

Charting a New Course: “Meta-missiology”

This issue is perhaps one of the most significant we have ever published. This Special Edition, focused on de-westernizing the Gospel, falls into the realm of pioneering in missions which is why we have entitled our editorial “Charting a New Course”. By this we mean that the post-modern phenomenon has given us an opportunity to chart out and create new patterns of faith and practice in general, and of missions in particular.

We call these “new” patterns because in a real sense we have never been here before. We have never had to swim in the ocean of relativism and subjectivism so prevalent in the post-modern West. Also, and despite it, it has provided an opportunity to rediscover the Gospel and who Jesus really is—“the desire of all nations.” It also is pioneering because the post-modern situation has catapulted us into defining for ourselves a “meta-missiology”—one which is long overdue. Our readers will see that the articles in this Special Edition are like a voice crying in the wilderness, literally crying “to prepare the way of the Lord” for the new day and the new millennium—a call to do God’s work in His way. Above all it is a call to celebrate an intimate marriage ceremony between theology and missiology, between biblical missiology and the apostolic mission practice that flows out of it.

By “meta-missiology” we want to denote a transcending missiology, one that is higher and beyond the missiology we have grown accustomed to in the West. The prefix “meta” is used in the same sense as in the word “meta-physical” or “meta-physics” which pertains to that which has real being, seen as the essential nature of reality as in “meta-physical truth.” Webster defines “meta-physics as “that division of philosophy

which includes ontology, or the science of being, and cosmology, or the science of fundamental causes and processes in things.” Hence “meta-missiology” pertains to the true and essential nature of mission as well as the fundamental “causes and processes” of missions. Seen from this perspective it becomes clear how radically new the charting of the course in missions really is.

We have chosen Jonathan Campbell’s presentation to lead the way because it provides a basic framework for the whole. Campbell’s clear cut call to free the Gospel from Western bondage, reminding us of the basics of Christ as being the “the way, the truth and the life” is anything but simple. It cuts through the mire of “dialogue”, “world religion issues”, and “political correctness” and provides the much needed apostolic authority so seldom heard in our insecure, confused and troubled world. This “apostolic voice” is primarily for missionaries, mission leaders and for churches involved in missions. All need to hear from those who “authoritatively believe” who speak with “anointing” in order to have the mire rinsed out of our ears and hearts.

Campbell’s article is followed by a superb presentation by Drs. Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou focused on “split-level” Christianity—a syncretistic “folk religion” that has veered off track—that is no longer biblical Christianity. We came by this “split-level” Christianity not unfairly, having been “taught” that this was the way of truth. But as Roland Allen has taught us the turnarounds in missions (and there have been many) are the direct work of the Holy Spirit. We believe we are in such a transition right now.

What is particularly significant about Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou is the united

prophetic voice which seeks to marry the natural with the supernatural and thus to create a holistic theology/missiology that encompasses the entire depth, height and span of man’s total life and all his experiences rather than a truncated missiology which denies core transcendent features of man’s reality.

The rest of the articles follow suit. Considering the ocean of relativism and pluralism we swim in, we should not find it surprising that the “apostolic” nature of the church and mission be discovered and seen for what it is. We need to understand that the apostolic must be seen as priestly first i.e., we minister unto the Lord first and then to the people. With the great theological vacuum in church and missions we have lost sight of that prior claim on us as His ministers. As Katz and Wells remind us, we need to return to the supernatural in conversion, and apprehend the eternal weight of glory revealed to us from heaven.

David Hesselgrave answers the question, “knowing all this...how then should we treat the “treasures” of the “world”? This is a much needed contribution to the practical living out of the High and Holy calling. The issues Hesselgrave presents and the conclusions he draws are as wise as the answers Jesus gave to the cunning religious leaders of His day. These are not simple answers nor simple problems, but must be thoroughly discerned in the light of God’s wisdom, revealed to us in God’s Word and made life to us by His Spirit.

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Releasing the Gospel from Western Bondage

The Gospel is often held captive by cultural ideologies, traditions and structures. In order for the Gospel to spread across cultures, it must be set free from the control of any single culture. For Western cultures, the Gospel must be de-modernized in order to be truly translatable across cultures and be able to fully impact the modern way of life that has spread around the world.

by Jonathan Campbell

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” Rom. 1:16-17¹

The gospel knows no boundaries. Just as God became flesh and dwelt among us, so the gospel must freely dwell among all cultures. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. This is good news to all peoples.

Over the past five years, I have come to understand the power and profound simplicity of the gospel. On journey with believers from both Western and non-Western contexts I have seen the gospel embodied in a variety of cultures from Seattle, Washington to Ulanbattur, Mongolia. My beliefs and lifestyle are emerging from the following discoveries.

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

When asked by Thomas, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? (John 14:5), Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6). This verse encapsulates what it means to embrace Jesus in all his fullness. The gospel is not an abstract idea or an institutional structure. The gospel is a living reality. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The Way (*hodos*) is Jesus. A way refers to a natural path or road way. Jesus is the Way to life. Through him we are reconciled to God. He is also the Way of life. Through his incarnation and life, Jesus provides a living example that he expects us to continue to live through community (John 13:15; 20:21; I Pet 2:21; I John 2:6). We are on journey with him he is both our goal and our guide (Isa 35:8; Heb 12:1-3).

The Truth (*aletheia*) is Jesus. Wandering in a sea of relativism, there is truth. This truth is not religious dogma, an institution or even religion. Truth is a person. Jesus. We gain hold of what is true through grabbing hold of Jesus. Reality is found in Jesus Christ (Col 2:17). We know truth through our relationship with the author of truth. And it is truth that sets us free (John 8:31-32). The truth of Jesus is the basis for the lifestyle of Gods people. Truth is the basis of the Way and the Way is the embodiment of the truth.

The Life (*zoe*) is Jesus. Through Jesus we are given life (John 6:35, 51, 63; 11:25). Jesus calls the world not to a new religion or even a better life, but to a new (*kainos*) life (II Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). To know Jesus is to know life. And this life is like no other. Jesus said, I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10; cf. John 15:11). To share in the life of Jesus is to experience him both now and forever (John 3:16; 17:3; I John 5:11, 20).

Jesus is the Way to life and the Way of life. Our message is not a doctrine, philosophy or system of thought. It is not a set of propositions to be argued or compared against. Philosophies may point to truths; but Jesus said, I am the truth. Jesus not only preached the good news, he is the good news.

To every spiritual and relational yearning, the gospel of Jesus is indeed good news. To the alienated, the gospel brings reconciliation. To those who are powerless to change, the gospel is transformational. To those who are despairing, Jesus brings the promise of a future and a hope. To the lonely, the gospel provides the security of loving community. To those searching for meaning, the gospel gives a new identity and purpose for living. The gospel of Jesus answers the spiritual and relational longings of all cultures.

The gospel is still incarnate in the Body of Christ. Contrary to a modern or hyper-mystical understanding of spirituality, the most profound spiritual experience we can have is not in isolation, but in community (cf. Matt 18:19-20). We cannot fully understand the Way of life outside community. The world sees the reality of Jesus when believers live as the Body of Christ in the world (II Cor 4:6-10; John 13:34-35).

The gospel is culturally translatable. The gospel is not Eastern nor Western, Jewish nor Gentile. The gospel is Jesus. This is the genius of the gospel. Jesus

knows no cultural boundaries. When the gospel becomes in cultured or over-contextualized, it becomes less than the good news. It becomes culturally isolated thereby hindering the natural progression across cultures.

WESTERN BONDAGE of the Gospel

Whatever influence the gospel had on the Western world, it is dwindling fast. With the curtain of modernity being pushed aside, the new light of postmodernity is revealing the hollowness of the Christendom church and westernized gospel. The modern church has become a subculture on the fringes of culture.

The Western gospel and its corresponding ecclesial expression presents a clear contrast with the early church: community was displaced by radical individualism, the experience of living the faith was replaced by gnosticism² the emphasis on obedience to Jesus shifted to the authority of pragmatism and the priesthood of all believers was substituted by professional clerics. Once a way of living, it is now almost entirely confined to a building or worship service.

In Jerusalem Christianity was a lifestyle, in Rome it became an institution, and in the West especially North America it has become an enterprise. Church as a missional movement with a distinct lifestyle was sacrificed on the foundation of institutionalism. And from this emerged the individualization of faith, the monopolization of the ministry and the separation of faith from practice.

Throughout Christendom the church has been willingly squeezed and pushed and diminished and redefined by modernity until the biblical and cultural are indistinguishable. Os Guinness submits a poignant explication of secularized evangelicalism: Compared with the past, faith today influences culture less. Compared with the past, culture today influences faith more (1993:16). Church is increasingly characterized by nominality, individualism, relativism and, ultimately, syncretism.³

The church sacrificed its integrity for relevance, resulting in syncretism. Wilbert Shenk is accurate when he asserts, the church in modern culture has succumbed to syncretism in pursuit of evangelization by its uncritical appropriation of the assumptions and methodologies offered by modern culture (1995:56). Generations of uncritical enculturation have left us with a diluted and impotent church.

These problems transcend Western contexts. Syncretism is a global reality. Because the Western church has been the dominating missionary influence until recently, the effects of syncretism can be seen worldwide. Shenk claims, This should not surprise us, since the model and practice of church taken to Asia, Africa, and Latin America was that of Christendom, and nominality has cropped up wherever Western missions have gone (1997:154). For example, my friend, Kasereka Kasomo observed the effects of missionaries who brought more than the gospel to the Wanande people of Eastern Zaire: I discovered that what we had been calling orthodox Christianity was Western syncretistic Christianity. He concludes, our Christianity was doubly syncretistic. Doubly syncretistic, as the Nande Church struggles to be orthodox, while really trying to be a Western church (1994:13).

The problem with the Western church is that we have defined the gospel one way (i.e. scripturally and spiritually), then have established structures and practices that are contradictory (i.e. institutional, individualistic, pragmatic and political). We have a normative view of doctrine, but not of practice. To separate faith from practice is to open the door to syncretism. And that is exactly what the modern church has done. The church is no longer faithful to its simple nature of the gospel, nor is it redemptively engaging culture. Modernity has dominated the church, rendering it a servile social institution.⁴

Any ideologies or organizational structures that are imposed upon the gospel will stunt the natural growth and reproductive capacity of the gospel. Noth-

ing should compromise the essential nature of the gospel. We should not want the gospel to be anything less or anything more than what the Word of God makes it. If the church hopes to fulfill her calling in the world, there must be a willingness to let go of any modern cultural perceptions and practices of the gospel and rediscover the powerful simplicity of the gospel and of being Gods missionary community actively engaged in the world. In short, the gospel must be de-modernized in order to be translated across cultures.

The modern church must come to the harsh realization that in many ways its gospel has been influenced more by modernity than by the life of Jesus and patterns of the early church. Renewal is not enough. Nothing less than a radical reorientation is needed for the gospel to break free from the modern influences. The New Testament reveals a gospel far more radical, dangerous, transformational, even revolutionary than we see in the common church of our day.

We all may need to go through a conversion something like the apostle Peter experienced in Acts 10 and 11. Peter's conversion from an ethnocentric Jew to an advocate for Gentile missions was one of the most significant paradigm shifts in the history of the church. So today, the church must repent of any cultural tradition that hinders the movement of the gospel across cultures whether modern or post-modern or pre-modern. Just as Gentiles can now receive salvation as Gentiles, so all peoples have a right to be followers of Jesus without having to become Western or to become institutionalized. Every people group is entitled to experience the Way of Jesus in their own culture.⁵

AUTHORITY AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

Marked by a rejection of traditional and religious sources of authority, modernity favored reason, knowledge and pragmatism as the road map to human

achievement and inevitable progress. Modernism denies divine authority and hinders the natural movement of the gospel. Therefore, a critical question for unleashing the gospel in cultures of relativism is: by what (or whose) authority do we make decisions regarding contextualization? Do we base our decisions on tradition (legalism), on what works (pragmatism) or on the latest cultural trends (syncretism)? Contextualization without accountability to objective truth (or metanarrative) will inevitably lead to relativism and syncretism.⁶

There must always be a divine standard by which contextualization is evaluated especially in the relativistic and pluralistic climate of postmodernity. Genuine contextualization is built on the assumption that there is a timeless and changeless core of the gospel that can be translated into any culture (cf. Sanneh 1989). In the 1974 Lausanne conference, Bruce Nicholls explained,

This Gospel of the kingdom as defined in Holy Scriptures is totally relevant to man in the totality of his need. This follows because the Gospel was designed and provided by the same God who made the human heart and who knows the depth of mans alienation from him and from his fellows (1974:647).

The revelation of Jesus Christ is always translatable. The spontaneous expansion of the gospel will be limited as long as people confuse the normative with the temporal. Namely, we must come to discern between modern forms and methods that have been developed in the modern era with the eternally translatable patterns of the gospel and church. Figure A illustrates four realms of authority which provide a standard for interpreting and living the New Testament in today's postmodern contexts. This chart distills the essentials from the non-essentials, it helps filter out anything that may hinder the natural

and supernatural movement of the gospel across cultures.

The process of translation is symbiotic or bi-directional. For the gospel to be embodied in a culture requires a mutual

Figure A
Spheres of Authority and Contextualization

SPHERE OF AUTHORITY	DESCRIPTION	TRANSLATABILITY
Christ's Commands (The Core)	<i>Commands</i> are non-negotiable. Jesus Christ is our ultimate authority. Therefore, our first priority is to faithfully follow Jesus and fulfill his purposes (Mt. 28:19-20; John 14:15, 21; I John 5:2-3).	Fully Translatable No Adaptation Non-Negotiable
Biblical Principles (The Substance)	<i>Principles</i> refer to scriptural teachings that complement the words and works of Jesus. Cross-cultural principles can be drawn from the apostolic teachings (Acts 2:42; Rom 16:17; II Thess 3:6, 14; II Tim 3:16).	Translate to maintain the dynamic equivalent. The essence is unchanging
Apostolic Patterns (The Application)	<i>Patterns</i> are principles and values in action. They are expressed in specific cultural contexts as behaviors, practices and lifestyles of first-century Christians that are normative (I Cor 4:16-17; Phil 3:16-17; I Thess 1:7-8; II Thess 3:9).	Translate, contextualize to fit the culture
Church Practices (The Expression)	Church <i>practices</i> or traditions are culturally inherited and/or established ways of thinking, feeling or doing. They should be tested according to the commands of Christ, biblical principles and then to cultural relevance (Mt. 15:3, 6; Rom 12:1, 2; Col 2:8).	Non-Translatable Culturally-Specific

Postmodernity, therefore, calls us to embrace the paradoxical tension of being authoritative and contextualized to continually evaluate mission strategies for their cultural sensitivity and biblical integrity. This requires us to nurture a keen discernment between the exotic (i.e. modern or culturally-specific) and the essentials (i.e. trans-modern or culturally-translatable).

Gospel Translation AS JOURNEY

Ecclesial translation should be an intrinsically spiritual process because the church is in an endless state of encountering the culture and being encountered. The nature and mission of the gospel demands that we continually wrestle with how to embody the Gospel in the world to be both biblically authoritative and culturally translatable. This ongoing process is guided by two basic questions: 1) What is the Gospel of Jesus? and 2) How will we then live the Gospel of Jesus in this changing culture?

exchange between the gospel and the culture. Bosch writes, Inculturation suggests a double movement: there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture. The gospel must remain Good News while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon (1991:454, emphasis in original). The challenge is to relate to the culture free of cultural trappings foreign to the context (i.e. not to transfer one's own native culture into a new culture). David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen highlight the tension as they describe the missionary task with its hazards:

The missionary's ultimate goal in communication has always been to represent the supracultural message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms. There are two potential hazards which must be assiduously avoided in this endeavor: (1) the perception of the communicators own cultural heritage as an integral element of the gospel, and (2) a syncretistic inclusion of elements from the receptor culture which would alter or eliminate aspects of

the message upon which the integrity of the gospel depends (1989:1).

Faithful translation demands that we exegete both the biblical patterns and the culture. This helps avoid one of three major errors: (1) syncretism, where we engage culture without critically exegeting Scripture, (2) hypocrisy, where we may exegete Scripture, but never engage the culture, and (3) isolationism, where neither the Scriptures or the culture is effectively engaged. Figure B illustrates

Figure B
Model of Engagement
Engage Culture

		Engage Culture	
		High	Low
Exegete Scripture	High	Translation	Hypocrisy
	Low	Syncretism	Isolationism

the relationship of these approaches in exegeting Scripture and engaging culture.

The process of translation is neither a science nor a pragmatic methodology, but rather an inherently natural and supernatural endeavor. At work in both the church and in the culture, the Holy Spirit freely gives wisdom, guidance and power to the community that strives to embody the gospel in its surrounding environment. Translation is a continuous process of engagement and embodiment. It represents a way of life the natural function of the missional community moving in the world. This ongoing process can be summarized by the following three movements:

1. Deconstruct our culturally-specific paradigm of the gospel: How have we been shaped by our culture(s)? In what ways have we been shaped by cultural influences (e.g. educational, religious, family, political, economic)? What are the common cultural/traditional standards used for defining the gospel? How much is translatable across cultures?

2. Recover the culturally-translatable gospel: What is the gospel of Jesus? What example did Jesus leave us? What didn't he leave us? What are the biblical essentials of the gospel and church? What are the non-essentials? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering us to live the Way of Jesus?

3. Embody the gospel in new cultures: How will we live this Way in new cultures? What are the hindrances (and opportunities) for translating the gospel in this context? How can we demonstrate the gospel and Christian community into this culture? How can we guard against drifting away from the simple gospel?⁷

Conclusion

The love of Jesus and the needs of our world demand that we translate the gospel in

all cultures. Roland Allen said,

The spontaneous expansion of the church reduced to its elements is a very simple thing. (Roland Allen 1962:156)

To harvest the fruit that the Holy Spirit is yielding, we must abandon any cultural constraints and recapture the powerfully simple gospel. Just as the boy David could not approach Goliath with the weight and encumbrance of the king's armor, so we must continually identify and remove those factors that inhibit the Body of Christ from moving freely (Cf. 1 Sam 17:38-40; Heb 12:1-3). We must guard against anything that might violate New Testament patterns of mission that lead to the movement of the gospel across cultures.

In the midst of our current cultural-ecclesial crisis, the most powerful demonstration of the reality of the gospel to post-modern cultures is the people of God embodying the gospel of Jesus nothing more and nothing less. Anything we might add to the essential Way of Jesus

threatens the translatability of the gospel. Only as the gospel becomes a way of life in the culture of the people will there emerge new indigenous movements in and across all cultures.

To live in the Way of Jesus nothing could be more simple. Nothing could be more difficult. Nothing could be more real and profound. Only then can we hope to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Endnotes:

1. All Scripture quotations, unless noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible: New International Version (NIV). Copyright 1984, International Bible Society.

2. Gnosticism rests upon a metaphysical dualism between the spiritual and material, between soul and body, between metaphysical truth and phenomenal representation, and ultimately between faith and practice. Modern Christianity is built on gnosticisms high regard for information with no necessary connection with loving obedience to Jesus (See also Lamin Sanneh (1989:17) and Jones (1992)).

3. Syncretism represents the blending of differing, even contradictory, beliefs into a new belief system that loses the unique essence of the original beliefs. See also W. A. Visser t Hooft in *No Other Name: The Choice Between Syncretism and Christian Universalism* (1963) and also "Evangelism in the Neo-Pagan Situation," in *International Review of Mission* (1976:83); Nida 1960:184-188; Vander Veer 1994:197).

4. Even the popular American psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck observes, "It has become apparent to me that the vast majority of church-going Christians in America are heretics. The leading indeed, traditional heresy of the day I call pseudodocetism. It is this predominant heresy that intellectually allows the Church to fail to teach its followers to follow Jesus (1987:297).

5. Note however, Peter's ongoing struggle in Galatians 2:11-16.

6. Ironically, neither legalism nor relativism can redemptively engage culture. The former seeks to control insiders and the later succumbs to control by outsiders. Legalism isolates and separates itself from both culture and authentic faith. Relativism assumes values are arbitrary and contingent upon the situation and the changing cultures and thereby loses its distinctiveness. Neither provides a solution for being salt and light in the world.

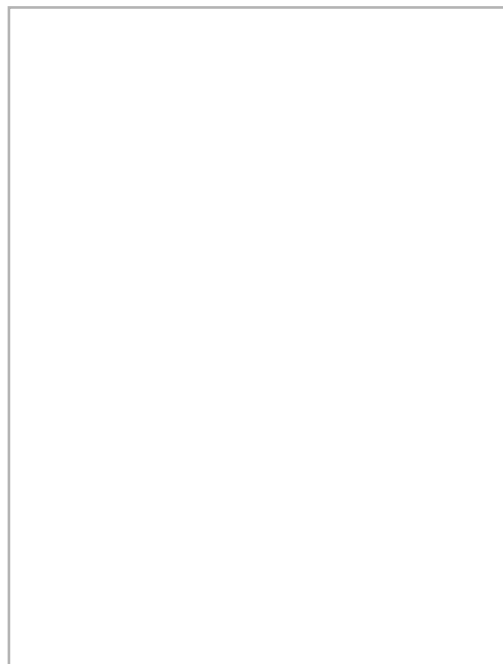
7. Stanley Grenz proposes that we embody the gospel in a manner that is post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric (1996:167-174).

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Photo
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of
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Responding to Split-Level Christianity and Folk Religion

Folk religion and split-level Christianity is found in young churches around the world. It also is common in churches in the West which saps the vitality of churches. At best it limits Christian faith to a narrow segment of people's lives. How should missionaries and church leaders respond to the persistence of old beliefs and practices long after people have become Christian? "Properly understood, following the principles of "critical contextualization" will steer us towards an enduring solution.

by Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou

How should Christians respond to split-level Christianity, including the bewildering variety of folk religions around the world? How can churches deal with the resurgence of witchcraft in Africa, spiritism in Latin America, Cargo Cults in Melanesia, new religions in Japan, and New Age and neo-paganism in North America? To ignore them and hope that they disappear as Christians grow in faith is to open the door for a syncretism that threatens the heart of the gospel. To try to stamp them out and replace them with imported beliefs and practices leads to split-level Christianity.

The latter is a two-tier Christianity that persists around the world despite centuries of instruction and condemnation by missionaries and church leaders. Sidney Williamson writes,

Most Christians live on two unreconciled levels. They are members of a church and ascribe to a statement of faith. But below the system of conscious belief are deeply embedded traditions and customs implying quite a different interpretation of the universe and the world of spirit from the Christian interpretation. In the crises of life and rites of passage the Church is an alien thing. (1965, 158)

"Split-level Christianity"¹ is found in young churches planted among traditional religionists around the world. It also is common in churches in the West. It has sapped the vitality of churches and limited Christianity to a segment of people's

lives. How should missionaries and church leaders respond to the persistence of old beliefs and practices long after people have become Christians?²

The answers we outlined in our book *Understanding Folk Religion*³ deals with old beliefs and practices, and to provide biblical answers to the questions people face in their everyday lives. It will require what we call "critical contextualization."

STEP ONE: EXAMINE LOCAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The first step in the process of "critical contextualization" is to examine phenomenologically the people's beliefs and practices in order to understand these as the people do. In our book we developed a model for studying folk religions, and used this to examine four key questions most folk religions seek to answer. Preliminary Christian responses were given to each of these questions. In a later section we looked at the public expressions of folk religions—their symbols, myths, rituals, organization, and movements.

In our book much attention was given to the phenomenological study of religions for several reasons. First, this is the step most neglected by missionaries in the past. Many study Scripture and theology, but do not study the people. The effective communication of the gospel cannot take place, however, without a deep understanding of the language and culture of a people. Too often missionar-

ies focus their attention on the message they bring, and ignore the context in which they communicate it. Consequently, the gospel remains incomprehensible, fragmented, foreign, and irrelevant.

Second, missionaries need to understand the religious beliefs and practices of the people to provide biblical answers to the questions they face, and to contextualize the gospel and the church in the local setting. Good contextualization requires wise judgments, not an uncritical acceptance or rejection of old ways. Wise judgments, however, require a deep knowledge of local realities. Without such understanding missionaries often jump to false or premature judgments.

Third, many of the key issues facing young churches emerge out of real-life situations that are always in particular contexts. Each culture presents a different set of questions that must be addressed theologically. For one culture it is polygamy, ancestors, and the spirit world, for another it is social oppression, injustice, ideologies, and massive social systems that stand in opposition to God. Missionaries must address not only the issues that emerge out of the study of Scripture but also address those that emerge in the daily lives of people and churches.

STEP TWO: BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

The second step in the process of "critical contextualization" is to test the

people's beliefs and practices in the light of biblical truth and tests of reality. This calls for a deep knowledge of the Bible and theological frameworks for understanding Scripture that serve as the criteria by which human social and cultural systems are evaluated and judged. Because folk religions are so diverse, no single set of theological answers will solve all the problems that arise. Specific theological responses must be developed for each context. There are, however, general theological principles that can be used to deal with the many theological questions that confront Christian churches as they emerge from split-level religious contexts. We will return to the steps in the process of critical contextualization after a discussion of the theological principles and the dangers we must avoid as a result.

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS

Theological principles that apply particularly to the questions raised in folk religions and split-level faith must be grounded in a larger theology of God, creation, sin, salvation, and Christ's return. There is always the danger in dealing with the pressing needs of everyday life to focus on one or another doctrine, and to lose sight of the gospel as a whole. What we need are biblically balanced answers to the existential questions addressed.

A Theology of the Invisible

Given the fact that the modern mission movement originated in the West, and the West increasingly depends on the world of sight, it is imperative that Christians recover an awareness of the invisible in this world. Eugene Peterson writes,

Most of the reality with which we deal is invisible. Most of what makes up human existence is inaccessible to our five senses: emotions, thoughts, dreams, love, hope, character, purpose, belief. Even what makes up most of the basic physical existence is out of the range of our unassisted senses: molecules and atoms,

neutrons and protons, the air we breathe, the ancestors we derive from, the angels who protect us. We live immersed in these immense invisibles. And more than anything else, we are dealing with God "whom no one has seen at any time" (1994, 89-90).

Until the invisible world becomes a living reality in the lives of Christians, they will not be able to deal with the questions folk religions raise. A theology of the invisible must take seriously a trinitarian understanding of God,⁴ who is continually involved in his creation by his providence, presence, and power. It must take angels seriously, for they are God's ministers on earth, and it must take Satan and demons seriously, for they are fallen angels seeking to keep people from turning to God in repentance, faith and obedience to Him.

Worship and Submission

At their core, folk religions are human efforts to control life. This is reflected in the first sin, when Satan tempted Adam and Eve, not to worship him, but to worship themselves. They could, he said, become their own gods. Self-centeredness and self-possession remain the greatest human temptation and the central concern for most folk religious beliefs and practices. People make sacrifices to gods and spirits to bargain for healing and prosperity. They turn to ancestors and divination in attempts to control their own well-being.

The desire for control also leads to a magical approach to problems, for magic enables humans to control their world, the gods, ancestors, and other beings in the middle zone.⁵ Even Christians are tempted to seek to control God by sacred formulas when their prayers do not bring the desired results.

The gospel rejects an ego-centered religion and a magical mentality. The center of its message is God and what he does. It calls humans to submit themselves to God, and to live not by control but by faith in his plan (Isa. 8:19-22; Jer.

27:9-10; Gal. 5:20; Rev. 21:8). This change from self-centeredness to God-centeredness is one of the most difficult for humans to make. The problem is compounded when people with middle-zone (split-level) worldviews are asked to develop a theology that emphasizes God's volition and human response rather than searching for and trying to manipulate God.

A Holistic Theology

Christians need to present God's work in the whole of creation. This begins with a theology of cosmic history: of God, the heavens, and eternity. This answers the ultimate questions raised by high religions regarding the ultimate origins, purpose, and destiny of all creation. It must include a theology of human history—of humans created in the image of God, the fall, God's redemptive acts in the Old Testament, Christ's death and resurrection in the New Testament, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. This answers questions related to redemptive history. It must also include a theology of God's work in the lives of individuals—of the meaning of life, desire for a good life, need for guidance, and longing for justice, and explanations of death, disasters, the unknown and evil in poverty, injustice, racism, and oppression. This answers the existential questions of everyday human lives

An holistic (whole) theology must also include nature—its design, its voice praising its Creator, its suffering at the hand of evil, and the new creation in which it will be fully restored (Rom. 8:22; 2 Peter 3:11-13). Nature is the place where humans meet God and converse with him. Modern-day Christians are ready to see God's hand in cosmic history, and, at times, in human history, but they see nature as an autonomous reality operating by itself according to impersonal laws. Only as they see God at the center of nature will they root out the secularism that plagues the contemporary world. This is an important process in

churches in the West as well as traditional mission contexts. The rapid shift to post-modernity, with its focus on self-fulfillment and ultimate narcissism forces a reevaluation (i.e., a need for an application of critical contextualization) of the Western, well-entrenched, and institutionalized church.

It is not easy for modern Christians to recover a holistic theology. Implicit in English and other Western languages is a Neo-Platonic dualism that separates supernatural from natural reality, God from nature, and religion from science. This dualism is not found in biblical thought. For instance, the word in Hebrew used for this world and its order is *bara*, "what is created," which includes angels, humans, animals, plants and matter. The word implies that these originate in and are continuously dependent on God for their very existence. Events in human lives cannot be divided into ordinary and miraculous. This affirmation of God's presence in all things is essential in answering the questions raised by folk religions as well as by modern man.

The Kingdom of God

A whole gospel is founded on a theology of the kingdom of God—in God's rule and work in the world. After the fall, sickness, suffering, starvation, and death became part of the world. Christ's response was to come as a human, as the Second Adam, and to establish and proclaim his kingdom as the new work of God on earth. The message of salvation includes good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight for the blind, and liberty to the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). But how does this kingdom relate to human experiences as people live in the kingdoms of this world with famine, oppression, poverty, suffering, disease, and death?

Down through history prophets have claimed that the kingdom of God has already come in its fullness. Christians, they say, need not be sick or poor or failures or sinners, or even die. In Paul's day some claimed that the resurrection had

already taken place (2 Tim. 2:18). Despite such preaching, sincere, devout, praying Christians remain poor and broken. In fact, they become sick and die.

The kingdom of God has come to earth in the person of Christ. It is found wherever God's people are obedient to the King. It has also come to humans in signs—those times when God shows them through extraordinary experiences what

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the kingdom is like. But signs are not the reality to which they point. Signs of the kingdom are all around, but the kingdom will come in its fullness only with Christ's return (Rev. 12:10). Until then, Christians live between two worlds. They are people of this sinful world. On the one hand they are tempted and sin, they are weak and fail, and the processes of disease, degeneration, and death are at work in them from the moment of birth. On the other they are people of the kingdom—although they sin, in God's sight they are sinless; although they face death, they have eternal life; although they see a decaying world around them, they also see the signs of a heavenly eternal kingdom in the transformed lives of God's people.

Power Linked with the Cross

Most folk religions seek power as the key to prosperity, health, success, and control over life. In response, Christians need a biblical theology of power. They face two dangers, on the one hand, they may avoid every kind of bold and sensa-

tional act for fear it is magic, even when God asks it of them. The church then is poor in the manifestations of God's power. On the other hand, through zeal to demonstrate God's power Christians can run after the sensational, even when God does not will it. But neither miracles nor the cross can be taken out of the gospel without distorting it.

The Scriptures have much to say about power. God is the God Almighty (*El Shaddai*, Gen. 17:1), who created and sustains all things by his power (Gen. 1), who defeated Satan and his hosts (John 16:33), who will bring all things into subjection to himself (Eph. 1:22). More over, by his might he saves those who turn to him and gives them power to become like him and bear witness to his greatness. All this must be affirmed.

Scripture also has much to say about the ways in which power is to be used. Unfortunately, many Christians think of power the way the world around them does. They see it as active—it manifests itself by demonstrations of might that overcome the resistance of the opposition. Consequently, they seek to show the world God's superiority by means of power encounters that demonstrate his ability to heal and cast out demons, confident that when non-Christians see these, they will believe. Scripture and history show that demonstrations of God's power lead some to believe, but many rise up in opposition, persecuting and often killing God's servants. This includes Satan and his hosts, and humans who oppose God and his kingdom of righteousness both individually and corporately through human institutions such as those that crucified Christ and persecuted the early church.

We need to see anew that God's use of power is demonstrated supremely on the cross. There Satan used his full might to destroy Christ—to provoke him to use his divinity wrongly. Either would have meant defeat for Christ—the first because Satan would have overcome him and the second because it would have destroyed God's plan of salvation. Godly power is always rooted in love, not pride; redemption, not revenge; and concern for the

other, not the self. God's power is humble, not proud, and inviting, not rejecting. Its symbol is the cross, not the sword. This is why the world sees God's power as weakness (1 Cor. 1:23-27).

Christians and churches are in desperate need of showing God's power in transformed lives in a Christlike confrontation of evil wherever they find it, whether demonic, systemic, or personal. They must guard against distortions of a biblical view of power, divorcing it from truth, and the temptation to use power for their own glory. They are stewards, called to be faithful in using the power God gives them for his glory, not their own.

A Theology of Discernment

In dealing with folk religions and split-level Christianity, God's people need a theology of discernment. People seek signs to assure them that God is present, but apart from the fruits of the Spirit, there are no self-authenticating phenomena. Miraculous healings, speaking in tongues, exorcisms, prophecies, resurrections, and other extraordinary experiences are reported in all major religions. For instance, Bab Farid, a Pakistani Muslim saint, is said to have cured incurable diseases, raised a dying man to life, converted dried dates into gold nuggets, and covered vast distances in a moment (Gilchrist 1987, 32).

Hundreds of thousands of people flock each year to the Hindu temple of Venkateswara at Tirupathi, South India, to fulfill vows they made when they prayed to him for healing. Upwards of 15,000 people claim healing each year at Lourdes, and many more at the Virgin of Guadalupe near Mexico City. Scripture points out that Satan counterfeits God's work, and warns God's people to guard against being led astray (Matt. 7:15-16; 1 Tim. 4:1, 7; 2 Tim. 3:1-4:5; 2 Thess. 2:9-10). They are to test the spirits to see whether or not these come from God (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Thess. 5:20-21; 1 John 4:1-6). In this, their attitude should not be one of skepticism, but of openness to hearing the voice of God when he truly speaks to them.

What are the signs that enable Christians to discern the work of God and differentiate it from the work of self or Satan? It is too simple to say that what God's people do is of God (cf. Matt. 7:21-23) and what non-Christians do is of Satan (cf. Num. 22-24). Human experiences must themselves be tested, for they are not self-authenticating.

The Bible provides several clear tests of God's work. First, does it give the glory to God rather than to humans (John 7:18; 8:50; 12:27-28; 17:4)? Around the world today people are drawn to strong personalities, and tend to deify them. This is particularly true in folk religions. Second, does it recognize the lordship of Christ (1 John 2:3-5; 5:3; James 2:14-19)? The test here is not one of orthodoxy, but of submission to Christ in humility and obedience. Third, is the evidence of God's power through the Holy Spirit emphasized, or the manifestations of the flesh? Fourth, does it conform to scriptural teaching? Are those involved willing to submit their lives and teachings to the test of Scripture? Fifth, are the leaders and people accountable to others in the church? The interpretation of Scripture is not a personal matter, but a concern of the church as an hermeneutical community. Sixth, do those involved manifest the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25)? Is there love or self-centeredness, patience or short tempers, gentleness or arrogance? Seventh, does the teaching and practice lead believers toward spiritual maturity (1 Cor. 12-14)? Some things are characteristic of spiritual immaturity which should be left behind as Christians grow spiritually. Eighth, does it lead Christians to seek the unity of the body of Christ, or is it divisive (John 17:11; 1 John 2:9-11; 5:1-2)? This does not mean that divisions will not occur. Rather it means that teachings that lead believers to a sense of spiritual superiority have led them astray, and therefore must be avoided.

Suffering and Death

Christians need a theology of sickness, injury, suffering, and death. The consequences of sin cannot be divorced from each other. The processes of aging and death are at work in humans from the moment of their conception. The side effects of this are sickness and bodily suffering.

Although God often does heal people both by natural and by extraordinary means, for Christians, their full deliverance is only after death, when they receive their new bodies. The hope and joy Christians manifest in godly dying and at funerals has been and often is a powerful testimony to others of the power and nature of the gospel.

Today there is little recognition that it may be God's will for a Christian to be sick, suffer, or undergo trials and difficulties in life, or that God can use these for their good. God can use sickness and suffering to draw people to himself, and to teach them patience and maturity (Job 42:5-6; James 1:2-4). These are also the consequence of persecution for Christ's sake and so Christians, in small measure, share in the suffering of Christ.

Many Christians do not recognize that illnesses are often the body's warning to stop them from living unhealthy lifestyles. Also there is little acknowledgment that Christians and non-Christians share in the common lot of fallen humanity, which includes famines, plagues, and illness. This does not mean that God is uninterested in the lot of his people. Rather it means that he loves both the saved and the lost, that he is working out his purposes in a fallen world, and that one day he will bring in a new and perfect creation.

In dealing with the longings expressed in split-level religions, it is important for churches to be caring communities in which the fallen, sick, oppressed, and needy find refuge, and in which the hostilities and jealousies of life that give rise to witchcraft are handled and forgiven. Churches must also be

places where believers gather to pray for God's blessings, and his deliverance from public crises such as droughts, plagues, and wars. Churches must also be communities that read the Scriptures together and hear what God is saying to them in their particular contexts.

DANGERS TO AVOID

In dealing with folk religious beliefs and practices, including split-level Christianity, there are dangers to avoid. This fact should not keep us Christians from engaging in the critique of folk religion as well as theological development in specific contexts. It does mean that we should be aware of problems that may arise. Here we seek to caution churches and leaders concerning certain areas that frequently give rise to various problems

Syncretism

The danger in responding to folk religions is not so much heresy as it is syncretism—combining elements of Christianity with folk beliefs and practices in such a way that the gospel loses its integrity and message. The problem here is not with old religious beliefs, but with the underlying assumptions on which they are built. The gospel must not only change beliefs, but also transform worldviews, otherwise the new beliefs will be reinterpreted in terms of the old worldviews. The result is Christo-paganism.⁶

One important area needing transformation is that of the magical mentality that dominates most folk religions. If this is not challenged, Christianity will be seen as a new and superior magic. This magical tendency is not restricted to traditional religionists. It is just below the surface in all fallen human beings. Magic makes them gods because it gives them control over nature, supernatural powers, and even God, through the practice of proper rites.

This was the experience of Simon (Acts 8:9-24) the magician who, seeing the miracles of Philip, Peter, and John, wanted to buy their kind of power with money. Peter severely rebuked him for his

old magical worldview. Simon repented, but he had learned a hard lesson—the gospel cannot be reinterpreted in other worldviews. It brings with it its own worldview that supersedes all others.

Magic is the opposite of Christianity. In magic humans are in control. In Christianity they are called to submit uncondi-

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tionally to God and his will. The difference between the two is not in practice. It is in attitude. Magic is formulaic and mechanistic. Christianity is based on worship and relationships. Prayer is magic if supplicants believe they must say the right things in the right tone of voice accompanied by certain right words and actions to be assured of the right results. It is worship when they kneel before God and cast their cares on him. The difference is often subtle. Christians can begin to pray seeking God's help, but, when the answer is delayed, unconsciously begin to become coercive. For instance, Christians can read Scripture to learn and grow, or to gain merit that earns them their desires. Some carry Bibles in their pockets, confident that these, like amulets, will protect them from harm.

Engaging worldviews is not only the task of new Christians in non-Christian contexts. The danger of becoming captive

to non-Christian worldviews is as great or greater among followers of Christ who live in the West where Christian assumptions still often dominate. They are in danger of reinterpreting the gospel in terms of their own cultural categories—of equating it with Western civilization, material prosperity, individualism, human rights, and freedom.

Andro-centrism

One of the most difficult worldview themes to deal with is the andro-centrism of religions created by humans. People see themselves as the center of the world, and everything revolves around them and their lives. Their religions provide them ways to get what they desire by bribing or begging the gods, spirits, and ancestors, and by controlling supernatural powers. The modern worldview shares in this andro-centrism.

Christianity challenges andro-centrism, and calls believers to a theocentric view of reality. New believers come to Christ with their own interests in mind—their salvation, their health, their well-being, their freedom from oppression. God begins with them where they are, and the church must do the same. The starting point is not the problem. The danger is institutionalizing immaturity. God calls Christians to spiritual growth in which their focus on themselves gives way to a love for God and others. While ministering to seekers at their point of need, the primary focus should be on moving them to mature expressions of worship and ministry. Unfortunately, many Christians have bought into the emphasis on personal health and prosperity as ultimate ends, and focus on themselves rather than on the millions around the world who are lost and dying because of poverty, oppression, and violence.

Believe it or not, it is a small step from self-centeredness to self-deification, i.e., the first and most fundamental of human sin. Satan did not tempt Adam and Eve to worship him, but to worship themselves—their own freedom and rights,

and their potential of becoming gods. Self-possession, not demon possession, is the greatest danger facing human beings. It is hard for Christians to move from feeling they need to be in control of their lives to entrusting themselves completely to God's mercy and totally submitting their lives to his will.

The results of self-centeredness in the church can be devastating. It leads to authoritarian leadership, competition, divisions and spiritual pride. Even those renewed in spiritual movements often look down on those not involved, and have a judgmental attitude toward those who disagree with them. Christ-centeredness, in contrast, leads to humility and a desire for the unity of the church, as well as a willingness to hear and speak (Rom. 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 10:12).

Experienced-based Theology

Folk religion, including split-level Christianity, is existential and experience-based. The result is a pragmatic concern for power rather than truth. Different methods are tried simultaneously to solve human dilemmas, with little concern that these often contradict one another. In such settings it is easy for Christians to base their theology on experience. From this point of view the test of truth is success. The sign of spiritual life and vital worship is feelings of excitement, health, and prosperity. As Jonathan Edwards pointed out, experiences are not self-authenticating.⁷ They must themselves be tested for their reality and cause. Christians need to avoid reading their experiences and theologies into Scripture—focusing on their experiences rather than on Scripture itself.

A corollary of experience-based theologies is confusing reports with reality. In folk religions there are many stories of spirits, visions, miraculous events, magical powers, witchcraft, fulfilled prophecies, guidance through divination, and the successes of amulets and rituals to protect people from calamities. It is important to take these seriously, for they reflect the reality as the people see it and upon which

they act. It is equally important not to equate all phenomenological reports with ontological reality. Careful, sensitive investigation of these reports is needed, and independent verification sought when possible. Christians must also test the sources of these events when they prove to be real. Certainly not all that is attributed to God is his doing.

Reinforcing Secularism

Contradictory as it may seem, by overemphasizing miracles Christians can reinforce secularism. For instance, by looking for supernatural events as manifestations of God's presence, they imply that God is not directly at work in natural phenomena which in the West are studied by science. As the knowledge of science grows, God is increasingly pushed to the margins of life. Moreover, as miracles become routine, they no longer appear to be extraordinary, and people look for new and more spectacular miracles to reassure themselves that God is with them. The net effect of these dynamics is the secularization of everyday life. The answer lies neither in seeking miracles, nor in denying them. It is to reject the dualistic dichotomy of miracle and natural together, and to see the naturalness of God's extraordinary healings and the miraculous nature of his ordinary ones. The church must avoid making miracles the signs of God's presence—making the phenomena the center of its attention and ministry.

Christians rejoice when God works in extraordinary ways to heal the sick, deliver the bewitched, and bring justice to the oppressed. What about those who are not delivered? Too often they experience a false sense of guilt and despair, but who are in the greatest need of ministry. To attribute sickness and death to a lack of faith or to spiritual defeat is too simple an answer—nor is it biblical (Job; John 9:2; 2 Cor. 12:7-9). Even more than a theology of healing, the church needs a theology of suffering and death—one that does not see these as failures, but as part of God's greater redemptive work in a fallen world.

It is important to be biblically balanced (Matt. 23:23-24). It is easy to emphasize one truth at the expense of others. It is easy to begin with Christ as the center of a Christian's life, but in the business of life to unwittingly move the center to one of the expressions of the gospel such as healing, justice, peace, or deliverance. The pitfall is that in time Christ becomes peripheral and the justifier of what is now the Christian's real concern. Balance is maintained only if Christ, not a particular cause, remains the true center of believers' lives.

In folk religions leaders are often charismatic authoritarian prophets, who develop personality cults. People who do not understand what is going on in life are attracted to a big leader who claims to know the way. Such leaders often appear in young churches, but this creates problems. It encourages most Christians to be followers, who have an uncritical trust in their leaders. They attribute healings, prophecies, and miracles to the leader. The leaders are tempted to take credit for the work, and encourage the adoration of their followers, and not be accountable to others. We must see that leadership, healing, guidance, exorcisms, and other ministries in the church belong to the congregation. Some members may have particular gifts, but they use these as members of the body.

We now return to the critical contextualization model to follow through on an understanding of the first two steps with their emphasis on local phenomenology and biblical understanding.

STEP THREE: DISCERNING THE TRUTH

The third step in the process of "critical contextualization" is to evaluate old beliefs and practices in the light of biblical truth. It is important to recall that our aim is not to destroy folk religions and to replace them with formal Christianity. It is to develop a vibrant Christianity religion that is rooted in the gospel. The life of the church is found in a laity for whom

the gospel is a reality that reconciles them to God and one another, and touches every area of their lives.

It is important to note, too, that there is no standard formula for dealing with folk religions. They vary greatly from culture society to culture society, and a different response must be made to each of them. There is not one kind of witchcraft. Practices loosely labeled witchcraft are found around the world. Similarly, there are many varieties of ancestor veneration, ways of seeking guidance, and beliefs in spirits and possession.

Given this diversity, it is important to provide churches with broad theological principles for dealing with the specific beliefs and practices they face. It is even more important to teach them how to do theology and how to do contextualization in their own contexts. Only as churches take this task upon themselves will they become mature and learn to live as Christians in their particular socio-cultural contexts. Only then will they learn to preach the gospel in ways that are understood by the people, and respond to needs without compromising the church's prophetic call. Answers to the questions raised by folk religions must be hammered out in the context of the local beliefs and practices, and constantly be reformulated as times and cultures change. This is best done by local Christians who understand and live in these settings.

Today young churches around the world are formulating their own theologies. Severe tensions often develop between daughter and parent churches, but the young churches can no longer turn back. If they are to make the gospel relevant to their own people, they must do theology in their own cultural settings. Attempts to export theologies developed in the West and to preserve them unchanged have to a great extent failed.

Developing a Meta-Theology

If believers are free to do theology, what are the theological absolutes? Evangelicals hold the Scripture to be true, for it is God's revelation, but how can Christians preserve that truth if they allow all

believers to read and interpret the Scriptures in their own cultural settings? The answer lies in a meta-theology—a biblically based way of doing theology that sets limits to theological diversity. What follows are some principles for a biblically based meta-theology.

THE VITAL CONTINUITY AND EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY AROUND THE WORLD REQUIRES BOTH A TRUE GOSPEL AND A TRULY TRANSFORMED CHURCH.

Rooted in Divine Revelation

The first principle of a biblically based meta-theology is that theological reflection must be rooted in the acceptance of Scripture as divine revelation. The Bible is not a record of humans searching for God, but of God revealing himself to them in the particular contexts of history, culture, and society. It is the source not only for finding answers to human questions, but of defining the worldview through which they should look at reality and live their lives.

Guided by the Holy Spirit

The second principle of a biblically based meta-theology recognizes that, believers must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in when interpreting Scripture. They must study it on their knees, in a spirit of humility, willing to listen and learn rather than with traditional dogmatic self-assurance. Christians must recognize that their theology is an understanding of Scripture—not Scripture itself. Consequently, although they must hold their theological convictions strongly, to the point of being willing to die for them, yet must not equate these with Scripture. They must admit that their understanding of truth is partial, biased, and possibly

wrong, needing correction. They must test their convictions by returning to Scripture and to the God of Scripture. They must recognize that the same Holy Spirit that they seek to guide them in their understanding of the Bible is also at work in other believers. They must allow others the greatest privilege they allow themselves—to make mistakes.

Done by the Church

The third meta-theological principle emphasizes the need for Christians to be open to the checks of the larger Christian community. Interpretation and application of Scripture in everyday life are not just personal matters based on one's private and personal opinion. Ultimately the church as a whole must interpret the Word and act as an hermeneutical community.

On the global level, when people from different cultures study Scripture together, they can help one another check cultural biases. It is almost impossible for individual Christians to see the cultural grids they bring with them to their understanding of the Bible. These are better seen by other worldviews. For this reason, missionaries and church leaders from outside play important roles in helping local churches to do theology, not by dictating the answers, but by acting as catalysts helping the people to understand Scriptures better, and to gently remind them of their cultural biases. It is more important that Christians learn to take their questions to Scripture and the God of Scripture, than that they get all their answers right from the start.

Evaluating the Context

A fourth principle of meta-theology highlights one of the hermeneutical tasks of the church which is to evaluate and respond to the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which she finds herself. Here it must undertake the process of "critical contextualization". Missionaries and church leaders can help local churches work their way through the process by encouraging the congregations to

gather information on the old ways when problems arise. Christians may respond to old beliefs and practices in different ways. They will keep many old cultural ways, just as Christians in the West do, but they will reject other customs as unchristian. Outsiders may not understand the reasons for this repudiation, but the people know the deep hidden meanings of their old ways. Sometimes missionaries and pastors need to question practices people have overlooked because these seem so natural to them. Christians will transform some old practices by giving these explicit Christian meanings.

After critically evaluating their old ways, people, led by their leaders need to create new beliefs and practices that are both Christian and indigenous. Although they are no longer pagans, they should not imitate Western Christianity. The process of "critical contextualization" takes the Bible as the rule of faith and life seriously. It recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers open to God's leading. It also strengthens the church by making it an hermeneutical community in which everyone seeks to understand God's message to his people in the context of their culture and everyday lives.

It is the need for this dynamic interplay between text and interpreters which we wish to emphasize. Today's readers cannot come to the text in a personal vacuum, and should not try to. Instead, they should come with an awareness of concerns stemming from their cultural background, personal situation, and the responsibility to others. These concerns will influence the questions which are put to the Scriptures. What is received back, however, will not be answers only, but more questions. As we address Scripture, Scripture addresses us. We find that our culturally conditioned presuppositions are being challenged and our questions corrected. In fact, we are compelled to reformulate our previous questions and to ask fresh ones... This process is a kind of upward spiral in which Scripture remains always central and normative. We wish to emphasize that the task of understanding Scriptures belongs not just to individuals but to the

whole Christian community, seen as both a contemporary and historical fellowship (LCWE 1978, 11).

Contextualization must be an ongoing process in the life of the church. On the one hand, the world is constantly changing, raising new questions that must be addressed. On the other hand, all human understandings and obedience to the gospel are partial. Through continued study and response, all Christians should grow in spiritual maturity.

STEP FOUR: MINISTRIES OF TRANSFORMATION

The fourth and final step in "critical contextualization" is to establish ministries that transform individuals and churches. This enables individuals and congregations to move from where they are to where God wants them to be. Christian faith is not simply an intellectual exercise in search of truth, nor is it primarily positive feelings of worship to Christ. It must go beyond knowledge of biblical truths to their application in the lives people live. It is the process of hearing and applying the unchanging truths of the gospel to life issues in specific contexts. It is to follow Christ as Lord in every area of life.

How does this transformation of lives and communities take place? Missionaries and church leaders cannot expect people simply to abandon their old ways and adopt new ones. People can only move from where they are by a process of transformation. This is true for individuals as well as social and cultural systems. The leaders must begin where the people are, and lead them step by step toward God's ways. This process is often slow and halting, as believers move forward and slide back. It is often piecemeal. Believers deal first with one area of their lives and then another, often overlooking what to outsiders are important areas needing transformation. In all this, leaders must be patient and redemptive, and not give up.

On one level, transformation is personal. In Christ, people become new crea-

tures. As Bible points out, their lives should reflect the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, making them holy and Christlike in character. The transformation begins with conversion, but it must continue throughout life as believers grow in holiness and Christian maturity. People come with their sins and scars, and leaders must begin with them where they are and gently lead them to Christian maturity. Evangelism and discipling are both essential to the life of the church. The first without the second leads to weak, immature churches poorly grounded in faith. The second without the first leads to ingrown, pharisaical churches that die in their self-centeredness.

On another level, transformation must also occur in social and cultural systems. Corporate transformation must begin in the church. The Christian community, as the body of Christ, is the outpost of God's reign on earth and should manifest the social order of the kingdom of God, which is based on love, reconciliation, servanthood and submission to Christ. The explicit beliefs and underlying worldview of the church must also be transformed to fit those in Scripture. If new converts learn Christian teaching, but continue to think in terms of the underlying categories and assumptions of their old worldview, the gospel will be subverted. The social organization of the church must be transformed. A church that holds to orthodox teachings but operates like the world denies the reality of the gospel. The vital continuity and expansion of Christianity require both a true gospel and a transformed church. The gospel gives life to the church, and the church proclaims the gospel. Either without the other soon dies (cf. Lingenfelter 1998).

Ministries of transformation must focus on people, not programs. They are not tasks to be accomplished by means of human engineering and action. They begin with learning to understand people, identifying with them, and building relationships of love and trust. They involve communicating the gospel in ways the

people understand, and helping them to critique their old ways and think biblically in their everyday lives.⁸

Ministry is an ongoing process, not a job to complete. People hear the gospel through their existing categories, assumptions and beliefs. Conversion begins when they turn to Christ as Lord, but it must lead to the transformation of their beliefs, values, worldviews and lives. The movement toward a mature, truly biblical understanding of reality is a long and difficult one because it calls Christians to new and radical ways of thinking and living in their societies and cultures.

Conclusion

Every church has a prophetic calling. It must proclaim the good news that creation will one day be restored to perfection; that sickness, loneliness, pain, and death will cease; and that all God's people will spend eternity in his presence with unbounded joy and wholeness. This, truly, is the good life. The church must examine the socio-cultural context in which God has placed it, and speak out against sin, injustice, oppression, and hatred. The criteria for making judgments are not the values of the world, nor the majority vote of all those who call themselves Christian. It is the Word of God, understood and applied by communities of committed believers, and proclaimed to the society in which they live. Particular responsibility is placed on leaders to help their congregations in this ministry (1 Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9).

Churches must deal with the challenges raised by folk religions. If they do not, their public witness will be compromised by the private practices of their members. Only when all areas of life are brought under the lordship of Christ will churches have a vibrant life and winsome witness in the world.

Increasingly in our pluralist world, these issues are no longer pertinent for missionaries, but regularly confront the churches in what used to be largely homogeneous communities in Western Europe and North America. Split-level Christian-

ity is a phenomena that impacts every corner of the world today. Presenting the underlying principles, we hope will enable Christians to effectively relate to their neighbors next door as well as half way around the world.

"Critical contextualization" remains an ongoing process that will not end until we all stand around the throne of God and join that great throng of believers from every language, tribe, and nation, and worship the Lamb who was slain for the

Christian Beliefs
and
Cultural Practices
Their book
called

"Understanding
Folk
Religion"

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salvation of all people. To him alone be wisdom, honor, power, and glory for ever and ever, amen! (Rev. 7:9, 11).

END NOTES

1. Father Jaime Bulatao who referred to it in 1962, and later elaborated on the concept in *Split-Level Christianity*, Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1992)

2. [Editor's note: The authors call this two-tier phenomena "religious schizophrenia." They claim that this has its roots in the modern missionary movement that largely originated in the West which was profoundly shaped by the Age of Exploration and the Enlightenment. This is studied in their book *Understanding Folk Religion*, especially in the very important first chapter of their book: "Split-Level Christianity."]

3. [Editor's note: This article is a condensed version of chapters 14 and 15 from their book *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, 1999 Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Mich.]

4. [Editor's note: The trinitarian and biblical concept of God is presented in Chapter 5 of their book.]

5. By "middle-zone" is understood a reality of life, beliefs and practices existing between formal religion on the one hand and science and the natural world on the other. In Western societies this middle-zone is frequently a hidden reality, or worse, an excluded from existence reality. It includes this-worldly supernatural realities such as earthly spirits, magic, evil eye, divination, and the like.

6. Christo-paganism is the older term used for syncretism. It was widely used in Latin America where much of folk religion looked Christian (or looked Catholic) on the outside, but where the inside (worldview) remained essentially pagan or animistic.

7. Jonathan Edwards was involved in a great revival in which there were many experiences, both positive and negative. In the process he

developed a number of criteria for discerning the work of God in a person's life. (Edwards 1959)

8. Those who expect to find in *Understanding Folk Religion* strategies for quick solutions to the problems raised by folk religions will be disappointed. Ministry is built on principles, not formulas. Transformative ministries have to do with the particular. The gospel is truth for people living in specific places and times, and caught in their own dilemmas. In dealing with folk religions it is important to remember that they are incredibly diverse. There are many kinds of witchcraft, divination, spirit possession, and magic, and each requires a biblical response that deals with its particular nature. Specific missiological answers must be formulated in specific contexts. Our book does not provide ready answers to the many different beliefs and practices of folk religions around the world. It seeks to provide a conceptual framework whereby Christians can think biblically about folk religions they encounter.

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Third Millennium Missiology: “Use of Egyptian Gold”

As mission enters a new millennium the utilization of profane learning—the use of “Egyptian gold”—in spiritual and mission endeavors takes on a new urgency. We need to investigate pertinent precursors and precedents in history, and above all else, we need to apply the principles in Scripture to make the God-designed impact for missions in the new millennium.

by David J. Hesselgrave

At the beginning of a course on church planting and development in Trinity Bible College in Kursk, Russia, I sensed a pervasive suspicion on the part of the students, especially the 22 pastors who made up about half of the class. I soon discovered the reason: Experience had taught them to anticipate more and more material on social structures, demographics, opinion surveys, program development and the like. When they understood that the primary focus of the course would be on biblical theology—and especially as they rediscovered the newness and relevance of the biblical text—their attitude changed completely. In session after session notebooks were readied; Bibles were opened; discussions came alive; and new auditors appeared.

In retrospect, it is easy to see what has happened at Kursk, and similar schools, since the doors of Russia opened to Western—especially, American missions. Studies in practical theology, Christian education, counseling and missions have become increasingly occupied with social science materials. In some cases those materials have not been well integrated with Scripture. In some cases they have even preempted the proper place of Scripture.

Problems connected with the utilization of profane learning in spiritual endeavor is not new, but for a variety of reasons these problems take on a new urgency as missions enter a new millennium. Accordingly, it would seem appropriate

to investigate pertinent precursors, precedents and principles in Scripture and church and mission history in order to chart a proper course.

Biblical Background

A number of pertinent Bible passages point to the relationship between Israel and Egypt, especially as that relationship has to do with the Exodus and its aftermath. Liberation theologians, for example, appear to give more attention to Israel's emancipation from Egypt than to almost any other single event in the Old Testament. At the same time, it is doubtful that any of us give sufficient attention to the subsequent struggle to “get Egypt out of Israel,” to use the phraseology of preachers. And yet this latter undertaking proved to be far more difficult than getting Israel out of Egypt. In fact, it constitutes a major theme of the Old Testament, to use Walter Kaiser's term, one of those “nodal points” that we do well to ponder.

Accordingly, the ubiquitous and ambivalent relationship between Israel and Egypt might well serve as a starting-point for this particular article. Throughout the Old Testament and right into the New, God's Chosen People alternately found Egypt to be a refuge and a prison. Their relationship with the Egyptians proved to be both a bane and a blessing. A few familiar illustrations and biblical examples will have to suffice.

1. In Genesis we learn how, after his

arrival in Canaan, Abraham built an altar and worshiped Jehovah. But in Egypt he vacillated; resorted to subterfuge in order to protect Sarah and himself, and was justly rebuked by none other than the Pharaoh himself!

Back in Canaan, at Sarah's suggestion, Abraham proposed to “help” Jehovah fulfill his promise by impregnating her Egyptian maid, Hagar. From that union sprang the Ishmaelites. Tension between Sarah and Hagar and their respective families was further exacerbated when Esau “despised” his heritage, married Ishmael's daughter Mahalath, and fathered the Edomites.

The Genesis record closes with Jacob and Joseph and the rest of Jacob's sons in Egypt as beneficiaries of Egyptian kindness and largesse. But they were destined to become victims of Egyptian cruelty and barbarism. Numerically they had been blessed. Seventy souls had gone down to Egypt and when they came out they were as “numerous as the stars.” (Deut. 10:22) But spiritually they had become impoverished.

2. The book of Exodus details Egyptian barbarism and, then, the Passover and Israel's miraculous deliverance. But the text goes on to demonstrate Israel's continued fascination for Egypt as expressed in her lack of appreciation for divine guidance and provision; her preference for Egyptian food, especially its leeks and garlies; her readiness to convert Egyptian

gold into a calf resembling a prominent Egyptian idol; her faulty assessment of the chances for overcoming the Canaanites; and much, much more.

3. According to the account in 1 Kings, no sooner had Solomon ascended David's throne than he formed an alliance with Pharaoh and cemented it by marrying his daughter and bringing her to the city of David (1 Kgs. 2:1). Solomon's wisdom surpassed "all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kgs. 4:30) but he was not wise enough to withstand Egypt's evil influence. In spite of repeated warnings Solomon's flirtation with Egypt soon became apparent in the prominence he accorded the city of Gezer, Pharaoh's dowry to his daughter (1 Kgs. 9:16-17); in the magnificent house he made for his Egyptian bride (1 Kgs. 7:8); and in the fact that he allowed his love for her and other foreign women to lead him to a lesser devotion for the Lord leading him headlong into idolatry (1 Kgs. 11:1-4).

In this way Solomon set the stage for the downfall of Israel. After Solomon's spiritual defection and the division of the monarchy, Jeroboam in the north institutionalized apostasy by taking cues from Aaron's use of Egyptian gold and from the idolatry of surrounding nations, especially Egypt. He built shrines; set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan; and appointed priests indiscriminately (1 Kgs. 12:26-33; 13:33).

Subsequently, King Hoshea, consorting with So the king of Egypt, offended Shalmaneser and thus invited the downfall of Israel. (2 Kgs. 17:1-18:13) Even King Hezekiah evidently leaned upon Egypt until Isaiah reminded him that it was not Egypt but the God who had delivered the fathers from Egypt who alone would deliver Judah (2 Kgs. 18:21, 19:21-28).

4. Coming to the Prophets, according to Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Jews of their time had to be warned not to lean on that "broken reed," Egypt (Isa. 36:6). After failing to heed that and other warnings, Jeremiah prophesied destruction and cap-

tivity. But he added that, though Jehovah would eventually deliver a faithful remnant from Babylon, those Jews who sought refuge in Egypt would be severely judged and judged in that land (Jer. 42:9-22).

5. During the so-called "silent years," it first appeared that Israelites who disobeyed and sought refuge in Egypt had chosen the better course. Aramaic Jewish papyri found at Aswan indicate that the Jewish colony in Egypt flourished and that they even built a large temple before the time of Cambyses in the late sixth century B.C. But Jeremiah was right. Eventually, the kindly Pharaoh Hophra was strangled to death; the temple was destroyed; and Jewish colonists came upon evil days.

Nevertheless, the God who makes even the wrath of man to praise him caused Ptolemy II to bring 72 Jewish elders from Palestine to Egypt in the third century B.C. in order to translate the Pentateuch into Greek. And, as is common knowledge, the resultant Septuagint translation was destined to play a crucial role in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles.¹

6. As the New Testament opens, the last independent Edomite King, Herod, concocted a diabolical plot to kill the baby Jesus. Ironically, the Holy Family was instructed to seek refuge in, of all places, Egypt (Mt. 2:13-19). Moving on in the New Testament, we discover various similarly intriguing references. According to the Acts record, people from Egypt were among those who heard the gospel in their own tongue on the day of Pentecost and Israel's deliverance from Egypt was a prominent part of Stephen's apology (Acts 2:10; 7:8-42). The writer of Hebrews uses the Egyptian captivity to warn of the dangers of falling away, hardness of heart, and the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-19); and he warns believing Jews (and all believers) that the treasures and pleasures of Egypt are to be resisted (Heb. 11:22-27. Finally, the apostle John predicts that two witnesses will be mar-

tyred in the streets of a great city of the future—a city identified as both Jerusalem and, mystically, as "Sodom" and "Egypt" (Rev. 11:310).²

Certainly, Egypt and its ubiquitous relationship with the people of God is a theme that was not lost to the New Testament writers and should never be lost to us as followers of the Lord. Accordingly, the institution of the Lord's Supper on Passover of the Passion Week—and every celebration of it since that time—recalls for God's people the fact that they have been redeemed from sin and "rescued from Egypt" by the body and blood of the Lamb of God.

While well known to Bible scholars, the foregoing biblical and historical references (and many others that could be added) deserve careful study by all of us and especially by Christian mission practitioners. The critical placement, recurrent attention (approximately 750 references in the Bible) and attendant phraseology of these references conspire to underscore both the theological and practical significance of the relationship between Egyptian religion and culture on the one hand, and the fortunes of the people of God on the other. Egypt is at once a friend and an enemy, a storehouse and a rubbish heap, a refuge and a snare for God's people. It is no wonder, then, that that very relationship came to occupy a prominent place in the thinking of one of the greatest of the Church Fathers at a critical time in the history of the church.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S VIEW

In the fourth century of the Christian Era a scholar destined to become one of the foremost fathers and theologians of the Christian church, Saint Augustine, came face to face with a most critical issue. Others among the Fathers faced it also, but it was the perspicuous Augustine who addressed it most forthrightly and instructively.

As is well known, many of the Fathers had been educated in rhetoric--the *summum bonum* of the education of the

time. The mastery of rhetoric at that time entailed both the acquisition of philosophical and other knowledge, and also the ability to communicate that knowledge clearly, appropriately, and persuasively. For that reason, the great universities of the time—whether in Athens or Rome or Alexandria or Augustine's Carthage—were famous as centers of education in rhetoric.

Early in his life Augustine was profoundly influenced by the philosophy and oratorical skills of Cicero; later by the Manicheism that found its way from Persia through Egypt to North Africa; and, ultimately, by a pervasive Neo-Platonism. But it was his early training in rhetoric that equipped him for his task as rhetor of Carthage and, subsequently, of Rome and then Milan. As his *Confessions* makes clear, rhetor Augustine took great pride in his classical learning while entertaining a decided disgust for Scripture. Concerning this he later wrote,

And now I was chief in the rhetoric school, whereat I joyed proudly, and I swelled with arrogance, though (Lord, Thou knowest) far quieter and altogether removed from the subvertings of those "Subverters" . . . among whom I lived, with a shameless shame that I was not even as they.³

I resolved then to turn my mind to the holy Scriptures, that I might see what they were. But behold, I see a thing not understood by the proud... For not as I now speak, did I then feel as I turned to those Scriptures; but they seemed to me to be unworthy to be compared to the stateliness of Tully...⁴

Augustine's attitude and perspective underwent profound change when, struck by the eloquence of Ambrose in his Milan pulpit, he was converted and baptized on Easter, 387. His conversion was thoroughgoing. As a consequence, after being ordained as Bishop of Hippo in 396, Augustine undertook a monumental task. Aware of the fact that the various perversions of orthodox doctrine tended to reflect one or another strain of a pagan philosophical heritage, he set out on a

two-fold task: (1) to define Christian doctrine in such a way as to preserve its exclusive character and weed out pagan accretions; and, (2) to effect a rapprochement between revelational truth and those aspects of pagan intellectual achievement not inherently antagonistic to that revelation. Accordingly, in the first three books

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of *De doctrina Christiana*⁴ he concerned himself with the discovery of biblical truth (*modus inveniendi* in rhetorical terms), and in the fourth book with ways of expressing and communicating that truth to others (*modus proferendi*).⁵

While Augustine's work reflects his tendency to allegorize Scripture, he nevertheless succeeded in providing his readers with what has come to be a classic statement of both the problem before us and also its resolution. Near the conclusion of Book II he takes his readers back to the Exodus story. He notes that Jehovah himself had ordered the Children of Israel to take vases and ornaments of gold and silver out of Egypt in order to put them to use as they proceeded toward the Promised Land. Could not the same hold true in respect to some aspects of pagan philosophy in general and, in particular, Augustine's own acumen in rhetoric? Is it

not possible to employ "Egyptian gold" in Christian service? Augustine answers these questions in the affirmative. He concludes that, wherever truth is found, it is the Lord's. Gold from Egypt is still gold. It is usable. It can be a real asset in Kingdom service. However, Augustine adds three cautions. The first is most explicit: Egyptian gold must be tested in the light of Scripture in order to determine whether or not it is real gold. The second is both explicit and implicit: The truths of Scripture are far more meaningful and significant than any knowledge obtainable from Egypt. The third is less obvious but, it seems to me, also implicit in the text: Quantitatively as well as qualitatively, more real, Kingdom-building truth is to be found in Scripture than in all the books of Egypt.

What shall we make of Augustine's solution to the problem of Egyptian gold? On the one hand, there can be little doubt that his rhetorical and philosophical learning contributed much to the way in which he championed biblical truth both within and without the Christian church. His role in the all-important Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) is an obvious case in point. Refusing to sacrifice revealed truth on the altar of pagan philosophy, Augustine nevertheless utilized knowledge and skills accruing to his pre-conversion training to refute Gnostic Christologies and sectarian gospels, and also in a successful effort to maintain Christian orthodoxy.

On further reflection, however, the problem may be more complicated than Augustine made it out to be, especially in our day. Speaking out of a background in German theology and on the faculty of a leading German university, for example, Eta Linnemann comes to a quite different conclusion. She holds that biblical Christianity and profane philosophy are inherently incompatible, the latter being erected wholly on the bases of scholasticism, naturalism and humanism. Consequently, she does not think that our emulation of Augustine and the church fathers

in this regard is entirely positive. Referring specifically to Augustine's gold from Egypt analogy, she writes:

I regard as unfortunate Augustine's statement in De doctrina Christiana that Christians can use the phantom of pagan sciences like the Israelites used the Egyptians's goods. It needs to be noted in passing that these same Egyptian riches were probably the material out of which the golden calf was made at Sinai. Unfortunately, in Christianity golden calves were made out of the riches of pagan philosophy.⁶

At the very least, Linnemann's statement should serve as a reminder that problems accruing to the use of secular learning in Kingdom service are not easily resolved. Not at all. In fact, at one point Linnemann herself adds to the complexity of the problem when she says that much of the scientific work of recent centuries (which she also grounds in humanistic philosophy) is actually helpful—this by virtue of the patience, faithfulness, mercy and grace of God himself.⁷

Whatever disagreement there might be at this point, looking at the great controversies in which the church has been engaged through the centuries, Augustine, Linnemann and all Bible-believers can agree on one thing. Namely, that it was not human knowledge, lucid argumentation or lofty eloquence that carried the day at Chalcedon and the other early councils, and it will not be human knowledge that will ultimately triumph in our day or any other day. In the final analysis, and in accordance with Augustine's dicta, what has carried the day in the past, and what will triumph in the future, is the truth of the revealed Word of God.

THE LAST FIFTY YEARS

It was especially after World War II that "Egyptian gold" became common currency in mission—both conciliar and conservative. During these last fifty years there has been a spurt and then a gradual decline of conciliar Protestant missions on the one hand, and a significant surge in

evangelical and pentecostal churches and missions on the other. But among both conciliars and conservatives the ideas and approaches of secular disciplines have been accorded a wide berth, though in differing ways and with different results.

During the last half century, conciliar missiologists have made repeated attempts to recover biblical authority and redefine mission in ways consonant with the mindset and methodologies of Western modernity and post-modernity. The results have been decidedly mixed. In 1968 in Uppsala, for example, conciliars more or less agreed to "let the world set the agenda." Predictably, the "world's agenda" drowned out Donald McGavran's appeal to remember the two billion who had not yet had an opportunity to hear the gospel. Then, after the adoption of the Third ("Reform") Mandate of the Theological Education Fund (1970-77), they conceived of one "contextualized" theology after another. Liberation Theology, Third Eye Theology, Waterbuffalo Theology, the Theology of Ontology and Time—these and still other theologies were deemed to have special relevance to the varied cultural contexts of their proponents. This despite the fact that, whether developed with an eye to the farmer in an Asian rice paddy or a villager in central Africa, most of those new theologies yield clear evidence of having been conceived, birthed and nurtured within the matrices of Western universities and theological schools where biblical revelation had been emasculated by historical criticism.

All the while, evangelical and pentecostal missiologists have prided themselves on their adherence to the plenary authority of Scripture and the cardinal doctrines of the church. Ostensibly at least, they placed their confidence in the revealed Word of God rather than in the social sciences. Nevertheless, in a profound sense and in unique ways, those very sciences were allowed to "set the agenda" for conservatives as well as for conciliars. This process gained significant momentum in the 1940s and 1950s when

the missiological relevance of the social sciences and the potential of rapidly developing technologies became particularly appealing.

Gradually but inexorably over the years appreciation gave way to fascination. More and more attention came to be devoted to the discovery and use of social science findings, theories and methodologies. Statistical analysis, dynamic equivalence, transformational grammar, functionalism, bonding, programmed learning, the "motivational pyramid, cognitive dissonance, decision scales, "yes-yes-yes" and other sales techniques, fuzzy and bounded sets, marketing—all of this and more came to be common grist for missiological mills. And all the while, continuing advances in technological know-how made data gathering techniques, informational networking, satellite telecasting and the like immediately available for Kingdom service.⁸

To illustrate, as this is being written, an entirely new project designed to break down resistance and mass market Christianity is being launched in Japan. Basing their strategy on the kind of imaging techniques used in the commercial world, knowledgeable, dedicated researchers propose to overcome Japanese resistance and achieve results rivaling those achieved by Francis Xavier over four hundred years ago! More than a dependence upon scientific methodology is involved here. Also involved is an almost unbounded confidence in the value and potential of secular science put to Kingdom use.

It is no mystery why conservative theorists and practitioners alike have dedicated themselves to the mastery and utilization of "Egyptian gold." They have done so with the best of intentions and out of a profound concern for world evangelization. They have done so because, the issue of biblical authority being largely settled (in their view, at least), it has been thought that biblical answers to missiological questions can be either readily assumed or easily adduced. What remains is to make full use of any and all

resources available in order to carry out the God-given task of discipling the nations.

Though unintended, the results were predictable. In this process we who are theologically conservative have become overly enamored with the glitter of "Egyptian gold." All too often we have disregarded questions having to do with the purity of that "gold" as well as related questions having to do with the extent of our reliance on it. Warnings that we have developed a form of "de-theologized missiology" have gone unheeded in many conservative circles.⁹

A generation ago the Church Growth School was greatly indebted to the findings of sociologists and social anthropologists especially. But, at the same time, its early proponents were profoundly aware of the need for integrating those findings with a biblical theology of mission. Various attempts were made by Alan Tippett and others of the Church Growth School to fill this lacuna. Over the years, McGavran himself became increasingly impatient with any kind of mission that denigrated Scripture and "Great Commission mission." In more recent times, however, church growth studies and strategies have become almost totally preoccupied with what classical rhetoricians thought of as the "audience," now seen as the "market."

MISSION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

It appears that, for over a century, Protestant missiologists of the various theological persuasions have labored almost too diligently under "Egyptian taskmasters." Many if not most of us have become almost too acculturated to an "Egyptian mindset" and overly given to the accumulation and utilization of "Egyptian gold." I confess to being implicated in the process. Now I would sound an alarm as we prepare for a new millennium with its potential for entering the "Promised Land" of an evangelized world.

The question is, "How then should we proceed?" Changing direction will be

most difficult for conciliars and liberals. As we have seen, already before the close of the "Great Century" in Protestant missions, the Bible had been so subjected to the ravages of the Enlightenment that they often found themselves bereft of authority for both the Christian message and the Christian mission. Because they did not go far enough, noteworthy attempts to

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regain biblical authority in the twentieth century have been only partially successful. Attempts to bridge the gap that separated Christ from Scripture and both Christ and Scripture from sinful man have not carried the day. Very recent approaches will prove similarly deficient. It will not be enough to get back to the Bible—almost."¹⁰ Without a completely authoritative Bible, conciliars and liberals will increasingly find themselves in the company of non-Christian religionists who nevertheless claim a relationship with the One God called by whatever name.

But here we address ourselves primarily to conservative evangelicals and pentecostals. How, then, should we proceed? We would do well to listen to some of our colleagues who have recently addressed themselves to this question.

We need to listen to the cautions of a missiologist whose expertise in anthropol-

ogy is well known—Paul Hiebert. Speaking to fellow missiologists, Hiebert takes note of the positive contributions of the social sciences to missiology but then cautions and counsels as follows:

...we face a real danger. In recent years in evangelical missions, we have been so fascinated by the power of the social sciences that we are in danger of leaving our biblical foundations, and, in the process, of losing the heart and soul of mission. We need to return to the Scriptures to lay the foundations for a theology of missions for the next century.¹¹

Also listen to the advice of a theologian who in the past was committed to the construction of new theologies but who now courteously but courageously exposes contemporary infatuations with the golden calves of modernity and post-modernity—Thomas C. Oden. In a monograph pertinently entitled "On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age," he proposes that we prepare for the new millennium by undertaking three tasks.

First, he counsels us to study the biblical text itself in preference to its modern interpreters. Second, he urges that we commit ourselves to contributing no new theology. Third, he challenges us to reacquaint ourselves with the Christian consensus of the first millennium.¹²

Listen also to a former student of Bultmann, Gogarten, Fuchs and Ebeling who subsequently became honorary professor of New Testament at Philipps University—Marburg-Eta Linnemann. Converted to Christ and called of the Lord to teach in the Bible college in Malang, Indonesia, Linnemann now says that historical criticism is based on the underlying scientific principle *ut si Deus non daretur* ("as if there were no God"). She says that this has meant that "Statements in Scripture regarding place, time, sequence of events, and persons are accepted only insofar as they fit in with established assumptions and theories. Scientific principle has come to have the status of an idol."¹³

Concerning future Christian endeavors, Linnemann is persuaded that two

principles stand out as being fundamental to those endeavors. First, the sciences should be recognized as basically anti-Christian even though they yield helpful information at times. Second, the Word of God should be recognized as sufficient for the work of God and as requiring no supplementation from sociology, psychology, educational theory or human experience!¹⁴

Finally, we need to listen to the exhortation of another New Testament scholar whose commitment to both sacred Scripture and Christian mission is well known to most of us—Donald A. Carson. He responds to the current state of affairs and to the challenge of the future in a way that leaves little doubt as to his take on both the urgency of the problem before us and the nature of its resolution. He writes,

...the Bible as a whole document tells a story, and, properly used, that story can serve as a meta-narrative that shapes our grasp of the entire Christian faith. In my view it is increasingly important to spell this out to Christians and to non-Christians alike—to Christians, to ground them in Scripture, and to non-Christians, as part of our proclamation of the gospel. The ignorance of basic Scripture is so disturbing in our day that Christian preaching that does not seek to remedy the lack is simply irresponsible.¹⁵

Then, with mission and evangelism specifically in view, Carson goes on to give us the solution,

Evangelism might wisely become, increasingly, a subset of biblical theology... As I use the expression, biblical theology refers to the theology of the biblical corpora as God progressively discloses himself, climaxing in the coming of his Son Jesus Christ, and consummating in the new heaven and the new earth. In other words, sequence, history, the passage of time—these are foundational to biblical theology.¹⁶

Readers will note that the two scholars who themselves have been caught up in higher criticism and new theologizing, Oden and Linnemann, are the most radical not only in defending Scripture but in urging its proper use. Indeed, though in

ways that are but slightly less restrained, that is precisely what Hiebert and Carson are also proposing. David Wells sums it up succinctly when he writes, “Two decades ago the debate was over the nature of Scripture, today it should be over its function.”¹⁷

Conclusion

In a significant way, the future of mission depends upon what conservatives make, not only of the authority, but also of the function of Scripture. Christian mission must be undergirded with biblical authority but it must be guided by biblical theology. The most hopeful future for missions and missiology depends on the “re-missionizing of theology” on the one hand, and the “re-theologizing of missiology” on the other. To accomplish this, a largely new kind of dialogue and synergism will be required. Theologians will need to fight off the infection of an Aristotelianism imported from Egypt centuries ago; devote less time and effort to the erection of theological systems; and, together with missiologists, give more attention to the kind of biblical theology that will arrest the minds and change the hearts of people of various religions and cultures.¹⁸ Missiologists will have to struggle against a pragmatism that is overly devoted to ingenious ways of employing “Egyptian gold” and puts too much stock on the often ephemeral results of alchemized strategies; and they will have to labor alongside theologians in an effort to understand correctly and handle rightly the Holy Spirit-inspired Scripture. Together, all alike will need to ponder again and again the contemporary relevance of Paul’s admonition to first-century citizens of both Caesar’s Rome and Christ’s Kingdom: “Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2 NEB.).

ENDNOTES:

1. Actually, various manuscripts edited about that time combine to form the basis of our modern texts. But, especially from a missionary point of view, the Septuagint Greek Old Testament dating to c. 275-250 B.C. ranks as the most important. It was widely distributed, was the Bible of the early Christians, and became the Bible of the Dispersion.
2. This prophecy entails a strange irony. Namely, that among those who behold the martyrdom of the two witnesses will be representatives of the world’s peoples, tribes, tongues and nations (the rubrics used to categorize the redeemed host in that oft-quoted missionary passage in Revelation 5:9).
3. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, (trans. Edward B. Pusey; NY: Collier Books, 1961) 38.
4. Ibid. 40.
5. Cf. James J. Murphy, “Augustine and the Debate About a Christian Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 46 (December 1960) 408.
6. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?*, (trans. Robert W. Yarbrough, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990) 55.
7. Ibid. 42-43.
8. The author has made an effort to discover the extent of social science influence on missiology over the period of about two decades from the later 1960s to the late 1980s (Cf. *Today’s Choices for Tomorrow’s Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988) :139-140. In part the study provided the basis for the writing of a book on directions open to missions in the years remaining to the twentieth century. It consisted of a modified content analysis of representative mission publications during that period. One aspect of the study entailed an analysis of 444 book reviews that appeared in *Missiology* between 1973 and 1986. (*Missiology* is the official publication of American Society of Missiology—an organization founded in the early 1970s and composed of Roman Catholics, Conciliar Protestants and Conservative Evangelicals/Pentecostals). This analysis revealed that the number of books focusing primarily on social science materials was 79 (or 17.8 per cent of the total). The number focusing on theological concerns (i.e., theology and mission, and theology of mission) was only slightly more—89 (20 per cent). The *Missiology* book review study was augmented by a modified content analysis of over two decades (from 1966 to 1988) of major articles in the *International Review of Missions* and the *Evangelical Missions*

Quarterly. The former is more ecumenically oriented; the latter is a joint publication of the Evangelical on the contributions of the social sciences whereas over four times as many (38 or 6.3 per cent) of 604 articles in the EMQ had that as a primary focus. On the other hand, 45 (10.6 per cent) of the 604 articles in the EMQ focused on theological concerns while almost three times that number (145 or 15.3 per cent) of the 949 IRM articles had that focus. To better appreciate the significant of this statistical data it would be necessary to set them in the context of all the categories involved. Also a more extensive content analysis would have to be made in order to ascertain more accurately the impact of secular studies and disciplines on the writers and writings of the books and journals that were under study. On the basis of the study in question all that one could confidently conclude is that, quantitatively at least, missiological inquiries of recent times reveal that almost as much attention has been given to profane studies and disciplines as has been devoted to strictly theological ones. Also, that more attention has been given to theological subjects in the ecumenically oriented IRM than in the evangelical-oriented EMQ. My own reading of this is that higher critical studies have so impacted conciliar missiological schol-

arship that theological understandings of mission are fluid and changing. They are, therefore, in need of constant review and revision. At the same time, theological discussions in the EMQ have tended to be less frequent and more superficial. This likely grows out of the fact that conservatives have more or less assumed theological orthodoxy on the one hand, and have seldom subjected secular-based innovations to serious biblical evaluation on the other.

9. Cf. Edward Rommen, "The De-theologization of Missiology," *Trinity World Forum* No. 19 (Fall, 1993).
10. Cf. Roger Olson, "Back to the Bible--almost," *Christianity Today*, May 20, 1996, 31-34.
11. Paul G. Hiebert, "The Social Sciences and Missions: Applying the Message" in Edward Rommen and Gary Corwin, eds. 184-210 *Missiology and the Social Sciences*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, Number 4, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1996) 203.
12. Thomas C. Oden, "On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age" in Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) 189-204.
13. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?*, (trans. Robert W. Yarbrough, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990) 84.

14. Ibid. 156-157.

15. Donald A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 84.

16. Ibid. 502.

17. David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 212.

18. Cf. Hiebert, Paul. cit. 203, fn. 8 and Thomas Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985).

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Forty Days of Prayer and Fasting

for the Parsee People during their “Holy Days”

March 10—April 18, 2000

EVERY YEAR, IN FEBRUARY/MARCH-MARCH/APRIL AND IN JULY/AUGUST-AUGUST/SEPTEMBER THE PARSEE PEOPLE OBSERVE THEIR HOLY DAYS CALLED, “MUKHTAD.” RITUALS BEGIN EARLY MORNING WITH CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP OF SPIRITS OF DECEASED RELATIVES, AND PROCEED THROUGH THE DAY UNTIL SUNSET. DEVOTEES BRING OFFERINGS OF SANDAL WOOD AND INCENSE TO THEIR FIRE GOD, ALONG WITH FLOWERS, FRUITS, AND OTHER GIFTS. THERE ARE SOME 3.5 MILLION PARSEES IN THE WORLD TODAY, WITH ONLY ABOUT 30 PARSEES THAT ARE BORN AGAIN. PLEASE JOIN US IN A FORTY DAY FAST FROM FEBRUARY 14 THROUGH MARCH 25, DURING THEIR HOLY SEASON. MARCH 25 THE BIRTHDAY OF THEIR LEADER, ZOROASTER. PARSEE AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN CONCERNED AT THE GROWING INTEREST OF PARSEE YOUTH IN MESSIAH YESHUA.

PARSEES WORSHIP FIRE AS THEIR PRINCIPAL GOD, AND SPIRITS OF DECEASED RELATIVES. MANY CONSIDER YESHUA TO BE A MAJOR MESSIAH OR PROPHET. THEIR “HOLY” BOOK IS VERY SIMILAR TO THE BIBLE, WHICH MAKES THE BIBLE ATTRACTIVE TO THEM. ALSO, MUCH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT HAS MENTION OF PARSEE KINGS. THIS IS A GOOD INCENTIVE TO OFFER PARSEES THE BIBLE FOR READING THE BIBLE. PERHAPS THE STRONGEST OBSTACLE TO THEIR CONVERSION IS THEIR SENTIMENTAL ATTACHMENT TO THEIR CULTURE, ESPECIALLY THEIR MEMORIES OF JOINT FAMILY RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES. PARSEE CONVERTS FIND THE BODY OF MESSIAH LACKING IN COMMUNITY SUPPORT, WHICH HAS MOTIVATED MANY TO REVERT BACK TO THEIR PAGAN ZOROASTRIAN WAYS.

PARSEE PEOPLE NEED TO BE DELIVERED FROM THEIR CHAINS. MANY PARSEES HAVE CHARGED THAT CHRISTIANS ONLY PREACH ABOUT LOVING, WHEN THE PARSEES ARE ALREADY PRACTICING LOVE. PLEASE PRAY GOD BURDEN LOVING BELIEVERS TO EARNESTLY PURSUE FRIENDSHIPS AND COMPANIONSHIP WITH THE UNREACHED PARSEES, AND SPEND ADEQUATE QUALITY TIME WITH THEM. PARSEES ARE RELATIONAL PEOPLE, AND ENJOY FELLOWSHIPING WITH OTHERS.

Specific Prayer Points

1. Mobilize INTERCESSION FOR THE PARSEES.
 2. PROMOTE AWARENESS IN THE BODY OF MESSIAH FOR REACHING THE PARSEES.
 3. RECRUIT STUDENTS AND MISSIONARIES FOR PARSEE OUTREACH AND PLANTING CONGREGATIONS AMONG THEM.
 4. OUTREACH AND PRAYERWALKS TO UDWADA SHRINE, AND OTHER PARSEE TEMPLES.
 5. NEEDS FOR “LOVE PARSEES” MINISTRY. (SEE NOTE BELOW.)
 6. PRAY FOR PARSEE LEADERS, PROFESSIONALS AND AUTHORITIES TO TURN TO THE LIVING GOD IN YESHUA MESSIAH.
 7. PRAY FOR THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE HEALING POWER OF YESHUA TOWARDS SICK PARSEES, ESPECIALLY TO THOSE NOT OPEN TO THE GOSPEL, TO ATTEST TO THE DEITY AND LOVE OF YESHUA.
 8. PRAY FOR PARSEE CHILDREN TO BE DRAWN TO YESHUA, REVEALING THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL TO THEM.
 9. PRAY THAT INDIGENOUS PARSEE CONGREGATION AND FELLOWSHIPS BE PLANTED. PRAY THAT THIS MAY HAPPEN IN EVERY PARSEE LOCALITY, ESPECIALLY IN IRAN, AFGHANISTAN, IN INDIA (UDWADA, BOMBAY, PUNE, AND GUJRAT), KARACHI (PAKISTAN), THE UNITED KINGDOM, NORTH AMERICA, GERMANY AND AUSTRALIA.
 10. PRAY FOR THE “JESUS VIDEO” OUTREACH: PRAY THAT EVERY PARSEE MIGHT RECEIVE A “JESUS VIDEO” AND A STUDY BIBLE IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE. PRAY THAT EVERY PARSEE MAY BE DRAWN TO READ AND STUDY GOD’S WORD AND KNOW YESHUA.
- NOTE: AT LEAST 250,000 “JESUS VIDEOS” ARE NEEDED NOW.

Special Note

THE “LOVE PARSEE” MINISTRY IS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY CARRIED OUT IN VARIOUS CITIES OF THE 10/40 WINDOW. PLEASE PRAY FOR EFFICIENT COMPUTERS, LAPTOPS, FAX MACHINES, TELEPHONE LINES, PHONES, FAXES AND OTHER OFFICE EQUIPMENT. PLEASE ALSO PRAY FOR SKILLFUL AND SUBMISSIVE WORKERS TO HELP WITH MINISTRY. NOTE: EXCEPT FOR THE “LOVE PARSEE MINISTRIES” THERE IS NO MISSION OUTREACH TO THE PARSEE PEOPLE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. THERE ARE ONLY SOME 30 PARSEE BELIEVERS. FOR SOME REASON, THE PARSEE PEOPLE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED FROM THE PRAYER NETWORKS OF MOST MAJOR MINISTRIES. PLEASE PRAY THAT THIS MAY CHANGE.

For more information, please look at the Parsee Profiles on the “Love Parsee” web site <www.unreached.org> and on the AD 2000 site <www.ad2000.org/profiles/parsee.htm> or contact the IJFM editor, Dr. Hans Weerstra <103121.2610@compuserve.com> Ask especially for “the Parsee beliefs” that are very useful for this forty days of pray and fasting.

Comparing Modern-Day Alternatives to Biblical Conversion

What are the modern-day alternatives to biblical conversion? It is absolutely imperative that we understand the modern aberrant teachings about conversion including the history of this development. To the degree that we understand the false from the true can we de-westernize the Gospel, appropriate the Biblical message of conversion for ourselves, and then proclaim its supernatural power and life changing message of turning to God to the needy world and all its peoples.

by David F. Wells

The world is filled with conversion stories. An alcoholic turns from drink to sobriety. A Western student's life is changed by the teachings of an Eastern guru. One person joins a cult; another rejects it. A Hindu family believes the soul of their departed loved one has "trans-migrated" to a new body and been reborn. Although such conversions may be precipitated by dramatic crises and result in changed behavior, they are not Christian conversions. They do not have Christ as their cause and object and his service as their result. They do not involve turning from sin to God by means of the Holy Spirit's work. They are not based on the substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ.

This article dealing with Christian conversion was written for two reasons. First, conversion is the only way one can enter the family of God, and so it is important that we have a thorough understanding of it.¹ Second, there are external and internal challenges to the Christian concept of conversion, and we need to understand them. Externally, Christian conversion is opposed on religious and ideological grounds by those who are hostile to the Christian faith. Internally, many churches and denominations have failed to preserve and teach the biblical view of conversion. In this article I mainly want to focus on the internal challenge of this all important crucial matter.

THE WIDER THEOLOGICAL WORLD

The most important question to ask about conversion is "What does the Bible teach?" not "What have past generations thought?" nor "What sort of conversion experiences have people had?" Because all Christians think they are biblical in their doctrine, it is important that we understand what individual Christians mean by biblical and how the Bible functions in their lives and church. Furthermore, we need to know how the Bible *should function* in our lives.

This article was written from a self-consciously evangelical point of view. However, as the Reformers taught, the Word of God alone is the sole infallible criterion for all Christian thought and action, and its function as such is an unending one. Each generation must allow the Word of God to reform its thoughts and actions. A commitment to the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures is a commitment to allowing them to judge and guide our beliefs. Therefore in we must measure everything, evangelicals included, by the Word of God, for we assume that no evangelical would want to believe and act in ways that violate biblical truth.

In the first section, I will focus on the non-evangelical portion of the Protestant world, as the subset of Protestants that comes to expression in the World Council

of Churches (WCC). The WCC has fostered many of the major alternatives to biblical conversion, and so we must examine these aberrant teachings and the history of their development.² The nineteenth century was one of astonishing evangelical vitality that resulted in the formation of several significant Christian youth movements and in two famous mission conferences: New York (1900) and Edinburgh (1910). The latter conference gave rise to the International Missionary Council (1921). This organization, along with the Life and Work movement and the Faith and Work movement, developed into the World Council of Churches (1948).

Over time, the evangelical voice in the WCC became increasingly muted and the evangelical concern for personal conversion has become progressively disparaged. The blame for this is twofold: First, non-evangelicals have opposed the biblical gospel, and second, evangelicals have been guilty of anti-intellectualism. In part, the latter problem may be attributed to evangelicalism's roots in the laity of the Church, which traditionally has not been concerned with theology. During the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the early part of this century, many evangelicals were openly anti-intellectual and not interested in serious theological debate. They abandoned the field of theology to non-evangelicals, whose unbiblical ideas on conversion began to take root.

The non-evangelical ideas influenced the International Missionary Council and (IMC) were reflected in the proceedings of that organization's world conferences in Jerusalem (1928) and Madras (1938). On the one side, evangelicals maintained that sin can be forgiven only through faith in Christ's substitutionary death and that salvation by grace through faith excludes the possibility of salvation on any other grounds—for example, on the basis of human will or good works. On the other side, non-evangelicals repudiated the evangelical understanding of conversion and argued that non-Christian religions were valid forms whose contents could be infused with Christian thinking without requiring conversion to Christianity. Some evangelical missionary agencies, like the China Inland Mission in 1916 and the Christian and Missionary Alliance in 1932, were offended and dismayed by this false gospel and withdrew from the IMC. Opposition between evangelical and non-evangelical views of the gospel became so intense that the ecumenist Joseph Oldham characterized these streams of thought as two different religions, as did the evangelical J. Gresham Machen in his trenchant analysis *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923).

The ecumenical non-evangelical understanding of conversion gave rise to the social gospel on the one hand and to vision of a world religion on the other. Each of these theologies has a distinctive, non-biblical way of understanding conversion.

Social Gospel Theologies

Few theologies have tried harder or more deliberately to invalidate the evangelical view of conversion than the theology of the "social gospel." This is true of the social gospel's original form in the liberalism of the mid-1900s and of its more recent manifestations in theologies of secularization, revolution, and liberation.

Walter Rauschenbusch is the father of the modern social gospel. Dissatisfied with the results of his parish ministry among German immigrants at the Second German Baptist Church in New York City, he went to England to get acquainted with that country's new social movements and then to Germany to study exegetical and systematic theology. While Rauschenbusch was in Germany, he was influenced by liberal luminaries such as Albert Ritschl, Julius Wellhausen, Adolf von Harnack, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Their teachings revolutionized his former evangelical understanding of the gospel. Rauschenbusch returned to America to teach theology at his *alma mater*, Rochester Seminary, where he began to promulgate his new version of the gospel. His first book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907), renounced the individualistic and futuristic orientation of pietism, while trying to preserve its spiritual dynamics.

The gospel according to Rauschenbusch presents salvation as a corporate, not an individual, process. According to Rauschenbusch the origin of sin is not rebellion against a holy Creator but social alienation from one another. Sinful acts are those that alienate us from one another. Following Schleiermacher, Rauschenbusch transferred the root of sin from the human heart to society. The effects of each person's sins condition the behavior of all other persons. Rauschenbusch rejected the biblical picture of Satan as a personal, sinful seducer and substituted the prevailing socioeconomic and political evils of his day in Satan's place.³

According to the social gospel, salvation means overcoming the world's socioeconomic needs in the "kingdom of God." Rauschenbusch taught that the "kingdom of God" is a present, ethical-religious condition that is found in the lives of those who practice the ethics of Jesus. This kingdom, which begins as a personal, experiential reality, is to be established as a political reality through corporate human effort. In the political

theologies favored by the WCC, this has implied that the task of Christians, churches, and mission agencies is to join liberation struggles against racism and oppressive political systems.

It is easy to understand why the social gospel was seen as undercutting the theological foundations of the evangelical missionary movement. The sense of the eternal lostness of unbelievers, which had caused agony to young Hudson Taylor and motivated thousands of evangelical missionaries to rush into the newly opened areas of Asia to rescue the souls of "China's millions," was gone with the wind. Indeed, according to Rauschenbusch concern for personal salvation is "close to refined selfishness." Rauschenbusch expressed his understanding of the missionary imperative this way: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and the salvation of your souls will be added to you... our religious individuality must get its interpretation from the supreme fact of social solidarity."

These new ideas soon began to influence the younger generation. In 1902 at a meeting of the World Student Christian Federation, H. de Bie from Holland urged Christians not to be content with conversion only but to strive to make their nations Christlike. The focus of this new gospel shifted away from a concern to see sinners receive eternal life through reconciliation to Christ and move towards a concern for humanizing the impoverishing and oppressive socioeconomic structures that cause misery. The righteousness of God, the fulcrum in Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, gave way to social justice as the primary expression of Christ's lordship over the Church and world.

NEW TERMINOLOGY

This new gospel in time required new terminology. Justification was replaced by humanization. The older evangelical notion of "man turning towards God" was replaced by the new idea of "God turning towards men" (for example, at Uppsala in

1968). The older theology of “bringing people to Christ” was supplanted by the new theology of “finding true humanness.” As the Indian theologian M. M. Thomas explained, conversion has to do with finding freedom from all that binds and oppresses human beings—not with turning to God in faith and repentance. Thus according to the “new gospel” conversion is not a redemptive act of God but a human work of cooperation with the forces of justice. Advocates of this new gospel deliberately have left the phrase the forces of justice ambiguous. In practice, however, they have identified these forces with left-wing political agendas.

The heart of the new gospel is captured in the title of Hans-Jurgen Schultz’s aptly named book *Conversion to the World* (1967). According to Schultz, the god Mammon does not reside in human hearts but in social structures. Thus God is not at work to change human hearts but to liberate social structures. Given such a gospel, it is no wonder that Philip Potter’s sentiment came to prevail in WCC circles. According to Potter, evangelistic missions that invite personal faith in Christ and his saving work “have been rightly condemned in all our ecumenical conferences,” the traditional gospel has produced “introversion,” in whose place Potter proposed “dialog” with religiously minded people. Potter’s advocacy of “dialog” is a bridge to the second major development in liberal theology—the idea of a world religion.

World Religion

According to Friedrich Schleiermacher, the essence of all religions is a “feeling of absolute dependence” upon a transcendent power. This feeling is universal and is shared by all people—it is an integral part of our humanity. Religions are man’s attempt to explain and understand this feeling of absolute dependence. Therefore, Christianity is a religion that differs from other religions only in degree—not in kind. Other religions are

not untrue; Christianity is simply more true. Thus at the Edinburgh Conference (1910), even John Mott urged missionaries to make connections with the “rays of light” in other religions.

In the decades that followed the 1910 conference, comparative religion developed as a science and provided a complete

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, BELIEVERS WITNESS TO CHRIST, NOT TO THEIR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST. THEY FOCUS ON THE OBJECTIVE REALITIES OF SALVATION—ON CHRIST AND HIS WORK—NOT ON THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THIS WORK.

theological agenda for ecumenists. According to this new discipline, a mysterious and undefinable reality lies at the center of all human experience, as Rudolph Ott argued in *The Phenomenon of the Sacred*. Comparative religion was a ready mate for the other great fascination of that time—the theory of evolution. Together they provided the ground for believing that human consciousness of the divine gradually emerged in history in the form of different religions. Advocates of this idea seldom considered that the transcendent, mysterious reality that supposedly lies at the center of human existence might also be the realm of the demonic, as Paul teaches (Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 10:20; Eph. 2:1-3; 6:10-12).

This evolutionary line of thought has consistently been represented in WCC thinking. For example, it gave rise to the study project “The Work of God and the Living Faiths of Men” (July 1956), which

formally opened up the WCC to other religions. At the WCC’s Third Assembly (New Delhi, 1961), what had been a stream became a torrent. Once again, using the assembly’s theme of Christ as “The Light of the World,” there was a curt repudiation of evangelical missions. According to this conference, the gospel has nothing to do with a unique disclosure of God in Christ nor with a unique, redemptive work of God through Christ. Instead, the gospel is about the “cosmic Christ,” the mediator of creation who is universally perceived in all religions. As people pursue their own liberation, Christ emerges in their ideologies, regardless what these ideologies may be. The culmination of this line of thought came at the WCC’s “Program on Dialog with Other Religions and Ideologies” (Addis Ababa, 1971). According to this conference, “dialog” is by no means a Christian cover-up for the traditional gospel or an attempt to win converts to this gospel. Instead, dialog is a Christian way of showing respect for other religions, and it provides an entry into the wide spirituality that all religions share.

Missio Dei

Among missiologists, this kind of ecumenical and interreligious thinking has been captured in the notion of *Missio Dei*. The component ideas for this new understanding of missions have come from many different sources: from Karl Barth, came universalism; from Fredrick Gogarten came the thought that secularization is the way the gospel liberates people today; from Alfred North Whitehead and others came the belief that the being of God is merged in the stuff of creation and together, in dependence on one another, they are in process and evolution; from the WCC itself came the social gospel and the endorsement of other religions.

According to this new concept of mission, the trinitarian God is involved as creator, redeemer, and renewer through-

out the process of human history. He does not transcend history as a personal, supernatural being. Instead, he is to be identified prophetically as the hidden force in human history that unceasingly drives it toward its final destination: the kingdom of God.⁴ Thus all human movements that promote the goal of a new humanity in a world community, including nascent non-Christian religions and theistic ideologies, are to be seen as instruments in the *Missio Dei*. As such the church must treat them as allies in a common mission, for they, too, serve the cosmic Christ, regardless of whether they mention his name.

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARALLELS

This new ecumenical approach to other religions, as expressed in the WCC's Dialogue Program, has a Roman Catholic parallel. In 1961 Catholic dogmatician Karl Rahner set forth his theory of the "anonymous Christian." According to Rahner, God desires the salvation of all people through Jesus Christ. Although only a minority of people know Jesus by name, God has ordained other religions as channels through which he grants salvation to the religions' adherents. Salvation granted in this manner is based on the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Only after the Christian gospel has been presented to the adherents of other religions in an existentially challenging way can they consciously accept Jesus as their savior. After consciously receiving Christ as their Savior, they do not pass from damnation to salvation but simply become aware of the salvation they have enjoyed all along as "anonymous Christians."

Rahner's theory was soon developed by his German disciples H. R. Schlette and J. Heiseltz, who concluded that other religions are the "ordinary ways of salvation for their adherents." Hubertus Halfab, a radical supporter of Rahner, carried this position to its extreme and argued that the mission of the church is to make "Muslims better Muslims, Buddhists better Buddhists and Hindus better Hindus."

Almost simultaneously, Asian Roman Catholic theologians applied Rahner's view to the historic Eastern religions. Raimundo Panikkar, a Spanish-Indian theologian and the most outspoken representative of this group, argued in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1965) that the pre-incarnate Christ wedded himself to Hinduism at the conception of its ancient, sacred books, the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. According to Panikkar, because Jesus is encountered in the mystic experiences of Indian yogis, as well as in the rituals performed in honor of Hindu deities, there is no need to evangelize Hindus in an effort to convert them to Christianity. Instead, Panikkar advocated "dialogue in depth" between Christians and Hindus that would enable both to experience the oneness of their mystic encounter. As the outcome of such dialogue, Panikkar visualized a mutual penetration of all religions and their respective spiritual heritages that would result in "one, holy, catholic and apostolic religion."

The biblical alternative to these ecumenical ideas that we will present is built upon two suppositions: First, Christian conversion is supernatural, and second, it is unique. On both points the biblical position collides head on with prevailing ecumenical modern sentiments.

CONVERSION IS SUPERNATURAL

In what sense is conversion supernatural? Is it supernatural in the sense that God is the primary and direct cause of all human behavior, so that acts of faith are really his, rather than the penitent's? Most Christian thinkers have found this type of determinism injurious to biblical teaching. Is conversion supernatural in the sense that God is its indirect cause? This is an arguable position. God certainly is the indirect cause of conversion in at least three senses. 1) Without God's saving action in Christ, conversion would not be possible. 2) Without the convincing work of the Holy Spirit, conversion would not

be desirable. And 3) without the function of the Scriptures, conversion would not be Christian.

Reformed theologians add a fourth sense: Without regeneration, conversion would be unthinkable, for regeneration and conversion are related as cause and effect. The creative, regenerative work of God produces an overwhelming desire to turn from sin and conveys the ability to believe in Christ, though initially God's regenerative work may take place below the level of consciousness.⁵

What is the mechanism of conversion that causes inward change? The answers a Christian gives to this question are not compatible with modern assumptions. The modern worldview understands conversion as part of human behavior, or as part of abnormal behavior, whose causes are strictly natural and discoverable. Conversion is the purely natural effect of purely natural causes. This secular understanding of human behavior severs it from any divine or spiritual reality and treats it as a thing in itself that is self-originated and self-interpreting.

It is true that conversion is a type of human behavior that involves deep and complex psychological and sociological changes. Being a form of human behavior, however, does not preclude conversion from also having a divine component or cause, just as conversion's psychological dimension does not preclude the presence of a spiritual aspect, and just as conversion's personal nature does not preclude the reality of conflict with supernatural forces of good and evil.

Biblical Christianity always has acknowledged conversion's spiritual dimension. In fact the Protestant Reformation was precipitated by the conviction that God's saving grace could be neither triggered nor augmented by anything we do. The Reformers believed that God has not accomplished part of our salvation and left us to complete the other part through obedience and good works. Instead, they taught that God's salvation in Christ is free, perfectly complete, and is

accepted and entered into by faith alone.

This fundamental conviction, however, is tested anew in each generation. Fallen people have a persistent tendency to believe that their behavior somehow completes what God has left incomplete. This leads to the belief that salvation is a cooperative work. In the sixteenth century this sort of synergism (syncretism) was understood ecclesiastically: religious obedience to the church was added to grace. Today in the West, this sort of synergism (syncretism) is understood psychologically: self-development and self-gratification are added to grace to produce a "holistic" person. In some Third World countries, this sort of synergism is understood politically: involvement in causes that promote justice is added to grace to produce a new society. Regardless of the means and understanding, all such synergistic (syncretistic) theories violate the principle of the all sufficiency of God's grace in salvation.

The God of the Bible is a jealous God. All attempts to add human effort to God's grace denigrate and destroy grace. Therefore God is intolerant of our attempts to assist grace, whether they are ecclesiastical, psychological, or political in nature, and he is jealous for the purity of the grace he offers.

Grace that needs human assistance for completion is nothing more than divine help. It is nothing more than God supplying what we cannot do alone. Grace that is nothing more than a divine helping hand is not biblical grace. For according to the Bible, God's grace single-handedly accomplishes what he intends it to achieve, with no admixture of human help.

The discussion of God's grace assumes that there is a relationship between God and ourselves within a single natural-supernatural reality. God's grace is supernatural, in so far as it is quite different from human potential, power, or wisdom; but it is "natural," in so far as God and his works are not oddities or bizarre intrusions in the world but are properly part of it. Given the structure of the world, the shape of human person-

ality, and the content of human experience, the reality of God is as natural as the existence of water for fish. God is what our world and lives demand, and without him both are painful enigmas.

CONVERSION IS UNIQUE

Conversion is not uniquely Christian, but Christian conversion is unique and uniquely true. If we focus on behavioral changes, Christian conversion may be difficult to distinguish from some other types of conversion. If we focus on Christ to whom the sinner has turned in faith,

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AND CONSEQUENTLY
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AND SERVICE.**

Christian conversion is as different from other forms of conversion as Christ is from the founders of other faiths.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the uniqueness of Christian conversion has been obscured. Conversion has come to be understood in purely subjectivistic terms as changed behavior. The objective realities of conversion—its divine origin, supernatural change, and eternal results—have been downplayed and rejected. Additionally, evangelical "testimonies" about God's saving grace in Christ are understood as nothing more

than personal biographies that attribute changed behavior to Christ. Critics of Christianity point to similar testimonies in non-Christian religions. Although most Christian testimonies are sincerely intended, and though God uses them to bring people to salvation, testimonies are not the best way to explain Christianity to non-Christians.

If Christianity is true, then by definition Christians will have experienced Christ. They will have a personal, living knowledge of Christ as God incarnate. They will know him as the humble, suffering servant who bore their sins and God's judgment on the cross. They will acknowledge him as the sinless anointed Messiah whom God raised from the dead. They will worship him as the King of kings who conquered both death and the Prince of Darkness and who will return victorious and in great power. They will rejoice in their knowledge of Jesus as the Great High Priest who has opened heaven and the very supernatural power of God to believers. They will experience God's forgiveness of their sins. They will know what it is to return in the rags and tatters of human depravity, with no right to a place in God's house, and to be welcomed, drawn in, clothed with fine robes, and feasted at a banquet in their honor. They will experience and know the indwelling power and presence of God's Spirit, who will assure them of their salvation, of God's mighty presence in their lives, and of their belonging to God's people. And they will be able to speak of these things from their hearts. If Christian faith is true—and it is—there will be experience of which they can speak!

Nevertheless, there are two ways in which we need to exercise vigilance in the way we describe our conversion experience. First, the typical evangelical testimony usually departs significantly from the New Testament pattern of witness-bearing. In the New Testament, believers witness to Christ, not to their experience of Christ. They focus on the objective realities of salvation—on Christ and his work—not on their experience of this work.

Second, testimonies that stake the truth of Christianity on the experiences being narrated, rather than basing the truth of Christianity on Christ himself, confuse people by directing their attention away from Christ, who is unique, to human experiences, which may not sound or be unique. For example, if the truth of the gospel is tied to a testimony of transformation and change, then non-Christians can point to similar stories of transformation and change in non-Christian religions, sects, cults, or even among users of certain drugs. Under the best of circumstances, our own experiences are difficult to evaluate. The experiences of others are even more difficult. To evaluate experiences properly, we need what we usually do not have—a deep and accurate knowledge of a person's true character and the full record of his or her life. People who give testimonies usually are strangers to us. Since we know little about their characters and their lives, how can we evaluate the truth and the validity of their testimonies? How can we discern the authentic from the unauthentic or even from counterfeit conversion stories?

Furthermore, we need to be careful about the way testimonies function in the overall body of Christian teaching. Perhaps because of the influence of revivals, and perhaps because in our pluralistic society we feel the need to produce some irrefutable evidence that Christianity is true, evangelicals tend to treat conversion in a way that it was not treated in the biblical worldview. Conversion is important, and no one should diminish this. Apart from those converted in childhood, few Christians are likely to forget their conversion experience. But conversion is not an experience that stands alone. It is the doorway to the building of salvation. And God does not want us to stand in the doorway, marveling at the threshold. He wants us to enter the building and marvel at what is inside.

Our continuing vulnerability in this matter is made clear when we insist that Jesus must be Lord, as well as Savior. Many people who have experienced conversion exhibit little subsequent maturity and growth. Many of them can give eloquent testimonies of how they came to

Christ, but when pressed, they can say little about how they are going on with Christ. To insist that they need to follow Christ in obedience as their Lord, in addition to having him as their Savior, is an extraordinary admission of failure on our part and theirs. The apostles did not distinguish Christ as Lord and Christ as Savior. According to the Bible, it is Christ the Lord who saves us from our sins (Rom. 10:8-13). *To receive Christ the Savior is to receive him as Lord.* To repent of sin and trust Christ's death for salvation involves trusting the living, resurrected, exalted Lord to apply the benefits of his death and resurrection to us. *Only if he is Lord can he save us.* To our shame, we have almost stood the New Testament on its head. Ours has become an anemic gospel that demands little of the convert in terms of repentance and obedience, and consequently Christ receives little from us by way of commitment and service.

True conversion is not an isolated experience but one that is related to a life of discipleship. Conversion is the point in time and experience at which we enter into such a life. Discipleship belongs to and should follow from conversion the way that natural life belongs to and follows from live birth. Just as there is no life without birth, so there is no birth without an ensuing life, however long or short that life may be. And just as there is no discipleship without conversion, so there is no conversion without an ensuing life of discipleship that involves growth in moral maturity, a deepening faith, and loving service.

Conversion is the doorway that is inextricably linked to the house of Christian faith. Although Christianity is objectively true, regardless of our believing it, how we understand our believing deeply affects what we understand Christian faith to be. If we understand sin correctly, and if we have a clear vision of Christ's substitutionary work on the cross, we will see that the biblical doctrine of conversion is a necessary and inevitable corollary of the Bible's teaching about sin and salvation.

But however we and our churches choose to commend Christian faith, we need to begin this study by reminding ourselves that the faith we commend is not

Christian if it is not centered upon and determined by Christ. It is the historical Jesus, who is personally identical with the Christ of the resurrection, who is the objective of our faith, its ground and its reason. Without him, there is no faith, at least, there is no true Christian faith. And without a Christ unique in who he was and what he did, there can be no belief that is in any sense biblical. Christian faith is about a Christ who is without peer, equal, or parallel. He stands alone as God incarnate. He stands alone as one in whom, and because of whom, sin, death, and the devil have been conquered. Faith in such a Christ is faith that by its very nature is different from faith in any other person or cause in this world.

ENDNOTES

1. [Editor's note: This article is a reprint of the "Introduction" from David Wells's book (now out of print) entitled *Turning to God: Biblical Conversion in the Modern World*. His whole book was written for the purpose to help us thoroughly understand Christian conversion in light of its modern alternatives.]
2. Of course, not all Protestants in the WCC are non-evangelicals, just as not all Protestants outside the WCC are evangelicals.
3. Recent liberation theologies have developed this idea along the lines of the Marxist doctrine of class struggle.
4. The two catchwords *shalom* and *humanization* depict this concept.
5. Even Wesleyan forms of Arminianism argue for prevenient grace, the grace of God without which no one can believe but in the presence of which no one has to believe. Thus even Wesleyanism, with its modified concept of regeneration, understands God's grace as the cause of the conversion of those who choose to believe. These are talking points for initiates—for those who accept a Christian world view—and for those who are seeking to understand their own conversion.

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Apostolic Service: The Mystery of Priestliness

(Part II)

“And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces .” (Lev. 9:23, 24)

by Art Katz

Everything had been done according to as it was commanded, and then God Himself ignited the sacrifice supernaturally. It is interesting that the seventh day of waiting results in the eighth day of release. The number eight represents the resurrection life and power. Seven days of complete death and the eighth day of the power, which is the life of God Himself.

The Glory of God

If we have not seen that glory, it is because we have not fulfilled all that the Lord commanded us to do. If there is any single distinctive that is at the heart of apostolic, it is the singular jealousy for the glory of God. That is what makes us fools for Christ's sake, namely, a faith that believes for that glory and a jealousy for the demonstration of that glory. To have any lesser criterion for success is to rob God's people and to frustrate the Lord Himself and to fixate us at a lesser level.

When the glory of God appears, then the Lord appears, for the Lord is His glory. It is this appearance that the church so desperately needs. His glory is not some ethereal thing, but a substantive phenomenon that can be seen and experienced. We have lived so long without it that we are satisfied merely with the phrase about it without any real expectation for it. “To Him be the glory in the church...” is Paul's summation of the church in Ephesians 3:21a. There has got to be glory in the church or it simply is

not the church, and it has failed in its purpose, because if it does not come through the church, then it does not come. If it is not in the church, then how shall it be communicated anywhere in the world?

...and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces (vs. 24b).

That is the effect of the appearing of the glory of God on men, however resistant, stiff and self-willed, superficial and shallow they are. Your face is what you are. Everything came down before God when they saw that. That is blessedness. There was none of that ‘Amen’ and ‘Hallelujah’ stuff that punctuates our charismatic services, but a prostration that is so profound and so utter that when you rise from that, you never rise in the same way in which you went down. All of your seeing, your whole perspective, all of your reckoning, valuing and plans are affected by that going down. You cannot again go on as before. That is what happens when you fall before the demonstration of the glory of God. The God of Moses and Aaron is God still, and if He will have a priestly people on the earth as consecrated as was Aaron and his sons, as obedient as Moses, then that glory will again fall.

The priests were to teach the people the difference between the profane and the sacred. How as a Body can we manifest that distinction to the world? How can we perform priestly ministry with

such a discernment when such a priestly reality is absent from our lives? We have neglected to ascend the holy mount. We have lost all desire for transfiguration glory. We have not recognized that there is a holy place where one stands alone in the presence of God, ministering first to Him. We have grown content to remain outside the tent of meeting where our religious activity has become a kind of entertainment, technically correct, but devoid of glory, devoid of the fragrance of heaven and devoid of priestly ministry.

Jesus came out of the holy place with God and so must every minister who aspires to be priestly. The brashness, the metallic ring and the human, earthly atmosphere of so much ministry is sure evidence that men have not waited in the holy place or even recognize that there is such a place to which God is calling them and which awaits them.

Our voices, like our faces are a trademark and a statement of a consistent relationship with the God of all grace. They indicate in an unmistakable way what is the truth of and the depth of the relationship of a believer with his God. When that radiance comes, we will not know it. We will have come to a total unselfconsciousness about ourselves, that we will not even be aware that we are shining. This radiance is obtained in one place only, namely, the priestly place, a place of waiting in the presence of God by those who believe that there is such a place and have

the faith to enter it and live and move and have their being from that place. Then the world will know the difference between the sacred and the profane.

We desperately need the restoration of a priestly people. There has been such a failure of the priestly ministry to be expressed in our midst that we have lost even the desire to experience the glory of God. We have grown content with so little, content with merely 'good' meetings and expecting no more. An expectation must first be rekindled in us, an expectation that the glory of God can actually fall from heaven like fire—men brought down on their faces, awe, gasps, hands clasped over mouths, deep breakings. If we are desiring this result for the wrong reasons, then we can forget of ever seeing it. Those of us who desire to see people coming down in great prostration can even secretly desire it for their own self-glorification: When we seek to frame a message in order to impress our audience, then that is the end of the message. It is no longer a priestly word.

AS THE PRIEST, SO TOO THE PEOPLE

This is one of the reasons why we need each other. There is no man, however pure his priestly desire, who will not one day slip into some admixture and some desire for personal glorification if he is not in some kind of daily relationship with others who will detect the first signs of it and call it to his attention. This priestly-ministry jealousy cannot even be obtained by us alone. It is Aaron and his sons.

The whole congregation of Israel was assembled to witness the consecration of Aaron and his sons, because all were intimately involved and profoundly connected. The priest was not just a religious functionary who received payment for services rendered. There was a vital link. As the priest, so also the people. We see in Israel's history the decline of the priesthood, the loss of their purpose, their becoming a professional class and the

final horror is what Caiaphas became as the tormentor and persecutor of Jesus. We see how even that high calling can go so low. It was a statement of Israel itself. When the priests have come to that place, then the nation is also in that place. If you want to study the history of Israel, then study the history of its priesthood.

When Israel's priestly class was full of zeal, when it had a heavenly respect for its calling, when it was a separated class of men who feared God and revered the duties that they were given to perform and were faithful in performing them, then Israel was at its zenith. When they began, however, to be seduced away; when they were attracted to the Hellenistic culture that was then sweeping the world and which was the exaltation of man; when they began to give their children Greek names rather than Hebrew and came to be more fascinated with philosophy than sacrifice (which they had come to consider as crude and irrelevant), then Israel declined and ultimately collapsed.

The same could be said of the church at large today. We too are somewhat embarrassed and offended by the cutting and bloodshed that is inseparable from priestly ministry. We too are swept up in the culture of our day, finding the entertainments, the methods, the psychology and the wisdom of our age more enlightened and engrossing than the crude insistence on radical purging and cleansing. We have turned away from the priestly thing of sacrifice and blood. It is another way of saying that we have turned away from 'the offense of the Cross'.

God has established His order. The outer layers, passable in the world, must be stripped off and our nakedness washed by the Word. Then the priestly garments are put on, one by one, in prescribed order, and there was to be only the linen of righteousness—no wool, for God's priests shall not sweat. They went up, not on steps, but on a ramp. They did not even dare lift their legs to the next step lest any flesh be glimpsed. For no flesh shall stand in His presence and no sweat,

both the statements of religious, human exertion, rather than the priestly ministry that comes out of the rest of God. With all the hacking, all the slaying, all the blood letting, one would think that they would be drenched with sweat.

However, when we begin to do the prescribed thing given by God in an exacting obedience by the Life of God, it will not be done with sweat. The fact that our Sundays are so sweaty is a testimony to the fact that they are no longer priestly. One of the great ironies of our time is that more sweat is exuded on Sundays than any other day of the week. There is more feverishness, more anxiety, more apprehension and nervous exhaustion, more fleshly exertion to produce successful religion than we could imagine or care to acknowledge. If we were more jealous for His glory than our own honor and reputation, then we would not sweat so much.

To be priestly is to be untainted by human fretting, human contrivance and human exertion. There is something in all of the laborious requirements, something in the sacrifices and sprinklings, so immersed in blood and gore from finger tip to elbows, that precludes there being anything of themselves left to perform something priestly. This is the heart of the mystery of priesthood. It must be in the power of His everlasting life, not in some makeshift pumping up of ourselves in to some image of what we think priestly ministry ought to be. God's priests were so enervated, so devastated, so prostrated and so exhausted of all bravado and self-assurance and so filled with the understanding of the holiness of the things that were set before them, that they could not even begin to presume to initiate or to do anything out of their own humanity.

THE CALL TO PRIESTHOOD

We have fallen so far from the sense of priestliness, that we consider service to men to be the highest expression we can or need to attain. We regard the sweat of our exertions in that service as evidence of our fulfillment and approval, but God

sees it otherwise. The heavenly priest comes out from the holiest place, out from waiting upon God, out from being emptied from all his own good ideas, good intentions, methods. He leaves behind his own order of service, his own message, his own selection of songs and comes forth with that which is given by God from heaven. We need to see more such people who are willing to forsake their own intentions, because God has breathed upon their spirits in the holy place of rest and waiting.

Why is it that so often the worship in services is grueling and almost too painful to hear, that it itself is a sweaty exercise, almost like a calisthenics of going through certain charismatic exercises? Is it not because the men who lead it have not waited in the holy place? The disposition to wait on God is indispensable to true priesthood. It is both the prerequisite and the result of submitting to all of God's requirements. We are not, however, by nature disposed to wait upon God in the quiet and rest of hidden places. We are disposed rather always to do, and to do only what seems acceptable to our own understanding, an understanding that is never tried nor tested before God.

There seems to be a conspiracy and a calculated campaign to drive the consciousness of priesthood from the church. We are inundated with sound and noise, multimedia displays, concerts—the sensual ear and eye thing—that not only has to be heard, it has to be felt. If the amplification of the sound is not great enough that you feel the shock and the resounding of it, then it is not enough. In that milieu, God is yet calling us to be the priests of the holy place. If our speaking has anything to do with the releasing of the word of God from heaven, then it can only come from having heard what He has commanded us to bring in the holiest place of all, which is a place of silence.

When one such minister comes, who has waited in the place of silence, we are not always happy over him. We are intimidated because we thought that we had it

all together. We saw ourselves as well-meaning and industrious elders, who were able to quote the Scriptures and had a firm grasp on the doctrines of the faith and knew how to counsel men. Then comes a visitor from heaven, a priest of God, and we are devastated. He brings an aura, a fragrance, a spirit that challenges us and reveals us to ourselves. All of a sudden

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we feel earthbound, heavy and all too human. We recognize that so much of what we had been doing and saying had become old, earthbound and stale.

We need more invasions from heaven and more such priests who will come and minister before men only after they had first ministered to God in the holy place. We need priestly ministry, ministry from men who have first made sacrifice for themselves, who have first offered up their flesh, their own ambitions, their own vanity, and self-deceit, their own fear and greed and man-pleasing, men who have a heart to endure the wearisome requirements of God, to submit to painful dealings, men who are prepared to see blood spurt and wounded flesh writhe and kick and gasp for breath, men who will stand steadfast and unswayed, who will let death be worked in them to the end, who are willing to suffer the reproach and

embarrassment of inner parts being exposed. Such men are rare. They are God's priests who alone are qualified to wield God's sword, sanctified by blood; who alone have the disposition and utter fearlessness required to cut into the flesh of God's people and to expose the inward hidden parts of our being, to wound flesh and let its life blood flow out and to perform priestly ministry in God's house.

THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

Though the Levitical practices are no longer required, the truth of them yet stands. We need to have our understanding altered, because of His Son, God says:

Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6b).

It is a new order, not the Aaronic order. The old order is dispersed and lost. The new order is older than the Aaronic order. The older order has merely been restored, because when Abraham came back from defeating the kings of Sodom and that area, he met a mystical figure and gave him a tenth of all that he had. He deferred to him, for the lesser is blessed of the greater. This high priest served him bread and wine and his name was Melchizedek. It was an Old Testament glimpse, a pre-incarnate flash of what is to be the abiding and eternal glory of the Son of Man, who abides a priest forever. Abraham, great man of faith that he was, recognized the authority and superiority of that priesthood. It precedes even the establishment of the Aaronic order, which was only itself a shadow of the greater thing to come.

Not only is there a connection between apostolic and priesthood, but there is also a connection between that which pertains to sons and that which pertains to priests. This mysterious high priest, this Melchizedek, is not descended from the genealogy of Aaron, but a king of righteousness and peace, of whom it says in the Scriptures:

Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually (Heb. 7:3).

There is a remarkable antithesis to the earlier Aaronic priesthood—exactly opposite to this. The new order is above culture, time and nationality. It is without beginning of days or ending of life. The Aaronic priesthood required genealogy, ancestry and earthly identification. In fact, anything earthly contradicts it. The new resembles the Son of God, a priest without interruption. It is exhausting even to consider this, the kind of priest who ever lives to make intercession for the saints. What is the source of His animation, His energy and His life? We are exhausted just to consider these possibilities, yet God has called us to be such a church and such a presence, such a fulfillment of His eternal purpose and such an agency for a Kingdom that is to come. What kind of priesthood is this? This is something other than a professional, ministerial posture that is somehow appropriate behind the pulpit, but something other in the private life. This is true priesthood, a priesthood without interruption. Are we jealous to be this kind of a priest? Do we recognize that except this dimension be added to our being, then there is no way that we can consider Jesus the Apostle, no more than He Himself can fulfill His Apostolic dimension without also being the High Priest of our confession? It is equally incumbent and required of us, a priesthood of this kind, not on the basis of natural qualification, but in exact proportion as we resemble the Son of God, that is to say, priests without interruption, above time, culture and nationality, without mother or father or ancestry, without beginning of days or ending of life, a continual flow out from the Throne of God Himself on the basis of the power of an endless and indestructible life. A Son who has been made a Priest forever.

The higher and the true identity is the one in God that abides as a priest forever.

It will take a wrenching, because how will your father and mother like it? It is as if you have to renounce your physical identification as a slap in their face. You have to be cut off from those things that want to obsess you and establish your identification in earthly terms. It is part of the price and one cannot explain it to men. "Who is My mother?", said Jesus, in reply to being told that His mother and brothers were waiting outside. By an earthly evaluation that sounds cruel, but that is because we have not entered into His priestliness and we have not understood the profound detachment that a priest must have from every fleshly connection on the face of the earth. Ironically, we will never be a better son or daughter than when we will come to this priestly detachment. There is a whole sickly, soulish involvement of life between mothers and sons and grandchildren where they live off each other. It is a vampiry type of thing that sucks the blood.

We need to come to an identity beyond what we are in the earthly and natural way, and yet not to diffuse or eliminate male nor female, Jew nor Gentile. That is Satan's ploy. He wants to obscure and eliminate the distinctions that God counts very important. It is not that they should be abolished, but that something transcendent comes out of the union of these distinct entities that creates a 'new man'. It is a strange paradox of being a Jew or a Gentile, a male or female and not annulling that obvious thing, but esteeming it as from the God who gave it for His own purposes, and yet not celebrating it in a way that forms a kind of membrane between ourselves and those who are not like us. Wherever time, culture, ethnic, earthly and temporal factors are invoked, consciously or unconsciously, we move out of that priestliness, and we forfeit the Biblical priestly ground and its power.

We come into this calling because we have come into the Son, who is the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace, the High Priest of God. If we are in the Son of Man by virtue of joining Him in

His death by the power of the Cross through baptism, we are also with Him abiding as a priest continually. We are in the Melchizedek priesthood in exact proportion as we are abiding in the Son—no more and no less. It has nothing to do with natural factors, but only with resurrection life, a life offered in sacrifice and raised up in glory. We are brought to a transcendent place of identification with Him by which every natural, racial, religious, ethnic and other distinction is transcended.

INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE

And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of a physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:15-16).

It is the same life that burst forth out of death, that resplendent glory that is available to everyone who will give it opportunity to be expressed out of their death. It is the foundation of the royal priesthood and the community of God. This kind of priesthood, that is uninterrupted and that resembles the Son of God, needs also to have as its foundation and source His endless and indestructible life. This is not something that we can do. We are not going to play at being priests by building on the strength of our own expertise, our own ability, knowledge, minds, religious cleverness and even our own well-meaning intention.

The Melchizedek priesthood is not based on the inheritance that is come by blood and ancestry, but it is based on the inheritance that has come by the blood of the Lamb, to those who have entered into the Life of that Blood and have put aside their own that they might express through that Blood and through that Life these priestly things.

It is my conviction that the issue of the resurrection is going to be the fiercest end-time issue for the people of God. It is going to be the plumb line of God that separates the false church from the true. It

is not that the false church will not applaud the doctrine of the resurrection, it is simply that they will refuse to live in it and by it. That shall be the great divide, between those who have mere verbal profession and those who are in the Life.

What is the fundamental basis for our identification, our own identity and our own knowledge of ourselves? A priest is detached from racial, ethnic and cultural lines as well as from time and place. He is one who occupies the heavens with God. He is not at all affected or limited by present contemporary culture. He stands above it. He is transcendent, and therefore he is relevant everywhere and at any time and at every place.

SEATED IN HEAVEN

There is something about the nature of this priestliness of such an emancipating kind, that it is little wonder that it can give itself perpetually to the purposes of God, for the basis of its energy is endless and indestructible! This type of ministry is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, a minister in the holy place, the true Tabernacle that is not erected by man, but by God.

Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all... (Heb. 8:4a)

Our High Priest is in another dimension, namely, the heavenly place. Anything less than that would invalidate His priestliness. He has His true existence and reality in the heavenly sanctuary. If He dwelt on the earth, which is to say, if His values and mind-set were earthly, then He would not be a Priest at all.

God intended that those made in His image would live in the reality of heaven even while on the earth. They are on it but they do not dwell in it. When the smoke clears at the very end of the age, in the eschatological climax, there will only be two species of mankind to be found on earth, and it has nothing to do with race, but with earth or heaven. Those who dwell in the earth, whose hearts fail them for fear of the things that shall be coming

upon the earth (for that is all they know and all they look for and expect. All of their values are established in it. They are earthlings), and the other group are those who dwell in heaven. They may be on the earth, but it is not their place of habitation. Earth is not where they reside, but the place where they serve. Most of us as

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Christians are such earthlings, so moored in the earth, so bound by its gravitational tug, so connected by soulful ties of affection and investment in the earth that we cannot break loose to ascend up into the heavenly place.

THE Holy of Holies

This is a Priest who can come before God in the holiest place of all—and only the High Priest can. God has eternally fixed it. Therefore, in Exodus 25, it is interesting to read the description of that holiest place. God gives it to us in extraordinary detail. We know that the Tabernacle of God, like the Temple which came later, has the same essential architectural pattern and outer court, that is open to the daylight without any covering. The place of entry is the bronze altar for sacrifice

and the basin for washing, symbolic of our entry into the house of God through the atonement of the Blood of the Lamb. As we then proceed further, there is a second court and this is covered by skins, and there is a veil and the priests daily entered. There were not as many as trafficked in the first court, in the heavy labor of sacrifice and fire and slaughter, but by those priests whose function it was to light, both morning and night, the holy altar of incense, and to place the shewbread on the table of the Lord. It was a room that was shut off from the natural daylight. It received its illumination from a seven-branched candlestick, a much brighter light, not subject to the variables of the natural elements of weather and sunlight. It is a constant light and a brighter light, but there is yet a final and an ultimate place and few there be that have entered there. It is the holiest place of all! The Holy of Holies, and there is no daily traffic there. There was only one who could enter there in the course of an entire year, and that on the basis of the blood of a pure sacrifice. In that place there was no seven-branched candlestick, and yet it is the brightest and most glorious light of all. It is the Shekinah glory of God Himself. It is His Presence, directly over the mercy seat and over the ark of the Law.

And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. And you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony,

I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel (Exodus 25:17-22).

Paul cried out again and again, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Perhaps some of us have begun to emit such a groan as we become increasingly conscious of the magnitude of what this apostolic and priestly calling is. How do we move from an institutional age toward the restoration of apostolic glory in the church? How do we communicate the dimension of things that have been lost in our modern church experience? How are we to restore the sense of urgency and imminence of the things that shall shortly come to pass? How shall we warn our generation that God has appointed a Day in which He will judge all nations by Him whom He has raised from the dead? How are we to be fitted for such apostolic confrontation? Where is our courage and our boldness, our understanding and our sensitivity? We need to thread our way through all these painful adjustments and turn from the power of tradition and the established and institutional ways of men, in order to come to the formation of this living church, this powerful, prophetic witness, whose presence alone is a testimony to the principalities and powers of the air. Where are we to find our answers?

And there I will meet with you...and speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel (v. 22).

This is the alternative to becoming mere technicians and adopting yet another brittle phraseology. God bids us come into the holiest place of all, the high-priestly place that is open to those who come in the form of the Son of God, without father or mother, or beginning or ending of days. It is the source of the indestructible life, a source of inspiration and anointing of words that He will give us, if we are to fulfill the mandate of God. There is a holy place beyond, and there is an entry within that veil by the Holy Spirit symbolized by that burning incense on the

altar that continually ascends up to God, a picture of the worship that comes with the induction into the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There is a seeing in a much brighter light new things beyond the initial issue of salvation to the more serious and purposeful things of God. It is a deeper place that admits only ‘high priests’, who are called also to that which is apostolic. In this place is found the “stewardship of the mysteries of God.”

We will never glimpse the things apostolic and true except in this light. We will never fulfill the apostolic mandate and evangelize the world except it be by the words that are given with inspiration, and that are communicated with the intensity of the Life that is transmitted in the holiest place of all. God bids us enter into this place, and to dwell in that Presence, for there He will meet with us and give us all in commandment for the sons of Israel.

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

THE SABBATH REST

We are bidden to enter within the veil. It is the Sabbath rest that God has prepared for His people. Religious acts and works that stem from a bad conscience, that is to say, something that you feel obliged to do, are called dead works by God. The work of God comes always and eminently out of the rest of God and is always performed on the Sabbath day and no other. It alone is that act which brings sight to the blind.

When the Jews of Jesus’ time were antagonized and stupefied at this bewildering Man, who performed these glorious things on the wrong day, He could say to them in utter simplicity that it was the Father who was doing the works. You will know when you are in the rest of God when you are at peace, not because there is an absence of trial or tension, but because even in the midst of the turmoil of it, yet are you in the Shekinah place, the holiest place of all, independent of the

circumstances that are flurrying everywhere about you.

God is not cruel to set before us such a calling and to think that we shall be able to fulfill it on the paucity of our own human enablement. There is yet a deeper place, an ultimate place, an absolute place. It is the holiest place of all and it is for all those who are called to that which is apostolic and high-priestly. Consider Jesus as you have never before considered Him—the Son in whose image we also are called. For he who is joined to Him is one spirit with Him. We can understand Paul better when he says that he lives and moves and has his being in Him. Where are we and where do we desire to be, and where have we the faith to be? Do we desire an apostolic participation in the eternal purposes of God? Will we be able to stand against apostolic persecution and suffering, where we count not our life as dear unto ourselves? We have got to come into a certain priestly place without which there cannot be an apostolic fulfillment. Jesus has rent the veil and bids us come, on the basis of His qualification. Let us therefore enter within the veil with a true and sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

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The goal of this article is to explore evangelical mission commitments in the context of a twentieth century post-Constantinian, post-Christian culture.¹¹

Western society is becoming more pluralist, endorsing tolerance and idolizing relativism. This produces unique challenges for the Church. A Christian plausibility structure no longer holds, and modernity languishes. This context is new for the Western Church. Yates suggests, "... an inescapable reality in the twentieth century remains the relationship of the Christian gospel to relativism, how to balance the great danger of absolutes, with their oppressive and suffocating effect when improperly deployed, with a prevailing relativism."¹² He is referring to the absolutes of totalitarian regimes, and he would agree that some forms of Christianity could also become such.

Christian missions has always been involved in crossing cultural boundaries. Issues of cultural relativism are not new. What is new in Western society is the incipient pressures to idealize relativism and quash dogmatism. Certitude is not a virtue, and absolutes are anathema. How do we defend a gospel in a society that rejects absolutes and truth and is agnostic and even antagonistic towards matters of faith and belief?

EVANGELICAL IMPULSE

A definition of terms is always helpful especially when such terms are in a state of flux. Are we clear what is meant by evangelical? Shenk states, "The hallmarks of evangelicals have been their fidelity to the Bible, passion for missions and evangelism, and disciplined lifestyle. Evangelicals maintain that they have kept faith with the Reformation whereas theological liberals have abandoned the historic doctrinal commitment. Evangelicals also tend to be conservative in their social and political views and in their patriotism."¹³

Furthermore Shenk alludes to the possibility of an historical center. He states, "A basic premise of the Christian

faith is that men and women can be saved only through faith in Jesus Christ." He notes that this has been taught by the leading historical confessions of the Christian Church. While affirming that only those who come to Christ are saved, the Westminster Confession states, "much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may be very pernicious, and to be detested." The Christian Church's mission to the world has been based on this very premise.¹⁴

MISSIOLOGICAL CORE

I am proposing four theological constructs that are at the core of evangelical missiology. They are: 1) Revelation (the Scriptures), 2) the Trinity, 3) Religions, and 4) Eschatological Destiny. I will briefly explore how evangelicals have viewed these in a convergence model and how fragmentation occurs.

One's view of the Bible determines theological outcomes. This is an epistemological issue. The acquisition and certainty of knowledge and the ascription of meaning are related to the authoritative stance one is willing to give to a source. Issues of revelation, truth and absolutes, cultural conditioning and hermeneutics are all relevant here.

Theology as the acquisition of knowledge must be explored. Hiebert attributes the missionary movement with raising profound questions about the nature and limits of Christian theology. This is the result of the movement toward contextualization and the proliferation of "Christian" theologies around the globe. Hiebert queries, "If now we must speak of 'theologies' rather than of 'theology,' have we not reduced Christian faith to subjective human agreements and thereby opened the door for a theological relativism that destroys the meaning of truth?"¹⁵ Does contextualization automatically introduce a theological relativism? If so, how do we

relate to truth and absolutes? We will explore this issue and highlight Hiebert's distinction between *theology* and *Theology*¹⁶ as it relates to the matter of revelation.

Christology is critical to the missiological debate. An acknowledgment of Christ's deity, and salvific work is central. Both Christ's words and His works must be analyzed to decipher the missiological imperative and communicational impact. But the missiological issues are really Trinitarian. The nature of God, the work of the Spirit and the Church as the body of Christ are equally important in understanding the missional task.

Missions has recognized to varying degrees that it functions in dialogue with other religions. Should the Christian attitude be one of superiority, confrontation, supplanting, or of supplementing other faiths? It is often around one's view of religion that commitments waver, doubts are cast, agnosticism flourishes and missions is compromised. When answers cannot satisfy one's sensibilities or sympathies, beliefs are syncretized to assuage the angst.

Eschatology also plays predominately in missiological urgency. Patterson and Carpenter have documented well the Fundamentalists' focus on pre-millennial hopes and evangelical urgency.¹⁷ Moody and Torrey painted the picture of life boats in a sea of humanity, trying to pluck souls from the horrors of hell. The eternal state of the lost exerted a heavy burden on the shoulders of the saints. Eschatological vision framed the horizon.

CONSENSUS AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The New York World Missions conference of 1900 was one of several global conferences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ten years later the Edinburgh World Missions Conference excelled in the magnitude of its tasks and breadth of its endeavors. Edinburgh became a benchmark for evangelical missions and a barometer for trends to follow.

leadership from around the world. "Its aim was to demonstrate and inspire rather than plan and reflect"²⁷ Commission IV of Edinburgh dealt with the "Missionary Message and the Non-Christian Religions." In preparation for this report, D. S. Cairns posted a massive mailing to missionaries around the world, dealing with issues such as "points of contact between the Christian gospel and the non-Christian religions and 'the chief moral and intellectual and social hindrances' to the acceptance of Christian belief."²⁸

Two of the respondents to Cairn's report represent contrasting views about other religions. These have been described as fulfillment "yes" and fulfillment "no." N. Farquhar, Oxford scholar and missionary to India with the London Missionary Society, represented the fulfillment "yes" school of thinkers "who saw Christian faith as a fulfillment of Hinduism even as it fulfilled Judaism."²⁹ There was much in Hinduism that Farquhar saw as expressing doctrines of grace, forgiveness and salvation. Yates notes, "Farquhar stood for a view of Indian religion which said a firm 'yes' to much in it." Yet he still held to the Lordship of Christ and "while he saw Christ as bringing the best of Hinduism to fulfillment, the relationship was also one of supersession and replacement."³⁰

On the other hand, A.G. Hogg, Professor of Philosophy at the Madras Christian College represented the "no" side to fulfillment. Hogg noted that, "...if this be the real relation of Christianity to Hinduism, to call it one of fulfillment may be... permissible but the description obscures the fact that it fulfills by, at least partially, destroying."⁴¹ While in some vague way Hogg acknowledged the Hindus' yearning for God, he could not in any direct way equate that with Christian teaching expressed supremely in Jesus Christ. "Cairn's report laid out one very significant area of understanding, an approach to the non-Christian religions, which was to be sympathetic and charitable while holding to the claims of finality and 'absolute-ness'... for Christ."³²

The debate was forwarded through the years of the First World War and again focused at the IMC meetings in Jerusalem in 1928. Here we experience the strains of evangelical commitment and missiological fragmentation. It is my thesis that the kind of fragmentation that followed Jerusalem is paralleled in contemporary history. Evangelicalism is witnessing the same kind of stresses that were experienced during these pre-WCC days, although the Western ethos is somewhat different. A reflection on the fundamentalist-modernist controversy may help here.

Patterson suggests that "consensus served the missionary movement well for many years [but] it gradually unraveled in the 1920s and 1930s." Financial and cultural issues as well as the fundamentalist-modernist conflict were the reasons for divergence.³³ Fundamentalists worried about compromising theological truths. They "emphasized the priority of evangelism and the centrality of Christ's divine nature, as a measure of orthodoxy."³⁴ They were also concerned about the direction in which ecumenism and social involvement were going. Liberals on the other hand took a different approach to foreign missions "that sacrificed traditional conceptions of evangelism and the relationship of Christianity to other faiths."³⁵

THEOLOGICAL REASONS AND SOCIOLOGICAL REALITIES

We have reason to understand weaknesses in the Fundamentalist approach. It held to an extreme idealism buttressed by a scientific rationalistic worldview. Newbigin refers to the tragic split that divides Christians—liberals and fundamentalists.³⁶ Fundamentalists identified God's revelation as a series of objectively true propositions while liberals saw the essence of Christianity in inward spiritual experiences. Newbigin credits fundamentalists for the necessity of seeing the need of a tool (e.g., the Bible) through which to challenge the reigning plausibility struc-

ture. Their flaw was their propositional approach that co-opted the Bible as an inerrant factual scientific manual.³⁷ Newbigin states, "What is unique about the Bible is the story which it tells, with its climax in the story of the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of the Son of God. If the story is true, then it is unique and also universal in its implications for all human history."³⁸

Herein lies the issue we need to address as twenty-first century missiologists. If we move away from a fundamentalist epistemology (e.g., idealism or naïve realism), how do we reinforce the kind of certainty that buttressed their claims? How can the fundamentalists' commitments to evangelism, Christology, the Faith, and their view of other religions remain in tack with a shift in epistemological understanding? Can evangelicals avoid the trap of liberalism and maintain a burning commitment to Christ's kingdom, which of necessity involves missions? Newbigin feels that much of Western Christianity has made a move away from fundamentalist epistemology which is flawed but in that move has left no room for any "proper confidence" in the Gospel.

As a result of some of the work done at Jerusalem and the intense debate generated by the Laymen's report, the IMC commissioned Hendrick Kraemer to prepare a volume for Tambaram in 1938 which was entitled *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. There was a certain sense of inclusiveness in many of the reports given at Tambaram. The years between the Jerusalem, Tambaram, and Madras Conferences of the IMC (1928-1938) were years when "...missiology focused particularly upon the relationship of Christian faith to other religious traditions."³⁹

Carpenter tried to decipher what gave the fundamentalists mission their force and what it was that led to the demise of mission focus in the SVM and the conciliar mission movement. The theme of the SVM conference December 28, 1928 to

Two other themes developed out of Lausanne '74. Van Engen suggests they were the reflection of John Stott, who moved away from a solely 'proclamational' stance at Berlin in 1966 and articulated the social dimension of the Gospel at Lausanne. After much debate, Peter Wagner of Fuller Seminary acquiesced to the concept and endorsed the notion of "holistic mission" as he distinguished it from "holistic evangelism."⁵¹

The second major shift for Stott was the evangelical response to *missio dei* as articulated by the WCC. Van Engen notes, "So the motivation of the Church's mission was understood to lie in the Trinitarian nature of God's character itself and, by extension, in the nature of the Church. With such broad foundations, Lausanne's vision and goals became wider and more holistic."⁵²

The decades of the seventies and eighties saw a new flurry of activity in evangelical missions. Consultations on *Theology and Mission* were held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School on two occasions in the late seventies. Under the Lausanne banner a major conference was held at Pattaya in 1980 and the "First Conference of Evangelical Mission Theologians for the Two Thirds World" was held in Bangkok in 1982. In the midst of this discussion new forces coalesced. Globalization, technology, and travel brought world religions into closer proximity. They were given new attention by theologians and missiologists. It appears that Hendrik Kraemer's earlier prediction was being fulfilled. He prophesied 50 years ago that the real meeting between the gospel and non-Christian faiths was still ahead.⁵³ This meeting was becoming a reality. That is the context in which we find ourselves—a context, Newbigin suggests, for which the churches of the West are ill prepared.⁵⁴

NEW FRAGMENTATION

A new genre of literature is being investigated by evangelicals today. Paul Knitter identifies the writing as a subset of the "Mainline Protestant Model" rather

than conservative evangelical.⁵⁵ This is the work of evangelical ecumenists such as Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch and Stephen Neill. Gordon Smith suggests that their value lies in the fact that they have not been part of North American evangelicalism.⁵⁶ Each author affirms the uniqueness of Christ, and the scandal of particularity, but upholds the necessity of continuity between the gospel and non-Christian religions. We need to explore this literature and acknowledge the writers' contributions to the debate concerning other religions, a discussion which Smith suggests is "one of the most critical theological debates of our day."⁵⁷ Because these writers represent ecumenical and reformed traditions their contribution is broader than traditional Western evangelical theology. We must therefore take into account the diversity they bring to the field of missiology.

At the beginning of this article we alluded to the direction that David Bosch was taking, and pointed out the imprecision in his definition of mission theology. We cannot underestimate his stellar contribution to the field of missiology and particularly his thoroughness in appraising us of the spectrum of theologies being formulated. I suggest though that Bosch is one of the authors contributing to the diversity and fragmentation of mission.

In the introduction to his book he talks about "Mission: The Contemporary Crisis," a predominant theme of his work.⁵⁸ Bosch seems to be uncomfortable in prioritizing the missionary task.⁵⁹ Drawing from his panoramic perspective of history he identifies thirteen different elements of the emerging missionary paradigm, elements that could be labeled as thirteen different paradigms for mission. The difficulty with the paradigms is that sometimes they focus on the task of the Church, sometimes on the activity of God, and other times on the context of ministry. One of his significant conclusions is that evangelicals have strongly used eschatology as the focus for world evangelization.⁶⁰

In describing the evangelism paradigm Bosch notes, "Basic to my consider-

ations is the conviction that mission and evangelism are not synonyms but, nevertheless, indissolubly linked together and inextricably interwoven in theology and praxis."⁶¹ His eighteen addendum are informative and provocative. Whereas evangelicals focused on the task of evangelism and the centrality of the Church and Christ, some of Bosch's paradigms have these critical dimensions notably reduced. It behooves each mission board to assess their ministries in light of each paradigm.

THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS

A recent book, *Readings in World Mission*,⁶² collates original missiological writings, identifying and classifying the foci of missions over the centuries. Part II reviews contemporary paradigms of missions. The editor, Norman Thomas, takes the thirteen paradigms that Bosch identified and uses more extensive missiological literature to illustrate each.⁶³

The contribution of Lesslie Newbigin must be noted. Newbigin began to be recognized in broader evangelical circles with the writing of *The Other Side of 1984*. He suggested an agenda for the churches in Europe and more specifically Great Britain, elucidating the missional context that needed to be addressed there. His writing became better known in North America with the publications of *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986) and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989). Subsequently the Gospel and Culture Network continues to build on the contribution of Newbigin, exploring the post Christendom context in which the Church functions and ministers. Hunsberger states it as follows: "[Newbigin] has thrown down the gauntlet, challenging the churches of the West to look to our own contexts as missionary settings and to be as rigorous about what that must mean for our own missionary life as we have been about mission done elsewhere."⁶⁴

Newbigin recognizes the post enlightenment context of Euro/America, and sug-

ISSUES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

At one time in our history exclusivist and universalist categories identified contrasting views regarding other faiths—other religions. Today the agenda around the lostness of man, original sin, other religions, and Christ's salvific work is receiving more attention. Consequently other theories or theologies such as "inclusivism" muddy the waters.

As a result of this cursory historical review, I would suggest five things that contemporary evangelical missiology must take into account. While cultural and theological centering has definite validity, the tendency for a promising future exists. Here are a few reasons.

First, a centering of evangelical missiology will not be found in denominational theological formulations. Since the West is in a post-denominational era, evangelical constructs will be centered in larger, pragmatic churches and parachurch organizations. New congresses such as Lausanne need to step in the gap to help redefine mission for the twenty-first century.

Secondly, fragmentation will continue to be the pull of the twenty-first century. The pluralistic Western context lends itself to fission and diversity. Globalization is an example. While on the one hand globalization portends toward a global village, "glocalization" is on the increase. Religious, cultural and tribal localized identities are becoming more important in a "Mac World." Missiology will not escape the pull towards diversity and local expressions.

Missions have always had to confront cultural diversity. Issues of relativity are not new. However, in some respects, Western missions is traveling down a new road. In others, they are merely mirroring history. It is fairly certain that evangelical missions cannot return to the center it ascribed to for 150 years of history past William Carey (1792).

Thirdly, theological centering will be discovered outside the West. The Asian

Church has had to operate in a multi-faith, multi-cultural, relativistic context for millennia. The Western Church has not. The West has not learned to adapt to the new realities of relativism and non-majoritarianism. How does one address the "failure of nerve," and yet hold onto the universal claims of the gospel not in a triumphalistic manner but yet with conviction and passion?

Fourthly, missiology has only come into its own as a viable academic discipline in North America in recent years. It is obviously nuanced by contextual, theological, philosophical, and historical factors. I have explored the possibilities of a traditional evangelical missiological center and offered the reasons for suggested fragmentation.

Evangelical theologies of mission will proliferate. Hiebert was right that in this day of contextual theologies a theology of doing theology is required. The *process* of theologizing is equally as important as the *product*. Recognizing this, evangelicals need to explore the concepts of core commitments and acceptable boundaries. This is no easy matter.

Patterson has this insightful historical observation:

On the right, fundamentalists worried that crucial theological verities were being compromised—so they initiated divisive searches for modernists among the denominational boards, and some even set up competing missionary organizations. On the left, liberals began to clamor for a radically different approach to foreign missions that sacrificed traditional conceptions of evangelism and the relationship of Christianity to other faiths. Caught in this squeeze, the previously resilient Protestant missionary consensus fell victim by the mid-1930s. While the controversies between fundamentalists and liberals cannot completely explain this development, they contributed heavily to the loss of consensus.⁷⁴

Fundamentalists and liberal categories have proven deficient. Labels polarize. However we need to explore these categories and discern whether they are

anachronistic because of their content or their package. Covell recognizes that American evangelicals are not a unified group.⁷⁵ He identifies with Paul Knitter's classification of fundamentalists, conservative evangelicals and ecumenical evangelicals. The last two categories seem to coexist in the self-identity of those subscribing to the Lausanne covenant. It would be profitable to find out how each of these groups works out the covenant in practice.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Early in this article I suggested that Evangelical missions witnessed exponential growth where there existed core commitments or convictions that forged a compelling vision—a vision of God's goal for His Church, His love for the world and His plan for the future. The conviction arose out of a commitment to God's revelation, both in the Word and in His Son, the particularity of that revelation and presence of the Kingdom. These framed an evangelical worldview or plausibility structure through which the world made sense. This article has tried to identify the cracks that shattered the structure and the tensions that challenge its existence. The biblical doctrine of revelation, trinity, eschatology and sin are core doctrines that comprise a matrix of beliefs—all of which affect missionary awareness and mission commitment.

The approach of this article has been historical. I trust its lessons will point us in a direction for the future. The point is not necessarily to seek convergence. The point is to seek faithfulness to a God who is faithful. The point is to discern weakness where we have erred. The point is to affirm the missional intent of the Creator, the missional purpose of the Church and the corrupting nature of the world.

Is there anything we can learn? Let me suggest a few lessons. The above context necessitates five considerations in developing a theological process. They relate to: 1) revelational centers, 2) pre-

and bounded sets. The centered set analogy identifies the direction toward which those with a faith commitment are traveling. The bounded set establishes the boundaries of a concept, object, or reality. They still are needed in classifying reality. What are the cognitive and existential boundaries that define a Christian, that define missions, or identify the role of "other religions?"

The centered set theology exhibits a Christological focus that acknowledges Christ's deity, and His salvific work. No one has explained this better than Van Engen.⁸³ In a day when the meaning of Christ's lordship in a religiously plural world is one of the most critical issues the Church deals with, history can surely teach us a few lessons and point us in the right direction. May Christ be our point of convergence and in His mission may we find ours!

END NOTES

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- The International Missionary Council (IMC) was one of the continuation committees from Edinburgh 1910, which perpetuated discussions on Protestant missions themes until its merger with the WCC in 1961.
- Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 72.
- James Alan Patterson 1990, 86.
- Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy, The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992).
- The WCC journal *International Review of Missions* was changed to *International Review of Mission* because it was felt that missions had become too anthropocentric and it was really God's mission *missio dei* that should be the focus and not man.
- David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York, Orbis Books, 1991), 4.
- Ibid.*, 8.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*, 511.
- See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989), C. Jeff Woods, *Congregational Megatrends* (New York, The Alban Institute, 1996), Gene Edward Veith Jr. *Postmodern Times*, (Wheaton, ILL., Crossway Books, 1994), Graig Van Gelder and George Hunsberger, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996).
- Timothy Yates 1994, 5.
- Wilbert R. Shenk in *Modernity and the Decentering of Conviction*, article presented at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, April 1999, 5,6.
- Ibid.*, 7, 8.
- Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflection on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1994), 93,94.
- Big "T" theology must be acknowledged if we subscribe to any notion of truth or absolutes. See Paul Hiebert 1994:70. The postmodern issue of perspectivism also addresses the same issue. See *Onto-theology, Metanarrative, Perspectivism and the Gospel*, by Merold Westphal, article presented at Overseas Ministries Study Center, April 1999.
- Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: american Evangelicals and Foreign Missions. 1880-1980*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990), 73-103.
- Patterson 1994, 74.
- Ibid.*, 74,75.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*, 76.
- Patterson 1994, 78.
- Yates 1994, 7.
- It is well recognized that colonialism favored the expansion of Christian missions more than hindering it. Newbigin therefore intimated that missions flowed down the corridors of world power. With the explosion of independence in the post-1950 era, geopolitical factors were not as favorable.
- Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994), 7,8.
- Hiebert 1994, 9.
- Yates 1994, 9.
- Ibid.*, 24.
- Ibid.*, 26.
- Ibid.*, 26,27.
- Ibid.*, 28.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*, 77.
- Ibid.*, 78.
- Ibid.*
- Newbigin 1989, 24
- Yates 1994, 97.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*, 94.
- Ibid.*, 94, 95.
- Ibid.*, 131.
- Ibid.*, 132.
- By 1985 the NCC had fallen to 4,349, while the evangelicals or independents sponsored 35,386, "Charles E. Van Engen," A Broadening Vision: Forty Years of Evangelical Theology of Mission," in *Earthen Vessels*, Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, eds. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990), 209.
- Ibid.*, 209. Lindsell, *Missionary Principles and Practice* (Westwood, NJ, Revell, 1955), 28-30.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*, 214.
- Ibid.*, 215.
- Ibid.*, 204.
- Ibid.*, 219.
- Graham, "Why Lausanne?" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 28-30.
- Van Engen 1994, 220.
- Ibid.*, 221. Van Engen gives an excellent overview of the Evangelical activities of the eighties that influenced missiology. See pp 224-232.
- Lesslie Newbigin 1994, 19.
- Ibid.*
- Gordon T. Smith, "Religion and the Bible: An Agenda for Evangelicals" in *Christianity and the Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions*, Rommen and Netland, eds. (Pasadena, William Carey Library, 1995), 13.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*
- Bosch states, "From all sides the Christian mission is under attack, even within its own ranks," 1991, 518.
- See his concluding chapter in *Transforming Mission*, 1994, 511-519.
- Ibid.*, 419.
- Ibid.*, 411.
- Norman Thomas, ed., *Reading in World Mission* (Mary Knoll, Orbis Books, 1995).
- More reflection needs to be given on each of these paradigms. Furthermore, a taxonomy needs to be established that reflects evangelical paradigms of mission. For starters I would suggest mission as church planting, discipling, spiritual warfare, engagement, obedience, kingdom fulfillment, the gospel in culture.
- George Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America" in *The Church between Gospel and Culture* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996), 6.
- Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 32.
- Ibid.*, 32, 33.
- Ibid.*, 33.
- Newbigin 1989, 169.
- Ibid.*, 175.
- Ibid.*, 177.
- Clark Pinnock 1992, 18.
- Ibid.*, 15.
- Ibid.*, 158.
- Patterson 1994, 77.
- Ralph Covell, "the Christian Gospel and World Religions: How Much Have American Evangelicals Changed?" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* January 1991, 12.
- Ibid.*, 68.
- Paul Hiebert 1994, 11,12.
- In writing *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, Pinnock stated his pre-understanding, or overriding commitments that controlled his lesser assumptions and beliefs. He acknowledged that in his approach to the Scripture there was an issue that took priority over others. It is here that we agree with or critique the remainder of Pinnock's thesis.
- Hiebert 1994, 37.
- See Gene Veith 1994, 16-18.
- Samuel Rowen, *Missionology and the Coherence of Theological Education*.
- Ibid.*, 47.
- Charles Van Engen, "The Uniqueness of Christ in Mission Theology," in *Christianity and the Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions* Rommen and Netland, eds. (Pasadena, CA, William Carey Library, 1995), 183-217.

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