

## Kingdom and Church in Frontier Mission

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## Kingdom and Church on the Debatable Frontier

The death of John Stott this past month will prompt many a fond retrospect. At a crucial time in the emergence of contemporary missiology, he represented the gold standard of biblical mission to a generation of baby boomer Christians.<sup>1</sup> Any young student attending the Inter-Varsity Urbana missionary conferences can't forget the authoritative clip of his English-accented diction as he expounded the biblical basis of mission. His editorial brilliance in drafting the Lausanne Covenant in 1974 helped synthesize the controversial mission perspectives emerging at the time.<sup>2</sup> It was Stott's biblical integration that effectively umpired the arguments in and around the "evangelism vs. social action" debate that intensified that historic week in Lausanne. Now more than three decades later, after many sign posts of discussion and debate, the Lausanne declarations from Cape Town 2010 indicate that this conflict is almost passé. Stott's early advocacy of the equal partnership of these 'two wings' of mission seems to have succeeded.

This issue of the IJFM contends that a residue of this missiological tension still remains. A more complex dichotomy now runs silent and deep and profoundly shapes how we identify and classify the frontier of mission. This competition is sharp and clear in Dana Robert's recent review of the changing definitions of 'mission frontiers' through twentieth century Protestant mission discourse.<sup>3</sup> (p. 98) Two world wars tore at the mandate of world evangelization and the idea of a mission frontier broadened to include a church crossing boundaries into the problems of the world. Her assessment indicates that the language of the frontier swings between the *unreached* and the *oppressed*.

Both these emphases were given a platform at the Lausanne Congress in 1974. Ralph Winter's anthropological sensitivity to cross-cultural distance in evangelism introduced a new demography of the world's 'unreached peoples'. Latin American leaders Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar introduced a political sensitivity that exposed the social injustices and economic inequities in many a majority-world context.<sup>4</sup> One prioritized the cultural *differences* in translating and communicating the gospel for cross-cultural extension of the church; the other emphasized the ethical *disparities* that called for the transformation of social, economic and political institutions. Ralph Winter's more recent reinterpretation of Protestant mission history reframed this same binary tendency

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in his two paradigms of *Kingdom Mission* and *Church Mission*.<sup>5</sup> While not inherently contradictory, they represent two distinct ways of marking the frontier of mission.

This issue of the journal continues to explore the tension between these two classifications. The second part of Bill Bjoraker's interaction with James Davidson Hunter's *To Change the World* captures how a new understanding of culture orients mission towards the transformation of institutions (p. 75). Hunter's 'slight twist' on the great commission reclassifies the *ta ethne* of the world as 'spheres of life', as 'realms' of engineering, health care, commerce, art and law.<sup>6</sup> He calls for a mission "that seeks *new patterns of social organization* that challenge, undermine, and otherwise diminish oppression, injustice, enmity, and corruption and, in turn, encourage harmony, fruitfulness and abundance, wholeness, beauty, joy, security and well-being."<sup>7</sup> He distills how many would identify Kingdom-minded mission today.

Part two of Rick Brown's article might also resonate with a generation which faces increasing religious pluralism (p. 49). His theology of the Kingdom might help younger minds transcend a 'conflict-of-religions' approach they so often suspect of traditional 'church mission'. According to Bradford Greer, it's a new voluntarism calling for a more *integral mission* among the unreached (p. 61). Their praxis indicates a greater demand for the *strategic intersection* of church planting and Kingdom transformation in mission agency thinking. Alan Johnson picks up on Christopher Wright's paradigm of 'ultimacy' as a most effective paradigm for this integration (p. 67). And after years of work with disability in the overwhelming conditions of India, T.S. John has discovered the complimentary role of church planting movements (p. 89). Of course, a new generation isn't waiting around, but spawns new hybrid ministries from their own intuitive blend of *evangelization* and *emancipation*. In a spirit of integration so indica-

tive of John Stott, we'll continue to examine this interface of Kingdom and Church at this year's ISFM in Scottsdale, AZ, September 27-29. Stay informed at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org).

Looking forward,



Brad Gill  
Editor, IJFM

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL 1975.

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant – An Exposition and Commentary*, Lausanne Occasional Papers, No. 3, (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Dana Robert, "Mission Frontiers from 1910 to 2010", in *Missiology: An International Review*, Part I (Vol XXXIX no. 2, April, 2011) Part II (Vol. XXXIX, no. 3, July, 2011) (Electronic Issue).

<sup>4</sup> Rene Padilla, *Evangelism and the World, Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Int'l Congress on World Evangelization* (Worldwide Publications, Minn., MN, 1975) p. 116f.

<sup>5</sup> David Hesslegrave and Ed Stetzer, ed., *Missionshift* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids) pp. 164f.

<sup>6</sup> James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 256, 257.

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, p. 247.

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The IJFM is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: *The World Consultation on Frontier Missions* and the *International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions*. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the IJFM seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the IJFM (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the IJFM for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.

# The Kingdom of God and the Mission of God: Part 2

by Rick Brown

Ralph Winter said “the Bible consists of a single drama: the entrance of the Kingdom, the power, and the glory of the living God in this enemy-occupied territory.”<sup>1</sup> Mark Driscoll writes, “At its simplest, the kingdom of God is the result of God’s mission to rescue and renew his sin-marred creation.”<sup>2</sup> Thus the mission of God is to bring people into his Kingdom and extend its blessings to those outside as well. In the first part of this article I began to frame this drama, and we examined some characteristics of the Kingdom of God. We noted that the word ‘kingdom’ would have evoked a complex web of concepts—a schema—in the minds of people living in biblical times. They were familiar with what it was like to live as a citizen in a kingdom and to have allegiance to a king, and they were expecting God to overcome sin and evil by establishing a global and eternal Kingdom in which righteousness dwells, ruled by God through his Son the Messiah.

## *4. Stages in the Development of God’s Kingdom*

One aspect of the Kingdom of God that is different from earthly nation kingdoms is that it has stages of development. (1) It was prefigured in the nation Kingdom of Israel and was foretold by the prophets as its ideal successor. (2) God then inaugurated the Kingdom by sending Jesus his Son, the Savior-King, in whom the Kingdom was visibly present. Ridderbos wrote:

The secret of belonging to the kingdom lies in belonging to him (Mt. 7:23; 25:41). In brief, the person of Jesus as the Messiah is the centre of all that is announced in the gospel concerning the kingdom ... The kingdom is concentrated in him in its present and future aspects alike.<sup>3</sup>

(3) Since Jesus’ ascension and enthronement in heaven, the Kingdom has undergone a stage of growth under Jesus’ invisible reign that continues at the present time. (Most modern amillennialists and postmillennialists identify the millennium with this period of growth.) (4) This stage will end when Jesus returns manifestly to judge all people, eliminate dissenters, remove all evil, and “consummate” (i.e., complete and perfect) the total reign of his kingdom over all the earth. (Premillennialists identify the millennium with this stage.)

*Editor’s Note: An earlier version of this article was published in the bulletin of the Asian Society for Frontier Mission, Oct–Dec, 2010. Due to its length, part one was published in the preceding issue of IJFM, where the author introduces the first three aspects of the Kingdom and Mission: the Old Testament background, the conceptual grid that characterizes this Kingdom, and the people or ecclesiae of the Kingdom.*

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(5) Finally, when every evil has been eliminated and the world has been made new (1 Cor 15:22–28), the “kingdom of the world” will become “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15–19), also called “the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph 5:5), “the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:43), and “the age to come” (Luke 18:30; 20:35). This is commonly called “the Eternal Kingdom” (based on 2 Peter 1:11) and includes “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). MacArthur refers to these five stages as the (1) prophesied, (2) present, (3) interim, (4) manifest, and (5) eternal stages of God’s Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> It is significant to note that during the interim Kingdom, between Jesus’ ascension and his return, his throne is in heaven, as are the saints who die before his return. Paul refers to this as Christ’s “heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim 4:18).

It is common for theologians to lump the three middle stages together and describe the whole period from the inauguration of the Kingdom to its final consummation as a single development. This is variously called “the present Kingdom,” “the provisional Kingdom,” “the mediatorial Kingdom,” “the Messianic Kingdom,” “the Kingdom of Christ,” or in Western tradition, *regnum Christi*. The last stage is called “the future Kingdom,” “the final King-

dom,” “the Kingdom consummated,” and “the eternal Kingdom,” and in the Bible “the age to come,” “salvation,” and “eternal life.” It is this last stage that is frequently mentioned in the New Testament as the “hope” of the Gospel. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these are two stages of the same kingdom, named “the Kingdom of God,” which includes the very same citizens in this age and the next. This is represented in Figure 6.

Paul wrote, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). He went on to explain, “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:53). It is clear from the future tenses in most of the beatitudes that while the disciples of Christ have citizenship in the Kingdom and receive many blessings in its present stage, the full blessings of the Kingdom are in its future stage (Matt 5:3–12):

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Nevertheless, members of the Kingdom do have a “taste” of the blessings of the future Kingdom, especially in the fruit and gifts of the Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22–23)

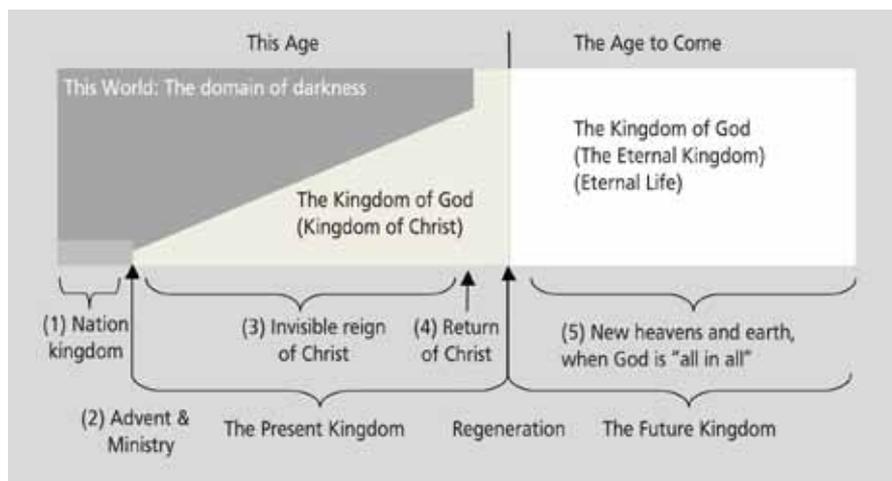
Paul describes the life we have now in the Kingdom of God as “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).

Jesus said it was the Holy Spirit who would empower his followers to become his witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8). This they did in both word and deed, as Jesus had said when he commissioned them “to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Luke 9:2). Ralph Winter has characterized the word and deed of ministry as “Church mission” and “Kingdom mission”:

I employ two phrases: 1) Church Mission, which I define as the winning of people into the Church wherever in the world, and thus extending the membership of the Church, and 2) Kingdom Mission, which we define as the work of the church beyond itself, going beyond Church Mission to see that His will is done on earth outside the Church.<sup>5</sup>

Here the word “Church” means all the people of God’s Kingdom as a community, and by “Church mission”

Figure 6: The stages of development of the Kingdom of God



Ralph Winter meant the ministry of calling people into the Kingdom as disciples of Christ. By “Kingdom mission” he meant their benevolent ministry to people and societies outside the Kingdom, in which their actions bear witness to the love and grace of God that overcomes evil. As N.T. Wright said, “If we believe it and pray, as he taught us, for God’s kingdom to come on earth as in heaven, there is no way we can rest content with major injustice in the world.”<sup>6</sup>

*May [we] know what is the hope to which he has called [us], what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. (Eph 1:18).*

### 5. The Good News of the Kingdom

The Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah (Isa 40:9; 52:7), proclaimed in advance the “good news” of God’s mission. They said God was planning to establish an eternal age of perfect righteousness and blessing, and that he would do so through his special “servant” (Isa 42:1; 52:13). Isaiah described this Mediator as the very “arm” of God (Isa 40:10; 52:10), suggesting the incarnation, and as a divine and everlasting king who is like a son to God (Isa 9:6–7; Ps 2) “his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Daniel said God would establish this eternal and righteous kingdom through a heavenly figure who is “like a son of man” (Dan 7:13–14) and that it would grow to encompass all the earth (Dan 2:35). The New Testament reveals that person to be Jesus. He began his ministry by proclaiming “the Gospel of the Kingdom,” meaning the good news that God was now inaugurating his Kingdom and calling people into his Kingdom community. Jesus indicated that he is the Savior-King whom God had sent and the heavenly “son of man” whom Daniel foresaw.

Unfortunately, the people of this world are all sinners and do not qualify for a Kingdom that is free of sin and evil, but

**B**y “Kingdom mission” he meant their benevolent ministry to people and societies outside the kingdom, in which their actions bear witness . . .

Jesus proclaimed the good news that people could be forgiven and become citizens of the Kingdom by repenting and believing in him. This offer is implied in his initial proclamations: Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.” The phrase translated as ‘at hand’ has been explained several ways, but the one that best fits the context is that the Kingdom is now available, “within your grasp.” The statement in Luke 17:20–21 that “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” is explained similarly by some to mean “within your reach,” meaning present in Jesus and available to you but requiring your response.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, Jesus is the sacrifice of the new covenant by which it is possible for people to be accepted into the Kingdom.

Jesus entrusted his disciples with the same message (Matt 10:7; Luke 9:2, 60) to all the nations (Matt 24:14), telling them to say “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9), and this is what they conveyed (Acts 20:25; 28:31). They announced in Christ the inauguration of the Kingdom and the opportunity to be accepted into it as full citizens and as heirs of eternal life when the Kingdom is consummated after Christ’s return. W. F. Arndt wrote:

What is offered to those that accept Jesus the Savior and King and become citizens in that blessed realm of which He is the Ruler is not wealth, not power, not health, at least not directly. With the forgiveness of sins they have received rest for their souls, a joyful outlook upon the future, the assurance of heavenly bliss, and with this righteousness all other things will be added unto them (Matt 6:33).<sup>8</sup>

Jesus highlighted the gift of the Holy Spirit as a major blessing of the Kingdom (Luke 11:13).

Jesus said “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). That task in the mission of God was passed from Jesus to his disciples; he said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). The mission he delegated to his followers involves more than proclamation; it involves the discipleship of people in every ethnic group: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20). Paul said, this involves “training” them “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,” that they might be “a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:12, 14).

Earthly kingdoms do not allow foreigners to become citizens unless they pledge loyalty to the king. Applicants who reject the king are rejected as candidates for citizenship. The same applies to the Kingdom of God: people cannot enter the Kingdom unless they accept Jesus as their King. Jesus made this fairly clear when he condemned the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida for not responding when they saw his miracles (Luke 10:13). He made it clear in a parable, when the king says on his return, “But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me” (Luke 19:27). He uttered a similar judgment against the wicked tenants in the parable of the tenants (Matt 21:33–41), and “when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about

them” (Matt 21:45). Jesus went on to make it explicit that the “son” in the parable was also the “cornerstone” of (the Messianic) Psalm 118:22, whom the (religious) builders had rejected (Matt 21:42). “Therefore I tell you,” Jesus said to the Pharisees, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it” (Matt 21:43).

Jesus gave similar warnings for those who reject the proclamation of the gospel by his disciples. He said:

And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. (Matt 10:14–15)

Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near. (Luke 10:11)

What had come near to those people but passed them by was the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God as sons of God, brothers of Christ, and heirs of eternal life. Charles Erdman wrote, “The very essence of the Gospel becomes embodied in the promise of a place in the Kingdom for all who will repent of sin and believe in Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

It is evident that the mission of God is not to institute a religion but to replace this fallen and sinful world with his perfect and eternal Kingdom and to save into this glorious new world all who believe in the Savior-King whom he has sent. By their faith they are born again of God’s Spirit as children of God and become heirs of eternal life in the age to come. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). God’s saving mission reveals his love for humankind, and his eternal Kingdom will reveal the fullness of his love and glory, not in a new religion, but in a new world. The

future Kingdom will have no temple or religion, but will be filled with the glory of God and the Lamb, by whose light all the “nations will walk” in love and harmony (Rev 21:22–24).

The biblical words for ‘send’ usually mean to commission someone to carry out a mission. For that matter, the English words ‘mission’ and ‘commission’ come from the Latin word for ‘send.’ Clearly the sending of Jesus as the Savior-King, God’s Son the Messiah, is central to God’s mission of love. The gospel can be seen as the proclamation of both God’s Kingdom mission in Christ and God’s invitation to join the Kingdom, enjoy its present and future benefits, and be his channel



of blessing to others. Thus one cannot fully understand the gospel without also understanding the mission of God, the Kingdom of God and the role of Christ the King in that mission. These all go together and are best understood as a whole.

Jesus sent his disciples to help fulfill this mission, telling them to “go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). This requires us to inform everyone of God’s mission in Christ to save people from this fallen world, to cleanse them from sin by Christ’s death and resurrection, to sanctify them by his Holy Spirit, and to make them citizens of his kingdom and heirs of the age to come, after Christ returns in glory. For in this present Kingdom we “have tasted the heavenly

gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:4–5), but our hope, as Paul often says, is for the glory of the age to come. This is “the hope to which he has called you” and “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18).

Paul summarizes this gospel in his letter to Titus (2:11–15a):

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things . . .

Peter summarizes the gospel in a similar way (1 Pet 1:3–5):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

We can praise God forever that we are among the people of God, whom he has called “into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12), and that God has commissioned us to extend his call to people in every ethnic group.

*But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:11)*

## 6. Mysteries of the nature of the Kingdom of Christ

Many first-century Jews had great expectations of the Messiah and his kingdom. Some of them anticipated a messianic kingdom that would include

all nations (based on prophetic passages such as Isaiah 2:4; 11:10; 42:1; 52:10, 15; 55:4–5; Psalm 2:7–8; Daniel 2:44; 7:13–14). It seems, however, that most Jews of the time were expecting the Messiah to set up a Jewish state and defeat its enemies. But the kingdom that Jesus brought differed from what was generally expected, and these differences constitute what Jesus called the “mysteries of the Kingdom.” In general he taught a very different concept of the Messianic stage of God’s Kingdom from that which people expected,<sup>10</sup> and in doing so he taught a very different concept of the Messianic King.

Jesus revealed the true nature of the Kingdom through many parables, figurative sayings, and symbolic actions.<sup>11</sup> Thus the Kingdom parables are also parables about the person and work of Jesus the Messiah, and to understand the mysteries Jesus revealed, it is helpful to know the common misconceptions that he was correcting.

**The benefits of Kingdom citizenship are present now only in part, but fully in the future.**

- The beatitudes (Matt 5:3–12)
- The wheat and weeds (Matt 13:1–43)
- The vineyard workers (Matt 20:1–16)
- The faithful servant (Matt 24:45–47.)

**The Messiah came, not in glory, but as a servant.**

- And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. (Luke 2:16)
- And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Matt 8:20)
- Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:5)
- They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their

cloaks, and he sat on them. (Matt 21:7)

**One becomes a citizen of the Kingdom, not by birthright as a descendant of Abraham and not by the Mosaic covenant, but by entering a new covenant of faith in Jesus as one’s Savior-King.**

- “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child like a child shall not enter it.” (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17)
- “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (John 10:9)

**Personal regeneration is a requisite for citizenship in the Kingdom.**

- Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:5)
- “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 18:3)
- And he [the king] said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt 22:12–13)

**Most people will reject the king’s offer of citizenship in the Kingdom and will be excluded.**

- For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matt 7:14)
- The sower (Matt 13:3–8, 18–23)
- The banquet (Luke 14:15–24)

**Many Jews and their leaders will reject the King and be excluded from the Kingdom.**

- The nobleman (Luke 19:11–27)
- The tenants (Matt 21:33–41)
- The cornerstone (Matt 21:42)
- The unfruitful fig tree (Mark 11:12–14, 20; Luke 13:6–9)
- And no one after drinking old

wine desires new, for he says, “The old is good.” (Luke 5:39)

**Citizenship in the Kingdom will be offered to the lowly and to Gentiles, some of whom will accept it.**

- The banquet (Luke 14:15–24)
- The two sons (Matt 21:28–32)
- The tenants (Matt 21:33–41)

**The number of those who become citizens of the Kingdom will increase gradually.**

- The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. (Matt 13:31–32)
- The mustard seed and the leaven (Matt 13:31–33 and parallels)

**Growth will come by divine grace.**

- The growing seed (Mark 4:26–29)

**Citizens of the present Kingdom may experience ill-treatment and loss rather than safety and prosperity.**

- “A disciple is not above his teacher” (Matt 10:24–25).
- “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34)
- Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27)
- So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

**The present Kingdom and its surpassing value are not visible to most people.**

- The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened. (Matt 13:33)
- The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matt 13:44)

- Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt 13:45–46)

#### The King will be killed.

- The tenants (Matt 21:33–41)

#### The King will triumph, rising from the dead.

- The cornerstone (Matt 21:42–44)
- The sign of Jonah (Matt 12:40–42)

#### The King's death will bring life to many.

- Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24)
- I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)
- The cornerstone (Matt 21:42–44)

#### The King will leave, return, and judge his servants.

- The ten talents (Luke 19:12–27)
- The two servants (Matt 24:45–51)

#### During his absence, the King will rule, bless, and empower his people.

- The vine (John 15:1–6)

#### The King will not immediately destroy the unrighteous but will postpone the reckoning until the judgment day.

- Weeds among the wheat (Matt 13:24–30)
- The fishnet (Matt 13:47–50).

#### Judgment will be based, not on religion or claims, but on the evidence of faith in Christ as seen in love for him and his people.

- “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 7:21)
- “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” (Gal 5:6)

- “I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18)
- “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.” (Titus 1:16)
- The sheep and goats (Matt 25:31–46). “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (v. 4)
- “These trials will show that your faith is genuine ... So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” (1 Peter 1:6–7)

One of the greatest mysteries is the suffering of the Messiah. This had been foretold in Isaiah 53 and Psalms 22, 110, and 118, but Jewish theologians expected this to occur near the completion of his conquest, not the beginning, and none of them expected him to be killed and rise again after three days.<sup>12</sup> Bright noted that “a Messiah King who should suffer and die was the last thing in the world that Jewish nationalism expected or wanted.”<sup>13</sup> In contrast, as Matera shows, Jesus clearly understood Psalms 22 and 118 to prophesy “that the Messiah King would suffer before he inaugurated his kingdom,” and he clearly understood the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 in the same way.<sup>14</sup>

Some scholars assert that the main mystery is that the Kingdom is present in a hidden form in Jesus, who hides his kingship until his exaltation.<sup>15</sup> The theme of Ambrozic’s book on the subject is to demonstrate that from the beginning Jesus’ kingship and kingdom were kept nearly invisible: “The present kingdom is thus a hidden kingdom, a reality which is already with us and yet is still coming, a fulfillment straining for its completion, a glory visible only to those to whom its mystery has been entrusted.”<sup>16</sup> It should be clear, however, from the discussion above,

that there was not just one mystery about the Kingdom, whether the messiahship of Jesus or the interim stage of the Kingdom, but there were many ways in which the King and his Kingdom differed from expectations.<sup>17</sup>

*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. (1 Cor 2:9–10)*

### 7. The Kingdom of God or a conflict of religions approach

Historically, many mission endeavors have followed a conflict-of-religions paradigm that sought to extend a particular denomination or a particular religious tradition in competition with other Christian denominations and non-Christian religions. So they have promoted the distinctives of their various forms of Christian religion, such as their particular theological formulations, their form of church polity, their professional clergy, their religious calendar, their rituals, their order of worship, their denominational associations, their style of religious buildings, etc. While all of these institutions can be useful for nurturing God’s people and for advancing the Kingdom, these customs and institutional religion in general should not be viewed as ends in themselves, because the New Testament does not even mention them, much less mandate them for Kingdom communities (ecclesiae). Instead of religious rituals, it recommends kindness and purity:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)

In place of religious rites and rituals, the New Testament emphasizes the Kingdom of God, living “in Christ,” praising God, praying in one’s heart, and meeting together frequently as loving faith communities.

The conflict-of-religions approach assumes the Bible encourages a social struggle with the different religions and

religious groups in the world, in which people of other religions are persuaded to convert to one's own, but this is not the biblical mandate. The Bible says "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against ... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). So the struggle is spiritual rather than social, and "conversion" is likewise spiritual rather than social, a struggle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (see Matt 12:26, 28). Biblical "conversion" is spiritual as well, not from one religion to another, but from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God. "For he has rescued us," Paul says, "from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13 NIV). Thus the Bible represents a Kingdom perspective of God's mission, in which the goal of mission is to advance the Kingdom of God in all social groups rather than to promote one religious tradition over all others. Charles Van Engen wrote:

Thus the major question is not if one is a member within a particular religious system, even if it is a Christian tradition. Rather, the crucial issue is whether or not one relationally belongs to the person of Jesus Christ.

The ultimate question is the question of discipleship—of one's proximity to, or distance from, Jesus the Lord.<sup>18</sup>

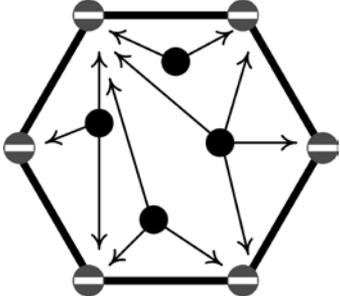
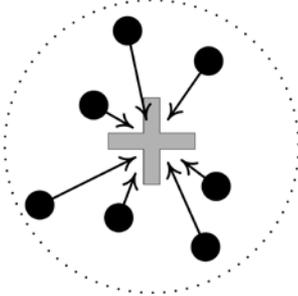
Paul encouraged fellowships (ecclesiae) of believers to grow through love and obedience to Christ's teaching. These faith communities were far different from the pagan religious institutions, which focused on temples, idols, priests, rituals, and sacrifices. They were not competing on the same level. Paul was polite towards Gentiles rather than polemical, drawing them towards the Savior (1 Cor 10:32–33). Rather than revile their idols, he proclaimed "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor 5:19). He showed respect to each socioreligious group by adapting his lifestyle to fit its customs and background (1 Cor 9:20–23). When speaking to Pharisees, he adapted his identity and preaching style to that of the Pharisees (Acts 22; 23). When preaching to Greeks, he praised their religious fervor and cited verses from their sacred poems (Acts 17), while staying true to the oneness of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 9:21). In Ephesus, for example, Paul and his "fellow workers for the Kingdom of God" (Col 4:11) taught daily for over two years, and they had a great impact, yet they never insulted the traditional religion of the Ephe-

sians nor their goddess (Acts 19:37). They proclaimed "the word of the Lord" regarding his Kingdom (Acts 19:8–10), without polemics, and they looked to God to confirm the word with grace and power. The result was that many believed and then abandoned their idolatry and secret arts on their own. Thus Paul is a model of the Kingdom-of-God paradigm of mission, as opposed to the conflict-of-religions paradigm.

Jesus is the perfect model of the Kingdom paradigm of mission. When Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God among Samaritans in Samaria (Luke 17:11–19; John 4:5–42), to Gentiles in Lebanon and Decapolis (Mark 5:1–20; 7:24–8:10), and to Romans in Galilee (Matthew 8:5–13), he did not command them to observe the Jewish religious practices that he and his own disciples observed. He did not proselytize at all. Although in Galilee he lived in close proximity to pagan temples, and he traveled in the pagan regions of Lebanon and Decapolis, he did not condemn their religious traditions and institutions but revealed to them something far better: the Kingdom of God and the surpassing grace of the King. The ones he criticized were the leaders of the "house of Israel," who were too judgmental and narrow-minded to receive the Kingdom.

**Sectarian Mission versus Kingdom Mission**

(based on Hiebert 1994, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, Grand Rapids: Baker, chapter six.)

	
<p><b>Sectarian Mission:</b> The goal of mission is to expand a particular denomination or religious tradition by encouraging people to join it and to comply with the membership criteria of its boundary markers.</p>	<p><b>Kingdom Mission:</b> The goal of mission is to encourage people to enter the Kingdom of God by becoming disciples of Jesus as their King, Savior and Lord, and to obey all he has commanded.</p>

When Jesus commissioned his apostles to make disciples in all ethnic groups, he told them to teach the new disciples to do everything he had commanded. This would have included his command to believe that God is one and is due their undivided love (as commanded in Mark 12:29) and what he taught about the Kingdom of God, as well as the good attitudes and behavior he commanded for the people of God's Kingdom. Jesus did not, however, command everyone to observe one particular pattern of worship, and he did not establish one himself. He commanded his people to be constant in prayer, faith, love, peace, and joy. In practice these virtues have been encouraged by religious services of a variety of forms, highlighting the fact that various religious activities and institutions are instruments of God's mission rather than the goals of mission. Their encouragement should therefore be in accord with what is best for the individuals and faith communities concerned rather than for purposes of proselytism. Guidelines for this concern were clearly established in a 1997 report issued by the Roman Catholic church and global leaders of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches after seven years of dialogue. They agreed that evangelism is "an essential part of the mission of the Church" (§8), but "proselytism is an unethical activity" (§93) and "must be avoided" (§94). Evangelists and church leaders should "respect the dignity of persons and their freedom to make their own choices" (§93).<sup>19</sup> Mark Driscoll writes, "Therefore, while not imposing religion on anyone, the church of Jesus Christ is to constantly be proposing reconciliation with God to everyone ... [using] timely biblical methods that are changing depending upon culture. This is the essence of what it means to be a missional church that contextualizes its ministry."<sup>20</sup>

E. Stanley Jones described the relationship between the Kingdom of God and religions, including forms of Christianity (which he called "the Church"). He wrote:

This kingdom is bound up with no culture, no nation, no race, and no

religion. It is open to everybody, everywhere on equal terms. Jesus never used the word religion, for he was not founding a new religion to set over against other religions, for religion is man's search for God. The Gospel is God's search for man. So anything good in any race, religion, or culture, which is worth preserving, will not be lost in the Kingdom. "I come not to destroy but to fulfil." Anything good that can be fitted into the Kingdom in culture or religion will be fulfilled in the Kingdom. "Into it the kings of earth bring their glories ... they shall bring to it the glories and treasures of the nations" (Rev 21:24–25 Moffatt).

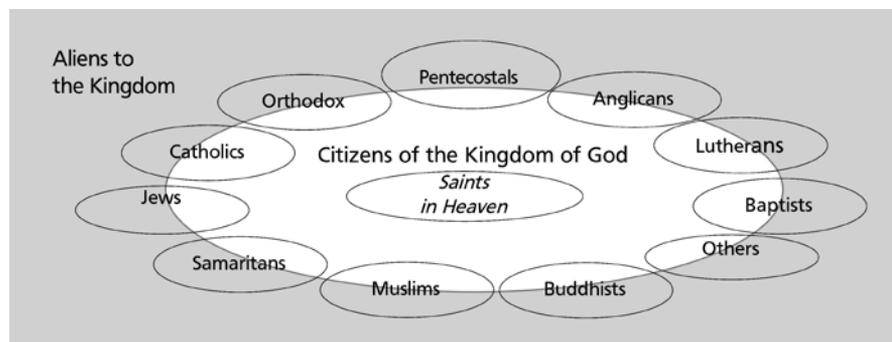
But the Church is not the exclusive agency of the coming of the Kingdom. Wherever men bring forth the fruits of the Kingdom, there the Kingdom is, to that degree, inside the Church or outside the Church.<sup>21</sup>

Jones observed from experience that there are people belonging to diverse socioreligious groups who accept the authority of the Bible, believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and "bring forth the fruits of the Kingdom," and who must therefore belong to the Kingdom. Today there are hundreds of thousands of born-again followers of Jesus and the Bible within non-Christian socioreligious groups, such as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others, and the amazing evidence of God's grace and spiritual fruit among them is undeniable. This situation is represented again in Figure 7.

Many Christians regard this situation as less than ideal and want believers in other denominations and socioreligious groups to leave them and join one like their own, so they can be alike and can benefit from the advantages of their own tradition. However, what is clearly important for spiritual growth is that people (1) belong to the invisible ecclesia of God's Kingdom and (2) be part of a local ecclesia of fellow members of the Kingdom.

The Greek word *ecclesia* originally meant an assembly of citizens, called out of their homes and places of work to meet together. In the New Testament it usually signifies local assemblies of citizens of the Kingdom of God or the citizenry of the Kingdom as a whole. In the Greek Old Testament it translates *qāhāl*, meaning an assembly, usually of God's people, and sometimes the whole community. The question then arises as to what constitutes an authentic ecclesia of the people of God's Kingdom? There are, of course, diverse ecclesiologies, as Kärkkäinen's survey ably shows,<sup>22</sup> but historically theologians have distinguished an authentic local ecclesia by its spiritual qualities and its visible practices. Irenaeus wrote in 180 AD that it is through the Holy Spirit that we have "communion with Christ ... and the ladder of ascent to God," and that "where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace."<sup>23</sup> So, by his definition, the spiritual indicator of an authentic ecclesia is that the Spirit of God is present, conveying God's manifold grace to his people through Christ.

Figure 7: The Kingdom of God includes people from many different socioreligious groups.



As for the practical indicators of a local ecclesia, John Calvin described them as follows:

Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence, since his promise cannot fail, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>24</sup>

This implies leadership as well, which L. D. Waterman makes explicit.<sup>25</sup> Different Christian traditions have different leadership structures, observe the Lord's Supper in different ways, and baptize differently, some not even using water,<sup>26</sup> yet they do have these things in some way. Even Jesus fellowships outside Christianity, such as ones among Orthodox Jews and Sunni Muslims, have leaders, study the Scriptures, celebrate the Lord's Supper, and baptize in various ways. Some Christians object to Kingdom assemblies like these which do not identify with a form of Christian religion, but they exist anyway, and it is important to give God time to develop these faith communities in the way he wants. God spent two thousand years working with the Hebrews before he sent Christ and inaugurated his Kingdom. It was more than a thousand years after that before the satisfaction theory of the atonement was developed, and centuries more before it took the penal substitutionary form that evangelicals now take for granted as the Gospel.<sup>27</sup> This shows that God works over time, and that we need to be patient while he works with new bodies of believers in contexts outside the Judeo-Christian cultural sphere, using them to spread the Word throughout their societies while bringing them into maturity as Kingdom communities.

While humans tend to value uniformity and oppose differences, these natural tendencies create division.

## **T**he spiritual indicator of an authentic ecclesia is that the Spirit of God is present, conveying God's manifold grace to his people through Christ

It is evident from the variety in the natural world and from the teachings of the New Testament that God values diversity. At the time of Christ there was religious conflict among Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, but Christ "himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility," making all believers "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:14, 19). When John was granted an end-time vision of the redeemed in heaven, as recorded in Revelation, he could discern representation of every language and social group. As for religions, there is no temple in the world to come, and presumably no religions: "his servants will worship him," and "they will see his face" (Rev 22:3-4), knowing God fully, even as He knows them (1 Cor 13:21). Then it will be clear, as E. Stanley Jones said, that God's "kingdom is bound up with no culture, no nation, no race, and no religion."

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. (Rev 7:9)*

### Conclusion

From the foundation of the world, God prepared the future Kingdom for his children to inherit at the end of this age (Matt 25:34), and we can say that the mission of God has been to direct history towards this goal. To that end God gave us the Scriptures and the Savior, Jesus Christ—who is God himself, the Word of God incarnate—to be the Messianic King of God's present (and future) Kingdom and to save people into it for God's eternal glory. Jesus fulfilled the divine mission in several ways. He pro-

claimed the opportunity for people to become heirs of the Kingdom of God through faith in him; he taught them what to believe, what to value, and how to behave as citizens of the Kingdom; he died for their sins and rose to life for their salvation; and he sent the Holy Spirit to guide his disciples, empower them, and sanctify them.

Jesus then commissioned his disciples to serve the mission of God themselves by proclaiming this Gospel of the Kingdom to every ethnic group (Matt 24:14; Mark 16:15), by discipling those who believe in each group, by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to obey all that Jesus had commanded (Matt 28:19). God gave the people of his Kingdom—the global ecclesia—the Bible, the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of the saints, and gifts of ministry to equip them to minister and lead them to maturity in Christ. Local ecclesiae foster the spiritual growth and ministry of God's people by facilitating their meeting together to study the Bible, to praise God, to pray for one another and for others, to be instruments of God's grace to their whole community, and to nurture the Kingdom qualities of love, righteousness, peace and joy (James 2:8; Rom 14:17). Thus the Bible reveals a Kingdom paradigm of the mission of God and of the role of God's people in this mission.

Jesus did not found an institutional religion or commission his disciples to propagate one. Nevertheless, organized religions have enormous instrumental value in serving God's mission. Christian religious institutions provide an organized means of evangelizing, baptizing, discipling, and teaching, supplemented by home groups. When disciples of Christ in non-Christian cultures remain outside of institutional

Christianity, they usually rely on home meetings alone for these services. On the other hand, when these disciples retain their native social identity and take a Kingdom-of-God approach to mission and ecclesia, the Gospel of the Kingdom often spreads throughout their social networks, leading many more to faith in Christ, including whole families.

It is evident from the Bible and from observation that the ultimate mission of God has not been to make some particular denomination or socioreligious group triumphant over others, nor to limit his grace to one of them, but to lead history and humankind into a new and perfect world, his eternal Kingdom. That future Kingdom will have no temple and no need for religions as such, “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22). God himself will dwell among his people (Rev 21:3; cf. Lev 26:12; Zech 2:10; 2 Cor 6:16), and they will delight in his presence. They will have perfect “righteousness, peace and joy” in their relationship with God and with one another, to the eternal glory of his name. God’s mission will have been accomplished.

*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Rev 21:3–4) IJFM*

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ralph Winter, ‘The Kingdom Strikes Back: Ten Epochs of Redemptive History’, in Ralph Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne (eds.), *Perspectives on the World Christian*

*Movement: A Reader* (4th edn.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), p. 411.

<sup>3</sup> Herman Ridderbos, 'Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven', in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd edn.; Leicester, England: IVP, 1982), p. 657. See also Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 56. More common are analyses such as that in Boyd Hunt, *Redeemed! Eschatological Redemption and the Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), pp. 66-67, 73. Hunt analyzes the usage of 'kingdom of God' into two categories. The first is God's universal rule in creation. The second category has three senses: "the kingdom of Israel," "the kingdom present" and "the kingdom consummated."

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Winter, 'Three Mission Eras and the Loss and Recovery of Kingdom Mission, 1800-2000', in Ralph Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (eds.), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (4th edn.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), p. 264.

<sup>6</sup> N. T. Wright, 'Building for the Kingdom: Our Work is Not in Vain', *ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> See G. R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35/1 (1992). He writes (p. 23), "May we translate the phrase 'in your midst'? That is possible, for Jesus was standing there; and where Jesus is, there is the kingdom. But that is a very rare use of the term *entos*. More likely we may take the meaning to be as in various contemporary papyri: 'The kingdom of God is within your reach.'" Wright takes the same view in N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Concepts and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 469. He writes: "But philologically the meaning is most likely to be a third option: 'within your grasp.' 'If you had eyes to see,' Jesus seems to be saying, 'you could reach out and take hold of the new reality that is already at work.' This reading is backed up by the following verses (17.22-37)." So also J. C. O'Neill, 'The Kingdom of God', *Novum Testamentum*, 35 (1993), p. 139. Luz suggests that it means both "in your midst" and "available to you" in U. Luz, 'Basileia', in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 202.

<sup>8</sup> W. F. Arndt, 'The New Testament Teaching on the Kingdom of God', *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 21/1 (1950), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Erdman, *The Gospel of Mark: An exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> "Jesus was announcing that the long-awaited kingdom of Israel's god was indeed coming to birth, but that it did not look like what had been imagined. The return from exile, the defeat of evil, and the return of YHWH to Zion were all coming about, but not in the way Israel had supposed." Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> According to N. T. Wright, "Narrative analysis of the parables is as yet in its infancy." *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>12</sup> See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (3rd edn.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), vol. 1, p. 205, vol. 2, pp. 433-35.

<sup>13</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> Frank J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (SBL Dissertation Series 66; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> This view conflicts somewhat with dispensational teaching; they say (rightly perhaps) that the main mystery is that the kingdom will have a hidden interim stage before it comes in glory. They differ from other scholars in claiming that this mystery kingdom was not put forth until the Jews had rejected the messianic kingship of Jesus and the nationalistic kingdom that they say he offered to them.

<sup>16</sup> Aloysius M. Ambrozic, *The Hidden Kingdom: A redaction-critical study of the references to the kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1972), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Ladd's view of the mysteries seems overly reductionistic. "The mystery of the kingdom is this: Before this eschatological consummation . . . the kingdom of God has entered this age and invaded the kingdom of Satan in spiritual power to bring to men in advance the blessings . . . which belong to the age to come." George Eldon Ladd, 'Kingdom of Christ, God, Heaven', in Walter Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 609. The actuality is much more complex, as indicated by the variety of parables required to represent the various mysteries.

<sup>18</sup> Charles E. Van Engen, 'The Uniqueness of Christ', in Ralph Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne (eds.), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (4th edn.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), p. 312.

<sup>20</sup> *Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness: The Report from the Fourth Phase of the International Dialogue 1990-1997 Between the Roman Catholic Church and some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders* (1997) <<http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj4/rcpent97.html>>.

<sup>21</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), pp. 292, 293.

<sup>22</sup> See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, 'Identity and Plurality: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspective', *International Review of Missions*, 91/363 (2002).

<sup>23</sup> Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies', in Alexander Roberts et al. (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1; New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1907 [180]), p. 458, §3.24.1. As examples of grace in the ecclesia, Irenaeus cites "apostles, prophets, teachers, and all the other means through which the Spirit works."

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: J. Clarke, 1949 [1559]), §4.1.9.

<sup>25</sup> Forthcoming in L. D. Waterman, 'What Is Church? From Surveying Scripture to Applying in Culture', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 47/October (2011). "A biblical church is a significant group of Jesus' followers having an identity as a church (*ekklisia*) who gather together regularly on an ongoing basis, with recognized leadership under the headship of Christ, to worship God and encourage one another in obeying all his commands (including, but not limited to baptism and the Lord's Supper)."

<sup>26</sup> Quakers have traditionally distinguished between the baptism of John, which was in water, and the baptism that Christ performs, which is in the Holy Spirit, saying the latter supplanted water baptism. The Salvation Army views enrollment and the donning of their senior uniform as the equivalent of baptism. Among evangelists and many evangelical churches, especially ones that practice infant baptism, the confessional role of believer's baptism has been largely supplanted by the sinner's prayer.

<sup>27</sup> Anselm of Canterbury proposed the satisfaction theory of the atonement in *Cur Deus Homo* (1098 AD), arguing that the death of Christ satisfied the debt to God's honor owed by humankind because of their sin. Thomas Aquinas revised this in his *Summa Theologia* (1274 AD) to a penal substitution, and John Calvin developed this further in the 16th century. Many evangelicals regard this doctrine as the core of the Gospel, but it took centuries to reach that status.

# Integral Mission and the New Mission Applicant: Absorbing the Positive without Neglecting the Essential

by *Bradford Greer*

**W**estern mission organizations are encountering applicants who eagerly desire to engage in transformational intervention and development in order to facilitate the development of just and equitable communities. The gospel is their impetus to work with the poor, the disenfranchised, and with at-risk groups. Passages such as Luke 4:18–19 and Matthew 25:31–46 constructively shape their passion to ensure that social dimensions of the gospel are actualized in their areas of service. Yet, these applicants are increasingly inclined to overlook a vital component of the gospel: Christ's work in liberating individuals and communities from the debilitating aspects of our human fallenness through his giving of the promised Holy Spirit. Thus, an unhealthy dualism continues to pervade people's understanding of the Church's mission. Though applicants are zealous to represent Jesus, the Christ, they are less inclined to have people encounter Jesus as the Christ. This trend is only going to increase over the next ten years.

This current trend is a natural outgrowth of a fifty-year shift in cultural assumptions and values. Due to this shift in values more and more people view traditional articulations of the biblical message as dehumanizing and over-spiritualized. A number of Protestant churches have been very slow to adapt to this cultural shift and changing perception. Part of the reason for their slowness is that these churches would have to acknowledge that their articulation of core doctrines are no longer adequate and need revision. It appears that the churches' commitment to their dogmatic theologies has outweighed their commitment to Scripture and to being culturally relevant.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is an irony of history that Protestant churches have aligned themselves with their traditional readings of Scripture and thereby created a need for another reformation. This reformation is already in process and the aforementioned trend among new applicants is simply one outcome of this process.

Rather than bemoan the cultural shifts within our western societies and people's consequent negative reaction to traditional dogma and creeds, I suggest

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integrating the positive developments that have arisen from these cultural shifts and through a courageous return to Scripture construct contextual theologies that make sense to those seeking to serve Christ in this generation.

Out of these theologies must come an integrated, holistic paradigm of mission. This paradigm of mission must intentionally value the tangible, social impacts of the gospel as well as the absolute necessity of the involvement of Jesus, the Spirit, and the Word in creating transformed communities. Thus, this mission paradigm will view these dimensions of the gospel as integral to the Church's engagement with the world.

In this paper I will describe this cultural-theological shift that is taking place and then suggest ways that a mission organization can constructively respond to this shift among their applicants. The intention would be to develop their applicants' capacity to understand and value *integral mission* as the Church's appropriate response to its world in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Dehumanizing Dogma***

Calvin's understanding of original sin<sup>2</sup> and the consequent statement in the Westminster Confession that "all are made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to evil"<sup>3</sup> have enjoyed predominance as the classical "Christian" position. This doctrine is used to neatly divide the world into two camps: Christian and non-Christian, good and bad.

However, many applicants no longer see the world this way. C. S. Lewis rejected this perception of the world back in the 1940s when he wrote:

The world does not consist of 100 percent Christians and 100 percent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name: some of them clergymen. There are other people who are slowly becoming

Christians though they do not yet call themselves so.<sup>4</sup>

Applicants are much more cognizant of the diversity within the human race and refuse to neatly divide the world between the "good" Christians and the "bad" non-Christians. They see many people doing good and acting nobly in a variety of circumstances. They also read the Scripture and see examples of goodness that do not fit into our classical paradigm. Cornelius exemplifies one who was considered a good man and God heard his prayers because of his goodness. And this happened prior to Cornelius hearing about Jesus (Acts 10:1–4). This only reinforces their perception that the classic theological position is irrelevant, harsh, and judgmental.

Rejection of the classical position is not a new development. Theologians have disagreed over the impact of the fall since Augustine. Erasmus and Luther debated the issue. Arminius disagreed with the Calvinist position. Brunner argued about it with Barth.<sup>5</sup> However, many churches have been intolerant of alternatives to the classical position and reified and pejoratively labeled alternatives as *Pelagian* or *Semi-Pelagian*. This historic intolerance has crippled the church's ability to adapt to the present cultural shift.

### ***Overspiritualized Focus***

More and more applicants also react negatively to the dualistic view of humans as bodies and souls and the consequent overemphasis on focusing on people's souls while neglecting the circumstances of their lives.<sup>6</sup> An extreme example of the negative outworking of this dualistic view occurred in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti. Some earnest Christians went to Haiti and tried to take 30 children back to the United States. These Christians were part of a small movement that encouraged adoption so children could come to faith. Many Christians were aghast at

the behavior of these missionaries and at the motivation behind this adoption movement. Adoption should be a means of expressing unconditional love and seek the well being of the entire person, not just her/his soul. However, this adoption movement was simply the natural outcome of a dualism that placed undue emphasis on people's spiritual condition.

This dualistic view of humanity has created a somewhat irreconcilable dichotomy in mission. Mission workers either focus on proclamation and church planting or on working to improve the conditions of people's lives through intervention or development. In addition, missionaries tend to disparage the work of those on the other end of the spectrum.

Due to the present cultural shift, an increasing number of applicants are aligning themselves on the intervention and development side of the spectrum. The outcome of this is that they place diminishing significance on verbally explaining the gospel. One young man's reply to a question about sharing his faith exemplifies this: "I would rather give a cup of cold water to the one who is thirsty."

This seeming irreconcilable dichotomy between proclamation and social action and the rejection of traditional, fundamental doctrines has created a quandary for mission work. First, the confidence of many of the new applicants in traditional theological formulations has eroded. Second, since Scripture provides the basis for these traditional theological doctrines, its authority and relevance is questioned. Third, the corrective move against seeing human beings as souls and neglecting of the social dimensions of the gospel has influenced new workers to place diminishing significance on gospel proclamation. Finally, this change is reinforced by the way applicants view humanity. People are not as evil as the Church's doctrines have portrayed them. Thus, it is increasingly felt that there is less of a

compelling need in mission for people to encounter Jesus as the Messiah than there is to help people experience fruits of the gospel: liberation from oppression and corruption, equal access to education, equal rights, and equal opportunity.

The objective of a mission organization might be to *co-labour with Christian development programs that address strategic needs and match action with clear gospel presentation*. This objective is increasingly going to be difficult to achieve in the present context. Is there a way forward in this changing environment? I suggest that one way forward is to absorb the positive within this cultural shift without neglecting the essential.

### ***Identifying Our Problem: Fallenness in Narrative Perspective***

First, what must we as Christians believe? Is it essential that we believe the doctrine of original sin as it has been historically articulated?

The doctrine of original sin arose out of the desire to answer the question: Why is everyone remarkably prone to doing what is wrong?<sup>7</sup> In one sense, embedded within the question was an admirable admission. Theologians humbly and honestly agreed that Paul described themselves when he said: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 2:23 ESV). These were not people who were pointing the finger at others. They overtly acknowledged that they also did wrong like everyone else.

It would have been nice if the Bible had definitively answered this question. If it had, then there would have been no room for disagreement over the answer. However, the Scripture does clearly affirm the human predicament: wrongdoing (sinning) is the universal human experience.

How is this admission that ‘all have sinned’ significant? How is it meant to shape the way the Church

## ***How is the admission that ‘all have sinned’ significant? How is it meant to shape the way the Church engages in mission?***

engages in mission? Is it enough that Christian workers seek to represent Christ and engage in interaction and development so that people are empowered in new ways to create just and equitable communities?

There are those who would assert that a Christian presence is unnecessary and may even hinder people’s attempts in creating meaningful community. The Swedish film, *As it is in Heaven*, asserts this very proposition. (By the end of 2008, this movie possibly became the longest running film in Australian history.) The local Lutheran priest in the film is unable to produce authentic community, and he even hinders its development. In contrast, those who increasingly detach themselves from the priest and the church are the ones who are able to create a meaningful community through the sharing of a common purpose, extended interaction, growing transparency, and gradual acceptance of one another.

The film constructively criticizes that which certainly needs criticism: a religious Christianity that fails to produce authentic Christian ethics in people’s lives. The film, however, intimates that creating an authentic, just community is possible apart from Christ. Is this truly possible? Rather than looking for answers in propositional statements, let us turn to the narrative of Scripture.

God had extended his loving grace to the people of Israel by freeing them from their slavery in Egypt. He brought them out of Egypt and took them to Mount Sinai. At Sinai God gave Israel the Torah so that they would know how to build fulfilling, meaningful communities in the land he was to give them.<sup>8</sup>

The Israelites entered the land with the promised presence of God and

the Torah. However, the disturbing narrative of the history of Israel is that even with the presence of God among them the Israelites consistently failed to follow the Torah. Over time the constructive purpose of the Torah was lost and eventually replaced by its effect.<sup>9</sup> Rather than being the guidance on how to build authentic communities, the Torah became the standard that showed people how “sinful” they were (Romans 3:19–20). The narrative teaches us that even with proper instruction and even with the presence of God, constructing just and equitable communities is virtually impossible for human beings.

The repeated failure of the people of Israel in building just communities should indicate to each and every Christian worker just how serious a problem our human fallenness is. Though it may be demeaning to view our fellow human beings as “totally depraved,” the Scripture appeals to us to humbly acknowledge that we as humans have a serious problem and that we ostensibly obstruct the tide of human, social, and economic development and the creation of just and equitable communities.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Valuing God’s Solution: The New Covenant***

Second, just as we must humbly acknowledge the debilitating impact of our human fallenness on achieving transformational development and the creation of just communities, we must also intentionally value God’s solution to our human predicament.

God saw how his people had repeatedly failed to develop authentic, God-honoring communities and he responded by giving a new covenant. In this covenant he provided a way for humans to be transformed and empowered to create authentic

communities. Ezekiel lucidly articulates this new covenant:

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my rules (Ezek. 36:25–27 ESV).

It was Ezekiel's articulation of this covenant to which Jesus referred when he told Nicodemus: "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5 NRSV).<sup>11</sup>

God's solution to the human predicament was to provide a means by which we could be transformed. The solution included the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven so that Jesus could pour out on us the Spirit. The Spirit would empower us to live according to the ethical standards that were enshrined in the Torah.<sup>12</sup>

By means of this covenant and the work of Christ we enter and actualize the kingdom of God in our midst. Without the empowering Spirit human beings are simply unable to create just and meaningful communities.

The tragedy of Christian history is that we have deemphasized the Spirit's role in actualizing in us the ethical standards to which the Word calls us. Instead, we have overemphasized the role of cognition, belief and justification. Our desire to be free from guilt has caused us to neglect the ethical standards to which the Scriptures call us. Our apparent neglect of biblical ethics and our lack of dependence on the Spirit in creating transformed, authentic Christ-like lives is what has fueled the contemporary antipathy to Christianity, an antipathy exemplified by *As it is in Heaven*.

This clarifies the reason why proclamation is essential to the church's mission. It is an integral part of how God enables communities to

be just and meaningful. Proclamation acknowledges that we humans do not have the power to overcome our self-destructive inclinations. Proclamation affirms that God has created the means for our release from the debilitating effects of our fallenness.

### *Affirming God's Purpose: Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*

Finally, God's solution enables communities to be transformed from the inside out and actualize the ethical standards enshrined in the Torah/Scripture. The actualization of these ethical standards is included in the word *salvation*.



The Scripture indicates that salvation is not to be solely thought of in spiritual terms (forgiveness, justification, etc.) or individual terms (personal salvation). The scope of salvation embraces individuals (John 3:16), communities (Acts 8:5–8), the environment (Lev. 25; Rom. 8:19–20), and ultimately the cosmos (Eph. 1:9).<sup>13</sup> In addition, God's purpose is that this salvation, this message of hope, of empowerment, of ethical standards, and of its transformational impact, be taken to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:47).

Contemporary objectives of sustainable development (Harris 2000) reflect the biblical, ethical standards in significant ways. These objectives are:

1. to develop a just and equitable society within a cultural milieu,

2. to enable the development of goods and services on a continuing basis, and
3. to live in ways that respect and preserve their environment.

These objectives align well with the church's mission. However, as Christians we do not expect these objectives to be obtainable apart from the direct involvement of Jesus, the Word, and the Spirit. Although we do not disparage the efforts of development work over the past fifty years or so, we are compelled to acknowledge that the results have been disappointing, and understandably so.<sup>14</sup>

Since salvation embraces the totality of individuals and communities, the Church's mission cannot be broken down and dichotomized into two opposing categories: proclamation vs. intervention and development. Integral to the Church's mission is the proclamation and the demonstration of the gospel. The Church's mission is to engage in *integral mission*:

Integral mission... is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task (The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission)

### *Conclusion*

A cultural shift has taken place over the past fifty years that has positive benefits. While it may have caused

people to reject traditional theological explanations of the world, it has enabled people to embrace diversity and change, to think reflectively, as well as expect authenticity in faith. These positive impacts of this cultural shift should be lauded. However, this shift has undermined people's confidence in traditional church structures and in the Scriptures, and caused them to question the value of gospel proclamation.

I suggest that mission organizations recognize this shift in the thought world of its applicants and adapt to it. If possible, I suggest they contextualize their theology so that it can highlight the essentials of the faith in ways that are not perceived as demeaning and that fully value all that God has done through Christ for his creation. In this way these organizations may help their applicants align themselves more completely with God's purpose and engage in integral mission, helping individuals and communities actualize the salvation that God offers. **IJFM**

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See N.T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 39-53; also Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke's View of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p.2.
- <sup>2</sup> See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. J. Allen. (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), Vol. 1. II.i.8.
- <sup>3</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes*, 6.4.
- <sup>4</sup> See C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1952), p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> For more contemporary digressions from the classical position, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 1981). See also Ben Witherington, III, and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p.144-153.

<sup>6</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 252-253.

<sup>7</sup> See Alan Jacobs, *Original Sin: A Cultural History* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), xv.

<sup>8</sup> Bradford Greer, "The Sharia of God: A Contextual Bridge for Islamic Contexts", *The Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 44/3 (2008). Also, Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians*. Edinburgh, UK: T. and T. Clark Ltd, 1998), p. 256.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Wright, "According to the Scriptures': The Whole Gospel in Biblical Revelation", *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33/1 (2009), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, 'Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective', in W. A. Elwell (ed.), *Encountering Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> See Greer, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> See also R.E.O. White, "Salvation", in W.A.Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> See Tomi Ovaska, "The Failure of Development Aid", *Cato Journal*, 23/2 (2003), p.175-188.

# Mission as Word and Deed: Transcending the Language of Priority

by *Alan Johnson*

**O**n a recent trip to Chennai, India, I stole some time in a little food stall to order my thoughts. I found myself between two friends on opposite sides of the evangelism/social action debate. I had always been able to dodge this bullet. Now I couldn't evade a commitment to either proclamation or Christian social action. In my own ministry I had just evangelized like crazy and tried to help the poor in practical ways. If people had a problem with my social activities I would say, "Hey, I'm not a role model, I'm just trying to do what God told me to do." I even recall some years back, in my inaugural address for the Hogan Chair of World Missions at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, stating I was glad that all the debate over evangelism and social responsibility was well past us. My friends tease me about that now. Debate continues and I find it's time for me to clarify my position.

Let me back up a minute and explain myself. I'm uncomfortable, like many of us, that the church has developed bifurcating language around ministry in "word" and "deed." But I have always felt dissatisfied with attempts to do away with the tension by using catchword phrases like "no distinction between word and deed." It seems to separate things just as much as prioritizing one side or the other. If there is no distinction, if they are equal, then I can just do one or the other without having to make any connections between them. The problem is that we can't assume the world will understand our "good deeds" have any relation to the gospel. What we do is constantly filtered by people through their worldview, and our unexplained deeds could take on a meaning that is totally unconnected to the good news of what God has done in Christ.

So I would say really clever stuff like, "Do everything, at the same time, all the time!" "We need the whole package!" But then I got knocked off the fence in an email discussion between these two friends and colleagues who had locked horns in this debate. The core of their discussion focused on the nature of the Gospel and whether that term was to be understood in the narrow sense of what God has done in Christ being proclaimed verbally to the world, or in the broad

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sense of embracing all expressions that are consonant with God's reign.

So, there I was parked in a food stall in Chennai, India, trying to sketch out a solution for these two friends. I had two goals in mind. The first was to provide some concepts to help build bridges between those who find themselves more on one side of the continuum than the other. The second is to bring some analytical perspectives that can potentially help to clarify issues as people work things out in real-time on the ground in ministry. As I pressed forward to answer my two friends, I had to review multiple mission theologians and church historians, some which I mention herein. But I profited most from the recent writing of Christopher Wright, who perceptively led me beyond the language of priority to a new terminology that integrates evangelism and social action. But before hearing Wright I think we need to unpack some of our conceptual tendencies.

### *Moving Away from Ideal Type Polarities*

What I have found is that most often our discussion about the evangelism/social action nexus is carried out in abstract terms. Almost like the Weberian ideal types,<sup>1</sup> we tend to profile the positions as polar opposites. On one end you have people who only preach the Gospel and do nothing to help people along in this world, and on the other you have people who do helpful things for others and never say a word about Christ. Reality is of course more complicated because the preachers usually get involved in people's lives, and visa-versa, the helpers often talk of their faith. Very few at the end of the day would be willing to affirm *only* proclaiming the Gospel or *only* doing social action without reference to the good news of Jesus.

I see two important points here. First, for the sake of developing argument we tend to utilize abstract scenarios, but in real-time everyday life we are much more integrated. Second, many of the pressing issues are not located in that theological zone where we interpret the

biblical data about the gospel and God's concern for human welfare on the earth, but rather in the real-time practice zone of actual concrete ministry situations. So it is not so much a theoretical matter of what takes priority, as it is a contextual matter of what we are doing or should be doing in any particular place or circumstance. Underlying all this debate are actual experiences (often negative) which color the contemporary discussion on best practices. It seems to me that if folks who lean to one side or the other saw more people living out the middle ground ("do everything all the



time"), they would feel less compelled to emphasize one side of the other. They would be quite happy pragmatists who preach and serve (and many journals would go out of business because nobody would be writing long essays about the subject!). But there is enough problematic reality between both ends of the continuum to keep the ink flowing.

My suggestion here is that the polar positions are not helpful starting points for discussion and that it will be more productive to find tools that are helpful in discerning how things are played out in concrete ministry situations.

### *A Theological Perspective: Matrices and Explosion*

If we are going to resist the temptation to argue from opposite poles, how are we to proceed? What I am proposing here is a possible way toward constructive dialogue that helps build a more integrative strategy and practice. I be-

gin with three theological premises we all can generally agree on, but I want to link them to two new interpretive constructs that might help bring clarity to various ministry scenarios.

1. The term *euangelion* (good news, gospel) was used in secular Greek to describe an event that changed the world, thus it was good news. The gospel writers appropriated this term to describe what God has done in Jesus Christ; this covers the entire redemptive event from his birth through his ascension and the pouring out of the Spirit.
2. This good news is then announced, the verb *kerysso* meaning 'to proclaim as a herald'. For those who experience this good news personally, they then herald the good news of salvation and the coming of the new age.
3. Good news calls for an individual response, but results in a corporate entity, the new community of faith. These local expressions of Christ's body scattered throughout the world bear witness to the good news and announce it to the world in word and deed as they live under God's rule.

I now want to run these basic New Testament ideas through two interpretive grids. The first comes from Paul Johnson in his *History of Christianity*, where he introduces the notion of "matrices" (sing., matrix) that are inherent to the Christian faith. The term matrix is used in a number of different fields, but its original meaning had to do with the source or origin from which something takes form or develops. The idea of matrices emerges from Johnson's interpretive sweep of Christian history in which he notes how the faith simultaneously unleashes both vital spontaneous forces as well as institutionalizing tendencies. The tension between spontaneity

and the existing institutional order is endemic to Christianity, but he roots this tension not just in the innovations themselves, but in the very ‘matrices’ of our faith as the gospel encounters each new context (1976:234, 252).

Johnson uses his astute historical perspective to help us see why our faith has the potential for manifold interpretation and action. He describes the teaching of Jesus as “more a series of glimpses, or matrices, a collection of insights, rather than a code of doctrine. It invites comment, interpretation, elaboration and constructive argument, and is the starting point for rival, though compatible, lines of inquiry. It is not a *summa theologica*, or indeed *ethica*, but the basis from which an endless series of *summae* can be assembled” (1976:28). He notes how “the theological wisdom of Christ, in providing a whole series of matrices for future experiment, was demonstrated again and again as new varieties of Christian action came into existence, flourished and declined” (1976:234). What’s important for our subject at hand is to see in Johnson’s insight just how the ‘matrices’ of our gospel can lead to “rival, though compatible, lines of inquiry”, to “varieties of Christian action,” and to “future experiment.”

The second perspective comes from the work of Lesslie Newbigin in his chapter entitled “The Logic of Mission” in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Newbigin challenges the idea of the mission of the church as purely obedience to a command. He suggests that the New Testament evidence argues for a mission that begins “with a kind of explosion of joy. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed. It must be told. Who could be silent about such a fact? The mission of the Church in the pages of the New Testament is more like the fallout from a vast explosion, a radioactive fallout which is not lethal but life-giving” (1989:116).

## **T**he mission of the Church in the pages of the New Testament is more like the fallout from a vast explosion. (Lesslie Newbigin)

What happens if we interpret these New Testament premises through the ideas of “matrices” and “explosion”?

1. One matrix that is always produced when the Gospel is accepted and a community of faith comes into being is an explosion of joy to shout the message. Just as any explosion radiates from the center out to the margins, so we see in the New Testament that centrifugal movement where the good news extends from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth among every tribe and tongue.
2. A second matrix is an explosion of caring. As God’s people, living under his rule, it brings us into a collision course with all that is not right in the world. Note in Genesis 18:19 that God’s choosing of Abraham to bless all the nations also includes “keeping the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just.” This matrix of caring will always challenge the status quo of the world system and its acceptance of the abuse of power, corruption and violence.

Because these matrices are not unchanging codes fixed by one single context, but rather provide the energy for unending creativity to generate new responses in new situations, we are not limited to only New Testament scenarios. Thus the matrix of shouting the good news meant that when distinct ethnolinguistic peoples without a gospel witness were encountered, a new burst of energy and translation was generated to address this. Although we have no record of Jesus rescuing babies who had been chained to die in the wilderness, the matrix of caring extended into new contexts and

led early Christians to rescue these babies in defiance of social norms.

### *Different Groups Do Different Things*

The more I have thought about the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility, the more I’m convinced that much of tension can be resolved when two sets of conditions, two “starting points”, are kept in view. The first is an appreciation for different kinds of groups. The second is the presence and vitality of the church in a given social setting. I will discuss them in this order.

First, let me affirm that at the level of the individual Christian in his web of personal relationships, sharing good news and caring in Jesus name are done holistically, often simultaneously, and not sequentially. Word and deed are wrapped together and hard to unpack in such close relations. Winter’s point that in family you never choose between evangelism and caring for needs is well taken (1990:99). In an ongoing relationship over time deeds are interpreted by words, and testimony to the Gospel is confirmed by our deeds.

However, when you move outside the boundaries of individuals and kinship relations the dynamics begin to change. We can expect the balance between word and deed to change when we consider local churches (modalities), mission teams (apostolic bands that function as sodalities), parachurch organizations, or faith-based NGOs. We run into problems when we try to treat all of these entities in the same way and hold them to the same balance of word and deed. The relationship between evangelism and social action is clarified if we allow that different kinds of organizational forms handle these two

matrices in different ways. They will do some things better than others. It's understandable that for groups or organizations to be successful they need to do some things to the exclusion of others. That organizations will focus only on evangelism, or only on Christian social action, is not at all strange, nor does it mean they deny the importance of the part that is not their focus; it's simply a matter of staying on course with their reason for being.

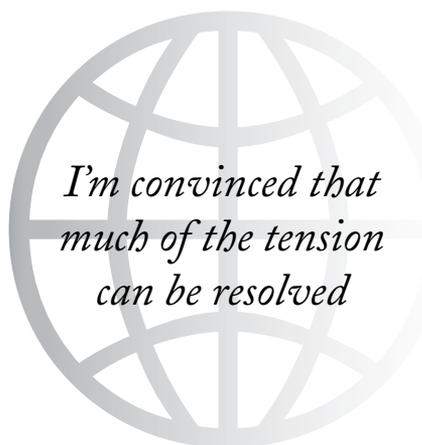
It is a bit more complex when we make a distinction between local churches and mission teams. While some people feel uncomfortable with this, I think it is more analytically powerful and strategically sound to see the mission team sodality as functioning with a much narrower agenda than local church modalities. Local churches have "family" type characteristics, work primarily within their own sociocultural sphere, have a multiplicity of giftings, and their members are embedded in relationships within the community. To evangelize and care in Jesus name should be the DNA of all local churches, and it's critical they develop structures or mechanisms to both evangelize and care as widely as possible. If for instance one of those mechanisms focuses only on social action, it still flows out of the life of the local church and its witness remains holistic in nature. In this sense, what individuals do in terms of witness and caring in their relationships is expressed on a wider canvas of a local church and its community.

When we consider the mission team sodality, I understand its function in a narrower sense, defined classically by the Pauline notion of taking Christ where he is not known. The priority is the evangelistic matrix and the goal is making disciples that form local church modalities and then bear witness and live out the values of God's rule. Whereas local churches do both things through the life and witness of their individual members and the ministry expressions of the church, the

primary purpose of the apostolic band is to make disciples and form local congregations. Mission teams may do many things that allow them to stay on the ground in a given location, but the focus is narrow.

### *Different Starting Points Need Different Kinds of Action*

Even if we own that these different kinds of groups (in this case local church modalities and mission team sodalities) have different kinds of priorities and do different things well, we also must face a second



strategic factor: the presence or absence of Christians, churches, and church movements.

Let me synthesize a sentence from the theological perspective above and then vary the scenario so that we can see how it plays out in terms of the relationship between evangelism and social action.

God desires to see humans redeemed and reconciled to him and to live out the values of heaven under his rule in a community of faith that is salt and light to the world.

Note that you cannot separate the different aspects of this statement since it's a cycle, where those who experience reconciliation are announcing the good news, then birthing new people into the community of faith, and who in turn are salt and light. But how do the different aspects play out in different contexts?

What happens if you are standing in the middle of 80 million people who don't know Christ, or who may have a minuscule number of Christians, and no viable church movements? In this scenario our theological statement takes on a more sequential feel because you have to announce the good news in order to build the community of faith that will in turn live out the message. That proclamation may indeed be wrapped in loving Christian social action, but in such a circumstance, explanation of the gospel is needed in order to make sense of that action, and the overall priority will be on evangelism and making disciples into faith communities.

Let's change the scenario again. What if you are in a place with many forms of Christianity, much of it nominal, with large viable church movements amidst crying physical needs and all kinds? And these churches have nicely dressed folk sitting in little buildings on Sunday and going to heaven while they ignore the marginalized outside their doors? Here we have the critical function of waking up these local church modalities to the fullness of what the good news means.

I need to make a few qualifying statements so I'm not misunderstood. First, to say that the work of the mission sodality has the goal of planting the church does not mean that the social concern it may be involved in is a "carrot on the stick" activity designed primarily to warm people up to hear about Jesus. It has to be genuine love in Jesus' name and because Jesus loves people, with no strings attached. Neither can this social concern be disconnected from who we are, because the "who we are" in Christ is what is driving our actions and that needs to be made clear.

Second, when local churches express God's compassion for the hurting in their local setting, it does not mean that they abandon evangelizing those who are non-Christians around them as well. Christian social concern in a place with visible and vibrant forms of

Christian faith can enhance understanding of the gospel.

Thirdly, we have to be careful not to export local church modality practices automatically into the sodality setting. It's an uncritical and naïve use of method. It has been my observation that many times local churches in the West that are not very socially active at all in their own setting, want to "do mission" by some kind of social action in a cross-cultural setting. This becomes problematic at several levels. If they are going to a place that has churches and Christians, their efforts are often completely outside of existing church structures. They can damage the effort and morale of these existing churches, or in other cases, they set a disempowering example of what social ministry is by implying it can only be done with funding from the West. If they are going to a place with few or no Christians, their assumption that people will "see Jesus" in their actions is unfounded. It's an assumption based on their experience in their home setting where there is more visible Christian faith and a common culture and worldview. It can have disastrous consequences (like the accusation of "buying" people to become Christians) rather than helping people understand more about the gospel.

### ***Back to Theology: Chris Wright's Notion of Ultimacy***

Having dodged the bullet for so many years, and having remained highly involved both in evangelism and social ministries, I personally have had no problem with using prioritizing language (i.e., first evangelism, then social concern). Years ago during a discussion about the relationship between word and deed a friend said that logically, at the very least, there has to be a priority on evangelism since you can't have Christian social action without there being Christians.<sup>2</sup>

There are some, however, who find prioritizing language very problematic.<sup>3</sup> Chris Wright offers an alternative sug-

## **T**he objection is usually couched in terms of the observation that . . . Paul did not campaign for the end of slavery

gestion that is the best biblical and theological basis I have ever seen for avoiding bifurcating terminology. The material that follows is drawn from Wright's *The Mission of God* chapters eight and nine on the Exodus and Jubilee.

Wright argues that God's model of redemption is the exodus event. The Hebrew verb *ga'al* at Ex. 6:6 and 15:13 are the first occasions (with the exception of Gen. 48:16) of the language of redemption. When a person is the subject of the verb the term is *go'el* (redeemer) (2006:266). The English word *redeem* from its Latin roots suggest a financial transaction where you 'buy something back.' But in ancient Israel the *go'el* had wider social dimensions associated with the demands of kinship. The 'kinsman protector' or 'family champion' was involved in avenging shed blood, redeeming land or slaves, and providing an heir (2006:266–67). 'The *go'el* then, was a near kinsman who acted as protector, defender, avenger or rescuer for other members of the family, especially in situations of threat, loss, poverty or injustice' (2006:267).

Wright asks the question, "When God decided to act in the world and in human history in a way that could be pictured as a *go'el* in action, what did he do?" (2006: 268). He points out that the exodus shows political, economic, social, and spiritual dimensions. "In the exodus God responded to *all* the dimensions of Israel's need [the exodus] effected real change in the people's real historical situation and at the same time called them into a real new relationship with the living God" (2006:271). He concludes that Exodus-shaped redemption demands Exodus-shaped mission (2006:275). He warns that there are two interpretive options that fall short of this holistic missional

hermeneutic: to concentrate on the spiritual significance and marginalize the political, economic, and social dimensions; or to concentrate on the latter so that the spiritual dimension is lost (2006:276).

Wright begins the chapter on jubilee by noting that the exodus was a single historical event. God was concerned that its basic principles be worked out in Israel's everyday life. "There needed to be an ongoing commitment to economic and social justice, freedom from oppression, and due acknowledgement of God through covenant loyalty and worship" (2006:289). Wright says that if the exodus was God's idea of redemption, then the jubilee found in Leviticus 25 was God's idea of restoration (2006:290). After working through the details of the institution he then looks at its evangelistic, ethical, and eschatological implications, concluding that "the wholeness of the jubilee model embraces the wholeness of the church's evangelistic mission, its personal and social ethics and its future hope" (2006:300).

The next twenty pages in this chapter in Wright are critical, but I cannot produce the argument in detail here. What Wright does masterfully is to respond to the objection that New Testament mission is only evangelistic and not holistic. He not only responds to this objection, he also sets out a perspective that embraces both evangelism and holism.

The objection is usually couched in terms of the observation that Jesus did not get involved in politics, and Paul did not campaign for the end of slavery, so therefore is not New Testament mission to focus on evangelism? (2006:303). Wright answers these objections on hermeneutical, historical and theological grounds. I want to draw

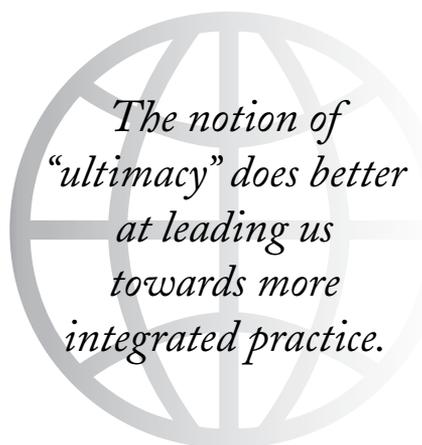
on just two of his points. First, he says that it is a false hermeneutic “to argue that whatever the New Testament tells us about the mission of the followers of Christ *cancels out* what we already know about the mission of God’s people from the Old Testament” (304).<sup>4</sup> Second, he looks at the centrality of the cross, then unpacks all of God’s purpose through the cross, and then shows how the cross must be the center of our mission: “The fact is that sin and evil constitute bad news in every area of life on this planet. The redemptive work of God through the cross of Christ is good news for every area of life on earth that has been touched by sin, which means every area of life. Bluntly, we need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess” (2006:315).

He then turns to examine the issue of primacy/priority between evangelism and holistic mission. Based on his theological work with the exodus, jubilee, and the cross, he suggests that the notion of “ultimacy” does better at leading us towards more integrated practice. Here is a brief summary of what this ‘ultimacy’ looks like (2006:317–319):

- Think of mission as a whole circle of all the needs and opportunities that God sends us to address in the world.
- If you analyze a particular local context, it will reveal a complex web of interconnected factors constituting the whole range of brokenness, sin, and evil across the entire human dimension.
- The key question then is, “What constitutes the good news of the biblical gospel in this whole circle of interlocking presenting needs and underlying causes?” (318).
- Virtually any *starting point* can be appropriate, depending on what is most pressing, so you enter the circle anywhere.
- But “*ultimately*” we must not rest content until we have included within our own missional

response the wholeness of God’s missional response to the human predicament—and that of course includes the good news of Christ, the cross and resurrection, the forgiveness of sin, the gift of eternal life that is offered to men and women through our witness to the gospel and the hope of God’s new creation” (319).

When I first worked through this material it just jumped off the page to me. It was the first time I had found a way of expressing things that did not



let anyone off the hook. To focus on only one side or the other is to have a defective and truncated mission. Because ultimacy keeps us focused on the Cross and how it addresses the full range of human brokenness, the need for priority language disappears.

### *The Contemporary Trajectory: Problems in Trends and Applications*

As I noted above, much of the debate on the relationship between evangelism and social action relates not to theological issues but to how that relationship is played out in practice. From the fieldworker side, when you are in a place with few Christians and trying to preach the gospel and plant the church, it is frustrating and even frightening to see people from local churches in the West who want to come and/or

finance “social ministry” so they can do mission. What you often find is that they are not motivated theologically, but rather by an issue, a technique or a trend that is currently popular and can raise interest and funds. There’s a loss of intentionality and commitment to the longevity of perspective required to announce why they are doing what they are doing. This kind of work retains the “form” but loses all the heart and ends up becoming “mission as stuff that makes us feel good.” It voids the outworking of God’s mission priorities in a given place.

Many cross-cultural workers in unreached people groups are seeing more and more visitors (and even new recruits to the mission) who are enamored by a particular social, economic or political issue rather than a vision of Jesus and his glory among the nations. In the part of the world where I live we now have people contacting our team who want to come and free sex slaves in a one week mission trip. When you are standing in the middle of millions of lost people your heart cries out to such well-intentioned folks “Please, preach the unsearchable riches of Christ!” Jesus is the pearl of great price and only as people come to know him can lasting change come to their social systems. We dare not demean the mission of God by doing stuff that makes us feel good. We can’t have our little forays out into the real world and then escape to our air-conditioned technology filled bedrooms, throw candy at people in Jesus’ name, or video document naïve interventions that have failed before the plane lifts off to return home. In some cases, full-time cross-cultural workers can become experts in playing the home base heart strings in order to keep a steady stream of teams and funds flowing. The missionary role devolves into managing visitors who want to “do missions” in the space of a ten day trip. That is mission on our terms, not God’s costly mission.

Of course, one can also reverse this scenario and see how field personnel deeply involved in caring for physical

needs would feel when people come and just want to “get them saved” and ready for heaven. What can be theologically clear from one side or the other gets very tangled as it is played out on the ground. It’s why I often quip to my missionary colleagues that missions education is lifetime employment. There is so much confusion about notions of mission. Even after you explain something in a crystal clear fashion people will go and do the opposite because that is what mission is to them, regardless of what the Bible says.

So what do we do in the real world where people lean instinctively towards either side of this evangelism/social concern issue? I believe we must promote a more integrated picture of mission. We need to talk in terms of ultimacy, not just priority. It allows us to deal with people on the basis of what has fired their heart first. Whether it is evangelism or caring for the poor, in whatever relational interface we find ourselves with them, we can start to build a more integrated picture of

God’s mission and their participation in it. The language of ultimacy keeps everything in view, helping our words make better sense, helping us to move towards better practice in our mission contexts, and giving this generation a more integral understanding of mission as word and deed. **IJFM**

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ideal types are generalized abstract concepts that describe not an individual course of action, but an idealized or ‘typified’ one (1947:12-13). Weber said that seldom if ever can real phenomena be found that corresponds to an ideally constructed pure type (1947:110); it is used for purposes of analysis.

<sup>2</sup>Later on I discovered Chris Wright makes the same point (2006:316).

<sup>3</sup>Wright enumerates some of the problems in using primacy/priority language. It implies all else is secondary; it suggests something has to be your starting point when in reality a serial approach is not always possible or desirable and does not fit the practice of Jesus; and to insist that social change will come as believers influence society reflects a flawed logic—people will copy what they know and if all they see is evangelism that is all they will produce (2006:319).

<sup>4</sup>Wright argues that “the paradigmatic force of the socioeconomic legislation that governed Israel’s life in the land still has ethical and missional relevance for Christians” (2006:304). This point is developed in detail in his book *Old Testament Ethic for the People of God*.

# How Do Cultures Really Change? A Challenge to the Conventional Culture Wisdom: Part 2

by William Bjoraker

The first part of my article on the missiological merits of James Davison Hunter's recent book, *To Change the World*, appeared in the previous issue of IJFM (28:1, January–March 2011). As we launch into this second part, let's recall the overall logic of the two parts.

## *Reassessing Culture and Culture Change*

Hunter offers a bold reassessment of the “common view” of how Christianity changes culture. He claims that the conventional wisdom fails to explain how cultures really change. We looked at five historical examples that confound the conventional wisdom on culture change. Then we began to exegete Hunter's own explanation of “the real problem” by examining his seven propositions on the nature of culture. I list these propositions again since they provide a necessary preamble to Hunter's thesis of culture-change.

1. *Culture is a system of truth claims and moral obligations.*
2. *Culture is a product of history.*
3. *Culture is intrinsically dialectical.*
4. *Culture is a resource, and as such a form of power.*
5. *Cultural production and symbolic capital are stratified in a fairly rigid structure of “center” and “periphery”.*
6. *Culture is generated within networks.*
7. *Culture is neither autonomous nor fully coherent.*

We begin this second part by turning to his four propositions on culture-change, beginning with proposition #8. I have also added a further proposition of my own, which accounts for an aspect of culture change ignored in Hunter's thesis.

8. *Cultures change from the top down, rarely if ever from the bottom up.*
9. *Change is typically initiated by elites who are outside the centermost positions of prestige.*
10. *World-changing is most concentrated when the networks of elites and the institutions they lead overlap.*
11. *Cultures change, but rarely if ever without a fight.*

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*12. Social crises, catastrophes and the consequent trauma provide optimal conditions for maximal culture change. (Bjoraker)*

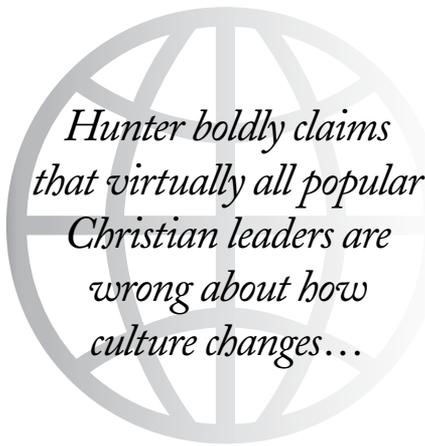
I will provide historical evidence and revisit previous examples from Part 1 to substantiate Hunter's view of culture change. We'll explore some missiological implications and finally suggest one example in mission praxis that seeks to apply Hunter's perspective. I also will try and provide some suggestions along the way on how we might use Hunter's perspective in cultures where we serve across the world. All page references, (p. \_\_) or (pp. \_\_), are to Hunter's book.

*Four Propositions on How Cultures Really Change*

*8. Cultures change from the top down, rarely if ever from the bottom up*  
Hunter states, "... the deepest and most enduring forms of cultural change nearly always occur from the top down." In other words, the work of world-making and world-changing are, by and large, the work of elites: gatekeepers." (p. 41). It is true that there are many economic, social and political movements which appear to occur from the "bottom up", but their ends are often limited and short-lived, unless "the top" embraces and implements the change. Political revolutions that succeed nearly always involve leadership from the ranks of marginal and disaffected elites who build new organizations. Though the impetus may come from populist agitation, it does not gain traction until it is embraced and propagated by elites. This is because capacity (*cultural production* and *symbolic capital*)<sup>1</sup> is not evenly distributed in a society, but is concentrated in certain institutions and among certain leadership groups who have lopsided access to the means of cultural production. In the fairly rigid structure of center and periphery explained in Hunter's Proposition #5, Hunter claims that culture-change happens largely via the elite "gatekeepers" at the center of cultural production.<sup>2</sup>

*Bjoraker's Comments:*

Here is where I would differ somewhat from Hunter. I think it clear that broad and lasting change will require reaching elites, but populist movements from the bottom-up should not be underestimated. When the bottom puts pressure on the top, if it is sufficiently strong and sustained, the top often responds and begins to change in the direction agitated for from the bottom. Change can begin in a number of locations in the society. The key is whether or not change reaches and is embraced by those with symbolic and cultural capital, those elites, networks, resources,



institutions and power structures that carry enough influence to be agents of systemic and structural change. Change can begin at the bottom, but it must finally become a wave that crests at the top, or it will just crash back to sea; here Hunter appears to be correct. But it is not entirely accurate for Hunter to claim "cultures change from the top down."

An example is the American Civil Rights movement of 1955–1968, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. In this case change did begin from a bottom-up populist movement.<sup>3</sup> True, it would not have succeeded in changing American society without President Lyndon Johnson embracing the cause and successfully getting a bill through Congress and signed into law as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Grassroots mobilization alone was not enough

to bring lasting culture change. It had to be embraced by the top for lasting change to occur. But, again, it is not accurate to simply say that the significant culture-change wrought by the Civil Rights movement was "from the top-down," though its final success required the top. So regarding this movement, Hunter is partly correct.

It may have been more accurate for Hunter to apply his Proposition #3 ("culture is intrinsically dialectical") to this perspective on the locus and direction of change. I'm suggesting a dialectic between the top and bottom... and the middle, and perhaps points in between. Though the systemic elements of culture are symbiotic, they're not symmetrical, not always rationally predictable or coherent. Culture is complex, often chaotic, filled with ironies and unintended consequences.

Fascinating examples of culture change are transpiring in the Middle East and the Arab world in the so-called "Arab Spring." As I write, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and more are experiencing political revolutions. Clearly these are populist revolutions and began mostly from the bottom-up catalyzed by Facebook and social networking technology (though those with access to this technology were not on the bottom of the bottom). In these revolutions, the top did not embrace the changes; the "top" was ousted. In the first two revolutions at least, the top leaders were faced with rejection by their own institutional power bases and were forced to resign. So the change movement was *de facto* embraced by elites near the top, if not the very top. To what degree whoever is now at "the top" implements the changes—"freedom and democracy" as advocated by the liberal forces the bottom—is still too early to tell as I write (August, 2011). But change is not happening from the top-down in these revolutions, as I understand Hunter to hold to be generally the case. And let us note that most revolutions end badly—the French (1789), the Russian (1917), the Chinese (1949)

producing worse tyranny and violence than the regimes they overthrow. But change culture they certainly did. The chaos in the current Libyan revolution is massive.

### The Case of Egypt

The current revolution in Egypt will be an interesting case study for this proposition. Readers may assess the predictive accuracy of Hunter's proposition and my analysis here one year, three, or five years out from this writing (August, 2011).<sup>4</sup> The euphoric and intoxicating rush toward a hoped-for democratic representative government by populist protesters without first carefully building the necessary democratic *institutions*—(a free press, free elections, a legislature with a healthy opposition that really stands a chance of coming to power, a judicial system not dictated by religious or ideological prejudices, effective rule of law enforcement) (Proposition #3)—makes it extremely likely that authoritarian power will win the day, trumping the *ideas* of freedom and democracy even if the majority aspire to them. Democracy is widely hailed but little understood by the people. Underlying the ability to create successful institutions and the kinds of institutions they create are the cultural values and practices that characterize a people. As Daniel Etounga-Manguelle said, "Culture is the mother; institutions are the children." Egypt has no cultural history of democracy or representative government (Proposition #2). They have only known pharaohs, kings, and autocrats. So, Egypt is now under the authoritarian rule of the Army.

Will modern Egypt emerge from this military dictatorship? What comes next?

If a power struggle between Islamists and the Army is the major contest, whichever of these two entities win, the result will be an autocracy. There are multiple parties, but largely two main camps—a broad constellation of liberals on the one hand, and the

**H**e contends that this model not only does not work, but it cannot work. On this basis, Christians cannot "change the world."

Islamists (esp. Muslim Brotherhood) on the other. Sharia law and democracy are incompatible. The Army may yield to the obligation they feel to the strong populism that ousted Mubarak, and facilitate free elections. If so, the top will have embraced the change coming from the bottom, and it could be lasting and society-wide. If not, it will be an instance in which a wave of change began at the bottom, but the changes advocated from the bottom did not crest at the top, so the wave crashes back to the sea. The Islamic organizations have a vast network of resources (Propositions #4, 6), and may vote themselves into power, and then make sure it is the first and last free election (just as Mubarak never held free elections). This is what Hamas did in Gaza in 2006, and what Hezbollah did in Lebanon in its *de facto* takeover in 2010.

If the populist movement fails, and autocracy again wins the day in Egypt, Hunter's Proposition #8 will be confirmed (at least in this instance), that lasting and society-wide culture change must come from the top-down. It will be simply a different kind of autocracy emerging—a shift from Mubarak's secular autocracy to an Islamist theocracy. Cultural differences do make a difference—the American Civil Rights movement changed society due to the presence of representative democratic institutions that emerged from a cultural history that values the rule of law and established institutions championing freedoms and rights. Egypt lacks both.

**Reflection Question:** *Can you observe any other top-down or bottom-up culture change in the society you are studying? What has catalyzed this? Explain the dynamics as best you can. How can change agents be most effective?*

### 9. Change is typically initiated by elites who are outside the centermost positions of prestige

Change is often initiated outside the centermost positions. When change is initiated in the center, it typically comes from outside of the center's nucleus. Innovation moves from elites and their institutions to the general population, but from elites who do not necessarily occupy the highest echelons of prestige, who are not the top gatekeepers. Hunter agrees with Italian social theorist Vilfredo Pareto, who argues that elites are either "foxes" or "lions" (p. 43). Lions are the leading gatekeepers who defend the stability of the *status quo*. Foxes are those who innovate, who experiment and take risks for change. Foxes are usually second tier elites, who challenge the authority of the lions. But it is difficult for foxes to maintain a stable social order, so the lions eventually win out. More interestingly, when the foxes win out, they become the new lions. There is a "circulation of elites" (Pareto's term), and foxes are both the primary change agents and the ones who arise to replace the new lions.

### Bjoraker's Comments:

This proposition is an elaboration of Proposition #8, asserting that while cultures change from the top-down, it's the second-tier elites who play the critical role. One of the authors Hunter critiques is Andy Crouch, currently an editor-at-large for *Christianity Today Magazine* (pp. 27–31). Crouch responded to Hunter in an online *Christianity Today* article (Sept. 12, 2010). Following is a quote from Crouch's article:

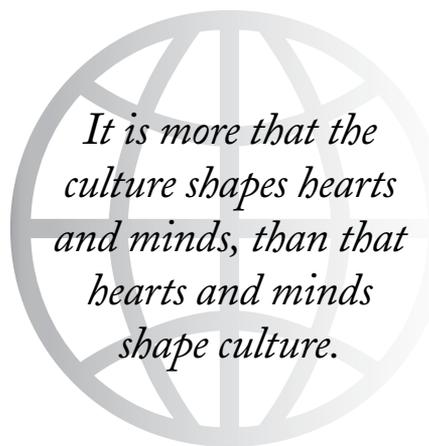
Hunter and I do have very different instincts on the role of cultural elites. Of course, by definition, elites have disproportionate influence on culture. That is how we know they are elites. Yet history is full of surprises,

not least the cultural reverberations from an apparently failed Messiah who spent most of his short career on the fringes of a colonial outpost where washed-up elites like Pontius Pilate were put out to pasture. And as I argue in the book ["Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling" (2008)], there are significant forms of culture making that can only happen at local scales, and they are out of reach of "cultural elites" precisely because of their local scale. The president of the Swarthmore-Rutledge Home & School Association shapes the culture of our children's elementary school in a way that Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, cannot. Indeed, a major function that elites like Duncan play in our society is to search the margins for creative models that they can implement more widely. During the health-care debate, a model of excellence invoked by all sides in Washington was the Cleveland Clinic. No disrespect intended, but: Cleveland! Does this not suggest that the language of "center" and "periphery" is too neat to be useful, at least in a complex society like the United States? (Crouch 2010)

Crouch makes a valid point. In complex, multicultural societies, there are just too many nodes or centers of tension, conflict, and overlapping disparate networks to be able to predict change as happening neatly—as either "top-down" or "bottom up." In peasant, or small-scale oral societies, this Proposition #9 has more applicability. But in spite of these caveats, Hunter provides a necessary corrective to the popular view that "grassroots" movements are *the key* to culture change. The metaphor of "grassroots" ("populism" in Hunter) implies connection to the top of the grass plants that grow from those roots, so faithfulness to the metaphor requires, by definition, that change reach the top. Local and peripheral movements may be one key to culture change, insufficient of themselves to change a society, except on a small scale. Such small-scale change in a

cultural enclave or sub-system can bring good, but is subject to the larger nation-state's hegemony.

*Reflection Question: If you are studying a peasant or small-scale oral society, contextualize this observation by doing some research to determine whether this may describe how change has taken place in that particular culture. For a larger, multicultural society like the United States or Brazil, your observations will face greater complexity.*



**10. World-changing is most concentrated when the networks of elites and the institutions they lead overlap**

The impetus for culture change, "for world-making and world-changing," is greatest where various forms of cultural, social, economic and often political resources overlap. "... when networks of elites in overlapping fields of culture and overlapping spheres of social life come together with their varied resources and act with common purpose, then cultures do change, and change profoundly" (p. 43). Persistence over time is essential; little of significance happens in three to five years. But when cultural and symbolic capital overlaps with *social capital* and *economic capital*, and in time with *political capital*, and when these various resources are directed toward shared ends, working in synergy, then, indeed, the world changes.

**Bjoraker's Comments:**

The maxim, "An idea whose time has come," captures this notion. An idea whose time has not come will have

insignificant consequences. But an idea whose time has come (*read: ideas that have converged with overlapping resources, money, knowledge; that are located within fields of cultural, social and political capital; that are operating near or in the institutions that are at the center of cultural production; all of which are moving toward a common purpose*) will have consequences.

Thus, ideas do have consequences in history, but not because they are inherently truthful, but rather because of the way they are embedded in powerful institutions, networks, interests and symbols. These factors—overlapping networks of leaders and overlapping resources, all operating near, or in, the central institutions of cultural production and in common purpose—are the conditions under which ideas finally have consequences.

**Analogies of Change**

This is one of Hunter's strongest propositions, so allow me to illustrate. A rough analogy of culture change according to this proposition would be the phenomenon of a flock of common starlings. Starling flocks of tens of thousands can hover in the sky, and then at a certain point in time, the whole flock can shift into various shapes. The analogy is imperfect since starlings do not have institutions and elites. But when the energy (resources) of the individual birds in the flock and the timing and direction of the starling flock's intended shift converge (overlaps), the whole flock changes configuration quickly. So also, a whole culture can quite quickly shift if and when these cultural forces overlap and align in common purpose.

Another analogy is the notion of a 'tipping point' found in Malcolm Gladwell's book.<sup>5</sup> Imagine for a moment someone making a stack of quarters (American 25 cent pieces) with each successive quarter slightly off center in the same direction. This will soon resemble the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The placing of which quarter will cause the tipping point? One more? Two more? Gladwell offers

examples of cultural products that passed a certain point in popularity in the market and then “tip.” He offers the example of “Hush Puppie” shoes, whose sales spread from a few downtown Manhattan hipster shops to every mall in America in the space of two years (2000:5). He also draws analogies to disease epidemics that “go viral.” And at certain times, under certain conditions, “ideas, products, messages and behaviors spread like viruses do” (2000:7). Under certain conditions there is rampant contagiousness, when one little causal factor can have dramatic effects.

The recent Tunisian Revolution of December 2010, which ended with the ouster of longtime president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, is an example of forces in a society reaching a “tipping point.” Cultural forces were poised or in a dynamic state of tension such that it was ready to tip. Escalating protests and street demonstrations were sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street vendor, whose outrage and despair over the confiscation of his produce cart drove him to this extreme act. Facebook and Twitter quickly connected and united these forces in networking power. The forces unleashed by this “tipping point” then spread to Egypt, ousting Mubarak and on to Libya, finally felling Gaddafi; and the consequences are still in process as I write.

**Reflection Question:** *Do a study of other societies in which a tipping point has been reached, when several overlapping dimensions of the culture converged to make this happen. How might one facilitate various networks and institutions to join forces to facilitate Kingdom of God “tipping point” culture change?*

### 11. Cultures change, but rarely if ever without a fight

Conflict is one of the permanent features of cultural change. Culture is terrain in which the boundaries between ideals, interests and power (and the structures and institutions in which

**I**ndividualism has severely weakened the influence of the Christian worldview, no matter how many may profess Christian faith.

they are embodied) are contested. Institutions and groups defend their understanding of the world against alternatives. The view and structure most desired and plausible to those who have the resources and power is the one that prevails and creates a hegemony (dominance). This is the phenomenon and process of social and political legitimation and delegitimation. Hunter states that legitimation never goes uncontested, that the struggle is never even, nor is it fair. For a dramatic example, think of the chaotic struggle that will play out in Libya for who will be the legitimate successors to Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. Who, among the cluster of tribes, will be able to establish legitimacy with the people of the nation-state Libya?

#### **Bjoraker's Comments:**

Typically it is through different manifestations of conflict and contest that change in culture is forged. Challenges to the status quo must “articulate” with the social setting” (p.44), which means

An alternative vision of society... must resonate closely enough with the social environment that it then becomes plausible to the people. If it does not, the challenge will be seen as esoteric, eccentric, parochial, unrealistic, or irrelevant.

Leaders implement all intentional change. If the leaders lead too far out in front, they will not gain or retain a loyal following. If they are too close to the people, they are not leaders. There must be sociological connecting tissue, a level of bonding between leading elites and the masses, or elites will fail to be instrumental in bringing change to the broader society. This process always involves tension and conflict. Political elections are one means of the contest. But, describing how it works, Karl von Clausewitz said, “war is the continuation of politics by other means.”

**Reflection Question:** *What are the best ways to fight the battle for culture change within the people group or culture to which you are called? There are many options, so you need to choose your battle(s) wisely. Who are the effective leaders functioning? Why are they effective? How can you help your organization to network with those fighting necessary spiritual-cultural battles, and join forces as allies in a common campaign?*

#### **Bjoraker's Added Proposition on Culture Change:**

### 12. Social crises, catastrophes and the consequent trauma provide optimal conditions for maximal culture change

I think it vital to include a proposition that Hunter did not address—the important role of *liminality* in culture change (from the Latin word *limen*, meaning “a threshold”). It’s defined as “a psychological, neurological, or metaphysical subjective state, conscious or unconscious, of being on the threshold of or between two different existential planes” (Oxford English Dictionary). The term has been used in anthropology to describe the state that exists during a *rite of passage*, the limbo condition when the old phase no longer exists and the new phase has not yet begun. During such extraordinary times, humans are in a more pliable, malleable state than during their ordinary lives. So these are times when individuals and societies can may readily change.

Crises in the form of social and natural catastrophes—such as war, disease epidemics, natural disasters and economic collapse—create a liminal state which motivates people to seek new answers, new ideas, and new resources that give meaning to cope with and prevail in the crisis and its traumatic effects. This is especially

true when the prevailing religion(s) and/or worldview fail to provide satisfactory explanation for the crisis, and do not provide meaning and comfort for the suffering. When they fail to provide the resources against destructive forces, new religions and worldview(s) may emerge or be adopted, or new social networks and institutions initiated. This is a *kairos* moment for change agents to step in, to facilitate change in Kingdom of God directions.

### ***Crisis and Change in History***

Below I discuss a few historical examples of rapid culture change in response to crisis, catastrophe and trauma:

1. *The Growth of Christianity across the Roman Empire during major disease epidemics of the Second and Third Centuries A.D.* As a result of the first major epidemic, “the Plague of Galen” (165–69 AD), a quarter to a third of the population died. During the second (251 AD), five thousand people per day were reported to have died in the city of Rome alone. These diseases were apparently small pox or measles (undiagnosed at that time). Most importantly, during these epidemics the pagan gods were shown to be impotent in aiding the population; and the philosophers had no answers. In contrast, Christianity provided *superior explanations* (The Fall, sin and Satan), *superior meaning* (suffering provides moral testing, sifting, and moral character formation), and *superior comfort* (eternal life in heaven awaits the departed). Christians demonstrated *superior sacrificial love, service and solidarity* in the face of suffering. Christians had a higher rate of survival from the epidemics than the



- pagans, due to their caring communities. People were impressed and drawn to the new religion and its practices. This resulted in remarkable growth of Christianity during these times and changed the culture of Europe (Stark 1996:73–90).
2. *The Window of Receptivity to the Gospel in Japan after World War II.* As a result of the disastrous calamity that befell the Japanese people in 1945, they gave up their faith in the emperor as a god. The emperor himself renounced his divinity, for it had failed to save them from the unspeakable horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their worldview collapsed and introduced a period of liminality (roughly 1945–1950), a period in which there was a higher rate of Japanese turning to Christianity than ever before or since. Though the turn to Christianity did not continue, the Japanese did turn *en masse* from militarism and emperor worship to modern secularism; the culture had radically changed.
  3. *The American Civil Rights movement of 1955–1968.* The Civil Rights movement culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 brought radical

changes for African Americans. However these changes came out of a cauldron of crisis and trauma—the lynching and sufferings of the blacks in the South, the marches, the resistance to them, the political assassinations of the 1960s culminating in the martyrdom of Dr. King himself. All this was in the broader context of the trauma of the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement at home, the “generation gap,” the hip, drug, back-to-nature, rock music and counterculture movements. The “seismic sixties” brought culture change to America.

4. *The Terrorist Attacks of 9/11.* The catastrophic terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001 effected social, political and cultural change in ways too numerous to list or describe here, but for a sampling—the launching of two wars dramatically changed the lives of several nations, the creation of new institutions (e.g., The Department of Homeland Security), change in airport and domestic security systems, the soul-searching within the Islamic world as it seeks to come to terms with modernity, new polarizations of many kinds, and many films and songs emerging in popular culture. These comprise some of the changes in culture resulting from this national trauma.

*Reflection Question: How can you and your agency be ready to wisely step in with resources and use to full advantage any catastrophe or crisis among the people you are called to serve, such that you facilitate culture change toward Kingdom of God values? Anticipate crises, and prepare to use them for culture change.*

## *Evidence of Culture Change in History that Verifies the Twelve Propositions*

Hunter offers a brisk overview of key moments in Christian history and of the rise of the European Enlightenment and its various manifestations to provide empirical evidence for the propositions about culture and culture change (pp. 48–78). I summarize them here.

The numbers after the descriptions of the cultural change movements indicate which of the twelve the propositions that operated in the culture and culture change.

### *1. The Rise of Christianity as the Dominant Religious and Cultural Force in the Roman Empire in Just 300 Years*

This astounding transformation of culture moved from periphery to center, through networks, institutional network of the synagogues, utilizing resources like education, symbolic capital, and institutions in urban centers.<sup>6</sup> (#s 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10)

### *2. The Conversion of Barbarian Europe*

Through monastic networks and literacy, through propagating new truth claims and the Christian worldview, through top-down conversion movements as kings and tribal chieftains led their tribes, networks, and entire peoples to Faith, most often through the resources of overlapping elites. (#s 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11)

### *3. The Carolingian Renaissance*

Through overlapping networks of cultural resources, finance and education, and new application of the Christian Faith to learning, as happened through Charlemagne's court and schools. (#s 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10)

### *4. The Protestant Reformation*

Through networks of urban elites (like university professors), with their intellectual and cultural capital, forming new institutions, and overlapping networks, drawing from the wealth of resources they brought

**T***he key actor or force in history is not individual genius but rather the networks and the new institutions that are created out of those networks.*

with them—intellectual, institutional, administrative, financial, political—all in common cause. (#s 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)

### *5. Successor Movements: Awakenings, Anti-Slavery Reform and Revivals*

The “First Great Awakening” gained momentum through transatlantic networking, by leaders with elite educations, and through the synergy of overlapping resources. The anti-slavery movement in Great Britain emerged through elite networks (the “Clapham Sect” that included British MP William Wilberforce) that had access to powerful institutions like the British government. (#s 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10)

### *6. Beyond Christianity*

The European Enlightenment (eighteenth century) involved intellectual resources, networking, and the symbolic capital of elites and new institutions. European Socialism (1864–1914) involved networks of disaffected elites, drawing heavily on the institutions and resources of the society they hoped to overthrow (e.g. newspapers that Marx utilized). World War I brought catastrophe, out of which Marxist-Leninist communism came to dominate Russia. (#s 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)

Hunter, making a strong case from history, concludes, “The alternative view of cultural change that assigns roles not only to ideas but also to elites, networks, technology, and new institutions, provides a much better account of the growth in plausibility and popularity of these important cultural developments. This is the evidence of history that change in culture does not occur when there is [merely] change in the beliefs and values in the hearts and minds of ordinary people or in the

creation of mere artifacts.” (bracketed word mine).<sup>7</sup>

## *Revisiting the Five Examples (from Part 1) that Belie Conventional Culture Wisdom*

We return now to the examples cited by Hunter at the beginning of this article (in Part 1),<sup>8</sup> that belie “the common view of culture change,” namely, that the beliefs in the minds of the majority of ordinary individuals in a society change the culture of the society in line with those beliefs. Why do minorities have disproportionate influence on culture? I will state the example and then offer my commentary based on Hunter's alternative view of culture and culture change:

### *1. Christian Faith*

Given the strong Christian heritage in the USA, and that most Americans admit faith in God, why are Christian ideas not more influential in the society?

The Christian worldview is too often reduced to an intellectual belief system (idealism) that does not penetrate deeply enough to shape the moral character of the broader culture and its institutions. The Christian Faith does not have enough leverage in the most influential centers of cultural production and does not carry enough symbolic capital to influence elite academic institutions, law schools, public policy think tanks, magazines and journals, the arts, popular music, television and film. An element of pietism and individualism contribute to this lack of influence. The level of elite cultural capital, networking power, institutional control at the centers of influence, and media leverage that was operational and culturally hegemonic during the Protestant Reformation and early America does not exist for American evangelicalism today.

### 2. *The American Jewish Community*

Why has this small minority group had influence quite disproportionate to its size?

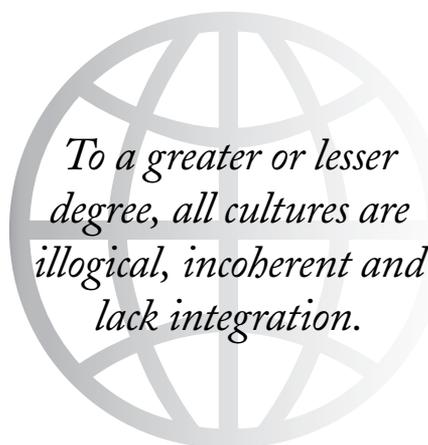
The American Jewish community does have leverage in many influential centers of cultural production, carry enough cultural capital to influence elite academic institutions, law schools, public policy think tanks, magazines and journals, the arts, popular music, television and film. One thinks of Steven Spielberg in film, the many Jewish lawyers and writers, entertainment industry leaders and of financiers like the last two Federal Reserve Board chairmen, Allan Greenspan and Ben Bernanke. Suffice it to say that this Jewish community holds the highest percentage of Nobel prize winners of any ethnic group, though they comprise only .01% of the human race Jewish communities are strong in culture producing centers, like New York and Los Angeles (whereas evangelical centers are in places like Colorado Springs and Orlando).

### 3. *The Gay Community and the Gay Rights Movement*

How does such a small minority have such great influence?

The Gay community and homosexual rights movement draw on major worldview themes in the American national character—freedom, utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism—for their cause. They have succeeded in equating their cause with the American values of freedom and equal rights, which then draws liberal academic institutions to champion their cause. Their cultural networks have succeeded in leveraging influential centers of cultural production, especially in the media, education and the entertainment industry, which then provide accumulated economic, social and symbolic capital, access to the “gatekeepers” and the reality-defining institutions of society They have been arguably more effective than any other group

in using the arts and entertainment and media to gain acceptance for their agenda. Think of the different television series—“Ellen,” “Will & Grace,” “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” the “L-Word.” There is now little public space to raise moral concerns about this movement; those who do are labeled “homophobic.” They have swayed public opinion, such that the Biblical view of sexuality and marriage has lost its cultural hegemony. The Gay rights agenda has won broad support and sympathy to their values and ideas because they have embedded them in powerful institutions among elites with resources and



social power. Their skills in changing culture have been formidable.

### 4. *Darwinism is Still the Official Creed in US Public Schools*

Given a near even demographic split between those who believe Darwinism (macro-evolution) is supported by the evidence and those who did not, why doesn't the public schools' curriculum reflect both views: Creation and Evolution?

Naturalism pervades the establishment view as to what constitutes pure and true “science” and this view holds powerful influence over the educational institutions. Teachers unions like the National Education Association (NEA) have institutional leverage. There are vested interests in promoting Darwinian views, not only in individuals' jobs, but in biology text

book companies. Here is an example of where powerful elites and institutions trump good and truthful ideas. This is less a battle of ideas and more a battle of interests.

### 5. *Abortion on Demand*

Pew Forum surveys said only 15% of the population hold that abortion should be always legal, and 50% said only in some circumstances should it be legal. Why don't laws and policies reflect majority opinion on this matter?

There are real similarities between the abortion rights movement and the Gay rights movement. Abortion rights activists draw upon the major worldview themes of the American national character—utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism. Through effective use of media—using euphemisms like “reproductive freedom,” “the right to choose,” and “a woman's right to her own body,” that resonate with freedom themes—they have succeeded to equate their cause with that of freedom and rights. They have influenced the views of the “gatekeepers” of social opinion; liberal academic institutions and powerful elites champion their cause of “freedom of choice.” The ruling of the Supreme Court in *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973, which made abortion on demand the law of the land, demonstrates that good and true ideas of the majority may not win out. Institutions, elites, and resources trump the ideas of the majority of individuals.

### *Missiological Implications and Applications*

So, we return to that basic question at the top of this two-part article—*How do cultures really change?* What can we learn from a great sociologist about missiology? Hunter has provided a provocative theory of how cultures really change. How might his insights assist a Kingdom minded missiology today? *How might we facilitate culture change toward Kingdom of God values and shalom?* I will suggest

several directions in light of the twelve propositions of this study (numbered after each point):

*Cultivate Humility in Our Rhetoric, Expectations and Efforts to Engineer the Transformation of Culture*

The word “transformation” is used copiously today and many books have been written on the theme. Are we overusing and cheapening the word? Certainly not in our vision, aspirations and prayers to change the world. But in the results we claim, I believe many of us are hollowing out the word. Are we as individuals and churches assuming and claiming to be more effective as agents in engineering culture change than is warranted? Doesn’t the dialectical nature of culture, the various and unequal loci of power in a culture, its relative incoherence, the relative strength and weakness of ideas vs. economic forces, the often unintended consequences of cultural activity and change efforts— doesn’t this argue for us having a lot less ability to change a whole culture (society) than we might think? Hunter’s proposition #10 asserts that change “is most concentrated when networks of elites and the institution they lead overlap.” If this is the case, we must ask—how much can we arrange the overlapping? It is an extremely difficult challenge to engineer a “tipping point.” Research would suggest that only a *counter hegemonic movement that is culturally embedded can challenge the power of a reigning cultural hegemony in a society* (Howell & Paris 2011:132–137). A measure of humility and a period of taking stock may be in order, perhaps especially for Americans (I speak as one), who write most of the books on transformation.

*Persevere as a Church in Broad and Effective Change over Generations*

Holistic change in a culture requires developing and sustaining a counter-culture alternative that socializes children in the Biblical worldview and

practice communally, while remaining engaged in the society. It requires a proper understanding of “calling,” a response to the call of God to work in all the spheres of culture. Cultural “tipping points” do come. But many cultural changes come unintended by the church and often blindside her. Intentional culture change takes a visionary, proactive, persistent, countercultural push that is widely networked and resourced and produces a movement. It may take centuries. The growth of Christianity in the Roman Empire took three centuries for it to change the culture. Why do we think we can change a society in a few years? And if the restraining forces resisting change in the broader culture are stronger than the forces driving change, tipping points do not come, and the efforts may not bring lasting culture change. Then also revitalization and renewal of positive changes is needed every generation. (Propositions #7, 10, 11)

*Develop a More Sophisticated Understanding of the Forms and Uses of Power in Culture*

All humans are implicated in power relations and the power structures of the world (except perhaps hermits, but even they are implicated by trying to escape it). Power is inescapable, ubiquitous and a universal social reality across all cultures. We are not only *homo sapiens*, we are *homo potens*, endowed with a measure of freedom, responsibility and power. As Hunter states, “human relations are inherently power relations” (p. 178). As a result of the Fall of Man, human need to shape nature and to manage the dangers and insecurities inherent in the world require expenditure of energy. That energy expended is an essential expression of power (pp. 177). Yet, because of differing capacities of humans to acquire resources and to influence the environment, power is inherently asymmetrical. Because power and power relations are inherent in our human existence in the world, how

the people of God engage the world always involves how they relate to power. Culture change always involves power.

This is where Hunter is surely correct to challenge a major thrust of the “neo-Anabaptist” thinking that holds “that the mark of true discipleship is to ‘accept powerlessness’” (p. 181). Hunter emphasizes, “*Only by narrowing an understanding of power to political or economic power can one imagine giving up power and becoming ‘powerless’*” (italics his) (p. 181). Anthropologically, we know that only by being completely isolated from the world and its resources could humans escape being implicated “in the exercise, exchange and contest of power” (p. 181). Since power is expressed through individuals, through social groups of every size and within every institution it is impossible to avoid or transcend power relations (p. 179). Everyone and every group has some power, even though they may be passive aggressive or practice non-violent resistance.

“Powerlessness” is thus a fiction. We may claim that the church is only an organic fellowship, or a spiritual community. But it is also an *institution*, and its members are part of overlapping communities and institutions in the real world of a body politic. Christians have served in the police and armed forces of their countries, in institutions involved with coercion and the use of force. This legitimate use of force is necessary in this fallen world order (See Romans 13:1–7). So the question is not between power and powerlessness, but rather—“*how will the church and its people use the power they have?*” (p. 184). Thus, every evangelical mission effort that thinks it can evade or avoid the realities of power is living in denial, and there will be unintended consequences of such effort—power will act upon those who think they are being “powerless.” Changing culture, therefore, certainly involves an

inherent dynamic of power.<sup>10</sup> And this power can be further specified as to its forms and uses.<sup>11</sup> But any effort to facilitate culture change must discern the dynamics of power in the keenest possible degree.<sup>12</sup> Evangelicals should focus on developing a morally counter-cultural hegemony, but one that is not coercive (unless one serves in a police or legitimate armed force serving state). The church should not rely heavily on politics to change culture, but rather on culture to change politics. (Propositions #3, 4, 5, 10)

#### *Intensify Our Focus on Understanding and Developing Institutions*

Hunter's propositions encourage us to develop, maintain and transmit institutions, and in the case of those which are distorted and unjust, to penetrate and change them. Institutions can be abusive, but institutions *per se* are a good, integral and necessary part of any culture. We are *homo institutionalis*. The basic social structures of human interaction are institutions, embodying inherited structures, values and practices. Some are God-ordained: marriage and family (Genesis 2:18–24), civil authority or the state (Romans 13:1–7), the church and its leadership/ministry gifts (Ephesians). Though their shapes differ in various cultures, their moral forms are universal. They constitute the socially ordered grounding for human life, they infuse and transmit values, and they socialize children in the humanizing and identity-forming traditions of their people. Segments of late modern Western culture despise organized religion and distrust the constraints of all institutions. We must amend this attitude and rightly respect the role of institutions, and figure them into our studies and efforts in international development and culture change.<sup>13</sup> (Propositions #2, 3)

#### *Develop and Maximize Networks of All Kinds*

Hunter's propositions assert that facilitating overlapping networks' efforts in common cause will bring effec-

tive change. We are *homo reciprocans*. Reciprocity is an inherent motivation in the social nature of humans. The discussion above under "Evidence of Culture Change in History..." demonstrates that culture is generated and transmitted through networks, that the agency in culture change is not primarily the autonomous individual, as in "Great Man" theory.<sup>14</sup> The propensity in the West to think individualistically is deeply imprinted into our Western identities and education, at least since Descartes' "I think therefore I am." We write myriads of books about personal and individual transformation and self-help. We interpret the Bible individualistically, using singular pronouns in English translation when the original Hebrew and Greek have plural pronouns that embody a richer corporate solidarity, affirming human life-in-community. Overlapping networks produce a synergy in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. We need to continually cultivate communal and network thinking and doing.<sup>15</sup> (Propositions #3, 6)

#### *Strategize to Reach the Elites in a Society*

We cannot simply follow the pietistic tradition and focus exclusively on evangelism and church concerns. If we hope to change culture, we need to bring Biblical influence incarnationally (via human embodiment) into those segments of a culture that bear most influence on the society. Often the church has held the notion that belief that the more Christians we have in culture, the more society would become good and moral. Consequently, evangelism has been the focus of the church for many decades. But this premise is flawed. The more Christians there are in a society does not necessarily equate to a better culture. A case in point is Nigeria, where the majority profess to be Christians, but the nation suffers serious corruption. While not forgetting the poor and marginal-

ized, those with symbolic capital and cultural resources—the gatekeepers of a society—must be a strategic focus. (Propositions #4, 5, 8, 9)

#### *Train Emerging Leaders to Aspire to Attain Gatekeeper Roles in Society*

We need disciples of Jesus who excel in their professions, who hold high offices, who produce culture, who win respect and honor in their fields, who thus earn the right to be heard among their peers in those fields, who create wealth and wisely invest it in the Kingdom of God. We need to win university students, and challenge our young people to acquire the best educations they can. If the church really wants to influence culture, we must equip those believers in the workplace and the professions and encourage young people to seek careers in areas of cultural influence. A major way to do this is to engage in the society and to produce culture—higher education, the arts, science, journalism, the legal and medical professions, good business practices and running for and holding public offices. Believers who enter these professions must understand they do so in response to a calling, and not as "just a job," a lower or lesser calling than "fulltime Christian ministry" in the traditional and pietistic sense. We must continue to amend this secular/sacred, lower/higher dualism. We should teach these callings are to be for the common good of the society and love of neighbor, not just instrumentally for ourselves in the church, or simply as an evangelistic strategy.<sup>16</sup> (Propositions #4, 5, 9)

#### *Recover and Use the Power of Story*

Although Hunter does not discuss the use of story and the orality arts, I suggest it as an implication of his first two propositions. All humans are hard-wired for story. We are *homo narratologicus*. The postmodern shift in the West invites the recovery of the story all the more. Hunter's propositions have highlighted that culture is much more than a cognitive worldview. Two sayings carry the

import of this point—“Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes their laws” (Plato). And, “A picture is worth a thousand words; a story is worth a thousand pictures” (Anonymous). Stories reach us at all three levels of worldview (the cognitive, affective, and evaluative) in a way that abstract, propositional, analytical forms of knowledge delivery cannot. Therefore, any efforts that hope to bring worldview and culture change must utilize story.

The evangelical missions movement has used chronological Bible storying for years in reaching non-literate peoples and oral learners in the non-Western world. Often it was assumed that storying was only for primary oral cultures, but the postmodern turn in Western Culture is driving a storytelling revival. The video and digital age media have conditioned us, and brought changes in learning style preferences. Generationally, the Millennials, the Baby Busters/Gen Xers, and even many Baby Boomers now prefer to learn through spoken and visual means rather than through the printed word. We have been conditioned into a post-literate “second orality” by our iphones, ipods, ipads, YouTube, and the social networking media like Facebook.<sup>17</sup> Increasingly, Western literate people are hungering for the relational face-to-face communication of oral cultures that use stories, proverbs, songs, chants, drama, poetry, and other forms of communal and interactive events. There is a growing orality/story movement in the evangelical mission world, seeking to address this situation.<sup>18</sup> Although unrecognized by Hunter, intentional efforts to change culture will be facilitated greatly by the use of story. (Propositions #1, 2)

### *Implement Proactive and Compassionate Response Following Catastrophes and Crises*

Facilitating change towards Kingdom of God values is very opportune in societies experiencing liminal con-

ditions. After the dropping of the atomic bomb on the two cities of Japan in 1945, the worldview of the Japanese collapsed. General Douglas MacArthur called for Christian missionaries to come to Japan. Many heeded the call. There was a window of time (of several years) when the Japanese people were more receptive to the Gospel than they had ever been or have been since. When the catastrophes of war, earthquakes, and epidemics shake a people or nation, that is when they may turn receptive to the Gospel, and are malleable for worldview change. The devastating 9.0 earthquake that hit the east coast of Japan in March 2011 was just such a catastrophe. How can redemptive culture change be facilitated in its wake? We need to bring more than humanitarian aid; we need to be agencies that creatively plan for action that accelerates culture-change toward the Kingdom coming on earth as it is in Heaven. (Proposition #12)

Hunter’s work challenges us to think deeply about human culture and how we can facilitate its change toward Kingdom of God values. Through the use of his analysis, we can work smarter, not necessarily harder (many work very hard already). We can see culture changed as an anticipatory sign of the coming consummation of that Kingdom, when all things shall be transformed anew.

### *An Illustration of Contemporary Mission for Holistic Culture Change*

Hunter is correct in his Proposition #10, that no matter how pietistic a church movement may be within a society, no matter how much evangelism it displays, it will not automatically lead to significant culture change. But in explicating this proposition in his “Essay II: Rethinking Power”, he criticizes all political expressions of American Christianity, with their prevalent “politicization of nearly everything” and “the conflation

of the public with the political.” He laments their “discourse of negation” and their ideological move to the right or left of the deeper “culture wars” (pp. 129–131).

But I contend that Hunter inappropriately levels this same charge against the “Reclaiming the 7 Mountains of Culture” movement ([www.reclaim7mountains.com/](http://www.reclaim7mountains.com/)). This mission movement illustrates the very elements Hunter claims in his proposition #10 are required for real and lasting culture change. This vision began with Loren Cunningham, founder of “Youth With a Mission” in 1975, and then converged with and was confirmed by Bill Bright, founder of “Campus Crusade for Christ,” and Francis Schaeffer, Christian philosopher and founder of “L’Abri.” Cunningham’s testimony is worth quoting here.

It was August, 1975. My family and I were up in a little cabin in Colorado. And the Lord had given me that day a list of things I had never thought about before. He said “This is the way to reach America and nations for God.” And [He said], “You have to see them like classrooms or like places that were already there, and go into them with those who are already working in those areas.” And I call them ‘mind-molders’ or “spheres”. I got the word “spheres” from II Corinthians 10 where Paul speaks in the New American Standard about the ‘spheres’ he had been called into. And with these spheres, there were seven of them, and I’ll get to those in a moment.

But it was a little later that day, the ranger came up, and he said, ‘There is a phone call for you back at the ranger’s station.’ So I went back down, about seven miles, and took the call. It was a mutual friend who said, ‘Bill Bright and Vonnette are in Colorado at the same time as you are. Would you and Darlene come over and meet with them? They would love to meet with you.’

So we flew over to Boulder on a private plane of a friend of ours. And

as we came in and greeted each other, [we were friends for quite a while], and I was reaching for my yellow paper that I had written on the day before, he said, 'Loren, I want to show you what God has shown me!' And it was virtually the same list that God had given me the day before. Three weeks later, my wife Darlene had seen Dr. Francis Schaeffer on TV and he had the same list! And so I realized that this was for the body of Christ. (Cunningham 2007)

As a result of this vision, YWAM founded the "University of the Nations," with extension schools around the world, and has been training missionaries to the "seven mountains of culture" (cultural subsystems or "spheres"). It's important to note that what Hunter calls "institutions" in his technical sociological language, Cunningham and those following the "Reclaiming 7 Mountains" movement call "spheres" or, metaphorically, "mountains." The seven "spheres" or mountains, in alphabetical order, are Arts and Entertainment, Business, Education, Family, Government, Media and Religion. The mountain metaphor also resonates with Hunter's view that influence and power in a culture are embedded in networks of elites with resources in these commanding heights of culture and that for culture change to be lasting it must ultimately come from the top-down. This is clear in a video track that explains this movement's vision and rationale:

In every city of the world, an unseen battle rages for dominion over God's creation and the souls of people. This battle is fought on seven strategic fronts, looming like mountains over the culture to shape and influence its destiny. Over the years the church slowly retreated from its place of influence on these mountains leaving a void now filled with darkness. When we lose our influence, we lose the culture and when we lose the culture we fail to advance the Kingdom

of God. And now a generation stands in desperate need. It's time to fight for them and take back the mountains of influence. ... (Video, "Reclaiming the Seven Mountains of Culture" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQtB-AF41p8>) [note: the seven "mountains of influence" to which he refers are family, religion, education, government, business, media, arts and entertainment].

Hunter argues that the same failed logic of American Christian political involvement is at work in this movement, to wit—that America has been taken over by secularists, and that it is time to "take back the culture". This movement just wants to acquire political power and impose their version of America on the rest. He says "the same language of loss, disappointment, anger, antipathy, resentment and desire for conquest" motivates them (p. 131). He objects to the use of terms like "enemy," "attack," "reclaim their nations for Christ," "take back," "occupying and influencing spheres of power in our nations," and "advancing the kingdom of God."<sup>19</sup>

Since Hunter's Proposition #11 states that culture does not change without a fight, I wonder why he decries this language. And his use of this last phrase, "advancing the Kingdom of God", fails to fully appreciate what Messiah's Gospel of the Kingdom is about. The primary message of not only John the Baptist but of Jesus Himself was that that "Kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus' parables of the Kingdom are all about how the Kingdom of God is advancing through His ministry and continues by His followers throughout this Age, and until His Second Coming when the Kingdom is consummated.

I must respectfully disagree with Hunter's dismissal of this movement. I see that their efforts to reclaim the culture share the very logic of Hunter's propositions on culture change. You can hear it in

this quote by Os Hillman, one of "Marketplace Leaders":

For the last several decades the Church has operated from a belief that the more Christians we have in culture, the more society would become Christianized. Consequently, evangelism has been the focus of the Church for many decades. However, this premise is flawed. Research has proven that more Christians in a society do not necessarily equate to a better culture. Case in point is Nigeria. Some say that there more than 60% of the population is born-again, but this nation has serious corruption... If the church really wants to influence culture, we must equip those believers who operate on these mountains and encourage young people to seek careers in these areas. (Hillman 2011)

In sum, I affirm Hunter's Proposition #10, but I fault him for not endorsing a movement that resonates with his view of culture change. It's regrettable, for Hunter has given us a model for continuing to think deeply about human culture and how we can facilitate its change toward Kingdom of God values. His analysis helps us envision how culture changes, and how culture changes toward Kingdom values as an anticipatory sign of the coming consummation of that Kingdom, when all things shall be transformed anew.

#### *For Further Reflection and*

*Application: Do a historical study of other societies in which a cultural tipping point had been reached, when several overlapping dimensions of the culture converged to create a tipping point and made lasting change happen. Strategize and plan to facilitate various networks and institutions to join forces for Kingdom of God culture change in our time. IJFM*

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Proposition # 5 in Part One, "How Do Cultures Really Change? – A Challenge to the Conventional Culture Wisdom" by William Bjoraker, IJFM, 28:1, January–March, 2011, (p. 19).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> One can argue that this movement was indeed top-down by elites with networked resources because Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was part of an elite. He held a PhD and his associates in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were educated ministers. They were elites within the black community (affirming this Propo-

sition #8 at the black community level), but because they were black they were not at the "top" in terms of holding the power of symbolic and cultural capital in the whole of American national society and body politic. Virtually the whole African-American community was then on the bottom.

<sup>4</sup> Fareed Zakaria is guardedly optimistic of real culture change in Egypt. He reasons that the youth bulge (60% of the region's population is under 30), and the information technology connecting them, will create progress toward liberty and freedom, and an end to corruption and poverty. But will this idealistic youthful majority be enough? It has not been successful in Iran (Green Movement of 2009–2010) or China (Tiananmen Square, 1989). Zakaria's assessment seems to ignore Hunter's argument that good and moral ideas of the majority do not necessarily win out when other forces and configurations of cultural power may be too strong. ("The Generation Changing the World", *TIME Magazine*, February 2011 (pp. 28–31)

<sup>5</sup> "The Tipping Point: How Little Things can Make A Big Difference" (2000). This book draws from social science studies, and offers a wealth of examples from popular culture, more or less subject to other interpretive analyses, but a recommended resource for the study of culture change.

<sup>6</sup> Stark's research establishes that the early Christian movement was based in the middle and upper classes. "The early church was anything but a refuge for slaves and the impoverished masses" (1996:28). The apostle Paul knew Greek language and culture (the language of the center) gave him inroads to higher classes. Paul was intent on reaching Rome, the center of the Empire. Earlier Marxist-tinged deprivation theories that holding that the dispossessed masses constituted the Christian movement appear to be well refuted. Christianity was not a proletarian movement. There were Christians among the aristocracy, the senatorial class, and even in the imperial household who carried considerable prestige and social status. Most Christians were drawn from the literate classes; there were overlapping networks from "urban circles of well-situated artisans, merchants, and members of liberal professions" (1996:31–35). The church fathers were virtually all highly educated men, born into families of high social standing.

<sup>7</sup> From FaithfulPresence.com; the web site associated with Hunter's book,

under “Book Abstract,” entry under Essay 1, Chapter 5: [http://www.faithfulpresence.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=14&Itemid=19](http://www.faithfulpresence.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=14&Itemid=19)

<sup>8</sup> See “How Do Cultures Really Change? A Challenge to the Conventional Culture Wisdom” by William Bjoraker, *IJFM*, 28:1, January–March, 2011, pp. 15.

<sup>9</sup> This phrase comes John Howard Yoder, a major theologian and leader of the Neo-Anabaptist movement, in his work *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972:244.

<sup>10</sup> Generally three major categories of power are present in the human relations dimension of a culture: *coercive power*, *persuasive power*, and *hegemonic power* (Howell and Paris 2011: 132–136). Coercive power is the use of force, legitimate or illegitimate. Persuasive power is use of words, relationships and actions to influence others. Hegemonic power is the diffuse power of dominant ideas, values and practices embedded in networks, institutions, and interests in a society such that a particular complex of ideas and values holds the most influential sway in the culture. Only a counter hegemonic movement that is culturally embedded can challenge a reigning hegemony.

<sup>11</sup> See *Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses*, by Dennis H. Wrong, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> Political scientists distinguish between “soft power” and “hard power.” Soft power is exercised symbolically and culturally (symbolic capital, influence, persuasion). Hard power is exercised through the technologies of force. Soft power is the power to define reality in a culture, the power to name things and describe their purpose, to define morality and ethics, what is acceptable and unacceptable. What is a family? What is legitimate

sexuality? What is worth living for and dying for? This power predisposes societies and individuals within them to action. Such power is ultimately greater than hard power (coercion, force). As the old saying goes, “The pen is mightier than the sword.”

<sup>13</sup> Recommended book on the values and purposes of socio-cultural institutions: *On Thinking Institutionally*, by Hugh Hecllo, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> See “How Do Cultures Really Change? A Challenge to the Conventional Culture Wisdom” by William Bjoraker, *IJFM*, 28:1, January–March, 2011, under Proposition # 6, pp. 19.

<sup>15</sup> On individualism and collectivism and the American social DNA, see: *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, by Robert N. Bellah, Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1996. And for an advanced social science study, see: *Individualism and Collectivism*, by Harry Triandis, Boulder, Oxford: Westview Press, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> On the Christian view of calling: *The Call*, by Os Guinness, Nashville, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1998. Guinness deftly addresses “the Catholic distortion” of calling (a two-tiered secular/sacred; higher/lower dualism), and the Protestant distortion (severing the secular vocations from the spiritual, so that a “vocation” (literally “calling”) has become just a job. He distinguishes between the “primary call” (“by God, to God, for God”) from the secondary call (“Everyone, everywhere, in everything”) with its varied calls to work in all of life and culture. Every believer has both the primary calling and a secondary calling, the secondary being a response to the primary.

<sup>17</sup> Pink has argued that our moment in history is a time of “right brain rising.” To put very simply the argument of his book: “*Left brain direction*” (rational, mathematical, scientific, analysis, text-oriented, logical, linear, sequential, detail-oriented) was dominant during modernity. Left brain relates largely to the cognitive dimension of worldview. “*Right brain direction*” (artistic, aesthetic, emotional and relational expression, literary, synthesis, non-linear, context-oriented, big-picture, holistic, metaphor and story-oriented) is rising in postmodernity out of human hunger for its lack during modernity. Right brain relates largely to the affective and evaluative dimensions of worldview. Left brain direction remains necessary, but it is no longer sufficient. We need a “whole new mind,” a holistic mind (2006).

<sup>18</sup> See the whole issue devoted to “Orality” of the journal *Missiology*, Vol. XXXVIII, Number 2, April 2010. Also a fine practical treatment of the West and non-West by Avery T. Willis, Jr. and Mark Snowden, *Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in A Teflon World*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> We can assume Hunter is speaking at the sociological level, in which case he is correct to criticize any language of hostility and warfare when aimed by individuals or groups at others. Surely we need greater civility in the public square, in our public discourse with “flesh and blood.” But we are in a protracted spiritual war between good and evil. Biblically, “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers...” (Ephesians 6:12). Spiritual warfare talk among co-workers and in prayer concerts is appropriate, because Scripture uses the language of warfare for our engagement in these battles.

# Sustaining Kingdom Advance: Discovering the Role of Church Movements

by *T. S. John*

**I**t was the end of my senior year and like so many other seniors I needed to figure out what I was going to do after college. Two years earlier I had dedicated my life to Christ and changed my major from Business Administration to Bible—not a degree that offers much hope for finding a job among the Want Ads. But I didn’t want just any job. I wanted to do something to change the world!

Since coming to Christ I grew to appreciate pillars of the Church like St. Francis and Mother Theresa who had given themselves to help the poor as an expression of their faith. I interpreted the Bible through their stories. Verses like 1 John 3:16-18 inspired me regardless of my poor hermeneutics (like applying “Brothers in need” to the general population of people in need rather than the appropriate context of the church). And when it came to the Great Commission, I preferred to understand it in accordance with the version St. Francis is said to have coined: “Preach the Gospel throughout the world. If necessary, use words.”

I did not see myself applying my Bible degree towards the pursuit of a career as a pastor or church planter. Frankly, nothing turned me off more than the idea of being a church pastor, for no other reason than I thought such a role lacked the profundity and significance I was seeking in life. With that ethos guiding my final two years in college, I got involved as a student volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, first through the college chapter of Evangelicals for Social Action and then as co-founder of the campus chapter of Habitat. I loved it and believed involvement with them was that significant career to which I could give my life.

## *Habitat for Humanity in India*

So as I considered what I should do after college, I applied for Habitat’s volunteer program that helps build houses for the poor overseas. I was accepted and saw this as God’s direction to join. The following Fall I flew down to Habitat’s headquarters in Americus, GA, for training and was introduced to a community of a couple hundred staff and volunteers who, like me, wanted to witness

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to Christ by helping the poor. Habitat's founder, Millard Fuller was the organization's inspirational leader and head cheerleader who could energize a crowd to support his cause better than anyone I had ever seen.

Under Millard's enthusiastic leadership Habitat won national acclaim in 15 short years and was on a trajectory for tremendous growth fueled by millions in contributions and the high status involvement of a multitude of celebrities. One of Habitat's most famous volunteers was former US President, Jimmy Carter. I met President Carter and frequently heard him teach Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in nearby

tions with no form of rehabilitative services to help them. After a few visits to their homes in the villages I felt I could not ignore their horrible plight. I began visiting them on a weekly basis along with other local volunteers in order to provide some meager assistance and plan for more significant interventions in the future.

But, after 18 months in Nagar, Habitat transferred me to their project in Barrangar. There I had the opportunity to live in a slum for over a year, worked side by side with nine poor families to radically improve their housing conditions and helped establish the local office of Habitat. After all

now become a vision of mine and my new wife. Our first step was to follow Habitat's model of developing a local board of directors to act as the local platform on which the ministry would be built. But we were careful to recruit born again Christians with respected reputations in the community. Staff members were also required to be born again Christians and the Board held them accountable to high, biblical standards of accountability and ethics. This allowed us to avoid many of the internal organizational pitfalls that Habitat had fallen victim to in South Asia. Additionally, I had become more evangelical in my outlook, believing that changed hearts and minds were as important as changed physical circumstances. Hence, we integrated a more proactive evangelistic outreach to our ministry.

Over the next ten years the ministry grew to over 30 staff serving 2,000 people annually who were affected by disabilities, eventually including people affected by leprosy and HIV/AIDS. In 2004 we made national waves by hosting the largest conference on "Disability and the Church" that South Asia had ever witnessed. The keynote speaker was our close friend Joni Earikson Tada and over 600 Christian leaders from across the nation attended. Finally, in 2007, we dedicated a half million dollar, fully equipped rehabilitation center that culminated a vision born 15 years earlier.

### *A Growing Dissonance*

At this point, one would think I would be content with the direction of the ministry I helped found. After all, our vision of a rehabilitation center had come to fruition, thousands of needy people were being helped, seeds of the Gospel had been successfully planted among them and dozens of disciples were being made in a region of South Asia that was traditionally known as the grave yard of missions. I had always compared our growth with that of Habitat's growth in the US, and

*I had become more evangelical in my outlook, believing that changed hearts and minds were as important as changed physical circumstances.*

Plains, GA. To be in the middle of all this growing enthusiasm and recognition for Habitat was a very heady experience and created for me a paradigm of ministry to which I readily acceded. After all, how could anyone question the strategy of generating enthusiastic support for a grass-roots, ministry that resulted in millions of dollars being sent all over the world in the name of Jesus to help the poor help themselves?

Following three months of training at the Habitat headquarters my co-worker and I arrived by train in Nagar, South Asia, to start our three-year assignment. It was a very disappointing first 18 months at Nagar in terms of ministry with Habitat. We spent most of our time uncovering corruption among the local Habitat committee, which I discovered was a pervasive problem affecting many foreign-funded charitable and ministry initiatives in South Asia. However, I found an outlet for my frustration by volunteering for a fledgling ministry to disabled children in the rural areas surrounding Nagar. These children were in such desperate situa-

the disappointments in Nagar, my experience in Barrangar gave me hope that the Habitat model of para-church ministry could work if it was more carefully implemented.

### *Expanding Disability Ministry*

While I was away in Barrangar I remained in touch with that fledgling ministry among the disabled children back in Nagar, and I would return occasionally to guide and assist in better establishing that outreach. As my three-year commitment to Habitat wound down I sensed a call to return to Nagar someday to help shore up the disability ministry and grow it so that it could make a significant impact. As I departed South Asia I dreamed of someday returning to establish a rehabilitation center that would provide much needed services to all those neglected, dirt-poor disabled children.

After three years in the US an opportunity miraculously presented itself to return to South Asia to establish a disability ministry that had

I believed we were on track to grow significantly in the future and make a similar name for ourselves.

But I wasn't content. There were certain aspects of the ministry I began to question. Dissonance slowly grew to disillusionment. Initially I attributed this disillusionment to burnout, mainly because I ate, drank and slept disability ministry 24/7 for 10 years. This actually paved the way for me to readily accept the idea that I needed to hand over the reins of leadership to our national leadership team, which is a good thing. Any foreign missionary worth his/her salt recognizes that leadership must transition into the hands of national leadership as soon as possible. But as I reflect on it now, this rationale probably had as much to do with my inability to reconcile conflicts and inconsistencies in our ministry paradigm as it did with feeling burnout or following good missions practice.

For example, if we were going to do more to help the millions in poverty we had to become bigger. This meant we had to increase our capacity to raise funds and manage the outreach. In order to do this I believed we needed to establish multiple donor development offices in donor countries around the world and establish outreach offices in different parts of the country. After all, isn't this what all significant, international ministries to the poor were doing?

But the thought of pursuing growth to make our ministry more "significant" made my head swim. I had started this journey 15 years earlier living in the slums and working alongside the poor. Now it appeared that if I was to lead this work towards regional or even national significance, I would need to return to a life of business suits and board meetings—the empty, corporate vision of myself that I had given up in college—just to prop up all the good we wanted to achieve.

Actually, what made that vision empty was not the business suits and board

meetings, but all the questionable things those symbols entailed in the business-like paradigm of parachurch ministry: using slick marketing campaigns to attract donors as we compete with other ministries for scarce resources; blowing our own horn through attractive communication pieces; the transactional nature of our services both to the poor and the donor; the business-like manner in which we handled our staff. It all was beginning to turn me off, regardless of the amount of good it was doing.

And the amount of good it was doing was questionable. To be sure, thousands



of children and youth with disabilities had been equipped "for a life of independence and advancement" (our slogan) But to what end? Except for the 100 or so who had been baptized, the rest had not experienced spiritual transformation in Christ. Consequently, not only was their eternal fate left in question but their life on this earth would continue to perpetuate the ideologies of selfishness that prop up the "web of lies" that keep the poor embedded in poverty.

Certainly we could define what we were doing as "pre-evangelism" and escape any sort of accountability for our rehabilitation program's effectiveness in making disciples. But where was this sort of extended, never-ending "pre-evangelism" in the New Testament? It would appear that people in the New Testament made a choice to either become a disciple or reject dis-

cipleship fairly early in their encounter with Christ-followers. Those who accepted Christ were welcomed into the community of believers, those who rejected Christ remained outside the community of faith and missed out on blessings that accrued to the members of the community. I wasn't finding any precedent in the New Testament to extend the continued provision of benefits from the community of faith to those who refused to join them. In other words, the early church seemed to recognize that participating fully in the community of faith was essential to the holistic transformation of people. And that's what the early church seemed interested in: holistic transformation...not just improving people's economic or social condition.

Then there was the questionable nature of being dependent on foreign funding. All my training on sustainability and community empowerment said that resources and leadership must eventually come from the local community. Yet we were an evangelical Christian organization in a country of less than 3% Christians. In almost all the villages we worked there were no Christians. Militant expressions of local religions were on the rise. If we expected these villages to take ownership of our initiatives we would most certainly have to eliminate Christ's Great Commission mandate from our work. Not only was that counter to our calling, but I believed it was a form of capitulation to the unjust and oppressive forces within these communities. And we knew of several Christian organizations that had capitulated and no longer carried a significant Christian witness in their work.

Furthermore, to expect a village community to eventually own our initiatives was based on the assumption that their leadership adhered to values and beliefs conducive to the welfare of the initiative. In our experience, nothing was further from the case. We found corruption rampant in the villages,

so to expect unregenerate people to selflessly lead our initiatives seemed hopelessly naive.

### *The Scalability of Church Planting Movements*

Finally, there was the inescapable fact that our foreign-funded model lacked that scalability necessary to reach the teeming millions who remained untouched by any sort of rehabilitative services. To be frank, our work among the poor was a drop in the bucket, a sobering reality which confronted even the largest foreign-funded relief and development ministries working in the country. To be sure, hundreds of thousands, maybe even a few million were being helped by the combined efforts of this multitude of parachurch ministries. But the need was in the hundreds of millions and there was no way all the combined efforts of Christian relief and development agencies could ever achieve the scale required to assist all those in need.

Our only option was to ignore our model's weaknesses, turn our backs on the hundreds of millions who remained in poverty as a result of those weaknesses, and console ourselves with the thought that at least we were impacting the lives of a few thousand people every year. But that rationalizing didn't quell my feelings of dissonance. I didn't know how to resolve this dissonance with the paradigm of parachurch ministry under which I had been trained.

As providence would have it, the stateside organization entered the picture at this time and asked me to consider returning to the US to take on the role of US Director. Simultaneously they were seeking a new International Director and had their eyes on Kent Parks, a global leader in the field of reaching unreached peoples. Kent's passion was "church planting movements" (CPM), a paradigm I was not only unfamiliar with but found it unappealing based on the title alone. But after sitting through some

initial interviews between Kent, the Board and key constituents, I realized CPM may offer some answers to my questions and concerns about the parachurch charitable ministry paradigm.

Eventually I agreed to accept the position and, fortunately for me, Kent did as well. Over time I learned more about CPM and realized it answered my questions and concern better than other paradigms of ministry I had encountered. For one thing, CPM was not the formulation of certain mission strategists in the sterile offices of a Western mission agency looking to herald the next best approach to missions. Rather,



these movements sprung up from the grass roots of the unreached world, in hard-to-reach regions throughout Asia. "Church Planting Movements" was simply the name given to the observations missionaries were gradually accumulating as they witnessed huge movements to Christ among unreached people groups.

Some key observations of these movements immediately caught my attention. The first was that the "resources are in the harvest." Local laws and circumstances prevented overt foreign participation in the religious initiatives taking place in the regions where these movements were springing up. This had the positive effect of preventing unhealthy dependence on outside resources and instead forced the movements to sustain themselves through resources

from within. It taught members within the movement to take the financial and moral responsibility for fulfilling the commands of Christ rather than depend on foreign resources to do the job. It meant this model had the potential for financial scalability.

Similar laws and circumstances that prevented overt foreign participation in the movements also prevented overt Christian initiatives and presence. Consequently propagating Christ's transforming power could not occur through highly public initiatives such as we find in the West (e.g. evangelistic crusades, highly publicized service events, Christian broadcasting and media, etc) but had to be done in a low-key, "off the radar" relational manner generally through one's "oikos", or circle of influence. Likewise, gatherings of disciples could not occur in large numbers in stand-alone church buildings. Instead, disciples were forced to gather in small groups often times in their own homes. These seemingly negative circumstances had the positive effect of ensuring that the transformation of individuals occurred not in a setting of isolation (which often characterizes the spiritual experience of Western Christians in their "going to church") but in the context of a small community of Christ followers who provide the support, accountability and discipleship holistic transformation requires.

Additional positive offshoots of the above factors were also observed. Laypeople were disciplined to become layleaders in an "on the job" training process much like the Apostle Paul training Timothy to train others (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). These layleaders were largely responsible for leading the movements rather than seminary trained, professional clergy. This allowed for a scalable leadership pool that could expand as the movement grew without experiencing the bottlenecks that often occur if seminary credentialing and full-time salaries are imposed as clerical necessities.

With unpaid lay leadership and little if any spending on infrastructure, administration and church buildings, resources are available instead for more strategic transformational, Great Commission initiatives such as helping those in legitimate need, helping sister communities of Christ who are in need, funding small scale training events and sending missionaries to unreached regions to spread the transforming power of the Gospel.

### *Contextualized Community Transformation*

Furthermore, with greater emphasis on local dependence, these movements interpret and apply Scripture in contextualized, community-oriented ways rather than import concepts of spirituality and development that have greater affinity with Western modernity, secular development practices. One major impact of this local hermeneutic is its openness towards signs, wonders and miracles. Hence, “holistic transformation” is not simply about Christ-followers experiencing sustainable spiritual, physical and economic well being in community. They are also experiencing God’s miraculous intervention where man’s interventions have failed, thus deepening their faith in Christ and giving them the boldness to live out His commands in spite of local hostilities.

When I began understanding the implications of these observations, I realized CPM could lay the groundwork for broader community transformation. Because it was a “grass roots” initiative and people were being transformed by Christ with minimal outside resources, it could provide the impetus for poverty alleviation initiatives that are locally sustainable and rapidly multiplying among communities. I envisioned growing numbers of people from one community to the next coming to Christ in ways that mirror the description of the Church in Acts 2 and 4 where “God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among

**T***he social conscientiousness of Western Christians can be wooed into a questionable hermeneutic when considering Christ’s teachings about the poor.*

them.” (Acts 4:33-34). If that’s what CPM was about, I wanted in! In CPM (or whatever one might call indigenous, rapidly spreading, layperson-led, house church movements, focused on discipling people to disciple others) I found the solution to the problems of the poor and destitute. My dissonance disappeared. I could picture a loving congregation of people within a community willing to embrace others in their poverty, helping them help themselves in the most dignified and holistically transformational way. With the blessings of God upon them and a fervor to see this form of transformation grow, it could spread to other peoples and communities that have not yet experienced the power of Christ. Catalyzing that type of community, that type of church, that type of movement, was what the poor and oppressed of Nagar needed from me.

### *Changing Paradigms*

And now, following the call of God, my family and I have returned to Nagar with this new paradigm of ministry. We are excited to be back, but must admit that 14 years of following one paradigm and then changing to another leaves us feeling inadequate for the task ahead. But we believe it’s truer to Christ’s Great Commission call, with a scalability that holds greater potential for individual and community transformation in our region.

I must admit that my life probably would have followed a different course had I understood the profundity of church planting movements back in college. It’s taught me how easily the social conscientiousness of Western Christians can be wooed into a

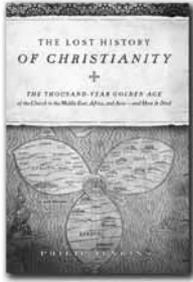
questionable hermeneutic when considering Christ’s teachings about the poor. This is especially the case when the pressure to abandon a biblical approach for a more secular humanist approach is pervasive among popular media, social scientists, philanthropists and government aid agencies. We must be vigilant and proceed with a faith that God’s way of transformation is what builds His kingdom.

But more importantly it has taught me that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing when he released his disciples into the world to carry out the Great Commission. For within that commissioning is the DNA that is the good news for the world’s poor. It is a form of transformation couched in the context of a local community of Christ-followers that offers the embrace of Christ to those in need and multiplies itself exponentially to reach the ends of the earth. In our short time back in South Asia we are realizing that catalyzing such a movement is not easy but has the capacity to profoundly change the world. **IJFM**

# Book Reviews

*The Lost History of Christianity*, by Philip Jenkins  
(Harper One, 2008)

—reviewed by Fred Lewis



There is a lot of talk in missionary circles about how to establish new churches. There's some talk about the persecution of Christians. And post 9/11 there's a little talk about the disappearance of Christianity in Asia and Africa after the Muslim conquests in the 600s. But until I read the following quote from *The Lost History of Christianity* by Philip Jenkins (Harper One, 2008), I had never once thought about a *theology* of the extinction of a form of Christianity: "Besides the missionary theology cultivated by many churches, we also need a theology of extinction" (Jenkins, 249).

Many well-deserved, positive reviews of Jenkins' book were written soon after it was published. Jenkins indeed does a good job of re-telling the story of the initial expansion and near extinction of distinct forms of Christianity (i.e., 'Christianities') in Africa and Asia up to about 1400, C.E. It's an interesting and sobering story, containing many implications for missions in general.

Given that *IJFM* is published in order to facilitate frontier missiology, I started to reflect on the causes of the deaths of different Christianities as a way of drawing insights or lessons for practitioners of frontier missions. Although learning about what may lead to the death of a Christianity is not quite the same as focusing on what promotes a healthy one, becoming aware of what leads to the extinction of a Christian movement ought also to be helpful to pioneer missionaries.

Close to the end of Jenkins' book he briefly mentions and discards the idea that extinction may be accounted for by God punishing disobedient nations, as He did when the Babylonians captured and destroyed Jerusalem, taking many of its people into captivity. It seems that Jenkins found distasteful (or antiquated?) the idea that God might still punish peoples today.

Of seemingly more interest to Jenkins is a discussion about the role of Islam in God's purposes. Is Islam a global adversary in a spiritual cold war with Christianity? Is Islam a Christian heresy? Is Islam an equally valid path to God (Jenkins, 259)? Given the reality that Islam now dominates regions of the world where once lived significant Christian

populations, these questions at first thought seem to be relevant and crucial. Yet based on Jenkins' own presentation of the stories of how Christianities perished in those lands, we cannot say that the Muslim conquests in the 7th Century were also responsible for the extinction of Christianities in the 14th Century. If Christianities in Asia and Africa had died out within a few decades of the initial conquests, then it might be possible to conclude that Islam as such was the culprit. But that isn't what happened. Whether Christianity ought to be considered a forerunner of Islam or an equally valid path to God (and I certainly don't hold to either of those positions) is beside the point. It is plain that we cannot merely blame the presence or activities of any Islamic religion in Asia and Africa for the disappearance of any Christianity from Japan to Tunisia in any century. A more refined theology of extinction is required. So, while I recommend Jenkins' well-researched account on the matter of lost Christianities, what is missing from it—and Jenkins implicitly acknowledges this fact—is a theological and biblical explanation for this tragic phenomenon.

If Christianities in Africa and Asia died, not as a result of losing out in a struggle with another religion, but as a result of some other cause, what was it? Jenkins lays the blame for the extinction of Christianities at the doorstep of organized, sustained, state violence. "Based on the experiences of Christianity through history, we must stress the primary role of the state in the elimination of churches and communities" (Jenkins, 209). "The deeply rooted Christianity of Africa and Asia did not simply fade away through lack of zeal, or theological confusion: it was crushed, in a welter of warfare and persecution" (Jenkins, 100). "While religions might sicken and fade, they do not die of their own accord: they must be killed" (Jenkins, 30). In Africa and the Middle East, "... the largest single factor for Christian decline was organized violence, whether in the form of massacre, expulsion, or forced migration" (Jenkins, 141). Governments or rulers, not religions, exterminated Christianities from various lands.

Let me pause here and restate the topic. We're not just considering what may cause a religion to weaken, sicken or fade, but what actually kills it. A footnote in Jenkins' book led me to an article by James Bissett Pratt, which asserts this important distinction.

There is an oft-quoted saying that men do not usually die of that which kills them. The real cause of death is frequently an undermining disease which leaves the constitution so weak that it succumbs to the attack of some germ which under normal conditions it could easily have resisted. So it was with the religion of Egypt. It was long moribund before it died, but it held on in a dead-and-alive condition until attacked by the combined forces of Greek naturalistic philosophy, Asiatic cults, and Christianity. These gave it the final *coup de grace*. The real cause of its death was its age-long irrational conservatism (p. 101).<sup>1</sup>

**B**esides the missionary theology cultivated by many churches, we also need a theology of extinction (Jenkins, 249).

I suspect that many missiologists could generate a list of factors that tend over time to weaken Christianity. Other missiologists could write up a list of factors that tend to inhibit or block its establishment, growth and spread. These are important discussions, and I am not trying to delve into any of them in this article. But Pratt makes a point of distinguishing between those factors that kill a religion and those that weaken it. In the quotation above, he is interested in identifying the chronic diseases that may afflict religions. In this short review, on the other hand, I'm seeking to identify the killer. I'm trying to pick up the implicit challenge Jenkins issued when he said that we also need a theology of extinction above and beyond the missionary theology we usually cultivate.

Reading that governments or rulers from time to time literally snuff out Christianity in a land recalls the extinction of historic churches in China and Japan, nations where Islam was not the culprit in any way. Scanning back through Moffett's two-volume work, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, one can see that it was indeed Chinese authorities who stamped out Nestorian Christianity in China in the 10th Century. Moffett discusses the possible motivations of those authorities and comes to no definite conclusion since the available data is too slim. Based on the evidence, Nestorian Christianity and other religions the Chinese government persecuted were definitely considered non-Chinese. However, it is worthwhile to note that previous regimes tolerated those same religions in China.

The story in broad outline is similar in Japan, where it was Japanese authorities who decided to exterminate Christianity there. Those authorities had the perception that Christianity was not "Japanese," not consistent with Japanese traditions and, therefore, left the people open to the displeasure of the gods. What changed from one year to the next was not the character of Christianity in Japan but the *government* of Japan. What was previously tolerated became taboo.

One imperfect Muslim example suffices to make the same point from Egyptian history. Jenkins writes that between 1293 and 1354 the Mamluks launched 4 separate campaigns to force Christians and Jews to convert to Islam (p. 125). Again, for some reasons a formerly somewhat friendly or accommodating government turned hostile to Christians. In all three instances, there seems to be a rather abrupt shift to a strongly antagonistic stance towards Christianity from one that was relatively more benign.

In trying to make sense of this phenomenon, our thoughts may wander to the Book of Acts, where the establishment of the Way in Jerusalem is soon followed by persecution.

That burst of persecution did not snuff out the Way; neither did it last very long, especially when viewed from a longer, historical perspective. Nevertheless, the persecution recorded in Acts illustrates the truth that organized violence against Christianity is sometimes normal, something to be expected, at least occasionally, but for relatively short periods of time. For those looking for any magic bullet in contextualization, note that the presence of followers of Jesus in Jerusalem and Judea disturbed the religious and social status quo, in spite of the fact that the church in Jerusalem was entirely Jewish in membership, practice and theology.

Jenkins devotes space to this contextualization factor. It exposes what for many of us is a deeply held assumption: The establishment, growth and flourishing of Christianity depends to a large extent on its degree of contextualization, on the degree to which it is considered native or natural in a given setting. Jenkins notes that a lack of contextualization and/or the presence of serious divisions within a Christian movement can make it sick, weaken it and lead to its decline. The weakening of a Christianity as a result of internal divisions or by virtue of its association with foreign elements may make it more susceptible to destruction, but I'm suggesting that those factors do not kill it.

What, then, from a "spiritual" point of view, might kill off a Christianity in a given locale? I speculate that it is Satan who either possesses or influences key government leaders so as to inflict as much harm as possible on a local Christianity. Using these people, Satan from time to time is "lucky" enough to succeed in wiping out a limb of the worldwide body of Christ. It is significant, I think, that for Jenkins evil spiritual forces, personal or impersonal, play no role in his own theologizing about, or explanation of, the extermination of a Christianity anywhere in the world. The index of his book contains not a single reference to demons, Satan, or evil spirits.

Nevertheless, in theologizing on the extinction of Christianities, we might ask on what basis God might allow Satan to succeed in utterly destroying a part of the body of Christ? Granted that Satan is powerful and hostile to God, should we expect to suffer casualties in his war against us? Why would God allow a local Christianity to become extinct?

Biblical material could help us integrate the relationship between the weakening and death of a Christianity. I propose that it is God's withdrawal of His special presence that allows Satan to wipe out a brand of the faith in a locale. In Ezekiel 8-11 we read of the step-by-step movement of God's glory out of the temple in Jerusalem, out of the city and the land (cf. Ezek. 8:6; 9:3; 10:18-20; 11:22-23). In the rationale for the

departure of God's glory from the temple in Jerusalem, human sinfulness definitely played a role. But human sinfulness in itself did not destroy it, for that was left to the Babylonians who could do so only *after* God departed from His dwelling place.

In New Testament theology, God's people are now His dwelling place. It would seem, then, that at some point in time things can get so bad in a local expression of Christianity that God is forced to withdraw His special presence from them. His withdrawal would not necessarily imply that every single person had turned away completely, for there were faithful Israelites who survived the destruction of the temple. Jenkins describes something similar occurring in Asia as conditions changed over the centuries (cf. chapter 4, "The Great Tribulation" and chapter 7, "How Faiths Die"). While some believers did die as a result of governmental persecution, others fled their home areas to resettle elsewhere. In this way local bodies of believers were destroyed while still preserving some faithful individuals through forced migration. Perhaps we should understand the human events Jenkins describes so well as a gradual emptying of God's indwelling presence from those areas? What Satan finally killed off through his government agents were empty shells of what used to contain God. Eventually, as God withdrew Himself from their midst one expression of Christianity after another was killed by Satan through the apparently normal working of human history.

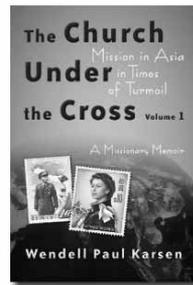
I can think of three applications of these ideas for frontier missions. First, building on the recognition that Satan uses governments to execute weak Christianities, we need to pray for government officials so that societies might be relatively peaceful, safe for new communities of Christ followers (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Second, we in our discussions about God and sin ought to emphasize more the hindering effect of our sin on God's actions among and for believers, rather than focusing so much on the effects of sin on people. Third, and more fundamentally, instead of thinking about spreading the Gospel, might we think instead of expanding the special presence of God among the nations, of making Him more accessible and available to people who do not know who He truly is? Jenkins to some extent describes a process whereby Christian communities turned inward as a means of self-preservation, tales that are obviously a warning for us today (cf. chapter 8, "The Mystery of Survival"). Following in the footsteps of those communities is a way of ensuring at least the contraction of God's special presence in our world, when just the opposite is needed. Although the dwelling of God among us must of course be protected, the burden of frontier missions is to work to expand and increase His special presence among all peoples, so that people and God may dwell together while He pours out His life among us in ever greater measures.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> "Why Religions Die," James Bissett Pratt, *University of California Publications in Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No. 5, pp. 95-124, 1940.

*The Church under the Cross: Mission in Asia in Times of Turmoil (vol. 1)*, by Wendell Paul Karsen (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2010)

—reviewed by Yalin Xin



Dr. Karsen was an ordained pastor at Lakeland Reformed Church before being assigned as a missionary to Taiwan in the earlier 1970s, involving himself in the democratic and human rights movement of the Taiwanese people, for which he was recognized in an award from Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. He subsequently served in Hong Kong for almost two decades, continuing his ministry amidst a people experiencing regional changes. Karsen has also taught at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, upon return from his overseas deployment.

Karsen's memoir of his missionary experience provides readers with an extraordinary peek into how Christians were acting or reacting to the civil and religious changes taking place at the time in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Published in the historical series of the Reformed Church in America, this volume is devoted to two periods of Karsen's missionary experience in Asia: mission in Taiwan from 1969-1973, and mission in Hong Kong from 1974-1984, and again from 1990-1998. His involvements in the socio-political and economic scenes of the two regions opens a window to readers on perspectives in Christian ministry that were often neglected: 1) that Christian ministry is meaningful only when it addresses the felt need of the people in the context; 2) that missionaries are not to shy away from the social and political struggles of the people they serve; 3) that missionaries should actively participate with the people in discovering and addressing the root of societal problems.

The first part of the book sets the scene for the socio-political situation in Taiwan, a time when the Nationalist government was still a fresh new regime and ruled the people in Taiwan with an iron fist. The people were at the receiving end of harsh rule, being oppressed and exploited, and the church was caught right in the middle, being under constant suspicion and surveillance from the government. This was a reality, as Karsen astoundingly found out, that was contradictory to the promise that China Lobbyists (for the Nationalist cause in Taiwan) made in the US. And it was not very long before Karsen needed to make a choice: to identify himself with the oppressed by participating in the cause of justice and human rights, or to distance himself from this responsibility. Would he join in "exposing the evils that were going around us, opposing those evils

*He identifies how “privileged position,” “security,” and “fundamentalist” belief prevented churches in Hong Kong from addressing the root of an unjust system in the region.*

in any way we would, and deposing the perpetrators of the evils when and where possible” (p. 74)?

Karsen chose to play an active role in standing with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT), advocating the need for the Church to be critical of social injustice in Taiwan and addressing the root of problems. PCT, with its 167,000 membership, stood strong through a turbulent time in the earlier 1970s, voicing the plight of the Taiwanese people under a Nationalist regime that disregarded human rights. Through campus ministry and publication, Karsen engaged seminary and university students in facing the socio-political issues of the time and addressing them from a Christian perspective. He also worked closely with national leaders such as Andrew Hsieh and Peng Ming-min in solidarity with the Taiwanese people’s struggle for democracy and human rights. On account of this, he and his family were eventually denied visas to return to Taiwan while on furlough in the U.S.

For the next two decades, following his exit from Taiwan in 1973, Karsen continued his overseas missionary involvement in Hong Kong, a dramatically different context from Taiwan. Before he critically examines the stand taken by Hong Kong churches, Karsen provides brief background information on colonial Hong Kong, as he did in the previous section on Taiwan. He helps orient readers to the complexity and the ‘fundamental inequities’ of the region. He identifies how “privileged position,” “security,” and “fundamentalist” belief prevented churches in Hong Kong from addressing the root of an unjust system in the region. As a result, “Christians by and large had been natural partners for the British in developing a society within the colony that was built on the pillars of power and profit” (p. 231).

Since the 70s, however, in the midst of political and social change in the colony, a new generation of Christian leaders emerged on the scene, “engaging in fresh theological thinking” and challenging the status quo (p. 234). Churches were awakened to their inescapable responsibility of being a prophetic witness in the society, and started to be actively involved in labor reforms, educational reforms, and social reforms and political reforms. As the director of Hong Kong Christian Council’s Communications Centre, Karsen and the staff were instrumental in providing an “outlet for Christian reform advocates and church leaders to express themselves on public issues during the crucial decades leading up to 1997” (p. 286). Karsen identifies a “seminal event”

toward the end of 1980. At a consultation on the mission of the church in Hong Kong, church leaders across denominations joined hands to advocate that the church “stand up and challenge the Hong Kong government in the areas of government policy, justice, and the plight of the poor” (p. 290).

This is a fascinating account of a very personal missionary journey as well as testimony to the work of God among Christians in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the last three decades of the 20th century. The author is obviously very familiar with issues at stake, with personal experience and involvement on the one hand, and serious documentation and research on the other. It is insightful and informational. In telling his own story, Karsen gives due acknowledgement to Christians he served within both regions, of their struggle, bravery and faith. From a Christian Reformed perspective, Karsen makes his points loud and clear: Christians should actively support or criticize the sociopolitical systems for the sake of justice, peace and good for all. He was insightful in appealing to Christians to directly address the root problems of the political and economic system rather than just “applying Band-Aids to social sores” (p. 231).

Karsen moved beyond a singular concern for the injustice and oppressive political systems to include Christian involvement in other spheres—education, economy and social work—which he deems important in the efforts to address root problems of Taiwan and Hong Kong. These glimpses of his efforts are helpful in providing a more holistic picture of the life and ministry of Christians in these unique contexts. But more might need to be uncovered than these Christian initiatives if we are to understand the overall process and results. The task of a future book might reveal how Christians identify, integrate and address the multi-faceted human problems in these regions, rooted as they are within socio-cultural, economic, political, and spiritual spheres. **IJFM**

# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, you'll find resources outside of the IJFM that we hope you'll find helpful: other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, YouTube videos, etc. We welcome suggestions, but cannot promise that we will publish each one we receive. Standard disclaimers on content apply.*

## The Negotiable Frontier

Dana Robert's recent contribution to *Missiology*, "Mission Frontiers from 1910 to 2010", has given a fresh historical perspective on how we negotiate the "frontier" in Christian mission.<sup>1</sup> Rather than a quantitative analysis of the frontier mission movement, Robert provides an interpretive essay on the concept of "frontier" and how we use it to prioritize mission. The abstract indicates the following:

The idea of mission frontiers is an enduring theme in mission theory and practice. This article charts the changing definitions of frontiers in twentieth century Anglo-American Protestant mission discourse. Part I traces the concept from 1910 to the end of European colonialism, through the concepts of "unoccupied regions" to multiple boundary crossings. Part II begins with the mid-century postcolonial idea of frontier as boundary between belief and unbelief, documents disputes over the definition of frontiers, and argues that the concept of unreached peoples represented both a shift and a narrowing of discourse about mission frontiers. The article concludes by raising questions about the nature of frontier discourse in the twenty-first century.

Her claim is that behind the term "frontier", or "mission frontier", has been "a locus of heated debate over the meaning and validity of mission." She begins with the 'pioneer spirit' of the American frontier and its influence on the student volunteerism in the late nineteenth century. "Go West, young man" simply became "Go East" and the mandate to occupy the world. She weaves the lives of mission statesmen like John R. Mott, Sherwood Eddy and J.H. Oldham into the radical shift that took place in the 1920's after WWI "shattered the myth of Western superiority." It was in this context that "missionary frontiers moved from the territorial expansion of Christianity to include Christian witness amid secularism and colonial racism." The "generational shift in mission philosophy" became evident with a revolt among young mission leaders at the 1924 SVMFM convention, where "students engaged in passionate discussion of Western racism, war, and labor relations, but expressed little interest in foreign missions." But she also details the pendulum swing from the 60's mood of moratorium in mission, to that 'strange optimism' of Donald McGavran, and the identification of 'frontier peoples' in

the early 70's. She is at her best in the combination of interpretive synthesis and historical detail.

Towards the end of second part she highlights the role of 1980 World Consultation on Frontier Missions in Edinburgh, Scotland, and how this meeting 'shifted the amorphous concept of *mission frontiers*'. She notes 'the inverted word order' that became *frontier missions*, and correctly suggests that this "served to limit frontier discourse specifically to planting evangelistic churches among unreached people groups, in order to complete the task of world evangelization." Then she forecasts a questionable future: "It remains to be seen whether the definition that (Ralph) Winter crafted will continue to have the same influence among twenty-first century 'transformational' evangelicals that it had in the late twentieth century." Robert is suggesting that another shift in frontier discourse is presently in motion, and that this shifting is quite normal in the history of mission discourse.

Robert's analysis has the shortcoming of narrowing down on the discourse of mission within the more ecumenical wing of mission and the World Council of Churches. Maybe the more evangelical, neo-evangelical and fundamental mission movement didn't use the term "frontier", but they would have defined their frontier nonetheless. What Robert sees as a shift to a frontier between 'belief and unbelief' in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was simply a frontier evangelicals consistently called 'the lost'. By focusing down on missionary discourse Robert might have failed to give a comprehensive treatment of *mission frontiers*, but she has demonstrated how we negotiate the priority of mission through the language of 'frontier'.

She has probed mission history with what social scientists call "an essentially negotiable concept."<sup>2</sup> Words like 'frontier', or more theological terms like 'kingdom' and 'church', can be contested terms with no uniform accepted use. While there may be a general sharing of their meaning, these terms are complex and more open for debate. They usually designate some exemplar or paragon of achievement, and they're used to define a situation, to characterize an issue, to construct a priority, or to capture the terms of discourse. Robert's tracing of our bargaining over *mission frontiers* exposes how history and context can often shape our priorities in mission, and indeed, how one single term can symbolize mission-shift. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dana Robert, "Mission Frontiers from 1910 to 2010", in *Missiology: An International Review*, Part I (Vol XXXIX no.2, April, 2011) Part II (Vol. XXXIX, no.3, July, 2011) (Electronic Issue).

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984) pp. 185f.