

SCRIPTURE, CULTURE, AND MISSIONS



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Scripture, Culture, and Missions

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Many scholars today are discussing the need to contextualize the presentation of the gospel and the way that we do ministry. Jesus gave believers his Great Commission and sent the church on mission (Matt 28:19-20; John 20:21). Contextualization considers the culture into which the gospel is proclaimed and tries to remove unnecessary stumbling blocks to communicating the good news of salvation. The subject of contextualization, however, gives rise to many questions concerning why and how the church engages in mission. For instance, what role does Scripture play in contextualization? What forms and strategies should believers use as they are engaged in mission? Should they contextualize at all? If so, how far is too far? How far is far enough? How should Christians understand culture? Who should contextualize? What principles or values should be used in contextualization? How can one ensure that the gospel enters the culture and does not become diluted by the culture?

This issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* (*SWJT*) focuses on the relationship between Scripture, culture, and missions. Most of the essays enclosed in this volume were delivered at the *Sola Scriptura* or *Sola Cultura?* conference held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on April 14-15, 2011. The contributors to this issue will answer many such questions like those asked in the previous paragraph. First, since Scripture should be the driving force behind any theological or missiological enterprise we undertake, I have contributed an article titled, "A Biblical Theology of Missions and Contextualization." The address provides some theological and methodological principles to help believers as they engage in evangelism, missions, and contextualization. I have the privilege of serving at Southwestern as Professor of New Testament and Managing Editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. Second, in an essay called, "Global Choices for Twenty-First Century Christians," Malcolm Yarnell discusses, from a global perspective, our theological choices in fulfilling the Lord's commission during the twenty-first century. Yarnell is Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Center for Theological Research at Southwestern Seminary. He was also my predecessor, having faithfully served as the managing editor of *SWJT*. Many thanks, Dr. Yarnell, for your outstanding service and a job well done! Third, in an article entitled, "Proclaiming the Changeless Truth in These Changing Times," Norman Geisler speaks to the problem that the evangelical church faces today of proclaiming a premodern message in postmodern times. Three crucial areas are addressed: absolutism, exclusivism, and supernaturalism. A well known philosopher and apologist, Geisler serves at Veritas Evangelical

Seminary as Chancellor and Distinguished Professor of Apologetics and Theology, occupying the Norman L. Geisler Chair of Christian Apologetics. Fourth, Paige Patterson examines in an address titled, “Encountering Culture in Light of the Book of Daniel,” how four Hebrew children in the book of Daniel responded to a culture change that they had no idea was coming. He ascertains what we can learn about how we as followers of Christ should respond to the cultural circumstances in which we find ourselves. Patterson is President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, serves as Professor of Theology, and also holds the L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism (“Chair of Fire”). Fifth, in his article “*Scriptura* or *Cultura*: Is There a *Sola* in There?” Keith Eitel describes the tensions between text and culture, explains how the role of culture has come to have sway in the current conversation, and proposes a set of biblical principles to take the lead in the contextualization dance between text and context. Eitel serves Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as Professor of Missions, Director of the World Missions Center, and Dean of the Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Missions. Sixth, in a preliminary analysis, David Hesselgrave asks, “Did Cape Town 2010 Correct the ‘Edinburgh Error?’” For many years it seemed to Hesselgrave that the fateful “error” at the famous World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, was its failure to deal with vital matters of the Christian faith—with theological and doctrinal issues crucial to the future of Christian mission. Hesselgrave, a prominent missiologist, wrote an earlier article entitled, “Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error?” In the present article, however, he asks whether missions conferences (particularly the one held at Cape Town) held 100 years after Edinburgh have corrected the errors of the earlier conference. Seventh, John Morris anticipates the following essay and provides “An Introduction to McGavran’s Thoughts on the Church and Denominations.” Morris serves as Assistant Professor of Missions at Southwestern and secured the rights to publish the next article, a little known piece written by Donald McGavran in 1985. Eighth, in his essay, “The Church, the Denominations, and the Body,” the late Donald McGavran, arguably the greatest missiologist of the twentieth century, addresses and analyzes the tremendous drive for denominations to unite, and thus, structurally speaking, make one church. McGavran served as Dean Emeritus of the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Finally, John Massey contributes a thought provoking theological review of Church Planting Movements (CPMs) methodology in “Wrinkling Time in the Missionary Task.” Massey is Associate Professor of Missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously served as a career missionary from 2001-2011 with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. This journal issue also contains several regular and extended book reviews.

We pray that these articles equip and assist you as you engage in evangelism, missions, and contextualization. If you like what you read in this issue and would like to have one of our faculty members speak in your church or lead your congregation in a study of any sort, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are more than happy to serve you. Further, if God has called you into his service please consider allowing us the privilege of preparing you at Southwestern for a lifetime of ministry. God bless you!

A Biblical Theology of Missions and Contextualization¹

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Introduction

When I first saw the title of the conference at which this address for pastors and students was delivered—*Sola Scriptura* or *Sola Cultura?*—it seemed presented simply as an either/or type of question. My next thought, I confess, was “Is that a trick question or something?” The answer to that question seemed so blatantly obvious, especially for Baptists who claim to be a people of the book, the authoritative word of God. Unfortunately, the answer is not as obvious to many as it is to us.

I am not a missiologist and have no particular expertise in the discipline into which I now trespass. I do have an interest in the field, but I am no specialist.² So, anything I might have to say on this subject will be based upon Scripture, the word of God, and particularly the New Testament, which, frankly, is how I think it should be, even for a specialist, because our authority is the word of God. Scripture should dictate and govern our faith and practice.

I have the challenging task and enjoyable assignment of looking at the biblical text to see what we might learn about evangelism, missions, and contextualization, particularly the latter issue as it relates to the former ones. Though others in this journal issue will describe “contextualization” for you better than me, I would like to offer some brief definitions: “Simply put, contextualization is taking into consideration the cultural context in which we are seeking to communicate the gospel.”³ Tim Keller puts it this way:

¹Adapted from an address delivered at the *Sola Scriptura* or *Sola Cultura?* Conference held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 14–15, 2011.

²This is very similar to what John Stott expressed when he, a pastor-scholar trained in New Testament, wrote the first edition of his book on Christian ethics. See John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), Preface to the First Edition (1984), 9.

³This definition is one put forward by Juan Sanchez, “To Contextualize or Not to Contextualize: That is NOT the Question,” *The Gospel Coalition* (Dec 13, 2009). See <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2009/12/13/to-contextualize-or-not-to-contextualize-that-is-not-the-question/> (accessed: 15 Oct 2012).

Contextualization is “giving people *the Bible’s answers*, which they may not at all want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and place are asking, *in language and forms* they can comprehend, and *through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them.”⁴

I am grateful to Dr. Paige Patterson, who wrote the article in this issue covering the four Hebrew children in the Old Testament book of Daniel. He identified the four Hebrew children as prime examples of those who followed the Lord God, even when they encountered and lived in a culture other than their own. Despite the king’s edict to the contrary, e.g., Daniel still kneeled three times daily to pray and give thanks to God, as was his habit (cf. Dan 6:10). By looking at such texts, President Patterson lent a hand to me in that I do not now have to cover passages on their contextualization experience, which I had originally planned to do.

It is impossible in the space allotted to look in detail at every biblical passage that touches on missions and contextualization. However, some often cited, key New Testament texts that do touch on the subject will be examined—for example, Matt 28:19-20, Acts 17:16-34, and 1 Cor 9:19-23—to derive some theological and methodological principles to help believers as they engage in evangelism, missions, and contextualization. I am not under any delusion that this address will solve any problems concerning contextualization issues, but as we take a fresh look at these texts in their biblical contexts, we may discover some truths that are overlooked, or at least, rarely emphasized.

Matt 28:19–20

At a conference that was subtitled, “Reasserting the Biblical Paradigm for the Great Commission in the Twenty-First Century,” it seems only proper that any look at the biblical text start with Matt 28:19-20. Perhaps like me you tire of hearing people say we need to come up with a “vision” for doing missions. Now, I think I know what people mean when they say such things, but I always want to reply, “You know what? Aren’t you fortunate?! God has already done that for you in his word. We have the Great Commission.”

Indeed, Matt 28:19-20 is Christ’s Great Commission to his church, the command of the resurrected Lord to his disciples before his ascension into heaven. And in his Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as the rejected Messiah of Israel, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the ever-present, divine Son of God who has all authority and power to establish his rule and reign. One can see something of Christ’s authority, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount when he often says in a section known as the Antitheses, “*You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you*” (5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34,

⁴Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 98.

38-39, 43-44).⁵ At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount one reads the words, “The crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one having authority*, and not as their scribes.”⁶ Jesus did not teach like the scribes did. To support their statements they would say, “Rabbi so-and-so has said,” or “Rabbi ben-Jonah has said,” but Jesus said, “I say to you.” And in Matt 28:18 the resurrected Christ, who, according to Rom 1:4, “was declared [to be] the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness,” issued this command. Christ is God; he is the Son of God; and as such, he possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, in light of the fact that Christ is God and has all authority, he is able to commission his church.

Christ commanded his church to “Go and make disciples.” The main verb in the text is the aorist imperative μαθητεύσατε (“make disciples”). Aorist imperatives, in general, convey a sense of urgency and immediacy of action. The main verb μαθητεύσατε is modified by the aorist participle, πορευθέντες; not “as you go,” as is frequently explained, but “Go and make disciples.”⁷ Πορευθέντες is an attendant circumstance participle; that is, the action “go,” in some sense, is coordinate with the action of the finite verb, “make disciples.”⁸ And as such, the participle takes on imperatival force as well. Further, the action of the participle is “something of a prerequisite before the action of the main verb can occur.”⁹ That is to say, no making of disciples will take place unless you go: “Go and make disciples!”

The object of the main verb “make disciples” (μαθητεύσατε) is πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (“all the nations”)—every nation on the face of the earth, every people group on the planet—red and yellow and black and white, all are precious in his sight. Followers of Jesus are to make disciples of everyone everywhere, regardless of color or locale. Thus, the Great Commission involves not only sharing the gospel (i.e., not just missions and evangelism: “Go”), but another great responsibility: “make disciples.” A disciple is basically a follower of Christ and his word/teachings. He is a learner, adherent, and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, someone who seeks to spread the gospel and its teachings to others. Believers in Jesus are to train those with whom they have shared the gospel and led to the Lord. They are to do “follow-up.” They are not to leave converts to Christ unchurched, untrained, and undisciplined.

The text contains two participles of means, βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες (“baptizing” and “teaching”), that define the action of the main verb “make

⁵Emphasis added. Unless otherwise noted, translations of the biblical text are my own.

⁶Emphasis added.

⁷Emphasis added.

⁸Though Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 640, 645, places the attendant circumstance participle “go” into the “disputed examples” category in the latter book, he rightly presents it as a clear example in his abridged *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 280-81.

⁹Wallace, *Basics of NT Syntax*, 280.

disciples.”¹⁰ In other words, they make more explicit what Jesus intended to convey with the command to “make disciples.” Participles of means convey the means by which disciples are made, namely, by baptizing, then teaching. First of all, disciples are to be baptized/immersed. Before they are baptized they have no doubt to come to an understanding that as Christ’s followers, they are dead to sin, buried with Christ in his death, changed and raised to walk in a new way of life. When they are baptized, they are immersed, notice: “in the name [sg.] of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος; the triune God).¹¹ Baptized followers of Christ will need to be trained, and so another crucial means by which Christians make disciples is teaching. They are to be taught “to keep/obey all things as many things as Jesus commanded” (τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν). In other words, they are taught the teachings of Christ, the things that Christ commanded, the word of God; and, not only are they trained, they are taught to obey the commandments of Jesus.

Jesus concluded the Great Commission with the words: “And behold *I am with you always* to the end of the age” (καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος).¹² Earlier in Matt 1:23 his readers were told of the promised Savior, the Messiah to be born to Mary, Jesus, who will be called Immanuel, “God with us.” God himself through the person of Jesus was promised to be present amongst humanity. And, he was present on the earth through the Incarnation. In these climactic verses of Matt 28:19-20 the resurrected Lord who commissioned his followers also promised to be ever-present, with them always to the end of the age. That truth ought to be a comfort and an assurance for believers in Jesus as they are engaged in missions and making disciples.

Several principles can be derived from this text. First, followers of Jesus are vested with an authoritative message from the authoritative Christ. Second, they are commanded to go and make disciples. Third, they are commanded to make disciples of the people of all nations. Fourth, they are commanded to make disciples by means of baptizing (in the name of the Triune God) and teaching (which includes teaching them to obey Christ’s commandments). Fifth, the authoritative Christ through his Holy Spirit always accompanies and empowers believers as they do.

Acts 17:16–34

When considering the book of Acts, one first needs to consider the Gospel of Luke. Scholars treat these biblical books together as Luke-Acts because they are believed to be written by the same author, Luke, and because Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. In his Gospel, Luke used eye-witness reports and written accounts to provide his own orderly, trustworthy

¹⁰See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 645.

¹¹Insert added.

¹²Emphasis added.

version of Christian origins (Luke 1:1-4). The purpose for the good doctor's Gospel is specifically found in Luke 1:4. He writes to Theophilus (and no doubt others like him) so that he/they might know of God's *pledge-promise* (ἄσφαλεια; most often translated as "exact truth") to him/them with respect to Jesus Christ and the preaching of the gospel. He/they were given a pledge assuring him/them of the truthfulness of Christ's passion and the certainty that the gospel will spread in spite of opposition.

Luke wrote with the above theme and purpose in mind; his Gospel is indeed one of promise and fulfillment. For example, God promised Zechariah through an angel that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son whom they would name John (1:13). That promise was fulfilled with the birth of John the Baptist (1:57-66). Through this same angel God promised that John the Baptist would be the forerunner to the Christ, the Messiah (1:16-17). That promise came to pass in the ministry and preaching of the Baptist (3:1-20; esp. 3:3-6, 16-17). The angel Gabriel promised Mary that she would give birth to a son named Jesus (1:26-38). That promise was fulfilled of course when Jesus was born (2:6-7). An angel of the Lord proclaimed Christ's birth to shepherds and gave them a sign: they would find the baby lying in a manger (2:8-12). Later, the shepherds found the infant lying in the feeding trough (2:16-17), just as the angel promised. Jesus stood in the synagogue at Nazareth to read Isa 61:1-2, an OT promise about the Messiah (4:16-22), then sat down and told those attending that particular Scripture was fulfilled in him that day (4:21). When his disciples asked about future things to come, Jesus gave them a *climactic* promise concerning the preaching of the gospel, viz., as they preached Christ as the Messiah they would be brought "before governors and kings" because of him, leading to an opportunity for witness (21:12-15). Christ's promise to them is fulfilled throughout the book of Acts as the disciples are engaged in ministry, persecuted, seized, and brought before the magistrates. The resurrected Jesus also gave his disciples the promise *par excellence*, the Holy Spirit, telling them to wait in the city of Jerusalem until they received power from on high (24:49). The fulfillment of that promise occurs in Acts in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).

Acts shows the sovereign spread of the gospel with all "bold speech" amidst great opposition. Key terms in Acts are *παρρησία* ("boldness; bold or frank speech"), *παρρησιάζομαι* (to preach boldly, fearlessly), and their cognates. Jesus' disciples practice this kind of speech throughout the book of Acts. In addition to bold proclamation, other themes found throughout Acts include prayer and persecution. All three of these themes are perhaps best exemplified in Acts 4:23-31 and its context. Peter and John have healed a man and were preaching that salvation comes through no one else but Jesus Christ (4:12). Consequently, they were brought before the Jewish leadership, examined, threatened, and released, but told never again to do these things. They replied to those who tried them "we are unable to stop speaking about the things we have seen and heard" (4:20). Subsequently, Peter and John go back to their own people and report what had happened; then, they do not

pray for deliverance, but instead lift their voices in one accord in prayer to God asking him to do great works through the name of Jesus and to give them boldness (παρρησία) to keep preaching Jesus fearlessly (4:29-30).

In the book of Acts, Paul had also been boldly preaching. He was preaching in Thessalonica (17:1-9) until a mob riot of jealous Jews caused him to leave for Berea (17:10-15). In Berea, Paul's preaching was warmly received until the Jews from Thessalonica followed him, discovered he was preaching Christ, and caused trouble for him there as well (17:13). Consequently, Paul was escorted by believers to the city of Athens (17:15).

In Athens Paul was greatly distressed (παροξύνομαι; "provoked") seeing that the city was full of idols (17:16). This word is often used in the LXX to describe the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, who is "provoked" to anger when he sees idolatry.¹³ Paul was "provoked" in spirit by the idolatry he saw and no doubt had a desire to convert the Athenians from idolatry to belief in the true and living God. This provocation is sometimes described as "jealousy."¹⁴ Exod 34:14 states that "the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (LXX). The Lord God resents competition; he brooks no rivals. When Paul saw the idolatry in Athens, his very soul revolted at the sight of people giving to others and to things the worship that rightfully belonged to God.¹⁵

Seeing others give their worship to idolatry, i.e., God-substitutes, should move the followers of Christ in a similar fashion because people's worship should go to the Lord God Almighty. Motivation for doing missions and evangelism should be obedience to the Great Commission, and compassion should motivate believers to action as well, but so also should jealousy or zeal for God's glory and Jesus Christ his Son. Paul's response to the idolatry he saw resulted in witnessing to others: bold preaching. In other words, Paul's reaction compelled him now to give gospel testimony (17:17). First, he reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and God-fearers (Gentiles who sought after God in the synagogue). No doubt he would have proclaimed there that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah of their Old Testament Scriptures. Second, he also witnessed daily to anybody who happened to be present in the ἀγορά (marketplace). Third, he also encountered and conversed with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (17:18). The Epicureans were philosophers who "considered the gods to be so remote as to take no interest in, and have no influence on, human affairs."¹⁶ They believed that the world came into being through chance, a random coming together of atoms.¹⁷ They also thought there would be no continued existence after death,

¹³John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today, gen. eds. J.A. Motyer and John R.W. Stott (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 278.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 279.

¹⁶Ibid., 280.

¹⁷Ibid.

and thus, no judgment.¹⁸ Pleasure was their aim in life, and they sought to live free of pain and fear. The Stoics, on the other hand, acknowledged a supreme being but did so in a pantheistic, God-is-everything, sort of way.¹⁹ They believed in fate, self-sufficiency, doing their duty, and living in accord with reason and the natural world.²⁰ Several of these philosophers would appear on the Aeropagus council before which Paul would later appear.

The philosophers with whom Paul had been sharing the gospel reacted to his message in a couple of ways. First, some insulted him, “What does this scavenger of information (σπερμολόγος) wish to say?” (17:18). They thought he had no original thoughts or ideas of his own. “But others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of strange/foreign deities’ (ξένων δαυμονίων)” (17:18). Luke tells us that they made that remark because Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. Stott suggests that they thought Paul was introducing to Athens a new male God named Jesus with his female consort, Anastasia (ἀνάστασις, the Greek word for “resurrection,” also a lady’s name), to add to their pantheon of gods.²¹ If so, notice Luke did not record in Acts a response by Paul that we might imagine as contextual and cultural-friendly: “Well, I’ll just let them keep on thinking that for the sake of culture. That’s part of their culture and now that I’ve got a foothold amongst them with their idea of the resurrection, I’ll just let them keep thinking that, and then later on when they are ready, I will explain to them more fully what the resurrection really is.”

No, Paul’s preaching instead led to his being taken and having to give an account for his teaching before the supreme council of Athens: the Aeropagus (17:19).²² The members of the council wanted to know what this new teaching was that Paul was proclaiming (17:19). They explained they wanted to know what these astonishing things meant (17:20). This reaction is understandable because to them, what Paul was preaching seemed to be a trendy thing (cf. 17:21). So, standing before the Aeropagus council members, and in response to their request, Paul masterfully guided them to an explanation of the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. The verses that follow are at the heart of matters regarding contextualization.

As Paul began to address the council he told them that he had observed they were “religious in every way” (17:22). This observation was no understatement because of the rampant idolatry in the city. He next explained that as he was looking at their objects of worship throughout the city, he had even seen inscribed upon an altar the words: “To An Unknown God” (17:23). He then “eagerly seized on this inscription as a way of introducing his proclamation of *the* unknown God. There was, to be sure, no real connection

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 280-81.

²¹Ibid., 282.

²²Literally: “the hill of Ares” (Roman: Mars). At this point in time, however, it referred to the council of Athens and not the place.

between ‘an unknown God’ and the true God; Paul hardly meant that his audience were unconscious worshippers of the true God.²³ In other words, Paul was not acknowledging the authenticity of their unknown God nor their pagan worship. Rather, he took advantage of the Athenians’ knowledge of an anonymous altar he had come across while in their city and used their acknowledgment of an unknown God to enlighten their ignorance. As Marshall explains, he drew “their attention to the true God who was ultimately responsible for the phenomena which they attributed to an unknown God.”²⁴

Christ-followers engaged in missions and evangelism ought also to look for similar items to pique the interest of their hearers, i.e., ways to connect, conversation starters if you will, as they present the gospel to those who do not know Jesus. I can remember sharing the gospel with an orthodox Jew on one occasion as I returned from the country of Turkey. After exchanging pleasantries, my initial bridge or way to connect with him was to discuss not only Isa 7:14 but also the role of the Ten Commandments in Judaism. These subjects are important to believers in Jesus, but they are especially important to Jews, and out of that discussion, with that way to connect, I was able to share the gospel. Or, I think of the illustration that President Patterson once gave in a Southwestern Seminary chapel service when he told how he had met on a flight a man who obviously had an interest in hunting. The man had observed, as I recall, that Dr. Patterson was reading something related to hunting, and he asked the president, “Are you a hunter? He replied, “Why yes I am; I hunt goats.” The man thought about it for a moment and then said, “Okay, I’ll bite,” and Dr. Patterson then shared the gospel with him after that conversation starter.

Paul next began to describe the God of the gospel for the members of the Aeropagus (17:24). When he did, he focused on only a few points of agreement between their different religious systems/worldviews and the Christian message. Mostly, however, and this is important to note, *he drew out the contrasts between their beliefs*. Paul used a contrastive bridge, if you will, as he presented the gospel. First, Paul preached that God is the Creator of the universe (17:24).²⁵ This proclamation struck at the heart of building structures for idols for “a God who is Creator and Lord clearly does not live in a temple made by human hands.”²⁶ The apostle pointed out a difference between the Athenians’ manmade idols and the true and living God. Second, Paul preached that God is the source and sustainer of all life (17:25).²⁷ Thus, “such a God has no need of men to supply him with anything; on the contrary, it is he who is the source of life.”²⁸ Third, Paul preached that God is

²³I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, gen. ed. Leon Morris (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 286.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Stott, *Acts*, 285.

²⁶Marshall, *Acts*, 286.

²⁷Marshall, *Acts*, 287; Stott, *Acts*, 285.

²⁸Marshall, *Acts*, 287.

sovereign over all the nations (17:26–27). He created from one man (Adam) everyone on the face of the planet, fixed their days and time, and even determined the boundaries of their countries and where they would live. God’s purpose in all of this (according to 17:27) was that people “*might seek after him* in the hope of touching and finding him.”²⁹ Paul relayed that seeking and finding him should not be difficult because God is not far from each one of us (17:27). This line of thought was apparently current in Stoic philosophy but only in an impersonal, intellectual sense. As a follower of Christ, Paul of course meant it in a personal sense.³⁰ Fourth, Paul proclaimed that God is the Father of all mankind (17:28–29). He used some truth that he found in pagan philosophy and applied it to God. He spoke out against their idolatry on the basis of the fact that mankind is God’s offspring.³¹ Fifth, Paul preached that the God is the Judge of the world (17:30–31).³²

If one reviews several of the contrasts that Paul pointed out as he proclaimed the gospel, he will see that the ideas that he preached exposed the false ideas about God that the Council, these philosophers, had. The gospel Paul preached as he spoke about God goes against ideas like men should be self-sufficient. Paul taught that God sustains life. Paul’s preaching goes against the idea that the world was created by chance. He taught instead that God is the Creator. Paul’s preaching about the God of the gospel went against all of their idolatry, and then he zeroed in on the fact that God will judge them (17:30–31). It is difficult to argue that such preaching is seeker-sensitive and contextualization friendly. Paul has just met these men, and shortly later he started preaching judgment. He told them that God, in his mercy, had been very patient with them up to this point; he had overlooked their ignorance and idolatry, and had not yet visited it with the punishment that it deserved (17:30). But now, Paul told them, you have no excuse because God commands all men everywhere to repent—to make an “about-face,” to change their minds and make a 180-degree turn away from sin and towards God—because of the certainty of the coming judgment (17:31).

Indeed, he has fixed a day when he will judge the world—everyone will be judged; it is all-inclusive in scope; no one is exempt. On that day, God will judge the world righteously, with justice. And that day is fixed; it is definite, and the judge has already been appointed. The Judge is the Man whom God has appointed—Jesus Christ. God has committed the judgment to his Son Jesus, and he has given proof of this judgment to come by raising Christ from the dead. Verse 32 says that when they heard of the resurrection, some sneered, some said—whether they meant it or not—we will hear you again sometime, so Paul left their midst. A few (Dionysius the Areopagite, Damaris, and some others), however, became followers and believed (17:34). Despite the rejection, those who were saved made it all worthwhile.

²⁹Ibid., 288.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 289.

³²Stott, *Acts*, 287.

Principles that might be learned from this passage in Acts that touch on evangelism, missions and contextualization include the following. First, followers of Jesus need to ask God to burden them for the souls of people, i.e., to feel the way that he does toward them, and that is, to grieve for those who reject Jesus as Savior and Lord, seeing them as sinners, people precious in the sight of God who stand in need of salvation from the penalty and judgment of sin. God forbid that the reason that Christians do not witness to others as they should is because they do not feel the way that God does about people. Second, followers of Christ need to develop and sharpen their skills in proclaiming the gospel. They should learn to seek out common interests with people so that they can be used to share the gospel with them. These are things to take advantage of so as to present the gospel message. Compromise here is not an option. Believers in Jesus do not accept or acknowledge, even for a short period of time, the false ideas or designations of worldviews contrary to the gospel. Third, believers in Jesus need to learn to expose false ideas that are contrary to the gospel. This is indeed bold preaching. And, as you explain the gospel, you do not focus so much on any similarities as you do instead pointing out the contrasts between Christianity and the belief systems of others. That is part and parcel of being a gospel preacher. Christ-followers are distinctively different and so is their doctrine. Believers in Jesus need to know Scripture well enough to deal with false ideas whenever they encroach upon the gospel and the truth of God's word. Likewise, they ought to be familiar with some other belief systems outside of Christianity, particularly if they become involved in missions to a specific locale. For instance, if one is going to serve in India, he should know the beliefs of Hinduism fairly well. With the latter religion, if a preacher does not point out contrasts and spell out the gospel clearly, the Hindu will simply incorporate Jesus into his belief system as one of his many other gods. Similarly, if one is going to serve in the Middle East, then he should know the beliefs of Islam well, and so forth.

1 Cor 9:19–23

First Corinthians 9:19–23 is probably one of the clearest and yet most controversial texts of all when it comes to discussing evangelism, missions, and contextualization. Some background information is necessary before we plunge into this passage. The occasion behind 1 Corinthians goes something like the following. Paul's founding visit to Corinth is in Acts 18 (c. A.D. 50–52). A couple of years later, while Paul was in Ephesus, he wrote the "previous letter" (5:9). Though the contents of this letter are unknown, it surely must have dealt with the problem of sexual immorality in the church. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5 suggest that the Corinthians had misunderstood his directives in this letter. This misunderstanding led to the writing of 1 Corinthians (c. A.D. 55). This letter was occasioned by several events: (1) Paul heard from Chloe's people (1:11) that a factional party spirit had de-

veloped in Corinth; (2) he also received a letter from the Corinthian church to which he began to respond in 1 Corinthians 7. He took up the items in the church's letter one by one, most of them introduced by the words "now about" (cf. 7:1, 25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, 12). Most likely, this letter from Corinth was written as a response to Paul's "previous letter" and was carried to Paul by three men (Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus) from Corinth (16:15-17). This Corinthian delegation may also have brought oral reports to Paul about the problematic situation in Corinth; things were not going so well.

Paul wrote to chide the Corinthian church into acknowledging the Lord's "ownership" of them and the implications of that ownership in the different areas of their lives (cf. 6:19-20). The Corinthian church was chock full of problems. As Paul penned this letter, he critiqued the division within the church (1:11-15) and the errant beliefs which led to this split. He taught them that they did not belong to Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and others (cf. 1:12), but rather they belonged to Christ. They were not their own and had been bought with a price, thus they were to glorify God with their bodies (6:19-20), i.e., their slave-bodies (σῶμα).³³ Paul also sought to address the questions raised by the Corinthian church.³⁴ They had questions about spiritual gifts; they had questions about marriage, and in 1 Corinthians 8 they had questions about meat offered to idols.

Whenever idol worshippers offered sacrifices, the shares of what was left of the animals that had been burned up was given first to the priest, then to the families who had presented the offerings. The leftover meat was eaten at dinners in the pagan temple or its vicinity, or at home by their families, guests, and friends, or it would end up in the marketplace to be sold. So you can see how this situation might become difficult. The Corinthians had some questions about eating this kind of meat. Does a follower of Christ eat meat offered to idols? Some of the Corinthians said, "Yes, it doesn't violate our conscience; it doesn't hurt our testimony, no problem!" Whereas others thought it was a sin to eat meat like that. Someone, somewhere along the way, must have said, "I know! Let's ask the apostle Paul." So they did.

Paul told the Corinthians that there really is no such thing as an idol (8:4); however, he went on to say that not everybody knows this fact (8:7). For Paul, idols are of no significance because there is only one true God (8:5-6). But in the matter of meats offered to idols, he said, love must regulate your knowledge that there is no such thing as an idol by giving up rights which will cause a weaker brother to stumble (8:7-13). Some Christians did not realize that there is nothing wrong with this, and they would defile their consciences by eating the meat (8:7-8). And if you eat the meat, Paul said, you are going to ruin your weaker brother and cause him to sin against Christ (8:9-12). And so, Paul told the church in 1 Cor 8:13 that the liberty of believers in this matter should be limited by concern for their brother's well-

³³First Corinthians contains much slavery language, of which this is but one example.

³⁴He also instructed the Corinthians to participate in the offering for the Jerusalem saints (16:1-4).

being: “Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I may not cause my brother to stumble.” So, some important principles of Christian liberty are found in chapter 8 that need review before proceeding to chapter 9.

After warning the church in chapter 8 how improperly exercising one’s liberty in Christ might lead to the ruin of those who are weak in faith and conscience, Paul then illustrated how he was more than willing to exercise restraint, even when it came to the liberties he had as an apostle of Jesus Christ. And Paul’s relinquishing of his privileges as an apostle in order to preach the gospel illustrates the attitude towards Christian liberty that gains God’s approval (9:1-27).

Paul started chapter 9 with a series of four questions that each anticipate the answer “Yes.” He demonstrated he was a true apostle who had certain rights that go with his office. His position as an apostle was based on his vision of the resurrected Christ and the evidence of his apostolic work (9:1-3). He had the right to eat and drink as he was involved in his missionary endeavors (9:4). He had the right to take along a believing wife, as did others (9:5). Paul also taught that he had a right to refrain from working with his hands; his apostleship entitled him to financial support because any worker is deserving of his wages as the Lord had commanded (9:4-14). Nonetheless, he had not used these rights and was also not trying to secure them for himself (9:15). Apparently, some critics in Corinth criticized Paul for not taking support (cf. 2 Cor 11:7-12). He pointed out, however, that rather than using that right, he endured all things—(catch this if you catch nothing else)—*so that he would cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ* (9:12). That is one of the extremely important, key operative principles for Paul as he lived out his life and engaged in ministry. Paul put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

For Paul, the gospel put the importance of his apostolic work into perspective. He had used none of his apostolic rights to support. He gave up those rights in order to gain a reward for going beyond his duty (9:15-18). He did not want his reason for preaching the gospel to be suspect. Paul knew that he had to preach the gospel without thinking about compensation. He belonged to the Lord and was indebted to preach (9:16). He knew he would receive a reward from God if he willingly preached the gospel apart from the praise of men and remuneration.³⁵ Even when he did not feel like it, nonetheless God had still entrusted him with the gospel, a stewardship in trust (9:17). Stewards (chief household slaves in those days entrusted with the affairs of their masters) did what their masters told them to do whether they liked it or not. Paul’s reward involved offering the gospel he preached without cost; he did not want to use or abuse his right to financial support; offering the gospel to the lost without charge was his reward (9:18).³⁶

³⁵Robert G. Gromacki, *Called to be Saints: An Exposition of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 112.

³⁶Ibid.

Paul also taught that the gospel puts the methods of his ministry into perspective (9:19-23). Now remember, the context of this passage has Paul *refraining* from the use of his rights/liberty in Christ. So, we need to be careful here. The point here is not to stress how much liberty I have and what all I might do and get away with as I am engaged in missions and contextualization, but rather, from what should I *refrain* as I am attempting to reach others for the Lord/gospel. That distinction is an important one. Paul gave up personal rights in other areas as well in order to win more to the gospel. Notice that this text begins in 9:19 with Paul's remark that though he is free from all, he has "made himself a slave [a slave has no rights] to everyone,"³⁷ and then he fleshed that statement out with some concrete examples of the type of people whom he serves as such when engaged in mission. In the examples that follow in 1 Cor 9:19-23 Paul's words are not without restriction. He never meant something like, "To the adulterer, I became as an adulterer. To the embezzler I became as an embezzler. To the cannibal, I became as a cannibal." He would not say such things. What about to the New Ager? "I became as a New Ager?" "To the Hindu, I became as a Hindu?" "To the Muslim, I became as a Muslim?" Would Paul say that? What did he mean?

Paul said, "I made myself a slave (*δουλόω*) to everyone" (9:19). First, "To the Jews, I became as a Jew that I might gain Jews" (9:20). How did Paul do that? We have some concrete examples in Scripture. He preached in the synagogues on the Sabbath (throughout Acts). He had Timothy, a half Jewish and half Greek co-worker, circumcised so that his mission team might be more effective (Acts 16:3); as a witness to Jerusalem Jews, Paul agreed to the request to associate himself with Jews who had undergone purification vows (Acts 21:20-26).³⁸ So, there are ways in Scripture that Paul "became as a Jew to the Jews." Second, "To those under the law I became as one under the law" (9:20). This phrase may be exegetical and refer to the Jews he just mentioned in 9:19, or it may refer to Gentile proselytes to Judaism. Third, "To those without law I became as one without law" (9:21), i.e. Gentiles (we have already seen an example of an approach to Gentiles in Acts 17), though Paul did not want anyone to misunderstand; he made it clear that he was not without morals. He was not without God's law for he was still under the law of Christ; indeed, he was a slave to Christ and his teachings. Fourth, "To the weak I became weak" (9:22). We have already seen an example where Paul became weak to the weak. This reference either refers to unbelievers or likely back to 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul spoke of the weak. In the latter case, if eating the meat caused his weak brother to stumble he would not eat meat; he would not do anything to hinder the gospel of Christ. It is important to note that Paul is not in any of these categories. He is no longer a Jew under the law; he never was a Gentile; he is not a weak brother—no; he has accommodated his weak brother in Christ. But, he "flexes," as many have put it,

³⁷Insert added.

³⁸Examples borrowed from Gromacki, *Called to be Saints*, 113.

to communicate the gospel.

Paul became “all things to all men” (9:22). He was a slave to all. On Paul’s words here Tullian Tchvidjian aptly remarks,

Becoming ‘all things to all people’ does not mean fitting in with the fallen patterns of this world so that there is no distinguishable difference between Christians and non-Christians. While rightly living “in the world,” we must avoid the extreme of accommodation—being ‘of the world.’ It happens when Christians, in their attempt to make proper contact with the world, go out of their way to adopt worldly styles, standards, and strategies. When Christians try to eliminate the counter-cultural, unfashionable features of the biblical message because those features are unpopular in the wider culture—for example, when we reduce sin to a lack of self-esteem, deny the exclusivity of Christ, or downplay the reality of knowable absolute truth—we’ve moved from contextualization to compromise. When we accommodate our culture by jettisoning key themes of the gospel, such as suffering, humility, persecution, service, and self-sacrifice, we actually do our world more harm than good. For love’s sake, compromise is to be avoided at all costs.³⁹

Yes, Paul engaged in contextualization, but only up to a point. He never compromised the gospel message; he never compromised his morals, nor did he ever contradict the teaching of Christ and the will of God as found in the teaching of the word of God. He clearly operated within boundaries. He was flexible, yet firm, accommodating his lifestyle and the methodology with which he shared the gospel to the group he was aiming to reach for Christ.⁴⁰ Paul willingly gave up the exercise of his rights “on account of the gospel” and by doing so saw himself as participating in it (9:23). The example *par excellence* of one who gave up his rights is found in Jesus and the Incarnation. He is the basis for our mission and contextualization efforts. Though he is God he did not take advantage of that right; rather he forsook the glory of heaven to become a slave, taking on human form, amongst us. He did so in order to save humanity through the cross (Phil 2:5-8; cf. Heb 2:14-18).

Paul went on to say that the gospel puts the discipline of his life into perspective (9:24-27). Within boundaries, he did whatever it took to share the gospel with others. In this passage, Paul explained that he gave up his rights to gain God’s approval in the same way that an athlete disciplines himself in order to win the prize. Athletes would constantly train under oath ten months prior to the games, eat the right diet, and abstain from indulgences.

³⁹Tullian Tchvidjian, “Contextualization without Compromise,” *Resurgence* (online at <http://theresurgence.com/2010/04/22/contextualization-without-compromise>; accessed: 13 April 2011)

⁴⁰Gromacki, *Called to Be Saints*, 112-13.

Paul used the illustrations of running and boxing, probably taken from the Isthmian games held at Corinth, to underscore the need for self-control in the Corinthians' Christian lives (9:26). He declared that he himself did not run without a definite goal in mind and did not box as one "beating the air." This statement referred to the image of when a boxer threw a punch in a fight. The opponent would do his best to dodge the blow so that it would be uselessly thrown in the empty air. To connect with one's punches was extremely important in antiquity because the ensuing momentum of a missed punch would make the boxer extremely vulnerable to his adversary's brutal blows. Greek boxing gloves (*himantes*) were leather straps wrapped around a boxer's hands and wrists in such a way to become like a club. The Romans in turn modified the leather thongs by adding a metal insert so that the boxing gloves (*caestus*) were even more deadly. Paul maintained that every punch that he threw connected. He did not throw empty and meaningless punches in the air when it came to the preaching of the gospel and the contextualization of that gospel to others.

Several principles may be derived from this passage and its context. First, for the sake of Christian love and the propagation of the gospel of Christ, we need to be willing to refrain from the exercise of any rights that we may have as believers or individuals. Second, we must do nothing to hinder the gospel of Christ. Third, we need to be flexible and firm as we operate within boundaries and accommodate our lifestyles and methodologies to share Christ with different peoples. Those boundaries would include never violating the word of God as we do so. We should also never compromise the Christian message of the gospel nor our morals. Once we do, we lose our credibility and further, the blessing of God. Fourth, we must be disciplined and exercise self-control as we are engaged in evangelism and missions being as effective as we possibly can, making our opportunities count. Fifth, in all of this, we keep our eyes focused on the Lord Jesus, who is the basis for our contextualization (Phil 2:5-8).

A Concluding Prayer

Father, burden us for the souls of people and empower us through your Holy Spirit and by your grace not to do anything that might hinder the gospel of Jesus Christ as we are engaged in mission. The gospel of Jesus puts all of our evangelistic, missionary, and contextualization efforts into perspective. Help us to remember that fact. Protect us, we pray, from the evil one. Let us neither compromise the gospel, nor compromise ourselves. Instead, let us lead holy, disciplined lives, and be distinctively different so that the world sees the love of Christ in our lives and in the message of reconciliation with which we are entrusted. God help us and bless us as we seek to be effective and faithful stewards. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Global Choices for Twenty-First Century Christians: Bringing Clarity to Missional Theology

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I have been asked to discuss, from a global perspective, our theological choices in fulfilling the Lord's commission during the twenty-first century. It is incumbent upon a theologian to discern the current state of a conversation as he enters it, identifying its tenor, parties, definitions, etc. A reading of recent contributions to theological missiology, or missional theology, engenders immense respect for the various participants, along with a desire to encourage clarity in the concepts being utilized. This essay engages with that conversation from a taxonomical perspective, dwelling especially upon the role of the recent concept of "culture" and its related terminology. With a genuine appreciation for the current and coming contributions of the new global churches and their theologians, it argues from the perspective that the existing free churches present a finer model for their continuing development than any other extant paradigm. Like the free churches of more recent centuries, the new churches on our globe would do well to discern the Spirit within the voices of other Christians, while avoiding their errors in departing from the Word.

Wilbert R. Shenk began the recent acclaimed volume, *Globalizing Theology*, with this remarkable sentence: "From the human point of view, there is no way we can engage with the gospel independent of culture." He goes on to argue, "We have no choice but to recast knowledge and relationships in light of the processes of modern globalization." Shenk concludes that "to get our bearings in this new situation requires that we let go of what is worn-out and turn to the hard work of discerning new ways of seeing."¹ The editors and contributors to the volume do not depart from this basic claim, although there are degrees of dependency upon the conception of culture within the volume. In a significant borrowing from evangelical theologian David Wells, one of the editors fluently cites then continually treats culture as in some sense, "normative." Indeed, placing the world in tandem with the Word, he goes on to argue, "Doing theology, then, is a multidisciplinary activity requir-

¹Wilbert R. Shenk, "Foreword," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 9-11.

ing us not only to exegete the Word but also to exegete the contemporary world.”²

An avant-garde evangelical theologian, Kevin Vanhoozer, agrees with this Hegelian placement of culture alongside gospel, which he retitles the “catholic principle” and the “canonical principle.” He also concurs with the common criticism that Western missions have been unduly influenced by the propositionalism of evangelical confessionalists. He endorses the movement toward a pastoral and performative theology in “the turn to the context” or “the turn to the cultural context.” Although Vanhoozer is careful to retain Scripture as the “primary source” of theology, he grants a very large place to culture as a theological source. It is indefinite whether the divergent materials of the Word and the world will end in a faithful synthesis, in spite of Vanhoozer’s warnings about such problems as syncretism.³

Discerning the choices before the global churches requires a stable taxonomy, especially in light of the variety of theological ideas used as well as their shifting definitions and indefinite conclusions. There are several important theological terms and ideas employed in contemporary missiological discourse and these require careful delineation if we are to begin arriving at a consensus on the appropriateness of the choices before us. The following six terms will be defined according to the biblical-theological commitments of the free churches: Scripture, Culture, Christ and Culture, Relevance, the Cultural Mandate, and the Great Commission. We shall conclude with a query regarding whether free church engagement may be preferred to evangelicalism’s desire for cultural comprehension.

1. Scripture

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to

²Harold A. Netland, “Introduction,” in *Globalizing Theology*, 17.

³Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule Them All?’ Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity,” in *Globalizing Theology*, 85-126. While critical in one place of propositionalism, Vanhoozer elsewhere seems unduly bound to Reformed theology. Idem, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 98-106. For other discussions by Vanhoozer on culture, see *First Theology*, 309-36; idem, “A Drama-of-Redemption Model,” in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 151-99.

Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.⁴

A definition for Scripture, such as this one from the Southern Baptist Convention, is rightly acceptable to most evangelical and free church Christians due to its affirmations of inspiration and inerrancy. However, in misiology as in preaching, there is a dynamic understanding of the Bible that also ought to be taken into account. While describing Scripture as “perfect” and as having “salvation for its end”—both of which indicate divine movement—this statement only partially captures the divine dynamism attested in Scripture. We therefore turn to Scripture itself for a clearer discourse on the nature of Scripture as the living, active Word of God that reaches through proclamation into the hearts of people everywhere.

Rom 10:17 states, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of Christ.” The last phrase, *dia rhēmatos Christou*, is a preposition with a genitive of means, which means “by” or “through.” “The ‘preaching’ is the ‘word’ about Christ, the ‘word of faith,’ so called because it awakens faith in its hearers.”⁵ Karl Barth agrees with this evangelical assessment: “For the Word of God is nigh it, and the report which its preachers proclaim must surely proceed from the Word of God. Surely men do discover from the report of the preacher the faithfulness of God, and surely faith and obedience are thereby generated.”⁶

Yet other passages support an understanding of Scripture as the searching and sufficient Word of God. Several texts appear to treat the Word of God as subject, fallen humanity as object, and the proclaimer as instrumental. For instance, according to Isa 55:10-11, the Word of God descends from heaven above to accomplish on earth that for which God has sent it. In Rom 10:5-10, which draws upon Deut 30:11-14, the Word of God that is proclaimed comes near to the heart and mouth of the hearer and is ready to be believed internally and confessed externally. 1 Cor 4:6 warns the hearer not to exceed what is written, indicating the sufficiency of Scripture and therefore the necessity of staying close to the text. In Heb 4:12-13, the Word of God—primarily understood as the written Word, but certainly with reference to the empowering divine Word behind the text—searches out and judges the internal man because it is living and active and sharper than any two-edged surgical knife.

The Word of God is thus both dynamic and sufficient to accomplish the divine will. The Word of Christ, the efficient cause, generates personal faith in the hearer. The preacher of the proclaimed Word is merely instrumental, a tool in the hand of the Word become flesh. Unfortunately, however, too many evangelicals treat the Word of God as requiring human aid to

⁴*The Baptist Faith & Message* (2000), Article I.

⁵F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Revised 1985), 197.

⁶Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, transl. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 387.

become effective for salvation, as if the Word of God was not powerful in grace but limited by the cultures of man. Does this not generate an echo of a Pelagian view of preaching? In response, we affirm that the Word is sufficiently powerful, while the preacher is instrumentally dependent. The Word works through the preacher, not because of the preacher.

Does this mean that the preacher may just simply speak the words of the text? Or, that the missionary may not be concerned with translation? The answer to both questions is, of course, no. The Lord's Great Commission implies both translation and extensive discussion in the commands to make disciples "of the nations" and to "teach all that I have commanded" (Matt 28:16-20). However, even as the missionary speaks the Word of God in the languages, and therefore cultural paradigms, of the people, the Word itself is not bound by languages but utilizes human language for its purpose. Indeed, the Word stands in judgment of language even as it enters that language to transcend the limits of a particular culture and introduce the God who is above all cultures. Likewise, while the preacher may employ various cultural paradigms—illustrations, explanations, etc—to reflect upon the biblical text, it is the Word that illuminates itself by the Spirit even while the preacher is continually stumbling towards coherence.

2. Culture

The Etymology of "Culture"

The way in which "culture" is used in the study of Christian mission is actually the seventh and most recent use according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, following the much earlier concept of cultivating crops. This use can be traced back only into the late nineteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as, "The distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular society, people, or period."

Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) was the first to use "culture" (*Kultur*) and the related term of "cultivation" (*Bildung*) in the sense of the development of a people (*Volk*). *Kultur* is "the life-blood of a people, the flow of moral energy that holds society intact." This use of "culture" has developed into a threefold usage: the common culture of the *Volk*, the high culture of the elite, and the popular culture "founded in choice, taste and leisure."⁷ *Bildung* is a complex term indicating the advancement of "culture" through the intentional "education," "cultivation," "development," or "shaping" of the whole human person, especially with regard to intellectual and social skills.

Kultur was subsequently expanded in meaning in the works of the idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). The way Hegel used *Kultur* was of a self-referential system that requires the person to find truth in that system. Through the dialectic of the idea and of nature,

⁷Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2000), 1-2.

the *Geist* (Spirit) realizes itself in “self-consciousness.”⁸ Hegel’s relativistic view of culture was mitigated only somewhat through his peculiar view of the *Weltgeist*, or World-spirit, which comes to know itself through the human dialectic of successively higher cultures, ultimately culminating in the fourth and highest self-knowledge of the German world, discovering in itself freedom.⁹

Culture in Theology

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) is the premier theologian of culture, for it was the central concern of his work. For Tillich, theology is primarily apologetic. It is an “answering theology,” where the “situation” asks the question and theology provides the answer. He rejects “kerygmatic theology” as only effective “under special psychological conditions, for instance, in revivals.” Beyond this, it is impossible, for “theology cannot escape the problem of the ‘situation.’” His systematic theology depends on the “method of correlation”: “It tries to correlate the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message.” Of course, he recognizes this is a theological assertion “made with passion and risk,” though he fails here to define the risk.¹⁰

Tillich appreciated the magnitude of Hegel’s system: Hegel’s “great synthesis is the turning point for so many of the actual problems of today So Hegel is in some sense the center and the turning point . . . of a world-historical movement which has directly or indirectly influenced our whole century.” Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of modern theological liberalism, and Hegel “are the points toward which all elements go and from which they then diverge, later bringing about the demand for new syntheses.”¹¹ Tillich goes on to delineate the syntheses of Hegel’s thought: God and Man, Religion and Culture, State and Church. Everything is brought into the system and culture stands at the center. For Tillich, “religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion.” Culture, therefore, provides the key to Christian power: “He who can read the style of a culture can discover its ultimate concern, its religious substance.” This is the promise that Tillich makes to those who would study culture. The employment of culture and its style is the means to Christian influence.¹²

The Church has the function of answering the question implied in man’s very existence, the question of the meaning of

⁸G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§ 438-43.

⁹Idem, *Philosophy of History*, transl. J. Sibree (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 151-369.

¹⁰Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-1963), 1:6-8.

¹¹Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 114-15, 5.

¹²Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 42.

this existence. One of the ways in which the Church does this is evangelism. The principle of evangelism must be to show to the people outside the church that the symbols in which the life of the Church expresses itself are answers to the questions implied in their very existence as human beings. Because the Christian message is the message of salvation and because salvation means healing, the message of healing in every sense of the word is appropriate to our situation. This is the reason why movements at the fringe of the Church, sectarian and evangelistic movements of a most primitive and unsound character, have such great success. Anxiety and despair about existence itself induces millions of people to look out for any kind of healing that promises success.¹³

In case the evangelical free church Christian is encouraged by Tillich's description, note his next sentence: "The Church cannot take this way." In other words, for the premier theologian of culture, "sectarian and evangelistic movements" are anathema to the Christian concerned with cultural influence. Tillich concludes, "The Church and the culture are within, not alongside each other. And the Kingdom of God includes both while transcending both." In other words, the church and the culture are synthesized to create the Kingdom of God.¹⁴ In effect, the theology of culture simultaneously anathematizes free church evangelism and free church ecclesiology as it baptizes the culture. Tillich does leave a place for the "Church School" to inculcate transcendent truth, but he laments that in his day, Christian education "does not represent the spirit of our society as a whole." Thus, Christians must continue to seek to influence the culture by melding with it to create the Kingdom of God.¹⁵

Is "Culture" a Scriptural Term?

Part of the difficulty with using the term "culture" is that it does not translate any scriptural term, nor does it fit exactly within any scriptural concept. However, there are at least two near concepts in Scripture: 1) *Ethnos*: a multitude living together; a tribe or nation; specifically, the nations other than Israel, and 2) The various terms for "world" or "age": *aion*, *cosmos*, *oikoumene*. We draw upon both of these near concepts to culture in the following survey.

How then are these near terms used in the Old Testament? Among the prophets, all the nations are under divine judgment due to their sin. In Amos 1-2, the nations of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and Israel are condemned; in Isaiah 13-23, this judgment extends to Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Israel, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom,

¹³Ibid., 49-50.

¹⁴Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁵"Basic Considerations," in *ibid.*, 153.

Arabia, Judah, and Tyre. In Jeremiah 46-51: Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, and Babylon join the list of the doomed. Summarizing the prophecies against the nations, Isa 34:2 says, "For the indignation of the Lord is against all nations." Among the prophets, it is quite noticeable that the people of God themselves are also under divine judgment due to their sin. Moreover, among the prophets, all parts of a nation are under divine judgment due to universal sin. In Isa 9:13-17, judgment is due upon the elders, prophets, and princes, as well as the young men, fatherless, and widows: "For everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer and every mouth speaks folly."

Providentially, among the prophets, all the nations are also invited to a restored relationship with God. Jonah learned the hard way that ethnocentric tendencies are inappropriate for a prophet. Similarly, Isaiah prophesies, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance" (19:24), for salvation is also for the Gentiles (chaps. 56, 60). Eschatologically, "I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory . . . and I will also take some of them for priests and Levites," says the Lord" (66:18, 21). Moreover, among the prophets, all individuals within a nation are invited to distinguish themselves over against unrepentant individuals in their nation. Ezekiel 18 repeats versions of this refrain: On the one side, "the soul who sins shall die." On the other side, the repentant son "shall not die for the iniquity of his father. He shall surely live."

Jeremiah also relays some truths regarding the relationship of the proclaimer of the Word and the listening culture. First, the prophet should expect to be unpopular with the nation when relaying some divine messages (20:7-10). Second, the prophet who prophesies cultural affirmations must be tested and live in fear of divine judgment (chap. 28). Third, Jeremiah counseled the people of God how to live in the midst of their own and other nations. The people should "seek the peace of the city" in which God places them (chap. 29). Finally, the people must not disobey God and must avoid seeking safety in the ways of the nations (chap. 42).

There is a fine balance between cultural judgment and cultural engagement within the ministry of Jeremiah and of all the prophets, a balance that extends beyond Israel to the nations. As Walther Eichrodt noted in his magisterial *Theology of the Old Testament*, cultural differences break down in light of the impending judgment: "the distinction between Israel and the heathen becomes almost meaningless as compared with their common liability to the divine retribution that is threatening all mankind."¹⁶ However, this universal judgment is in "paradoxical unity" with a universal hope, which is made a "concrete reality" in "the Gospel of the New Testament based on the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ."¹⁷

In the New Testament, three principles are detectable. First is a prin-

¹⁶Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, transl. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 470-71.

¹⁷Ibid., 471.

ciple of evangelical engagement: All the nations are the subjects of intensive evangelism by the people of God (Matt 28:18). Second is a principle that may be characterized as a holy aloofness: As the people of God exist among the nations, they are expected to remain separate from the sinful ways of the nations in this passing world (2 Cor 6:11-7:1; 1 John 2:15, 17). Third is a dualistic principle of allegiance to eternity with temporary residence in time: The people of God are “a holy nation” who currently reside as “resident aliens,” living responsibly amidst the nations yet with different, exalted priorities (1 Pet 2:9-12).

Preliminary Theological Implications

Because of the limited correlation of “culture” with the teaching of Scripture, the Christian must exercise care in the use of the term. However, if we take “culture” simply to mean the “thoughts and ways” of the “nations” in the “world,” we may discern some theological implications from Scripture. First, by no means is culture a neutral phenomenon. Because culture is a collection of human thoughts and ways, culture is marked not only with divine blessings upon all, but also with universal human depravity. Second, to “immerse” oneself in a culture entails the high risk of embracing the gods (or false ends) of the depraved culture. The cult of idols and the culture of idolaters are intimately intertwined with one another. Syncretism is a constant danger. Third, Scripture seems to call for both evangelistic engagement with and holy separation from the cultures of the nations in which the churches live.

3. Christ and Culture

A Presbyterian Proposal

The terminology of “Christ and Culture” received its definitive form in the work of H. Richard Niebuhr, who delivered a set of lectures at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1949.¹⁸ The resulting book has shaped the theological discussion ever since. Niebuhr’s paradigm of “Christ Against Culture,” “The Christ of Culture,” “Christ Above Culture,” “Christ and Culture in Paradox,” and “Christ the Transformer of Culture,” as well as his preference for the last option, are widely recognized and need not be detailed here.

A Free Church Response

Craig Carter, in *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, has provided a helpful critique of Niebuhr’s paradigm: First, it is interesting that both liberals and evangelicals agree with the Niebuhr paradigm. Second, the paradigm “is based on a very large, general background assumption: the theory of Christendom, which is taken for granted by both author and readers.” “Chris-

¹⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

tendom” is defined as “the assertion that Western civilization is Christian.” Third, from Carter’s perspective, “building and sustaining Christendom requires activity incompatible with being a follower of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹

Niebuhr dismissed the Anabaptist challenge to Christendom and affirmed the “Christ the Transformer of Culture” style of Christendom. However, Carter, in a parallel argument to the “holy aloofness” noted above, argues that the Christian community “is necessarily against culture in many ways, but the kind of all-or-nothing choice demanded by Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* is a false dichotomy.”²⁰ Carter also notes that “once one rejects the Christendom assumptions behind Niebuhr’s book, the whole typology becomes suspect.”²¹ Carter draws deeply on the work of the Anabaptist historian and free church theologian John Howard Yoder (1927-1997) in order to construct his critique. According to Yoder himself, there are many types of Constantinianism (historical Christendom), but they all share these assumptions:²² First, God works primarily through the culture rather than the church, effectively placing Constantinianism in opposition to biblical ecclesiology. Second, the church thus finds its relevance in the culture, so that a “secular revelation” of an overarching “truth” is believed to come through the power of, for instance, the Roman emperor. Thereby, Constantinianism becomes a challenge to biblical revelation. Third, the Constantinian paradigm argues, “It is the business of the church to identify with ‘our side,’ with the good guys.” In short, this means identifying the church with whatever power is in control or on the rise. The third challenge of Constantinianism is, therefore, its undermining of a biblical political theology.

According to Yoder, however, these three are not the only problems. There is, fourth, “the progressive abandonment of the vision of catholicity.” Constantine did not rule the entire world, for Christians existed outside the empire in large numbers and large numbers of Christians in the empire refused the state-church (e.g., Donatists). Moreover, as Constantinianism entered new forms with the Roman Catholic church and the Reformation state-churches, the definition of the true church was increasingly restricted. In other words, Constantinianism presents a challenge to the communion of saints. Fifth, with the correlation of church and state in the Christendom system, “At each level the capacity of the church as a body to be critical of internal injustice shrivels as well.” In other words, the state church loses its prophetic voice, because it is part of the ruling class, allowing Constantinianism to pose a challenge to integrity in proclamation.

¹⁹Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 13-17.

²⁰Ibid., 25.

²¹Ibid., 17.

²²This section interacts with Yoder, “Christ, the Hope of the World,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 192-218.

A Baptist Free Church Response

So far, this free church theologian would agree with the responses of Yoder and Carter to the Christendom/Constantinianism model of Tillich and Niebuhr. However, there are three ways in which I would expand their critique, as well as one major disagreement and one minor disagreement that should be mentioned.

Three further critiques of Christendom may be registered beyond those so far delineated by Yoder. First, because of Christendom's dependence upon infant baptism as an assurance of culture-wide Christianity, Christendom predisposes lost people against hearing the witness of the Christian evangelist. Constantinianism, in other words, presents a direct challenge to biblical baptism. Our second additional critique concerns the church's energies. The attention of the churches, according to the free church understanding should be directed toward evangelism through proclamation of the gospel. Unfortunately, in the pursuit of Christian cultural hegemony, these are siphoned off into pursuing secondary and tertiary matters. Rather than speaking the Word of God, Christians become legislators and judges of culture who act like full citizens rather than resident aliens. This is a severe challenge to the New Testament focus upon the biblical means of grace. Third and finally, in Christendom, the church has declared "holy" that which God has not and often that which God has declared "unholy." The magistrate begins to take on sacred properties, so that the goals of a human system realized through the human coercion of human faith comes to be seen as normal. Cultural comprehension as the goal of conversion results in the perversion of the means of grace, the violence of human faith, and the denial of human voluntariness. This final critique means that Constantinianism presents a severe challenge to biblical holiness. Indeed, Yoder would go so far as to describe the Christendom system as "not merely a possible tactical error but a structured denial of the gospel."²³ The error of Christendom "was not that it propagated Christianity around the world but that what it propagated was not Christian enough."²⁴ Yoder's negative critique of Constantinianism or Christendom is powerful and necessary. However, where I would part ways with Yoder is in his positive proposal. On the one hand, Yoder is probably correct when he argues, "The Christian church has been more successful in contributing to the development of society and to human well-being precisely when it has avoided alliances with the dominant political or cultural powers." Much more should be said in this regard.

On the other hand, Yoder seems to fall into the same trap as Niebuhr in placing "culture" in a synthetic relation with the Lord Jesus Christ. The very language of "Christ and culture" elevates culture unduly as a concept, placing culture at eye level rather than as a subsidiary matter. Caught in this way of thinking, even as he seeks to avoid it, Yoder writes, "Instead of asking,

²³Idem, "The Disavowal of Constantine," in *ibid.*, 245.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 257.

‘What is God doing in the world?’ the church should ask, ‘How can we distinguish, in the midst of all the things that are going on in the world, where and how God is at work?’²⁵

Instead of focusing on the ways of general revelation, I would argue for a focus on special revelation. Our question should not be about the general ways of God in the world, but on the specific way that we should witness to the biblical gospel in this limited and fallible world. Instead, our question should be, “Where would God have me proclaim His Word?” Thus, I would argue that the paradigm of “Christ and Culture” is conceivably inappropriate for Baptists at a fundamental level. This is because of the necessary presence of the Word in our work. Moreover, it is because we affirm heartily the holy and peculiar nature of the church vis-à-vis culture, not to mention the separation of church and state. Finally, it is because the means of our warfare are spiritual rather than physical. Baptists have, historically, seen the problem of culture as, quite literally, a problem. The following paragraph from *The Baptist Faith and Message* summarizes that view. Notice how each use of “culture” and “age” entails discernment as well as judgment, implicitly recognizing that “world” is the proper near term to “culture.”

New challenges to faith appear in every age. A pervasive anti-supernaturalism in the culture was answered by Southern Baptists in 1925, when the Baptist Faith and Message was first adopted by this Convention. In 1963, Southern Baptists responded to assaults upon the authority and truthfulness of the Bible by adopting revisions to the Baptist Faith and Message. The Convention added an article on ‘The Family’ in 1998, thus answering cultural confusion with the clear teachings of Scripture. Now, faced with a culture hostile to the very notion of truth, this generation of Baptists must claim anew the eternal truths of the Christian faith.²⁶

4. Relevance

A term that is increasingly used in popular missionary discourse is that of “relevance” or making “relevant.” According to the *Oxford Shorter English Dictionary*, “relevant” means, “1. Legally pertinent or sufficient. 2. Bearing on, connected with, or pertinent to the matter in hand.” In other words, relevance indicates the sufficiency and importance of something to the contemporary age. One hundred years ago, the eleventh edition (a rather famous one) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was published. A full-page ad in the *New York Times* proclaimed the eleventh edition was “the sum of human knowledge—all that mankind has thought, done or achieved, all of the past

²⁵Idem, “Christ, the Hope of the World,” in *ibid.*, 203.

²⁶*Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), Preface.

experience of humanity that has survived the trial of time and the ordeal of service and is preserved as the useful knowledge of today.” The 29-volume set was touted as sufficient for mankind’s needs: “all is included that is relevant and everything explained that is explainable.”²⁷ Apparently, relevance is an ephemeral (very temporary) phenomenon, visibly indicated by the fact that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has been supplanted with other, especially online encyclopedias. But is contemporaneousness enough to define what is truly relevant? We think not.

What about synchronizing with the culture? Since “relevance” is defined by the contemporary nature of a matter to the culture, should Christians, therefore, be concerned to “immerse” themselves in culture? Such has been the import of Mark Driscoll’s call for “cultural immersion” and the “missional life,”²⁸ as well as Kevin Vanhoozer’s previously mentioned affirmation of the “turn to the cultural context” and the need for “cultural exegesis.” Such is the result of the seminal work of David J. Bosch in the thought of the missional movement. Bosch argues for mission and its theology to be transformed by a concern for mission above everything. The mission is so important that the idea of the church’s holiness, or “what distinguished them,” inappropriately distracted the early church. It is rarely noticed that Bosch’s work utilizes the historical-critical method and postmodern paradigms of interpretation in order to undermine traditional missiology. In other words, Bosch’s project to transform mission depends upon the downplaying of Scripture’s calls to live uniquely in the world, which cannot be downplayed without a concomitant deflation of the biblical text.²⁹

A Faithful German Critique

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) faced the question of relevance and its appropriate definition with his life as well as his theology. Unlike Tillich, Bonhoeffer refused to stay in America for the duration of the war and returned to Germany to face life with his people, even as he maintained his criticism of Hitler’s National Socialist regime. Fairly early in his ministry, Bonhoeffer recognized the need to speak to the culture in ways the world understood. According to the German martyr, this means speaking in concrete terms to the present time: “The word the church speaks to the world must . . . from a profound knowledge of the world, be relevant to its present reality, if it would resound with full authority . . . otherwise it will be saying something else, a human word, a powerless word.”³⁰ Thus, the concept of

²⁷Carol Zaleski, “Faith Matters: The Great EB,” *Christian Century* (5 Apr 2011).

²⁸Mark Driscoll, “The Need for Cultural Immersion,” available through Desiring God Ministries at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLbpDV7gmV8> (Internet, accessed 1 October 2012); Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 16-20.

²⁹David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 20-24, 28-29, 50.

³⁰This and the immediately following quotations by Bonhoeffer are taken from speeches in Czechoslovakia and Switzerland, in *DBW*, 11, 332-53, transl. in Ferdinand

relevance has a very positive role in the transmission of the gospel. On the other hand, if the church's word is to be relevant, it must also be prepared to discern and to rebuke the infiltration of evil into culture and church. In 1932, unusually early in the context of the German Protestant churches, Bonhoeffer warned, "Nazism is also penetrating into the church. Responsible theologians are faced . . . with the task of strengthening those Germans and Christians in Germany who are struggling against Hitler." Bonhoeffer's argument for relevance was tempered by the need to define clearly the church's overall relation to the culture.

Bonhoeffer's words stand in stark contrast to the enthusiastic affirmation of National Socialism by the "German Christians," who declared in 1932, "We want a Protestant church rooted in our own culture."³¹ Their desire echoed the promise of Adolf Hitler, who claimed the individual and communal relevance of Christianity: "He was absolutely convinced that neither personal life nor the state could be built up without Christianity."³² Hitler said he only wanted to "to help the church forward, as it had to a large degree lost touch with the masses of the people."³³ Not only Protestants, but Catholic Youth, too, received Hitler's promises enthusiastically, hailing "the National Socialist revolution as the great spiritual breakthrough of our time. [For] only the powerful National Socialist state, rising out of the Revolution can bring about for us the re-Christianisation of our culture."³⁴ As the years progressed, a few Christians, in the Roman and Protestant churches as well as in the free churches, began to recognize the need to separate themselves from the Nazi effort to coopt the churches for its own diabolic purposes.

What was it in Bonhoeffer's theology that prepared him to see what so many others could not? He responded with his own question: "What church can speak in such a way? Only a church which proclaims the pure truth of the Gospel. . . . But wherever the church recognizes its guilt with regard to the truth, and wherever the church is nevertheless called by God's command to speak, there the church must dare to speak, solely in faith that its sins are forgiven." For Bonhoeffer, speaking the relevant word to the world required hearing the Word "against us," demanding repentance. The relevant Word against us exists alongside the relevant Word for us, offering forgiveness. Unfortunately, too many only want to hear the Word for us. Bonhoeffer lamented, "Hasn't it become shockingly clear, in everything we have talked about with one another here, that we are no longer obedient to the Bible? We like our own ideas better than those of the Bible. We are no longer reading the Bible seriously; we are no longer reading it against ourselves, but only in

Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, transl. Isabel Best (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 90.

³¹"Guiding Principles of the 'German Christians', 26 May 1932," in *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, ed. Peter Matheson (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1981), 6.

³²"Roman Catholic Conference in Berlin, 25-26 April 1933," in *ibid.*, 20.

³³"Hitler Receives the Protestant Church Leaders, 25 January 1934," in *ibid.*, 42.

³⁴"Catholic Students Union on National Socialism, 15 July 1933," in *ibid.*, 26.

our favour.”³⁵

Bonhoeffer, like Karl Barth shortly beforehand, had recently discovered “The Strange New World Within the Bible,”³⁶ and it had helped him, as it had helped Barth, to reject the Protestant Liberalism that compromised with the culture and the Protestant Fundamentalism that lacked intellectual seriousness. The Word objectively stood above and judged all cultures and all inhabitants. The Word of God is living and active and sufficient to judge and redeem, but it must be heard and heard “against us” as well as for us. The Word that is not heard as judgment and does not transform the hearer is simply not the Word of salvation. In a series of letters to friends, Bonhoeffer described the change fostered during a year of study in New York: “For the first time I discovered the Bible [which] I had often preached . . . but I had not yet become a Christian. . . . Then the Bible freed me from that, in particular the Sermon on the Mount. Since then everything has changed.” Bonhoeffer was transformed through the challenging preaching of a French pacifist and of an African-American Baptist Church.³⁷

Over against Bonhoeffer, who was both willing to stand against his own culture and hear the Word of God through other cultures, are the German Christians, who were only too willing to immerse themselves in the pagan culture. The German Christians advocated the church should *gleichschalten*, “synchronize” or “coordinate,” with the movement of the spirit in German culture by adopting the Führer principle and the Aryan paragraph.³⁸ This effort to “readjust” the church “to the values of a Germanic Christianity” resulted in such gross efforts as bringing the church further under the hierarchy of the state, liberating the church from the Old Testament “with its Jewish recompense ethic” as well as major portions of the New Testament, and exorcising the doctrine of original sin.³⁹

Such efforts eventually brought some within the Protestant and Catholic churches to their senses, as seen in the heroic confession of the Barmen Synod. In article one of the Barmen Declaration, they reasserted their entire dependence upon the Word of God, and in subsequent articles, uncannily paralleling Yoder’s critique of Christendom, they reasserted their submission to Jesus Christ as Lord of His church, to separation from the ideological commitments of the world, to the independence of the church from the state, and to the concrete priority of the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Bonhoeffer himself was unable to lead the Confessing Church out of the hands of the state completely, because, in spite of his call for true discipleship, both he and the Confessing Christians were still trapped in the

³⁵Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 92.

³⁶Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, transl. Douglas Horton (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 28-50.

³⁷Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 95.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 124.

³⁹“The ‘Sports Palace Scandal’, 13 November 1933,” and “Protest of the Provisional Leadership to Hitler, 28 May 1936,” in *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 39-40, 59.

⁴⁰“The Barmen Synod, 29-31 May 1934,” in *ibid.*, 45-47.

intellectual paradigm of Christendom.⁴¹ Hitler had used the Constantinian desire for cultural comprehension skillfully in his relations with the Protestant and Roman churches.

Today, some evangelicals have adopted a combination of a Hegelian understanding of culture, as self-enclosed reality without reference to a transcendent God, with a postmodern understanding of culture, as self-enclosed linguistic discourse that is hostile towards a metanarrative. The result is the idea that relevance is determined by the culture and the Word of God has to be “made relevant” in order to impact the culture, as if it were limited and weak, except for the power of those within the culture. This understanding contradicts the idea that the Word of God is both above culture and moves into the culture. Transcendence, judgment, and grace are thereby compromised. The proper response is to emphasize the gracious, living, and powerful nature of the Word. The living Word of God, not the culture of fallen man, ultimately defines what is relevant!

5. The Cultural Mandate

A Presbyterian Proposal

Calvinist theologians have invented a theological concept that serves as a rival to the Great Commission, on the side of creation rather than redemption, but which demands the full attention of the church in its mission. According to Genesis 1:26-28, God made man and commanded them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Cornelius Plantinga Jr., standing within the Reformed tradition, argues that the command to have dominion is more than stewardship of nature: “But God’s creation extends beyond the biophysical sphere to include a vast array of cultural possibilities that God folded into human nature.” This is the so-called “cultural mandate,” and it entails dominion over “an array of cultural gifts, such as marriage, family, art, language, commerce, and (even in an ideal world) government.” For Plantinga and the Reformed, the church’s role includes not only “care for earth and animals . . . but also with developing certain cultural possibilities (‘filling’ out what is only potentially there).” Indeed, the church must realize that “all” of creation is “potentially redeemable.”⁴²

An Immediate Baptist Free Church Response

My immediate response is that the “redemption” or “transformation” of culture is a Christendom idea still looking for a scriptural basis, rather unsuccessfully. The concept depends upon a this-world eschatology that assumes

⁴¹Bonhoeffer later intimated in his prison letters a shift in fundamental thought toward “religionless Christianity,” but we possess too little to know exactly where he was headed.

⁴²Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 29-35.

man is the cause of the coming of the Kingdom of God, a type of eschatology conducive to certain untenable brands of amillennialism and postmillennialism. However, the concept has generated a plethora of evangelical efforts to define the cultural mandate and how the church can bring it about. This is true for liberal evangelicals,⁴³ for missional theologians,⁴⁴ and for emergent evangelicals,⁴⁵ as well as for conservative evangelicals, such as Plantinga.

6. The Great Commission

The terminology of the “Great Commission” arose in the late sixteenth century and was popularized by the late seventeenth-century Baptist theologian, Benjamin Keach, whence it entered the modern vocabulary. The Great Commission is typically identified with Matt 28:18-20. The Great Commission does not have equivalent parallels in the other gospels. However, comparison should be made to Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:45-49, and John 20:21-23. The Great Commission has a single command with multiple and orderly responsibilities: Go, Make Disciples, Baptize, and Teach.⁴⁶ In Acts 1:8, we are given further detail about the church’s method of fulfilling the commission. This commission to the world begins locally in Jerusalem and spreads through the region to the entire world.

The making of disciples is described in Romans 10 as the result of the proclamation of the Word of God, which comes to the hearer and is ready to empower a response in heart and mouth. Again, Rom 10:17 presents faith as coming through hearing and hearing by means of the Word of God. The means is the Word; the instrument is the preacher; the recipient is the hearer. The means of grace for salvation among the lost, according to Scripture, is the proclamation of the Word of God. There is no other means given to the church to bring salvation to the world.

The Choices Before Global Christians in the Twenty-First Century

Two choices present themselves to the churches regarding their fulfillment of the Great Commission. First, in a recent volume lauded by young Reformed leaders, Peter J. Leithart argues that the Constantinian “merger” of faith and empire seems to have been a most effective evangelistic method during the fourth and fifth centuries.” Although he admits that the church’s capture of the culture may not be the way forward right now, the use of government to spread the Christian faith through a new Constantine should

⁴³Philip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology for Church and Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

⁴⁴Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

⁴⁵Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁴⁶For a fuller treatment of this text, exegetically, historically, and systematically, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Heart of a Baptist* (Fort Worth, TX: Center for Theological Research, 2005).

remain an available option.⁴⁷ The second option is to recognize the folly of Christendom and offer a more biblical solution, which we believe to be most clearly revealed at the current time in the best thought of the free churches.

The Folly of Christendom

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), one of the most trenchant critics of “Christendom,”⁴⁸ noted the illusory nature of focusing upon transforming this transitory world rather than depending radically upon the eternal ways of God in faith. Kierkegaard develops this argument through reminding us of priorities: the priority of eternity to the temporal, the priority of individual faith over human system, and the priority of New Testament discipleship over cultural compromise (Christendom). A review of Kierkegaard’s critique helps establish the folly of Christendom.

First, with regard to the priority of the eternal over the temporal, while expositing James 4:8, Kierkegaard argued that purity of heart requires willing one thing. To will for anything other than God is to will a changing thing, which is to will many things. This is described in Scripture as the willing of a double-minded man. “[T]here is a wisdom which is not from above, but is earthly and fleshly and devilish.” That fallen “wisdom” calls the man to will the temporary rather than the eternal. In contrast, Kierkegaard says, “Each one who in truth would will one thing must be led to will the Good [i.e. God].”⁴⁹

Second, with regard to the priority of individual faith over human system, while expositing Genesis 22, Kierkegaard argued that God requires man to reach above this world to Him in faith. The problem with Hegelian philosophy is that it places the outer higher than the inner. The Danish philosopher sees a different way forward, placing the human system below the personal encounter with the divine. “Faith, on the contrary, is this paradox, that interiority is higher than exteriority” (Cf. Heb 11:1, which states, “Faith is the conviction of things not seen.”) Moreover, “It is God who demands absolute love.” As a result, He may call us to act contrary to cultural expectations. (Cf. Luke 14, which states, “If anyone comes to me, and hates not his own father.”)⁵⁰

Third, Kierkegaard addresses the priority of New Testament discipleship over cultural compromise (Christendom): “What Christianity wants

⁴⁷Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 289-90, 297. Cf. Andrew Walker, “Saving Constantine,” *The City* 4.1 (Spring 2011): 84-87; and Trevin Wax, “The Vindication of Constantine,” *Christianity Today* (March 2011).

⁴⁸For the ninth century provenance of the term “Christendom” as a descriptor of Christian hegemony, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Allen Lane, 2009), 503.

⁴⁹Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing: Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession*, transl. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper & Row, 1938), ch. 3.

⁵⁰See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectic Lyric by Johannes de Silentio*, transl. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, Revised 2003), Problema II.

is . . . the following of Christ.” “What man does not want is suffering, least of all the kind of suffering which is properly the Christian sort, suffering at the hands of men. So he dispenses with ‘following,’ and consequently with suffering.” “Is not ‘Christendom’ the most colossal attempt at serving God, not by following Christ, as He required. . . . [I]n comparison with the Christianity of the New Testament, it is playing Christianity.” “The interest of Christianity, what it wants, is—true Christians. The egoism of the priesthood, both for pecuniary advantage and for the sake of power, stands in relation to—many Christians.”

New Testament Christianity does not appeal to the natural man, while counterfeit Christianity appeals to his carnal pleasures, offering “nauseating syrupy sweets.” “Our Christianity therefore, the Christianity of ‘Christendom,’ takes this into account; it takes away from Christianity the offense, the paradox, etc., and instead of that introduces probability, the plainly comprehensible. That is, it transforms Christianity into something entirely different from what it is in the New Testament, yea, into exactly the opposite; and this is the Christianity of ‘Christendom,’ of us men.” “The result of the Christianity of ‘Christendom’ is that everything, absolutely everything, has remained as it was, only everything has assumed the name of ‘Christian’—and so we live a life of paganism.”⁵¹

We conclude Kierkegaard’s searing critique of Christendom’s focus upon the temporal, the human system, and the culture with a parable written in 1845: “You are standing as if on the summit of the mount of Transfiguration and must depart—but then all the little demands of finitude and the petty debts owed the green-grocer, the shoemaker, and the tailor take hold of you and the final result is that you remain earthbound and you are not transfigured, but the Mount of the Transfiguration is transfigured and becomes a dunghill.”⁵² Christendom replaces Christ’s promise of an encounter with God on the Mount of the Transfiguration with a human dunghill.

The Free Church Solution

If the folly of Christendom disqualifies it as a serious option for global Christians in the twenty-first century, a second option that presents itself is that of the baptizing free churches. This is the way of engaging the world through biblical means (evangelism) according to biblical life together (ecclesiology). This way brings many benefits. Among these are the freedom and Biblicism of the free churches’ ecclesiology. The regenerate church seeks congregational faithfulness to the Lord, living holy lives in the midst of a fallen culture. In the free church paradigm, there is a greater opportunity, though not ensured, that holiness may be preserved. The truly regenerate church

⁵¹Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack upon “Christendom” 1854–1855*, transl. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Revised 1968), 121–123, 147, 150–51, 158, 162–64.

⁵²Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, transl. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 473.

should remind her members of the need for separation from the wickedness of the world. Meanwhile, perhaps paradoxically from the Christendom perspective, missional engagement with the world is preserved in the free church model. The regenerate church recognizes that it must “seek the peace of the city” in which it resides as a “resident alien.”

This brings us to the second major benefit of the free church solution: its emphasis upon a Word-oriented evangelism. The free church understands that it must engage lost people honorably in a perishing world through the proclamation of the Word of God. In the free church solution, Scripture is the first to be honored. The Bible is recognized as the means by which the Spirit of God brings faith and thus the means by which evangelism is to occur. In the free church solution of missionary outreach, there is also an attractive empathy for humanity. It recognizes that the Spirit lays the groundwork for proclamation of the Word through means of the mind (e.g., rationalism, apologetics) and the heart (e.g., art, music, emotional events). Moreover, in perhaps the strongest undermining of the structure of Constantinianism or Christendom, baptism is reserved for the redeemed, ensuring respect for the freedom of humanity and denying any coercion of the human will. The future of the global churches will be better served through attention to the legacy of the free churches, with their Christ-honoring and world-discerning ecclesiology alongside their Word-honoring and human-empathetic evangelism, rather than through the illusory promises, structures, and means of Christendom.

Proclaiming the Changeless Truth in These Changing Times

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Introduction

The problem the evangelical church faces today is that we are proclaiming a premodern message in postmodern times. This is true in three crucial areas: absolutism, exclusivism, and supernaturalism. Evangelicals believe in absolute truth. We also hold that Christianity is exclusively true and that the gospel involves a supernatural act in the physical resurrection of Christ. The problem, then, is threefold: First, we are preaching an absolutistic message in a relativistic age. Second, we are preaching an exclusivistic message in pluralistic times. Third, we are affirming a supernatural world in a naturalistic world. To explain this thesis, we must first focus the problem. First, we will briefly state the central beliefs of both sides.

The Problem: Opposing Beliefs in Three Crucial Areas

It is widely acknowledged that evangelicals believe that 1) truth is absolute, 2) truth is exclusivistic, and 3) that the truth of the gospel involves belief in the supernatural. Likewise, it is generally acknowledged that the postmodern world rejects absolutism, exclusivism, and supernaturalism. Given this, we are attempting to proclaim absolutistic truth in a relativistic age, an exclusivistic worldview in a pluralistic world, and a supernatural message to a naturalistic mindset. Let us discuss each one of these.

The Church Affirms an Absolutistic Message in a Relativistic Milieu

By absolute truth we mean something that is true for all persons, at all times, and in all places. Indeed, we are commissioned to preach the gospel everywhere (Matt 28:18-20) to “all nations” and to “every tribe, kindred, and tongue” (Rev 7:9). In short, we believe the gospel is true for everyone, everywhere, and always, not just for some people, somewhere, and sometimes.

However, one of the dominant characteristics of postmodern cultures is relativism. The slogan, “What is true for you is not true for me,” is widely heralded. “Your truth is not my truth” is another cliché of our culture. Both truth and meaning are thought to be culturally relative. Ironically put, the

absolutes of the Bible are considered relative, and the relativity of Einstein is considered absolute.

This clearly poses a problem: How can we proclaim the absolute truth in such relativistic times? Does not such an antiquated message disqualify itself? Does it not become some kind of archaeological curiosity or a dinosaurically outdated proclamation? What is more, even if our message is proclaimed as absolute by the speaker, it will be taken as relative by the hearer. For often it is the hearer's worldview that determines what the hearer hears, not the speaker's worldview. So, even the absolute truth spoken through a relativistic cultural filter will be heard as a relativistic message. In short, we may be *preaching* that Jesus is "the truth" but they may be *hearing* that he is only the truth "for me" but not necessarily for everyone.

Indeed, in a relativistic scenario, someone may adopt Christianity but still believe it is not true for everyone, even though they have accepted it as true "for them." This raises a thorny problem of whether someone can be absolutely saved by believing the gospel in a relativistic way. If so, what does this do to our absolutism? If not, what does this do to our allegedly "regenerate" church roles, since Barna surveys indicate that only ten percent of born-again teenagers believe that truth is absolute. It suffices to say that we have a serious problem, maybe even more serious than we think.

The Church Affirms an Exclusivistic Message to Pluralistic People

While we are pondering that problem, consider another one: we are declaring an exclusivistic message to a pluralistic people. Evangelical Christianity holds that there is only one way of salvation. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). He adds elsewhere that anyone who attempts to come any other way than through "the door" is a "thief and a robber" (Jn 10:1, 9-10). Jesus says flatly, "If you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins" (Jn 8:24). He adds, "Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (Jn 3:36). His Spirit prompted an apostle to add that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Paul adds, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

Unfortunately, this exclusivistic message is falling on deaf pluralistic ears. It is seen by our culture as narrow, intolerant, and even imperialistic. After all, do not all roads lead to heaven? As the great Texas theologian Willie Nelson has said, "I believe all roads lead to the same place. We're taking different ways to get there, but we all end up in the same place. It's kind of like Kinky Friedman's statement, 'May the God of your choice bless you.' That's the main thoughts that I have about life."¹ Likewise, the most influential female—and formerly Baptist—lay theologian Oprah Winfrey declared,

¹Clayton Neuman, "10 Questions for Willie Nelson," *Time*, 7 August 2006, 6.

"I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity."² Of course, there are more scholarly representatives of this view such as John Hick.³ George Willis Cooke puts it this way: "Religion, wherever manifest, answers to the same human demands; and it reaches the responding satisfaction, by quite similar methods and to the same primary end."⁴ So, any religion achieving this goal is considered true. In brief, we are not only proclaiming the absolute truth to our relativistic times, but we are preaching an exclusivistic message in a pluralistic milieu. How, then, shall we preach? Usually, the very implication of exclusivism turns off a pluralistic hearer, for the message seems so narrow, intolerant, and bigoted.

The Church Affirms a Supernatural Message in a Naturalistic Mindset

Another postmodern characteristic of our culture is naturalism—the belief that everything can be explained by natural laws, that nature is “the whole show.” Miracles either cannot or at least do not occur. Long ago, Benedict Spinoza and later David Hume sought to demonstrate that miracles are not credible. Spinoza wrote, “Nothing . . . comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws . . . for she keeps a fixed and immutable order.” So, “we may, then, be absolutely certain that every event which is truly described in Scripture necessarily happened, like everything else, according to natural laws.”⁵ Almost a century later David Hume added, “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature [and] firm and unalterable experience has established these laws.”⁶ And since “a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle.”⁷ This anti-supernaturalism spread into science via Hume’s friend James Hutton and into theology through Levi Strauss who wrote the first anti-supernatural life of Christ. More recently, Rudolph Bultmann, with his massive influence on New Testament Scholarship adds, “the only relevant . . . assumption is the view of the world which has been molded by modern science and the modern conception of human nature as a subsistent unity immune from the interference of supernatural powers.”⁸ This, he declares, includes the resurrection of Jesus.

²See Oprah Winfrey, Transcript of the first “A New Earth” web seminar dated March 3, 2008. Online: http://images.oprah.com/images/obc_classic/book/2008/anewearth/ane_chapter1_transcript.pdf.

³See John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: WJK, 1993).

⁴George Willis Cooke, *The Social Evolution of Religion* (Boston: Stratford Publishers, 1920), xviii.

⁵Benedict Spinoza, *A Theological–Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 1:83, 87, 92. This volume was originally published in 1670.

⁶David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Charles William Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), 122. This volume was originally published in 1750.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Rudolph Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, trans. by Reginald Fuller (London: Billings & Sons, 1954), 5–8.

Clearly, this leaves the evangelical in a difficult position, for the gospel itself, to say nothing of the rest of the miraculous life of Christ, necessarily involves a miracle—the bodily resurrection of Christ. The resurrection is part and parcel of the gospel which the apostle Paul defines as a belief in the fact that “Christ dies for our sins in accordance with the Scripture, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, and that he appeared” to many witnesses (1 Cor 15:3-5). Indeed, he says further that without the resurrection “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). In short, we are not only proclaiming the absolute truth to our relativistic times and an exclusivistic message in a pluralistic context, but we are preaching a supernatural message in a naturalistic milieu. If ever there were a clash between Christ and culture, this is it.

Facing the Alternatives

Given the collision between evangelical Christianity and our postmodern culture, the alternatives for evangelicals are clear: 1) change the message to fit the milieu, 2) change the milieu to fit the message, or 3) defend the absolute truth to our relativistic times. In short, we either ignore our culture (and become irrelevant), give in to culture (and become liberals), or else we do apologetics in our culture.

Changing the Message to Fit the Milieu

Changing the message to fit the milieu is the fatal mistake of liberalism. It loses the life-transforming power of the gospel and turns the church into a hymn-singing Rotary Club. It is an accommodation of the message of Christ to the culture, not a communication of Christ to the culture. It turns a living church into a dead one, a missionary church into a church needing a missionary, and a biblical church into a social experiment. Modern history is replete with tragic examples of this mistake. Looking back on forty years of ministry, the famous liberal preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, declared, “What man in his senses can now call our modern civilization standard? . . . It is not Christ’s message that needs to be accommodated to this mad scene; it is this mad scene into which our civilization has collapsed that needs to be judged and saved by Christ’s message.”⁹ Space does not permit more elaboration, but the “emergent church” is an example of this unfolding before our very eyes.¹⁰

Changing the Milieu to Fit the Message

Changing the milieu to fit the message is the fatal mistake of extreme fundamentalism. It is manifest among the “King James only” crowd that per-

⁹Harry Emerson Fosdick, *A Great Time to be Alive* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 201-02.

¹⁰For a good critique of the emergent church, see Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008).

manentizes one cultural manifestation of Christianity of one time into the only one for all time. They take one translation for one time and makes it the original by which even the original Greek must be corrected. In so doing, they unwittingly change the meaning of Scripture and undermine its divine authority. A classic example of this is the insistence of the word “let” (in 2 Thess 2:7), which in 1611 meant to hinder and now means to permit, thus reversing rather than preserving the original meaning. This is not only a fatal error on understanding Scripture, but the same is done with regard to other elements of the Christian faith. Music is another example. Modes of music are largely culturally relative. In spite of its Christian roots in the New Orleans funeral services, jazz was considered the music of the devil in fundamentalist churches in the early and mid-1900s. Also, formerly bar room tunes later became acceptable gospel songs. I will never forget my shock when I discovered that my favorite pre-Christ dance tune “Now is the Hour” was a gospel song called “Cleanse Me” that was being sung in the little fundamentalist church in which I was raised!

For over two decades I taught classes at the Cornerstone Music Festival in Western Illinois. When asked on the Moody Bible network why a conservative like me participated in a Christian Rock Music festival, I replied, “When I go fishing, I do not put strawberries on my hook (my favorite desert). Rather, I use worms because the fish like them better. The contemporary kids like rock music better. So, we are using it to try to hook them for Jesus.” Acceptable forms of music change with the times, and so do modes of communication. When I began preaching sixty years ago, we did not even have white boards, let alone overhead projectors, PowerPoint, or smart boards. Now I hardly know how to communicate without some recent technology. While liberals tend to relativize the absolute message, fundamentalists tend to absolutize the relative mode in which it is expressed. To re-coin an old motto used in the 1950s, “We need to be anchored to the Rock, but geared to the times.” We need to learn how to proclaim the unchanging truth in the changing terms of our time.

Defending the Absolute Truth in a Relativistic World

Given what we and the contrasting culture believe, there are limited options for evangelicals to communicate Christ to the culture. First, we could change the message to fit the milieu. Second, we could change the milieu to fit the message. Or, third, we can defend the absolute truth to our relativistic times. We choose the latter for reasons that will become obvious. But how do we do this without compromising our message? In a word, by apologetics. Whose apologetics? you may ask. The apologetics of Jesus, I reply. He was not only a master teacher, but he was a master apologist. In a chapter on parabolic apologetics in our recent book, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, we note that Jesus was able to use the stories by which people lived to illustrate the truths

he wanted to convey.¹¹ Let me illustrate how to pre-evangelize relativists and pluralists so they can understand the absolute and exclusive nature of truth in which alone the true gospel makes sense.

If the evangelical church is going to survive it must overcome its aversion to apologetics and take the Scriptures seriously when they declare, "I am set for the defense of the gospel" (Phil 1:17). "Know how you ought to answer each one" (Col 4:6). "Give a reason for the hope within you" (1 Pet 3:15). "Contend for the Faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Indeed, the apostle Paul was a master apologist in his Mars Hill encounter (Acts 17) and with the heathen at Lystra (Acts 14). He appealed to general revelation available to all men who know from creation that there is an invisible creator and "so they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). He also appealed, as did C. S. Lewis so masterfully in *Mere Christianity*, to the moral "law written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15) that points to a moral lawgiver.¹²

For the skeptic who thinks that apologetics does not work in pre-evangelism to point people to Christ, I note several things briefly. First, it worked for Paul on Mars Hill. After his message we read: "But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34). Second, St. Augustine was pre-evangelized for some time before he came under the preaching of St. Ambrose and had his garden experience. For one thing, he reasoned his way out of skepticism.¹³ For another, the reading of the philosopher Plotinus helped deliver him from his materialistic understanding of reality. Finally, only after being impressed that Christianity had answers to tough questions by listening to a debate between a Christian and a Manichean was he pre-evangelized enough to be able to understand and believe the gospel. Third, for the clichéd argument that the Bible is like a lion that does not need to be defended, it only needs to be proclaimed, I respond with a question: Would this naked fideist accept the *Quran* (or *The Book of Mormon*) if they claimed that "The *Quran* (or *The Book of Mormon*) does not need to be defended; it simply needs to be expounded?!" No, they would rightfully ask for evidence that it is actually the Word of God. We should be willing to do no less for the Bible.

Fourth, of course, the Word of God comes to us with self-vindicating authority, but it is not self-evident that the Bible (rather than the *Quran* or the *Gita*) is the Word of God. One needs to provide evidence for that. Finally, it is charged that only the Holy Spirit can bring persons to Christ, not apologetics. While this is true, it is also true that the Holy Spirit can and often does bring people to Christ by the use of apologetics. I have a file of examples where this happened. Let me share one with you: "For several

¹¹See Norman Geisler and David Geisler, *The Apologetics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

¹²See part one of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

¹³See John J. O'Meara, *St. Augustine: Against the Academics* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950).

[years] we've prayed for my son-in-law, an avowed Atheist. After reading your book . . . here is his note: 'I thought I'd drop you a line and let you know that I finished the book yesterday, and as I was sitting at my desk at work that morning, I came to realize that even if I didn't have every answer to every question, I at least had a preponderance of evidence in my hands, which has finally tipped the scales in God's direction again. So I said a prayer and accepted Jesus.'¹⁴

Defending the Truth through Apologetic Pre-Evangelism

As Francis Schaeffer taught us a generation ago, we must do "pre-evangelism" before we can do evangelism.¹⁵ It makes no sense to speak to someone about the Word of God, if they do not believe there is a God who can speak. Nor is it a meaningful exercise to talk about the Son of God, unless there is a God who has a Son. To claim there is absolute and exclusivistic truth of God, someone must first believe there is a God of truth. The simple fact of the matter is that our old evangelistic methods are outdated and ineffective since they do not start where people are.

Let me illustrate. A generation ago I was using what was generally a good evangelistic method at the time devised by D. James Kennedy called "Evangelism Explosion." My friend and I were doing door-to-door evangelism with it when even then we ran into a brick wall. The gentleman who answered the door did not have one of the two standard answers to the question: "If you were to die and stand before God and He would say, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' What would you say?" His answer was, "I would say to God, 'Why shouldn't you let me in?'" I had no clue what to say next. The book did not say. So, I ushered up a quick prayer, and God helped me out my dilemma. I said to the gentleman at the door, "Sir, if we knocked on your door and you did not want to let us into your house, and I said, 'Why shouldn't you let me in?' then what would you say?" He said, "I would tell you where to go!" I replied, "That is exactly what God would say to you!" With that, our evangelistic prospect suddenly became serious and said, "To tell you the truth, I am an atheist, and I don't believe in God." Now what do we do? We do pre-evangelism. If he does not believe in God, then it will make no sense to talk to him about a Son of God who died for our sins and rose from the dead by an act of God as He said in the Word of God.

What did I do? I pre-evangelized him. By asking crucial questions, I got him to move from atheism, to hard agnosticism, and then to open-minded agnosticism (in which he was willing to look at the evidence). First, I asked him if he was absolutely sure there was no God. He was not (and few are). Then I asked him if it was possible that God existed. He said it was possible but did not think that he did. Then I said, You are not really an atheist who says I know there is not a God. Rather, you are really an agnostic who

¹⁴Personal correspondence from Bernard LaTour (4 June 2005).

¹⁵See Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1968), 137.

claims he does not know if there is a God. When he agreed, I asked if he was a soft or hard agnostic. I explained that the hard agnostic says he knows that you cannot know if there is a God, and the soft one claims only that he does not know if there is a God. Since he claimed to be a hard agnostic, I asked him if he knew for sure that he could not know anything for sure. He seemed a bit stunned. After I pointed out that if he did, then he was not a hard agnostic since he knew something for sure. Once he agreed that he was a soft agnostic (who did not know, but could know), I asked if he *wanted* to know. What could he say? When he said Yes, I gave him a book by a skeptic who set out to disprove Christianity and was converted after looking at the evidence.¹⁶ After he agreed to read it, we returned later and found him convinced by the evidence and open to the gospel. We shared the plan of salvation with him and had the privilege to lead him to Christ.

In light of this discussion, there are three main tasks for pre-evangelism in this postmodern world: 1) To defend the absolute nature of truth, 2) To defend the exclusivistic nature of truth, and 3) To defend the credibility of miracles.

1. To Defend the Absolute Nature of Truth

In order to defend absolute truth we must first define it. Truth is what corresponds to reality. A true statement matches its object. It tells it like it is. While there are other aspects of the term “truth,” as used in the Bible, such as reliability or faithfulness, correspondence is the key element, and it is clearly implied in the biblical text. This is supported by the use of the term in everyday discourse (as indicated by dictionaries), courts, and by great philosophers. Further, this definition of truth is undeniable.

Truth as Correspondence in the Bible. For our purposes, this point is crucial. There are numerous places in which the Bible implies a correspondence view of truth.¹⁷

1. The command not to bear false witness is based upon a correspondence view of truth. The command implies that any statement that does not correspond to the facts is false.
2. Satan is called a liar (Jn 8:44) because his statement to Eve, “You will not surely die” (Gen 3:4), did not correspond to what God really said, namely, “You will surely die” (Gen 2:17).
3. Ananias and Sapphira “lied” to the apostles by misrepresenting the factual state of affairs about their finances (Acts 5:1-4).
4. Joseph’s statement to his brothers implies a correspondence view of truth: “Send one of your number to get your brother;

¹⁶The book was Frank Morrison, *Who Moved the Stone?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958). Morrison was a lawyer and skeptic who set out to disprove Christianity but was converted after seeing that the evidence favored Christianity. The first chapter of his book is titled, “The Book that Refused to be Written.”

¹⁷See Robert Preus, *Inspiration of Scripture* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1955), 24.

- the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth” (Gen 42:16).
5. Moses commanded that false prophets be tested on the grounds that “if what a prophet proclaims . . . does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken” (Deut 18:22). This too implies correspondence to reality is what is meant by “true.”
 6. The prayer that Solomon prays at the dedication of the temple entails a correspondence view of truth: “And now, O God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father (that there would be a temple) come true” (1 Kgs 8:26).
 7. The prophecies of Micaiah were considered “true” and the false prophets’ false words “lies” because the former corresponded with the facts of reality (1 Kgs 22:16-22).
 8. According to the psalmist, something was considered a “falsehood” if it did not correspond to God’s law (truth) (Ps 119:163).
 9. Proverbs states, “A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful” (14:25), which implies that truth is factually correct.
 10. Nebuchadnezzar demanded of his wise men to know the facts and he considered anything else “misleading” (Dan 2:9).
 11. Jesus’ statement in John 5:33 entails a correspondence view of truth: “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth.”
 12. In Acts 24, Paul says, “By examining him you yourself will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him” (24:8). They continued, “You can easily verify [the facts]” (24:11).
 13. Paul clearly implies a correspondence view of truth when he writes, “Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor” (Eph 4:25).
 14. The biblical use of the word “err” supports a correspondence view of truth, since it is used of unintentional “errors” (cf. Lev 4:2, 27). Certain acts were wrong, whether the trespassers intended to commit them or not, and hence a guilt offering was called for to atone for their “error.”

Truth as Correspondence in Everyday Discourse. Everyday usage of the term truth also implies correspondence with the facts. Consider these phrases: “That’s not true,” or “Tell me the truth,” or “Don’t hide the truth from me.” These all imply a correspondence view of truth. This is supported by *Webster’s Dictionary’s* definition of “truth,” which is based on ordinary usage of the word.¹⁸ The very first definition of “truth” regarding an utterance is:

¹⁸See *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1985). Of course, truth can also be used in the sense of fidelity or trust, but we use truth statements because they correspond with the facts, not the reverse.

“(1) the state of being the case: FACT.” Likewise, under “true,” Webster says, “(1): being in accordance with the actual state of affairs. (2) conformable to an essential reality.” Certainly, we do not accept as true something simply because one intended it to be true. A trusted friend, with all good intentions, may give us false directions, but we still consider the directions false because they did not correspond with the facts. Neither sincerity nor good intentions are sufficient to determine truth. The truth is that people can be sincerely wrong.

Truth as Correspondence in the Courts. Likewise, no court in the land would accept as truth anything but what corresponds to the facts. Swearing to tell the expedient, the whole expedient, and nothing but the expedient, so help me future experience would never be accepted by a judge or jury. Only “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” is accepted because only it corresponds to reality. It does not matter whether one replaces the word “expedient” with the words “relevant,” or “well-intended,” or “personally satisfying,” or “what feels good,” it would still not be acceptable by the general public or our legal institutions as “true.” The correspondence view of truth is nearly universally understood in common discourse as what is meant by truth.

Truth as Correspondence According to Great Philosophers. Many great philosophers also defined truth as correspondence to reality. Consider the following:

- Aristotle (4th century B.C.). Aristotle writes, “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while *to say of what is that it is*, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is or that it is not, will say either what is true of what is false”¹⁹ In short, truth is telling it like it is, and falsity is not telling like it is.
- Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). In his work on *Truth, Freedom, and Evil*, Anselm defines truth as follows: “All I know is that when a *proposition signifies* that what is the case *is the case*, then it is true and there is truth in it.”²⁰ In short, truth is what corresponds to “what is the case” or what “exists.”
- Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). According to Aquinas, “Truth is defined by the *conformity* of intellect and thing; and hence to know this *conformity* is to know truth.”²¹ Elsewhere he adds, “For all understanding is achieved by way of some assimilation of the knower to the thing known—a harmony we call the *matching* of understand-

¹⁹Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.7.1011b 25-30. Emphasis added.

²⁰St. Anselm, *Truth, Freedom, and Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). See chapter two.

²¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.16.2.

ing and thing.”²² So the notion of truth is “first found in understanding . . . which *corresponds to* the thing and can be expected *to match* it.”²³

- Mortimer Adler (1902-2001). General Editor of the Great Books series, Mortimer Adler, also defines truth as correspondence. He affirms that “the truth of thought consists in *the agreement or correspondence* between what one thinks, believes, or opines and what actually exists or does not exist in reality that is independent of our minds.”²⁴

Truth as Correspondence is Undeniable. Finally, not only is the correspondence view of truth used in the Bible, in everyday speech, in the courts, and by great philosophers, it is undeniable. The statement, “Truth is not telling it like it is,” itself claims to be telling it like it is. The very claim, “Truth is not what corresponds to reality,” itself makes an implicit claim that it corresponds to reality. Truth is found in expressions or propositions, not in persons. We say someone is a “truthful person” only because he tells the truth. Jesus was the “truth” (Jn 14:6) because he not only always told the truth but because he perfectly expressed or corresponded to the father (Jn 1:14; 14:9). Thus, “personal truth” is a misnomer. There are truths about persons and truths from persons, but contrary to Emil Brunner and other Neo-orthodox thinkers, there are no personal truths.²⁵ If it is true, then it is an accurate proposition or expression about reality. Neither is it proper to speak of truth being “based” in personal relations as some do. Personal relations are subjective, and truth is made based in the subject. Truth is a statement or expression about what is objective. The *appeal* and acceptability of truth can be enhanced by loving relations and we are exhorted to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), but the *nature* of truth is not personal.

Truth as Absolute. Truth is not only correspondence with reality, but it is objective and absolute. By that is meant that a true statement is true for everyone, everywhere, and always. A true statement does not change. The truth of a statement remains the same, if it is one which corresponds with its object. Of course, the object may change, but when it does the previous statement was not false when it was made. The new (and different) statement is true only if it corresponds with the new object or reality. As Aristotle noted, “Statements and beliefs . . . themselves remain complete unchangeable in every way; it is because the actual thing changes that the contrary come to belong to them. For the statement that somebody is sitting remains the same; it is because of change in the actual thing that it comes to be true at one time and false at another time [e.g., when he stands up].”²⁶ In short,

²²Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Truth*, 1.1.

²³Ibid., 1.3. Emphasis added.

²⁴Mortimer J. Adler, *Six Great Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), 34. Emphasis added.

²⁵Cf. Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946).

²⁶Aristotle, *Categories*, 5 4a35-4b12.

truth statements do not change, but a new statement about a new state of affairs can be contradictory to another statement about it at another time. So-called relative truths seem to be such only because of confusion. For example, “I feel warm” and “you feel cold” in the same room at the same temperature. But these are first of all statements about different feelings and about different persons. But if “the temperature in the room is 70 degrees Fahrenheit,” then that is objectively true no matter how different people feel in that same room at the same time.

Truth does not change with the times since each true statement corresponds to a given object at a given time and place. A true statement (made about a given object at a given time) is true for all time and in all places. For example, the statement that “There is ice at the South Pole (right now)” is objectively and absolutely true no matter who or where it is made or by whom. A true statement is true at all times, everywhere, and in all places. So, all true statements about the universe are absolute since they are about something at a given time and place. Thus, they are objectively true for everyone.

2. To Defend the Exclusivistic Nature of Truth

Once truth is defined as correspondence and known to be objective or absolute, we can address the pluralistic objection of postmodern thought, namely, can opposing views both be truth? The answer to this is easy, since the undeniable law of non-contradiction demands that opposites cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. In short, the opposite of true cannot be true. It must be false.

It is important to note in this connection that Aristotle did not invent this logic, nor is it a uniquely “Western” logic. Even in Hindu refrigerators there cannot both be a bottle of milk and not be a bottle of milk at the same time in the same sense. Even the Zen Buddhist who insists that ultimate reality—the Tao—goes beyond logic (i.e., beyond the law of non-contradiction) does not believe that the Tao is the same as the non-Tao. Nor if Taoism or Zen Buddhism claims to be true, do they believe that the opposite of their view is also true. The law of non-contradiction transcends geography and culture. It applies to all reality. To claim that “logic does not apply to reality” applies logic to that reality in that very statement.

The famous Muslim philosopher Avicenna had a sure-fire way to demonstrate the law of non-contradiction. He insisted that anyone who denies it should be beaten and burned until he agrees that to be beaten is not the same as not to be beaten, and to be burned is not the same as not to be burned! Actually, there is a more philosophical way to demonstrate the validity of the law of non-contradiction. It is to show that it is undeniable, for any attempt to deny that the opposite of true is false assumes that the opposite of that statement is not true but false. One has to use the law on non-contradiction to affirm it and also to deny it. It is literally inescapable for all rational beings.

The implications for pluralism are fatal. If the opposite of true is false, and if there are opposing truth claims in various religions, then all

religions cannot be true. While this could be done with any religion, the several crucial doctrines in the top two religions illustrate the point:

Islam Affirms	Christianity Affirms
God is only one Person	God is not only one Person (He is three)
Jesus is only Human	Jesus is not only human (He is also God)
Jesus did not die on the Cross	Jesus did die on the Cross
Jesus did not rise three days later	Jesus did rise three days later
Salvation is not by Faith Alone	Salvation is by Faith Alone
The Quran is God's Word	The Quran is not God's Word
The Bible is Corrupted	The Bible is not Corrupted

It is clear that if Islam is right on any or all of these, then Christianity is wrong on them. They are opposites, and opposites cannot both be true. Since these are crucial doctrines, then if the Islamic view is true, then the Christian view is false. Further, if the Christian view is true, then the Islamic view is false. Both religions cannot be true on these essential doctrines (and on many more).

Pluralists often use the parable of the six blind men and an elephant to make their point. One blind man feeling the ear of the elephant says it is a fan. Another who touches the elephant's side affirms that it is a wall. Still another, holding the tail thinks it is a robe. The one with his arms around a leg believes it is a tree. Still another blind man, feeling the end of the tusk, is convinced that it is a spear. And the last blind man who has a hold of the trunk is sure it is a large snake. So, we are told that all religions are true but that each one sees thing a little differently. The problem with the parable for the pluralist is that it actually illustrates just the opposite, namely, the exclusivist view. For all these blind men were wrong; none had the truth. The only one with the truth, the exclusive truth, was the man telling the parable who alone knew the absolute truth, namely, that it was an elephant! All the rest were blind to the truth.

3. To Defend the Credibility of Miracles

Finally, Christianity is a supernatural religion. At the heart of the gospel is a supernatural event—the bodily resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:1-6;

Rom 10:9). Without miracles, Christianity is false and futile. As the apostle Paul puts it, if Christ did not rise from the dead, then “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). But strong arguments have been posed against miracles.

David Hume offers perhaps the best and most enduring argument against miracles. He argued that 1) a natural law is by definition a regular event, 2) a miracle by definition is a rare event, 3) but the evidence for the regular is always greater than the evidence for the rare, 4) a wise person should always base his belief on the greater evidence, and therefore 5) a wise person should never believe in miracles. It should be noted that this is a valid argument. That is, if the premises are true, then so is the conclusion. Stated this way, the false premise is number three, which states that “the evidence for the regular is always greater than the evidence for the rare.” This is a false premise for many reasons. If true, then one should not believe an improbable event did happen, even if it did happen. Clearly, there is something wrong with a method that says you should not believe in a fact, even if it has occurred.

Hume’s argument also confuses probability and evidence. Just because it is improbable that it *would* happen, based on past regular experience, does not mean that this improbability should override actual evidence that it *did* occur. There are several counter-examples from Hume’s own naturalistic worldview.

1. First, Big Bang cosmology shows that the origin of the space-time universe is a rare event, but nevertheless the evidence is so strong that it has convinced most astrophysicists. One agnostic scientist, Robert Jastrow, puts it this way: “Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world.”²⁷ He adds, “The scientist’s pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation. . . . This is an exceedingly strange development, unexpected by all but theologians. They have always accepted the word of the Bible: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’”²⁸
2. Second, all anti-supernaturalist scientists believe in the spontaneous generation of first life somewhere in the universe, and so far as we know, it is not being repeated regularly (or at all) in the present.
3. Third, the same is true of macro-evolution. It is a one-time past occurrence that is not being repeated in the present. Yet some evolutionists are so convinced that it has occurred that they even call it a “fact.”²⁹

²⁷Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 14.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 115.

²⁹Carl Sagan said clearly, “Evolution is a fact, not a theory” (*Cosmos* [New York: Random House, 1980], 27).

In short, Hume's anti-miracles argument collapses because there is good evidence that some things occur in spite of their rarity.

The simple fact of the matter is that if God exists, then miracles are possible since the biggest miracle of all (creation) has already occurred. Former atheist, C. S. Lewis wisely observed that "if we admit God, must we admit Miracle? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain."³⁰ Actually, to prove miracles are impossible, one would have to prove that it is impossible that God existed. Few have ever tried this, and no one has ever succeeded.³¹ In fact, the evidence has been mounting that God does exist. Even agnostic astronomer Jastrow says, "That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact."³² This means that the foundations of anti-supernaturalism have crumbled. With it, the third pillar of postmodernism is gone.

Summary and Conclusion

The problem facing the evangelical church today is that we are proclaiming a premodern truth in these postmodern times. This is true in three crucial areas: absolutism, exclusivism, and supernaturalism. Evangelicals believe in absolute truth. We also hold that Christianity is exclusively true, and that the gospel involves a supernatural act in the physical resurrection of Christ. The problem is that the postmodern culture is relativistic, pluralistic, and naturalistic. Thus, we are preaching an absolutistic message in a relativistic age, an exclusivistic message in pluralistic times, and we are affirming a supernatural message in a naturalistic era.

How, then, shall we preach? As Francis Schaeffer taught us a generation ago, we must do pre-evangelism before we can do evangelism, for it makes no sense to speak to people about the Word of God if they do not believe there is a God who can speak a Word. Nor is it a meaningful exercise to talk about the Son of God unless there is a God who has a Son. And it makes no sense to proclaim that there are supernatural acts of God (like the resurrection of Christ) unless there is a supernatural being who can act. In short, we must preach apologetically. Otherwise, we need to apologize for our preaching. C. S. Lewis states this need when he says, "To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered."³³

³⁰C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 109.

³¹See Norman L. Geisler. "God, Alleged Disproofs of," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 275.

³²See "A Scientist Caught Between Two Faiths: Interview with Robert Jastrow," *Christianity Today* (6 August 1982).

³³C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 50. In "Christian Apologetics," Lewis adds that "a century ago our task was to edify those who had been

Encountering Culture in Light of The Book of Daniel¹

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Introduction

In this reflection, I want to examine how four Hebrew children responded to a culture change that they had no idea was coming. Let us see if we can learn something about how we as followers of Christ should respond to the cultural circumstances in which we find ourselves. In 1951, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote his now famous book, *Christ and Culture*. Toward the end of that book, he said the following:

Our examination of the typical answers Christians have given to their enduring problem is unconcluded and inconclusive. It could be indefinitely extended. The study could be brought more nearly up to date in a consideration of manifold essays on the theme which theologians, historians, poets, and philosophers have published in recent years for the enlightenment and sometimes to the confusion of their fellow citizens and fellow Christians. . . . Yet it must be evident that neither extension nor refinement of study could bring us to the conclusive result that would enable us to say, "This is the Christian answer."²

Niebuhr's lack of confidence that his own conclusions were final and his lack of confidence that any real answers would be determined in the future seem to have been the way of theologians in those days, and yet the present circumstance would suggest that this mindset is still a problem.

Probably my favorite single work on the subject of culture itself is a book entitled *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* by Roger Scruton. In his fascinating study, Scruton says the following in his attempt to answer the question, "What is culture?" He writes,

The concept of culture leapt fully armed from the head of Johann

¹Adapted from an address delivered at the Sola Scriptura or Sola Cultura? Conference held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 14-15, 2011.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 230-31.

Gottfried Herder in the mid-eighteenth century, and has been embroiled in battles ever since. *Kultur*, for Herder, is the life-blood of a people, the flow of moral energy that holds society intact. *Zivilisation*, by contrast, is the veneer of manners, law, and technical know-how. Nations may share a civilization; but they will always be distinct in their culture, since culture defines what they are.³

In another definition, Scruton says, “A culture is defined as something separate—an island of ‘we’ in the ocean of ‘they.’”⁴

Some culture is of course healthy. Other aspects of culture are not healthy. There is a discussion of culture that I could not resist sharing found in a book entitled *Managing Cultural Differences*.⁵ The authors give us a fascinating vignette and a concocted story that conveys something of the weakness of American culture. I found their definition irresistible and only too true. They show that not all aspects of your culture are healthy. They imagine the following scenario:

The Americans and Japanese decided to engage in a competitive boat race. Both teams practiced hard and long to reach their peak performance. On the big day they both felt ready. The Japanese won by a *mile*. Afterward, the American team was discouraged by the loss. Morale sagged. Corporate management decided that the reason for the crushing defeat had to be found, so a consulting firm was hired to investigate the problem and recommend corrective action. The consultant’s findings: The Japanese team had eight people rowing and one person steering; the American team had one person rowing and eight people steering. After a year of study and millions spent analyzing the problem, the consulting firm concluded that too many people were steering and not enough were rowing on the American team. So, as race day neared again the following year, the American team’s management structure was completely reorganized. The new structure: four steering managers, three area steering managers, one staff steering manager, and a new performance review system for the person rowing the boat to provide work incentive. That year the Japanese won by *two miles*. Humiliated, the American corporation laid off the rower for poor performance and gave the managers a bonus for discovering the problem.⁶

³Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2000), 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 3.

⁵Robert T. Moran, Philip R. Harris, and Sarah V. Moran, eds., *Managing Cultural Edition: Leadership Skills and Strategies for Working in a Global World* (Burlington, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2011).

⁶*Ibid.*, 33.

Now it seems to me that this imagined scenario would be enough to tell you that American culture is oftentimes over organized and would be Exhibit A of the fact that sometimes culture is helpful and at other times it is not.

Another of my favorite books was written by a Quaker philosopher by the name of Elton Trueblood. He had a couple of books that came out about the same time. One of them is called *The Incendiary Fellowship*, and one of them is called the *Company of the Committed*.⁷ I warmly recommend both of those books to you even though they were written in the late sixties, because they are pregnant with insight. They oftentimes have some conclusions with which I would hope you would *not* be sympathetic, but nevertheless, Trueblood had some marvelous insights. He speaks of some of the problems that the Christian church faces in its dilemma that is imposed on the people of God. Trueblood says in *Incendiary Fellowship*, "For example, there are cities in which the Y.M.C.A. is urged to drop the word 'Christian' from its name, and at least one financial drive has failed because of refusal to do so."⁸ He also says,

It is important to note that the chief pressure has not come from Jews, but from those whose religious expression is a vague goodwill. The resistance is not specifically to Christianity but to anything which has the sharpness of outline. Before Christians succumb to such pressures they are wise to note that there is no cutting edge that is not narrow. There is no likelihood whatever that Christianity could have won in the ancient world as a religion in general. It survived very largely because it accepted a scandal of particularity. It could not have survived had it not been sufficiently definite to be counted worthy of persecution. . . . A tolerant pantheism, which is at the real core of some of the self-styled new theology, will never be persecuted because most people will never oppose anything so vague. What people oppose is the conviction that God really is, that Christ was telling the truth when he said, 'No one comes to the Father, but by me' (Jn 14:6), and that God's purpose involves moral distinctions. People naturally resist the conception of an objective moral order, finding it far more comfortable to suppose that all moral laws have only subjective reference and can therefore be neglected with impunity. We are missing the point terribly if we do not see that a faith which is as definite as the Gospel of Christ is now and

⁷See David Elton Trueblood, *The Incendiary Fellowship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); and David Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

⁸Trueblood, *Incendiary Fellowship*, 24. You can tell how long ago that was written, because nobody knows anymore that the YMCA once had the Christian name associated with it.

always will be a stone of stumbling and an occasion of offense. Because the sharp line is never popular, we are foolish to expect it to be so. Those who try to follow the narrow way must expect to be part of the minority all of their lives.”⁹

Encountering Culture in Light of the Book of Daniel

This is perhaps sufficient to help us understand that we must *encounter* culture and not simply dig a hole and hide. So, I want to take you to the book of Daniel, particularly the first three chapters. The discussion of this biblical book will serve as the exegetical foundation of our study of culture. We will seek to learn from the four Hebrew children how effectively to encounter our culture.

Now let me set the stage for you by stirring up your pure minds by way of remembrance. Things were decaying rapidly in Judah, when in 605 BC King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians made his way across the Fertile Crescent into the area of Judah. On the way, he had a conflict that changed the course of the ages in many ways. So, in 605 BC, the famous battle of Carchemish was fought in which Pharaoh Neco was defeated and sent hurrying back to Egypt. In a very real way that meant the end of the Egyptian empire. It never has risen to greatness from that day until this day. Even in Roman times, still, it was Roman Egypt and not really Egypt. Consequently, that was the end of one great civilization. Judah was rebellious also and so Nebuchadnezzar came and surrounded the city of Jerusalem. The end effect of this was that the king of Jerusalem and Judah wisely decided not to make a fight of it, because he was out-gunned considerably, even if that expression is a bit anachronistic. They succumbed and surrendered, and Nebuchadnezzar took with him to Babylon some of the Hebrew children. Judah rebelled again in 598 BC. Nebuchadnezzar returned and once again there was a capitulation. This time Ezekiel was taken and sat at the river Chebar (a man-made canal connecting the Tigris and Euphrates rivers together). There we have the writing of our book Ezekiel. Judah rebelled again in 586 BC, and Nebuchadnezzar returned this time with a vengeance. This time Jerusalem falls and is razed to the ground. The people are taken away in captivity, leaving behind only our biblical prophet Jeremiah and a few of the jetsam and flotsam of the country, the poorest farmers. These few were so frightened that they decided to go to Egypt. Jeremiah resisted this move but was not given a choice and was taken against his will into Egypt.

Now, in the meantime, the Hebrew children that were taken into Babylon found themselves pressed into service to the King of Babylon. We read this story in chapters 1-3 of Daniel, and to some degree even to chapter 6. What happened to these Hebrew children is that they were pressed into a regimen of learning all that the Babylonians needed to learn in order to be-

⁹Ibid., 24-25.

come skillful leaders among the high ranking people of the empire.

The question arises, “How exactly did Daniel and his friends respond to this?” Several things apparently happen to them. First of all, they are removed from a land where they are familiar with all things and where they have their own cultural understandings and placed into a very strange place and a very unusual country in a land that is not sympathetic at all to all that they had held to be holy and true. As if that were not enough, you recall that their names are changed. Every one of their names is changed when they are pressed into service of the Babylonians: “To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego” (Dan 1:7-8).¹⁰ All four of the Hebrew children have the name of the Hebrew God in their name: Daniel, “God is my Judge,” or Azariah, the “ah” being the first syllable of the personal name of God, Yahweh, and so forth. We are unsure of the exact translation into the tongue of the Chaldeans, but apparently what happened is that the name of their God is taken out of their names and substituted with the names of Babylonian deities. Part of the brainwashing effort is to get them to think Babylonian deities rather than what were considered to be the localized deities of the land of Canaan. As if that was not enough, they were likely made eunuchs upon being pressed into the service of Babylon.¹¹

Now it is difficult to imagine how things could be any worse than this in the transfer from one culture to another. Apparently there is every effort to make matters as difficult as possible for them to transfer their whole way of thinking and their whole life of commitment to the true God of Israel and to his morality. How are they going to respond? I want you to notice in the text four things that they did that I believe will help us respond to our own culture today.

Appropriate the Wisdom of the Host Culture

First, these four Hebrews appropriated the wisdom of the host culture. Sometimes we might be surprised by that when we tend to be totally negative toward our culture or any other culture, but in fact, they did appropriate the wisdom of that culture. In Dan 1:4, they are to take “young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.” The language and the literature of the Chaldeans would

¹⁰Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New King James Version (NKJV).

¹¹Scholars are divided over this issue, but my pastor, Dr. Criswell, for many years at First Baptist Church Dallas was never divided in his mind about it; as far as he was concerned and many scholars also, Daniel and his companions were made eunuchs during their captivity. There is some evidence for this conclusion: First of all, there is no mention ever of any families for Daniel, Hananiah, or Mishael. Second, you will notice that they are placed in the keeping of the chief of the eunuchs, and he is in charge of all that is going to happen. Thus, it appears probable that they were made to be eunuchs upon this pressing into the service of Babylon.

not essentially be immoral. It would be the language and the literature of a people, so there was no harm in doing that. We pick up this element again and the same thing seems to be declared in 1:17, where it says, “And these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all the literature and the wisdom; and Daniel also had understanding in visions and dreams.” That last statement in the verse is critical to giving him persuasive powers in a particular culture that might have been less important in Israel or in Judah but became of paramount importance as we shall see as the chapters go by in Daniel.

So the first thing that Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael do, by whatever name, is they become excellent students of the wisdom and the culture of the Chaldean empire. We must do the same. We cannot afford the posture that says we are going to stand at arm’s length from anything that is cultural and we are not going to have anything to do with it. Too many times, that is exactly what we are doing in church today. For example, very few in the church make themselves aware of the fine arts, or continue to study the value of good music, and instead, we have substituted in the church of God that which comes from the popular rather than that which comes from a permanent and valuable part of culture. That is not a mistake that the Hebrew children make. Rather, they appropriate the wisdom of the host culture.

Avoid Theological, Moral, and Spiritual Compromise

Second, in the process of appropriating this cultural wisdom, they vigorously avoid theological, moral, and spiritual compromise. Look at Dan 1:8: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine that he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” I love that expression. Daniel “purposed in his heart” to resist the compromises that are a part of any culture that are not godly, wholesome, nor healthy. It will require a purpose of heart to follow the ways that we have learned of the Lord; to be faithful to his biblical revelation and to the lordship of Christ. So, while they appropriated the *wisdom* of the host culture, they *avoided* theological, moral, and spiritual compromise.

Acknowledge Your Need of God’s Intervention

Third, they acknowledged their need of the intervention of God. Here they are, learning the host culture. They have a purpose in their heart that they will not defile themselves with that part of it that is unwholesome, unhealthy, and ungodly, but they do recognize that they are helpless to do this within their own power. They realize that they must seek the Lord for themselves. Look at Dan 2:17-18: “Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek the mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish the rest of the wise men of Babylon.” Now you recall what has happened. Nebuchadnezzar is suspi-

cious of the wisdom of his academy. He suspects that his wise men might not be so wise, so he says, “Look, I’ve had a dream. Tell me what it means.” No problem, Oh King. What was the dream? No, explain the dream itself, and then tell me what it means. Well, nobody in all of history has been asked to do a thing like that! How could we possibly know what you’ve dreamed? Well, you’re supposed to be *wise* men.

It is interesting to study what these wise men are called. In Dan 2:2, “the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.” When you read that in our present context, you might immediately think of “suspicion,” and some sort of “Hocus Pocus,” and all kinds of things that were probably not a part of those original words. These are the words in the Hebrew text: מִיִּמְטָרִים (“magicians”), מִיִּפְשָׁא (“astrologers”), מִיִּפְשָׁב (“sorcerers”), and מִיִּדְשָׁב (“Chaldeans”). We do not know the exact definition of these terms, and they are perhaps properly translated as “magicians,” “astrologers,” “sorcerers,” and “Chaldeans.” Nevertheless, one author has suggested that they are actually levels of academic achievement in the Babylonian empire. It would be too much to press this, but it might be that you would see the magicians as the high school graduates, the astrologers as the bachelor degree graduates, the sorcerers as the master degree graduates, and the Chaldeans, unquestionably the highest of educational attainment, would be the PhD graduates. You should not necessarily press these definitions, because there is no question that a certain amount of mysticism, fortune telling, star-gazing, sorcery, and astrology was definitely involved in what they were doing. But it is also true that this represents the intelligentsia of the Chaldean empire, and that is what Daniel and his friends were being trained to be a part of; to be a part of the intelligentsia of the Babylonian empire.

Now, “You’re supposed to be so intelligent,” the King says, “just tell me the dream and then give me its interpretation; and if you don’t do it, it will be your final act; and I will see to it that you no longer deceive people.” Daniel quickly realizes that this is a serious situation. The four Hebrew children are now included in that group, and they too will lose their lives. Here, therefore, as in every other situation, they must have the intervention of God. Daniel does a wise thing. He tells Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael what has happened so that “they might seek the mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret” (Dan 2:18). We are not always going to know in every situation presented to us by culture exactly what is good and what is not. We often have to make decisions about that which is not quite clear. These decisions will be neither black nor white but will be in the gray zone. The central thing that we need to understand in responding to these situations as the church of God is that we dare not proceed on our own recognizance. We must seek the face of God, and the four wisest men in all of Babylon do exactly that. They come before God.

Accentuate the Superiority of God's Ways

Finally, not only did they appropriate the wisdom of the host culture, avoid theological, moral, and spiritual compromise, and acknowledge their need of God, but they then accentuated the superiority of God's ways; and they did it openly and to anybody who might hear them. Listen to Dan 2:19-23:

Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness and light dwells with Him. I Thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand.

So, as you face the eccentricities of the cultural circumstances, some of you will face those continually here. Others of you will be on a mission field somewhere, and like the Hebrew children you will find yourself in the midst of a strange culture. Appropriate every bit of its wisdom including the language, the *lingua franca* of the area. Having appropriated that knowledge and wisdom, avoid the theological, moral, and spiritual compromises that will be there, acknowledge your need of the intervention of God, and then accentuate the superiority of God's ways.

The Active Response of the Hebrew Children

Well, how exactly did this play itself out? What actions can we see from these Hebrew children as all of this develops?

They Interceded for Their Captors

First of all, they demonstrated mercy toward those that were deceived by interceding for them. Look in Dan 2:24: "Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: 'Four of us know the secret, *butcher the rest of them*, and we'll live.'" Thank goodness that they were not Irish Texans. That is what I would likely have done. I would have said, "Now they got smoked out in the open, they had it coming." But, you know, that would not be godly would it? They did the godly thing. Look what they do. Daniel said to Arioch, "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation" (Dan 2:24). The first thing he does is to intercede for the very people who have been involved in the deception. Do you know that above all else, *that* is the obligation we have to the cultures in which we

find ourselves? Intercession on their behalf. After all, every member of every culture is a man or a woman for whom Christ died. However much deceived they may be, even if they are an active part of the deception themselves, it behooves us to do exactly and precisely what Daniel and his friends did, and that is to intercede on behalf of those who have been deceived.

They Assessed the Limitations of the Culture

Not only did they intercede, but they also candidly assessed the limitations of that culture. In Dan 2:27, we are told, “Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, ‘The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king.’” There are grave limitations in any culture no matter what it may be. There is a glass ceiling for the comprehension of any culture minus the revelation of God.

In Scruton’s book, he has a fascinating chapter entitled “Yoofanasia” that deals with youth and culture. Scruton says, “It must by now be apparent that high culture in our time cannot be understood if we ignore the popular culture which roars all around it. This popular culture is pre-eminently a culture of youth. There is an important reason for this, and my purpose in this chapter is to bring this reason to light—to show why it is that youth and the culture of youth have become so visible, in the world after faith.”¹² He continues, “Among youth, as we know it from our modern cities, a new human type is emerging. It has its own language, its own customs, its own territory and its own self-contained economy. It also has its own culture—a culture which is largely indifferent to traditional boundaries, and traditional loyalties, and traditional forms of learning. Youth culture is a global force, propagated through media which acknowledges neither locality nor sovereignty in their easy-going capture of the airways: ‘one world, one music,’ in the slogan adopted by MTV, a channel which assembles the words, images, and sounds that are the *lingua franca* of modern adolescents.”¹³ He goes on,

Pop culture is the spontaneous response to this situation—an attempt to provide easy-going forms of social cohesion, without the costly rites of passage that bring moral and emotional knowledge. It is a culture which has demoted the aesthetic object, and elevated the advert in its place; it has replaced imagination with fantasy and feeling by kitsch; and it has destroyed the old forms of music and dancing, so as to replace them with a repetitious noise, whose invariant harmonic and rhythmic textures sound all about us, replacing the dialect of tribe with the grammarless murmur of the species, and drowning out the unconfident stutterings of the fathers as they trudge away toward extinction.¹⁴

¹²Scruton, *Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture*, 105.

¹³Ibid., 105.

¹⁴Ibid., 121.

Needless to say, Scruton does not have a real high view of modern youth culture and is perhaps a bit overboard, but not too much in his ultimate assessment. Now, Daniel and his friends did not hesitate to say that there are serious limitations. The present situation in which they cannot determine the dream of the king nor interpret it only bears ample testimony to the limitations of the Babylonian culture.

They Boldly Affirmed the Adequacy of God

They did one more thing: They boldly affirm the adequacy of God in a courage borne of faith. Though the Babylonians had failed, Daniel says, “But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these” (Dan 2:28). Daniel then outlines the dream and gives the interpretation thereof. Notice what he says there, “There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets.” This statement makes an absolute claim for revelation. God opens what cannot be known to man by simple investigation, and through divine revelation, he makes himself known.¹⁵ Those kinds of things are repeated in Dan 3:16-17, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are about to encounter a fearful heat wave. They are called to give an account to Nebuchadnezzar, and they say to him, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (3:16-17). Their words and actions exhibit a holy boldness in that culture. Yes, they appropriated all that could be known in the culture, but they were not afraid to stand against that which was unholy and ungodly.

¹⁵One of my favorite stories of history concerns a people that many of you will not have heard about. They were called the Karaite Jews. The Karaite Jews still exist today. There are not many of them, about 5,000 worldwide, and most of them live in the Holy Land. At one time during the middle ages, the Karaite Jews represented about forty percent of all Judaism, and were especially prominent in Spain. I like the Karaite Jews because they were famous for their rejection of the Rabbinate. They did not believe that the work of the Rabbis carried the same weight as Holy Scripture. They accepted the concept later formulated as *Sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone in faith and practice. Just this year a new book has been issued by the Karaite Judaistic society in New York. In describing their position, they say, “A central tenet of our religion is the belief that Yahweh is concerned about creation. Yahweh was not content to establish creation, stand back and observe it from afar. He is intimately involved with and concerned about the world he has invested so much of himself in. The Torah is the ultimate expression of Yahweh’s concern for his creation. Through it, Yahweh has reached out to us from beyond the gap of our incomprehension to communicate his will in a concrete and unambiguous manner.” One thing I would do is to add the New Testament to this statement, but the fact is that in their commitment to God’s revelation in the Torah, the Karaite Jews have it right. Cf. Paige Patterson, review of *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding*, by Fred Astren, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 241-42.

A Concluding Challenge

In the book of Daniel, we see how the Hebrew children reacted and responded to their culture. What we actually have is testimony after testimony in the book to the recognized superiority of those who worship the God of Israel. The community looks at them and cannot help but acknowledge their superiority. In Dan 5:11ff, we find this conclusion. Belshazzar's feast is underway in chapter five, and no one can read the writing that has been written on the wall.¹⁶ Here, once again, the wisdom of the host culture plays out. But, the queen has a memory, and she says, "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation" (Dan 5:11-12). By that time, the culture had raged on, but everybody knew that in a desperate situation, you had better call Daniel. He was the one who had the obvious wisdom and anointing of God.

In his *Company of the Committed*, Trueblood recounts, "When the great Timothy Dwight took over the presidency of Yale college not one student would admit publicly faith in Christ. When Dwight ended his presidency twenty-two years later, in 1817, the entire intellectual climate of the college had changed: it changed because Dwight did something about it."¹⁷ I conclude by challenging you neither to sit back in constant criticism of the culture nor to imbibe it uncritically, but rather, to commit yourself as Timothy Dwight did, to change the culture on behalf of the Lord God, and to make it different forever.

¹⁶For many years among scholars, the figure of Belshazzar was thought to be a part of Hebrew mythology, because he did not occur in any of the Babylonian records. In any university in the world today, if a matter is mentioned only in Scripture, then it can't be true, it must be Hebrew mythology. That's almost a given. That was still the case until some nosy archeologists began to uncover ancient Babylon, and when they did, they found inscriptions in the wall of Babylon, and Belshazzar showed up. In fact, this discovery clarified some things, because as it turns out, Belshazzar was never actually the King. You see, there is a wonderful expression here, when Daniel is told that if he can read the "handwriting on the wall," Belshazzar says that he would make him "third ruler in the land." Now, Daniel, don't buy it. If you're going to read it, it has to be number two, not number three. Belshazzar could not give him number two, because he was number two. It works out that Nabonidus was the actual King, but he was a scholar King and he was particularly an archeologist and he was off digging in an archeological ruin at that very time when Belshazzar's feast occurred and the fall of Babylon to Cyrus.

¹⁷Trueblood, *Company of the Committed*, 6.

Scriptura or Cultura: Is There a Sola In There?

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We live in a period of transition, on the borderline between a paradigm that no longer satisfies and one that is, to a large extent, still amorphous and opaque A crucial notion in this regard [i.e., the emerging paradigm of a postmodern theology or missiology] will be that of creative tension: it is only within the force field of apparent opposites that we shall begin to approximate a way of theologizing for our own time in a meaningful way.¹

We are under great pressure to adapt the Gospel to its cultural surroundings. While there is a legitimate concern for contextualization, what most often happens in these cases is an outright capitulation of the Gospel to the principles of that culture.²

Introduction

When societies, cultures, and civilizations collide in eras of escalating chaotic change on a clearly globalized scale, then confusion and doubt to some extent arise as humanity feels for a way forward. Twenty years ago, David J. Bosch spoke to the tensions that would be the path of missions future. What Bosch called a “creative tension” has now become a bold instability that threatens the core of biblically defined faith and has shifted balance to the predispositions of a secular and ever secularizing mix of cultures that are dominant in the processes of gospel contextualization.

In more recent years, Edward Rommen observes the shift and calls it “outright capitulation.” When Bosch and others parsed out the truth crises at the end of the twentieth century, Bosch advocated a moderating point between the polar pulls of absolutism, on the one hand, and relativism on the

¹David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 366–67.

²Edward Rommen, *Get Real: On Evangelism in the Late Modern World* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 182n371.

other.³ He expressed concern over the potential of “an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual and often mutually exclusive theologies. This danger—the danger of relativism—is present.”⁴

Such tense balance, now slipped over into imbalance, gives human experiences and contexts priority when discerning whether the Bible or culture should hold sway over our faith and practice. Herein lay the need for a reflection on the relationship between culture and Scripture. At present, it seems, *sola cultura* holds sway. Yet, we ask, how can one move back to the Reformation’s now distant echo of *sola scriptura* and regain the prophetic and countercultural voice of scripture that led Luther and others to throw off the yoke of rival truth systems? Or should believers in this postmodern world even wish to try? The aims of this article are to describe the tensions between text and culture, explain how the role of culture has come to have sway in the conversation, and to propose a set of biblical principles to take the lead in the contextualization dance between text and context. The latter is done against the backdrop of an anthropological model for understanding religious and social change dynamics and notes future trajectories that appear available to evangelicals in general and Southern Baptists in particular.

Text-Context Tensions in Doing Theology

It is hard to imagine the degree to which the rush of postmodern thought engulfs us with radically different modes or frameworks for thought, consequently altering the collective Western mind. Who would have thought that barely a generation ago words and syntax of speech were so vastly different and would change so quickly? Now “bad” means “good” (thanks to Michael Jackson), “good” means “bad” (thanks to Madonna), and “friend” is a verb (thanks to Facebook)!

Syntax changes reflect shifts of thought processes, and these both expose and reshape core philosophical and worldview thought simultaneously. Such dynamic processes converge and challenge or alter theological reflection and assumptions because they do not happen in a vacuum. Shifts rework our systemic thought to such an extent that now a horizontal rather than a vertical direction for revelation transpires. Does God speak to humans and consequently they are to be “doers of the Word?” Or is it more appropriate to conclude that there is loss of the biblical metanarrative, an overarching view of God’s word being similar to an “Archimedian point” that defines theological thought? Is it that humans set out to discover and reflect on

³See, for example, the then contemporary writings by Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992); Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992); Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁴Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 427.

theology horizontally? If so, there is a genuine probability that our search will result in humans preferring to be “hearers of the Word only.”

Systemic worldview “make-overs” shove theology’s orthopraxis primarily, if not exclusively, to the horizontal plane as well because of the “constant awareness of the limitations of human perception, including our theological perception of God’s revelation.”⁵ The church at large, therefore, “should always be aimed at actively and creatively challenging the whole of society and its institutions to deal with the values of the reign of God.”⁶ There is little doubt that the gospel includes a horizontal dimension. The Great Commission issues imperatives to “Go . . . make disciples . . . baptize . . . and teach.” Epistemological skepticism, and relativism its partner, redirect the source of revelation from either its general or special forms to a search process designed to discover mission where God supposedly speaks today. Gustavo Gutiérrez, the father of Liberation Theology, merely decades ago reflected this same set of assumptions when he concluded that a freeing theology is “not so much a new theme for reflection as a new way to do theology. . . . [This theology] tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open—in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of humankind, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just, and comradely society—to the gift of the Kingdom of God.”⁷

Vertical and horizontal tensions, or the contrasts between text and context, are not new. H. Richard Niebuhr skillfully identifies theological patterns that deal with these realities down through the church’s history in his now classic book, *Christ and Culture*. His prioritization of relativism (and of the absolute secondarily) is clearly seen when he describes responsible theologians as those that

can accept their relativities with faith in the infinite Absolute to whom all their relative views, values and duties are subject. . . . They will then in their fragmentary knowledge be able to state with conviction that they have seen and heard, the truth for them; but they will not contend that it is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and they will not become dogmatists unwilling to seek out what other men have seen and heard of that same object they have fragmentarily known. Every man looking upon the same Jesus Christ in faith will make his statement of what Christ is to him; but he will not confound his relative statement

⁵Charles James Fensham, “Missiology for the Future: A Missiology in the Light of the Emerging Systemic Paradigm” (D.Theol. Thesis, The University of South Africa, 1990), 250-51. Fensham was one of Bosch’s last doctoral students and reflects his influence as applied to ideological “futurist” thought and missiology.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

with the absolute Christ.⁸

So, are these the only two choices: horizontal relativism or vertical absolutism? D. A. Carson revisits this set of tensions and critiques both polar opposites. While not surrendering inerrancy and maintaining a high degree of theological certainty, he advocates a “modest modernism” and a “chastened postmodernism.”⁹ Further, he confirms that truth seeking humans, “can know, even if we cannot know [truth] exhaustively or perfectly but only from our own perspective.”¹⁰ For Scripture’s prophetic voice to be heard, the directional priority should flow from God’s Word to humanity with an increasingly closer approximation to God’s truth. Its signature effect is an increasingly apparent life-evident walk by the believer in a manner worthy of his calling. Transformation into the likeness of Christ should be the gradual outcome.

Elsewhere Carson outlines and affirms the idea of a hermeneutical spiral that enables truth seekers to grow by rightly dividing God’s truth.¹¹ This spiral dynamic takes the Bible seriously, as what it claims to be, while recognizing the foibles of human reason. Yet humans pose existential questions to the text with listening hearts, and recognize God’s revelation of himself by and in the text. Then, we anticipate the Spirit of God’s ministry impact to convict and transform life. Is one’s illumination of the Spirit exhaustive in that single moment? Paul says that there is a “renewing” of our minds, indicating a process for growing into a genuine knowing, being, and doing. Further questions posed throughout a lifetime to the text, under the lordship of Christ and the renewing effects of the Holy Spirit, spur on the sanctifying and transforming influence brought to bear upon believers in Christ. Sanctification is always spiraling and conforming ever more closely to the image of Christ.

Postmodernism’s influence in and among evangelical believers is changing our perceptions of all this. The thoughts of Niebuhr and others of his ilk are indeed being revived, even if inadvertently. Reader-response interpretations are based on the assumption that human understanding is so limited that God’s Word cannot or does not address believers in ways that

⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 238. Paul’s definitive prescriptions regarding the gospel and his caveat against corrupting it, or being thrown about by fluid doctrinal winds, both fly in the face of Niebuhr’s assertions (see Gal 1:6-9 and Eph 4:14-24).

⁹D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 90. See also the reasonable tests for truth rendered by Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 268-71.

¹⁰Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 90.

¹¹See D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 116-20. See also David J. Hesselgrave, “Contextualization and Revelational Epistemology,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 693-738; and David J. Hesselgrave, “The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration, and Communication,” *JETS* 28, no. 4 (December 1985), 443-54.

transform the hearer. Instead, the exchange between God and mankind takes on a mutual mixing of ideas and synthesizes them into something neither the biblical context nor modern ones may reflect. Simply stated, reshaping is bidirectional. God's Word reshapes believers and simultaneously believers reshape God's Word into something relevant to and fit for emergent or emerging postmodern cultural contexts.

For example, Craig Van Gelder utilizes this methodology to address and suggest ways to reformat biblical ecclesiology. He writes, "the specifics of any ecclesiology are a translation of the biblical perspective for a particular context. New contexts require new expressions for understanding the church. . . . The church has the inherent ability to translate the eternal truths of God into relevant cultural forms within any context. In missiology circles this process is referred to as contextualization."¹² Notice the translational model for contextualization evident in Van Gelder's theological method that illustrates the opinions of numerous Emerging Church Movement advocates. There is no guiding element designed to avoid precisely what Bosch, as noted above, foresaw could happen, namely, the development of "an infinite number of contextual and often mutually exclusive theologies."¹³

Karen Ward, another Emergent Church voice, uses the metaphor of swapping cooking "recipes" to illustrate how emergents prefer to "do theology." Specifically, she demonstrates this technique in regard to the atonement, stating that "we are looking for nonpropositional ways of coming to understand the atonement, ways that involve art, ritual, community, etc. . . . So we'll enter into the dialectic of Christian dogmatics, but with a grain of salt, knowing that if we get saved in virtue of our correct theology, we're all in trouble."¹⁴ Ward demonstrates the cautious concern of the present article. If Scripture is sometimes narrative but primarily teaches and instructs with propositional truth precepts, which reading it demonstrates, then why do emergents resist propositional truth so strongly when it is clearly in the Bible? By way of analogy from the field of art appreciation, we ask, Is the Bible a representational or an abstract art form, surreal or real? If it is what it purports to be, then Scripture speaks and humans should listen. In parallel, is theology more a didactic or dialectic process—proclamation or translation? Consequently, is Scripture or culture primary in ongoing contextualization?

Succinctly stated, postmodern skepticism + emergent sociological

¹²Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 41. Emphasis added.

¹³Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 427. For further illustration of this problem, see Keith E. Eitel, "Evangelical Agnosticism: Crafting a Different Gospel," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 150-66; and Keith E. Eitel, "Shifting to the First Person: On Being Missional," *Occasional Bulletin of the Evangelical Missiological Society* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 1-4.

¹⁴Karen M. Ward, "The Emerging Church and Communal Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 163-64. Emphasis added. The perspectives offered in this volume are presented by Mark Driscoll, John Burke, Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt, and Karen Ward.

discontent + rising religious pluralism + relativism = plural localized theologies so determined by local contexts as to overpower the sound of God's prophetic voice in the Bible, making for highly individualized designer theologies. Alan Hirsch, another emergent voice, pointedly expresses his apprehensions regarding this result and says he has observed how some emerging churches eventually die off because of this inherent danger. He warns that the "emerging church" is "very susceptible to the postmodern blend of religious pluralism and philosophical relativism. This makes it very hard to stand for issues of truth in the public sphere."¹⁵ The old adage is likely true: when a person does not stand for something, then he will probably fall for anything. Are there other dynamics to note in trying to determine how to move forward from this contemporary theological quagmire?

Cultural Change Dynamics

Patterns of religious change and the social phenomena they spawn are well documented. In one way it is as old as humanity itself. Even in the garden people preferred to adapt God's Word to their own liking. Drawing upon the perspective of cultural anthropologists regarding these social tendencies is helpful to track some of our current theological shifts. Anthropological observation and documentation of how new religious ideas affect cultures, particularly among peoples of the world that are less connected to the larger world, are now well over a century old. When core values change in a society, cultural worldviews follow suit and eventually shift, often in several directions. When sudden and sometimes disturbing change transpires from outside cultural pressure, "people recognize that they are in the process of being stripped of their own culture, but they have not been assimilated into the dominant culture."¹⁶ As this dynamic unfolds, mechanisms of cultural revitalization activate, and typically a "charismatic leader or prophet who has a vision" emerges with ideas for forward momentum.¹⁷

One example of cultural revitalization is the phenomenon of a "cargo cult." During WW II, South Pacific military campaigns transpired in and around indigenous island peoples. The outsiders came and went, but they left behind the wreckage of war, trinkets of modern life, and these items were a source of genuine curiosity to the islanders. When the strangers departed, the islanders invoked ancestral spirits for assistance in bringing the cargo bearers back. The point to notice here is that they peered backward in experiential time to rediscover and reformat meaning, purpose, and their existing cultural map.

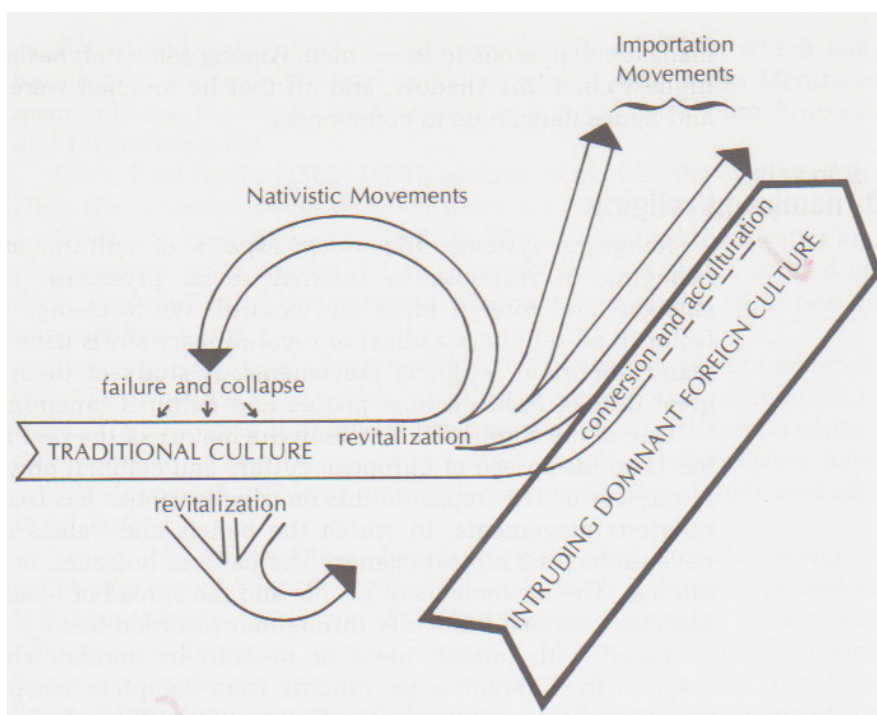
¹⁵Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 156-57. Oddly, though, Hirsch embraces relativized methods evident in these trends in spite of the potential pitfalls he himself notes.

¹⁶Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel, *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Glenview, Ill: Scott Foresman, 1981), 278.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

These religious movements “synthesize many traditional cultural elements together with elements introduced from the dominant society.”¹⁸ When the collision of the new and the old impacts the status quo of traditional culture, some degree of syncretistic re-formation results. Yet, unless there is a holistic core that can cohere through the transition, splintering or fragmentation results reflecting varying degrees of syncretism of the old and the new.

See the diagram below which Paul Hiebert uses to explain the essential elements of social change.¹⁹ Note, especially, the two items Hiebert terms “Importation Movements” in the diagram. In one sense, it seems believers in this postmodern era are vacillating between these two tributaries to practice forms of contextualization. One is nearer in proximity to conversion or capitulation to the external domineering and new cultural pattern. The other holds on to the anchored old beliefs and critiques and engages the new. As long as the Bible is that anchored influence, believers will live and speak with the prophetic voice of Scripture. If, however, dominance shifts toward the intruding new cultural dominance, then compromise happens.



¹⁸Tbid.

¹⁹See Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 388.

Paradigm Shifts

Since socio-religious change is as old as humanity, anthropologists are able to track the patterns that usually unfold and thereby identify which options seem most feasible to forecast future trajectories. Integration will happen; the question is regarding what the outcomes will shape up to be like. Hiebert notes four likely scenarios:

1. Engulfing or swallowing the new into the old system
2. Substituting the new wholesale for the old
3. Syncretistic blending of the old and new in ways not resembling either
4. Compartmentalization of the old and new as separate realities in the same life experience whether contradictory or not²⁰

Now, in the aftermath of the pivot point between two millennia, Christians are facing radical elements of change and challenge, especially in the West. Prophets are pointing believers back, back to anchor points in time. In one sense this cannot be avoided. It is the way social creatures react to preserve sense and meaning for reality. In North American evangelical circles, both traditionalists and postmodernists are looking back but to differing anchor points. Those influenced more heavily by postmodernism's relativized definitions of truth tend to write off the period of church history from approximately AD 325 to the close of the twentieth century. Those intervening years are negatively termed Christendom.²¹ It is more than a period of time, it is a *Zeitgeist* or spirit of the time. Attitudes of early Christians are highly prized among advocates of the Emergent Church Movement who show postmodern influence and point to ways forward. For instance, Doug Pagitt says, "It may be quite necessary for some of us to move forward with the way of Jesus in ways that are not encumbered by the history of Christendom."²² He also contends that "those outside the church have already concluded precisely this—the church, or self-professing Christians,

²⁰Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 422. Also, the chart above is from the same source. For another depiction of the ways new and old systems have mixed historically when the incoming ideas were generated by foreign missionaries in indigenous African cultures, see Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

²¹See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 274-75. Bosch notes the synergy between development of state governments and the Church from Constantine's time to the end of the Enlightenment and resultant mingling of motives for mission, especially since 1792. The era as a whole he terms "Christendom" or *corpus Christianum* as something of a sad saga between the ancient church and postmodern times.

²²Doug Pagitt, "The Emergent Church and Embodied Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 132-33.

hold no special right to speak for God. I contend that Christendom was useful when people of faith were having to engage in conversations with a dominant secular worldview.”²³

Traditional spokespersons advocate looking backward as well, but to the more ancient roots of the raw data of the Christian faith, namely the Bible itself. Luther advocated this in his rendition of *sola scriptura* and reaffirmed God’s Word as the only source of reliable religious knowledge. As noted above, the controversy ensues over who has the ability to comprehend or access that original data and how. Hermeneutical and theological methods grow increasingly more significant when trying or testing the prophetic voices in this time of radical theological displacement. Competing voices show some degree of syncretistic reformulation of the faith. It is significant to the discussion to determine which adheres more consistently to what God’s Word actually says since generally both sets of prophets wish the “cargo” of genuine Christian belief to return. Varying degrees of biblical affirmation correlate to fragmented prescriptions of the future.

So it seems we are faced with a choice either to reaffirm biblically defined and determined hermeneutical commitments in order to detect the prophetic voice of God’s Word, or to embrace degrees of skepticism that assume the Bible’s meaning is generally irretrievable as propositional truth that may be identified, understood, and applied in contemporary pluralistic settings. These are the tensions of decision regarding a premise of priority for either *sola scriptura* or *sola cultura*. New postmodern theologies are emerging and point us to new communities of faith and new moral definitions for life in the “secular city.” They come with a loss of things sacred, transcendent, or theological.

J. Andrew Kirk, early in the now aging discussion of contextualization by evangelicals, drew a then obvious conclusion regarding theological truth. His more recent observations are particularly relevant when compared to the first item in 1983. During the intervening years, the epistemological paradigm shifted, at least most clearly so, in evangelical circles. In the older piece, Kirk noted that “culture is not right just because it is local. Exchanging the absolutist pretensions of Western cultures for the total autonomy of non-Western ones fails to take seriously both the universal and particular implications of Christ’s lordship.”²⁴ Since there is a loss of foundational truths, and a conscious awareness of the centered self in relation to God, as well as a corresponding moral decay, Kirk now states that missiologically we must recover a “more convincing epistemological model” and that “this can only be done by retrieving an account of knowledge which brings together once again the Word of God and the Works of God into a consistent explanation of the whole of reality.”²⁵

²³Ibid.

²⁴J. Andrew Kirk, *Theology and the Third World Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 37.

²⁵J. Andrew Kirk, “The Confusion of Epistemology in the West and Christian Mission,”

Syncretism, in Hiebert's diagram of ideas noted above, is happening. Missiologically there is the tendency to do precisely what Kirk forewarned us about, namely localizing theological truth to the cultural level, now even to the personal or designer level. Syncretism does not need to evolve in such a way as to shift in that direction. A slippery slope can lead in more than one direction. To be obscurantist, capitulate God's truth entirely, or to compartmentalize (Hiebert's other alternatives) is not a pleasant set of options. The rub of syncretism will lead to transformation of the old or the new or both. In our rush to relevance, we are jeopardizing the prophetic voice of God that beckons human hearers to know Him and to respond in faith to His grace given in Christ for salvation and restoration of one's centered self. A little leaven can leaven the whole lump, so flirtation with postmodernity's epistemological categories works the rub of syncretistic tensions in the opposite direction and undermines the attempt to be relevant so that the outcome is secularly defined relevance without truth. Carson concludes that "it remains self-refuting to claim to know truly that we cannot know the truth."²⁶

How may we move ahead toward relevance without capitulation, preservation of the prophetic while at the same time demonstrating the most relevant reality of all, God's Word, both living and written? Here is where the hermeneutical spiral reenters the drama and assists us in extracting timeless precepts from God's Word. Paul applied a set of principles in pluralistic cultural settings. When taken together, these form a safeguard for believers against nefarious tensions that typically undermine biblical fidelity. His principles, which were also set forth in an era of cultural transition, are clearly relevant today even though they were formed during Jewish-Gentile culture wars among believers in the ancient church. He used them to encourage and instruct believers as they journeyed toward increasingly more complete transformation and pointed believers toward Christ's image.

A Proposal for Practicing Biblically Dominant And Critical Contextualization

While living in West Africa, I first consciously encountered radical contrasts in cross-cultural values. These contrasts challenged my understanding of ethical standards. I looked for ways to communicate cross-culturally values that could be both biblical on the one hand and not necessarily Western on the other. While sometimes there may be coincidental definitions of ethical truth on absolute transcultural levels, there may also be differing ways to understand and apply said truths on the culturally specific levels. For example, "murder" is prohibited clearly and the prohibition against it applicable in any cultural setting wherever or whenever believers may live. Yet, socially acceptable guidelines and definitions about what constitutes

Tyndale Bulletin 55, no. 1 (2004): 152.

²⁶Carson, *Christ and Culture*, 90-91.

“murder” are also subject to God’s prophetic critique. I have a former student, for example, that lives in a very remote tribal setting in the Pacific where female infanticide is practiced if a soothsayer looks into the child’s face at birth and detects an “evil” spirit. It seems to be a “witch” prevention program. Culturally, this is an acceptable condition for murder, and they routinely practice it. In the West, most nations practice a different form of infanticide based on a mother’s choice regarding abortion, commonly as a convenience for the mother. God’s Word stands in moral opposition to both. On the transcultural level, God forbids “murder,” but further analysis is required to know how to apply that absolute truth in relative and shifting contexts.

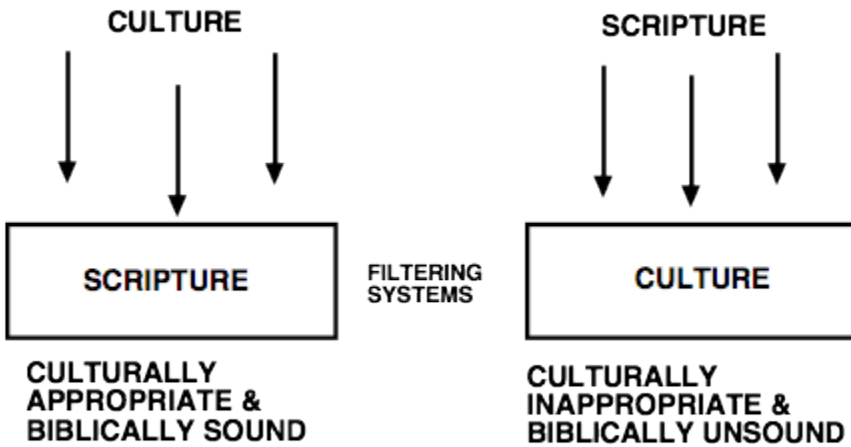
This is the nature of critical contextualization. This type of contextualization is genuinely critical, or value altering, and fosters transformation of life and worship of the one true God. Sherwood Lingenfelter, a missionary anthropologist, states it succinctly. He asserts, “Sin is seen as the pervasive corrupting force presented in Scripture, and culture is regarded not as a neutral objective entity that can be accommodated readily to the gospel, but rather a corrupted order that is inextricably linked to the unbelievers who participate in and perpetuate it . . . Christ is the transformer of culture through his body on earth, the Church.”²⁷ At the end of the day, where do we look to find how to ferret out God’s will for our relative realities wherever or whenever we may experience them? The apostle Paul used principles to address issues arising in the midst of similar cultural change dynamics in a radically transient societal mix during the founding days of the Church.

Especially when discerning God’s transcultural truth and developing biblical lifestyles within cultures, it is essential that we transplant biblical standards and not our own culture’s preferences. Not everything in a culture is automatically pleasing to God. As noted above by Lingenfelter, cultures are not neutral but all are tainted by sin. Thus, some things do conflict with God’s will in essence or in application. How can that be determined? We can make these judgments by filtering cultural assumptions, beliefs, practices, or customs through the grid of Scripture and not the reverse. Hence, our method is important, because sin is pervasive. If not carefully done, we can

²⁷Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 204-05. For further explication of the concept of critical realism and the consequent idea of critical contextualization, see Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Agents of Transformation: A Guide for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); and Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). For elaboration of the hermeneutical processes needed to insure that God’s Word critiques culture rather than the reverse, and to further insure that it is God’s Word that transfers to the host cultural setting (foreign or not), consult William J. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Book, 1988). Finally, see especially the five step practical process suggested by Grant R. Osborne, “Preaching the Gospels: Methodology and Contextualization,” *JETS* 27, no. 1 (March 1984): 27-42. These sources undergird the presuppositions found in what follows regarding Pauline practices in the ancient church.

inadvertently do the analysis and allow our cultures to accrete over and dominate the process. When the latter happens, culture actively critiques Scripture rather than Scripture critiquing culture.

Scriptural dominance in contextualization safeguards against culture or experience being dominant. Metaphorically speaking, the “wire mesh” of the filters below are the set of five principles that Paul used in the first century Church’s culture clashes. They are also helpful to contemporary critical contextualizers in any cultural setting, because Paul asserted them as universal in meaning while flexible in application. The principles are more evident and practical when posed as questions to the culture in question and to the critical-contextualizer. The chart and accompanying descriptions below outline a practical proposal for our missional future.²⁸



Five Pauline Principles For Filtering Culture Through the Grid of Scripture²⁹

1. Does it contradict any clear teaching of Scripture? 2 Tim 3:16-17
2. Does it violate or do harm to my body (mentally, physically, or spiritually) as the temple of the Holy Spirit? 1 Cor 6:19-20 Or, will it enhance the Holy Spirit’s development and expression of Christ’s holiness in and through my life? 1 Thess 4:1-8

²⁸For a more complete development of these concepts, see Keith E. Eitel, “Transcultural Gospel—Crossing Cultural Barriers,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (April 1987): 130-38; and Keith E. Eitel, *Developing a Biblical Ethic in an African Context* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing, 1987).

²⁹In the following principles, “it” refers to a worldview assumption, cultural belief, or custom subject to biblical evaluation.

3. Does it cause my weaker brother (or non-believer by implication) to stumble in coming closer to Christ? 1 Cor 8-10
4. Does it violate the express will of my spiritual head? Eph 5:22-6:9; Rom 13:1-7³⁰
5. Does it glorify God? 1 Cor 10:31 Or, Can I ask God to bless it with a clear conscience? Rom 14:19-23

Conclusion

Is there a *sola* found in the mix between culture and Scripture? The most reasonable reply is simply, “both.” Yes, there should be a priority of voice for Scripture. God’s revelation to us clearly indicates that He intended it to be the absolute rule for truth, faith, and practice. Not only has He preserved it throughout its development, but He also provides the Holy Spirit to aid believers in rightly dividing the truth. So the priority of prophetic voice is essential in the contextualization conversation. Scripture, in this way, is the *sola* or only authority.

However, there is also a sense in which the culture has a solitary role. Human beings are the only ones instructed to be doers of the Word. Humans collectively construct cultures, worldviews, moral values, customs, and practices that have a push and pull effect on our experiences and lives. As the only prescribed doers, we should become willing listeners. In this role, we must conform to the text’s prescriptions for being good listeners and doers. Simply stated, Scripture’s literary forms, styles, and intended outcomes whether inspirational, didactic, prescriptive, or all of these, sets the conditions for the conversation and not the reverse. A hermeneutical spiral places us always in the reactive mode rather than being proactive. Hearing precedes yielding, and that is followed by action. Being proactive, however, devolves into eisegetical practices and ends up imposing experience into God’s truth. This is more than sequential priority; it is foundational for biblical epistemology.

Social change is messy, especially when religiously oriented. The church in the West seems to be in a “cargo cult” state of mind these days. We seem to be looking back to times that we think were better. The emergent village voices, influenced heavily by postmodern skepticism regarding God’s truth, wish to look back into the ancient church’s beliefs and practices to rediscover meaning. More historically evangelical voices prefer to ground religious knowledge even further back, in the scriptural texts themselves. Scripture should speak and critique experiences and cultures, but not the reverse.

Pauline principles point us to time tested tools for evaluating experience. Though this work is difficult and sometimes tedious, it yields eternally important results. Perhaps the words of William Carey, who himself

³⁰If the spiritual head prescribes something requiring personal sin against God, then believers should not obey their spiritual heads in those circumstances.

held to a very high view of Scripture, can take on magnified meaning in the midst of this time of change. The order of his famous phrase that launched the modern missions movement among Protestants sets forth priorities and illustrates the roles for the dominant voice of *scriptura* and the listening heart of *cultura*. The church once again needs to *expect* great things from God and *attempt* great things for God! God specifically speaks in Scripture. Believers hear, act obediently, and do so with confidence in our missionary God's revelational heart.

Did Cape Town 2010 Correct the “Edinburgh Error”? A Preliminary Analysis

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Introduction

Prior to several 2010 centennials of the famous World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910 my article, “Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error?” was published in the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* and then republished in two parts in the various language versions of the Vatican’s missionary magazine, *Omnis Terra*.¹ For many years it had seemed to me that the fateful “error” at Edinburgh was its failure to deal with vital matters of the Christian faith—with theological and doctrinal issues crucial to the future of Christian mission. In view of challenges external and internal to the church at the time, that failure was as inexcusable as it was ominous.²

Anglican John R. W. Stott is even more straightforward. What I have termed a “fateful error,” he categorizes as a “fatal flaw” and then goes on to say,

Theologically, the fatal flaw at Edinburgh was not so much doctrinal disagreement as apparent doctrinal indifference, since doctrine was not on the agenda. Vital themes like the content of the gospel, the theology of evangelism and the nature of the church were not discussed. The reason is that Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, as a condition of participation at Edinburgh, secured a promise from John R. Mott that doctrinal debate could be excluded. *In consequence, the theological challenges of the day were not faced. And, during the decades that followed, the poison of theological liberalism seeped into the bloodstream of western universities and seminaries, and largely immobilized the churches’ mission.*³

¹See David J. Hesselgrave, “Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error? Future Mission in Historical Perspective,” in *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 121–49.

²Introductory Note: In this article, I am dealing with only one slice (theology) of a missionary movement that, when Pentecostals are included, has become one of the most significant developments of the post-war era. My concern here has to do with the relationship between evangelical missions and the revealed truth of God. Divine truth is the lifeblood of missions past, present and future. All else is dependent on its acceptance and vitality.

³John R. W. Stott, “An Historical Introduction,” in *Making Christ Known: Historic*

Stott is right, of course. In addition to the neglected themes he mentions, Edinburgh failed to deal with the need for a clear confession of faith, the historicity and authority of the Bible, special problems in geographical areas dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, and, yes, the very nature of the Christian mission itself. Conference planners seem to have prized spiritual fellowship and unity more than theological integrity. Following their lead, organizers of subsequent ecumenical councils and the World Council of Churches (WCC) itself gave highest priority to organizational unity. Leaders often quoted our Lord's prayer, "That they may be one . . . so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). Rarely if ever mentioned, however, were his prior words, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (Jn 17:17).

By the close of the twentieth century, the deleterious consequences of all of this were readily apparent. In the mainline denominations that comprised the bulk of WCC membership, orthodox doctrine yielded to liberalism, and biblical mission practically died. Those denominations had provided eighty percent of the North American Protestant missionary force at the beginning of the twentieth century; they provided but six percent at its close.

Three Centennial Celebrations in 2010

In this context I will deal briefly with three of the four commemorations of Edinburgh that were held in 2010—an ecumenical celebration attended by about 300 participants from around the world and held in Edinburgh itself; a more conservative Global Mission Consultation held in Tokyo, Japan and attended by approximately 900 delegates from about 60 nations; and, primarily, the most important of these celebrations—the Third Congress on World Evangelization held in Cape Town, South Africa, and attended by over 4,000 participants from 198 countries.

Edinburgh 2010

The program, study documents, and "Common Call" of the ecumenical commemoration held in Edinburgh in 2010 laid to rest any lingering doubts as to whether John Stott's and my assessments of the intentional dismissal of doctrinal discussions at Edinburgh 1910 are accurate and fair. The study documents emphasized that mission is no longer founded just on the Bible but on three bases: 1) experience or context, 2) diverse understandings of the biblical text, and 3) new theological frameworks. Reportedly, the initial draft of its "Common Call" emphasized the notion that "God's mission" is especially concerned with liberation and justice. *Only later was the word "evangelism" inserted.*

Tokyo 2010

The Global Mission Consultation in Tokyo can be located near the other end of the theological/missiological continuum. The preamble of its “Tokyo 2010 Declaration” begins with an affirmation of Scripture’s authority and with the Christian mission as being primarily occupied with the completion of the Great Commission:

We affirm that mission is the central theme of Scripture, through which God reveals Himself to be a God who communicates and works through us by action and word in a world estranged from Him. Furthermore, we recognize that fulfilling and bringing completion to Jesus’ Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:44-49; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8) has been the on-going responsibility of the Church for 2000 years.⁴

The Declaration then proceeds with affirmations and biblical confirmations having to do with “Mankind’s Need” (the lostness of all people); “God’s Remedy” (the gospel of Christ); “Our Responsibility” (the priority of disciple-making); and “Finishing the Task.” The statement concludes with a pledge: “With this in mind, we leave Tokyo pledging cooperation with one another, and all others of like faith, with the singular goal of making disciples of every people in our generation.”⁵

Finally, a “Saint Paul Award” was given to leaders from various nations who had made outstanding contributions to Christian missions over the years. This was not only a generous act; it was an act that, along with the Declaration, commended biblical mission to evangelicals the world over. On the other side of the coin, however, the idea that “mission is the central theme of Scripture” is highly questionable though frequently asserted. Mission is *our* work. The central theme of Scripture is Christ and *his* work. Also, the Declaration writers failed to make even one explicit reference to the church of Christ (though they did make reference to the “Body”). It is unlikely that the apostle Paul would have been guilty of such an omission!

Cape Town 2010

By almost any measure, the Third Congress on World Evangelization held in October in Cape Town, South Africa, was the most significant of 2010 centennials, especially from an evangelical point of view. Planned and led primarily by leaders of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) and the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), though with the aid of representatives from other evangelical groupings, it was most representative of evangelicalism as a whole. By virtue of its “Cape

⁴See “Appendix 10: Tokyo 2010 Declaration: Making Disciples of Every People in Our Generation,” in *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 446-50.

⁵*Ibid.*, 449.

Town Commitment” and programs projected for the future, it promises to be of signal importance to the future of evangelical missions thinking and involvement. For these reasons, Cape Town is the primary focus of this reflection.

The Third Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town And the Future of Evangelical Missions

I can appreciate that the overwhelming sense of spiritual exhilaration widely reported by those privileged to attend the Congress in Cape Town is both true and real. Having read the voluminous “Cape Town Commitment,” it is obvious that the document represents the earnest desires and noble aspirations of many evangelicals and, in that sense, is both uplifting and encouraging. That much is not in question. The question is, “Did the Consultation correct the Edinburgh error and therefore harbinger success for the future of evangelical missions?” Let us explore this question in the light of some recent history and biblical theology.

Some Relevant History

Human nature being what it is, internecine struggles began to plague evangelicals almost immediately after the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA) in the late 1940s.⁶ Early on, some of the most divisive of those struggles had to do with whether or not liberal prelates should be included in mass evangelism efforts; whether Scripture is authoritative in its entirety (inerrancy) or only in what it affirms (infallibility); and whether Christian mission is primarily evangelism/church development or also inclusive of socio-political action.

As time went on, additional problems were posed by “new” proposals forwarded in movements such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT), the Emergent Church (EC) and New Perspectives on Paul (NPP). All three of these movements are amorphous and with almost as many views as members. However, ECT proponents have tended to be ambiguous when it comes to Catholic and Evangelical differences on such matters as imputed versus imparted righteousness, the authority of Tradition and the Magisterium, the mediating role of Mary, and the sacrifice of the Mass. Charles Colson, for example, has treated the Eucharist in such a way as to obscure profound differences between Protestant and Catholic understandings of it. EC leaders have often encouraged younger evangelicals to divest themselves of the teachings of their forebears and embrace new understandings. One of the EC founders, Brian McLaren, has endorsed “missional” as connoting that believers first determine what their mission is and then construct a theology that supports it. And W. D. Davies’ new understanding of Paul which made justification by faith secondary to the centrality of Christ in Paul’s epistles

⁶The EFMA is now The Mission Exchange.

became a precursor of the NPP Movement.⁷ Thirty years later, in the late 1970s, NPP theologian E. P. Sanders concluded that “works righteousness” was not a problem for the Rabbis of New Testament times because they understood obedience to the Law as being a response to God’s love for Israel. He called this “covenantal nomism” and saw it as the kind of religion known by Jesus and, most likely, by Paul as well.

This is not the place to examine the degree to which ideas such as the foregoing rest on historical-critical methods of Bible interpretation, or their validity in the light of biblical theology, or their impact upon evangelical understandings of mission theology and strategy. But it is both the time and a place to note the importance of all of this and to consider how evangelicals ought to respond.

Prioritism and Holism in the Lausanne Movement

As a broad-based evangelical movement, Lausanne has not been immune to any of these challenges, but it has been especially vulnerable to one of them—namely, holism and even radical holism. Precursor to the Lausanne Movement was the World Congress on Evangelism held in Berlin in 1966. Sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Foundation and *Christianity Today* magazine, the Congress was an outgrowth of questions that had been raised regarding the validity of cooperative evangelism and the importance of evangelism and world evangelization. As a gathering of internationals engaged in evangelism it was widely heralded as a success though some were critical of the fact that it did not deal with the relationship between evangelism and social concern.

Due largely to the influence of Latin evangelicals, that relationship became a major concern at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization held in Switzerland in 1974 (Lausanne I). Its Lausanne Covenant, of which Anglican John Stott was the chief architect, established an enduring partnership between evangelism and socio-political action in mission. Evangelism, however, was still a basic concern in 1974-75. Ralph Winter gave an impassioned and well received appeal to reach “unreached peoples” at the Congress. There was also an interest in Church Growth as mirrored in the discussions about Donald McGavran’s “Homogeneous Unit Principle.” Then, in a follow-up book, Stott himself maintained that, in the partnership between evangelism and socio-political action, a “*certain priority*” for evangelism prevails.⁸

Subsequently the precise nature of this “priority” proved to be a very sticky wicket for the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization (LCWE) and for evangelicals in general. It was made “more sticky” when, in

⁷Cf. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980); and E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977).

⁸“Certain priority” is Stott’s phrase. One could wish that he had said *clear* priority! Cf. John Stott, *Christian Mission in the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 41-47.

the work just mentioned, Stott also advocated his preference for John 20:21 as over against Matthew 28:16-20 as a statement of the Great Commission, and for the ministry of Jesus rather than the ministry of Paul as a model for missionaries. To top it off, the issue of priority became really, really sticky when, some thirty years later, Ralph Winter himself announced his “radically different interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer and the Great Commission.”⁹ To the consternation of numerous of his colleagues, though to the delight of others, he proposed a kingdom-oriented missionary approach that made God glorifiable and the gospel credible by engaging in good deeds designed to “destroy the works of the Devil.”

In short, 2010, the year of Edinburgh centennials, dawned to find evangelical missions in full array and missionaries actively engaged in all sorts of worthy endeavors. But when it came down to their understanding of the Christian mission itself and how best to go about it, very often they were in disarray. A variety of movements and Lausanne itself had given birth to problems that cried out for attention and, to the degree possible, resolution. How would Cape Town respond? Would it correct the Edinburgh Error?

Focus on Cape Town

There were many similarities between the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and the Cape Town Congress. Both were faced with critical issues from both outside and inside the church and its missions. Many, if not most, of those issues were theological in nature. Both gatherings possessed a unique opportunity to influence the future of a large segment of the Christian church for good or for ill.

Of course, there were differences as well. Edinburgh 1910 was the beginning of the twenty-first century Ecumenical Movement while the Cape Town 2010 gathering occurred more than a half century after the beginning of the Modern Evangelical movement. Edinburgh 1910 produced a document calculated to help missions better understand the world and its peoples; Cape Town 2010 produced the much more significant “Cape Town Commitment” which included a whole host of proposals intended to help missions better understand and carry out their mission to a postmodern, globalized, and needy world.¹⁰

But Did Cape Town Correct the Edinburgh Error?— That is the Question!

We can agree with the majority of participants that Cape Town was a worthy commemoration of Edinburgh 1910. With many more participants, a

⁹See David J. Hesselgrave, “A Prolegomena to Understanding and Evaluating Dr. Ralph Winter’s ‘Fourth Era Kingdom Mission,’” in *Occasional Bulletin of the Evangelical Missiological Society* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 1-4.

¹⁰The full text of the “Cape Town Commitment” is available online at www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment. For summary of this document, see “Summary of the Cape Town Commitment” in *Edinburgh 2010*, 443-45.

huge increase in the number of representatives from the nonwestern world, a veritable avalanche of publications, and the prospect of continuing dialogues and discussions, Cape Town 2010 has the potential of being every bit as determinative of the future of twenty-first century evangelical missions as Edinburgh 1910 was of twentieth century ecumenical missions.

Only the passage of years will reveal whether Cape Town's influence will turn out to be positive or, to use Stott's word, "poisonous." However, with the passing of those years, fewer and fewer of us who actually witnessed both the heyday and the near demise of ecumenical missions as well as the rise of the post-war evangelical missionary movement will still be around to monitor Cape Town outcomes. As one of those who will not have that opportunity, I view Cape Town productions (especially, its "Commitment") and projections and see potential in both directions. Accordingly, at this point, my answer to the question posed above is, "Maybe yes; maybe no."

Why "Maybe Yes"?

As intimated above, it is relatively easy to see that, unlike Edinburgh 1910, Cape Town 2010 did not completely avoid theological issues. In fact, one can make a case for Cape Town as being a reflection of the "twin pillars" of mission and theology:

1. The organizing framework of the Congress was the familiar Lausanne formula, "The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World." This formula lent some assurance that, in addition to dealing with matters having to do with partnerships, logistics and strategy and, contra Stott's indictment of Edinburgh, Cape Town would also deal with matters having to do with the truths of the gospel, the importance of theological education, and the distinctive role of the church. And it did. Following suit, future consultations and conferences can be expected to deal with theological issues such as these as well as still others. This is encouraging.
2. Cape Town planners appointed a prominent evangelical theologian, Christopher J. H. Wright, to help set the agenda. Overall, theologians as well as Doug Birdsall and his fellow missiologists played a significant role in the planning and proceedings of the Congress. In addition, the appointment of a "think tank" helped to assure that evangelism and theology would not be overlooked at Cape Town and that, in turn, lends assurance that they are not likely to be overlooked in follow-up proceedings.
3. By virtue of the ready availability of a huge volume of Cape Town resources and the scheduling of upcoming gatherings that will consider and re-consider Cape Town proceedings and papers (including its Commitment), there will yet be numerous opportunities to rethink the Congress, reinforce

what is biblical, and correct/compensate for that which may have been mistaken or misleading. Perhaps this is the greatest encouragement of all because, if there is any one commonality that I have heard in reports of colleagues who were in attendance, it is to the effect that, though they experienced much of which they were appreciative, they also experienced certain (often rather inchoate) misgivings.

Why “Maybe No”?

Clearly, then, Cape Town planners did not *commit* the Edinburgh Error. They did not disallow or dismiss theological discussions but rather invited them. But did they *correct* the Edinburgh Error? Perhaps not. In my view, Cape Town was not necessarily a step backward for evangelicals in mission, but neither was it necessarily a step forward. Why?

1. First, though Cape Town dealt with certain very important theological and doctrinal issues, it avoided others. Whether by design or default, some of the most sensitive and critical of those issues noted above were completely beneath Cape Town’s radar. That is not a hopeful sign. Long ago Archbishop William Temple uttered the now famous line, “All of our problems are theological.” He was right. In spite of a multiplicity of obstacles of all kinds that face biblical missions these days, the most serious among them are *interior* to the Modern Evangelical movement and theological in nature. The fact that some of the most crucial of them are seldom if ever recognized by evangelical practitioners on the front lines only underscores the responsibility of evangelical leaders to bring them to the level of awareness and deal with them openly and candidly. Cape Town will be of little help in that process unless evaluators take notice of the problem and place even the most sensitive of these issues on future agendas.
2. Second, though comprehensive and even expansionistic to a fault (some 29 pages!), the Cape Town Commitment leaves much to be desired theologically. Lausanne I propounded the “Lausanne *Covenant*,” Lausanne II, the “Manila *Manifesto*,” and Lausanne III, the “Cape Town *Commitment*.” The difference in terminology here may represent more than a rhetorical bow to alliteration. “Commitment” is the weakest of these three words. Also, substitution of the “we love” formula for either the traditional “we believe” or “we affirm” formulas at the beginning of Commitment paragraphs seems to represent a turn away from confessional objectivity and in the direction of existential subjectivity. It may also be indicative of a shift from traditional Pauline theology and

- missiology to the “newer” interpretation of Rabbinic Judaism and the ministry of Paul mentioned above.
3. Third and perhaps most important in this regard, however, is the overwhelming number of “loves” in the Commitment—love of God’s Word, love of mission, love of the gospel, love for social justice, love for caring for creation, love for orality, love for storying, and on and on. This sort of expansionism overshadows the avowed “centrality” of evangelism and world evangelization. One cannot read this almost interminable list of “loves” without recalling Stephen Neill’s familiar warning to ecumenists of the last century: “When everything is mission, nothing is mission.”¹¹ Let us grant for the moment that all of the things enumerated in the Commitment may be good things to love; that all of the strategies mentioned may be good strategies to employ; and that all of the deeds advocated may be good deeds to do. Nevertheless, the first concern of Great Commission mission is not for good things, good strategies, and good deeds but for gospel proclamation. The primary consideration in gospel proclamation is not *felt love* but *true truth*.

Hope for the Future—Three Imperatives

Recently, a much younger and highly respected evangelical professor of missions was motivated to write to a small circle of professor friends. Despite the many organizations, tremendous energy, and sometimes almost frenetic activity that characterizes the evangelical missionary movement these days, he warned that the future of evangelical missions is very much in jeopardy. With a deep sense of urgency, he urged his colleagues to be especially watchful and faithful to biblical faith and mission.

He is by no means alone. We do not like to face it and therefore we ordinarily do not, but some of our foremost evangelical theologians and historians also forecast a bleak future for evangelicals if they continue on their present path. Taking the long look, I understand. Review again the early struggles of post-war evangelicals mentioned above and you will notice a pattern. In those early controversies having to do with cooperative evangelism, the inerrancy of biblical autographs, and the priority of evangelism in mission, the issues were clearly delineated and opposing points of view were vigorously debated over a number of years. Nevertheless, agreement was not forthcoming. However, with the passage of time differences were more or less settled, *not* by reasoned discourse, but simply by a *growing indifference*. In all three cases, these controversies were “resolved” in a direction that can only be described as more liberal and less conservative.

John Stott is right. It could not have been *theological disagreement*

¹¹Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 81.

that afflicted Edinburgh 1910, because its leaders disallowed theological discussion. It was *theological indifference* that was fatal both to Edinburgh and, later, to ecumenical missions. The same could be true of evangelical missions in the aftermath of Cape Town, not because critical theological discussions are *disallowed* but, rather, because they are *disdained*. Additionally, mission-minded evangelicals have an abiding interest in cultural change and simply *love* to generate and discuss new strategies for dealing with it. However, they tend to demonstrate an uneven interest in that which is *changeless* and are prone to taking unchanging truth for granted rather than celebrating it and elaborating it. *These preferences must change*. They must give way to three imperatives if evangelical missions as we know them are to have a future.

Imperative #1:

To be and remain “evangelical,” mission entities must understand and describe Christian mission as witnessing to the truth of the “evangel” or good news of the gospel of Christ and discipling the peoples of the world in his Name with special attention being given to those who have yet to hear the gospel.

This imperative can be stated in a variety of ways, of course. It can also be carried out in a variety of ways. The endeavors that attend it will also differ. However, neither semantics nor theology should be allowed to obscure the fact that, at its very core, the missionary mandate is world evangelization. The word “mission” is a much debated term in mission circles. In secular parlance, however, it is almost invariably understood in accordance with its dictionary definition—i.e., as having to do with sending someone on a stipulated assignment or, sometimes, the stipulated assignment itself. Few, if any, seem to have a problem with this meaning of the word except those involved in the mission of the church! Historically, ecumenists have had a major problem with the word and now it occasions serious problems for evangelicals. That should be sufficient to alert us to the fact that the problem is as much *theological* as it is *semantic*—in fact, much more so.

That should not be and need not be. Missiologists who advocate the adoption of some alternative word that does not carry the same negative connotations have a point. Theoretically that could be done, but as a practical matter it is all but out of the question. Some missiologists advocate use of the biblical terms *apostolos* and *apostellō* and, following Catholic practice, urge us to think and speak in terms of the “apostolate.” That proposal has more to be said for it, but even if adopted it would not resolve the problem because it does not answer to the basic issue. Viewed from a biblical perspective the question is: “When New Testament missionary/apostles specifically, and successor missionaries generally, were sent forth, what was their stipulated assignment?” The answer to that question was so obvious to Stephen Neill some fifty years ago that he said, “If everything that the Church does is to be classed as ‘mission,’ we shall have to find another term for the *Church’s particular responsibility for ‘the heathen,’ those who have never yet heard the*

*Name of Christ.*¹²

Making allowance for Neill's now archaic word choice, Bible-believing Christians should be able to agree that, whatever else the Christian mission may entail, beyond question it entails evangelism and evangelization. That takes *priority* (Stott's word) in the text and that biblical *priority* should be made crystal clear in context of missions today.

Imperative #2:

As a first order of business in any organization, conference, or undertaking designed to further biblical mission, attention should be given to a confessional statement/statement of faith upon which its deliberations and determinations will be based. Unanimity on nonessentials is not a requirement for Christian unity and cooperation. Unanimity on essentials may not be necessary when the objective is something less than fulfilling the Great Commission. But when the goal is to glorify God by preaching the gospel and discipling the nations, unanimity on the essentials of the Christian faith is necessary. When that is the objective, enthusiastic well-wishers cannot be allowed to replace robust gatekeepers.

After spending over sixty years in missions, Donald McGavran admonished colleagues to give careful consideration to the distinction I am making here. Not necessarily opposed to alliances formed for other purposes, McGavran nevertheless arrived at a point where he insisted that, if the purpose is to "disciple the *ethnē*," we must be assured that participants embrace the cardinal truths of the Christian faith. We must also know the *kind* of authority they ascribe to Scripture. If some participants disagree as to whether or not people are lost, for example, they cannot be expected to agree as to what needs to be done on their behalf. If some do not agree that the Bible is completely trustworthy and the final arbiter in all matters of faith and practice, they cannot be expected to agree as to how missiological proposals will be measured and evaluated.

Admittedly, affirmation of an orthodox statement of faith will not guarantee error-free outcomes, but the absence of such an affirmation will make errors more likely and outcomes more tentative and even questionable. As a matter of fact, evangelical entities and gatherings should do more than agree upon and actually state their basic beliefs; they should give regular attention to the review and refreshment of them. Even though duly *affirmed*, beliefs cannot be automatically *assumed*. Mainline church congregations repeated the Apostles' Creed as a part of their worship rituals long after various items in the Creed had been dismissed as irrelevant or discarded altogether. The importance of all doctrines articulated in orthodox faith statements is assumed, but at any given time and place the special relevancy of some of those doctrines will be most obvious and necessary. If biblical mission is to prevail, essential doctrines should be periodically recalled, their

¹²Neill, *Creative Tension*, 81. Emphasis added.

meaning refreshed, and their relevance renewed.

Imperative #3:

Evangelicals must reclaim the apostle Paul as the model missionary, his message as entirely normative, and his methods as most instructive. As recently as the mid-1960s when I was privileged to join the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Paul's gospel was unquestioned, his missionary methods were salutary, and Paul himself was considered to be the "Missionary Par Excellence." That was a heritage bequeathed to us by some of the most prominent mission theorists of over one hundred years. But the winds of change were already blowing and were destined to become a gale. Despite continued references to the work and writings of Paul and the publication of some outstanding works on this great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's influence in missionary theology and practice gradually but steadily yielded center stage in both theological and missiological studies and publications. This was due to a confluence of factors: NPP thinking on New Testament Judaism; a rethinking of Reformation theology; widespread acceptance of the transformational mission paradigm; the meteoric rise of missiological holism; the preference accorded to Jesus the Model Missionary; a preoccupation with the kingdom; the popularity of missionary strategies such as orality and "storying the gospel"; and still more.

I do not mean to indict these proposals and movements wholesale. Some are manifestly good and most helpful. Each must be evaluated independently. However, in one way or another, all seem to have contributed to the downgrading of the importance of Paul's writings and ministry. Whatever else might be said, the following cannot be gainsaid: Paul did not receive his gospel indirectly from the apostles in Jerusalem but by direct revelation. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote a considerably larger part of the New Testament than any other writer. It was Paul who was sovereignly chosen as missionary to the Gentiles, and it was Paul and his team who evangelized and planted churches throughout the first century Mediterranean world.

Answering the call of God and following Paul's example, earlier missionaries of the modern missionary movement, while lacking some of the skills now thought necessary and committing some of the offenses of which they are now accused, nonetheless gave themselves first and foremost to the proclamation of the gospel and the planting of those majority world churches now so highly and rightly esteemed. Only when evangelical missionaries of the present and future find it in Scripture and in themselves to recover Paul, proclaim a Pauline gospel, and enlarge the church of Christ will they make an optimum contribution to our world and, yes, to the kingdom of God.

The Bottom Line

What did the centennials celebrate? Well, they celebrated the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference, of course. Yes, but what else? Well, they celebrated unity in mission. Fine, but what *kind* of unity? It is at this point that the three centennials differed and differed sharply:

- Edinburgh 2010 celebrated the unity of *diversity*—diversity in experience and context, differences in biblical interpretation, and the multiplicity of new forms of theologizing.
- Tokyo 2010 celebrated the unity of *priority*—the priority of evangelism in the Great Commission, the importance of essential doctrines of the Christian faith, and the place of the apostle Paul in modeling mission.
- Cape Town 2010 celebrated the unity of *action*—the centrality of the kind of evangelism that can be demonstrated by working for socio-political justice, saving the environment, and establishing peace.

The future of evangelical missions will be determined in large measure, not by these centennials themselves, but by the choices evangelicals make between and within the kinds of unity celebrated in these three centennials. Then,

May the LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers.
May he not leave us or forsake us that he may incline our hearts
to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments,
his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers . .
. That all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is
God; there is none other (1 Kgs 8:57-58, 60, ESV).

Introduction to Donald McGavran's Thoughts On the Church and Denominations

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Donald Anderson McGavran (1897-1990) was arguably the greatest missiologist of the twentieth century. *Christianity Today* ranked his magnum opus, *Understanding Church Growth*, as the second most influential book that shaped evangelicalism in the last fifty years.¹ The principles he described continue to be both relevant and controversial in missiology. For example, McGavran's receptivity principle is biblical, and yet it has been denied or deemphasized by some Southern Baptist missiologists.² Unfortunately, some people have misunderstood some of McGavran's principles, and other people have confused McGavran's classic Church Growth Movement with the popular Church Growth Movement or with the Third Wave Movement.³

In 2007, David Hesselgrave alluded to one of McGavran's last concerns before his death in 1990: "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."⁴ Hesselgrave recently sent the letter and essay/article to Keith E. Eitel. In the letter of January 12, 1987, McGavran said, "I am sending to you an article of my own which I would dearly love to see published in some magazine."⁵ In reference to the unity issue, he asked, "Is there any way in which we can urge our brothers and sisters who are now worshiping structural unity to return to carrying out the Great Commission and 'being all things to all men in order to win some'?"⁶

¹"The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals," *Christianity Today*, October, 2006, 55.

²John Michael Morris, "An Evaluation of Gospel Receptivity with a View toward Prioritizing the Engagement of Groups and Individuals for Evangelism and Church Planting" (Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 83-135.

³Sonny Tucker, "The Fragmentation of the Post-McGavran Church Growth Movement," *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (Spring 2003): 25-34.

⁴David J. Hesselgrave, "Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error? Future Mission in Historical Perspective," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49 (Spring 2007): 135.

⁵Donald A. McGavran to David J. Hesselgrave, 12 January 1987.

⁶Ibid.

One interesting aspect of the 1985 article is McGavran's mention of inerrancy: "Both of them believe that Christ is indeed God and Savior, and the Bible is indeed the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God."⁷ In the past, McGavran had used the word "infallible" to describe the Bible.⁸ Some people consider "inerrant" to be synonymous with "infallible," but other people consider "infallible" to mean that the Bible is without error in matters of faith and practice but that it may be in error in matters of science and history. Inerrantists believe that the Bible is not in error in any sense. McGavran's use of the stronger term is significant.

McGavran's thoughts in the 1985 article are extensions of some of his thoughts expressed in two chapters of the 1984 book, *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today*.⁹ Some of his statements in the 1985 article are virtually identical to his statements in the 1984 book.¹⁰ McGavran was familiar with interdenominational relationships. His maternal grandparents and uncle were British Baptist missionaries in India, and he was a Disciples of Christ missionary there.¹¹ McGavran did not believe that the denominations are sects; rather, he believed that denominations are spiritually unified in Christ. While discussing Romans 15:7 in his 1984 book, he disagreed with the idea of structural unity:

Fifty thousand true Particular Churches do not break the unity of the Church. . . . Structural unity is not what this passage of the Bible teaches. . . . These are truly ecumenical decisions. . . . They allow the multiplication of Particular Churches while maintaining unity in Christ. They believe in One Body *and* many members.¹²

⁷Donald A. McGavran, "The Church, the Denominations, and the Body," September, 1985, 6.

⁸McGavran, *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from India* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 200; *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 82; *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 19, 71, 95; idem, *Back to Basics in Church Growth* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1981), 13, 125-126; idem, *The Satnami Story: A Thrilling Drama of Religious Change* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1990), 74.

⁹Chapter 8: "Ecumenical Decisions" and Chapter 23: "Fragmenting or Upbuilding the Body."

¹⁰For instance, as to which groups should be considered part of the body of Christ, in the book he says, "If they confess Christ according to the Scriptures and count the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, they are valid Christians" (1984, 70). In the article he says, "Provided any part of the Church believes in Jesus Christ as God and Savior and the Bible as its only rule of faith and practice, it may hold variant opinions in regard to all other doctrines. Provided that all doctrines are truly based on scriptural authority, they may be held" (1985, 5). In regard to unacceptable groups, in his book he mentions belief in "Marx, Krishna, or Mohammed" (1984, 71), and in his article he mentions "Venus, Marx, or Krishna" (1985, 7).

¹¹Gary L. McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 26.

¹²McGavran, *Momentous Decisions*, 70-71.

He similarly stressed spiritual unity in his 1985 article when he said that the denominations “are all equally parts of Christ’s body.”¹³

In a 2011 e-mail interview, McGavran’s daughter, Pat Sheafor, gave her recollections (and those of her older sister, Helen) of his perspective on doctrinal issues:

Both Helen and I saw and remember Dad’s moving to a much more ecumenical view as his work in church growth involved both studies of how churches in various parts of the world grew and as students from a multiplicity of denominational backgrounds came to study at the then School of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary. . . . I know that Dad believed firmly in baptism by immersion, as do I—for me and my house. Our Disciple/Campbellite background goes deep. But I don’t think Dad had any problem with believing that persons who have been ‘sprinkled’ were also believers and Christians. If I am remembering the article you sent—my sense is he is pretty clear on there only needing to be two basic tenets—belief in the Bible as God’s word and in Jesus as God’s son and one’s personal savior. If his article is saying anything, it says to me that in the latter years of his life his doctrinal beliefs were much more accepting of the whole of Christ’s body, the church. . . . As Dad aged, and he started the School/Institute of Church Growth when he was 65, his wisdom about church growth and his generosity of doctrinal belief expanded.¹⁴

In 1984, McGavran seemed certain that the number of denominations would increase: “Particular Churches have multiplied throughout the earth and will multiply still more as the myriad classes, tribes, and cultures of men turn to faith in Christ.”¹⁵ He used David Barrett’s *World Christian Encyclopedia* as a source for his statistics: “David Barrett says that in the six continents are found 20,800 denominations.”¹⁶ He made a similar statement in the 1985 article: “David Barrett, the Anglican scholar, in his famed *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982) says that there are 20,800 denominations in the world (p. v). . . . The number of denominations will unquestionably increase.”¹⁷ Later in the 1985 article, however, McGavran seemed unsure as to whether the number of denominations would increase: “It may be that in the next thirty years the 20,000 denominations will diminish to 12,000.”¹⁸ Ten years after McGavran expressed his uncertainty, Barrett’s *World Christian*

¹³McGavran, “The Church, the Denominations,” 3.

¹⁴Pat Sheafor, e-mail message to author, 22 January 2011.

¹⁵McGavran, *Momentous Decisions*, 70.

¹⁶Ibid., 69. The first footnote on page 69 cites the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

¹⁷McGavran, “The Church, the Denominations,” 1.

¹⁸Ibid., 9.

Encyclopedia indicated that the number of denominations had increased to 33,090.¹⁹

McGavran concluded the 1985 article by calling for the acceptance of the spiritual unity of different denominations.²⁰ Thus, a member of one denomination can acknowledge a spiritual kinship with members of other denominations while believing that his denomination is the most biblically-correct group. Christians can love their brothers and sisters in Christ from other denominations without ignoring doctrinal differences. His attitude was reflected in other School of World Mission faculty members: "Each member of the faculty, coming from a different denomination himself, also was inclined to believe that these other denominations, though *validly* Christian, were not quite as *correctly* Christian as his own."²¹ McGavran's point in the 1985 article is valid. We can love the members of truly Christian denominations as fellow members of the body of Christ and tolerate their doctrinal differences, but at the same time we can respectfully discuss doctrinal distinctives and seek to persuade people of the truth of our theological positions.

¹⁹"Global Statistics: (1970) 16,075 denominations with 1,130 million members; (1995) 33,090 denominations with 1,769 million members." David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2: 658.

²⁰McGavran, "The Church, the Denominations," 10.

²¹*Ibid.*, 2.

The Church, the Denominations, and the Body¹

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September 1985

David Barrett, the Anglican scholar, in his famed *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982) says that there are 20,800 denominations in the world (p. v). These are increasing every year as Christianity spreads into more and more peoples, classes, tribes, and castes. The number of denominations will unquestionably increase. What does this say to the tremendous drive for denominations to unite, thus, structurally speaking, making one Church? To phrase it theologically, What does our Lord's declaration, "I will build my church," say to this multiplicity of denominations? Must the great goal today be a wiping out of these denominational divisions of the Church which pit one denomination against another? Must not a central concern of all denominations be to work toward a single Church of Christ?

The drive toward creating such a Church has been notable in the past. Twenty years ago eight major denominations in the United States resolved to form one great united church with possibly 35 million members. We read much about COCU, Churches of Christ Uniting. My own interest in the matter was greatly sharpened when in 1954 I traveled across Africa from east to west visiting as many mission stations as I could in order to examine the degree to which the tribes were actually becoming Christian. There were no hotels in most of that territory. I had to ask for hospitality at whatever mission station I came to. Sometimes these were Anglican stations. When my genial hosts would inquire which church in America I belonged to and I told them the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ, they would respond cheerfully, "Oh, one of those American sects."

That same summer shortly after my arrival in America my board, the United Christian Missionary Society of Indianapolis, sent me to Evanston, Illinois, where I attended the second Assembly of the World Council of Churches. While there I heard prominent ministers of my Church frequently speak of the sects. They did not mean themselves. They meant the Baptists, the Nazarenes, and the Pentecostals! I was forced to consider whether the Church really consists of one great central, structurally united denomination

¹Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the missions magazine *Global Church Growth* (vol. 28, no. 2) in 1990. This publication has since gone out of print. McGavran's article is re-printed here in full because of the enduring significance of McGavran's reflection on this subject and its relevance to the missiological issues raised in this volume.

and many fringe groups or sects, or whether, as the Christian faith spreads around the world in thousands of different segments of the population, it *necessarily* assumes many different forms, all parts of the true Church. Each is suited to its own segment of society and the structure and development of its nation. Therefore it is structurally different from the others. Sometimes these differences are minute, sometimes substantial. *Are all of these denominations integral parts of the one true Church, or are they sects outside the true Church?*

During the years 1965–85 it has been my privilege to be part of an interdenominational theological seminary. Men and women from more than 80 denominations have attended our School of World Mission. They have come from the United States, England, Germany, Nigeria, Korea, and many other countries. The position of the School of World Mission faculty has been that all these denominations are validly church. Each member of the faculty, coming from a different denomination himself, also was inclined to believe that these other denominations, though *validly* Christian, were not quite as *correctly* Christian as his own.

From these experiences and many others I find the conviction growing that just as my body has a great many dissimilar parts, so the body of Christ has many dissimilar parts. Just as my fingernails do not resemble my eyes, and my tongue does not resemble my knees, so among denominations there are some significant differences. Yet they are all parts of the body of Christ. If they believe in Jesus Christ as God and Savior and the Bible as their ultimate rule of faith and practice, they are parts of Christ's body. Whether they observe Saturday or Sunday as the day of worship, eat meat or do not, or believe in apostolic succession or not *does not exclude them from the body*. It simply means that they are different parts of the body.

Furthermore, as one looks at the worldwide body realistically, he sees that in some denominations more than half of the members are college graduates whereas in some others more than nine-tenths of the members are illiterate. The average income of members in some denominations in America is \$20,000 a year and in India the average income of others is a hundred dollars. The worldwide Church spreads among very different kinds of people and necessarily assumes many different structural forms. Some valid Churches have a congregational form of government, others presbyterian, and still others episcopalian. Yet they are all equally parts of Christ's body.

With this by way of introduction, we can now pose a most important question. Is the Church an organism in which in 1982 there were 20,800 different parts—denominations? Or is it composed only of such parts as confess and believe that they are structurally one? The Roman Catholics would, of course, vote for the second position. The documents of Vatican II, notably in Chapter 2, "The People of God," state very clearly and repeatedly that there is only one ecclesial structure which can be called the Church. It is that founded on "Peter the Rock." While other ecclesial structures are called churches by some and contain many parts of the true faith and may be honored by God to the salvation of souls, Chapter 2 states clearly,

“Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made itself by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in her could not be saved.” The document moves on to state that God the Omnipotent may indeed save some who belong to other religions if He wishes but this in no way diminishes the status of the one true Church.² This Church is ruled by the pope at Rome and his bishops. A true bishop is one who has been ordained by three other properly ordained Roman Catholic bishops who have laid hands on his head. Only those are true priests or ministers who are ordained by a properly ordained bishop who can transmit the power which “Peter the Rock” passed down to his successor bishop in Rome. Roman Catholics hold that since the Church was established by Christ on Peter the Rock and since Peter’s power was transferred to the bishop of Rome by the laying on of Peter’s hands and by that bishop to all succeeding bishops, therefore there is only one True Church. The true leaders of the Church have all been empowered by apostolic succession.

As opposed to this Roman Catholic view of the Church, the general Protestant view has been that these matters of church organization and ordination divide various parts of the body, but they do not say that because I am an eye I maintain that arms and legs and hair and skin are no parts of the body. Unfortunately some branches of the Church do maintain, sometimes quite vigorously, that they are the only true Church. All others are not church at all but mere denominations or sects. This was the position of my genial Anglican hosts in Africa in 1954, though they were too courteous to express it so bluntly.

As one sees congregations multiplying all across Africa south of the Sahara, in China, Korea, Guatemala, and many other parts of the world, he also sees that men and women become Christians in denominations of considerably different conformations. Furthermore, as Christianity spreads around the world, and a quarter and then a half of the population of Asia become Christian and the Christian faith spreads into thousands and tens of thousands of segments of populations in all lands, the growth of Branches of the Church markedly different from each other is certain to occur. Indeed, there can be no great growth without a mighty multiplication of minor differences. Consequently, all Christians, in the interest of loving relationships with other Christians, should maintain that the body of Christ does indeed take form in many different ways and that each of these ways is validly Christian. While they are *validly* Christian, they are not *correctly* Christian. They do not hold to interpretations of the Scripture which are held by some careful students of the Word.

How then can we promote loving relationships among all these parts of the body? How can we keep these different segments of the body from competing with each other, taking each other’s members, and denouncing

²*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, America Press, Association Press, 1966), 32-35.

each other? How can we appear to be one body if we allow such different views of the Church and—to our minds—“misinterpretations” of various biblical passages? The only answer adequate to these questions is to maintain that, provided any part of the Church believes in Jesus Christ as God and Savior and the Bible as its only rule of faith and practice, it may hold variant opinions in regard to all other doctrines. Provided that all doctrines are truly based on scriptural authority, they may be held.

For example, the doctrine on believer’s baptism voiced by evangelical, Bible-believing Lutherans will not be the same as that voiced by Bible-believing Baptists. Each branch of the Church will defend its own baptism doctrine on scriptural grounds. Each will believe the other to be wrong. Nevertheless, Missouri Synod Lutherans and Southern Baptists ought to believe that the other denomination is a genuine part of the body of Christ. Similarly, many Branches of the Church will use only fermented wine in the communion service. Others will hold that fermented wine (unquestionably that which our Lord used on Thursday night) today is immoral. Only unfermented grape juice should be used. “Our Branch of the Church,” it will say, “will not use fermented wine. To do so would encourage widespread use of alcoholic liquors.” Just as in the human body there are many dissimilar parts, so in the body of Christ there are many dissimilar parts. Some denominations (Churches) were established hundreds of years ago in a feudalistic society. Others are today being established in democratic or socialistic societies. Their convictions concerning church government are bound to differ.

Some object that the acceptance of varying interpretations of Scripture can lead easily to heresy and the formation of denominations which are really not Christian. This is certainly true. On the other hand, the Bible does permit different groups of Christians to hold different opinions about many subjects. Let us consider two denominations. Both of them are equally valid denominations (Branches of the true Church). Both of them believe that Christ is indeed God and Savior, and the Bible is indeed the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. Yet one, on biblical grounds, forms doctrines which unquestionably differ from those held by the other which also forms its doctrines on biblical grounds. No heresy is involved. Where to draw the line between different opinions which are clearly heretical and those which are demonstrably biblical is and will always remain a moot question.

Among the 20,800 denominations which Dr. Barrett lists are unquestionably some which would be ruled out of the true Church by others. While different passages of the Bible may be understood differently by different groups of people, certain other doctrines are clearly non-biblical. They cannot be justified by the Bible. That the body has many different parts must not be so widely interpreted that it includes branches which incorporate as essential doctrines clearly non-biblical ideas. The body must be the body of Christ, not that of Venus, Marx, or Krishna.

A church may differ structurally very considerably from other Branches

and yet be a true Branch. This branch may have five leaves on it. That branch may have 500. This branch grafted on to the true vine may bear white grapes. That branch may bear purple grapes, and other branches may bear grapes of varying size, shape, and color. But they are all part of the true vine. They are all true branch. That is, they are true Church (denomination). Opposed to this view of the Church is that which holds that in the true vine there should be only one Branch. That alone is the true Church. Structural unity is the test. Uniformity of doctrine must be maintained. One set of national and indeed international officers must guide the entire "Church."

All agree that structural unity has some advantages. It is in many cases more economical to manage. Since it speaks for many more people, it has more political clout. Its leaders have greater resources at their disposal to do what they consider necessary. Above all it typifies by its structure one Church. The Lord Jesus does not tell us that He is establishing His churches. He does not speak of having many bodies. He said, "I am going to build my church upon this rock"—the confession of Me as Messiah and only Son of the living God." All these facts make a church possessing structural unity attractive. All this makes a multiplicity of Branches of the true Church seem of dubious value. On the other side, however, when one clearly perceives that mankind exists as a vast mosaic of peoples (plural), it becomes immediately apparent that any *structural* unity which maintains that the universal Church has one set of leaders, follows one pattern, speaks with one voice, has one name, and has one hymnal and one liturgy is an impossible concept. Not only must there be multitudinous parts of the true body but also multitudinous leaders who will hold different opinions as to what the Bible requires to be done under their particular circumstances.

For example, the degree of pastoral training needed in a denomination will be one thing in a university community in a highly developed nation and quite a different thing in the illiterate nomadic section of the Turkana tribe in the desert of northern Kenya. We live today on a planet which many believe is moving rapidly toward one world, where all receive equal remuneration, education, employment, and leisure. The old idea of highly privileged societies and savage tribes separated by enormous geographical differences has passed away. To some Christian thinkers, therefore, the idea is most appealing that in this one world, where there is without question one gospel, there must also be one structurally united church. All its parts must bear the same name and be guided by the same set of officers.

In contradistinction to this appealing view, however, there must be placed the unquestioned fact that in this one world, where airplane travel does bring every part within a few hours of every other part, there are enormous social, educational, economic, and political differences which seem likely to continue. With the birthrate unchecked in so many parts of the world, the assurances given by so many scientists that this world will be populated by eight billion people within the lifetime of many now living on earth seems quite reasonable. The inhabitants of a section of planet earth populated by

2,000 people to the square mile cannot live as full a life as those where each square mile is populated by 100. Those in drought-stricken areas cannot live as full lives as those who live in fertile, well watered plains. Nations at peace will live much better than those which engage in constant wars. Norwegians are likely to live much better than Cambodians. As the church takes shape in these very different populations, any structural unity seems an impossible dream.

Supporting this view is the fact that there are in the world today more than 20,000 denominations—Branches of the Church. As the gospel spreads into many segments of society in China, India, the Muslim world, and secularized atheistic multitudes in Europe and North America, it seems certain that the Church will take many forms. Each denomination would like to see all new congregations hold firmly to its own doctrinal statements and ecclesiastical forms. Presbyterians would be delighted to see all newly formed congregations soundly Presbyterian, and Pentecostals would like to see them soundly Pentecostal. Every Branch of the true church would like to see the absolute truth of its position recognized by everyone! But any such outcome is dubious. Quite possibly the 20,000 denominations will in the next fifty years become 40,000 reasonably Christian denominations.

There is, to be sure, a strong counteracting force. The inspired, authoritative Bible cannot for long be interpreted in 40,000 ways. The Bible itself, as it is studied, understood, and obeyed, will eliminate many questionable interpretations. Varying opinions will diminish. This will be particularly true as nations develop and levels of income and education become fewer. As population control is practiced in nation after nation, the various segments of society will unquestionably grow more and more like one another. They will then read the Bible from more and more the same point of view. How fast this force will operate is unclear. It may be that in the next thirty years the 20,000 denominations will diminish to 12,000. Were this to happen, all 12,000 should be considered as genuine parts of the body of Christ.

Facing this probable course of events, what should be the position of practicing Christians of each Branch of the Church toward other Branches of the Church? *We are talking here about valid Branches.* We should accept the fact that the body of Christ takes shape in many different ecclesiastical structures. As long as these are valid Branches of the Church, each Christian should live comfortably with the fact that they are not as correctly Christian as his own! Some of these Branches will multiply exceedingly. Some will remain static. But all Branches of the Church which are pleasing to the triune God are truly Church.

Wrinkling Time in the Missionary Task: A Theological Review of Church Planting Movements Methodology¹

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God is at work in amazing ways in the world today. The sheer number of people coming to Christ and the number of new churches that are being started staggers the imagination. The epicenter of this earth-shaking movement of God is not in the Northern hemisphere but in the Southern hemisphere. The Northern hemisphere, or the West, as a result, has quickly lost its position as the numerical seat of evangelical Christianity.² As Southern Baptists, how do we position ourselves in such a way that we can support and further the phenomenal global growth of evangelical Christian churches and multiply reproducible Baptist churches? The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (IMB), beginning in 1997 with a strategic emphasis called *New Directions*, has increasingly adopted a course of focusing on unreached areas of the world, an emphasis driven by the eschatological vision of bringing to fulfillment Matthew 24:14.³

¹This article was first completed as an unpublished paper in 2006 while I was serving as a field missionary with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Scripture are from the NASB.

²Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.

³The IMB follows the people group focus of the Church Growth Movement, which correctly views the word “nations” in the New Testament as specific groups of people with a common ethnicity and culture. IMB defines an Unreached People Group (UPG) as one containing less than 2% of evangelical Christians and utilizes the terminology of “finishing the task” to refer to “engaging all remaining Unreached People Groups” (UPGs) and fulfilling the eschatological vision of Matthew 24:14. See Jerry Rankin, “Mobilizing for Missions in the New Millennium,” available at <http://www.imb.org/missionspartner/mobooklet/mobone.asp>. Matt. 24:14 figures prominently in IMB promotional literature. Rankin says, “It is a vision that will be fulfilled, for Jesus said in Matthew 24:14, ‘The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a witness to every nation and then the end will come.’ In Revelation we are assured that a remnant from every tribe, people, tongue and nation will be redeemed and represented around the throne of God. How exciting it is to know we are a part of fulfilling that divine vision and purpose!” He also says, “Some people predicted that the coming of the New Millennium would bring the end of the world. But Jesus Himself said that the end won’t happen until the gospel has been preached to all the nations. As Christians,

In 1997 the IMB undertook a strategic shift in *New Directions* to realign itself with a changing world in order to engage all Unreached People Groups (UPGs) in the most efficient and expeditious manner possible with the belief that global evangelization is possible in the present generation.⁴ The IMB chose to employ the Church Planting Movements (CPM) methodology, primarily expressed by David Garrison in his book, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*, to lead Southern Baptists to “finish the task.”⁵ Garrison currently serves as Global Strategist for Evangelical Advance for the IMB. CPM methodology has enjoyed global influence through CPM training facilitated by IMB personnel worldwide to nationals and missionaries from other mission organizations.

The period encompassing CPM strategy implementation has built upon previous missiological emphases and has led to certain positive results. I will highlight some of them before offering my critique. First, the emphasis on reaching Unreached People Groups (influenced by Ralph Winter) reminds the church to guard against becoming complacent and comfortable in the harvest; the church can and should take the gospel to the ends of the earth. The UPG focus has resulted in unprecedented gains in IMB research and the production of people group profiles. As a result, Southern Baptist churches have become more aware of their world and the spiritual needs within it, as well as more informed, focused and deliberate in their missiological efforts. Second, CPM strategy desires to avoid creating patterns of unhealthy dependence on the missionary in local contexts. Third, centers of theological education should diversify their modes of delivery

we still have an unfinished task ahead of us—to take the good news of salvation to every person on earth. As we enter the 21st century, God is opening all kinds of doors for Southern Baptists to join Him on mission overseas.” See “KOM-Y2K—The New Millennium,” Vol. 3, Episode 3; available at <http://www.kidsonmission.org/pdfs/KOMVCVol3.pdf>. In another place, he comments, “Our own task of Empowering Kingdom Growth was unmistakable when Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:14 that the Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached in the whole world as a witness to every nation before the end would come. He anticipated the day when every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So, if we are to be Kingdom people or Kingdom churches, it means we will be involved in making Jesus Christ known among the nations. Our passion will be to see God glorified, not just in our own lives and what we do, but also among all peoples, even to the ends of the earth. A Kingdom perspective is not self-centered but outward-focused.” See Jerry Rankin, “Kingdom Growth to the ends of the earth,” available at <http://www.empoweringkingdomgrowth.net/ekg.asp?page=105>.

⁴David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, available from <http://www.imb.org/CPM/Chapter9.htm>; internet; accessed 14 March 2006. Garrison writes, “A growing number of Christians today are observing signs that we may be entering the homestretch. God is pouring out His spirit among the nations (see Acts 2:17). Those who interpret these Church Planting Movements as signs of His divine intervention in history are re-examining their lives and redoubling their efforts. . . . Simply put, if this is of God, we want to be a part of it. Entering the homestretch, we find our pulse quickening, our pace strengthening and our resolve heightened.” Garrison’s first CPM work was published in booklet format and is available at the IMB website, <http://www.imb.org/CPM/default.htm>.

⁵David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

when such change is more conducive to equipping leaders who are far from places of residential training. Fourth, this visionary period has led to a greater emphasis on mobilizing all believers and churches for missions and church planting, both Southern Baptists and global national partners. Fifth, models for missionary ministry need to be flexible enough to allow for engaging groups in restricted access countries or regions where the missionary may not be able to live. This flexibility has continued from the previous Cooperative Services International (CSI) division of the IMB. Sixth, according to CPM strategy missionaries need to be intentional, visionary, and creative to accomplish ministry objectives. Seventh, the UPG focus has led churches in the West to become more aware of the plight of the persecuted church in non-western lands and the unique challenges to church planting among them.

I write with a concern for the theological and biblical foundations for mission strategy and, more specifically, the theological and methodical implications of Church Planting Movements principles as set forth by Garrison and incorporated by the IMB. The following article, therefore, is a theological critique of the principles set forth in David Garrison's book with special reference to his concept of *wrinkling time* in missionary work, which he believes will expedite and facilitate rapid Church Planting Movements. The concept of wrinkling time is inherently connected to the goal of facilitating the establishment of rapidly reproducing house churches. It is the means by which rapid multiplication is accomplished and, therefore, best summarizes and expresses the strategic paradigm of CPM missiology (the phrase, wrinkling time, only appears a few times).

I will refer to wrinkling time and the strategy of arriving at rapid reproduction synonymously. I seek to demonstrate how speed is the core value of CPM missiology and explore the theological and methodological implications it has for the nature of the missionary task, evangelistic method, church planting, the nature of the church and its leaders, the nature of leadership development, and the recruitment of a new missionary force. The scope of the paper includes at times offering assessment on how CPM principles as set forth in Garrison's work have evolved through implementation in the IMB. I will periodically offer evaluation, therefore, that goes beyond what is expressly expounded in the CPM book. I also look at the reversal of a missiological determination among Southern Baptists to avoid a "Standard-solution, one size fits all" strategy for a "Unique-solution" which takes into consideration cultural, political, and theological differences.⁶

⁶David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 234-36. Hesselgrave refers to the effort at finding a missiological standard solution as "skeleton key" or "golden key" approaches to missionary methods and strategy. He muses, "People who are really serious about missions tend to be given to the notion that there must be some method somewhere that, if found and used, will enable us to complete the task of world evangelization." He names a number of such post-World War II attempts to find *the* standard solution, all of which eventually passed off the scene and out of memory. He states, "Many of the strategies were and are viable and helpful.

The vision of CPM missiology for the global proliferation of new house churches forms an underlying component of CPM missiology but is not completely novel. In large part it parallels Wolfgang Simson's work, *Houses that Change the World: The Return of House Churches*, locating it within the stream of the House/Simple Church Movement in the West, which calls for a Third Reformation in the Church, that is, a return to house church as the only authentic organic expression of the body of Christ in the world.⁷ This article cannot fully explore the similarities to Simson, but it should be noted at the beginning that Garrison's approach shares a kinship and ethos with a broader movement to redefine ecclesiology and "reform" evangelicalism globally through a return to the small house church model, led not by pastors but "lay leaders," as the primary means to restore the New Testament church and achieve global evangelization.⁸

The implementation of CPM missiology is set against the backdrop of an eschatological belief that God desires the church to "finish the task" of global evangelism in the current generation.⁹ The eschatological component

But none has provided the comprehensive solution to abiding challenges. If these fads have damaged the Great Commission mission, it is because the hype diverted attention from less glitzy but more substantive efforts. Such keys are still being manufactured. Each should be subjected to more evaluation than was sometimes given in the past. It is doubtful that there is any 'key' to world evangelization that was not known long before we arrived on the scene." Hesselgrave later lists Church Planting Movements as expressed by David Garrison, as one of the post World War II missiological winds that needs evaluation. After posing questions about the nature and implications of CPM strategy, he concludes, "Before we devote money and personnel to such a strategy, it requires extended study and protracted prayer."

⁷Wolfgang Simson, *Houses that Change the World: The Return of the House Churches* (Emmelsbull, Germany: C&P Publishing, 1999). Due to sparse footnoting in Garrison's book the reader cannot find direct references to many sources that Garrison cites in his bibliography, including Simson's work, to which Garrison's thought bears similarities. I have highlighted several conceptual connections with Simson, but many others exist. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 155-168. Garrison mentions positive examples of movements bearing CPM characteristics. He cites Larry Kreider and *DOVE Christian Fellowship*, a house church network built upon the pattern expressed in Simson's work, *Houses that Change the World*. He also cites Neil and Dana Cole and *Church Multiplication Associates*, which includes 9 house church networks.

⁸"House Church," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_church; internet; accessed 9 March 2006. Though not a professionally researched resource, it is interesting to note that Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopedia, now lists the Southern Baptist Convention as one of the major denominations "beginning to officially support efforts at developing networks of house churches." Under Curtis Sergeant's tenure as director of the IMB's Missionary Learning Center, which is responsible for new missionary orientation, Simson's book was, at least for a time, required reading for new missionaries.

⁹Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 279-313. Quoting Todd M. Johnson of the World Evangelization Research Center, Hesselgrave cites twenty slogans offered by various organizations since 1900, reflecting their confidence that "closure" can be achieved in global evangelization within their respective generations. He credits the influence of Dispensational Premillennialism with the connection between the Second Coming of Christ and "closure" strategies for world evangelization. Hesselgrave, though himself a Premillennialist, opts to ground missiology on the biblical injunctions to obedience and faithfulness to the Great Commission rather than on "countdowns" to the Second Coming.

addressed here goes beyond what is expressly stated in Garrison's book but is important to note for evaluating how CPM is uniquely suited for a UPG focus to fulfill an eschatological vision. Mission leaders use Matt 24:14 as the rallying cry, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world (inhabited earth) for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come."¹⁰ Interpreting this passage as the task of missions today has been a driving force for missions among some denominations since the nineteenth century. CPM methodology follows in their path. In this approach, the word for nations (*ethnos*) is correctly interpreted as *people group*, that which possesses a distinguishing identifiable ethnicity and culture. When all people groups have "access to the gospel" or have been "engaged," the "end shall come." The triumphalistic tone is closely akin to postmillennialism and dominion theology and pervades CPM strategy, challenging belief in the imminent return of Christ and offering an estimation of human ability in the culmination of redemptive history.¹¹

At the implementation stage, the urgency of the hour then becomes

¹⁰Trennis Henderson, "Rankin utilizes 2 time zones to share mission message in Ky.," Baptist Press, Aug 15, 2001; available at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=11520>. Henderson reports on Jerry Rankin's address to two Kentucky Baptist churches. He notes, "Sounding a theme that frequently punctuates his mission messages, Rankin said, 'I tell our missionaries I believe we're sending them out to be the last generation of missionaries.' Citing Matthew 24:14 – 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come' -- Rankin said, 'When I read those words, my heart beats with excitement. Those words are being fulfilled.' Though 'I don't get caught up in end-time eschatology,' he added, 'the fact is the gospel has penetrated every nation of the world. . . . God is opening the doors. God is moving in providence and power,' Rankin said. 'God's Spirit is moving to fulfill the Great Commission.' Highlighting Southern Baptists' role in reaching the world with the gospel, he told the crowd, 'If we're going to be faithful and obedient to what God would have us do, we must have a vision for evangelizing the nations.'" Rankin admits to using Matt 24:14 repeatedly in his preaching. He even denies that IMB mission efforts are connected with the second coming. But he goes on to argue, "The signs of Christ's coming will continue to be prolific, creating speculation, but Jesus made it clear that global evangelization will precede the end." He says, "Some interpret Matthew 24:14 in eschatological terms of fulfillment in the millennial reign of Christ, rather than as a result of our mission efforts. Nevertheless, if it is the Father's desire to be exalted among the nations and His ultimate purpose is for every tribe, people, tongue and nation to be represented among the redeemed around His throne, then we should strive with all diligence to fulfill our Lord's command and make disciples of all nations." See also Jerry Rankin, "Does Missions have anything to do with end times?" *The Commission*, 13 August 2001; available at <http://www.tconline.org/firstperson/rankinfile/503127.html>. Rankin also comments, "Global events are constantly providing opportunities to penetrate new areas with the gospel. Previously Unreached People Groups are systematically being engaged with a Christian witness. Each year the evangelistic harvest, as reflected in baptisms and new churches, seems to increase exponentially. These developments create speculation regarding the possibility of completing our Great Commission task in terms of making disciples among every nation and people group." See Jerry Rankin, "What will it take?" *To The Ends of the Earth*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2005), 7.

¹¹Cf. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 29: "In Church Planting Movements, the glory of the Lord is spreading from person to person, people group to people group like a swelling river as it begins to spill out over its banks until it covers all *the earth as the waters cover the sea*."

doing “whatever it takes” to ensure the implementation of an expeditious strategy to plant a witness among all UPGs. As a result, the resources of the churches through their mission organization must not be tied up in time consuming endeavors, like extensive church development or in-depth work with existing conventions. Urgency is rightly emphasized as the proper disposition for the church on mission. But does the eschatological vision arising from Matt 24:14 serve as a prescription to the church, which warrants leaving behind the slower and more arduous tasks of broad-based theological and biblical education (formal or informal), directly making disciples and planting churches that have the DNA of doctrinal soundness, longevity, and reproducibility? Can churches through their mission structures hasten the coming of the day of the Lord through its engagement of all UPGs?¹² If so, what percentage in each UPG needs to be reached to arrive at the critical number?

The period of CPM implementation has emphasized “finishing the task,” leading to some positive outcomes. It has pressed churches to reach beyond prior efforts and to utilize all available resources to communicate the gospel to the far corners of the earth. The church’s mandate involves global engagement to the ends of the earth. Does the New Testament, however, define the mission of the church in terms of “finishing the task” or being *faithful* to the task? Jesus commands the latter and not the former, as finishing the task relates to His unique mission. Jesus’ disciples in Acts 1:6 were concerned about the immediate inauguration of the kingdom. Jesus replied in Acts 1:7-8, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” The message of Jesus to his disciples was to expect His coming at any time, so that when He comes again He will find His people faithful to the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and multiplying the gifts He has given to the church in the lives of others (cf. Matt 24:42-51; 25:1-13, 14-30; Luke 12:35-40, 41-48). The belief that finishing the task within a given time frame (hastening the coming of the Lord) places the value of speed at the core of the missiological enterprise, short-circuiting key aspects of the missionary task for the sake of rapid reproduction.

Wrinkling the Missionary Task

Garrison laments,

¹²See Manda Gibson, “Can we finish the task?” *To the Ends of the Earth*, 2, no. 3 (2005). The entire edition is devoted to demonstrating how Southern Baptists can finish the task of the Great Commission. Writers confidently state that by 2010 it can be done: “Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave His followers an assignment: to make disciples of all people groups. Christians have been working on the mission ever since, and completing it is finally within our grasp.”

Missionaries naturally think in sequential steps. First, you learn the language, then you develop relationships with people, then you share a witness, then you win and disciple converts, then you draw them into the congregation, then you raise leaders, then you start all over again. The sequence is perfectly logical but can take years to unfold. And like falling dominoes, the whole process comes to a halt if one plank doesn't fall.¹³

Garrison immediately establishes his aversion to time in the missionary task and seeks to circumvent the "logical" order in exchange for a more expeditious approach. He suggests that missionaries adopt the concept of *wrinkling time* the Christian science-fiction writer, Madeline L'Engle, espouses in her book, *A Wrinkle in Time*. He poses the same question to missionaries that L'Engle poses in her book, "What is the shortest distance between two points?" Garrison says, "Those mired in sequentialism will naturally respond, "A straight line." He suggests that missionaries follow L'Engle's approach of wrinkling time. He asserts,

Strategy Coordinators engaged in Church Planting Movements have learned to wrinkle time—combining multiple steps into a single model. They don't wait for the completion of step 1 before they are already tackling steps 2 through 20. They learn how to wrinkle these steps together and find them all unfolding in ways that mutually reinforce one another.¹⁴

A missionary can engage in evangelism, he says, before the language is learned, and can begin modeling house church right away so that "By the time house church participants have all become believers these new converts already understand how churches function, and have even begun to catch a vision for reaching their entire community."¹⁵ The most telling aspect of his approach to *wrinkling* time comes when he comments,

Some missionaries insist on taking the time to "lay a good foundation" with a small group, rather than sowing the gospel widely and expediting a Church Planting Movement. Time is not the precondition for a good foundation; sound doctrine and sound practice are. In fact, slow sowing and slow harvesting communicate to the hearer that the message isn't urgent so why bother responding to it?¹⁶

Wrinkling time is used somewhat euphemistically for the CPM strategy of arriving at rapid multiplication. CPM missiology identifies speed as a

¹³Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 243-44.

¹⁴Ibid., 244.

¹⁵Ibid., 244.

¹⁶Ibid., 244.

critical characteristic of existing CPMs and values it in potential new ones. Garrison partly wants churches to break out of tradition-bound approaches to church planting that restrict lay-based church planting in favor of ordained-pastor-based church planting. The implementation of CPM strategy and its emphasis on rapid reproduction is framed within the broader organizational eschatological vision of global evangelization. As a result, at the implementation level the value of rapidity redefines every aspect of missiology from the nature of the missionary task, the role of the missionary, evangelistic method, discipleship, church formation, church leadership, leadership development, to missionary preparation and recruitment. Garrison's definition of Church Planting Movements incorporates the principle of velocity. He says, "A Church Planting Movement is a *rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment.*"¹⁷ Wrinkling time in the missionary task, therefore, recurs as a dominant theme in CPM missiology, which is designed to shorten the time needed to generate results, that is, the rapid reproduction of small lay-led house churches and the resulting evangelization of all UPGs.

CPM principles are visionary and creative. They also express a desire to adopt missiological methods informed by basic New Testament principles, but does rapidity as a missiological principle have clear biblical roots? Garrison cites the following texts in support of rapid reproduction: Mark 1:18; Mark 1:20; Mark 2:2; Acts 2:47; 14:21-23; 16:5; and 19:20.¹⁸ The passages in Acts that refer to the growth of the church, however, are descriptive and are not outlining a strategy for initiating Church Planting Movements. They show part of Luke's purpose to describe the progress of the gospel across cultural and social barriers. The use of the texts in Mark is also dubious, as these have no relation to offering a principle for initiating Church Planting Movements or starting rapidly reproducing house churches. While the New Testament and church history record great movements yielding many converts and churches, the use of these proof-texts falls far short of offering biblical precedent for the principle of rapidity as a key tenet of missiological practice.

At the practical level the value of rapid reproduction can function as a pragmatic Procrustean bed, reshaping those aspects in the missionary task that do not fit the needs of speed and forward movement. The inherent danger of an emphasis on rapidity is a truncation of the basic Pauline pattern of evangelism that results in sustainable churches, the appointing of gifted spiritually mature and proven leaders, training of leaders, and continued strategic involvement in church development. The emphasis on rapidity also stands in contrast to Jesus's pattern of leadership development; he took three years to build and train his team of apostles. These necessary steps should not be short-circuited. Practitioners should take care that short-term gains do not take precedence over long-term sustainability.

¹⁷Ibid., 21.

¹⁸Ibid., 337-38.

Can sound doctrine and practice be established without laying a proper foundation, which takes time? To press Garrison's analogy of farming, even nature itself establishes the necessary principles of preparing the soil, planting, watering, and nurturing the seed once it has sprouted in order for it to bear fruit. Good farming and gardening are processes that require as much attention at the beginning as at the end. CPM strategy urges missionaries to translate practically Paul and Jesus' sense of urgency in missions by developing ambitious three to five year plans with completion dates, asking the question, "What's it going to take to see a Church Planting Movement (this year or in the next three to five years)?" He then asserts, "By building deadlines and target dates into their planning they keep a sense of urgency that is sensitive to the millions who will die each year without Christ. As they learn to wrinkle time, sequentialism disappears into the wrinkles."¹⁹ Garrison rightly highlights the need for missionaries to have a plan and a bold vision. Urgency, however, does not demand cutting corners in the missionary task. Jesus and Paul were quite sequential in their ministry. Both operated with a sense of great urgency and passion in their respective callings, but they never sacrificed quality for speed, nor did they set artificial time limits on God. Garrison's goal is admirable, but the means to achieve it is problematic.

Jesus did not take the shortest route possible in training his disciples. He could have sent them out immediately when he first called them to start planting and leading new churches.²⁰ He first, however, communicated to them the basic elements of a sound theology through word and deed. Every miracle he performed instructed His disciples about His identity and mission, along with the identities of the Father and the Holy Spirit, the nature of the church and their mission to disciple the nations. The teaching He gave them would later enable them to carry out their apostolic ministries with the proper theological foundation and confidence, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The phenomenal rapid spread of the gospel in Acts did not happen until the Lord first trained the disciples and imparted unto them a firmly established sense of calling and mission. The rapid spread of the gospel also occurred due to the presence of the synagogue in major cities, which offered access to the Old Testament for Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, serving a form of "pre-evangelism" making conditions conducive for explosive growth.

Paul's approach to the missionary task also contained sequential

¹⁹Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 245.

²⁰Even Paul and Apollos needed further training and a more complete knowledge of the "Way" to maximize their ministry effectiveness. In Acts 18:24-28, Luke describes Apollos as one "mighty in the Scripture," "fervent in spirit," and "eloquent." Priscilla and Aquila, however, knew he needed further instruction to achieve more effectiveness in his evangelistic ministry to the Jews and in his edification ministry to the church. They "expounded unto him the way of God more accurately." Though Paul received his commission as an apostle at conversion (Acts 9:15), he soon after went to Arabia, Damascus, and then three years later to Jerusalem to consult with Peter before entering into the most productive phase of his apostleship (Gal 2:16-24). While Paul immediately began preaching Christ, it is generally believed that this period was partly one of preparation.

elements and a concern for the long-term viability of the churches he helped to establish. He described himself as a wise master builder and acknowledged that others were needed to build on his foundation (1 Cor 3:10-11). Paul never demonstrated an interest in pragmatic short-term solutions and methodologies. One cannot find any evidence in the New Testament that Paul, the greatest of all missionaries, was concerned with cutting corners and wrinkling missionary work to produce churches more quickly. Instead, he spent the necessary time and energy to make disciples, form churches, strengthen those churches through appointing leaders, write letters to leaders and churches, and daily agonize in prayer over their growth and stability. In fact, Paul said he daily carried the burden of the churches upon him (2 Cor 11:28). He did all of this with a great sense of urgency, believing that he was living in the last days.

The reality and threat of false teaching and the constant need for training leaders and discipling churches kept Paul diligent. By the time he finished his initial work in Ephesus, he was able to say that he preached the whole counsel of God, daily admonishing each one with tears (Acts 20:17-24). He spent two years daily teaching and proclaiming the gospel in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10). In Acts 20:31 he reveals that he spent a total of three years ministering in Ephesus. When he finished this initial stage pastors were in place and the work set on a solid foundation (Acts 20:17). But even after the initial stage of planting these new works, Paul wrote a letter to them and sent Timothy to help them. Paul did not envision seeing a few believers come to Christ, appointing new believers to lead them, and then abandoning the work for another field. On the contrary, he felt that it was part of his apostolic calling to see the process through to the end, a task that consumed his life. To the churches of Galatia, who were struggling with those preaching another gospel, Paul says in Gal 4:19, "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." Paul's passion was to see churches grow in the knowledge of Christ and His Word and become active, able, and willing participants in the Great Commission.

God has worked progressively and sequentially throughout salvation history. His revelation was progressive until the time of Christ (Heb 1:1), using His law as the revelation of His holy will to prepare Israel and the world for the coming of Messiah. Only until the fullness of time had come did Christ appear born of woman under law in order that He might redeem those who were under the law (Gal 4:4-5). His work was progressive until his resurrection, when God inaugurated a new era in salvation history. Jesus utilized the construction metaphor to speak of building His church in this new era of God's redemptive purpose. He told Peter in Matt 16:18, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Paul spoke of foundation laying in Eph 2:20 in reference to the church, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." The church beginning in Acts has taken the gospel to the far corners of the earth

in the progressive unfolding of the expansion of the Kingdom of God among the kingdom of men. God according to His sovereign purpose sends some to prepare the ground, others to sow, others to water, and yet others to harvest. Both biblical and ecclesiastical histories testify that God works progressively, incrementally building upon previous periods of providential preparations and divinely established foundations. The harvest creates exuberance, but harvests do not appear *ex nihilo*. Some degree of foundational work always precedes every harvest and might take years (and might take a relatively short period of time) before it has been properly placed (1 Cor 3:6).

Church history is also instructive regarding the sequential and time-consuming nature of missionary work. Much of the harvest that the church is reaping today in various parts of the world is the result of earlier efforts, some extending back to the early stages of the modern missions movement in the seventeenth century. The history of Protestant missions from that time to this has been one of trial and error, agony and ecstasy, sowing, watering, and reaping. A strategy, therefore, that purports to be able to speed up kingdom work through utilizing principles that have been discovered only recently raises theological and methodological concerns and questions that warrant further examination.²¹

If missiologists were to evaluate William Carey and Adoniram Judson according to CPM strategy, then the two would receive failing grades. Both men expended their lives with a great sense of urgency in fulfilling God's calling, but it took years to produce their first converts. They did not short-circuit the long, slow and arduous task of learning the language, adapting to their culture, developing relationships, making disciples, translating the Bible into the language of the people, planting churches, and training leaders. They trained leaders not in rapid multiplication principles but in principles that enabled them to know, teach, and contextually preach the Bible, develop a Christian worldview that undermined the pagan one of their own culture,

²¹Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 11-12. Garrison discusses in his book how CPM as a methodology was formed. He says that a number of Strategy Coordinators and IMB leaders met in Singapore to "reverse engineer" how God was working in alleged Church Planting Movements across the world to distill principles from their observations into a methodology. The result of this attempt at "reverse engineering" God's work was the small booklet, *Church Planting Movements*, and then later the expanded *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*. He confidently states, "Done properly, reverse engineering can reveal volumes about the Creator's designs, desires, and method of operation." CPM missiology moves from the descriptive to the establishment of strategic principles. The inescapable implication is that if applied correctly this methodology will produce results because you are following God's laws of working. The approach at developing CPM methodology also raises questions regarding the use of a purely empirical method of discovering God's ways of working in redemption (observation and reverse engineering) and the use of Scripture alone as a sufficient guide to revealing how God works and informing missiological methods. Is the group of CPM practitioners (perhaps unknowingly) claiming a certain level of "inspiration" and authority for their method? Some clarity would be helpful. One would like to see a more vigorous search and use of Scripture in the development of CPM methodology.

and plant real churches with real leaders. Can these critical components of a holistic mission strategy ever be wrinkled? Enlarging the scope of mission strategy to incorporate each of these critical dimensions means taking the needed time, utilizing the right gifts, engaging in incarnational ministry, and above all realizing that there are no shortcuts in kingdom work.

Wrinkling time for the missionary appears to be an overly pragmatic and even impatient approach to church planting designed to achieve the maximum results over the shortest period of time in order to engage all UPGs and hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God. When driven by speed and pragmatism, even with good and lofty goals in sight, the quality and sustainability of the product will always be sacrificed. In CPM methodology, quick results take short-term precedence over long-term sustainability.

CPM missiology also draws from secular management principles to craft mission strategy. While Garrison's emphasis on being deliberate and intentional is laudable, he appears to marshal various Scripture passages to justify a pragmatic approach to initiating Church Planting Movements.²² Garrison calls CPM a "God thing" but strongly implies that God cannot work among a people group until the Strategy Coordinator envisions the complete evangelization of it.²³ Of course, organized missions efforts necessitate planning and strategizing according to sound biblical principles. Church planting strategies must evolve and change in differing contexts. Garrison's emphasis on intentionality is commendable. But asserting that a Church Planting Movement cannot happen until missionaries develop three-to-five-year plans, beginning with the end-vision and working back to the beginning, is attempting to reduce evangelism and church planting to statistical probabilities and secular management principles. It certainly exaggerates the role of the missionary in evangelism and church planting.

Paul's passion was to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in all of its fullness. He followed a pattern in his travels and in his ministry, as we have already established. He proclaimed the gospel to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. He drew inquirers aside for follow up. He formed churches and trained leaders. He often returned to churches to strengthen them further. Even in the midst of Paul's plans and desires, however, there were sovereign

²²Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 331-42. Abundant examples of proof-texting are located in the section, *Biblical Index*. His attempt to demonstrate from certain Scripture texts that rapid reproduction is the norm for the missionary task falls far short of basic principles of biblical interpretation and demonstrates the lack of proper biblical and theological foundation for Church Planting Movements strategy. For example under the heading, *Rapid Reproduction*, Garrison cites Mk. 1:18 as a proof text for rapidly reproducing, one assumes he means reproducing churches. Mark says, "At once they left their nets and followed Him." He also cites Mk. 1:20, "Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him."

²³Garrison's approach bears more similarities to Charles Finney and his confidence in the use of right technique to generate results than with Jonathan Edwards and his confidence in the sovereignty of God working through the gospel proclaimed to bring a genuine movement of God.

redirections of his ministry, which fell outside of his own expectations and plans. Acts 16:6-10 records a telling account of how God worked in just that way. Luke records that they were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia,” even though they were attempting to go there. The Spirit of Jesus did not permit them. Instead, God gave Paul a vision in the night directing his team into Macedonia. Consequently, the gospel was opened for the first time in modern day Europe. God has called the church to be obedient to His plan and direction, which cannot be contained in any strategy or methodology. If a mission strategy becomes rigid and universalized, then no room exists for the sovereign redirections of the Holy Spirit, who would lead to places where He purposes to work through a variety of means and gifts.

For Garrison, the key element in initiating a Church Planting Movement is the missionary’s vision.²⁴ He says, “Church Planting Movement practitioners often speak of their vision or end vision. This describes what they hope to see when God’s vision for their people or city is fulfilled. One brother put it this way, ‘If you can’t see it before you see it, you’re never going to see it.’” He continues, “Jesus filled his disciples with great expectations and a vision of the end fulfilled. He taught them to pray for the vision’s realization, ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’”²⁵ It is dubious to expect that a secular version of vision casting baptized in Christian language will yield the same results in kingdom work.

Moreover, the proper theological foundation for missiological methodology consists not in church efforts yielding kingdom inauguration, which is wrenched from the Model Prayer, but in the Great Commission, which is based upon Jesus Christ’s authority in heaven and earth. God has already given His vision—go, baptize, disciple, and teach. Upon this basis the missionary can do and say with William Carey, “Expect great things from God; Attempt great things for God.” Undue confidence, however, in the planning process and in the implementation of a specific strategy ultimately sets missionaries up for failure and frustration by placing a burden upon them that transcends the New Testament mandate of making disciples. The vision God has given in the Great Commission relates to being *faithful* to the task and not *finishing* the task. Missionaries should plan, pray, and work hard at cross-cultural ministry, ministering their gifts, and in the end leave the results in the hands of the Sovereign Lord. The weakness of CPM methodology, at least in its pure form, is the implied premise that if it is applied correctly then results *will* come. While Christians all want to see a movement of God whereby churches are reproducing churches, ultimately Christian theology demands submission to and dependence upon the sovereign working of the

²⁴Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 278. Garrison says, “The best place to begin your efforts is at the end, with the vision God has given you. Evaluate all that you do in light of that vision.” Garrison does not clearly state the content of the vision. At this point he leaves himself open to the charge of being mystical in his approach to “visioning.” The Bible provides the Christian with the vision needed to fulfill God’s purpose in global missions.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 200.

Spirit to yield results in God's timing, which likely will transcend human plans and strategy.

At heart, Garrison's approach redefines the nature of the missionary task. The New Testament does not define the missionary task according to speed-based CPM principles.²⁶ While wrinkling the process sounds good as a paper theory and entices pragmatic human nature, it carries the potential of cutting corners that leaves new believers vulnerable to heretical groups that survive and prey on new believers, creating anemic dysfunctional churches with spurious leadership, and giving false hopes and expectations to missionaries as to what they should see in their ministry. To date, no long-term assessments have been done on the effectiveness and viability of CPM as a mission methodology. Short-term strategies designed to yield quick results likely will prove to be aberrations in the long-term, at best, and, at worst, a service to the cults and other spiritual parasites who prey on the spiritually immature. Wrinkling time is a creative concept in the realm of science fiction, but in the real world, anything of lasting value takes time and sustained effort to develop and nurture.

Wrinkling the Role of the Missionary

Ultimately, wrinkling time in the missionary task distorts the biblical role of the missionary and disconnects missionaries from incarnational witness. The Strategy Coordinator (SC) paradigm as the "new breed of missionary" has its roots in the non-residential missionary model employed by the old Cooperative Services International, a division of IMB formerly employed in closed countries, such as China. While this creative and flexible model was necessary in restricted access countries, open countries posed no problem, generally speaking, to missionaries living and serving among their people group. After the IMB dissolved CSI when New Directions began, the ethos and approach of CSI was adopted throughout the organization.

Consequently, the non-residential model has become *the* paradigm for missionaries in all parts of the world, to which a quick look at the IMB website's list of priority positions bears witness, even though most SC's currently live among or near the groups they are attempting to reach. That which was perceived as a workable model in closed and restricted access countries, largely composed of illiterate peoples, became universalized as a "one size fits all" strategy throughout the world, which begs the questions, Can a missionary model designed for one area of the world be successfully imported to another that possesses very different needs, cultures, and socio-

²⁶Ibid., 219. Garrison states, "Yes, it is true that the term Church Planting Movement doesn't appear in the Bible. But having reviewed the biblical evidence, it is clear that rivers of Church Planting Movements flow through the New Testament and these rivers issue from the very life and ministry of Christ. Once you recognize this it is difficult to ever see your own church life in the same way again." Once again, the "biblical evidence" Garrison cites never rises above the level of eisegesis.

economic and political realities? Due to the speed-based approach to missions, the SC has become one step removed from “hands-on” ministry in order to facilitate not just evangelism that results in churches but Church Planting Movements.²⁷ The need for speed, driven by the eschatology of CPM, places the burden upon the missionary to do more than the IMB has ever expected missionaries to do in the history of missions and even the Bible itself.²⁸

Eschatological expectations drive CPM missiology. If missionaries are to participate in “finishing the task” in this generation, then they must do more than just minister their gifts. Since this incarnational approach yields too few results, the SC missionary (according to Garrison’s paradigm) must outsource ministry to others in order to achieve the widest possible coverage among the assigned UPG. The eschatological assumption is that once all UPGs are engaged the task will be completed. The emphasis on utilizing many different resources to evangelize an area and the inherent flexibility form two strengths of the SC model, but what role does the SC have beyond the outsourcing of ministry?

Paradigms for missionaries should follow biblical models. Can the SC model of missionary be found within the New Testament, particularly in reference to Jesus’ or Paul’s ministry? Upon closer examination of the ministry models of both, one discovers that ministry was never solely outsourced but was incarnational. To be sure, the principle of multiplying leaders was critically important in their work and should be for the church today. The Pauline mission had a large team with varying gifts as Paul’s letters reveal. If Paul were alive today, he would no doubt use all available technology to carry out his mission. He would not, however, attempt to achieve most of it solely through electronic means with little interpersonal contact.²⁹ Paul placed a

²⁷See Jerry Rankin, “The New Breed of Missionaries,” *Baptist Press*, 2 December 2005; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=22203>. Rankin says, “Most would see their role as “catalytic”—their presence producing a reaction and movement to Christ rather than working for whatever may result from their own efforts.”

²⁸See Michael Chute, ed., “Strategy Coordinators: Key Missions Players,” *The Commission* (Fall 2005), 21. Regarding the role of the SC, the *Commission* magazine says, “They lead, dream, worship, learn and plan. They’re strategy coordinators, and they play a key role in reaching the whole world with the gospel. Strategy-coordinator missionaries give entire people groups and cities—from African tribes to Asian megacities—the chance to worship Jesus. They study cultures, learn languages and develop master plans for reaching every individual in their people groups with the gospel. Then they enlist other missionaries, volunteers, local Christians, and prayer partners to help carry out those plans. The goal? To see the book of Acts come alive as the gospel spreads quickly and churches multiply rapidly in church-planting movements that can only be explained as works of God. Ultimately, strategy coordinators hope to leave their work in the hands of Christians from their groups as they move on to others still in darkness.” Again, a key theme is the SC missionary’s role in outsourcing ministry to volunteers and his (or her) responsibility to develop plans to accomplish the vision speedily.

²⁹See Jerry Rankin, “The New Breed of Missionaries.” In regards to evangelizing an entire people group, Rankin says, “To accomplish this, SC’s are not bound by residential restrictions—in fact, they often use computers to facilitate their teams’ work, mobilize

premium on people, and he evaluated his ministry in terms of effectiveness in affecting transformation in the lives of people through proclaiming the gospel of Christ, modeling fidelity to Christ and His Word, discipling new believers, starting churches, training leaders, developing existing churches, and soliciting their help in taking the gospel to unreached areas.³⁰ Clearly, his approach was incarnational. He said in Phil 3:17, “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” He never replaced incarnational ministry and witness with mobilization of volunteers. Paul says in his farewell address to the Ephesian pastors in Acts 20:18-21, 26-27 (emphasis added),

You yourselves know, from the first day that *I set foot in Asia*, how *I was with you* the whole time . . . how *I did not shrink from declaring to you* anything that was profitable, and *teaching you publicly* and from house to house, *solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks* of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Therefore, *I testify to you* this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For *I did not shrink from declaring to you* the whole purpose of God.

Paul clearly was directly involved in ministering the gospel, training leaders, and expending his life fully to declare the gospel. He did not deem it too slow for the needs of rapid reproduction but critical to fulfilling his calling as a missionary to the Gentiles.

Garrison places high value on the SC position as the optimal model for missionary work in today’s world.³¹ If the model is strictly followed, the SC becomes a manager of missionary activity, a super-apostle of sorts, delegating various aspects of ministry to volunteers from the United States and from the field. Clearly, in the IMB there has been a push toward implementing this model of missionary globally, and in those areas where it is being followed in its pure form, it has resulted in greater responsibility for the missionary (no longer just starting churches but “initiating” Church Planting Movements), reducing the role of the missionary in many ways to volunteer coordinator, and undermining direct missionary involvement in evangelism and church

resources and stay connected with a network of prayer intercessors.”

³⁰Rom 15:20 is frequently cited as rationale for focusing the bulk of resources on UPGs to the neglect of existing work. The context, however, demonstrates the passion of Paul for preaching the gospel where Christ has not been named, and his equal passion and deep involvement to develop existing work. He is writing a letter to the church at Rome to help them firmly grasp the nature of the gospel and its application to various issues they are facing. He even declares his intention to pay them a visit. He also mentions his ministry among the poverty stricken saints in Jerusalem. The chapter demonstrates the complex and varied nature of Paul’s mission efforts. To cite Paul as an example of one who focused exclusively on unreached areas misrepresents the concern he demonstrated for establishing existing work.

³¹Cf. Jerry Rankin, “The New Breed of Missionaries.” Rankin conditions world evangelization on the Strategy Coordinator role. He strikes a triumphal note by saying, “One of the deterrents to reaching all peoples is the need for more SC’s.”

planting.³²

The move toward the SC model raises the question, What place do the varying gifts within the body of Christ have as vital components of the career mission force, such as gifted cross-cultural church planters, evangelists, and those gifted in teaching on the formal and informal levels? What role does the gifted missionary play, whose effectiveness is in cross-cultural communication of the gospel, planting of new churches, and the training of leaders? The New Testament necessitates the employment of a variety of gifts to accomplish the common goal of faithfulness to the Great Commission. The need for speed has relegated such gifts, however, to a nominal place, judging them to be too slow for the new demands of rapid reproduction and total evangelization of UPGs in the shortest time possible. Streamlining the missionary force to the SC model changes the landscape of missionaries from a multicolored mosaic to a one-dimension painting. In the end it severs many members of the body of Christ from career missions appointment, squeezing the sovereign gifts of the Holy Spirit into the latest paradigmatic pragmatic mold to accomplish most expeditiously the eschatological vision of global engagement and kingdom inauguration.

Wrinkling Evangelism and Discipleship

Wrinkling time in missionary work not only affects the nature of the missionary task and the role of missionaries, it also affects the nature of evangelism and discipleship. Garrison writes, “Conventional wisdom in the West has often taught a reasonable yet much less effective pattern of gospel transmission. ‘You must earn the right to share your faith,’ goes the traditional model. ‘Once you have developed a friendship and demonstrated what is special about your life. Then, you can tell them about Jesus.’” He continues, “A passionate purveyor of Church Planting Movements denounced this Western model. ‘We teach that it’s not about you or earning the right to share your faith. Jesus earned that right when He died on the cross for us. Then he commanded us to tell others!’”³³

First, Garrison is once again setting up a straw man, the traditional western model, to strengthen his argument. Abundant evangelism and incarnational witness are not mutually exclusive. Second, the value of velocity in the missionary task erodes away at the concept of incarnational witness and gives shape to a form of rapid-clip evangelism with no apparent plan for abundant follow up. Again, one can look to the example of Jesus, the ultimate embodiment of the incarnational principle. He spent 30 years among His people as the incarnational declaration of the good news. Paul was certainly passionate about sharing the gospel at every opportunity and

³²See *ibid.*, where Rankin comments, “The overarching objective of the SC missionary is to see that all people in the population segment become evangelized and have reproducing churches planted among them.”

³³Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 177.

asked churches to pray for him that doors of opportunity would be open for him to declare the gospel boldly. Paul also considered the manner in which he lived his life to be important in discipling others. Paul intimates in 1 Thess 1:4-6 that it was not only the gospel and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that brought the believers to faith in Christ; it was also the integrity and example of the men who preached it to them that made a lasting impression. Paul said,

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

How one lives out his faith does indeed enhance the power of Christian witness. For missionaries it takes time to establish one's presence, credibility, and life witness. The rapid growth that the house churches experienced in the first three centuries of the church, when the movement began to be urban, owed to the fact that Christians bore testimony to the risen Christ through their dramatically changed lives from paganism to the Christian faith. Their effectiveness was rooted in the close proximity of their lives to their neighbors. It is ironic that this movement, which advocates a return to the house church model of being the body of Christ in the world, would denigrate the most potent historical aspect of the house church model—the incarnational authentic personal witness of believers to family and friends. If one follows Garrison's logic at this point, then he must radically alter his conception of New Testament missions and evangelism, away from an incarnational model toward one that favors the utilization of a large volunteer force on short-term assignments to accomplish evangelism and church planting.

Can evangelism ever be wrinkled? The initial success of the early church in the book of Acts was among Jews and God-fearers, those who had already been exposed to the teaching of the Old Testament and likely to some knowledge of "the Way." The Diaspora synagogues brought knowledge of the Old Testament beyond these two initial targets of apostolic gospel preaching to the far reaches the Roman Empire, preparing the way for a greater harvest among the Gentiles. Evangelism among most UPGs begins from scratch, which involves laying a similar biblical foundation through consistent Bible teaching and sharing, a process that can take time and persistency. Anyone can press for quick decisions and get immediate results. Providential preparation, however, precedes the rapid spread of the gospel.

Evangelism and discipleship are never separated in the New Testament. The Great Commission involves the instructions to make disciples of all nations and teach them all that Jesus has commanded His church. While

the “Jesus film,” tracts, and other media have their place in evangelism, they can never replace due and diligent follow up, where more instruction is given to ensure that people hear, understand and respond properly. But if movement and speed become core values, then the temptation will be to circumvent even the most basic element of the missionary task—making disciples. CPM methodology redefines the nature of discipleship in order to expedite Church Planting Movements. Garrison believes that even volunteers can build discipling relationships with nationals over the course of a short visit overseas and then by continuing communication through the Internet. He contends, “Once again, the global spread of English can help. But more important is an improved definition of discipleship. Among Church Planting Movement practitioners, discipleship is increasingly being described as *teaching others to love Jesus as much as you do.*” Garrison’s desire to mobilize all Christians and churches in the global mission enterprise is healthy, but clearly, his “improved definition of discipleship” distorts the one Jesus gave in the Great Commission, which states that making disciples of all nations involves, in addition to baptism, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Garrison continues,

Following the 222 [2 Tim. 2:2] principle of walking with a new believer there is no reason why anyone can’t do this kind of discipleship. Walking with a new believer, listening to his testimony, praying with him, and expanding his vision for reaching a lost world—these are some of the many simple ways that you can help to disciple a new believer in the direction of a Church Planting Movement.³⁴

While his goals and desires are above reproach, one can see that the artificial need for rapid exponential growth redefines the basic mandate Jesus gave to the church to disciple believers and offers an unrealistic picture of the ministry effectiveness of volunteers on a two-week (or even two months) trip overseas. In reality, relationships must be cultivated over time and involves interpersonal dynamics that go beyond electronic communication.

With the development of the SC position, which is patterned after the old non-residential missionary model of CSI, and its global deployment, the concept of incarnational witness has eroded. While a few places in the world demand a non-residential approach because an overt missionary presence is not permitted, and portions of the SC model offer the best missiological solution, one must ask why this model is now held up as the new and most effective way of fulfilling the Great Commission worldwide, even in open access countries. The only answer is that according to CPM methodology this model holds the most promise for expeditious global evangelization, even though its value and shape arise from efforts in restricted access countries with large illiterate populations.

³⁴Ibid., 265.

Another aspect of the speed-based approach to evangelism is the emphasis on divine signs and wonders, which help CPMs move more quickly. Garrison boldly asserts,

As with today's Church Planting Movements, the New Testament gospel proclamation went hand-in-hand with divine demonstrations of God's power through healings, exorcisms, and miraculous signs. Jesus commanded the 72 to preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.' . . . As was His custom, Jesus first practiced all of these things before he commanded his disciples to do them. The Gospels use the word 'healed' 30 times, and each occurrence is associated with the work of Jesus. The post-resurrection church carried on the same practice. They healed the sick, cast out demons, and even raised the dead as they proclaimed the Good News of God's salvation. . . . These practices which have become alien to so many of our contemporary Christian churches, were a central part of the ministry of Jesus and the expansion of the New Testament Church. And they are well represented in today's Church Planting Movements.³⁵

Garrison later cites divine signs and wonders as one of the distinguishing marks of "most" CPMs. He said, "Church Planting Movements are born and nurtured in an atmosphere of God's mighty acts." He cites the experience of one missionary in China, who said, "All of the Church Planting Movements I've seen in China are full of healings, miracles, and even resurrections." He cites another example of a missionary in India who witnessed a resurrection from the dead among his people group. He goes on to speak of a missionary who looks for the man of peace in the village and when he finds him he proclaims to him the Good News of the Kingdom and then prays for healing for anyone in the family. God does not always heal but "he does reveal himself to them." Luke 10 is cited as the paradigm for missionary work today in both seeking the man of peace and praying for healing.³⁶

For Garrison, divine signs and wonders are not just essential corollaries to evangelism but are the marks of a healthy church ministry. Garrison explains, "One Strategy Coordinator explained, 'Their type of ministry is closer to what you find in the New Testament. They heal the sick, cast out demons, and share from their poverty with others in need.'" He comments, "Sounds pretty healthy." These observations come in the context of his argument that churches outside the West that have arisen as a result of a church planting movement are more healthy than their western

³⁵Ibid., 210-11.

³⁶Ibid., 233.

counterparts.³⁷ Garrison correctly rejects the notion that today God cannot display wonder working power to bring people to Himself. He makes, however, the classic Pentecostal, charismatic, and neo-charismatic argument against many evangelical churches today in making divine signs and wonders distinguishing marks of a healthy and vibrant church. By implication, missionaries should help start churches possessing such signs of health, that is, healing the sick and casting out demons.³⁸ God chooses occasionally to work the miraculous according to His own timing, but it is going beyond the New Testament to make such miraculous displays the signs of a healthy church or a prescription for missionary practice in evangelism. Garrison regularly moves from the descriptive, the miraculous ways God often chooses to work, to the prescriptive, the way God *always* works in evangelism. One is left with the implied conclusion that power encounters are the norm in the missionary task and are necessary to stimulate Church Planting Movements. Missionaries, therefore, are to be involved in facilitating such divine signs and wonders through their ministries in order to provide the needed elements to speed the work of God along among a given people group. Such neo-charismatic conclusions need more review, which goes beyond the scope of this paper, but a few observations are in order.

While God certainly chooses to act in miraculous ways at times in the conversion of sinners, He has chosen to use the Gospel as the exclusive means by which He converts sinners unto Himself, which is the greatest display of God's mighty power. Paul said in Rom 1:16 that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes and needs no supplement. Paul clearly describes the nature of the missionary task in Rom 10:13-15, where he highlights the preaching of the gospel as the means God has chosen to draw sinners to Himself. Paul never makes divine signs and wonders the prescriptive norm or prerequisite for making disciples or the sign of health among existing churches. If anything, he castigates the Corinthian church for being obsessed with the phenomenal and "supernatural." He is always more concerned about the purity of the message, preserved through teaching and proclaimed through preaching. He certainly never establishes any artificial prerequisites for successful evangelism. The only necessary prerequisites are the proclamation of the gospel and the call for sinners to repent and believe in Christ alone for salvation. Roland Allen perceptively observes that "St. Paul did not convert or attempt to convert people by working miracles upon them. He did not attract people to Christianity by offering them healing."³⁹ Peter's ministry followed the same pattern. In the account of the conversion

³⁷Ibid., 198.

³⁸Cf. Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 90. Regarding the practice of the healthy church, Simson argues, "Whenever Christians come together, therefore, they will pray for each other, pray for the authorities, pray for peace, come before God in petition and thanksgiving, pray for their enemies, bless those who curse them, practice exorcisms and pray for healing."

³⁹Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 43.

of Cornelius, a vision was given to Peter and Cornelius that resulted in Peter's visit, his subsequent proclamation of the gospel to Cornelius and those gathered in his house, and the conversion of all present. For those working among Muslim people groups, reports are common of individuals having dreams, prompting them to seek after Christ, and, subsequently, hearing the gospel and being converted. In cultures where dreams are significant, God is certainly at work in powerful ways to bring people to Himself.

A word of caution, however, should be sounded. Garrison mentions the need for preaching the gospel, but the implication that divine signs and wonders become a measuring rod for effective CPM strategy implementation is beyond New Testament prescription, and confuses the role of the missionary. Garrison's purpose in mentioning the characteristic marks of a CPM leads once again to the conclusion that divine signs and wonders serve as a metric for correctly implementing CPM strategy. In other words, if the strategy is being employed correctly, CPM will result with accompanying miraculous displays. Garrison's thought resembles John Wimber and the Third Wave Movement. Wimber admitted that divine signs and wonders will not occur every time in successful evangelism. Overall, however, he essentially argued that if divine signs and wonders do not take place, then the gospel is not being proclaimed in all of its fullness.⁴⁰ When the Kingdom of God clashes with the Kingdom of Darkness, a power encounter will result.

But do we find in the New Testament that signs and wonders were given as the necessary corollary to evangelism or the marks of a healthy ministry? As has been noted, in the ministry of Jesus, one can find that many followed Him precisely because they were fascinated with phenomenal supernatural displays but were not true believers (John 2:23-25). In fact, he rebuked those who sought for signs and called them a wicked generation (Matt 12:28-39). Jesus makes a shocking statement in Matt 7:21-23 regarding those who claim to be his workers but are not when he says, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" For Jesus miraculous displays were not the metric for or first priority of healthy ministry (or even Christian ministry!). The bold proclamation of the gospel in any setting is a challenge to the forces of darkness in the world today, and when it is preached with clarity and faithfulness, God can choose to do great and mighty things far beyond the capacity of the human mind to imagine. But this is God's work. The command to the church is to go into all the inhabited earth and preach the gospel to every person. Missiologists, therefore, should not set up artificial extra-biblical requirements whereby the validity of a missionary's ministry and the health of new churches are evaluated (e.g., by healing, exorcisms, and raising the dead).

⁴⁰Cf. D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament," in *Power Religion: The Selling out of the Evangelical Church?*, ed. Michael Scott Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 90.

Wrinkling Ecclesiology

Wrinkled missiology leads to wrinkled ecclesiology. CPM goals are laudable—starting reproducible churches that engage all Christians in the planting process. Garrison values starting “rabbit churches,” which can be started in as little as three months, as opposed to “elephant churches,” which take as many as 22 months.⁴¹ Again, speed is king. But what effect does a speed-based missiology have on the shape of churches it seeks to create? In every area of life the quality of a product is determined by the time, care, and skill that have gone into production. Wrinkling time carries the inherent danger of diminishing quality. Efforts may yield a mile-wide movement that is only an inch deep.

The structure of CPM churches bears more similarities to Brethren Church ecclesiology than Baptist polity. CPM churches have no identifiable leadership gifts in accordance with Ephesians 4, no emphasis on the central role of teaching or proclamation of the Word, and a de-emphasis on the role of the shepherd. CPM methodology believes that smaller churches are always better (twenty to thirty members).

Ultimately, as a missions strategy, it can lead to small CPM churches becoming totally disconnected from the broader evangelical Baptist community.⁴² For a Baptist mission organization, it means that small home groups that missionaries help to form potentially become isolated from existing networks of Baptist churches, thus creating a barrier to integration. While this might be the optimal solution in areas where Baptist work has drifted from its evangelical moorings, in areas where it has not, how then will these new groups achieve assimilation into established denominational work? In reality, CPM philosophy contains the implied premise that existing “traditional” churches (many started by previous generations of IMB missionaries) and existing conventions are to be avoided at all costs because they contain corrupt DNA that has led them to embrace more traditional expressions of church (e.g., having a building for corporate worship and paid/seminary trained pastors). For this reason the general missiological drift

⁴¹Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 194. Cf. Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 106. While Garrison does not reference Simson, he uses the same analogy of elephant and rabbit churches as does Simson citing the same “gestation” period for both, favoring the latter.

⁴²Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 260-61. The danger as a mission strategy, in addition to what I have already listed regarding a flawed ecclesiology, is exactly what was posted on the IMB website job description for a position in Burkina Faso: “In several countries where people group teams are located there are existing local Baptist Conventions or Unions with their own system of leadership training or theological education. There is currently no link between what our people group teams are doing, and the local Baptist Conventions/Unions. This makes it difficult for new churches that are started by people group teams to merge with Baptist entities in the region and for their leaders to be recognized by them.” “No link” is one weakness and by the way a striking admission in this case that non-involvement with existing conventions is counter productive. Actually, you might get groups formed but the challenge is to incorporate them into the broader Baptist work. The end result might be the subverting of existing Baptist work.

is away from cooperating with existing Baptist conventions and established churches for fear that new work will be infected with such corrupt DNA.

In many places, this drift has led to the employment of a “go it alone” approach to missions, especially when existing Baptist work proves unwilling to embrace CPM methodology. Rather than taking the needed time to mentor and help develop fledgling Baptist conventions and churches into positions of strength, therefore, the organization takes a more utilitarian approach to recruiting only those willing to partner within the prevailing missiological paradigm. Approaches to missions then become not the result of collaboration with various national partners in differing regions of the world to find the optimal approach for each unique context but rather a superimposition of a “one size fits all” approach developed in a western context and packaged to nationals as the only way that God has chosen to work universally. Such missiological disposition runs the risk of repeating the old “sin” of paternalism, repackaged in a new form, and alienating Baptist partners worldwide.

A positive of Garrison’s approach is his desire to mobilize the “laity” for ministry. He correctly attempts to foster an “every member a minister” attitude among Christians, which all would do well to emulate. Far too often church ministry and church planting have been restricted to a select few. His concept of “lay-led” churches, however, is questionable from a biblical-ecclesiological standpoint, along with the artificial dichotomy he creates between clergy and laity for the purpose of argument. Garrison says, “In Church Planting Movements the laity are clearly in the driver’s seat. Unpaid, non-professional common men and women are leading the churches.” Garrison lists two key reasons for lay leadership.

First is the practical reason. He observes, “A movement that produces thousands of new churches needs thousands of new leaders and the largest source for finding these leaders is the local church membership itself. To produce these leaders, one must fish from the largest pool of candidates.” The need for speed qualifies the nature of church leadership. The second reason is theological. He notes, “Lay leadership is firmly grounded in the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer—the most egalitarian doctrine ever set forth. After centuries of reliance on a small tribe of Levitical priests, God turned to the church and said, ‘You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood.’” He further argues that the priesthood of the believer gives each the *right* to lead.⁴³ Garrison says little regarding the gifted leaders given to the church as listed in Ephesians 4.

Doctrine and Scripture are once again conformed and eisegetically pressed into service to validate the CPM pragmatic need for rapidity. First, Garrison gives latitude for women to serve as leaders of the entire church contrary to the Pauline prohibition in 1 Tim 2:12. Second, he argues from the priesthood of *the* believer, ironically a highly individualized western

⁴³Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 189.

interpretation of this doctrine, which he claims to reject in ecclesiological matters, to justify elevating *any* believer to a position of leadership in the church. When accurately rendered, however, the biblical (1 Pet 2:9) and historical doctrine of the priesthood of *all* believers means that *all* Christians have equal access to God through Christ, and none have need of a human intermediary to have access God. The doctrine speaks more to responsibility and privilege in prayer than *rights* to positions of leadership.

Third, he fails to account for the normative role of the pastor/elder/bishop and deacons in Acts and the Pastoral Epistles as proper leadership and servant functions in the church. Certainly, that which qualifies a person for leadership is not professional training, level of education, or whether they are paid by the church, but the possession of the necessary spiritual gifts, an internal and external effectual call, proven character, ministry competencies, and spiritual maturity, which are transcultural principles laid down in the New Testament to guide the church in selecting its leaders. To short-circuit these biblical criteria means to deny the needed gifts God has given to the church in order for it to be truly healthy. While a genuine church might exist for a time with no pastoral leadership or deacons, the missionary should always guide the church back to the Bible to help them identify suitable candidates, rather than elevate unqualified candidates for the sake of speed. Paul was careful to give clear directions to both Timothy and Titus to help them identify suitable gifted pastors and deacons to fill these critical equipping and servant roles in the church (1 Tim 3:1-15; Titus 1:5-9).

With time being the critical factor and speed as the core value, there is no time to wait for proven spiritually mature leaders to arise in the house church. Garrison then crafts an ecclesiology to suit the need for rapid exponential growth. As a result, even new converts play a prominent role in the leadership of the church and in the formation of new ones, all at the insistence and instruction of the “CPM practitioner.”⁴⁴ The new convert can play a critical role in immediately and enthusiastically bringing others to faith in Christ (John 4:28-29), as Garrison rightly asserts, but Paul forbids the elevation of a new convert to a position of leadership in the church (1 Tim 3:6). In fact, he sternly warns in 1 Tim 5:22 to “lay hands on no one suddenly.” In light of these texts and the admonition in James 3:1 that teachers will incur a stricter judgment, missionaries should be careful not to press a novice into positions of influence in the church. If God has gifted them for leadership, they will prove themselves as such with time through demonstrated spiritual maturity and efficacious pastoral competencies.

To support his assertion that “lay leaders” lead CPM churches Garrison cites the calling of the disciples, who were common men, as examples of “lay leadership.”⁴⁵ He mentions Peter and John, when in Acts 4:13 the religious

⁴⁴Ibid., 230-31.

⁴⁵Cf. Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 35. Garrison follows Simson at this point. Simson notes, “House churches are led by elders, and they are just that: older than most, without necessarily being ‘elderly’. Elders do not have to be skilled Masters of Ceremonies and

elite were astonished that these “unschooled, ordinary men” were speaking so powerfully for Christ. But can we call Peter and John “lay leaders?” They were gifted apostles, who served as the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20).⁴⁶ In order for his principle of “lay leadership” to remain effective, Garrison argues that churches must be kept small and manageable for the untrained lay leader to handle. He says, “First, churches must remain small enough to be manageable by either one or several lay leaders. It is when churches exceed 20-30 members and begin using a separate church building that the task becomes too big for a layperson to lead without leaving their secular employment.”⁴⁷

The need for lay leadership partially arises out of Garrison’s belief that relying on adequately trained and fully or even partially supported pastors will always slow down Church Planting Movements. Has Garrison, however, missed a key contextualization principle at this point? Indigenous church planting demands that local leaders and believers decide the shape of the church? What if a church decides to have a building as a central gathering point? What if small groups want to merge together into a larger group for enhanced worship, concrete expression of their unity in Christ, instruction, and cooperation for ministry? What if formal theological education for leaders is valued, available, and strongly encouraged of gifted leaders, like in many western and Asian cultures? What if the church chooses to provide full or partial financial support for their pastor (1 Cor 9:3-14)? If churches choose yes to all of the above, then does this mean these components inherently are obstacles to reproducibility? Most non-western societies do not embrace the egalitarian ethos and structure of church leadership put forth by the CPM paradigm. Garrison imports a model of church and church leadership that does not arise from the New Testament or the flow and shape of local cultures, highlighting one weakness of a “one size fits all” approach in mission strategy.⁴⁸

An often overlooked observation about Garrison’s CPM methodology is that a small lay-led house church of no more than twenty to thirty members is not just valued at the beginning of a church start, but it embodies the ideal form of church, which he believes, biblically, to be a restoration of the New Testament ideal and, pragmatically, to be the quickest manner to reproduce new churches. He catalogues the demise of the house church in church history by noting,

learned teachers: modest and authentic fathers and mothers with obedient children will do nicely to start with. They are by then already many years into living a maturing life and passing the test of time, not graduates from a seminary able to perform some religious functions. This leadership is easy to find and develop anywhere without the time-consuming schools for religious specialists. It depends on initial apostolic and prophetic input and support, ministries which in themselves can be multiplied and therefore match and grow exponentially with a multiplying house-church movement.”

⁴⁶Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 216.

⁴⁷Ibid., 191.

⁴⁸Ibid.

By the time the church grew strong enough to build its own cathedrals and basilicas, perhaps as late as the third or fourth century, it was also employing professional clergy. When the church left the home it left something vital behind: intimate contact with every facet of daily life. Today's Church Planting Movements are reintroducing this lost dimension by bringing the church back home.⁴⁹

His Restorationism, however, even falls short of what is found in the New Testament regarding the nature of the church and its leadership. His argument most closely follows Simson, who argues that churches should be structured around the family unit.⁵⁰ His use of the term "lay leadership" is often unclear and his distinction between laity and clergy is not helpful. The terminology of the New Testament views the church as the body of Christ composed of different gifts (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Cor 12:1-31; Rom 12:3-8). If he framed his discussion around gifts, then his arguments would have more clarity. One gets the impression that his use of laity versus clergy helps further his argument against pastor-led house churches, making pastors synonymous with professional clergy.

Peter, John (whom Garrison calls laymen), and all of the disciples had given their lives to follow Christ, were personally discipled by Him, and ultimately became His spiritually gifted apostles, the very foundation of the church (Eph 2:20). In this sense, they hardly fit the categories into which Garrison attempts to place them. They were novices in the beginning, but Jesus expended a great deal of time and energy to train them. In the book of Acts they are presented as powerful gifted leaders in the early church. Jesus did not release them until they were ready. The issue, of course, is not the level of formal education, as many pastors do not have access to formal theological education, or whether the church financially supports the pastor. But clearly, the apostles received training and became the foundation of the church with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. New Testament churches are led and fed by pastors, spiritually mature and gifted leaders, who cannot be novices or new converts (1 Tim 3:6).⁵¹ Garrison would do well to clarify exactly what role pastors and deacons have in the lay-led local church. These two normative roles are rooted in New Testament ecclesiology and form an essential part of the section on the church in the *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000.

Garrison desires missionaries to wrinkle the time needed to allow for pastors to arise in the church to assume leadership, which, if followed in one's methodology, would result in the placement of spiritually immature leadership. Of course, there will be times when a church does not have a

⁴⁹Ibid., 214.

⁵⁰Ibid., 227-28. Cf. Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 79-101.

⁵¹Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 187-88.

gifted pastor, but this situation does not necessitate restructuring the church in such a way that the function of pastor is dispensed with altogether for the sake of starting new work more quickly. The prescription Paul gives to Timothy in 1 Tim 3:6 not to elevate a new believer to pastoral leadership becomes a “fly in the ointment” for CPM methodology and ecclesiology. Paul’s qualifications for leaders in this passage greatly reduce the potential pool of resources from which to draw new leaders by excluding new converts and those who do not possess the spiritual gift of elder/pastor/bishop with the accompanying character and spiritual maturity qualifications. Garrison realizes this might argue against his position on the nature of true church leadership. In response, he says,

Those who are reluctant to transfer this kind of authority quickly point out 1 Timothy 3:6 where Paul advises young Timothy that a bishop ‘must not be a recent convert. . . . However, Timothy’s church was already well established enough to reference several generations of believers (see 2 Tim. 2:2). In such an environment it was natural for Paul to delegate church oversight to those who had been closest to the original message delivered by the apostles, but *nowhere* does Paul place church authority in the hands of outsiders.⁵²

The problem Garrison encounters when attempting to explain away Paul’s instructions to Timothy is that Paul was giving a universal principle not bound to any one context regarding the qualifications of church leadership (i.e., the pastor/bishop/elder, one he certainly would have followed even in Acts 14:23). Second, how Garrison argues that by the time 2 Tim 2:2 was written there had already been “several generations of believers” baffles the reader, unless Garrison follows the higher critical dating of the Pastorals to the second century. Carson, Moo, and Morris argue that 2 Timothy was written from the mid to late A.D. 60s, which I believe is correct and hardly leaves room for Garrison’s conclusion regarding “several generations of believers.”⁵³ Third, he confidently asserts that “*nowhere* does Paul place church authority in the hands of outsiders.” But what about Timothy and Titus (or even Paul), both outsiders to the churches among whom they ministered? Paul sent them to set in order these various churches (Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 2:14-15), teach sound doctrine (1 Tim 4:11; Titus 2:1), preach the word (2 Tim 4:2), refute heresy (1 Tim 1:3-4; Titus 1:10-11), train leaders (2 Tim 2:2), and appoint pastors (Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 3:1-7)? They were under direct apostolic appointment, carrying that authority with them to the churches. Garrison’s point is well taken that missionaries should not create dependency through their presence, but the concept of the missionary pastor

⁵²Ibid., 187.

⁵³See D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 378.

is not foreign to the New Testament, as the above two examples illustrate, which CPM strategy flatly rejects as an ineffective use of time and resources. Once again, the methodology drives Scripture interpretation.⁵⁴

Garrison also argues from Acts 14:23, stating “When a new church is started, Paul does not hesitate to appoint local leaders right away.” He then cites Acts 14:23, which says Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for the churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, as proof for the immediate elevation of leaders.⁵⁵ First, what we do know is that churches had already been established in these cities because Paul and Barnabas had already spent time preaching the gospel in each of them. Second, we know that Paul and Barnabas returned to those locations to help establish leaders and encourage the believers to continue in the faith as they faced persecution. Third, the word *elder* is used synonymously with the role of pastor and bishop in the New Testament. In other words, Paul appointed pastors whom he felt were suitable leaders. Fourth, one need not jump to the conclusion that Paul was not also following the same criteria he gave to Timothy in the selection of those leaders. He would have scrutinized the individuals for the accompanying gifts and character qualifications required for church leadership before appointing them to that position. Finally, a portion of these appointees could have arisen from the Jewish congregations (either Jews or Gentile God-fearers) to whom Paul characteristically preached first; their OT background and training would prepare them ideally for leadership and militate against choosing new believers as “lay-leaders.”

Garrison’s point is well taken regarding the placement of unbiblical requirements upon an individual before allowing them to lead or even start a new church. One need not argue that a qualified leader involves that he be seminary-trained or even fully-supported by a church. But Garrison’s argument for immediate elevation of “lay leaders” and his understanding of Acts 14:23 and more importantly 1 Tim 3:6 are extremely inadequate and require further review if missionaries hope to ground their strategy for starting new and lasting churches upon basic New Testament principles regarding the nature of New Testament churches and their leaders. Garrison appears to diminish the role of biblically qualified leadership in the church for the sake of keeping the church smaller and rendering it “reproducible.” God has given gifted individuals to serve as equippers to the body of Christ (Ephesians 4), so that every believer individually and the church collectively have what they need to do the work of the ministry. Each believer possesses at least one spiritual gift for ministry in the body of Christ. The real issue is one of gifts and spiritual maturity, not level of formal education. The nature of their training will vary in differing contexts around the world. Clearly, God has given certain gifted individuals to lead, feed, and equip the body of Christ. Paul gives to Timothy and Titus qualifications for the only two

⁵⁴Cf. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 187.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 187-88.

offices (or functions) in the church, pastors and deacons, to guide them as they appoint elders/pastors for the churches. Should we not at least be concerned with shaping the church after the order of ministry that Paul gave to Timothy and Titus?

Strong pastoral leadership is not mutually exclusive with “unleashed” and empowered “laity.” Quite the contrary, true biblical pastoral leadership is measured by its effectiveness in just this area.⁵⁶ Paul clearly states in Eph 4:12 that gifted leaders are given to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” When this critical component is missing, and each member is not encouraged to minister his respective gift to the body of Christ, then the church becomes susceptible to spiritual immaturity and is blown about by every wind of doctrine. So what is Garrison advocating for church leadership? On the one hand, he forcefully advocates “lay leadership,” which fits within the speed-based paradigm. On the other hand, he asserts, “The New Testament has a place for church office roles such as deacons, bishops, elders, and pastors, but also includes dynamic functions for apostles, evangelists, and prophets.”⁵⁷

The similarities with Wolfgang Simson cannot be overlooked. Simson advocates a recovery of all the New Testament gifts for today, advocating a five-fold ministry of church leadership rather than a two-fold ministry of pastors and deacons. Simson says,

The local church is not led by a pastor, but fathered by an elder, a man of wisdom and engaged with reality. The local churches are then networked into a movement by the combination of elders and members of the so-called fivefold ministries (apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers) circulating ‘from house to house’, like the circulation of blood.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 36. Similarly, Simson argues against pastoral leadership of churches. He approvingly quotes Barney Coombes, “Nowhere in the New Testament do we find references to a pastor leading a congregation.” Simson comments, “The house church does not need a pastor in the traditional sense at all, because elders, functioning together with the corporate giftedness of the house church, maintain and multiply the life of the church.” Garrison and Simson’s thought appear to intersect at this point regarding the nature of church leadership.

⁵⁷Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 217.

⁵⁸Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, xviii; 75-76. Simson states, “According to Ephesians 2:20 the apostolic and prophetic ministry is not only essential for laying the foundations of the church: apostles and prophets are the very building material of the foundations of a church. Although the Bible reminds us to ‘test the apostles’ and ‘weigh the prophets’, it seems clear that the apostolic role is more foundational, and that it is healthy for prophets to submit to apostolic authority as well as to the authority of a local church. I assume that also includes the planting of churches, in the past, present, and future.” Simson confidently continues, “Many Christians understand that we are seeing today a major resurrection of the apostolic and prophetic ministries on a global scale. This will change the church inside out. We can be sure it will lead to the resurrection of apostolic-prophetic patterns and structures of church. I am convinced the house church is exactly such a pattern.”

Garrison appears on the surface to be an advocate for the Restorationism of Simson and the neo-charismatic movement, a tendency based partly on the pragmatic need for rapidity of movement, to enlist available Christians, even if new believers, to assist in the leadership process, and partly on theological convictions regarding the nature of a genuine church. Garrison clearly identifies himself pragmatically and theologically with the growing House Church Movement in the USA, which has similarities in outlook with the eclectic Emerging Church Movement. He applauds the “quietly rising tide of ecclesiastical subversives,” because they have rejected the “traditional church structure” of modern Protestant denominations. He mentions as a positive that these house churches are “no utopia of consensus and conformity. Their members grapple with issues of organization, scheduling, authority, and freedom. The refreshing reality is that any member can enter the discussion and the only consistent persuasive authority appears to be the New Testament.” Clearly, Garrison advocates a version of ecclesiological reform along Simsonian lines, which has now been incorporated into his CPM methodology, and has become the blueprint for new church starts in the IMB’s global strategy.⁵⁹

If speed is the core value in establishing churches, then the temptation will always be to cut corners on God’s plan for His church. Paul recognized establishing healthy churches took time. To be sure, the church must start somewhere, but it should also move toward the pattern that God has set for it, with spiritually mature and gifted leaders shepherding it, fostering an every-member-a-minister mentality among its members, and equipping the body of Christ for ministry. To diminish the vital role of the shepherd as the leader, feeder, and equipper of God’s people is to diminish the capacity of a church to function effectively and healthily. All of the members are needed to *be* the body of Christ in the world and bring the message of salvation to the ends of the earth, but this does not justify elevating ungifted leaders or even new converts to positions of prominence for the sake of speed. Starting healthy churches from which leaders arise is a process that missionaries must not wrinkle for pragmatic reasons and quick statistical gains, lest the result be dysfunctional and deficient churches, at best, or churches that quickly disappear or depart from the faith once for all delivered to the saints, at worst.

The final consideration in this section relates to the divergent ecclesiological vision of Garrison and the Southern Baptist Convention. Obviously, according to Garrison’s description of the traditional church, the vast majority of Southern Baptist churches fit this “inadequate” paradigm. If Garrison’s ideal church, the small lay-led house church of no more than twenty to thirty members, is followed worldwide, and he cites positive examples of house church movements in the USA, and more specifically, is applied to the Southern Baptist Convention, then “traditional churches” must disband and reorganize in order for them to meet the New Testament

⁵⁹Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 161-68.

standard.⁶⁰ For Garrison, the ideal church is the small lay-led house church no matter what the cultural context, geographical location, or disposition of various governments toward organized Christianity. Garrison thereby demonstrates in his thinking a great ecclesiological divergence from the Baptist denomination that underwrites the implementation of his CPM methodology through its International Mission Board. The result is an unresolved tension between Garrison's CPM church and what Southern Baptists have historically believed comprises a New Testament church in any context and the nature of true church leadership as expressed in the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.

Wrinkling Leadership Development

With speed as the core value, CPM redefines the nature of leadership development. The nature of training leaders changes from theological and biblical training to training in basic multiplication principles for the rapid reproduction of churches. The Training for Trainers model, also known as T4T, which has been widely utilized in the IMB, has become a key tool for the new CPM version of Theological Education by Extension (TEE). T4T, however, is primarily a multiplication principle that flows from the value of rapidity. The goal is not to help ground leaders and their ministries on a solid biblical and theological foundation, but to teach them how to multiply house churches quickly. Other similarly designed training modules, which have become widely utilized by IMB, are Acts 29 and Simple Church.⁶¹

Certainly, churches are multiplying in areas that have no access to formal theological education for their leaders. Various models of TEE have been developed and deployed in certain places to match the need and education level of the leaders whom God is calling out. Churches should applaud and redouble these efforts. The need for speed, however, has eroded away at even this concept of training and on occasion has been replaced by teaching multiplication principles, leaving a vacuum on the front lines in the area of theological education, which other groups with varying theological commitments are all too willing to fill. CPM's need for speed in the long run creates a climate conducive for theologically errant proselytizers to recruit and train leaders according to their theological commitments. When the emphasis in leadership development is just on "practical skills" training (e.g., how to start a small lay-led house church), then the long-term result will be fairly predictable. True God-called leaders deeply desire basic biblical and theological training, which is evidence of their calling to lead and feed

⁶⁰See *ibid.*, 155-68. Cf. also Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 179-92. Simson provides various transition models church leaders can follow to dismantle their existing "traditional churches" to form a network of house churches, an approach taught as part of the DAWN International Network seminars he holds periodically throughout the world.

⁶¹See Manda Roten Gibson, "Discipleship and Leadership Training: Central to IMB global strategies," *The Commission*, 2, no. 1 (2005), 3.

God's church. Today's missions force should be focused on providing such substantive training, which will enable the already explosive growth of churches to move in a positive, theologically healthy and spiritually vibrant direction.

Seminary training inevitably becomes devalued in a speed-oriented approach to missions.⁶² No time exists for national church leaders to take time out for a more focused time of training and preparation. Garrison virtually has announced the demise of institutional seminaries when he observes without any supporting documentation or research that "around the world, institutional seminaries have long been eclipsed by decentralized theological education through extension centers and correspondence courses."⁶³ Seminaries are viewed as ineffective means of training leaders because the concept of seminary itself reflects a classical western model of education.⁶⁴ But is this a fair representation of the concept of seminary and its adaptability to differing cultural contexts? I think not. In Middle English, the word "seminary" means seedbed or nursery. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a seminary in the non-technical sense as "an environment in which something originates and from which it is propagated." Done correctly on a solid conservative evangelical biblical foundation, seminary training, which has been embraced globally, can be a strategic way for missionaries to be involved in training and mentoring the next generation of pastors, church planters, missionaries, and theological educators, who in turn will be instrumental in shaping new churches and leaders that come into

⁶²Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 35. This approach's similarities with Simson are striking. Simson says, "Traditional Sunday Schools, Bible Schools and seminaries are mostly static, addition-based leadership development systems which grow, at best, in a linear and not an exponential way. They are an informational system, not a transformational system, as Beckham rightly points out. Therefore they cannot match a multiplying movement of house churches with an exponentially growing need for elders." Once again the need for keeping pace with lateral growth of house churches demands a revision of the nature of church leadership. I can understand why Simson would draw these conclusions about seminaries in a German setting, which have long been academic institutions with little to no concern for practical ministry or spiritual formation. But he goes too far in portraying all seminaries as purely informational. Cf. Brent Thompson, "24 motions at SBC stretch from missionary training to tax policy," *Baptist Press* (June 22, 2005). Concerns over a perceived drift away from IMB involvement in seminaries overseas was voiced by Russ Bush, professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. "Russ Bush, a messenger from Bay Leaf Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., moved that the SBC's International Mission Board bring to the convention in 2006 a plan that supports 'theologically conservative' educational institutions and that 'clearly explains and reaffirms the [IMB's] intent to continue to require theological training in a Baptist seminary for all full-time missions personnel.'"

⁶³Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 270.

⁶⁴Baptist Press Staff, "IMB President speaks plainly with state editors about private prayer language," *Baptist Press* (17 February 2006); available at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=22683>. In an interview with editors of state Baptist papers, Cameron Crabtree of the *Northwest Baptist Witness* asked Rankin to elaborate on a previous IMB meeting in which he defended the IMB's involvement in theological education despite growing belief to the contrary. He said, "You know, the effectiveness is not the western model, classic, institutionalized theological education. But by no means have we abandoned it."

existence. Involvement at this level of training, however, takes time.

The point is well taken that often in the past missionaries placed so much emphasis on the need for formal training that pastors were uprooted from rural areas and moved to study at the city seminary, where they experienced a higher standard of living and never returned home. Hopefully, we have learned that this is not the optimal solution. But it does not diminish the need to deliver biblical and theological training on site, not creating dependency, but having a place at the table of theological training. What about the cities? The world is becoming more urban. Does this not necessitate the need for continued strategic involvement in theological education in the large urban centers of the world? The classical argument against seminary training is becoming more obsolete as populations increasingly shift from rural to urban centers and as education becomes more valued and accessible in the new emerging global village. The rollback of involvement in seminary training has also created a vacuum that is being increasingly filled by others. CPM methodology functionally cedes to others a position of influence for the training of current and future gatekeepers of Baptist work in regions throughout the world and as such makes more difficult SBC efforts to forge global links with like-minded Baptists, especially in light of the SBC's withdrawal from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Reports from many regions bear witness to various seminaries forming ties with other Baptist groups closely related in theological outlook to the theologically eclectic European-dominated leadership of the BWA.

The conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention began primarily because of the leftward theological drift in its respective seminaries, which led to a denigration of belief in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. The architects of the resurgence saw clearly that the theological climate of the seminaries, where leaders were being trained, would profoundly impact the theological direction of the denomination. CPM's vision of leadership training clearly demonstrates that it is out of step with the values and experience of the SBC. CPM strategy, therefore, is self-defeating in its long-term effects, sowing the seeds of minimal involvement in theological education (including decentralized models such as modular and Internet based approaches) that could potentially one day yield a bumper crop of theologically malnourished leaders and churches. Formal theological education is not available to all, but in many places of the world it is becoming increasingly accessible, valued, and influential. It stands to reason that a long-term strategy would include aggressive involvement in training the next generation of national leaders, lest in the near future the SBC find itself globally isolated and irrelevant to the broader evangelical Baptist world. Such involvement need not mean that missionaries control the direction of seminaries but that they have a place of influence through their presence on the faculty, serving alongside nationals.

Wrinkling Missionary Recruitment

The need for speed and the eschatological vision that drives it has led to a different approach to missionary recruitment and a quest for new types of personnel. Along with the WIGTake (whatever it takes) mentality of “finishing the task” and “closing the gap” comes the need to rush missionaries to the field in an effort to engage all UPGs as soon as possible. In a recent *Mission Frontiers* article, IMB staffers Scott Holste and Jim Haney state, “Our [IMB] immediate goal is the engagement of all unreached people groups (UPGs) greater than or equal to 100,000 in population by the end of 2008.”⁶⁵ Such lofty goals that are time sensitive are admirable, but are they realistic? To achieve such an ambitious undertaking not only means working with other mission organizations (always healthy when they are of like faith and practice with Southern Baptists, but the pragmatic need for speed leaves the organization open to becoming overly ecumenical in its partnerships) but also speeding up the process of preparing and recruiting new missionaries.

With speed as the core value, the organization must create many categories of short-term assignments, drawing from a larger pool of resources, which is a phenomenon of New Directions, and shorten the theological educational requirements for new personnel.⁶⁶ As a result, under CPM strategy the amount of seminary training missionaries must receive before being deployed to the field has eroded significantly. The time sensitive nature of the organization’s sense of calling to play a crucial role in global evangelism to “finish the task” has led historically to the diminishing of an adequately trained missionary force. As the SC position has become the “new breed of missionary” to whom nationals worldwide look for leadership, does it not stand to reason that the more theological and biblical foundation they receive for their ministry (e.g., finishing a basic program of theological study such as the MDiv), the more effective they will be at training others and representing Southern Baptists in their worldwide ministries?⁶⁷ Currently, the SC needs only to complete thirty hours of seminary training to qualify for appointment. Cases have been reported of SCs being deployed to the field with no seminary training and of seminary students being recruited to SC positions before the completion of their program of study. Such rushing of missionaries to the field, which is what missiologist Ralph Winters calls

⁶⁵Scott Holste and Jim Haney, “The Global Status of Evangelical Christianity: A Model for Assessing Priority People Groups,” *Mission Frontiers* (January-February 2006): 8-13.

⁶⁶The IMB’s increasing use of International Service Corps missionaries on two year assignment (which can be renewed indefinitely) is one example of escalating utilization of short-term personnel.

⁶⁷The heart and soul of the IMB missionary force has become the Strategy Coordinator position. The IMB states the seminary requirements for SC as follows: “Strategy Coordinators are required to have a minimum of 30 hours of graduate level biblical, theological and missiological study for career service. Associates need 30 hours of bachelor’s level study in the same academic areas.”

the re-amateurization of missions, has been a recurring impulse in Protestant missions since the student missions movement of the nineteenth century, often creating more problems on the field than long-term fruit.

The nature and complexity of the contemporary missionary task demands theologically trained missionaries who are able faithfully to carry out 2 Tim 2:2. Training pastors, Christian workers, and missionaries has always been a family affair for Southern Baptists, where the seminaries work in conjunction with the churches and the mission board to develop and train the next generation of leaders. In a time when knowledge is increasing through globalization and the mission field is becoming crowded with theologically diverse groups vying for positions of influence among nationals, missionaries require a firm theological and biblical foundation for their ministries to help them rightly divide the Word of truth in evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and training leaders. The complexity and nature of the missionary task demands nothing less.

The trend has been to recruit more “lay” people with little or no formal theological education for various positions in the IMB. The International Learning Center processes new recruits for various assignments several times throughout the year, most of whom have not finished a full seminary program, including those filling Strategy Coordinator roles. Of course, various support roles do not realistically require it, but the need for speed demands that certain frontline positions increasingly be filled by personnel who have not completed a seminary program. In fact, a culture has emerged that values more personnel with less theological education. An erosion of confidence has developed toward the adequacy of the seminaries to provide the “needed” missiological-theological foundation for a CPM directed cross-cultural ministry. Garrison spends some time developing the importance of mobilizing volunteers to help initiate Church Planting Movements and engage UPGs. Once again, the time factor necessitates the facilitation and mobilization of an army of volunteers. More churches are interested in missions today perhaps than ever before, and this is a sign of health. But if a missiological method suggests that they can become SC churches (after the CPM model) and can effectively reach a UPG through short-term trips and discipleship by the Internet, then the method contains the wrong message and is actually undercutting the recruitment program for career missionaries.⁶⁸ After all, if you can do it by short-term trips and over the Internet in English, then why uproot your life and family to move overseas? Further, this model is as poor as suggesting that pastors can live in another

⁶⁸Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 265. Garrison encourages volunteers who feel inadequate because they do not know the language by saying to them, “Once again, the global spread of English can help. But more important is an improved definition of discipleship. Among Church Planting Movement practitioners, discipleship is increasingly being described as *teaching others to love Jesus as much as you do*.” He continues, “Today, with the advent of Internet communications, you can continue to nurture and disciple these believers even after you’ve returned home.”

country and shepherd a flock on a two-week trip.

Increasingly, CPM strategy devalues long term investment of an incarnational witness that does the slow arduous and often mundane tasks of learning the language and culture, integrating as much as possible to one's surroundings, developing relationships with nationals for evangelism and discipleship, and modeling through one's life and witness what it means to be a Christian, a leader, and a churchman. Again, the emphasis rests upon the SC's ability to outsource ministry to others through mobilizing volunteers.

Concluding Reflections

Respected evangelical missiologist, David Hesselgrave, wrote, "Post-World War II missions have been characterized by a number of methodological 'winds' that have blown across the landscape. Responsible missiology requires that we examine where these winds are moving us." CPM strategy is listed as one of these winds.⁶⁹ Hesselgrave poses a few questions that the CPM strategy raises:

Exactly, what is a church planting movement? That definition is clear, and Garrison does a good job of identifying examples of such movements. But what precisely are the differences between C.P.M. strategy and Pauline church development? What is the difference between planting a 'church planting movement' and planting churches that plant other churches? Given the difficulties of planting indigenous churches, exactly how does an outsider go about planting an *indigenous movement*, as missionaries are encouraged to do so? If it is God who 'gives the increase,' how can the 'planter' or 'waterer' determine the time, place, and pace at which a movement will occur? Are any important steps in developing responsible, New Testament churches short-circuited in starting church-planting movements? What are we to say about the marks of the church in Acts 2:42-47?⁷⁰

Hesselgrave concludes his brief section on CPM with a word of caution, "Before we devote money and personnel to such a strategy, it requires extended study and protracted prayer."⁷¹ While CPM strategy has been employed to varying degrees over the last decade, it is never too late to heed Hesselgrave's words to examine missiological winds in light of Scripture to ground missions strategy in sound biblical doctrine and practice.

In January 2005, the IMB perceived the need for further definition regarding the nature of a New Testament church and its leadership to guide its church planting strategies. As a result, they issued a *Church Definition*

⁶⁹Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 234-36.

⁷⁰Ibid., 235-36.

⁷¹Ibid., 236.

and Guidelines document to clarify the definition of church and bring closer accountability to the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. This was a good first step in reviewing and revising its missiological-ecclesiological commitments, attempting to bring missions practice in line with Scripture and Baptist polity. While CPM methodology contains some positive reminders, as a comprehensive mission strategy, it lacks an adequate biblical and theological foundation. Much more critical reflection is needed to ground the Southern Baptist global mission enterprise on a more solid biblical foundation. In fact, such realignment demands nothing short of theological renewal.

The CPM pragmatic ethos is to do “whatever it takes” to “finish the task.” But one must ask after reviewing the Great Commission and other relevant New Testament passages, which speak to the nature of the church’s mission, is it our duty to finish the task by initiating Church Planting Movements? The church’s job involves doing “whatever it takes” to be “faithful to the task” of making disciples and planting reproducible churches for the glory of God, no matter how long it takes. The call to be faithful to the task rings truer to what Jesus has told us to do; *initiating* Church Planting Movements through a cleverly devised strategy does not. The church is to utilize fully the various gifts God has given for its mission. In order for us to be ranked among the faithful stewards in the day of God’s accounting, then we must be faithful to God’s Word regarding the nature of the missionary task and be faithful to the Great Commission, which we can never wrinkle to accomplish our own pragmatic goals according to our own time table.

Indeed, God is at work in the world today. The church in non-western lands has eclipsed the church in the west in numbers and strength. We need not attempt to reduplicate the cultural trappings of the western church in the non-western world to be biblically sound in our missiology. We also must not compromise the biblical pattern for making disciples, starting churches, and training leaders. There is much to learn from our global brothers and sisters in Christ in the non-western world. Surely, a global engagement with our evangelical Baptist counterparts is needed and has already begun. We certainly can learn from each other and be mutually enriched in our understanding of the Bible and its applications for today. Let us do so with open minds and hearts and an undying commitment to the timeless relevance of the gospel and to the inerrant infallible Word of God, aligning our missiology with it and not attempting to align it with our missiology. The wholesale implementation of CPM methodology makes the case that our mission strategy as Southern Baptists should be the result of community collaboration among professional missiologists, practitioners, biblical scholars, church historians, and theologians. The strategy should reflect biblical and doctrinal soundness and should ring true to what Southern Baptists believe the Bible teaches regarding the nature of the missionary task, evangelism, discipleship, church planting, church leadership, and missionary recruitment. The theological integrity of Southern Baptist missions demands nothing less.

Review Essay (Part One): John Calvin on the Death of Christ and The Reformation's Forgotten Doctrine of Universal Vicarious Satisfaction: A Review and Critique of Tom Nettles' Chapter in Whomever He Wills¹

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Introduction

There has been a long-standing question and debate in modern Calvin studies whether or not John Calvin taught a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone. Did Calvin teach what we now call limited atonement in populist Reformed literature? Scholars are divided on the answer. G. Michael Thomas, Brian G. Armstrong, R. T. Kendall, Charles Bell, Kevin Kennedy, A. C. Clifford, and Paul Hartog are among those who believe that Calvin did subscribe to an unlimited satisfaction for all the sins of all men. Roger Nicole, Jonathan Rainbow, and Paul Helm (with qualification) believe the contrary. Pieter Rouwendal adopts a mediating position. Robert Peterson believes that Calvin's position on the extent of the satisfaction is indeterminate.² In his essay "John Calvin's Understanding of the Death of Christ," Tom Nettles has added his voice to those who side with the position that Calvin held to a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone.³

At first glance, Nettles seems to adopt the qualified argument made by Paul Helm. Helm argues that even though Calvin never overtly committed himself to a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone, he was, nonetheless, committed

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²See G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (UK: Paternoster, 1997); Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (UK: Paternoster Press, 1997); Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985); Kevin D. Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002); idem., "Was Calvin a 'Calvinist'? John Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 191-212; A. C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Paul Hartog, *A Word for the World: Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2009); Roger Nicole, "Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 197-225; Jonathan H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and The Cross* (Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1990); Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1982); Pieter Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position on the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (2008): 317-35; and, Robert Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement* (New Jersey: Mentor, 1999).

³See Thomas J. Nettles, "John Calvin's Understanding of the Death of Christ," in *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy*, ed. Matthew M. Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012), 293-315. Parenthetical citations in this review essay are to this essay.

to it. For Helm, in order for Christ's death to be truly substitutionary, a limited satisfaction for sins is necessarily entailed. Given that Calvin held to "substitutionary atonement," as defined by Helm, he must therefore have been committed to a limited satisfaction (even if he never expressly committed himself to it).⁴ As Nettles develops his thesis statement, he moves beyond Helm to the stronger claim of Nicole and Rainbow that Calvin actually did teach a limited satisfaction, if not by name, then by direct implication. To support this, Nettles claims that we can discern two critical lines of thought from Calvin. First, for all whom Christ died, faith and all the benefits of salvation are infallibly purchased. Second, that for Calvin, the high priestly and effectual intercession of Christ, assumedly for the elect as a class, delimits the scope and extent of the satisfaction.

When it comes to dealing with the evidence in Calvin suggesting that Christ died for the sins of all men, Nettles offers an interesting interpretation, one found in seed form in Nicole and Rainbow. In the many cases where Calvin says such things as, "Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world," Nettles says that Calvin merely meant to speak "from the human perspective," or from the perspective of human phenomenology. So when Calvin stated Christ suffered in the place of all men, he did not actually mean to speak from the divine "point of view" of what God in Christ accomplished in reality. Calvin was not saying what he believed Christ had actually accomplished for all men, or what was "theologically true." Unfortunately for Nettles, there does not appear to be any substantive support for the supposition in Calvin's writings at all. At most, Nettles can only point to Calvin's use of "classes" in his interpretation of 1 Tim 2:4-6. Nettles assumes that Calvin's apparent use of "classes" sets up a sort of "rule" to interpret all of Calvin's universal statements. There are two key problems with this assumption. First, Nettles, like Nicole and Rainbow, has misread Calvin's intent, and I think this can be demonstrated reasonably enough. Second, Calvin himself never applied this *rule* universally throughout his biblical exegesis, and even on key occasions he simply never refers to it.

The primary purpose of this essay, however, is not so much to prove that Calvin subscribed to an unlimited satisfaction for all the sins of all sinners, but to remove the objections to this possibility. The reader should understand that the following review is intended as a non-exhaustive *specimen* response to Tom Nettles' analysis of Calvin on the question of the extent of the satisfaction of Christ. My aim in this essay is to demonstrate that Nettles has treated Calvin 1) ahistorically and, therefore, inaccurately, 2) inaccurately with respect to critical comments from Calvin, and 3) illogically in terms of drawing conclusions from Calvin's statements.

The historian's inductive method shows us a better way to engage in historical analysis. The respective methods of Nicole, Helm, Rainbow, and Nettles, are driven *top-down* by their own systematic assumptions and not *bottom-up* by surveying the inductively derived data from Calvin. This top-down method is sometimes described as a deductivist approach that normally begins with a set of *a priories* and then attempts to posit them or identify them within the respective primary source texts. Proper historiography, on the other hand, works inductively to gather the data from the primary source texts, where the data form its own image or pattern. The only way to solve the question regarding Calvin's view of the extent of the Christ's satisfaction is to engage in inductive analysis. Unfortunately, the inductive method

⁴See Paul Helm, "The Logic of Limited Atonement," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3 (1985): 47-54; and idem., "Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of the Doctrinal Development," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 179-185.

is often disparaged or ignored. It is time consuming, demands patience, and requires that the researcher suspend certain personal assumptions and conflicts. Conflicts arise because reading a classical author often generates more questions than the researcher's personal theological "system" can handle. The temptation is to posit a quick answer on the basis of the researcher's own personal beliefs.

Another problem with the deductivist approach is that it can fall into the trap of isolating a given author from his historical-theological context. Rainbow does this repeatedly. As an example, he treats Martin Luther by way of a simple deductivist assumption that because Luther was a true *Augustinian* he would have held to limited satisfaction.⁵ Rainbow fails to locate Luther within Luther's own theological context thereby failing to identify what a true *Augustinian* might have looked like at the beginning of the 16th century. Indeed, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, and Wolfgang Musculus, et al, would have considered themselves good and true Augustinians, yet all held that Christ died for all men.

By applying the inductive approach to the question, "What would 'substitutionary atonement' have looked like in the early 16th century?" we need to survey the writings of not only Calvin, but also those of his contemporaries. By doing this, we can identify an early Reformation doctrine of vicarious satisfaction which was not seen as entailing the more modern view of a limited satisfaction of sins.⁶ Rather than fixate on the outdated "Calvin versus the Calvinist" thesis, or rather than treat Calvin in isolation, we should seek to identify and understand the early Reformation doctrine of unlimited vicarious satisfaction. If such a doctrine did exist, we can begin to examine Calvin afresh. Then the question becomes, "Does the data from Calvin fit this model of satisfaction, rather than the later model as defined by TULIP or strict five-point Calvinist orthodoxy?" To that end, this essay will produce numerous extended quotations from the various primary sources. The use of extensive primary source quotation is often criticized in some circles. In order to resolve this question, however, we must engage original authors, such as Calvin, with extensive quotations so that we can see their theology expressed in its proper context.

Limited atonement is defined as the doctrine that only the sins of the elect were imputed to Christ, such that, if we were to ask the question, "For whose sins was Christ punished?" the answer will invariably be, "For the sins of the elect alone." Throughout this essay, I will generally use my preferred term "limited satisfaction" in the place of "limited atonement," as the language of satisfaction was the term used in classic 16th and 17th century literature, and because the word "atonement" has a history of ambiguity. There will be no need to labor the point that the original Reformers, Calvin included, did believe in a vicarious satisfaction wherein Christ actually bore in his own person and body the curse of the law due to sinners. Rather, what is in view here is the question of the *extent* of this vicarious sin-bearing.⁷

⁵Rainbow, *Will of God and The Cross*, 181.

⁶Apart from the survey work of G. Michael Thomas, there is no substantive and balanced analysis of this first and second generation doctrine of an unlimited vicarious satisfaction in the literature.

⁷References to Calvin's *Commentaries* and *Institutes*, and Nettles' essay will be cited parenthetically. In some of the following quotations from the original 16th century sources, I have modernized the spelling, and occasionally reformatted both text and quotations within a quotation. Further, for my Calvin commentary material, I am using the older translations published by Baker Books. For our purposes here there is no significant translation differences.

Thesis Statement and Explanation

Nettles writes,

The thesis of this article is simple: Calvin's discussion of the atonement gives sufficient warrant for his theological progeny to infer that he believed that Christ's atoning work was intrinsically efficacious for the salvation of the elect only. Both the nature of the atonement, in Calvin's extended comments on it, and its connections as the necessary and pivotal means for God to execute His eternal purpose of redemption give warrant for one to conclude this limited atonement may be inferred from several pivotal exegetical/doctrinal discussions and is more consistent with his overall theological view than is a general atonement. It is not unwarranted from Calvin's writings to infer that for Calvin Christ's death merited from God all the subsequent blessings that would certainly be given to all for whom Christ purchased them (295, emphasis added).

To say that for Calvin, the atonement of Christ is intrinsically efficacious for the salvation of the elect only is rather generic, as all parties would agree. Further, to suggest that limited atonement is "more consistent with his overall theological view" is the older argument outlined by Helm that limited satisfaction is consistent with Calvin's writings. The third and final assertion turns out to be Nettles' central argument: Salvation (i.e., the blessings of) is effectually given to all for whom Christ died. It is the last statement that cannot be proven from Calvin, as he never uses this form of reasoning or argumentation. Rather, it may only be inferred based on certain statements found in Calvin. If it can be shown that Nettles' arguments either beg the question or are simply invalid, then perhaps there may be room enough to go back and read Calvin in his own theological and historical context without the later systematic and ahistorical grid which Nettles and others have imposed upon Calvin.

Nettles on the Concept of Substitution

First, Nettles' sub-heading, "The *Power* of Substitution in Calvin."⁸ For Nettles, substitution itself has power to save. Nettles does not elaborate upon the full nature of this power, other than its certain power to "purchase" people and "salvation" for the elect exclusively. What was Calvin's doctrine of substitution? While it is true that Calvin says Christ bore "our" sins and curses, this itself does not entail a limited substitution for the elect alone or an effectual substitution as later defined by TULIP or strict five-point Calvinism. Nettles' unstated assumption is that there is only one doctrine of substitution, as defined by strict five-point Calvinist orthodoxy, in Reformation theology and history. However, it is undeniable that Luther, Zwingli, Musculus, and Bullinger, contemporaries or near contemporaries of Calvin, understood that Christ really did bear "our" sins in "our" place, that is, he truly was a vicarious substitute *in our place*, suffering the wrath of God for our sins. Nonetheless, they all believed that Christ died for the sins of all men, of all who have lived, now live, and shall live. This shows that there was another conception of vicarious satisfaction in existence of which Calvin could have also shared.

We can identify the following factual assertions within the theology of Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Musculus: 1) that Christ stood in the place of men, bearing

⁸Nettles, "John Calvin," 297. Emphasis added.

the wrath and curse for sin, in their behalf, and 2) that he accomplished this for all men without exception. If this can be demonstrated, then it is clear that, historically, there was a version of substitutionary atonement which was “other than” the version of “five-point Calvinist” orthodoxy. It would then show us that the simple one-to-one association between vicarious satisfaction and limited satisfaction (as made by Nicole, Helm, Rainbow, and now Nettles) is not a *necessary* entailment. From Ulrich Zwingli, three examples:

1. “How much more had the victim to be absolutely spotless which made atonement for the sins not only of all who had been, but of all who were yet to come!”⁹
2. “Therefore the blood of Christ, offered once for all, endures to remove all the sins of all men.”¹⁰
3. “For He has atoned *for the sins of all from the founding of the world*, so is He even unto the end of the world, the bearer of salvation to all who trust in him; for He is everlasting God; through Him we were created and redeemed.”¹¹

Heinrich Bullinger held that while Christ presented himself as a satisfaction for sin, he did this in behalf of all sinners:

1. “The Lord made to meet on him, as an expiatory sacrifice, not one or another or most sins of one or other man, *but all the iniquities of all of us*. Therefore I say, *the sins of all men of the world of all ages have been expiated by his death*.”¹²
2. “Therefore, when he would sacrifice for the satisfaction of the sins of the whole world. . . . And that only sacrifice is always effectual to make satisfaction for all the sins of all men in the whole world. . . . Christians know that the sacrifice of Christ once offered is always effectual to make satisfaction for the sins of all men in the whole world, and of all men of all ages: but these men with often outcries say, that it is flat heresy not to confess that Christ is daily offered of sacrificing priests, consecrated to that purpose.”¹³
3. “And it is not amiss in this place first of all to mark, that Christ is called a propitiation, or satisfaction, *not for sinners or people of one or two ages, but for all sinners* and all the faithful people throughout the whole world. One Christ therefore is sufficient for all: one intercessor with the Father is set forth unto all.”¹⁴

From Wolfgang Musculus, one quotation will suffice at this point:

For like as God enclosed all under unbelief that he might have mercy upon all, so he will have this grace of *his mercy to be set forth to all men*: ‘So God loved the world,’ (says our Saviour), ‘that he gave his only begotten son, that everyone which believes in him should not perish,

⁹Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 112. Emphasis added.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 234.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 235-236. Emphasis added.

¹²Bullinger, *Isaiah*, 266b, sermon 151, as cited in Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 75. Emphasis added.

¹³Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 4th Decade, sermon 7, 2: 285-286, 287, and 296. Emphasis added.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 4th Decade, sermon 5, 2:218-219. Emphasis added.

but have life everlasting.’ And in the first epistle of John, we read this: ‘But in case any man do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins also of the whole world.’ *I think that there is meant by the world, all mankind, by which the world does consist, from the beginning of it, until the end.* Therefore when it is said, that *God gave his son for the world*, and that he is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world what else is meant, but that *the grace of forgiveness of sins is appointed unto all men*, so that the Gospel thereof is to be preached unto all creatures? In this respect the gentle love of GOD towards man is set forth unto us to be considered, whereby he would not have any to perish, but all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. But for all that, this general grace has some conditions going withal, of which we will speak hereafter.¹⁵

The doctrine of unlimited satisfaction was held by Martin Luther,¹⁶ Rudolf Gualther,¹⁷ Juan De Valdes,¹⁸ as well as the English Reformers, such as Richard Hooper,¹⁹ and Thomas Cranmer²⁰ and many others. All these and others held to a doctrine of vicarious satisfaction wherein Christ stood in the place of all men, receiving in their place the curse and wrath due to all of them. One could easily say that the original Reformation doctrine of unlimited satisfaction is the forgotten doctrine of the Reformation. Further, in terms of actual history, this demonstrates to us that contemporary with Calvin there was a doctrine of satisfaction which *did not* entail a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone, as expressed in the modern five-point Calvinist orthodoxy. Nettles’ first assertion, then, demonstrates that his historical analysis is system driven, that it is top-down, deductivist and *a priori*. However, when we compare Calvin to Zwingli, Bullinger, and Musculus, among others, we find identical expressions and language relating to the nature and extent of Christ’s death. Those who argue that Calvin held to a limited satisfaction cannot explain how it could be that when Calvin uses these identical expressions they did not mean the same for Calvin as they did for these other Reformers. On the other hand, reading Calvin in the light of his own historical context, gives us room to read

¹⁵Wolfgangus Musculus, *Common Places of Christian Religion*, trans. by John Merton (London: Imprinted by Henry Bynneman, 1578), 577-78. Emphasis added.

¹⁶For a sample of Luther’s many statements, see *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955), 2:384; 3:372; 5:220; 12:371; 13:239-40; 19:102.; 22:459; 23:184-85; 24:279; 26:37-38, 277-81, 282, 283-84, 285-86, 287; 40:14; and 51:316-17.

¹⁷For example, Gualther says, “And so it is necessary to have Christ’s death preached in these days, that all men might understand the Son of God died for their sins, and that they were the authors thereof.” Radulpe Gualthere, *An Hundred, threescore and fifteen Sermons, upon the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. by John Bridges (London: 1572), 108.

¹⁸Valdes: “Where it is especially to be understood that the duty of the Evangelical preacher is to persuade himself to know no other thing in this world but Christ crucified, since it is his proper office to publish the indulgence or general pardon made to men, confirmed by the blood of Christ, which He shed on the Cross; his duty is to preach nothing else but Christ crucified . . . for that in Christ, when hanging on the Cross, God punished the sins of all men, and for that in slaying His own flesh on the Cross, Christ slew that of all men.” Juan de Valdes, *Juan de Valdés Commentary Upon St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Church at Corinth* (London: Trüber & Co, 1883), 30-31.

¹⁹Hooper explicitly affirmed that Christ died in the place of all sinners who have lived, now live and shall live. See John Hooper, “Extracts From a Brief and Clear Confession of the Christian Faith,” in *Writings of Dr. John Hooper* (London: Religious Tract Society, [1800s]), 419.

²⁰Thomas Cranmer, “Disputations at Oxford,” in *The Writing and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1844), 1:395.

Calvin in a more historically accurate manner, such that the *a priori* assumption of “limited satisfaction” is undercut and removed.

As an example, in the following quotation, Calvin rehearses a hypothetical speech Christ might say to a person on the day of judgment:

Behold our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory, abased himself for a time, as says S. Paul. Now if there were no more but this, that he being the fountain of life, became a moral man, and that he having dominion over the angels of heaven, took upon him the shape of a servant, *yea even to shed his blood for our redemption*, and in the end to suffer *the curse that was due unto us* (Gal 3:13):²¹ were it convenient that notwithstanding all this, he should nowadays in recompense be torn to pieces, by stinking mouths of such as name themselves Christians? For when they swear by his blood, by his death, by his wounds and by whatsoever else: is it not a crucifying of God’s son again as much as in them lies, and as a rending of him in pieces? And are not such folk worthy to be cut off from God’s Church, yea, and even from the world, and to be no more numbered in the array of creatures? Should our Lord Jesus have such reward at our hands, for his abasing and humbling of himself after that manner? (Mich 6:30). . . . For when the son of God, who is ordained to be judge of the world (John 5:22), shall come at the last day: he may well say to us: how now Sirs? You have borne my name, you have been baptised in remembrance of me and record that *I was your redeemer*, I have drawn you out of the dungeons where into you were plunged, I delivered you from endless death by *suffering most cruel death myself*, and for the same cause I became man, and *submitted myself even to the curse of GOD my father, that you might be blessed by my grace and by my means*: and behold the reward that you have yielded me for all this, is that you have (after a sort) torn me in pieces and made a jestingstock of me, and *the death that I suffered for you has been made a mockery among you*, the blood which is the washing and cleansing of your souls has been as good as trampled under your feet, and to be short, you have taken occasion to ban and blaspheme me, as though I had been some wretched and cursed creature. When the sovereign judge shall charge us with these things, I pray you will it not be as thundering upon us, *to ding us down to the bottom of hell?* Yes: and yet are there very few that think upon it.²²

Note the critical elements. Christ suffers the curse of the law and wrath of the Father for this person, and yet this person is not ultimately saved. Calvin also identifies

²¹Calvin, as does Luther (Martin Luther, “Sermons,” in *Luther’s Works*, 51:316-317), references Galatians 3:13 many times in his writings with a universal intent. For example, he writes, “Now, since the Son of God, although He was not only pure, but purity itself, still was *the representative of the human race*, He subjected Himself to the Law; and (as Paul teaches) submitted Himself to the Law, “to redeem them that were under the Law.” (Galatians 3:13, and 4:5.). John Calvin, *Leviticus* 12:2. And again: “It follows, therefore, either that he was crucified in vain, or *that our curse was laid upon him*, in order that we might be delivered from it. Now, he does not say that Christ was cursed, but, which is still more, that he was a curse,—intimating, *that the curse of all men was laid upon him*’ (Isaiah 53:6.).” John Calvin, *Galatians* 3:13.

²²John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 196. Emphasis added. Often it is claimed that such Calvin quotations are taken out of context. Readers are invited to peruse Calvin’s many universal statements in context found on the following webpage: “The Genius and Complexity of John Calvin: Citations From Calvin on the Unlimited Work of Expiation and Redemption of Christ” (<http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=230>).

“intentionality” in Christ’s suffering for this person: so that he “might be blessed by my grace.” If we were to assume that Calvin held to the “substitutionary” satisfaction defined by Nettles and others, such hypothetical language could never have been sensible to Calvin. This “rehearsal” demonstrates that Calvin could conceptualize a form of vicarious satisfaction, wherein, the person for whom satisfaction was made might fail to be saved. What would be the point of an impossible hypothetical presented as a pastoral counseling? Nor is this a case where Rainbow’s interpretative hermeneutic is applicable, for, as Calvin rehearses, Christ is speaking, no less, to a perishing sinner, for the resurrected Christ, the line of demarcation between the elect and the non-elect has never been “unclear.”²³

Calvin and the Doctrines of Sufficiency and Satisfaction

The third critical assumption in Nettles’s argument is his conflating of Calvin’s sufficiency-efficiency doctrine with that of John Owen’s later doctrine of sufficiency. Regarding Calvin’s apparent universalism, Nettles says,

The affirmations of universal provision in other passages should be filtered through two realities. One, Calvin did receive the formula that Christ’s death was sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect. He affirms this in connection with his exegesis of I John 2:2, a passage to be quoted later, and in his polemical treatise *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*. This is the same view stated later by the Synod of Dort under the second head of doctrine, articles three through six, and also affirmed by John Owen. Looking at the redemptive work of God from the standpoint of men, all that God provides for the reclaiming of fallen humanity is set before them as theirs if they will but take it. (299, emphasis added)

And then later Nettles says,

His universal language, therefore, in relation to Christ’s atoning work, without exception, finds its meaning in the context of these three things: one, Christ alone is the savior of all who will be saved and there is no other savior; two, it is a linguistic device to express the expansion of the Messiah’s saving work beyond the Jews to the whole world, that is, the New Covenant inclusion of the Gentiles, the uncircumcised; three, Calvin explicitly says that Christ’s propitiatory work, both in justification and intercession, does not include the reprobate, and thus includes only the elect. (308)

First, this misunderstands the doctrine of Christ’s sufficiency as set out by Lombard, Calvin, the Synod of Dort, even the revised version of Owen and others. Second, Nettles reproduces his mistaken reading of Owen in his earlier work *By His Grace and For His Glory*. Owen’s real doctrine of sufficiency is a *hypothetical* sufficiency for those not elected. It is not an actual sufficiency for all men.²⁴ For Owen, there is no sufficient provision for all men as men. There is only a sufficient provision for all men *who come to him*. It is a sufficiency “for all” which is only hypothetical; “if they come to him” they will find a sufficient provision for their sins. This is not an actual sufficiency for all men, simply considered. Owen writes,

²³See Rainbow, *Will of God and The Cross*, 173.

²⁴See Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 302-414.

Sufficient we say, then, was the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of the whole world, and for the expiation of all the sins of all and every man in the world. *This sufficiency of his sacrifice has a twofold rise: First, The dignity of the person that did offer and was offered. Secondly, The greatness of the pain he endured, by which he was able to bear, and did undergo, the whole curse of the law and wrath of God due to sin. And this sets out the innate, real, true worth and value of the blood-shedding of Jesus Christ. This is its own true internal perfection and sufficiency. That it should be applied unto any, made a price for them, and become beneficial to them, according to the worth that is in it, is external to it, doth not arise from it, but merely depends upon the intention and will of God. It was in itself of infinite value and sufficiency to have been made a price to have bought and purchased all and every man in the world. That it did formally become a price for any is solely to be ascribed to the purpose of God, intending their purchase and redemption by it. . . . Hence may appear what is to be thought of that old distinction of the schoolmen, embraced and used by divers protestant divines, though by others again rejected, namely, "That Christ died for all in respect of the sufficiency of the ransom he paid, but not in respect of the efficacy of its application;" or, "The blood of Christ was a sufficient price for the sins of all the world;" which last expression is corrected by some, and thus asserted, "That the blood of Christ was sufficient to have been made a price for all;" which is most true, as was before declared: for its being a price for all or some doth not arise from its own sufficiency, worth, or dignity, but from the intention of God and Christ using it to that purpose, as was declared; and, therefore, it is denied that the blood of Christ was a sufficient price and ransom for all and every one, not because it was not sufficient, but because it was not a ransom.*²⁵

For Owen, therefore, the sufficiency of the satisfaction has two divisible elements. There is an internal (and abstracted) sufficiency which speaks to its inherent value. This guards Owen from falling into the trap of suggesting that Christ *suffered so much* for so much sin. That is, had God elected more, Christ would not have had to suffer more. But there is also the external or extrinsic aspect of the sufficiency of the satisfaction. For Owen, there is no external sufficiency for all men. The internal and external sufficiency relative to all mankind is purely hypothetical: *had* God elected more, then the one intrinsically infinitely valuable and sufficient satisfaction, *would have been* sufficient for them as well. The critical sentence fragment from Owen is, "therefore, it is denied that the blood of Christ was a sufficient price and ransom for all and every one, not because it was not sufficient, but because it was not a ransom." For Owen, Christ did not formally lay down a redemption "price" for all men, therefore, there is no actual sufficiency for all men.²⁶ This is a marked

²⁵ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Gould (London: Johnston and Hunter, 1851), 10:295-296. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Later in *Death of Death*, Owen scorns the idea of an actual external, albeit non-effectual, sufficiency for all men. Owen: "Fifthly, If the words are to be understood to signify all and every one in the world, then is the whole assertion useless as to the chief end intended,—namely, to administer consolation to believers; for what consolation can arise from hence unto any believer, that Christ was a propitiation for them that perish? Yea, to say that he was a sufficient propitiation for them, though not effectual, will yield them no more comfort than it would have done Jacob and his sons to have heard from Joseph that he had corn enough, sufficient to sustain them, but that he would do so was altogether uncertain; for had he told

departure from the earlier Reformation tradition that Christ did formally lay down a sufficient price for all men. Owen's distinction of the internal sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction retains continuity with the Anselmic tradition. His latter distinction of the external sufficiency, however, departs from it. This departure for the Reformed scholastic orthodox became the new standard from the first half of the 16th century, and it is the revision of the Lombardian formula which is generally understood and adopted by modern Reformed writers.

Owen's language matches that of Witsius, Turretin, and many others who modified the Lombardian Formula.²⁷ Herman Witsius' expression of the formula is a good case in point: "That the obedience and sufferings of Christ, considered in themselves, are, on the account of the infinite dignity of the person, of that value, *as to have been sufficient for redeeming not only all and every man in particular, but many myriads besides, had it so pleased God and Christ, that he should have undertaken and satisfied for them.*"²⁸

Unlike the revised version, Peter Lombard, and later Thomas Aquinas, held that Christ actually sustained a universal satisfaction for all sins, which effected a universally sufficient satisfaction for all sinners.²⁹ Christ also accomplished this universally sufficient satisfaction with the intention that the elect be effectually saved. This formula, however, was probably revised first by Theodore Beza. Pieter Rouwendal explains:

After the Reformation, Beza was the first to criticize this formula. During his conflict with Jacob Andreae, the latter maintained that Christ had "satisfied sufficiently for the sins of all individuals." Beza remarked that this, if rightly understood, was true, but it was said "very roughly and ambiguously, as well as barbarously." Beza's criticism of barbarous language was not against words such as "sufficient" and "efficient," but against the ambiguous use of the word "for" (*pro*). The humanistically educated Beza was skilled in Latin and understood that the preposition *pro* declared a plan and effect. Hence, the statement "Christ died for . . ." can only be completed by "the elect" or some equivalent. Calvin himself was dissatisfied with the formula sufficient-efficient, as will be shown in a separate paragraph, but he was not as critical as Beza. Calvin nowhere criticized the content of the formula, but thought it did not answer all questions regarding the atonement. Beza, however, criticized the formula itself as "ambiguous and barbarous." Beza did not deny the all-sufficiency of Christ's merit, but he denied that it was the intention of Christ to die for all men.³⁰

them he would sustain them sufficiently, though not effectually, they might have starved notwithstanding his courtesy" (*Works*, 10:337). Owen misunderstands the import of the classic doctrine of the sufficiency, and in his analogy he fails to insert the condition of faith. The sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction was never intended to communicate any certainty to any sinner apart from the presence of faith.

²⁷See, for example, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 2:458-459.

²⁸Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants* (Escondido, CA: The Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 1:256. Emphasis added.

²⁹See Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* (Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008), 3.20.5; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 3.48.2, 3.49.3; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 4.55.25, 27, 29.

³⁰Rouwendal, 319-320. Thomas notes the same point with regard to Beza: "Thus the statement that Christ died sufficiently for all could only be accepted in a hypothetical sense, which to Beza, made

In English, as in Latin, there is what is called a hypothetical contrary-to-fact subjunctive. Normally this is identified by statements which contain a conditional, *if* or *had*, with *could have been*, or *should have been*, or *might have been*, and so on. For example, "If John had reached out, he would have been saved," or, "Had Mary studied for her exam, she would not have failed." The point of this form of the subjunctive is that it is not actually the case that John was saved, nor that Mary passed her exam. Owen, Turretin, Witsius, along with Abraham Booth³¹ and others, all use this form of expression. To paraphrase Witsius, "Had it pleased God to elect more, the satisfaction *would have been* sufficient for them, in that, for then Christ *would have* undertaken to make a satisfaction for them as well." The reality is, as God did not elect more so Christ did not satisfy for them, the death of Christ is not extrinsically or externally sufficient for them, only that it could have been sufficient for them.³² Here the sufficiency is only a potential sufficiency for all. The satisfaction's internal sufficiency functions for Owen, Witsius, and others in this way: 1) Christ need not suffer *so much* for so much sin, and 2) all who actually come to Christ, will never fail to find a completely sufficient satisfaction for their sins.³³ On the other hand, Calvin held to the classic Lombardian expression of the formula, not the revised Bezarian version.³⁴ To read the revision back into Calvin is anachronistic. It is highly implausible, therefore, to read Calvin's universal statements as expressions of the revised hypothetical contrary-to-fact sufficiency-efficiency formula. If we must insist that his universal statements be read in the light of the sufficiency-efficiency formula, then they are to be read in the light of the original Lombardian version which advocated an actual universal vicarious satisfaction for all men.

The second critical point is Nettles' stress on the human perspective. As emphasized in the above quotation, he imagines we can look at the redemptive work of God in two ways. We can look at it from the perspective of what God actually says and actually accomplishes, or we can look at it *from the human standpoint*. Nettles writes,

Even though only by the secret operations of His electing grace does the Spirit apply any of the benefits, *from our standpoint we are to regard every person as a candidate to receive those blessings that Christ has died to procure*, and that their refusal is the result of sin, not of non-election per se, and constitutes a criminal resistance to the divine benevolence (300, emphasis added).

This assertion forms the core presupposition which Nettles will invoke to explain the apparent universal statements in Calvin. Whenever Calvin speaks of Christ dying for all men or the world, Nettles assumes that Calvin merely meant to communicate

it irrelevant;" Thomas, 57.

³¹Abraham Booth, "Divine Justice Essential to the Divine Character," in *The Works of Abraham Booth* (London: Printed by J. Haddon, 1813), 3:61.

³²In his work, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, Nettles creates a false dichotomy between Abraham Booth and John Owen. Because of his misreading of William Shedd and Owen, Nettles posits that Owen taught an actual external sufficiency for all, while Abraham Booth did not. However, when both men are read in context, both held to only a hypothetical sufficiency for all, namely, *had* it so pleased God to elect more, the death of Christ *would have been* sufficient for them, too (See Nettles, *By His Grace*, 302-314).

³³Undergirding the theological point of the sufficiency of Christ's death is the related question of savability. If Christ did not sustain a penal relationship with all men, then his penal remedy cannot be sufficient for all men—only that it could have been sufficient for all men, had he also sustained a penal relationship for them as well.

³⁴A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1868), 333.

the idea that, from our perspective, we are to regard all men as fit candidates for salvation, and that a provision of salvation has been made for them.

This idea is not new. Rainbow, for instance, applies the same interpretative method to Calvin's many statements that there are souls who have been redeemed by Christ, who yet perish in hell. Rainbow even extends this to Calvin's understanding of general love and the divine revealed desire that all men be saved. Rainbow writes,

Did Calvin mean that Christ died for every one of these wretched unbelievers? Did Calvin base this exhortation to pray for all men on the doctrine that Christ died for all individuals? Before this question can be answered, we must take some account of Calvin's general view of the activities of Christians toward unbelievers. . . . As in the case of church discipline and pastoral care, Calvin believed that Christian activity must be based, not on the elective decree of God (about which we have no firm knowledge in cases other than our own), but a practical working assumption. The assumption in the case of unbelievers was one which dovetailed with the universal saving will of God revealed in preaching: God loves all sinners and wills all sinners to be saved. *This we have seen, was not for Calvin theologically true. But it was the assumption which has to be made concerning Christian activity toward the world of men outside of the church.*³⁵

Rainbow further states,

In the final analysis, Calvin's doctrine of church activity toward the world was not unlike his doctrine of church discipline. . . . In both cases, there is an important working assumption which must be made for this help to be given: the wayward brother, it is that because he is a member of the visible church he is a blood-bought soul; with the unbeliever outside the church, it is that Christ's death extends to him as well. In both cases the assumption is based on a degree of ignorance about election and reprobation. And in both cases, the assumption creates a kind of ethical imperative which to ignore is really to despise the blood of Christ and the souls for whom it was shed. So, *in the end, Calvin extended a kind of "judgment of charity" even beyond the pale of the visible church. Only on the last day will the line of demarcation between the elect and the reprobate be as clear to human perception as it now is to God, and only then will God's treatment of human beings fully correspond to his decree.*³⁶

Rainbow is incorrect to claim that Calvin did not believe it was theologically true that God loved all mankind and truly desired the salvation of all men by the revealed will. The evidence for this in Calvin is so overwhelming that Rainbow's comment is indefensible.³⁷ Second, if Rainbow is wrong on the first point, then there is no support for his second assertion that when Calvin said Christ suffered for and redeemed all men he simply meant it as a judgment of charity. Third, Rainbow, like Nettles, adduces no textual evidence from Calvin where he indicates he only meant

³⁵Rainbow, *Will of God and The Cross*, 171. Emphasis added.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 173. Emphasis added.

³⁷See Calvin's various comments on such verses as 2 Pet 3:9, John 3:16-17, Ps 81:13, Matt 23:37, and Lam 3:33 in his *Commentaries*.

to speak “from the human point of view.”

There is no evidence from Calvin that he meant to suggest that we are to treat the unsaved “as if it were” the case that Christ has died for them, too, as he has died for us. It is simply an inference which contradicts all the *prima facie* evidence from Calvin. Nettles cites Calvin on Romans 5:18. First the text from Calvin:

He makes this favor common to all, because it is propounded to all, and not because it is in reality extended to all; for though *Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world*, and is offered through God’s benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive him (Calvin on *Romans* 5:18, emphasis added).

Regarding this Nettles says,

The language is carefully constructed, and Calvin’s precise affirmation will become clearer below. One can see that what Christ accomplished through His death, *was accomplished for the world*, a reality that justifies preaching the Messianic redemption to all nations. The gospel also is offered to all men irrespective of their being Jew or Gentile. Though so openly and freely declared, not all of those to whom the gospel is preached receive Christ (300, emphasis added).

Nettles is trading on an ambiguity. The question should be, Does the “world” function for Nettles in the same way it does here for Calvin? The problem is that Nettles provides no evidence from Calvin that the term “world” is to be understood phenomenologically. In as much as Rainbow suggests that Calvin is exhorting us simply to act “as if” Christ had died for all men, when in fact he had not, Nettles is advocating the same basic idea. The real line of investigation should be how Calvin means to employ the term “world” in the wider context of his writings. Given that Calvin specifically says Christ “suffered for” the *sins* of “all the world,” the most natural reading of Calvin suggests a universal vicarious satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. On what *textual* grounds from Calvin on Romans 5 could Nettles suggest otherwise? Nettles applies his interpretative method to another famous Calvin statement:

“Which he hath purchased.” The four reasons, whereby Paul doth carefully prick forward the pastors to do their duty diligently, because the Lord hath given no small pledge of his love toward the *Church in shedding his own blood for it*. Whereby it appears how precious it is to him; and surely there is nothing which ought more vehemently to urge pastors to do their duty joyfully, than if they consider that the price of the blood of Christ is committed to them. For hereupon it follows, that unless they take pains in the Church, *the lost souls are not only imputed to them*, but they be also guilty of sacrilege, because they have profaned the holy blood of the Son of God, *and have made the redemption gotten by him to be of none effect*, so much as in them lies. And this is a most cruel offense, if, through our sluggishness, the death of Christ do not only become vile or base, but the fruit thereof be also abolished and perish; and it is said that God hath purchased the Church, to the end we may know that he would have it remain wholly to himself, because it is meet and right that he possess those whom he hath redeemed (Calvin on *Acts* 20:28, emphasis added).

Nettles comments,

Calvin represented this as the danger of the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. From a purely *phenomenological standpoint*, the potential within every aspect of saving truth can be rendered of no effect by the unfaithfulness of men and their blind refusal to consent to the purpose of God in each part. Faithless ministers not only endanger souls but profane the sacred blood of the Son of God and make ‘useless the redemption acquired by Him, as far as they are concerned.’ It is not useless in the infallible purpose of God but ‘as far as they are concerned;’ to the degree that their faithless work is concerned in the matter, it is useless (301, emphasis added).

Nettles would have us believe that Calvin only means to suggest that the redemption price only appears to have been voided from the human point of view. While there is some truth to this, Nettles cannot adduce evidence which indicates that Calvin spoke of the redemption of the visible church as only a *phenomenological* redemption.

The next text of interest which Nettles cites is Calvin on 2 Pet 2:1. Here is Calvin’s commentary on 2 Pet 2:1 and Jude 4:

Though Christ may be denied in various ways, yet Peter, as I think, refers here to what is expressed by Jude, that is, when the grace of God is turned into lasciviousness; for Christ redeemed us, that he might have a people separated from all the pollutions of the world, and devoted to holiness, and innocency. They, then, who throw off the bridle, and give themselves up to all kinds of licentiousness, *are not unjustly said to deny Christ by whom they have been redeemed* (Calvin on 2 Pet 2:1, emphasis added).

And, indeed, in the Second Epistle of Peter, Christ alone is mentioned, and there he is called Lord. But He means that Christ is denied, *when they who had been redeemed by his blood*, become again the vassals of the Devil, *and thus render void as far as they can that incomparable price* (Calvin on Jude 4, emphasis added).

Regarding Calvin’s comments on 2 Pet 2:1, Nettles says,

We see the same defeat of grace in Calvin’s look at 2 Peter 2 when he pointed out that ‘those who throw over the traces and plunge themselves into every kind of license are not unjustly said to deny Christ, by whom they were redeemed.’ That does not mean that Christ’s purpose to ‘have us as a people separated from all the iniquities of the world, devoted to holiness and purity’ will fail in any instance (302).

Nettles’ phenomenological argument suffers from a serious flaw that brings us face to face with the problematic of his method and interpretation. Nettles’ hypothesis proposes that when Calvin spoke in terms of universal satisfaction he merely meant to describe Christ’s redemption from the human point of view, that is, no man is to be *a priori* excluded from redemption. We are to “view” all men as potential candidates of salvation and redemption. When we meet individuals within the church, we are to view them from this charitable perspective. When we meet individuals outside of the church, similarly, we are to also see them in this most charitable light as viable

candidates for redemption, for, as Nettles would explain, there is provision enough, on the terms of limited satisfaction, for them as much as there is for any man in the world. As noted, this is a modification and extension of Rainbow's "judgment of charity" argument.

Evaluation and Response

Calvin and the Language of Redemption

How can we test this hypothesis? What evidence could one adduce to falsify this hypothesis? Or what evidence would make it improbable? I would argue that in Calvin's comments on 2 Pet 2:1 and Jude 4 we have exactly such falsifying data which invalidates Nettles' "point of view" hermeneutic. We have here a case of known apostates, men who have left the church, repudiating it by denying Christ anew. From the human point of view, these apostates are known exactly for what they are, or at least in the eyes of Peter and Jude. They are men who have been accused a second time. Peter says, "These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, *for whom the black darkness has been reserved*" (2 Pet 2:17). Jude writes, "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, *those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation*, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). If we assume for the moment that Calvin really did hold to limited redemption, on what basis would it have been sensible for him to imagine that known apostates, men doomed to hell according to the inspired writers, had been redeemed by Christ? Rainbow's judgment of charity idea falls apart at this point. Nettles' "human point of view" hermeneutic suffers the same problem. The *human point of view* is clearly laid out for us by Peter and Jude: these men are doomed to hell. How meaningful is it for someone to propose that, from our standpoint we are to regard these persons as candidates to receive those blessings that Christ has died to procure, or further, that they have been redeemed?

To state this in another way, how sensible would it have been for John Owen to say of these apostates, "They have been redeemed"? Note, Calvin does not say, that we, or Peter or Jude, had *assumed* they *had been* redeemed. Surely the more plausible explanation is that Calvin believed that in some actual sense, in some objective and real sense, Christ had redeemed these men. These are not the only statements we have from Calvin which further demonstrates the inapplicability of Nettles' interpretation of Calvin here. Calvin, for example, says, "It follows, moreover, that the *poor souls whom our Lord Jesus Christ has bought* so dearly that he did not spare himself to save them, *perish and are given into Satan's possession*."³⁸ Calvin expressly affirms that there are souls which "perish" and are given into Satan's possession but which had been "redeemed." Calvin could not have been talking about some hypothetical counterfactual provision of salvation which would have been for them had they not fallen away. What limited satisfaction advocate has ever spoken of redeemed souls perishing in hell?

Again, to come back to our earlier question, "What evidence could Nettles present from Calvin to suggest that the *prima facie* reading should not be the accepted reading here?" When unbelievers are in view, the same problem presents itself. Calvin later writes,

³⁸Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 525. Emphasis added.

However, St. Paul speaks here expressly of the saints and the faithful, but this does not imply that we should not pray *generally for all men*. For *wretched unbelievers* and the ignorant have a great need to be pleaded for with God; *behold them on the way to perdition*. If we saw a beast at the point of perishing, we would have pity on it. And what shall we do when we see souls in peril, which are so precious before God, as he has shown in that *he has ransomed them with the blood of his own Son*? If we see then a poor soul going thus to perdition, ought we not to be moved with compassion and kindness, and should we not desire God to apply the remedy?³⁹

To incorporate Rainbow's terminology, "What actual evidence from the text of Calvin is there to believe that Calvin did not think this was theologically true, but only an *assumption* for the sake of Christian ministry to these unsaved, yet all the while, there is actually no actual satisfaction accomplished for them, that is, "in their behalf"? Calvin, as expositor of his own theology writes,

And that speaks not only to those who are charged with the responsibility of teaching God's word, but to *everyone in general*. For on this point the Holy Spirit, who must be our guide, is not disparaging the right way to teach. If we wish to serve our Master, that is the way we must go about it. *We must make every effort to draw everybody to the knowledge of the gospel. For when we see people going to hell who have been created in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that must indeed stir us to do our duty and instruct them and treat them with all gentleness and kindness as we try to bear fruit this way.⁴⁰

From the human point of view, these men are "going to hell." Note the tense again, and that he clearly speaks to an accomplished reality, not to a potential one. Calvin again:

And now there is another reason we must extend this teaching a bit further. It is, as I have already said, that, *seeing that men are created in the image of God and that their souls have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ*, we must try in every way available to us to draw them to the knowledge of the gospel.⁴¹

On the other hand, when Luke speaks of the priests, he is speaking of the responsibility of those who hold *public office*. Principally, they are ordained to bear God's word. So when some falsehood appears or Satan's wicked disseminations proliferate, it is their duty to be vigilant, confront the situation, and do everything in their power to protect poor people from being poisoned by false teachings and *to keep the souls redeemed by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ from perishing, from entering into eternal death*.⁴²

The language of "redeemed souls perishing" is not unique to Calvin. For

³⁹Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians*, 684-85. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰Calvin, *Sermons on Acts 1-7* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008), 587-588. Emphasis added.

⁴¹Ibid., 593. Emphasis added.

⁴²Ibid., 112. Emphasis added.

example, Rudolph Gualther, a near contemporary of Calvin, wrote,

But this man of sin . . . will be under the judgment of no man, *although he bring infinite souls of men, (that were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ)*, and bind innumerable people prentices, with the common enemy of mankind the Devil, *unto the slaughter-house of everlasting damnation.*⁴³

It is undeniable that Gualther held to an actual unlimited satisfaction for all the sins of all men, without exception. His language, therefore, demands to be taken in a straightforward manner. Luther's wording is nearly identical:

But you are no longer of the church, or members of the church, for in this holy church of God you are building your own new apostate church, the devil's brothel with limitless whoredom, idolatry, and innovation, by which *you corrupt those who have been baptized and redeemed along with yourselves. And you swallow them down through the jaws of hell into the abyss of hell itself, with a countless multitude, along with the terrible wailing and deep sorrow of those who see this with spiritual eyes and recognize it.*⁴⁴

From another source, William Tyndale:

And I wonder that M. More can laugh at it, and not rather weep for compassion, *to see the souls for which Christ shed his blood to perish.* And yet I believe that your *holy church* will not refuse at Easter to receive the tithes of all that such blind people rob, as well as they dispense with all false gotten good that is brought them; and will lay the ensample of Abraham and Melchizedec for them.⁴⁵

In the original Reformed polemic against Rome, one line of argument was that due to Roman Catholic indulgences and negligence countless multitudes of souls which had been redeemed by the blood of Christ were being lost to eternal destruction. With that understanding, statements like these from Calvin now make perfect sense:

Hence it ought to be observed, that whenever the Church is afflicted, the example of the Prophet ought to move us to be touched (*sumpatheia*) with compassion, if we are not harder than iron; for we are altogether unworthy of being reckoned in the number of the children of God, and added to the holy Church, if we do not dedicate ourselves, and all that we have, to the Church, in such a manner that we are not separate from it in any respect. Thus, when in the present day the Church is afflicted by so many and so various calamities, and *innumerable souls are perishing, which Christ redeemed with his own blood*, we must be barbarous and savage if we are not touched with any grief. And especially the ministers of the word ought to be moved by this feeling of grief, because, being

⁴³Rudolphe Gualter, *Antichrist* (Imprinted in Sothwarke by Christopher Trutheall, 1556), 120b and 121b. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴Martin Luther, "Against Hanswurst," in *Luther's Works*, 41:209-210. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵William Tyndale, "Answer to Sir Thomas Moore's Dialogue," in *The Works of the English Reformers William Tyndale and John Frith*, ed. Thomas Russell (London: Printed for Ebenezer Palmer, 1831), 2:131. Emphasis added.

appointed to keep watch and to look at a distance, they ought also to groan when they perceive the tokens of approaching ruin. (Calvin, *Isaiah 22:4*, emphasis added)

When the language of Calvin is compared to Luther we again see strong similarities of expression. Both make mention of God's compassion to countless souls perishing who have been redeemed in the context of churchly indifference, and the lack of true pastoral care and ecclesial oversight.

Calvin has many statements where he apparently asserts that Christ shed his blood for the whole world. For example, he comments, "Also when we minister the Lord's Supper, we rehearse what was said by our Lord Jesus Christ: This is my body which is delivered for you: *this is my blood which is shed for the salvation of the world* (Matt 26:26 and 1 Cor 11:24)."⁴⁶ This essentially parallels Calvin's statements regarding texts which use the phrase "the many" in reference to the death of Christ, especially his comment on Matt 20:28. In many of these instances, Calvin expressly notes that "many" means "all" as in Romans 5, where "all" in Adam die. He also explicitly connects them to John 3:16. When his comments are seen cumulatively, there is no reasonable way not to take him at his word:

That, then, is how our Lord Jesus bore the sins and iniquities of many. But in fact, this word "many" is often as good as equivalent to "all." And indeed, our Lord Jesus was offered to all the world. For it is not speaking of three or four when it says: "For God so loved the world, that he spared not His only Son." But yet we must notice that the Evangelist adds in this passage: "That whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but obtain eternal life." Our Lord Jesus suffered for all, and there is neither great nor small who is not inexcusable today, for we can obtain salvation through him. Unbelievers who turn away from Him and who deprive themselves of him by their malice are today doubly culpable. For how will they excuse their ingratitude in not receiving the blessing in which they could share by faith?⁴⁷

Yet I approve of the *ordinary reading*, that he alone bore the punishment of many, *because on him was laid the guilt of the whole world*. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that "many" sometimes denotes "all" (Calvin, *Isaiah 53:12*, emphasis added).

The word "many" (*pollon*) is not put definitely for a fixed number, but for a large number; *for he contrasts himself with all others*. And in this sense it is used in Romans 5:15, where Paul does not speak of any part of men, *but embraces the whole human race* (Calvin on *Matthew 20:28*, emphasis added).⁴⁸

⁴⁶Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, 1208. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ*, trans. T.H.L. Paker (Cambridge: James Clark, 2002), 140-41.

⁴⁸Compare Thomas Tymme's translation of Marlorate's quotation of Calvin on this passage: "But Christ here puts, many, not definitely for any certain number, but for a great number: because he opposes or sets himself against many. And in this sense the Apostle Paul takes it when he says: 'For through the sin of the one, many be dead: much more plenteous upon many was the grace of God, and gift by grace: which was of one man Jesus Christ.' In the which place Paul speaks not of any certain number of men,

“Which is shed for many.” By the word “many” *he means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race*; for he contrasts many with one; as if he had said, that he will not be the Redeemer of one man only, but will die in order to deliver many from the condemnation of the curse. It must at the same time be observed, however, that by the words for you, as related by Luke, Christ directly addresses the disciples, and exhorts every believer to apply to his own advantage the shedding of blood. Therefore, when we approach to the holy table, *let us not only remember in general that the world has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but let every one consider for himself that his own sins have been expiated* (Calvin on *Mark* 14:24, emphasis added).

“To bear,” or, “take away sins,” is to free from guilt by his satisfaction those who have sinned. He says the sins of many, that is, of all, as in *Romans* 5:15. *It is yet certain that not all receive benefit from the death of Christ; but this happens, because their unbelief prevents them.* At the same time this question is not to be discussed here, for the Apostle is not speaking of the few or of the many to whom the death of Christ may be available; but he simply means that he died for others and not for himself; and therefore he opposes many to one (Calvin on *Hebrews* 9:28, emphasis added).

From these statements we can see that “the many” for Calvin is the same as “all” in *Rom* 5:15: “But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.” In *Rom* 5:15, it is obvious that the phenomenological reading is impossible. Nor could it be objected that “all” denotes “classes” of men, but not individual persons. That being obviously so for us and for Calvin, our only reasonable conclusion can be that “the many” in such passages as *Heb* 9:28 was literally equivalent to the “all” of *Romans* 5:15. Furthermore, Calvin writes,

Thus ye see in effect, whereunto we should refer this saying, where Saint Paul tells us expressly, that the Son of God gave himself. And he contents not himself to say, that *Christ gave himself for the world in common*, for that had been but a slender saying; but [shows that] *every [one] of us must apply to himself particularly*, the virtue of the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas it is said that the Son of God was crucified, we must not only think that *the same was done for the Redemption of the world*: but also *every [one] of us must on his own behalf join himself to our Lord Jesus Christ, and conclude, It is for me that he has suffered. . . . Also when we receive the holy Supper*, every man takes his own portion, to show us that our Lord Jesus Christ is communicated unto us, yea even to every one of us. Saint Paul therefore doth purposely use that manner of speech, to the end we should not

but comprehends all mankind.” Augustine Marlorate, *A Catholike and Ecclesiastical Exposition of the Holy Gospel after S. Mathew, gathered out of all the singular and approved Deuines (which the Lorde hath geuen to his Churche) by Augustine Marlorate. And translated out of Latine into Englishe, by Thomas Tymme, Mimister, Sene and allowed according to the order appointed* (Imprinted at London in Fletestreate near vnto S. Dunstones church, by Thomas Marshe, 1570), 453.

have any cold imagination, after the manner of diverse ignorant persons, which take themselves to be Christians, and yet in the meanwhile are as wretched beasts. But when we once know that *the thing which was done for the redemption of the whole world, pertains to every* [one] *of us severally*: it behooves every [one] of us to say also on his own behalf, The son of God hath loved me so dearly, that he has given himself to death for me . . . But when we once know that the thing which was *done for the redemption of the whole world, pertains to every* [one] *of us severally*.⁴⁹

There are a number of points that can be adduced. First, this language is strikingly similar to that of Bullinger:

It is true that the faithful man, by believing, before received the food that gives life, and still receives the same, but yet when he receives the sacrament, he receives something more. . . . Moreover the same man obeys the Lord's institution and commandment, and with a joyful mind gives thanks for his and *the redemption of all mankind*; and makes a faithful remembrance of the Lord's death, and witness the same before the church, of which body he is a member. This is also sealed to those which receive the sacrament, that the body of the Lord was given and *His blood shed, not only for men in general, but particularly for every faithful communicant whose meat and drink He is, to life everlasting*.⁵⁰

Calvin's communion language is almost a direct image of Bullinger's. The force of this argument is buttressed by the fact that it is undeniable that Bullinger held to universal redemption of all mankind and a universal satisfaction for all sin. For this, two more quotations will suffice:

Our Lord therefore became man, by the sacrifice of himself to make

⁴⁹John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1995), 299-300, 212-213. Emphasis added. All page numbers after the ellipsis refer to the Childress translation: John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*, trans. Kathy Childress (Edinburg: Banner of Truth, 1997). See also Marlorate's interesting conflation of two Calvin comments: "That our savior Christ under the name of many, does mean not only a part of the world, *but all mankind also*. For he opposes or sets many against one: as if he should say that he is the redeemer not of one man only, but that he suffered death to deliver many from the guilt of sin, and curse. Even so in the fifth to the Romans, S. Paul takes many for all men, by a comparison between one and many [Rom. 5.]. Neither is there any doubt, but that Christ speaking here to a few, meant to make the doctrine common to more. Notwithstanding we must also not that in Luke, he speaking to his Disciples by name, exhorts all the faithful, to apply the effusion of his blood to their use. *Therefore, when we come to the Holy Table, let not only this general cogitation come into our mind, that the world is redeemed by the blood of Christ, but also let every man think with himself that Christ has satisfied for his sins.*" Augustine Marlorate, *Mathew*, 643-644. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰Heinrich Bullinger, "Chapter XXI Of the Holy Supper of the Lord," *The Second Helvetic Confession*, in James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries, in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 2:867-868. Emphasis added. Though this confession was first composed in Latin by Bullinger in 1562, and Calvin's *Sermons on Galatians* were preached earlier in the years 1557-1558, the striking similarity most probably reflects a common underlying theology. For example, compare Zwingli's statement: "But now I come to the words I quoted [Jn. 6:53]: 'Except ye eat,' i.e., *except ye firmly and heartily believe that Christ was slain for you, to redeem you, and that His blood was shed for you, to wash you thus redeemed* (for that is the way we are in the habit of showing bounty and kindness to captives—first freeing them by paying a ransom, then when freed washing away the filth with which they are covered), 'he have no life in you.' Since, therefore, *Christ alone was sacrificed for the human race*, He is the only One through whom we can come to the Father." Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 128. Emphasis added.

satisfaction for us; on whom, as it were upon a goat for the sin-offering, when all the sins of the whole world were gathered together and laid, he by his death took away and purged them all: so that now the only sacrifice of God has satisfied for the sins of the whole world.⁵¹

And:

Also they declare by the way, whom he has redeemed: that is to wit, men of all tribes, etc. In which rehearsal he does imitate Daniel in the 7. chap. and signifies an universality, *for the Lord has died for all: but that all are not made partakers of this redemption, it is through their own fault.* For the Lord excludes no man, but him only *which through his own unbelief, and misbelief excludes himself.*⁵²

Coming back to Calvin, we can see that in these cases, Calvin's language mirrors the language of his contemporaries, which lends weight to the argument that Calvin's theology of satisfaction was continuous with them as well. We can see from the examples of Calvin's language of "redeemed souls perishing" and of the redemption of the world relative to the individual, striking parallels between his expression and that of Gualther, Luther, Tyndale and Bullinger, all of which held to an unlimited satisfaction and universal redemption.

The point then is this: Why are we to imagine that the same language for Calvin apparently meant something completely different? What evidence is there within the data of the various texts that he himself adopted a different understanding of the critical terms like "world" or "redeemed souls perishing"? In terms of the pure historical data, there is no evidence to suggest this reading. It appears that what drives the conclusions of Helm, Rainbow, and now Nettles, is not the actual historical texts understood in terms of their own historical contexts, but their own systematic theological pre-commitments. They approach Calvin assuming that he shares their own *a priori* theological presuppositions.

⁵¹Bullinger, *Decades*, 1st Decade, Sermon 7, 1: 136.

⁵²Henry Bullinger, *A Hundred Sermons Vpon the Apocalypse of Iesu Christ* (London: Printed by John Daye, Dwellyng ouer Aldersgate, 1573), 79-80. Emphasis added. Note the parallels here with Calvin's statement on Heb 9:26. There are too many such similarities of expressions between Calvin and his contemporary Reformers to suggest that it was Calvin, rather uniquely, who stood apart from his Reformed brothers and advocated a doctrine of limited satisfaction.

Review Essay on Whosoever Will

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I am always interested to see what non-Calvinists make of the “doctrines of grace,” which I have found compelling. For that reason, I was glad to give *Whosoever Will* a closer reading, especially since I have such admiration for its contributors.¹ I have to say the book proved to be a strong cup of tea, and I have felt compelled to brew some strong tea of my own in what follows. But, to quote Jerry Vines, “I’ve never felt that disagreeing was attacking.”

The introduction by David Allen and Steve Lemke is interesting, irenic . . . and confusing. It is not clear what a newcomer to the issues would make of it. One quotation suggests that the Arminians agreed with the Calvinists on the depravity of man. But why did folks at Dordrecht feel obliged to put a T in TULIP? Then there are offsetting quotations suggesting that none of us in the SBC are Calvinists . . . and that we all are. We even have one suggesting that Calvin was not a Calvinist. We are told the contributors are “interested in dialogue,” but there were no wrong-kind-of-Calvinists at the conference. We read of their allegiance to the *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000, but then of their willingness to “embrace both poles of this issue.”² We are told we cannot call them Semi-Pelagians, but not what we can call them, unless it is “simply Baptist.” This seems less than conciliatory, pitting the “Baptists” against the “Calvinists.”

It seems to be an effort at triangulation, putting zero-pointers on one wing, five-pointers on the other, and then two-to-four pointers “in the mainstream.” But this is a tricky approach. For one thing, streams have a way of meandering, and you would hate to let your doctrine just go with the flow. But, more than this, “centrism” is a shaky hermeneutical principle. During the Conservative Resurgence, “Mainstream” Baptists tried to position themselves as the wise “infallibilists” between the deluded “inerrantists” and “liberals.” For them, it was enough that the Bible could lead to salvation, and all the fuss over floating ax heads was nugatory and scholastic. Of course, the inerrantist “extremists” were right, as are the “extremists” who say that hell means eternal torment for the lost. And it will not do to affirm annihilationism simply because it splits the difference between universalism and endless perdition.³

¹*Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

²Including the “zero-pointers” who reject the BF&M’s claim that the believer is secure?

³As I wrote in an Indiana Baptist column of the time, everybody loves to stake out the middle. That is why cities and states call themselves “Heart of Dixie” (Alabama), “The Keystone” (Pennsylvania), and “Gateway to the West” (St. Louis), “Crossroads of America” (Indianapolis), “The Hub” (Boston), “The Biggest Little City in the World” (Reno), “The Middle of Everywhere” (Rolla, Missouri), “Where City and Country Flow Together” (Elk River, Minnesota), and “Where Yee-Ha Meets Olé” (Eagle Pass, Texas). But that’s no way to pick a home. Of course, this is not to suggest that the right reading is always

So if “Calvinist” is the scary word for one group, what is the scary word for the other? We are told we cannot use Arminian or Semi-Pelagian. So the Calvinists are left to suffer alone in terminological awkwardness.

In chapter one, Jerry Vines begins the collection by walking through John 3:16, word by word, applying portions of the verse to the controversy over Calvinism, focusing particularly on “world,” “whosoever,” and “believeth.” He also touches on such verses as 2 Pet 3:9 and 1 Tim 2:4. Vines argues that the world God loves includes every single individual, but he might have given some attention to Prov 6:19, which says God hates “a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers,” or to Rom 9:13, which says God hated Esau. And to his rhetorical question, “If God does not love all the people of the world, why did God create them?” one might continue in Romans 9, where it says he created Pharaoh and other clay to demonstrate his power over them. Of course, there are responses (such as the one saying that “hate” means “love less”), but the listener to this sermon needs to hear at least one rejoinder.

When he comes to “believe,” he says, “It would be unreasonable to command someone to do something impossible for them to do. It would be like commanding an armless man to embrace you.” But what about Matt 5:45, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”? Is perfection within our reach?⁴ As I read the sermon and other essays in this volume, I was reminded of Samuel Johnson’s 18th century report on James Boswell’s refutation of the philosopher and bishop, George Berkeley, who said that matter was a fiction, and that physical objects were simply collections of sense experiences held together by God. Boswell kicked a stone and declared that he had thus embarrassed Berkeley’s theory. But Berkeley did not deny that there were stones and kickings of stones, any more than Calvinists deny that “whosoever believes” means “whosoever believes.” It is a conditional statement, an if-then proposition, the fulfillment of which is quite another question.

In chapter two, Paige Patterson gives a good overview of the doctrine of total depravity, including a brief discussion of the Federal Theory and Natural Headship. He exhibits his usual flair for the arresting illustration, including the man walking in the wrong direction, who, nevertheless stops briefly for an act of chivalry. Nevertheless, his enlistment of a Spurgeon quotation to counter the notion that regeneration precedes faith is puzzling. Sure enough, Spurgeon says that preaching faith to a regenerate man is like “waiting till the man is cured and then bringing him the medicine.” But this seems to serve a false dichotomy. Are we supposed to think that preaching faith is either useless to the unregenerate or superfluous to those who are born again? Why cannot the preaching of faith be the occasion for God’s regenerating work in the lost, and a blessing to those already saved?

Another odd dichotomy surfaces in the discussion of what it means to be “dead in trespasses of sin” in Eph 2:5. Using the case of Adam and Eve, Patterson

the most demanding, restrictive, or disturbing. Jesus told the Sabbath-legalists to “lighten up” in Mark 2 and the Hillel party to “tighten up” regarding divorce and remarriage in Mark 10. You have to take each text on its own grounds.

⁴Actually, John Wesley used Vines’ very logic on this verse to argue that it was. But we typically treat sinless perfection or full maturity as an ideal toward which we must strive, ever falling short. Regarding this command to an “armless man,” I am reminded of our National Guard riot-control training. We were told to “read the riot act” several times before moving in against those creating havoc. Even when we knew that they would ignore the order to disperse, we commanded them to do so just the same. It was a matter of legal accountability, not true expectation. It would build the case against them, just as God’s commands do regarding the reprobate.

argues that “being dead does not assure that someone can do nothing.” After all, “though dead spiritually, they could and did respond to God, preparing for His visit, hiding, talking with Him, and eventually accepting his remedy for their nakedness.” But Calvinists do not think that the spiritually dead are incapable of any action at all, including dealings with God. If that were the case, they would have to put a mighty spin on the spiritually-dead Satan’s negotiations with God in Job 1 and 2 to keep these passages in the canon. What then is Patterson’s account of the emergence of faith in a “dead” man? He draws on Robert Picirilli’s “preregenerating” grace which “enable[s] the yet unregenerate person to understand the truth of the gospel, to desire God, and to exercise saving faith.” But this just seems to kick the can down the road. It still leaves open the question of why Richard Dawkins shuns such grace when Lydia, in Acts 16:14, did not.

In chapter three, Richard Land makes three moves to counter Calvinistic notions of election: He uses John Leland to triangulate, gives a dispensational reading of Romans 9, and argues for the atemporality of God. Each one is problematic. First, the triangulation. He quotes Leland, a champion of religious liberty, as preaching “sovereign grace in the salvation of souls, mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism,” for “these two can be tolerably well reconciled together.” This produces, in Land’s estimation, a “distinctive Baptist soteriology,” which is “neither fully Calvinist nor remotely Arminian.” Well, certainly, there are a lot of Southern Baptists who claim a sort of middle ground. Some call themselves “three pointers” or “four-pointers with an explanation.” Of course, embracing the norm can be tricky business, in that most Southern Baptists are not soul winners today and most were not abolitionists before the Civil War. And it would be perilous to hold a vote in some SBC quarters on the “eternal suffering in hell for those who have never heard the gospel” and even the cult status of Mormonism.

Second, Land draws on a classic response (associated with Boethius, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas) to the predestination/freedom tension by making God atemporal (outside of time), and not just everlasting. Advocates sometimes picture God on a hill, high above a winding road which represents history, with all present to his view. That way, God’s foreknowledge is no foreknowledge at all, so no one is locked in on certain behavior beforehand. In deep reality, “before” and “after” do not apply to God’s work, or so the argument goes. This is tidy, but not clearly biblical. In his article, Steve Lemke later picks up the same theme, saying, “God is by definition outside space and time,” but this is arguably more a philosophical construct than a teaching of Scripture. Could it be that “timeless action” is “non-sense” in the purest sense of the word, like “square circle”? To deny that God is “outside of time” is not to deny that he is from everlasting to everlasting. It is just to say that time is essentially one-thing-after-another, and that God has been doing one-thing-after-another forever.⁵ But how does he know the future if it is not now present to him? Because he is the lord of the future. After all, “A king’s heart is a water channel in the LORD’s hand: He directs it wherever He chooses” (Prov 21:1).

Third, regarding Romans 9, I am gobsmacked by Land’s claim that it has nothing to do with individual salvation but only (following H. A. Ironside, whom

⁵When, in the first chapter of the Bible, God says, “Let us make man in our image,” he resolves to do something in the future, and then does it; and when, in the last chapter of the Bible, he warns that, if anyone tinkers with his revelation, he will, in the future, bring severe judgment down on his head; and midway in the Bible, he rebukes Job with the word, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations?” (Job 38:4) That is to say, “when in the past I laid the earth’s foundations.”

he quotes) “with privilege here on earth.” I did take Land’s challenge to “read Romans 9–11 carefully” along the lines he suggests, but I do not find my “previous understandings of election . . . challenged and changed.” Rather, I persist in the “theological confusion and mayhem” with which I started. I cannot read Paul’s words on God’s elective mercy as anything less than a general statement of his sovereign action toward individuals, whether Paul, Esau, or Pharaoh, with regard to their destinies, earthly and otherwise. Still, I admire the dispensationalists’ effort to construe these verses according to their perspective. That is what we do with paradigms, whether Dispensational or Calvinistic.

In chapter four, David Allen quickly offers a set of fine-grained definitions including such notions as “intrinsic and extrinsic sufficiency,” and leads us through some historical takes on the doctrine, including disputes among Calvinists. His favorite target is John Owen, who built on the “double payment” argument to offer a “Treble Choice” argument. Not surprisingly, the theological gradations employed to advance and counter Owenish thinking are impressive. But one has to ask whether the parties are flirting with the fallacy of misplaced precision, by which, for instance, one might try to compute IQ to the 10th decimal point because he can. The problem is that the subject, at least in human understanding, does not admit of such precision. It is the same sort of problem you see in disputes over eschatology, where this nation, institution, coalition, or person is identified confidently as the anti-Christ.⁶

I think the big point is lost in the scuffle over details, namely that Christ knew what his death was and was not accomplishing ultimately—the salvation of only a minority of mankind—and he assented to this. There was no “I hope this works out and someone picks up on it,” or “That settles it; nobody could refuse this gift.” As he hung on the cross, he was neither an “open theist” nor a universalist. To my mind, that is why this doctrine is important; it rules out real heresies. If both the “Calminian” and the Calvinist are happy with this Christ-knew-exactly-what-he-was-accomplishing version, then we may have an idle dispute over whether the atonement is limited or universal—a distinction without a difference, as we like to say in philosophy. But I fear I fantasize.⁷ Allen, along with others in this collection, also makes much of the “all” and “world” texts, and that is fair. But so is the reminder that terms have a “universe of discourse.”⁸ Furthermore, we need to watch out for the fallacy of division.⁹

⁶I have shared Allen’s frustration with some of the Calvinists’ reasoning on this doctrine. I remember in particular one argument to the effect that Christ would not have wasted a single drop of blood on one whom he knew to be eternally hostile to his offer. It was as if there were some sort of corpuscular economy, where cells, whether white or red, were somehow placed in an isomorphic relationship with sins or people. I remember thinking that my sins alone would require all Christ’s blood for atonement, and that regardless of the quantity of blood spilled, Christ’s decisive death was not defined in terms of liquid volume.

⁷Speaking of “Calminians” (a term Allen draws from James Leo Garrett, my esteemed theology professor at Southwestern), I think they have a problem with consistency. They seem to think that the five points of Calvinism are independent, like items on a buffet line. But they connect with each other: In my understanding, they derive from theological anthropology, from the total depravity of man, from man’s inability to muster the wherewithal to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. If man is really that flawed, then it takes a special act of God to save him, an act not performed on all, but only on the elect, those decided upon from the very beginning. This was no mystery to Jesus as he died sacrificially on the cross. And the Lord is following through decisively with every soul he has chosen to redeem, bringing certain hearts to life, where none deserves it.

⁸Paul’s assertion that “all scripture is God-breathed” did not include Mithrian or Persian “scripture.”

⁹For instance, “My grandfather gave his life on Guadalcanal to protect America” does not

In his “practical considerations” section, Allen exhibits a pretty low view of Calvinist ministers, suggesting that they are a sneaky bunch of agenda-driven, evangelism killers, who use code words to mask the fact that they cannot look individuals in the eye and assure them, “Christ died for your sins.” Actually, he is right about some of this. I have met some guys who thrilled more at the thought of surrounding themselves with five-point elders than of winning souls, just as I have met pastors who obsess over the Masons, “homophobia,” board appointment, “social justice,” achieving the Kurt Cobain look, being “Dr. Somebody,” leading Holy Land tours, and landing a bigger church. But I have also known a host of salt-of-the-earth Calvinists who are putting it on the line for the gospel, and not making fuss about their Calvinism. And they are everywhere.¹⁰ I do not mean to push a Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell posture on Calvinists. They should say what they believe, and many are doing just that, to the annoyance of many. But the counsel cuts both ways. If a young preacher finds John Bunyan, John Piper, and John MacArthur (to name three ministers faulted in this volume) woefully wrongheaded on central gospel issues, he should not hesitate to say so if a member of the pulpit committee expresses appreciation for their ministry. Otherwise, his silence may be a form of treachery in service of an anti-Calvinist agenda.

In chapter five, Steve Lemke gives “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace.” I very much agree with Lemke that Covenant theology and its fondness for infant baptism is an unfortunate legacy of Geneva, and that Baptist or baptistic churches trying to accommodate these Reformed sensitivities are making a big mistake. I do not think this is a trivial matter. Infant baptism gives the false impression that something spiritually significant has happened to the child. Consequently, the sprinkled one can grow into adulthood with a false sense of comfort. To suppose that the ceremony gives some babies an advantage over their “unwashed” counterparts in unchurched homes is odd to say the least. So yes, let us be Baptists unapologetically and not try to attract the pan-evangelicals who settle among the Anabaptists and paedobaptists with equal comfort. Beyond this agreement, I find much with which to differ with Lemke. Part of my problem connects with my favorite joke: When a man was asked if he believed in infant baptism, he replied, “Believe in it!? Man, I’ve seen it!” So when Lemke considers whether God’s saving grace is irresistible, he exclaims, “Man, I’ve seen it resisted again and again!” Well, yes, but that is not the point. Or maybe it is better to say, “That’s precisely the point, but you’re not noticing it.” I should explain: Resisting God’s grace is the default position for lost men.¹¹ So it takes a miracle to crack that “natural” shell, a miracle God performs just as effectively as the one he performed on stormy Galilee or at the tomb of Lazarus. Are we taken “kicking and screaming” into the Kingdom? Well, Paul was fairly frothing at the mouth against Christians when

necessarily mean “My grandfather gave his life on Guadalcanal to protect the top New Jersey mob boss, who was an American.”

¹⁰I remember when I agreed to speak on preaching at the Founders’ Conference in 1995. A denominational agency officer took me out for lunch and asked if I was getting flack for this, especially since a high-profile pastor had been hammering Calvinism in recent days. I said I had not, and then he volunteered that he was a five-pointer. I was surprised and asked him how that had happened. Well, it turned out he had served as youth director for a five-pointer who served on the faculty at Southwestern, and later became a dean. Seeing my surprise, he added that one of the most celebrated Bible professors at Southwestern was also a five-pointer. And all three were strong in the conservative resurgence, encompassing Calminians and Calvinists alike.

¹¹As the Abstract of Principles (serving both SBTS and SEBTS) says, we “inherit a nature corrupt and wholly opposed to God and His law.”

God confronted him graciously on the road to Damascus, but the frothing goes away as God does his work.

As he should, Lemke brings what he takes to be troublesome Scripture to the fore. For instance, he uses Jesus' words concerning Jerusalem ("How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, yet you were not willing!") to show the Lord's deference to human will. But this might not be so much a wistful soliloquy as a public indictment of their perditionousness, in which he takes no joy. Then he uses the rich man's difficulty in accessing heaven (as though he were a camel negotiating a needle's eye) to tweak the Calvinist, arguing that the wills of rich and poor alike "would be changed immediately and invincibly upon hearing God's effectual call." But the parable tracks with the "no atheists in foxholes" principle, that when you are sleek, well-entertained, and comfortable, you are less likely to fall on your knees than someone in desperate straits. And, as the passage teaches, God has no problem in driving a rich person to his or her knees.

When Lemke uses 1 John 5:1 ("Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God") as proof that belief precedes regeneration, I want to come back saying, "Whoever breathes air with his lungs has been born" does not prove that breathing air with your lungs causes you to be born. When he suggests that "irresistible grace" makes the "proclamation of the gospel an unnecessary add-on after people have already been saved," he equates regeneration-with-no-faith-content with salvation. But regeneration enables faith; it does not replace it. And what is Lemke thinking when he suggests that a man "spiritually dead with a depraved will" lacks the will "to go to church on Sunday or for many Sundays"? People go to church for a thousand reasons not grounded in regeneration—to please the family, palliate loneliness, hear great music, satisfy their curiosity, etc.

Lemke makes much of the "well-meant offer," which works only with the speaker's conviction that the salvation of every person is an open question in the eyes of God—or something like that. He refuses to countenance the "God of hard Calvinism," who seems to be "disingenuous, cynically making a pseudo-offer of salvation to persons whom He has not given the means to accept." But God can, with perfect honor, direct something he knows will fall outside the hearer's capabilities.¹²

Being a philosopher, Lemke is familiar with the Principle of Sufficient Reason, that is to say, "Things just do not happen." So it is fair to press the question, "Why do so many fail to take advantage of their 'assisting grace' to accept Christ?" We give special help as parents; some of our kids pick up biking or tennis quicker than others. Some are eager to visit the art gallery, others indifferent, but you take them

¹²Let me offer another illustration: My junior year in high school, I played trumpet in the Arkansas All-State Band. Our director, Joe Barry Mullins, from Northeast Louisiana University, was an intimidating but wonderful taskmaster. We practiced hour after hour in the ballroom of Little Rock's old Marion Hotel. Then, as the concert approached, we moved next door to the stage of Robinson Auditorium for a dry run. Not long after we had started on a piece, he waved us to a stop and said he wanted to go out into the auditorium to hear it there. Telling us to go ahead and play the piece on our own, he started us off, laid down his baton, and walked down into the darkened hall. We managed for a short while, but then the wheels came off. We lost the beat as some paused here and others there, as tempos varied, and entrances became ragged. Just as we realized it was a total mess, he came back on stage and explained that he did that show us how important it was to watch him carefully at all times. We got it. Now, was his instruction to us "well-meant," even though he knew we could not manage what he told us to do, namely to complete the piece on our own? Indeed, it was very well meant—to demonstrate our incompetency without him. Directions can serve a variety of good purposes, some of them obscure to the hearer. This is important to bear in mind as we read Isa 55:1-11, which compares God's Word to the rain, which we know can do many things—germinate seeds, wash out gullies, inspire poets, slow traffic, and drive graduation ceremonies inside.

all just the same, spending extra time to contextualize and analyze a painting for the indifferent in hopes they will catch the spirit. Why does not God do that, spending more time with the lost young Hitler than with the lost young Billy Graham, who seemed to have had plenty of enablement when Modcai Ham was preaching in his North Carolina neck of the woods?

When Lemke says that Calvinism raises questions about the character of God, he sounds a little like the indignant Job in Job 10 and like Paul's imaginary critic in Romans 1: "It isn't fair!" Or, to put it in Lemke's words, "God has much to answer for in the problem of evil." He presses the same point with a fireman analogy: What would we think of one who could rescue all the children in a burning orphanage but does not? The answer is simple: "He would be charged with depraved indifference."¹³ God's response in Romans 9 and Job 38 is truly surprising. He does not say, "I see your point. Sorry. Let me try to explain myself so that you can once again count me decent." His basic answer is, "Excuse me? Who exactly do you think you are to question my 'high-handed' ways? Is that any way for potter's clay to speak to the potter?"¹⁴ I wish I could assuage Lemke's anxiety over a God who "changes wills without permission." Perhaps he can see that, like determined suicide jumpers on a high ledge or bridge, we need to be grabbed and not just cajoled by God. We can thank him later when we come to our senses.

In chapter six, Ken Keathley takes up the matter of the P in TULIP, the only point strongly affirmed in the *Baptist Faith and Message*. I was looking forward to his discussion of how "once saved, always saved" was compatible with libertarian freedom, for it is remarkable that none of the millions of true Christians, either on earth or in heaven, has ever opted out of the Kingdom. Sure, people leave the church, but, as we heard in seminary, "The Faith that Fizzles before the Finale was False from the First." But we are talking about the real thing—saving faith. Of course, this is no problem for the Calvinist, since the believer has moved from bondage/death in sin to freedom/life in Christ. He is a new creature, with a new nature, which is "unable" not to care about Christ's work and will. But it is more problematic for the Calvinian, who has waxed long, eloquent, and even vociferous regarding the inviolability of man's libertarian will. Is he willing to say that man surrenders that will when he converts? If not, then how is it that a defector has never surfaced in heaven? But Keathley chooses to speak more about assurance than security, more about confidence than perseverance. In this, I think he mixes psychology, epistemology, and ontology, saying, "Christ is the foundation of assurance; good works merely support and confirm." Yes, indeed, Christ's saving work is the ground of the reality of our security; but our knowledge of our secure status, and the assurance it generates, does connect with good works.

He makes no mention of James (where we are taught that faith without

¹³Of course, the proper analogy more nearly asks whether, just weeks after 9/11, a soldier must rush into an explosive-weakened cave in Tora Bora to rescue Bin Laden and all his Al-Qaeda henchmen before they are hit by falling rock. The fact that God rescued some of us terrorists at the cost of great suffering to himself should put things in a different light.

¹⁴Then, in response to another Lemke challenge, we can say that God is, indeed, ultimately responsible for "evil" in the sense that there would be nothing at all if he had not created the world and continued to sustain it. As G. K. Chesterton explained, there would be no atheists if God did not exist. It is the same sort of thing they teach in the military, that the commander is responsible for everything that happens and does not happen in his unit; he can delegate authority, but he cannot delegate away his responsibility. Do Calvinians think there are things spinning beyond God's control? If so, do they find comfort in Rabbi Kushner's book *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, which solved the problem of evil by denying God's omnipotence?

works is useless) or 1 John, which sets a high bar for assurance. Regarding the latter, those of us who went out witnessing with Evangelism Explosion or Continuing Witness Training quoted 1 John 5:13 after the first diagnostic question, the one about “knowing for certain” that you had “eternal life” and knew you “were going to heaven” when you died. Well and good; we can know that we have eternal life. But what are these things he has written? And there’s the rub. Going back through the epistle, one encounters 1 John 2:1 (“This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands”); 2:6 (“This is how we know we are in Him: the one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked.”); 3:14 (“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers”); 3:18-19 (“Little children, we must not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth; that is how we will know we are of the truth, and will convince our hearts in His presence.”); 3:24 (“And the way we know that He remains in us is from the Spirit He has given us.”); 5:2 (“This is how we know that we love God’s children when we love God and obey His commands”). And so on it goes—external testimony, internal testimony. And it is pretty scary, since we are all painfully aware of our shortfalls. It would have been good to see Keathley wrangle with such verses, but he insists on saying, “Assurance of salvation must be based on Jesus Christ and His work for us—nothing more and nothing less.” Well, yes, but based in what sense? Based metaphysically or based doxastically? John is speaking of the latter, and it is not clear why Keathley is reluctant to do this too.¹⁵

Keathley does spend some profitable time on the apostasy passage in Hebrews, giving special attention to Tom Schreiner and Ardel Caneday’s “means of salvation” reading. Against those who deny perseverance/preservation of the saints by God’s warning against “falling away,” Schreiner and Caneday argue that God uses the warnings to help keep his children on track. Drawing on Bill Craig, Keathley suggests a problem here, namely that the regenerate do not need threats to stay regenerate. But I think it would be fair to at least read the warnings as a “means of sanctification.”¹⁶ Those of us trained in EE and CWT learned to write our testimonies along the lines Paul exhibited in Acts 26: My life before salvation; what happened at the point of salvation; my life since salvation. As I constructed my own testimony, I recalled both the joy I had on the day of my decision and my changed behavior in Sunday School the following Sunday. Both contribute to my assurance that the transaction occurred. Since then, I have been “working out my own salvation with

¹⁵I suppose it is his dismay at the concerns of the Puritans. He mentions the “haunted” John Bunyan, whose spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, reveals a “crippling anxiety” over his own election, with “pastorally damaging results.” He also speaks of Scottish Highlanders who were so unsure of their salvation that they abstained from the Lord’s Supper, lest they “eat and drink in an unworthy manner, and thereby incur the judgment of God.” Of course, there can be problems there, a sort of “paralysis by analysis” forgetful of the grace of God, a grace wonderfully pictured in 1 John 1:9. But the typical Southern Baptist church is not blessed with many exhibiting those Highland scruples. Indeed, what pastor does not wish that some of his baptized members might scrutinize their own salvation? And could it be that the “half of the SBC that the FBI can’t find” might be living spiritually-undistinguished lives under the impression that that assurance they felt at the moment of their confession was a sure sign of their redemption, a sort of “burning in their bosom” which confirmed the transaction?

¹⁶One thinks of Bill Cosby’s testimony: “My father established our relationship when I was seven years old. He looked at me and said, “You know, I brought you in this world, and I can take you out. And it don’t make no difference to me, I’ll make another one look just like you.” Except for the “don’t make no difference to me” part, the father’s statement is true: 1. Bill is his progeny; 2. He can kill Bill; 3. He can produce a replacement for Bill. He will not do it, but he could, the same as God the Father could. And the threat is effective; it helped Bill along in his development, just as God puts a helpful fear of himself in his children, though he has no intention of annihilating them or sending them to hell.

fear and trembling,” told by Scripture that “it is God who is working in [me] to will and to act for His good purpose.” Keathley explains, “Good works and the evidences of God’s grace do not provide assurance. They provide warrant to assurance but not assurance itself.” This seems to be a distinction without a difference.

In chapter seven, Kevin Kennedy asks, “Was Calvin a ‘Calvinist?’” Back in the 1980s, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim came out with a book denying that inerrancy was the historical position of the church. They assembled a variety of quotes from leading lights across the centuries, only to be embarrassed not long after by a John Woodbridge book, supplying the evidence for inerrancy that had escaped Rogers and McKim. They had cherry-picked the statements favorable to their thesis, leaving a false impression that biblical inerrancy was a latter-day notion, and a mistaken one at that. Perhaps Kennedy has done a bit of cherry picking himself. Perhaps not. We will have to leave this to the deeply-invested Calvin scholars. But what of the question’s relevance? The really interesting question for me is, “Was Paul a ‘Calvinist’ in the sense we are discussing?” The point is the truth of the matter, not its extra-biblical pedigree. If Calvin sheds light on the right answers to these critical questions, so much the better. But if he missed or twisted something, that is no reflection on the unmissed, untwisted truth.

Malcolm Yarnell’s chapter leaves us with more questions than answers. When he writes that “there is no biblical foundation for the idea of an invisible worldwide gathering of Christians,” one wonders what he makes of the last sentence of Article VI (“The Church”) of the *Baptist Faith and Message*: “The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.” When, in the 1980s, I interviewed Hershel Hobbs for an article on his theology, he said this sentence was put in to qualify Landmarkism. Is this Yarnell’s issue? When he rehearses the execution of heretic Servetus in Geneva and Anabaptists Hubmaier and Manz in Zurich, is he claiming that Calvinism is essentially theocratic, and murderously so? Can he supply us any historical context, or was this act as obviously wrong as it would be in 21st century Houston? By this standard of early embarrassments, are Southern Baptists essentially racist since their founders were slaveholders?

When Yarnell disparages those who distinguish between “necessary” doctrines and “nonessential” matters, is he saying that Southern Baptists are wrong to retain amillennial churches while excluding homosexual churches? Would not it have been better for him to say, “Be careful where you draw the lines”? And does he really want to call Presbyterians “antinomian” for baptizing babies? Does not that imply that they are willfully and knowingly transgressive? Why not just say that they are “wrong”? In other words, his treatment of “potential Calvinist impact” seems over the top. Yes, Baptists properly enjoy the fruit of the Anabaptist Radical Reformation, making them distinct from the Magisterial Reformation of the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anglicans. But it is also good that Baptists have not succumbed to the legalist, tribalist, primitivist, isolationist, pacifist, and communalist tendencies of the Mennonites and Amish.

Still, with Yarnell, I should say I am not so keen on a plurality of elders, whether at the church, associational, state, or national level. I am glad we had “unruly mobs” of laymen from little churches cram into vans for a drive cross country for a vote or two before they had to hustle back to their day jobs. If we had let the elites decide, the conservative resurgence would have failed.

R. Alan Streett writes the chapter on the public invitation and Calvinism.

Some Calvinists think they are committed to some sort of cultural package deal in addition to a set of doctrines, and in that package, one often finds disdain for the invitation. I have always found that odd. Did not Peter “issue a call for volunteers” on Pentecost, with amazing response? Does not Isaiah 55 say that every time the word goes out, something gets accomplished? And does not that include every single church service where the Bible is read and preached faithfully? And is not the Calvinist the one most likely to think miracles of conversion could happen even when the circumstances are discouraging? And is not public acknowledgment of momentous spiritual decisions encouraged in Scripture? Yes, invitations can be abused. We can all recount occasions when the preacher was manipulative, such as when he worded the appeal in a way which implied you were backslidden or worse if you did not come forward that very night. (Streett would have strengthened his article by giving examples of how things go awry.)

Though I basically agree with Streett, I have a few reservations. I do not share his enthusiasm for a general policy of baptism on the spot at the end of church, for there are some curious and awkward responders, including, in my own experience, a young boy who “just wanted to be baptized” like his friends, a Mormon missionary who was showboating after we had crossed swords in a home earlier in the week (it was his way of declaring that they were just as Christian as we were), and a vagrant who just wandered down the aisle because he wanted some money. In other words, it helps to put a little space between invitation and follow up. That being said, we hasten to baptize those who profess Christ as Savior and Lord. That is what Philip did with the Ethiopian eunuch. That is what happened to the converts at Pentecost. It is my impression that many churches treat baptism more as a certificate of achievement than as a letter of intent. I think the latter better fits the example in Acts. One can understand an extended trial period, wherein the candidate is catechized and his behavior monitored, but this is not clearly the New Testament pattern.

In chapter ten, Jeremy A. Evans moves against “compatibilism” using some familiar philosophical concepts, including Immanuel Kant’s “ought implies can” and J. L. Austin’s distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The former says you are not responsible for things you cannot help. Evans uses the latter to claim you need to mean what you say. Both, however, fail to advance his case. The problem with enlisting Kant is that it misses the point of the old statement from the Pogo comic strip, where the character says, “We’ve met the enemy and he is us” (as opposed to “he is ours”). There is no innocent Pharaoh whom God took on a ride for his purposes; Pharaoh was pleased to be along for the ride, putting the top down and playing the radio at full, pagan volume. Indeed, he was also driving and playing chicken with God’s emissary. His deeds flowed from character. He was not watching in horror as he heard his vocal equipment utter rude words to Moses and Aaron. But this is surely unfair. Did not God harden Pharaoh’s heart to resist Moses? Yes, but what would be the right thing for God to do? Soften Pharaoh’s heart, so that he would give away the store? Well, yes, he could have done that, but you would have the same problem with freedom. Pharaoh would not be praiseworthy on this model since the work of softening was God’s doing. Well, then, why not just leave Pharaoh alone to his own druthers? But where did he get his druthers? Are they *ex nihilo*? Did Pharaoh craft them himself? Or did he enjoy some sort of pure neutrality toward God and his work when he started out? Of course, not. Then in what sense was he free?

The simple answer is that he was free to do what he wanted to do. This is

the counsel of compatibilism. Of course, there is a perfectly good use of “free will,” which distinguishes deliberative human action from sleep-walking, muscular spasm, coercion at the point of a gun, or downward movement in a bridge collapse. But when the person has done what he wants to do because he is the kind of person who wants to do that sort of thing, then he chooses freely. But what of the cry in Romans 7, “I do what I hate to do”? This is like the lament of the person who cannot bear to look at his fat self in the mirror, but who has just ordered a double milk shake. Most would say that he truly wants to be thin, but that he does not want it badly enough; this shows he wants instant gratification more than the long-term satisfaction of fitness and beauty. Evans calls this circular reasoning, that “we always act on the motive we act upon,” or mere stipulation, “that strongest motive governs action.” But I think most would say that real and helpful revelation occurs in these circumstances, in that our behavior can belie our noble professions.

When Evans moves to talk of illocution and perlocution (and I am not sure he has to delve into Austin/Searle “speech act” lingo to argue his point), he invites yet another objection. Once in high school, I was complaining about some stricture or other in my life, and my mother said, “Fine. I want you to tell me whom you’d prefer for a mother. I’ll give her a call and ask if she’ll take you in.” She even suggested a name or two. Her locution (ostensible meaning) was the proposition that she desired me to supply a name. Her illocution (or purpose) was to put my whiny self on the spot. The perlocution (what the utterance accomplished) was my realization that I was a miserable ingrate. I think that makes sense, but Evans wants to say that this sort of thing “splits command from will.” But in my mother’s case, she said she wanted me to give her a name, but she really did not. Nothing wrong with that. She was teaching me a lesson and putting me on notice that she was not going to indulge my griping any more. Still, Evans says that when God tells the non-elect to repent, he “does not intend for His speech to change their moral standing before Him.” That is simply wrong. He heightens their culpability by presenting them a challenge, which they defy. Acts of defiance multiply guilt, just as extra counts of tax evasion multiply one’s difficulties in court.¹⁷

Evans also raises an interesting question about God’s freedom. On the compatibilist model, is he compelled to create the world, and do so precisely as he did? If we say yes, then that somehow “undermines his self-sufficiency.” Well, certainly he did not have to create the world because he was lonely or otherwise pathetic. But if we understand creation as the platform for “salvation history,” whose “telling” flowed freely from his nature, I am not sure I see the dilemma. There is something odd about saying, “Gotcha!” when we claim that God did precisely what he wanted to do, and in the most perfect way.

Reading through Bruce Little’s treatment of the problem of evil in chapter eleven, I am reminded of a statement I have heard time and again in the pastorate: “Well, my God would never (fill the in blank, as with “send people to hell,” “require me to remain single,” “say a woman could not be a pastor,” etc.). The problem is that

¹⁷Speaking of guilt, Evans finds the case of Judas compelling: “How Judas could be responsible for the prior cause, given that he did not exist when the causal loop was being formed, is difficult to see. Judas’s act of betrayal was causally necessitated by circumstances grounded in prior causes, to which he made no contribution at all. Where there is no contribution, there is not moral responsibility.” It is not clear where “original sin” fits into Evans’ scheme, but quite apart from the ancient history of the fall, Judas’ nature produced damnable treachery just as surely as a candle produces heat. You do not have to go back one day past Passover to find grounds for moral responsibility in Judas. This is not a matter of Bad-Judas displacing Good-Judas according to coercive plans long in place. This was Judas-Judas being Judas.

often God has done just that, and the Bible says so. I think that is the problem here. Little is indignant with anyone suggesting God would be responsible for evil in the world, even for good purposes. First, let me say that it is tricky to equate suffering with evil, in that a broken heart and or a broken leg can be the best things that could happen to a man who has callously broken the hearts of others and who will meet the girl of his dreams in the emergency room. Be that as it may, is it not clear that if God could intervene to save a child and he does not, he bears some responsibility? If I am standing on the dock with a life preserver and do not throw it, even though the drowning person is only ten feet away, am I not accountable to some extent? Little tries to obviate this problem by drawing a distinction between reasons and purposes. God's reason for letting her drown might be to let the natural order run its course or to uphold the principle of sowing-and-reaping, whereby a careless chaperone is exposed, but that does not mean he purposed that she would drown, or so Little explains. But that is small comfort to the father. ("Don't be angry at God. He had no purpose for her drowning. He just wanted to let things ride in this case.") If I were a father, I would be more comforted to hear that God intended my daughter's death to bring the family's witness front and center in the community, to spare her death in a house fire a few weeks later, or to force the city to post lifeguards where they have been needed for years.

For this reason, I do not recoil when I read John 9:1-3: "As He was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples questioned Him: 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered. [This came about] so that God's works might be displayed in him." In the verses that follow, we read that Jesus healed him, displaying the glory of God. So here it is arguably fair to say there was more than a reason for the congenital blindness, whether infection, genetics, or injury in utero; there was also divine purpose in it.

Little presses on to say, "If God allows or ordains evil in order to bring about good, then it would seem that Christians should not be engaged in standing against social injustice (that which the Bible calls evil)." Of course, everyone knows that great suffering can bring great good, as in the shaping of effective warriors in grueling SEAL training, or, to use a biblical example, in the Christian diaspora after the stoning of Stephen. Furthermore, is Little saying that W.W.J.D. is our rule of behavior? Surely, that will not work. For one thing, we would never run for Congress, or marry for that matter; Jesus would not, so we should not. And, on the other hand, do we have the green light to kill couples who fudge on their church offerings because God knocked Ananias and Sapphira dead when they did it? No. God has prerogatives and wisdom and goodness that we cannot touch. We are to do as he says, not as he does when it differs from what he says we should do.

When Little objects to the notion that "sin is made a part of the plan of God," you wonder how he reads Rev 13:8, where it speaks of "the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world" (NIV) or of the names "not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered" (HSCB). If the appearance of sin was extraneous or unforeseen to God as he proceeded with creation, then what was this business about a primordial book with the names of those to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb written in it?

I wish there had been more give and take in the collection. As it stands, it is more like a pep rally—but an interesting one. I am thankful for these Calvinian brothers, for the workout they give the Calvinists, and for the Great Commission

witness they bear at every hand. I do wish, though, they would go easy on the word “contradiction.” I think these writers throw it around way too easily. I remember a conversation with a Christian college professor, who later ran afoul of the Evangelical Theological Society’s inerrancy statement. He said that Matthew and Luke’s account of the Sermon on the Mount contradicted one another, the former placing it on a hill, the latter on a plain. But it was not a contradiction at all. Jesus could have preached on a level place atop a hill, or he could have preached the same message twice, once on a hill, once on a plain. There were perfectly good ways to reconcile the two accounts, just as there are many ways to ameliorate the problems proclaimed in this volume. I hope I have shown a few.

Book Reviews

***Lukan Authorship of Hebrews.* By David L. Allen. NAC Studies in Bible & Theology. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010. 416 pages. Hardcover, \$24.99.**

The authorship of Hebrews has been a puzzling question for biblical scholars since the days of early church fathers. Many suggestions have been made and various evidence has been presented, but no scholarly consensus has been reached. Most modern scholars are skeptical that the author of Hebrews will ever be known. Although the authorship of Hebrews no longer attracts much scholarly attention these days, it has always been a fascinating topic for David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ever since he was first introduced to the topic in college, he never stopped asking questions and searching for answers. He later completed his doctoral dissertation on this topic. Even after the completion of his dissertation, his quest for the authorship of Hebrews did not stop. He continuously worked on his thesis by revising and expanding his argument with new insights and evidences. His 35 years of research culminated in the publication of this volume.

Allen argues for Luke's independent authorship of Hebrews. He bases his argument primarily on the apparent similarities in linguistic features, purpose, and theology between Hebrews and Luke's other known works, namely, the Gospel of Luke and Acts. In addition, he offers a serious rebuttal to the common assumption that Luke was a Gentile and thus was not likely the author of Hebrews. He then provides a historical reconstruction of the background and provenance of Hebrews in light of the Lukan authorship.

Allen divides the book into seven chapters. In chapter one, he traces the history of the study of the authorship of Hebrews and points out that Luke has been frequently mentioned, even by early church fathers, either as a translator, editor, or author of Hebrews. In chapter two, he evaluates three candidates who gained the most support among modern scholars (Barnabas, Apollos, and Paul). He quickly dismisses Barnabas and Apollos because there are no extant letters written by them that can be compared with Hebrews. He is, however, more careful in dismissing Paul because of the strong church tradition and the internal evidences that seem to support the Pauline authorship. Nevertheless, he concludes that Paul is less likely the author of Hebrews because there are apparent differences in style and theology between Hebrews and Paul's letters.

In the next three chapters, Allen presents hard evidence that he considers "the weight-bearing walls" for his argument. In chapter three, he examines the linguistic features with a focus on the lexical, stylistic, and textlinguistic similarities and parallels between Luke-Acts and Hebrews. He presents the following findings: (1) There are 53 words unique to Hebrews and Luke-Acts and 56 words unique to Hebrews and Paul's letters. Although the number of unique words is pretty evenly divided between Luke and Paul, Allen leans toward Luke because he finds a few other words, including some medical terms, which are unique or common to Luke and Hebrews but never or rarely used in Paul. (2) The writing style of Hebrews is more similar to

that of Luke than of Paul. Allen regards this as the most forceful evidence against the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. He first points out that unlike other Pauline letters, the prologue of Hebrews lacks Paul's name and his characteristic salutation. He then identifies 39 specific Greek usages or phrases that are unique to Luke-Acts and Hebrews and an additional 25 Greek usages that further illustrate the similarity of Luke-Acts and Hebrews, although they are not unique to these three books. (3) The Old Testament quotation formulae in Hebrews are much more akin to those in Luke's Gospel than in Paul's letters, although they are not identical to the usage of either Luke or Paul. (4) The prologues of Luke, Acts, and Hebrews are similar in length, literary style, perspective, and word choice. (5) Acts 7 and Hebrews 11 are strikingly similar in word choice, Old Testament quotation formulae, and roles attributed to Abraham, Moses, and David. In addition, many words and ideas expressed in Acts 7 are found elsewhere in Hebrews. (6) Luke-Acts and Hebrews have a tendency to superimpose a chiasmic framework and parallelism over the entire discourse, which is rare in other books of the New Testament. From these linguistic observations, Allen concludes that although there are lexical similarities among Luke, Paul, and Hebrews, the stylistic similarities between Luke and Hebrews and the stylistic dissimilarities between Paul and Hebrews point to Luke as the author of Hebrews (or at the very least as co-author with Paul).

In chapter four, Allen compares the purpose of Luke-Acts with that of Hebrews with special attention given to the lexical and semantic parallels between the Lukan prologues and the prologue and hortatory sections of Hebrews. From this analysis, he concludes that both in Acts and Hebrews there is significant emphasis on the concept of the "Word" and the "hearing of the Word" and that Luke-Acts and Hebrews all exhibit a pastoral concern for the readers who are wavering in their faith. In chapter five, Allen highlights the theological similarities between Luke-Acts and Hebrews, especially in the area of Christology, eschatology, and prophetic fulfillment. In terms of Christology, he insists that both Luke-Acts and Hebrews focus on Jesus' ascension and exaltation and present Christ as the high priest, as the ruler over Israel in the fulfillment of the Davidic prophecies in 2 Sam 7:14, and as the Son in Ps 2:7. With regard to eschatology, all three books employ the pattern of promise and fulfillment and place less emphasis on the parousia than in Mark, Paul, or John. In addition, they reveal similarities in the concept of salvation, in the theology of the cross, in the use of the priestly terminology, and in the understanding of the new covenant.

In chapter six, Allen deals with the common assumption often used against the Lukan authorship of Hebrews, namely, that Luke was a Gentile and thus was not likely the author of Hebrews which was clearly intended for a Jewish audience. Allen asserts that neither Paul's statement in Col 4:10-14 nor Luke's mastery of the Greek language warrants this assumption. By contrast, he contends that "the men of the circumcision" in Col 4:11 can refer to the Jewish Christians of a stricter mind-set concerning the law and that Luke's name was mentioned last in this passage probably because he was especially close to Paul. In addition, Allen points out that there is no evidence that even Epaphras who is included in the second group along with Luke was a Gentile and that Col 4:10-14 was never used by early church fathers to speak of Luke as a Gentile. In further support, Allen presents evidences from the Luke and Acts that point to Luke as a Jew. Going one step further, Allen identifies Luke with Lucius mentioned in Rom 16:21 and characterizes Luke as a Hellenistic Jew born in Antioch of Syria. For evidence, he refers to Luke's special interest in An-

tioch in Acts and to the codex Bezae that has the first “we” narrative in Acts 11:28 as occurring in Antioch.

In the final chapter, Allen offers a historical reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding the writing of Hebrews in light of the Lukan authorship. His reconstruction goes as follows: Luke wrote his Gospel and Acts independently while he was with Paul in Rome (c. AD 60-63) in order to exhort Theophilus, a former high priest who served from AD 37 until AD 41. He then served as Paul’s amanuensis for the Pastoral Letters during Paul’s second Roman imprisonment. In AD 67 or 68, probably after Paul’s death and thus independently of Paul and after Timothy’s release from prison, he wrote Hebrews from Rome to encourage the converted former Jewish priests who were in Antioch of Syria and were under immense pressure to revert to Judaism and defend their nation against the perils from the Romans. Allen thinks that these priests are those mentioned in Acts 6:7 and they relocated in Antioch due to the persecution that arose over Stephen’s death. Allen concludes his argument for Luke’s independent authorship of Hebrews with the following closing statements: “The cumulative effect of the evidence implicating Luke is substantial. If the field of suspects for authorship is narrowed to include only those who are New Testament writers, then the evidence points to Luke. Having evaluated the available clues in this case of authorship attribution, I conclude that the missionary doctor, in Rome, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, wrote it” (378-79).

Undoubtedly, Allen has produced one of the most comprehensive and thorough monographs on the question of the authorship of Hebrews and probably the most convincing argument for the Lukan authorship. He deals with every pertinent issue that has been raised and examined every piece of evidence that has been presented. Practically no stones are left untouched and no evidence is left unexamined. His analysis of the linguistic evidence is painstaking and his immense knowledge of the secondary literature is apparent. Furthermore, his argument is well structured and his points are communicated clearly, though the subject matter occasionally becomes highly academic and technical. Also noteworthy is his rebuttal to the common assumption that Luke was a Gentile and thus was unlikely the author of Hebrews.

There are certain limitations in the lexical approach, subjectivity in the theological analysis, and uncertainty in the historical reconstruction. For this reason, Allen heavily relies on the analysis of stylistic and textlinguistic similarities and parallels between Luke-Acts and Hebrews for his argument. The uniqueness and significance of several Greek usages which Allen presents as evidence are, however, highly debatable. Interestingly, most of the similarities and parallels in Old Testament citation formulae and literary structure between Acts and Hebrews which Allen presents are found in the speeches incorporated in Acts. There is no doubt that Luke influenced the form, structure, and even content of these speeches, but if any of these linguistic features in the speeches came from the original speakers rather than from Luke, the basis for Allen’s comparison becomes weaker. Allen’s historical reconstruction in chapter seven is innovative and engaging, but the connections of Theophilus with the former high priest, the recipients of Hebrews with the former Jewish priests mentioned in Acts 6:7, and Luke with Lucius mentioned in Romans 16:21 are weak and need additional support. In addition, Allen’s argument that Luke wrote Hebrews after Paul’s death and thus independently of Paul is based on a particular reconstruction of the events mentioned in the Pastoral Letters that are historically uncertain and difficult to harmonize.

Can Luke be the author of Hebrews? I would say, “Yes.” Am I convinced

that he is? No. In my judgment, evidence is still insufficient to render the final verdict. Nonetheless, I think that Allen makes a significant contribution by successfully demonstrating that the question of the authorship of Hebrews is still open and that Luke is certainly a viable option. Moreover, his argument for Luke's independent authorship is intriguing. Whether one agrees with the conclusion drawn in this book or not, he/she cannot ignore or dismiss Allen's work too quickly.

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***Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence.* Edited by Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 931 pages. Softcover, \$70.**

Darrell L. Bock, Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, and Robert L. Webb, lecturer in New Testament at McMaster University and executive editor of the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, have edited a fine addition to the ever-growing amount of material in the last few decades on historical Jesus research. This volume is the culmination of over ten years of research and collaboration of the Jesus Group in the Institute for Biblical Research, which Bock and Webb co-convened (vii, 4, 84). The seminar members decided to study twelve key events (or sets of events) in the life of Jesus that (1) had a high probability of being historical, and (2) were likely important in developing an accurate framework for understanding Jesus (4, 83). Thus, the book consists of a chapter devoted to each event in order to (1) find its historical core, (2) examine its socio-cultural context in order to better understand the event, and (3) evaluate its significance for a better understanding of the historical Jesus (6, 83).

The strength of this volume comes from the impressive contributors, most of whom are well-published, highly-regarded experts in historical Jesus studies. It is the finest volume to date on historical Jesus research by imminent scholars from the evangelical Christian or "biblically orthodox Christian" tradition (7, 84). In addition to a co-authored introduction by both editors, Webb also writes a helpful primer on the historical enterprise of historical Jesus research and essays on Jesus' baptism and the Roman examination and crucifixion of Jesus. Bock writes the final summary chapter and an essay on the Jewish examination of Jesus. The following authors contribute one essay on a key event in the life of Jesus: Craig A. Evans (exorcisms), Scot McKnight (the Twelve), Craig L. Blomberg (Jesus' table fellowship with sinners), Donald A. Hagner (Synoptic Sabbath controversies), Michael J. Wilkins (Peter's confession of faith), Brent Kinman (Jesus' royal entry into Jerusalem), Klyne R. Snodgrass (cleansing the temple), I. Howard Marshall (the Last Supper), and Grant Osborne (Jesus' empty tomb and resurrection appearances)—an impressive list of contributors and an important selection of subjects.

All of the contributors write excellent essays that clearly demonstrate the historicity of their assigned event as well as how the event affirms the veracity of the four-fold canonical Gospel portrait of Jesus. Some of the most helpful insights in this book come from Hagner's essay, which contends that (1) all positions in this historical quest have some faith basis, and thus are somewhat subjective, (2) the burden of proof ought to be on those who deny the historicity of the Gospel tradition, (3) those who affirm the historicity still ought to evaluate it critically (269), (4) history is full of unexpected events and surprises, and (5) the typical quest for the historical

Jesus is a misnomer because at best it comes up with an artificial construct due to limitations in the historical method (288).

Here are two suggested improvements: (1) add an index of terms, and (2) lengthen the conclusion chapter to give more consequences for this important study (850-52). Further, here is a caveat for readers who believe in biblical inerrancy, such as this reviewer. Co-author Webb makes unwarranted assumptions and claims of redactional changes by the evangelists that are problematic, such as the claims that Jesus' baptism and the theophany were likely two separate events (112, 143), that Luke 1 is historically problematic (129), that Jesus was a disciple and protégé of John the Baptist (135), and that Jesus' eschatology changed through the years (140).

At the 2010 annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Society of Biblical Literature, Bock and Webb presented a summary of the present book. Bock noted that the contributors abided by the high standards of historical attestation used in historical Jesus research. They then evaluated twelve key events that clearly made it above the very high standards, showing that even with the restrictive ground rules in historical Jesus research, one can still find out who the historical Jesus is. One can then use these events to gain a core understanding of Jesus with which even the most critical scholar ought to be able to agree (826). Consequently, "what emerged from the Jesus of history [in the picture resulting from the research approach used by the scholars in this book] was the Christ of faith" (851). Skeptical scholars who responded to Bock and Webb at the SBL meeting kindly said they would not accept the work of conservative historical Jesus scholars as credible or worthwhile until those scholars listed what parts of the Gospels they deem are unhistorical in order to prove their objectivity. Commendably, Bock did not accommodate this flawed challenge. Yet, he continued to explain and defend the findings in the book. Even if they do not convert the skeptic, they can clarify the position of the traditional view.

This collection of essays does an excellent job in challenging moderate-to-skeptical historical Jesus scholars by using their own ground rules of historical study to analyze twelve key events. Thus, this helpful volume for everyone interested in this field of study, from the student to the scholar, is not just a *description* of historical Jesus research; rather, it is a prime example of how to *do* historical Jesus research properly from a mostly traditional/conservative perspective.

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Jesus Research: An International Perspective. The First Princeton-Prague Symposium on Jesus Research. Princeton-Prague Symposia Series on the Historical Jesus. Edited by James H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokorný. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 307 pages. Softcover, \$35.00.

The Princeton-Prague Symposia on Jesus Research met in Prague in the spring of 2005 and Princeton in April of 2007 (ix). The international scholars invited to participate in the symposia are well known in Jesus Research. This review will examine the volume containing the papers presented at the first symposium, which focused primarily on methodology, a matter with which scholars are concerned and amateurs usually are not (xxi, 6). The presenters were searching for a hidden consensus in Jesus Research (4). The contributors to this volume are James H. Charlesworth, Stanley E. Porter, Jens Schröter, Carsten Claussen, Gerd Theissen,

Michael Wolter, Klaus Haacker, Rudolf Hoppe, Petr Pokorný, Craig Evans, Tom Holmén, Ulrich Luz, and Brian Rea. Interestingly, the participants prefer the term “Jesus Research” over the more traditional term “study of the historical Jesus” (xxii). This is because they find the Jesus of history and subsequent confessions about him and adoration of him hopelessly entangled and impossible to separate. Their biased perception is unfortunate.

This book is not for the novice in Jesus Research. Nor does it approach the subject from a traditional perspective. For that purpose, one is better served by Craig Keener’s *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* or Darrell Bock’s trilogy on the historical Jesus. By contrast, the writers of this present volume “do not imagine that they can find the ‘real’ Jesus behind the perceptions and theologies of the Evangelists” (14, 37). Instead, they take the typical clinical historical view that deals with probabilities and possibilities of who Jesus was (14, 79, 97). Surprisingly, though, they actually discover some positive findings. For instance, in one of the better chapters, James Charlesworth shows the old critical paradigm of viewing John’s Gospel as non-Jewish, non-historical, and ignorant of ancient Palestine is no longer viable. Charlesworth posits not only the Jewishness of this Gospel but also the accurate description of pre-AD 70 Jerusalem architecture and topography by citing five fairly recent archeological corroborations (61-66). However, the last part of the essay is not as helpful. Charlesworth claims that term “Palestinian Jesus Movement” is better than the allegedly anachronistic term “Christian” since first-century believers still considered themselves to be Jews (68-69). Yet, there are at least three problems with this claim. First, the movement was no longer *just* Palestinian by the time of Paul’s first missionary journey in Acts 13. Second, this claim minimizes Acts 11:26. Third, by the early 50s many believers were Gentiles.

The strengths of this volume are that it (1) incorporates early Jewish writings, such as the pseudepigrapha and Dead Sea Scrolls, archaeological findings, and socio-rhetorical studies in Jesus research, (2) uses top-notch scholars, and (3) reflects fairly recent historical Jesus research, although from the moderate-to-liberal perspective. Thus, one expects to see nontraditional interpretations, such as (1) Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist in the desert (52, 171), (2) Jesus sometimes thought the *eschaton* would begin either in his or his followers’ lifetimes (57), (3) Cana was Jesus’ base of operations from John’s perspective (96), and (4) Gospel contexts can be inaccurate constructs (191, 198). One should contrast these views with those of more conservative scholars such as Keener and Bock.

A weakness throughout the book is that the authors only implicitly reach their goal of focusing on methodology and finding a consensus. Were it not for Charlesworth’s summary of what was to follow (4-13), one might have missed the methodology. Most of the articles focus on the application of a methodology rather than the description of that methodology. More methodological explanation by each author would have improved this book. Another weakness is the lack of theological balance, although the choice of authors has a commendable international balance. The conservative view is mostly missing, except when criticized in or relegated to a footnote (e.g., 29n45, 78n28; 92n91; and 220n96). The least helpful chapter is by Ulrich Luz, in which he compares Jesus and the founding of Christianity with two leaders who founded religions in Japan in the last two hundred years. His purpose is to cause one to re-think what is allegedly unique about Jesus and Christianity by examining seven areas of correspondence (243-51), but his summary is very short (254), and his application is lacking.

For a reader who believes in the historical veracity of the canonical Gospels, such as this reviewer, what is the value in reading a book written by scholars who doubt this truthfulness (78)? One must be aware of and follow these scholarly conversations in Jesus Research in order to dialogue effectively with these scholars. Then, one can add to the conversation based on the perspective of the inerrancy of God's Word. This reviewer looks forward to the next two volumes in this series. They are from the 2005 symposium, and they are not yet in print. They will include research from an even wider number of disciplines than the present volume, such as numismatics, canonical criticism, onomastics, orality in Gospel transmission, and time perspective (15).

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***Halos and Avatars: Playing Video Games with God.* Edited by Craig Detweiler. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010. 248 pages. Softcover, \$19.95.**

While the relationship between the church and various forms of entertainment has often been characterized by opposition, in the years following the explosive popularity of film, for example, the theological academy has seen fit to dialogue critically with it. When it comes to the medium of the video game, however, theology has had little if anything to say about it. The fact that theology is routinely late to the party when it comes to matters of pop culture notwithstanding, theology is actually simpatico with almost any other humanities discipline when it comes to indifference towards video games; there is no denying that for the majority of scholars, theological or otherwise, video games do not exist, at least not academically speaking.

Craig Detweiler, associate professor of communication at Pepperdine University, believes that such indifference need not be the case. By serving as editor of *Halos and Avatars*, a collection of essays regarding God and video games, he hopes to bring the serious discussion of gaming to the collective attention of a theologically minded audience. In his own words, the book "is an effort to take games seriously, to wade into an emerging field and make sense of an expanding phenomenon" (4).

The book is divided into three sections, each containing essays pertaining to distinct aspects of video gaming from a theological perspective. The first section, "Playing Games with God," is the most explicitly theological of the three, as its essays deal specifically with the possibility of video games communicating to the player theologically. "Halos," the second section, consists of essays that look more toward the inner mechanics of video games. The final section, "Avatars," includes essays concerning the role-playing players assume and the nature of virtual personas.

Because of the difficulty of reviewing a collection of twelve unique essays, this reviewer will highlight two found to be the most substantive. In the first essay, "From *Tekken* to *Kill Bill*: The Future of Narrative Storytelling?" Chris Hansen asks, "If games replace films as our preferred stories, how will they alter our understanding of narrative arc, character development, and our own sense of calling?" (19). He answers by comparing and contrasting video games and film and ends with a potential theological implication: he posits that the video game's ability to provide multiple paths to one conclusion (or even to different conclusions) could pose significant problems for the player's view of biblical truth (31).

A second essay of note is the final essay of the book, John W. Morehead's "Cybersociality: Connecting Fun to the Play of God." In the latter part of his essay,

he discusses a “theology of play,” a particularly fascinating theological concept. After noting that few theologians have ever approached a theology of play, Morehead intimates that, given the current proliferation of digital technology today, there is much potential for research to be done in this area (181-83).

The most significant value of *Halos and Avatars* is found in the underlying presupposition adopted by all of the contributors: that the medium of the video game is worthy of theological consideration and critique. Some of the authors do more towards the support of such a contention than others, but it is quite clear from the essays that theologians, ministers, and laypersons who are interested in the relationship between theology and pop culture would do well not to look upon video games with disdain. Strength is also found in several of the contributors’ thoughts regarding the implications of the interactivity of video games for biblical truth. Outside of the aforementioned example, this is perhaps best illustrated by Rachel Wagner’s essay, “The Play is the Thing: Interactivity from Bible Fights to Passions of the Christ,” in which she argues that interactivity of video games makes them “not suitable for portrayal of the passion of Jesus” (62). The very fact that the player has some control over what transpires in a video game can hold severe theological consequences.

The book does have two significant weaknesses, however. First, it is clear that some of the essay authors’ experience with video games is minimal. As an experienced gamer, this reviewer can assert with certainty that even gamers who are not theologically minded would quickly gather that some of the authors do not know as much about what they are discussing as they think they do. Second, the conclusions reached by several authors hold potential problems for the interpretation of biblical truth. While space does not permit listing them all here, perhaps the most illustrative is found in Detweiler’s conclusion for the book, in which he states, “[Jesus] was eventually fragged during a deathmatch on an unexpected field of battle. . . . After three days, Jesus respawned, took his place as Administrator, and redefined the way the game is played” (196). Though it is clear that Detweiler is attempting to frame the story of redemption in gamer parlance, by doing so he actually risks biblical interpretation using non-biblical terms and the trivialization of Christ’s salvific work.

On the whole, however, *Halos and Avatars* should be seen as a work that seeks to take theological discussion to an area it previously has not been and for that, it should be commended. Theology has been in serious dialogue with television and film for quite some time. With the proliferation of video games having significant narrative structures, theology would be remiss to ignore such an increasingly influential medium.

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***Proverbs 10–31*. By Michael V. Fox. The Anchor Yale Bible. Volume 18b. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 729 pages. Hardcover, \$60.00.**

This volume of the Anchor Yale Bible series is a continuation of Fox’s volume on *Proverbs 1–9*. Although the volume continues Fox’s previous work, it can be read independently. Fox’s commentary is composed of six primary parts: 1) an introduction, 2) the commentary proper, 3) four more or less self-contained essays, 4) textual notes, 5) a new translation of the book of Proverbs, and 6) a bibliography. In the introduction Fox takes up important issues related to the interpretation of Proverbs 10–31. First, he addresses how to read Proverbs as a collection. Fox argues that there

are “proverb pairs” and even, on occasion, “proverb clusters” that form an interpretive context. He explains these groupings as the result of associative thinking, that is, “[w]hen one thought gives rise to another or one word evokes a related one” (480). However, he does not see larger, elaborate structures in chapters 10–29. As Fox sees it, “It is far-fetched to imagine editors compiling proverbs according to grand and detailed designs” (481).

Next, Fox deals with the hermeneutical considerations for reading an individual proverb by focusing on its form and describing the templates that may have been used to construct a proverb. His description of the disjointed proverb template in which there is “a gap between the [parallel] lines [that] invites the reader to fill it” (494; e.g. Prov 15:16) is especially helpful for interpretation. Fox provides pointers for identifying this type of proverb, detecting the gap, and finding appropriate ways to fill it.

The commentary proper deals with the text verse by verse or unit by unit. Fox presents his translation of each unit followed by commentary. The length of the commentary varies widely from two or three paragraph to several pages, on occasion, including an excursus alongside the commentary. Technical discussions take place in a smaller font immediately following the commentary. Textual variants that Fox accepts, but that deviate from the Masoretic Text, are listed below the translation and most often addressed in the technical discussions. This format enables a readable commentary that also provides its technical basis.

Throughout the commentary Fox interacts with three primary dialogue partners: 1) Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom, 2) medieval Jewish Rabbis, and 3) modern scholarship from Franz Delitzsch to the present day. These dialogue partners reveal much about Fox’s work. First, the work focuses on the historical authors and/or editors responsible for producing the text of Proverbs 10–31. It describes what they meant and how they put the text together by analyzing the historical, literary, and linguistic features of the text, each area in which Fox is quite skilled. It does not include an attempt to incorporate that historical meaning into universal theological discussions or bring out contemporary application. Second, the traditions that shape Fox’s perspective are Jewish scholarship and modern critical scholarship. He rarely, if ever, deals with Christian interpreters from the ancient, medieval, or reformation periods. Third, his view of the Bible is consistent with modern historical-critical scholarship.

Following the commentary proper, four essays outline Fox’s reconstruction of the fundamental ideas that gave rise to the book of Proverbs as it is. The essays deal with the following topics as it pertains to wisdom: 1) the growth of wisdom, 2) ethics, 3) revelation, and 4) knowledge. From these essays Fox paints the following picture of the wisdom of Proverbs: wisdom is a human cognitive enterprise that seeks to discover what is good. What is good is what is consistent with the ideal of harmony. At first, the collectors of Proverbs viewed wisdom as a means to an end, not necessarily ethical and not requiring revelation (i.e., divine law) since humans are able to uncover what is good. Over time their picture of wisdom becomes more overtly ethical and theological. The first shift occurs when wisdom becomes a means to avoid evil, relating wisdom to revelation. Finally, wisdom becomes transcendent, and revelation is wisdom.

The commentary closes with textual notes, a translation, and bibliography. First, the textual notes include an analysis of textual variants for Proverbs 10–31. Fox catalogues the textual variants and offers commentary on the significance of

each variant and its possible implications for the meaning of the text. Second, the translation that Fox offers is fresh and enlightening. Fox possesses excellent technical expertise in Biblical Hebrew, and he is sensitive to preserving the structure and rhythm of the Hebrew in such a way that the English translation has a rhetorical effect similar to the original. Third, the sixty-page bibliography covers both volumes of the Proverbs commentary.

Fox's commentary skillfully does what it aims to do. It offers virtually no help in relating the text to universal (especially Christian) theological discussions, nor does it provide ways for relating the text to contemporary life issues, but anyone looking for a commentary that aims to describe the meaning of those who produced Proverbs will find this work competent, erudite, and insightful.

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***ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church.* By Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009. 216 pages. Softcover, \$19.99.**

In an evangelical subculture that has become somewhat self-obsessed with the inner-workings of church and its mission, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch attempt to get at the heart of the issue. The authors argue that when addressing the obvious errors in the church today, the focus is frequently on the externals and not on its core. In so doing, church critics may be on target in their appraisal, but the subsequent suggestions for re-addressing the situation actually provide more of the same instead of working at the root of the real issue. For the authors, a contrast between the "way of Jesus and the religion of Christianity" (6) demonstrates how far we have come from being defined by Jesus and the church of the New Testament.

ReJesus asserts that the only solution for the church struggling in a culture that has long since abandoned any semblance of Christianity is to re-Jesus the church. In other words, Christology must become the center and driving force. In the introduction, Frost and Hirsch explain that the starting point for any theology of missions or any approach to ecclesiology must be Christ. In fact, to recalibrate the church is to shift the "entire enterprise along Christological lines." (6) It is Christology that drives missiology (defined by the authors as "our purpose and function in the world"), and missiology allows us to define ecclesiology.

After setting the tone for the project, chapter one turns to an examination of how an encounter with Jesus changes the essence of life itself in following Him. This dramatic change leads us to personal renewal as discussed in chapter two. The believer should be transformed by the very person of Jesus. Of course, these personal transformations lead to a basic change in the way congregations function. Chapter three focuses on the need for a radical Christianity defined as a return to the root of the faith itself in Jesus. This means entering into the chaos of life and a struggling church with what the authors term as "radical traditionalism" (83), a rediscovery of the original rules laid out by Christ and being defined by them.

Chapter four frames the heart of the volume as the authors advocate an iconoclasm of the images of Jesus we have erected in our minds. They take on the feminized Jesus found in William Holman Hunt's famous painting, *The Light of the World* or the ethereal Jesus of Pompeo Batoni's *Sacred Heart*. In the midst of the discussion of how Jesus is co-opted for everything from marketing to entertainment, we discover the image of the wild Jesus who refuses strict categorization or co-option. Any

attempt at harnessing the wild Jesus of the Gospels will actually “devastate the way of Jesus from the inside” (128).

The truth of the gospel of Jesus defines our Trinitarian theology, according to chapter five, where the authors carefully define a theological framework for re-Jesusing the church that does not fall prey to a Jesus only or oneness theology. In the concluding chapters, Frost and Hirsch point out how the church should engage the culture. The heart of a holistic ministry in the minds of the authors is the center point between overlapping areas of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy. It is in this re-Jesused center that the church actually reflects the claims of Christ and functions as the community perpetually shaped and changed by the gospel.

There are a few drawbacks to the work. One is that the book needs stronger editing. There are little mistakes throughout (e.g. the varying capitalization of Christology). Another is a creative aspect of the book that works against its presentation. Scattered throughout the text are small vignettes of individuals that attempt to demonstrate how one could be a “little Jesus.” Some of these, like William Wilberforce or Harriet Beecher Stowe, stand out as men and women devoted to overturning the evil of slavery that marked their time. But most of the individuals highlighted, like Rigoberto Menchu, Dorothy Day, Father Damien of Molokai, and Simone Weil, suggest to the reader that a “little Jesus” is someone who works for social justices and causes. Though this is not their intent, the reader could be left with the idea that liberation theology or a return of the Social Gospel accomplishes the vision of re-Jesusing the church.

The main point that Frost and Hirsch defend—that Jesus should be the core identity that shapes the church—cannot be denied by any person serious about the church. Yet the authors fail to go far enough. Their re-Jesus sounds more like the Jesus of Barth and of neo-liberalism than that of the historical proclamation of the church. Perhaps this is an oversight on their part, but those holding to the centrality of Jesus must also deal with Jesus as the Word. And while the authors hold to a seemingly high view of Scripture, their failure to connect a picture of Jesus to the whole of Scripture instead of just the Gospels causes the book to fall short. The failure of affirming Jesus without simultaneously affirming the revelation of him in Scripture leads to the tired, worn path of liberalism where Jesus continues to be made into the image of existing social issues read onto the Gospels.

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***Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal.* By T. David Gordon. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010. 192 pages. Softcover, \$12.99**

Perhaps the issue of pop culture and church music has not been exhausted; perhaps it has. Nonetheless, T. David Gordon, professor at Grove City College, offers his own critique of contemporary worship practices in *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns*. Following his book, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (inspired by Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read:* and *Why Johnny Can't Write*), Gordon continues his quest to address major shortcomings in conservative Reformed churches. Whereas his first book was motivated by his experience with cancer, this book reflects on the loss of his infant daughter (many years ago) to leukemia. Direct and uncompromising, it is based upon the central belief, “I think

contemporary worship music is often of a lesser literary, theological, or musical quality than most traditional hymnody” (15). Gordon’s purpose is to persuade his readers “to be wary of using contemporary Christian music in worship services at all, to object to its common use, and to zealously oppose its exclusive use” (36).

Gordon follows a very simple progression. He acknowledges that he is primarily concerned with music that “sounds” contemporary because that genre is “fading, transient, or ephemeral” (60). It communicates the meta-message of “contemporaneity” and banality because pop music cannot demand a commitment of itself. He argues that earlier generations never considered listening to church music in leisure time because it was sacred, following that with a summary of Ken Myers’s description of high, folk, and pop music. Pop music suffers from an ignorance of tradition and poor quality while high music demands well-trained musicians and the “creativity of masterly poets” (131; he grudgingly admits, however, that folk music may be “the most appropriate idiom for Christian hymnody” [87]). He concludes with the claim that churches should not use music (or any other means) to “reach” a community, and that indeed the Woodstock generation introduced the guitar in church to appease itself and not younger generations, which apparently do not like guitars (159).

Frankly, the book itself is rather inconsequential. His well-taken points (churches do not advertise “Theologically Significant Worship” on their marquees, pop music tends to be monogenerational, and pop lyrics lose their impact when “not set to music” [135]) are borrowed from other authors, primarily Myers in *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes*. It is a purely contemporary product with little lasting value and almost no meaning outside of a narrow cultural context, filled with examples of hubris, ignorance of music history and the music industry, and unawareness of a huge body of literature already devoted to the topic. Though he claims not to be a musician, he stands in judgment of all music that falls outside an amorphous “traditional” genre that only he can identify. He claims to know the message of all contemporary music regardless of the author’s intent and worries only about the opinions of “mature” Christians. In the end, it seems as if Gordon believes the church should be some kind of cultural catacomb for trained musicians, regardless of the mission of the church as given by Jesus Christ.

An interesting question arises from reading this book. Gordon does not try to hide his disdain for the Free Church tradition, disregarding it as “sub-Christian” (122) because it rejects the universal church and her Reformed liturgies. A number of Baptists (including this reviewer) have recently argued that Baptist leaders should be more aware of historical resources for congregational worship and not so dependent on the latest trends in evangelical church practices. This book should give them pause. Most Baptists, especially those who take the Great Commission seriously, should not want to be associated with Gordon’s type of holdover from Puritan practice (that a church should be more concerned with perfecting itself than the world around it). Any kind of elitism which would result from pursuing high culture flies in the face of everything Jesus taught and explains why parts of Gordon’s traditions (he currently attends an Anglican church though he is an ordained Presbyterian minister) have fallen on such hard times. The Free Church tradition intentionally (and biblically) rejects any sort of professionalization that would divide clergy from laity, church from church, and Christian from lost. However, this does not mean that Baptists should celebrate mediocrity, as Gordon insinuates. It simply means that Baptists should remember that God cares much more about the heart than the

quality of the offering.

Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns will be read by few and impress fewer. However, it serves as a sober reminder of why Baptists should resist the temptation to drift into uncritical traditionalism in the historic liturgical sense (out of the uncritical traditionalism of a different kind that currently characterizes so many Baptist churches). God has provided churches with invaluable resources from throughout history, but the moment those resources become a snare (something used to divide Christians and churches into different classes) they must be dismissed. May the Baptists who investigate those resources in order to enrich their congregation's worship be strongly warned that they must never adopt Gordon's mindset towards God's church.

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***MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium.* Edited by David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. 312 pages. Softcover, \$26.99.**

Many evangelical missiologists remain locked in debate over a few missiological issues of vital importance. *MissionShift* will help to clarify these issues. Editors David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer differ with one another to some extent as they react to the thoughts of the other contributors to the book. The book is a compilation of three essays with five responses to each. Stetzer writes the introduction and a response to each essay. Hesselgrave writes the conclusion. Charles Van Engen writes the first essay: "Mission Defined and Described." Keith Eitel, Enoch Wan, Darrell Guder, Andreas Köstenberger, and Stetzer respond to Van Engen. The late Paul G. Hiebert writes the second essay: "The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization." Michael Pocock, Darrell Whiteman, Norman Geisler, the late Avery Willis, and Stetzer respond to Hiebert. The late Ralph Winter writes the third essay: "The Future of Evangelicals in Mission." Scott Moreau, Christopher Little, Mike Barnett, J. Mark Terry, and Stetzer respond to Winter.

An apparent de-emphasis on biblical limitations to missiological creativity is a recurring theme in *MissionShift*. Van Engen explains that evangelicals are searching for creative definitions of mission (22). Eitel cautions, however, that "creative tensions without biblically firm boundaries will result in compromises that undermine the message we have to offer to the world" (34). Köstenberger agrees with Eitel (64). Stetzer's characterization of Eitel's position is inappropriate: "He applies his concerns to any 'creative' missiology. This is the slippery slope argument—which the Pharisees applied to Jesus and the Judaizers to Paul" (73). Eitel only applies his concerns to creative missiology "without biblically firm boundaries." Stetzer also uses the term "Pharisees" in his response to Köstenberger and says that "Köstenberger follows Eitel's argument down the slippery slope" (78). In contrast, Hesselgrave agrees with the concern of Eitel and Köstenberger: "Left to their own devices, Evangelical mission thinkers and practitioners tend to become overly creative and unduly adventurous" (278).

In his response to Hiebert's essay, Whiteman endorses C5 contextualization, which can involve believers attending a Mosque and continuing to use Muslim forms. Whiteman says, "I am convinced that there are no sacred forms, only sacred meanings" (124). Geisler correctly notes, however, that "forms communicate

meaning” (142). He explains that “the C5 approach leads to syncretism, as field research has shown” (141).

In the final essay, Winter advocates a larger role for social ministry in evangelical mission work, and he spoke glowingly of the philanthropy of Bill Gates and Madonna (188). Little provides an appropriate retort: “Oprah can build schools; Madonna can sponsor orphanages; and Bill Gates can promote global health, but only the church is entrusted with the apostolic role of gospel proclamation” (217). Evangelicals who exercise good stewardship of limited resources will prioritize gospel proclamation over social ministry. In sum, a thorough reading of *MissionShift* will encourage caution in contextualization.

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***The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David.* By Anthony Le Donne. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009. 310 pages. Hardcover, \$49.95.**

The title of this volume provides the reader with an apt summary of the book’s central subject: historiography, social memory theory, typology, and the label of “The Son of David” as applied to Jesus. The compilation of these subjects as the book progresses makes for a rather technical and difficult read at times, but the book is still profitable for the detailed illustration it presents on how social memory theory may be applied to New Testament research. Le Donne’s key interest lies specifically within the field of historical Jesus research and how this realm of studies may be advanced further by approaching historiographical concerns from the perspective of a modified method of social memory theory. A positive contribution can be made to historical Jesus research, according to Le Donne’s thesis, by approaching historical inquiry through the analysis of memory refraction (i.e., the distortion between the remembered past and the actual past that inevitably results because memory recall is always perspectival, interpretative, and selective). Le Donne posits that this memory refraction can be discerned in the New Testament in typological interpretation (13-14, 50-52, 65).

Put more simply, Le Donne believes that research into the historical Jesus is lamented by many historians because they misunderstand the primary goal of historical study. The goal is not to arrive at a *provable* but, rather, at the most *probable* knowledge of the past. The actual events of history belong to the past and are not available for objective verifiable analysis. Historical inquiry, therefore, is concerned not with verifying the earliest historical facts but with postulating the earliest memory of the plausible past (70, 87). With this conception of history in mind and the demand for absolute historical attestation set aside, Le Donne avers that the historian can delineate what the most original memory of an event likely was by familiarizing oneself with his theoretical model of the mnemonic cycle and tracing the development of successive memory refractions as they move from one memory cycle to the next in diachronic fashion. Since interpretive traditions from previous to subsequent memory cycles share a recognizable continuity as they progress, the most plausible original historical memory that gave rise to similar and divergent traditions may be isolated, after distinct mnemonic cycles are compared and contrasted with each other (74). New Testament typology is important to Le Donne’s argument in this regard because it evidences a way of remembering that allows one to follow

chronological trajectories of thought relevant for Jesus studies (13-14, 59, 91).

The first three chapters in the book provide the reader with explanation of historiographical matters and then culminates with a delineation of Le Donne's thesis in chapter four. In the remaining five chapters, Le Donne applies his historiographical method of social memory to the title "Son of David" as used of Jesus in the Gospel narratives. He concludes that the title functions as a dual indicator with both Davidic and Solomonic connotations and that it is the product of typological interpretation (94, 268).

A few critical thoughts deserve mention. First, this book is demanding. The concept of social memory theory as a historiographical model is complex and makes for a hard-to-follow presentation at times. Second, Le Donne's overall conception of history stands in need of correction, especially from a biblical perspective. Admittedly, the presentation of history from personal memory means that all history is selective and interpretive to some degree. That history is told from some particular "point of view," however, does not mean that we must speak only in terms of plausible or probable history from memory. This is especially true when speaking of biblical history, for the doctrine of inspiration assures us of the historical objectivity and veracity of both Old Testament and New Testament events as they are recorded in Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17). The foundation of the Christian faith is grounded not in a likely but in an absolute and truthful history (cf. 1 Cor 15:12-19). A historiographical method, therefore, that questions the validity of the Gospel portraits of Jesus is fundamentally flawed.

Third, Le Donne maintains that typology is illustrative of memory refraction and relegates it to a "means of remembering" (59, 77) and "a manifestation of the mnemonic process" (261). Such a view of typology differs drastically from the traditional, biblical view of typology, which understands it to be the study of correspondences between Old Testament types and New Testament antitypes within the framework of salvation history, whereby the former predictively foreshadow the latter by divine design. Classifying typology as memory association of present events in light of past events fails to represent adequately the concept of biblical typology. Typology, as Jesus taught and as the New Testament writers understood it, sees Old Testament persons, events, and institutions as being predictive of his person and work (cf. Luke 24:27, 44-45; John 1:45; 3:14; 5:39, 46; Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 5:7; 10:6, 11). Typology should be understood as a form of prophecy and not simply as a way of remembering.

On a more positive note, however, *The Historiographical Jesus* is beneficial for the introduction and application it provides of social memory theory. Since this is a relatively new method for approaching historiographical questions in historical Jesus research, those who are unfamiliar with this methodological approach to New Testament studies will find this book to be a useful resource on key terminology in the field and on the theory of memory recall. Additionally, one can still find value in some of his observations, even if his conception of history and his method do not permit him to speak in definitive historical terms.

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2012 and the End of the World: The Western Roots of the Maya Apocalypse. By Matthew Restall and Amara Solari. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2011. 160 pages. Hardcover, \$16.95.

December 21, 2012, is the end.

If you are one of a host of interpreters who are committed to the thesis that the Mayan City El Tortuguero has yielded a Mayan calendar that covers 5,126 years and culminates this year with intense apocalyptic ramifications, then you believe that December 21, 2012, is the cataclysmic end of the world as we know it! Some things recounted in this book are beyond question. First, the discovery of the Mayan calendar in question, based on the famous Long Count and beginning in 3114 BC, is a remarkable discovery. Second, the calendar itself, chronicling such a long period of time, is in a class of its own. Third, unquestionably those who believe that the information contained in the calendar has an apocalyptic nature are sufficiently excited about the prospects of such a climax to civilization that they have succeeded in creating 2012 mania. Like other apocalyptic predictions, which seem to come more and more frequently, a large number of people are stirred to act totally beyond reason in the thirty to sixty-day period immediately preceding “the end of the world.”

Nevertheless, Restall and Solari, from the University of Pennsylvania, are not buying into the mania. Quite to the contrary they contend that there is nothing at all apocalyptic about the calendar. According to them, the calendar simply covers a period of time from one Mayan “beginning” to the end of that period, with virtually little anticipation of any end of the world or apocalyptic kingdom. Their fascinating accounts of the calendar provide a brief history of the discovery and the nature of the calendar itself. They present an overview of Mayan civilization and its expectations—particularly during the days of the Conquistadores—and then an assessment of the inroads of the Roman Catholic church, especially the Franciscan Padres, who, in the viewpoint of the authors, actually are the order most seriously responsible for the spread of apocalyptic views in the new world.

Although this reviewer has read the book, I find myself insufficiently prepared to make much of a judgment since I have had little opportunity to study the civilizations of ancient Central and South America. What Restall and Solari indicate about the nature of the calendar and its lack of apocalyptic prediction certainly makes reasonable sense. Because I have long been an observer of latter-day apocalypticists’ exaggerated anticipation, I can certainly believe that such conspiratorialists have seized an otherwise fairly innocent expression of antiquity and turned it into something that it is not.

However, when it comes to the authors’ understanding of the Bible and the Franciscans and the conditions of late medieval Catholic church, they could afford to do a little more homework. At one point they speak of “the book of the Revelations,” making one suspect that despite speaking of the book, they have not paid much attention to it. At another place they imagine millenarian advocates as seeing a millennium followed by a time of great trouble in the world when, in fact, no chiliast I know would be expecting a tribulation period to follow the millennium. There are some, of course, who would see one last great conflict in the battle of Gog and Magog; but even that point would be debated among others. Furthermore, the general position of the Roman Catholic Church has not been premillenarian but inevitably it has held to other apocalyptic positions, such as the idealist position advocated by Origen or the historicist or preterist position advocated by others. The confusion in

the mind of the authors seems to be that the Franciscans certainly had vivid doctrines of unending bliss and eternal punishment and unquestionably taught those to the Native Americans with enthusiasm. Beyond preaching, this included paintings of heaven and hell left behind on structures, and undoubtedly they anticipated the intervention of God at the end of the age—but were they millenarians? That would not be defined as premillennial interpretation today in any sense.

All of that said, I would recommend to all Christians this book as a relatively quick read. This reading of less than 150 pages will enable you to deal with those who come with whatever apocalyptic fancies to which they may turn as the year 2012 winds down. As a final word, even if the Mayan calendar did call for some sort of an apocalypse to take place December 21, 2012, I do not counsel any unusual measures for the storage of food, water, and medication and strongly suggest that no one pack a suitcase. After all, Jesus is the one who said, “No man knows the day or the hour of the return of the Son of Man.” That being the case, there is little need for concern in the Christian community.

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***Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision.* By N. T. Wright. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009. 279 pages. Softcover, \$16.50.**

This book is Wright's response to John Piper's *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*. Unlike the traditional Protestant understanding of justification, Wright argues for transformative, sacramental, and eschatological justification. Wright divides his work into two parts: his personal apology for this work and his own exegetical defense of his new understanding of justification. In the first part, Wright's primary concern is to justify what E. P. Sanders and James Dunn accomplished in the New Perspective on Paul movement. Wright compares the New Perspective movement to the Copernican revolution. What Paul fought against within Judaism is not the works of the law as a faithful and natural response to the grace of God, but ethnic demarcation that prevented Gentile believers from becoming genuine covenantal members. Therefore, “justification by faith” must mean that every Gentile could be a member of God's covenantal community, not by observing the ethnic regulations of the law, but by believing that Jesus abolished the ethnic wall between Jews and Gentiles on the cross. Judaism in the day of Jesus and Paul urged Jews to obey the law not in order to be saved but to maintain their covenantal membership. To see justification as a once-and-for-all event of forgiveness would be similar to a premodern Ptolemaic form of biblical exegesis.

Wright provides two fundamental critiques of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone. First, he claims that Luther's doctrine misrepresents the gospel as if it were all about “my relationship with God” alone and “my salvation” alone (25). This privatized understanding of justification ignores the covenant context of this Pauline doctrine and has failed to promote the ethical implications as well. The concept of Christ's imputed righteousness, however, is the worst damage portrayed by Luther and his Protestants. Wright contends that Christ's personal moral perfection cannot be an individual Christian's personal moral attribute. He asserts that the idea of Christ's imputed righteousness results from the Reformers' overreaction against the medieval Catholic misrepresentation of salvation. Wright asks his readers to realize that the phrase “the imputed righteousness of Christ” is not in the Bible (46).

In the second part of this book, Wright attempts to provide exegetical evidence for his New Perspective on Paul from his reading of Galatians, Philippians, Corinthians, Ephesians, and Romans. If one wants to know specifically how Wright constructs his exegetical arguments, one must review the biblical index of this book. Sometimes, he just ignores key verses that would challenge his argument and does not present any direct answer to the questions that his critics have raised. In particular, biblical texts such as Romans 5:1 and 2 Corinthians 5:21, which clearly refer to the present realization of justification, do not receive substantial response. According to Wright, the righteousness of God in justification refers to God's faithfulness to fulfill his covenantal blessings with human beings through the seed of Abraham. Justification is not about how to stand before God, the righteous judge, but about the divine declaration that a believer is already in that covenantal community. Justification has an "already and not yet" structure. The most problematic argument Wright makes is that believers' present justification is by grace, but their future justification is by their sanctified lives or works. Present justification is the anticipation of the final justification that believers should receive at the *eschaton*.

Evangelical Protestants who hold the supremacy of Scripture over tradition would agree with Wright that we should not take the Reformers' teachings as "infallible." However, a careful reader will wonder whether Wright himself follows the fundamental principle of *sola scriptura* when he reads Paul's critiques of Judaism from extra-biblical sources more than from the New Testament's canonical witnesses to it. Wright's readers should not abandon the emphasis on individual appropriation of justification. Jesus challenged Nicodemus to be born again by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. A young rich man came to Jesus in order to find a way of personal salvation. The jailor of Philippi asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" The problem is not the personal appropriation of the doctrine of justification but the privatization of that doctrine in an unbiblical way that does not pay attention to God's covenantal community and His plan for all human beings.

Unfortunately, Wright makes an unwarranted argument that Luther's doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness upon Christians is nothing but a varied Medieval Catholic notion of Christ's infused virtue by grace into sinful humanity. Wright misidentifies Luther's doctrine of imputed righteousness with the Catholic treasury of merits concept from which one may earn moral perfection. However, this is exactly what Luther and other Reformers condemned. One should not overlook that Wright does not present any documentation that could verify Luther's usage of God's imputed righteousness as the infused virtue of Christ. What traditional Protestants teach from the imputed righteousness of Christ is the transmission of Christ's perfect judicial status before God to those who are united with him by faith. Surprisingly, Wright seems to advance the concept of imputed righteousness when he argues that Christians should "inhabit appropriately the suit of clothes ('righteousness') that one has already inherited" (145).

No one would oppose Wright's argument that justification is not only a present reality but also an eschatological hope. However, many traditional Protestants would disagree with Wright about the nature of future justification. Good works would be the evidence or fruits of present justification but should not be the basis of future justification, as Wright argues. In order to prove his argument for eschatological justification based on works, Wright makes a surprising claim that is exegetically unacceptable and out of the context. According to him, the Gentiles in Rom 2 who do the works of the law written in their conscience are not pagan Gentiles but

“Christian Gentiles” (190). Since Paul promises peace and eternal glory to those Christian Gentiles who keep the law in Rom 2:10, argues Wright, eschatological justification based on works is a Pauline doctrine. However, Paul’s point in the first three chapters of Romans is that neither Jews nor Gentiles can be saved based on their works and, therefore, everyone is under the wrath of God. Rom 2:10 has nothing to do with eschatological justification based on works. Rather, that verse seriously challenges Wright’s argument.

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