***God is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself.* By John Piper. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005. 185 pages. Hardcover, \$17.99.**

In this brief, popular work, John Piper, Senior Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, argues that “the final” and “supreme good” of the gospel “is God himself seen and savored in all his glory (37).” Although some readers will disagree with Piper’s Calvinist emphases, he correctly insists that God ought to be every believer’s all-satisfying treasure.

The gospel is good news. 1 Corinthians 1:3–4 highlights the “indispensable deeds” of this news (67) and, in chapter two, Piper elucidates fifteen specific aspects that make it “good.” Yet none of these “facets of the gospel-diamond is the chief good or highest goal of the gospel” (45). Not even justification, which is “the sustaining source of all the other benefits of the gospel” (44), because it addresses the most fundamental need of humanity by removing sin and imputing righteousness, can be labeled the greatest good of the gospel. That honor belongs to God himself.

My point in this book is that all the saving events and saving blessings of the gospel are means of getting obstacles out of the way so that we might know and enjoy God most fully. Propitiation, redemption, forgiveness, imputation, sanctification, liberation, healing, heaven—none of these is good news except for one reason: they bring us to God for our everlasting enjoyment of him (47).

God Himself is the gospel. The heart of the gospel is not what He accomplishes in Jesus Christ for humanity’s sake but rather the purpose for which it is accomplished—bringing believers to God (1 Peter 3:18). The former makes much of humanity; the latter allows believers to make much of God.

In order to be truly converted, a person must love God for Himself, not merely for the magnificent gifts He provides. Fallen humans, for instance, naturally desire to avoid punishment and pain. Therefore, humans naturally desire to avoid hell; likewise, the appreciation for the one who provides such an escape is natural (121). By contrast, fallen human beings do not naturally love God for himself. Doing so is a supernatural act accomplished via the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers (79, 90–97). Rest assured, Piper does not want to belittle the gifts of God (117) for he too loves them, but he insists that their purpose is to point away from themselves and to the one great gift of the gospel, God himself (118).

The question driving this discourse appears to be the same one that impelled Piper's historical mentor, Jonathan Edwards, to pen *The Religious Affections*: Why do so many who seem to have embraced the gospel fall away? Piper suggests that loving God for something other than himself, i.e. His gifts, misses the heart of the gospel; people who do this have not truly embraced the gospel at all (37–38, 47) and do not possess “the kind of faith that survives torture” (88). Such faith is incapable of persevering through persecution, something 1 Peter views as a gift from God (127). Here, Piper challenges a comfortable American Christianity, which knows little of real persecution except through *The Voice of the Martyrs*.

Piper also challenges a cultural milieu in which many equate believing the facts about Jesus with conversion. As Piper points out, even Satan believes in this manner (62). Like Jonathan Edwards, he insists that true conversion comes when believing the facts is accompanied by true spiritual sight granted by the Holy Spirit as a person embraces God himself through the gospel (62, 81–85).

Three problems pepper the pages of this book. First, the incarnation deserves more lengthy treatment in any book that emphasizes God's gift of Himself. Piper touches on the incarnation but views it almost exclusively as a means to the cross, not considering its radical implications in light of his own theme (e.g. 118–19). Second, Piper's interpretive method of filtering every biblical passage and understanding all of life through the hermeneutical lens of the “glory of God” seems contrived. Some non-Calvinists will find this approach deeply offensive, as they do much of Piper's work. Finally, Piper presents an inadequate Christology, deemphasizing the radical nature of Christ's divine-human person as Christ himself acts as a means to God's glory.

This volume is well-written, biblically-oriented, and worth reading if only because it raises the kind of questions that American Christians need to consider in order to follow Paul's admonition to self-testing (2 Cor 13:15). My greater hope, however, is that *God is the Gospel* might serve as a segue into reading and appreciating the works of America's greatest theologian, the paradigmatic pastor-theologian and reformed-revivalist—Jonathan Edwards.

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***How Do Catholics Read the Bible?* By Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. 159 pages. Softcover, \$16.95.**

A well-known scholar and prolific writer, Daniel J. Harrington is professor of New Testament at Weston Jesuit School of Theology. He is the general editor of *New Testament Abstracts* as well as the *Sacra Pagina* Bible commentary series. An ordained Catholic priest, he has preached almost every Sunday for the last thirty-five years (113).

This little volume is both interesting and enlightening. Harrington certainly accomplishes his purpose of giving simple, easy-to-understand explanations to the non-specialist reader (xiv). Each chapter ends with some helpful “Questions for Meditation and Reflection,” and the twenty-five theses at the end of the book summarize the book well (129–32). However, he gives a one-sided picture of such matters as higher criticism of the Bible. He presents a positive assessment of redaction or other higher criticisms with no mention of any of their negative excesses. He does criticize certain beliefs that he rejects, such as supersessionism (79), literalism, or fundamentalism (103), but he presents Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology (38–39), and a problematic dual covenant idea (“a twofold way of salvation,” 80) with no criticism at all. It is as if he is writing to children and avoiding any mention of theological problems in the adult world.

Presumably, non-Catholics will comprise the majority of the readership of this volume. Thankfully, Harrington communicates well to a non-Roman Catholic audience. It is disappointing to note the trend among Catholic scholars away from a conservative interpretation of the Bible. The repeated description of “the word of God in human language” (35, 38) has too much emphasis on the human side of inspiration and the alleged errors that resulted. For example, an 1893 encyclical letter upheld biblical inerrancy (5), but a 1993 Pontiff Bible Commission harshly criticized an overly literal interpretation (11–12) as well as claiming biblical texts have dynamic (multiple) literal senses (104). Thus, Harrington rejects a literalist or fundamentalist approach to Bible interpretation (103). He calls Jonah and Esther “charming short stories” (26) like the apocryphal Tobit and Judith. One wonders what disparity there is between the Catholic clergy and laity in Bible interpretation, and it would have been helpful for Harrington to address this issue.

Apart from noting the obvious Protestant disagreement with Catholics over the Apocrypha (26–27), Harrington wrongly claims most Protestant Bible publishers add the Apocrypha in the appendix (26). Most Protestants will find his justification for the importance of adding tradition to Scripture weak (106–11). At any rate, although this book gives

good insight to Roman Catholic interpretation, it likely describes how their clergy and theologians—rather than their laity—tend to interpret the Bible.

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***Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine.* By R.C. Sproul. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2005. 210 pages. Hardcover, \$15.99.**

Is the Bible truthful? Is it reliable? Is it without error? These are among the most critical questions facing the church and believers today. R. C. Sproul, in his book *Scripture Alone*, has presented a convincing case for the inerrancy of Scripture and its reliability for believers today.

The book is composed of a collection of his earlier articles written in defense of the inerrancy, infallibility, inspiration, and authority of Scripture. Its appendices include a copy of “The Ligonier Statement” and “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.” The book is divided into two parts. The first part explains the history of the debate in the church on biblical inerrancy as well as Sproul’s argument for it. The second part is an explanation and commentary on the nineteen articles in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

Because the book is composed of some of Sproul’s previously written articles on the subject, it tends to be redundant at times. However, Sproul explains in the introduction that his purpose is to assist a new generation in understanding the history of the debate over the Bible and the defense of its truthfulness.

Sproul does an excellent job defining inerrancy and infallibility. He addresses the different beliefs concerning infallibility and also discusses the dangers of limited inerrancy. Sproul concedes that a person’s salvation does not depend on a right interpretation of these terms but does assert that right doctrine does. Moreover, even a belief in “inerrancy is no guarantee of biblical orthodoxy” (35), but Sproul rightly insists that there is a correlation.

One of the strongest discussions in the book is Sproul’s explanation of the problems of limited inerrancy. He explains how a limited view of inerrancy is subjective, artificial, and dangerous. He also notes how some have even justified sin by avoiding or reinterpreting clear biblical teachings.

Sproul admits that there are difficult passages in the Bible and even some “as yet unresolved discrepancies” (161). He allows the possibility that copy errors may exist between the original documents and the versions

that we currently have. However, he asserts that “for more than ninety-nine percent of the cases, the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty” (147). In addition, Sproul maintains that where difficulties exist, “no essential article of the Christian faith is affected” (148). Moreover, he explains that a great deal of progress has been made recently to resolve many of these questions. It should be understood that archaeological discoveries and other efforts are proving fruitful in continuing to shed light on the Scripture and resolve previously-thought irresolvable questions.

A final word that Sproul emphasizes is worthy of note. The Bible is true whether or not a person chooses to believe it. A person accepting it does not make it more true, and his or her failure to believe it does not make it any less true.

Sproul’s work is an excellent resource for anyone interested in learning about the history and critical importance of biblical inerrancy. His work should be read, studied, and digested in hopes that the next generation re-learn the lessons from this generation that God’s Word is ultimately, reliably, and undeniably true.

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***Where is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering.* By Warren McWilliams. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005. 259 Pages. Softcover, \$16.95.**

All of us have either experienced the topic of this book or someday will. That relevance makes this book immediately enticing. Growing out of his background as a university professor, McWilliams addresses many of the common sources suffering people experience from an objective view. The title of the book comes from the question of the struggling post-exilic Jews in Malachi 2:17. That question serves as the foundation of the book. McWilliams admits that many today struggle with the question, “How can a good, loving God allow suffering in His world?” (ix). Hence, he attempts to present a “biblical perspective on suffering” (ix) for the purpose of helping “Christians think about the issue of suffering and respond creatively” (x).

The book is organized in two parts. The first part deals with four questions people often ask about suffering: Is suffering a punishment for sin? Does God cause suffering? Does my suffering affect God? And is there an end to suffering? The second part of the book focuses on specific issues related to suffering, where the author deals plainly with common sources of suffering. Although McWilliams tries to distinguish his study,

which he calls a theology of suffering, from traditional theodicy, which he sees as more philosophical, the distinctions are often blurred.

The issues related to the different types of suffering tend to fall into two categories: one, God causes suffering either as a consequence of sin, a testing or learning opportunity, or for some reason known only to God; or, two, God allows suffering either as a natural consequence of the created order, or as the work of Satan. McWilliams admits that human experience does not always fit into logical doctrinal categories. Ultimately, the author asserts that God alone holds the key to the answers to the questions many sufferers ask. He describes mankind's actions as penultimate, whereas God's are ultimate.

McWilliams presents various viewpoints on each issue he addresses, but concludes each chapter with his personal view, which emphasizes God's grace and hope. One chapter that seems a little out of place is the chapter on animal suffering. The discussion is informative, but very speculative and incongruent with the stated approach of the second part of the book. The final chapter presents his appeal for "reverent creativity" (174) in our response to the struggles God allows in our lives. He highlights those who creatively responded to their suffering "from the resources of their faith in God" (174).

This book is an enjoyable read. Its strength is its practical focus and honest assessment of issues all of us face. Throughout the book, McWilliams maintains a strong biblical focus and steadfast faith in God. In the end, he allows that it is not wrong for sufferers to ask questions, and in fact, even the asking of them may be part of our spiritual growth process.

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### **Evangelism and Missions**

***Hispanic Realities Impacting America: Implications for Evangelism and Missions.* By Daniel R. Sánchez. Fort Worth: Church Starting Network, 2006. 320 pages. Softcover, \$27.95.**

Daniel Sanchez, professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has provided an invaluable resource for those interested in the dynamics of Hispanic ministry in the United States of America (USA). The book is divided into three main interrelated sections designed to provide both statistical data and sound theological interpretation.

The first section deals specifically with important statistical data which offers the basis for the book's claim that Hispanics "are now the

largest minority group in America and are projected to comprise one fourth of the American population by the year 2050" (xvii). It is in light of this fact that ten "realities" are exposed. One of them affirms that recent Hispanic immigrants have outnumbered previous generations, thus revealing a greater need for Hispanic speaking ministries and churches today than three decades ago (21). Another reality is that in the USA "Spanish language is not declining but increasing" (23). Still another reality is that "Hispanics are showing more receptivity to the evangelical message than ever before in the history of this country," making them the most responsive ethnic group to the gospel (35). The challenges for evangelical churches are obvious. Among other things, churches need to equip Hispanic leaders to share their faith in a context dominated by a Roman Catholic mindset. They also have to develop contextualized evangelistic, church planting, and church growth strategies that will accelerate outreach to all of the "Hispanics and enable them to establish churches with effective and compassionate ministries" (38).

The second section of the book is entitled "understanding Hispanics," and is composed of four fascinating chapters dealing with Hispanic historical, sociological, and theological issues. Two chapters specially deserve attention. Chapter 14 was written by Jesse Miranda, who also writes the book's very instructive preface. In "Modern Days Samaritans," Miranda, professor of Hispanic Studies at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, California, compares the historical, psychological, and behavioral patterns of first-century Samaritans and modern Latinos in the USA. For Miranda, many insights are gained from the way Jesus and the New Testament treated Samaritans and how North American evangelicals should treat and relate to Hispanics (138). Indeed, Hispanic Americans should find "comfort, instruction and inspiration" (155) for ministry in this chapter.

Sanchez's "Hellenistic analogy" (chap. 15)—an appealing comparison of the experience of first century Hellenistic Christians with contemporary Hispanic believers in the USA—leads him to conclude that Hispanics, who have experienced assimilation into the North American society, should consider their bi-culturalism not as a liability but as a "marvelous asset" in the furtherance of the Kingdom of God in this country and around the world (xv).

The third and final section of the book, presents four chapters devoted to practical suggestions and very useful principles for reaching Hispanics with the gospel, planting and growing Hispanic Churches, and involving them in missions. Readers will gain multiple benefits from all the valuable information gathered by the author's research and experience. Sanchez's book is readable and instructive. It should be read by all who are involved



in Hispanic Ministry in the USA and by those who have yet to enter this growing ministry field.

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***Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims.* By Sam Schlorff. Upper Darby, PA: Middle East Resources, 2006. 202 pages. Softcover, \$19.95.**

Sam Schlorff is retired from over thirty-five years of service as a missionary and missiologist in residence with Arab World Ministries (formerly North Africa Mission). His career includes assignments in Tunisia, France, and the United States. He graduated from Wheaton College, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary. Importantly, at Westminster he studied under the tutelage of Harvie Conn and Cornelius Van Til. *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims* is Schlorff's life work.

In Part 1, Schlorff makes an important contribution by classifying historic Muslim mission into six models. Beginning with George Sale, Henry Martyn, and other polemicists, he provides a summary for each model, largely from original sources, on the basis of the following eight observations: object of mission, theology of non-Christian religion, contextual approach, hermeneutic, church strategy, strengths, weaknesses, and the model today.

Another contribution is his recognition of the importance of hermeneutics for evangelical mission. He classifies methods of quoting the Qur'an as either positive or negative. The classification is helpful in displaying the missiological implications of the theological shift in the last century. A transition in missiology began with William H.T. Gairdner and Samuel Zwemer in their attitude toward Islam. Later, Geoffrey Parrinder and Kenneth Cragg formally introduced the new hermeneutic into evangelical circles. Cragg is not merely using the Qur'an as a proof text for the Bible. The open objective is to propose a new understanding of the Qur'an itself, an understanding that Muslims would find acceptable.

Part two appropriately finishes with a section on ecclesiology. It is helpful to field workers to recognize the three assumptions behind the prominent dynamic equivalence model: missionary extractionism, neutrality of culture, and Muslim forms with Christian meanings. Along the same lines, he calls attention to two categories important for evangelical missiology. First, one must be intentional with theological starting points. For evangelicals, beginning theology from anywhere but the Scripture should be unacceptable. Second, one must carefully choose a cross-cultural

hermeneutical model. All should take to heart his exhortation for an analytical, rather than synthetic, hermeneutic for Islamic cultural and religious forms.

The most promising part of *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims* is Schlorff's proposal of a new model. He introduced the betrothal model in the July 2000 issue of *Missiology*. It is based upon II Corinthians 11:2–3, and asserts that church planters are guardians for new churches. He summarizes it according to the same eight principles as earlier models, showing how his model could safeguard evangelicals from previous theological mistakes. For many field workers, long bewildered by a model not taken explicitly from Scripture, Schlorff performs an immeasurable service.

One weakness in the book is that he is the first to propose this model. First, for such a bold innovation in mission, the book is much too short. Two hundred pages simply cannot adequately express the import of Schlorff's proposals. However, the brevity does make the book readable for a wider audience.

The greatest weakness in the book is that it does not always incorporate positive innovations or address chief concerns from earlier models, especially the dynamic equivalence model. For example, in Dean Gilliland's response to Schlorff's initial article, which appears in the same issue, the new model is criticized for never mentioning the Holy Spirit. Perhaps more than previous models, the betrothal model rests directly on Scripture. In the Corinthian epistles, as well as the other writings of Paul, the Holy Spirit is prominent in the birth, life, and ministry of the new church. Yet, Schlorff does not explain the Holy Spirit's place. Further, his criticism of the dynamic equivalence model being anthropologically driven rather than scripturally so should be heard, but he does little to explain the place of culture in the new model. Such questions will arise, given the prominence of anthropology in mission today.

Finally, Schlorff sets forth a somewhat out of date and hard to apply model for evangelistic encounter with Muslims. He promotes a method of inter-religious dialogue called "Church Without Walls," but admits the method is not well suited for use outside of the West. Truthfully, evangelicals have much work ahead on how to proclaim Christ to Muslims. The betrothal model is promising for progress in the task.

*Missiological Models for Ministry to Muslims* is a book written three decades too late. It is the only book that evaluates mission in such way as to make the historical and theological framework of each model easily identified. Hopefully, evangelicals will incorporate Schlorff's research, and the betrothal model, into their ministry not only in the Muslim world, but also to the people of other religions.

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### Ethics and Philosophy

***Living Together: A Guide to Counseling Unmarried Couples.* By Jeff VanGoethem. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005. 208 pages. \$12.99.**

There has been a need in the evangelical community for a book on how to deal with the growing numbers of couples, both young and old, who are bypassing marriage and just living together. Jeff VanGoethem, a DMin graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and pastor of a growing church in Bloomington, Illinois, has researched and written an insightful and instructive piece to give guidelines for counseling such couples from a biblical and evangelical perspective.

The style of his presentation develops a reasoned basis for, not only cautioning couples not to live together before marriage, but to help guide couples who are already doing so to refrain from that form of immoral living and to move toward a more God-pleasing and biblically based marriage. The challenge of moving couples to act in this moral manner recognizes that many may not be willing to do so. Nevertheless, the author challenges pastors to seriously consider the need of the couples they marry for having a godly foundation for a lasting marriage, as well as seeking to create a moral climate in their churches by teaching against the practice of living together and promoting a consistently biblical view of marriage in their churches.

The first five chapters deal with a convincing amount of research that demonstrates why living together frequently results in broken and immoral relationships, as well as being contrary to a Christian lifestyle. Chapters 6 through 8 deal with perspectives from Scripture and church history for lessons against the practice of living together as well as those in favor of Christian marriage. The last four chapters give careful guidance for counseling with couples who are living together before marriage or are considering doing so. In all, it is a much needed piece of sane and sanctifying advice for wise Christian counselors, pastors, and church leaders, especially those who work with young adults.

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***The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity.*  
By Carl Raschke. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004; 240 p. \$22.00.**

As the title of the book suggests, Raschke believes we are on the brink of another sweeping reform of the church, one that is similar in thrust and focus to that of the sixteenth century. This new reformation is identified with the changes in thought brought on by the questioning of enlightenment foundationalism in the postmodern movement. Raschke sees his task as threefold: 1) to correct misconceptions of postmodernity among evangelical scholars and ministers; 2) to demonstrate that evangelicalism is really tied to enlightenment thought; and 3) to explain how postmodern thought can aid evangelicalism in being a “progressive rather than reactionary force” in the world (9).

In his historical analysis, Raschke notes that the post-structuralism out of which postmodernism grew was really a questioning of the prevailing scientism (as epitomized in logical positivism) of the day. Evangelicalism had long fought against the notion that reason and logic should have a place of primacy (over against mere faith), and so postmodernism really serves to strengthen its claims. In Raschke’s words, postmodernism had the ability to undercut the “priestly posturing on the part of the secular rationalists” (37). Raschke argues that the evangelical movement has strayed from the Reformation spirit and has instead wedded itself to Enlightenment rationalism and British empiricism. This wedding has stifled theological development and led to as dead an orthodoxy as the Catholic church of Luther’s day. Raschke hopes to call evangelicals back to the Reformation ideals of *sola fide*, *sola scriptura*, and the priesthood of believers. He believes that these ideals, or the spirit that drove them in the Reformation era, are to be found in the evangelical postmodern movement as epitomized in the Emerging Church movement.

Raschke contends that Luther’s emphasis on faith alone was a reaction against the *via moderna* of his own day (the relatively recent stress on human will in salvation). Similarly, postmodernism is a reaction against modernity, while evangelicalism, with its stress on logic and political action, is simply a part of modernity. Whereas the presuppositional apologetics of early Dutch Reformed theology focused on the differences in worldviews of believers and unbelievers, the political activities of current evangelicals (e.g., Reconstructionism) evinces an acceptance of the modern worldview and a fundamental lack of faith. According to Raschke, the aspirations of evangelicals in the political arena point to a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross and thereby prefer knowledge to faith: “Theologies of glory—whether they be Scholastic, Calvinist, commonsense realist, Hegelian, positivist, foundationalist, or presuppositionalist—all share the

common trait of making the claim that a particular reformulation of our understanding of truth and language is sufficient for understanding God” (110). However, one would be hard pressed to find any evangelical proponents of inerrancy claiming to have a complete understanding of God, or claiming that language is not an accommodation. But to say that verbal revelation must include an element of condescension is not to say that it must thereby include errors, as Raschke suggests. It is instead to note that it cannot be comprehensive or exhaustive of God’s nature. But this is a very different claim!

Raschke’s comparisons of the Reformers and the spirit of the Reformation with postmodernism are hardly convincing. In essence, he claims that since Luther questioned the established wisdom of his day, and that postmodernism does as well, their views are the same. There are many problems with this approach. The claims that Luther reacted against the moderns of his own day and that evangelicalism is really just a product of modernism, are both suspect. But perhaps the greatest problem is Raschke’s failure to admit Luther’s basis for reformation—the Bible as properly interpreted. It is to this topic that Raschke turns in his discussion of *sola scriptura*.

Raschke argues that evangelicals have also abandoned the Reformation idea of *sola scriptura* insofar as their emphasis on inerrancy has led to a misplaced trust in human reason rather than in God. He claims that this caused the goal of Bible interpretation to shift from hearing God’s voice to identifying propositional truth, which in turn, led to an exaltation of doctrine to (virtually) the status of revelation. Raschke suggests that the very use of the term, “inerrancy,” “betrays a certain skittishness about whether we can trust God, or profess to trust God, without some sort of ‘cognitive’ as well as confessional insurance” (129). This could not be further from the truth. Raschke fails to inform his readers that the doctrine of inerrancy was largely developed and codified in response to claims by liberal and neo-orthodox theologians that the Bible had actual errors in it. He also misleads his readers by suggesting that the doctrine of inerrancy somehow questions the sufficiency of trusting the Bible because it is a word from God. In point of fact, inerrantists have argued for the doctrine on this very basis—inerrancy is merely the logical presentation of the beliefs of Paul, Augustine, and Luther regarding the truthfulness of God’s Word because it is from Him. It is merely the claim that its truthfulness extends to everything it claims. Inerrantists make no claims of inerrancy for doctrines (even if some are still true). Raschke also misrepresents evangelical notions of saving faith when he claims that it is cognitive and devoid of the heart. In reality, evangelicals view saving faith as involving not only intellectual assent, but also an emotive or affective component. The evangelical claim

that intellectual assent is a necessary component of salvation is something the Reformers would surely have agreed with; Calvin spoke of a necessary work of the Holy Spirit on one's mind enabling him to understand the meaning of Scripture and Luther wedded his theology to the dictates of his conscience. Similarly, it is unlikely that Raschke really believes that saving faith includes no cognitive element; surely some level of understanding of who Jesus is and what He did is necessary for saving faith!

It is his contention that emphasis on truth of the very words is stifling of personal encounter with God because it demands only one meaning for each passage, while the emphasis of postmodernism on multiple meanings for passages allows believers to hear God speaking to them through His Word in various ways. God can say different things to different people by means of the same text/passage because that text gains new meanings as persons read it. However, Raschke has failed to note that, while most inerrantists do argue for only one meaning of a text, they also admit of several applications of a text. The various applications are grounded in the one meaning, and this is what guards against the possibility of relativist readings of the Bible, something evangelicals have constantly warned against in postmodernism.

Raschke moves to the third Reformation doctrine, the priesthood of believers, and claims that postmodernism more closely approximates the Reformers' emphasis of relationality in the *imago dei* than evangelicalism, which he believes is akin to the medieval scholastic emphasis on rationality and morality. According to Raschke, both mainline and evangelical churches view the work of God in the church primarily as top-down; the ministry of the Holy Spirit is conceived as coming through the vocational priesthood to the congregants. By contrast, postmodern churches, who utilize cell groups, recognize the value of horizontal work of the Holy Spirit by means of the congregants. Raschke seems to suggest that this can only be accomplished by means of the cell-group model, or at least cannot be accomplished through the traditional Sunday School program (though he give no reasons why this would be the case). His characterization may be true of some evangelical churches, but it is an oversimplification and too sweeping a generalization to be taken seriously of all. In fact, evangelicals have always included an appeal to heart as well as mind.

While some of the details of his presentation could be questioned, much of what Raschke says in this section is of value. His emphasis upon the leading of the Spirit and the ministering work of the laity is to be taken seriously and evangelical church leaders should take note. Ironically, his criticisms focus on the personal desires of church members and utilization of marketing strategies for determining programs echo arguments made against prevailing church growth wisdom from many evangelical



inerrantists. In fact, many of these same problems have been cited in the so-called “Emergent Church” movement, the very movement which Raschke commends to his readers. This, then, is precisely the point—the importation of business strategies into church development, management, and even worship is not merely a problem for traditional evangelicals, though we certainly have our share of guilt. In fact, it seems to be an error tied largely to Western American consumerism, and this is a problem all churches face, emergent or otherwise.

One of the values of Raschke’s work is that it clearly demonstrates the hostility toward evangelical commitments found in postmodernism. Raschke’s arguments against inerrancy, while simply a regurgitation of those presented by liberal theologians, show how even a conservative postmodernism is incompatible with evangelicalism. Thus, those evangelical scholars and pastors who flirt with postmodernism in any of its forms, endanger their students and congregations by denying the truth of the Bible and proclaiming a subjectivist approach to hermeneutics.

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***Rethinking Holy Land: A Study in Salvation Geography.* By Marlin Jeschke. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 2005. 171 pages. Softcover, \$16.99.**

The long-standing debate over the Holy Land typically concerns who owns the land: the Jews or the Palestinians? However, Marlin Jeschke interestingly reframes the question in his book on salvation geography: what makes this land—or any land—holy?

Jeschke rejects the popular evangelical claim that says modern Israel fits within God’s plan for the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, which He gave them in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1; 15:7, 18–21; 17:8), and that they will ultimately become Christian (Rom 11:26) (77–78). Yet, neither does he fall into the other camp, the supercessionist view, that says Israel has no divine claim to the land because the church has replaced Israel (135). Instead, Jeschke tries to minimize this issue to make his case that *any* land can be holy if a Christian practices salvation geography there.

He is clear about his aim in this book: to teach North American Christians how to use a new, biblical paradigm for how to acquire and possess a land and call it holy (21, 27). He believes the proper goal is salvation geography: “a community living out the distinctive style of possession of territory that salvation history teaches, receiving the land as a gift from God and stewarding it with respect for neighbors and descendants,



extending the reach of holy land” (23). Thus, *all* land could potentially be holy, so Israel has no special place as *the* Holy Land, according to Jeschke (140–41).

Although salvation geography sounds appealing if one could still reserve a special place for Israel as the Holy Land, most Christians will probably have a problem with Jeschke’s advocacy of total pacifism. Jeschke is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana (171). Since he is a Mennonite, his views on pacifism are expected; however, they appear naïve to this reviewer. Jeschke leaves no room for any kind of just war or self-defense of any kind, such as the protection of oppressed people, the defenseless, and even one’s family (152–56).

Jeschke writes clearly, adequately interacts with opposing views, accurately cites his sources, and appropriately makes some valid points, such as: (1) one should not practice *herem* (the ban) today (52–55); (2) a Jewish or Christian theocratic state has historically been fraught with difficulties (57–67, 113); and (3) a biblical theology should include how one treats the land (such as ownership) as well as what one does on the land (27).

Weaknesses of this book include: (1) although attempting to be balanced, Jeschke criticizes modern Jews much more than the Palestinians (19–20); (2) his promotion of total pacifism is unrealistic and too simplistic—charges he anticipates and tries to answer, although not successfully to this reviewer (152–54); and (3) although he attempts to take a biblical approach to salvation geography, he takes a decidedly critical approach to Bible interpretation. Of course, he is free to take whatever approach he wishes, but many Christians will reject his “biblical” approach as unbiblical. For instance, he rejects Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (41), and advocates reading “the canon with discrimination (52),” which to him means to discount “the more gruesome texts (45)” of violence in Deuteronomy and Joshua as later fabrications or exaggerations, contrary to what the biblical text says. However, his most glaring weakness is his assertion that Jews have fulfilled God’s promise, that they would be a blessing to the world, (Gen 12:3) through their inventions, scholarship, philanthropy, and contributions to the arts, rather than being the people through whom God sent Christ. Jeschke wrongly claims the Jews do not need to confess Him as their Messiah (131).

Jeschke’s viewpoint is interesting and thought provoking, but it is not necessarily helpful in the ongoing debate over ownership of the Holy Land, and it is only partly applicable to any other land.

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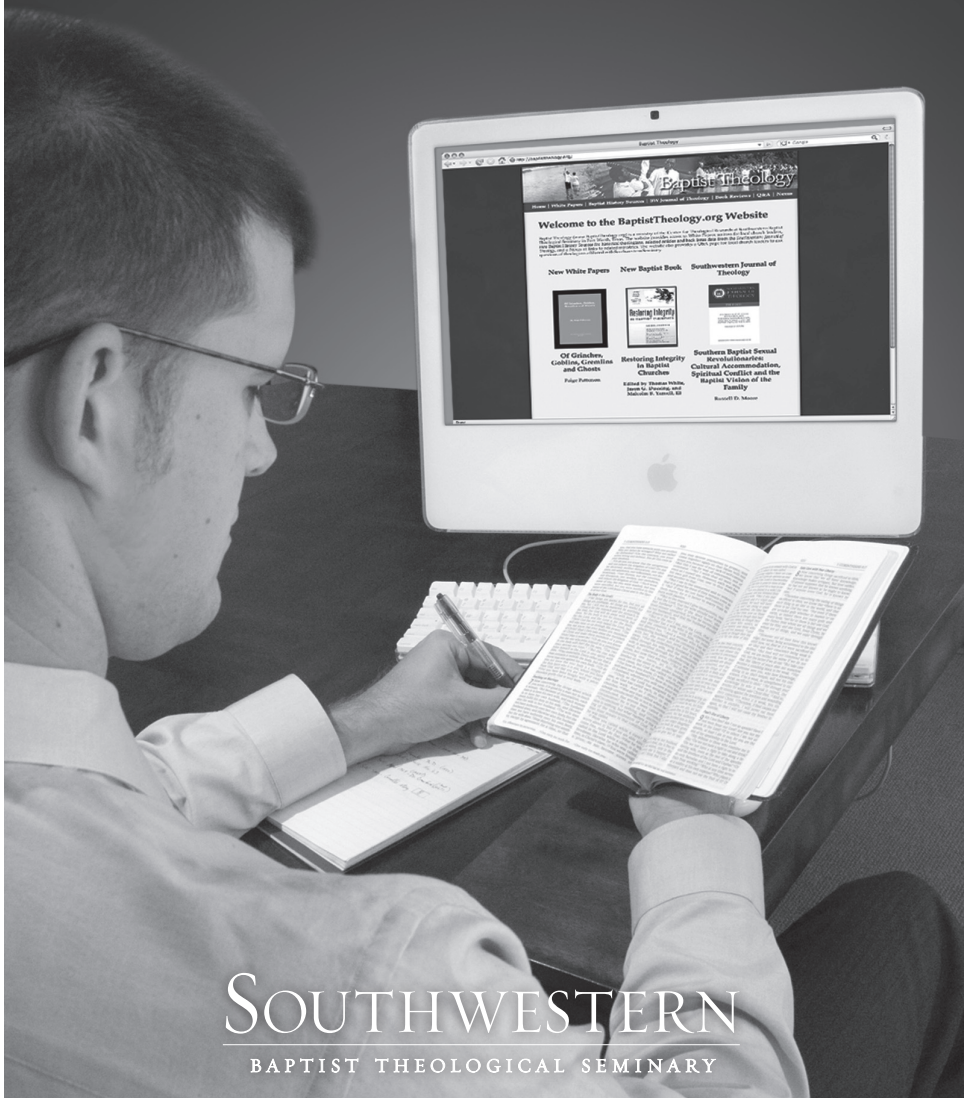
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