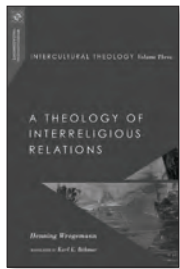


# Books and Missiology

*A Theology of Interreligious Relations* (Intercultural Theology, Volume Three), by Henning Wrogemann, tr. Karl E. Böhmer (from German, 2015), (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), xxi + 502 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



Henning Wrogemann makes an impressive big picture attempt to change paradigms and terminologies in his introduction to a theology of interreligious relations, with many sparkling insights along the way. He acknowledges that this is a tentative beginning (“even though they [the reflections contained in this volume] are somewhat fragmentary in nature . . . ,” xx), and this review will accordingly critique aspects of his presentation. But Wrogemann’s comprehensive analysis is a welcome challenge to religious paradigms that need to be discarded, and the book will be a great success if it stimulates various institutions and organizations to rewrite their curricula with new approaches. (The focus of the book is the curricula in Wrogemann’s own context of German higher education.)

Due to the author’s very broad approach to this subject, this reviewer was never quite certain exactly what Wrogemann was aiming at. Indeed, he clearly states that “this book proposes both a *theory of interreligious relations* and a related but methodologically independent *theology of interreligious relations*” (xx, italics original). But this suggested focus still leaves scope for the many related topics that Wrogemann addresses in his voluminous analysis. In the introduction to this new English translation he also indicates that:

It is the contention of this present volume that many contemporary theology-of-religion publications are simply incapable of answering the pressing questions of today. (xvii)

And Wrogemann does pretty well in exposing that incapability, yet I’m not satisfied that he ever gets to the roots of the problems in theology of religion.

By the end of the book Wrogemann is explicit about the overall aim of his larger three-volume project, of which this is the final volume. His focus is a new paradigm for mission studies:

... being a new term and an elaboration on the older subject heading *mission studies*, intercultural theology examines the processes in which in the course of the expansion of the Christian religious configuration, cultures, and contexts change due to Christian presences and practices. (454; italics original)

*In other words, intercultural theology refers to a new form of mission studies.* (462; italics original)

Before weaving these different objectives, Wrogemann is very clear about a fundamental presupposition of his work:

... this volume holds to the thesis that New Testament claims to ultimate validity are precisely what forms the Christian basis for lasting, sustainable, and constructive relations with the followers of other religious traditions. (xvii)

This reviewer is not certain that Wrogemann has demonstrated this thesis in his massive study, but would also opine that it is not a vital point to be made. It is always refreshing to read a strong affirmation of the “ultimate validity” of the New Testament amidst inter-religious relations (especially in light of later comments to be noted below on the interpretation of the Bible), but that this New Testament affirmation actually supports (as compared to undermines) relations with followers of other faiths is not easily demonstrated, and is arguably contradicted by history.

From the outset Wrogemann understands that “constructive relations with followers of other religious traditions” must face new historical conditions of globalization and pluralization. In his first chapter, “A Theology of Religions or a Theology of Interreligious Relations?,” he offers a brilliant summary of an older Western discourse of religion that is now problematic:

These [Western] perceptual patterns include the notion that cultures and religions are *uniform and very distinct entities*; the notion that at the heart of these cultures and religions is an essential core that guarantees their uniformity over long periods of time; the notion that *a religion’s real nature* is reflected not so much in its praxis but *in its religious scriptures*; the notion that *religions with written scriptures are fundamentally superior* to those without them; and the notion that *a people group is properly governed* when it is governed *according to its own laws*. This prompted colonial administrations to embark on a quest to identify the appropriate indigenous legal traditions.

In the framework of colonial discourse, typifications of other religions provided handy references for proving their backwardness as compared to the Christian civilizations of the West,

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*H. L. Richard is an independent researcher focused on the Hindu-Christian encounter. He has published numerous books and articles including studies of key figures like Narayan Vaman Tilak (Following Jesus in the Hindu Context, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998), Kalagara Subba Rao (Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005), and R. C. Das (R. C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity, Delhi: ISPCK, 1995).*

**W**rogemann lays a foundation for an all-out attack on our current constructs of religion, yet he appears to accept that Islam and Buddhism are religions and never offers an explicit critique of this dominant paradigm.

thereby serving to justify the colonial occupation. For instance, we frequently come across statements about Islam's inherent incapacity for reform as a result of its eternal and immutable law, the shari'a, and as a result of the fatalism of the Muslim people. Similarly, we find references to the passivity of Asian cultures and religions. The political exploitability of such religious comparisons is rather self-evident. (8-9, italics original)

This lays a foundation for an all-out attack on our current constructs of "religion," yet throughout the book Wrogemann continues to use this disputed term and never offers an explicit critique of the dominant paradigm that there are only a dozen or so "world religions" (an implicit critique will be noted below). The very title of the book assumes that the term "interreligious" carries a clear meaning, when in fact it does not.

Later, in this first chapter, Wrogemann has the bold sub-heading, "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: An Obituary of a Model" (14). The obituary of this very typical three-fold construct is probably premature, but the critique is valid. (There could also be obituaries for theology of religion and mission studies as I have previously pointed out; these also would no doubt be premature obituaries.)

### *Evaluating Theory-of-Religion Models*

In part 1, Wrogemann uses seven chapters to lay out his critique of current theologies of religion (e.g., revisionist, interpretive, interactionist, comparative, etc.). His objections to pluralism are especially impressive, as he shows that pluralist assumptions against specific truth claims (like those we affirm in the New Testament) are fundamentally non-pluralist. Wrogemann states that pluralists insist on a "self-relativization" (86) by those who believe in the truth of their scriptures. So while the pluralist call for a new foundation for interreligious interaction sounds impressive, it in fact fails to accept plural perspectives, particularly non-relativistic perspectives. Thus the pluralist approach actually undermines (or destroys) true encounters among sincere believers.

Wrogemann is also opposed to the intellectualizing of interreligious encounters. Part 1 closes with these words on the necessary "grounding" of interreligious relations:

When people simply assume that everybody has the freedom (more or less) to decide for or against some variant in the theology of religion, then they misjudge the social conditionality of identity in many cultures. It follows that as long as people formulate theology of religion models in a vacuum, their explanations will not sufficiently take into account the reality of interreligious relations on the ground, and their response

will thus remain inappropriate. This will be the subject of our deliberations in the following chapters. (136)

Through six chapters in part 2, Wrogemann looks at "How Islam and Buddhism View Other Religions." This title seems to uncritically accept that Islam and Buddhism are "religions;" the data within the chapter does not fit this assumption, but the root of this problem, as stated earlier, is never addressed. The focus on Islam and Buddhism puts this reviewer in an uncomfortable place, for his personal experience is overwhelmingly related to Hindu traditions. Maybe the fact that Hindu traditions so shatter the "world religions" paradigm makes it hard for Wrogemann to include them in his discussions? (In part 1 he very inadequately critiqued the Hindu-focused comparative theology of Francis Clooney, but that seemed too fine a detail to address in this review.) Wrogemann's procedure of highlighting a few intellectuals (acknowledged to be fringe people in the case of Islam) and their perspective on interreligious encounter almost seems to vitiate against his rejection of intellectualism in favor of holism. But at least there is a serious effort to listen to some voices from beyond Christendom.

### *Building Blocks of a New Theory*

Part 3 presents in seven chapters "Building Blocks for a Theory of Interreligious Relations." This is the core of Wrogemann's call for new paradigms that broaden points of contact beyond scriptures and theology, and in the process challenge traditional views of scriptures and theology. In his introductory statement he indicates that he

will approach the subject from the angles of cultural studies, religious studies, social philosophy, and the philosophy of the social sciences to accentuate those factors that are of particular importance for interreligious relations but that generally receive little attention. (211)

The first chapter of this part (chapter 16) backs up to again attack our current theologies of religion. Six fallacies are listed, and this is some of the most helpful material in the book. First, the *rationalist* fallacy is "the presupposition that *people are guided primarily by their thought processes* and that they act according to what they hold to be true" (213; italics original). That might seem too obvious to require stating, but it brings helpful clarity regarding the inadequacy of our intellectual constructs. Wrogemann insists that "people are not consistently *guided* by any means by basic premises in the theology of religion; instead their actions are determined by multiple reference points" (214, italics original).

**H**e emphasizes that his theory is about relations, not encounters, as the latter are fleeting and for most of the world it is long-term relations across the boundaries of religions that are important.

Second is the *individualist* fallacy, that individuals make decisions in rational ways whereas in fact relationships often determine individual decisions more than ideas do. A third fallacy Wrogemann calls the *monolinear* fallacy, and is particularly seen in the reductionism in pluralist appeals to recognize and accept others and their religious traditions. Wrogemann points out that “there is always and at the same time an entire spectrum of different positions between the poles of recognition and rejection within the complex contexts of interreligious constellations” (215, italics original).

Fourth is the *elitist* fallacy which

consists in turning a blind eye to those factors that are key for interreligious interaction—things such as liturgical and ritual performances, symbolizations, and media—which have a far greater effect on religious configurations than theological paradigms do. (215)

Fifth is the fallacy of *forgetting the body* (i.e., human corporeality) and how physicality and physical spaces impact religion and religious practices. Finally, there is a *religionist* fallacy which assumes the centrality of religious motives in all interreligious relations; “many other dimensions (historical, social, relational, societal, regional, economic, political, medial, etc.) are not considered” (216). Wrogemann’s identification of these fallacies alerts us to Western tendencies in the perception of religion.

In this same sixteenth chapter, Wrogemann goes on to spell out five theses about his theory of interreligious relations. He does not give a neat statement to his first thesis; but, this is where he comes closest to defining religion (inadequately, as I’ve already too often stated). The main point has to do with group identity, and how religion contributes to various group identities for many peoples.

A *theory of interreligious relations* takes these developments seriously, but it focuses in particular on collective we’s holding certain religiocultural worldviews and *competing with one another*. (219, italics original)

Here, as throughout the book, Wrogemann has helpful examples from different cultures across the world. He emphasizes that his theory is about *relations*, not *encounters*, as the latter are fleeting and for most of the world it is long-term relations across the boundaries of religions that are important.

His second thesis is about holism and dynamism:

...there is no such thing as religions having a fundamental nature....the phenomenon of interreligious relations is all about dynamic configurations and reconfigurations that cannot be immobilized by theology-of-religion theories. (222)

The third thesis is again about dynamism.

The point is to continually break up rigid perceptual patterns.... As we proceed with our theorizing, it will be important to show that in the field of interreligious relations, there are frequently very different factors in play to what observers generally assume. (223)

The fourth thesis is that this dynamic and multidisciplinary approach to interreligious relations must also impact the way we read the Bible. Biblical accounts are full of the very same complexities that are under discussion, so “those ways of reading these sources that promote standardization and systematization must be rejected out of hand” (224). The final thesis is again about breadth of recognition; “talking about religiosity or religion is never just a harmless exercise, but that it always has to do with aspirations and claims to social power” (236).

The six following chapters in part 3 then lay out the complexities from multi-disciplinary fields that must be wrestled with in order to genuinely confront what we call interreligious interactions. The first is identity in a chapter on “What Does *Identity* Mean: Interaction in Social Networks.” His basic perspective is to “steer clear of essentialization” (244), which is greatly appreciated but seems to be undermined by the “world religions” framework that still underlies his book. Then “inclusions and exclusions” are discussed; how are group identities sustained or fragmented?

A chapter then considers what it means to recognize and acknowledge the other. The public sphere is then discussed in another chapter that brings a perspective beyond the usual theology of religion outline. Pluralism and multiculturalism come under the microscope next, and again one of Wrogemann’s strengths is his insightful exposure of pluralistic utopias. Pluralists suggest that “good interreligious relations are *by definition* characterized by peace and harmony. These relations are not supposed to be disturbed by people changing their religious views” (292, italics original). Wrogemann suggests instead that

society is about maintaining a culture of public struggle between identities, including collective identities, in which dissent and disagreement are not seen as negatives needing to be eliminated but as resources for constructive coexistence. (295).

The closing chapter of part 3 involves an appeal for “a wide variety of methodological approaches” (297). Media studies, performance theory, “complex strategies of initiating, adjusting and perpetuating boundary-defining actions” (301), the actual actors, “individuals, groups, movements

*People position themselves in different ways at the same time, so that it is possible to speak of multiple positionings, multiple locations, and various degrees of loyalty. —Wrogemann*

or organizations” (302). One cannot read Wrogemann and then sit content with a neat theory about life or religion! Complexity marks everything and so must be central in all theorizing and planning.

### *Dialogue and Theological Formulation*

Part 4 is four chapters looking at dialogue. This is again outstanding material but this review is also too long so no detailed analysis will be presented. Current attitudes and practices in dialogue are critiqued in line with points above related to reductionism, intellectualism, etc. The author’s helpful analysis of the historical error of making “religion” an “entity” in relation to “Buddhism” (326–7) again shows the problem of the larger framework of the world religions construct. Wrogemann thus lays out all the data for why “interreligious” is too loaded a term to use for his theory/theology, yet it seems he cannot find an alternative. Religion is such a central concept to global modernity that it appears inescapable, yet it seems impossible to be genuinely post-Enlightenment, post-Eurocentric, or post-colonial without finding a way to be post-religion.

Over six chapters in part 5 Wrogemann develops his theology of interreligious relations. He begins with a chapter contrasting his position with that of theology of religion approaches. His six points are important enough to outline here. First, theology of religion approaches are too abstract:

those who do not reflect on the pretensions to prestige, constellations of power, and symbolic rivalries in play in this [interreligious] context open themselves up to accusations of completely failing to recognize what really happens in interreligious relations. (351)

Second, Wrogemann objects to the focus on peace in interreligious engagement, and appeals to Jesus and the realities of religious rivalries over the centuries to show that conflict can be life promoting.

A third contrast is the selectivity of theology of religion theories, whereas Wrogemann is looking for holistic engagement. Fourth is an acceptance of the reality of “diversity within religious configurations” (355) in opposition to the static essentialisms of a theology of religion. Fifth, abstract texts are central to theology of religion whereas Wrogemann wants to also look carefully at how texts (and sections of text to neglect of other sections) are engaged and used in real life by real people. Finally, Wrogemann is again against monolinear approaches that want to define what is central; “. . . people position themselves in different ways at the same time, so that it is possible to speak of multiple positionings, multiple locations, and various degrees of loyalty” (356).

In three chapters that spell out his theological position Wrogemann is blatantly trinitarian—“The Power and Love of the One God,” “The Interreligious Communication of Jesus Christ,” and “The Fellowship of the Spirit as a Contrast Model.” Wrogemann is to be commended for his head-on approach to difficult topics throughout part 5. In discussing the one God, he addresses the jealousy of God as well as the accusation that monotheism leads to narrow-mindedness and even violence. Discussing Jesus, he accepts that “*disputations, scolding, and protest are part of the communicative repertoire of the Son of God*” (378, italics original). But he goes on to show that Jesus was unique, that we cannot follow him in all his ways, and that his teaching points to the overcoming of aggression in human relations. (This is a very inadequate summary of such rich material—something that can be said about this entire review.)

An interesting pedagogical shift enters the text with chapter 30, his chapter on the Holy Spirit. This chapter is mostly interacting with First Peter, and the chapter that follows is interaction with the book of Revelation. Peter’s epistle shows the reality of suffering for followers of Christ, yet also the centrality of praise to God in response to his grace amidst that suffering. This attractive lifestyle of disciples of Jesus is an essential part of interreligious relations. The incomprehensibility of God’s grace to us leads to “a refusal to make definitive assertions about the state of salvation of other people” (397). The tension between genuine appreciation for people outside of Christ amidst ongoing “rivalry between different worldviews and religious validity claims” mitigates against tidy theories of theologies of religion (400).

Perhaps it seems odd that a chapter following one on the Holy Spirit would focus on the book of Revelation, but Wrogemann rightly says that

it makes sense to concentrate especially on those passages among the New Testament writings that seem to contradict most patently the concern of an appreciative hermeneutics of the religious Other. (412)

The clear binary in Revelation between the followers of Christ and the enemies of Christ is analyzed in terms of the language of the powerful contrasted with the language of the oppressed. This chapter is worthy of careful study, concluding that “a contemporary theology of interreligious relations will therefore not be able to proceed by adopting such pejorative motives” (420).

Approaching the concluding chapter of part 5, his section on the theology of interreligious relations, one has come to

**W**rogemann asks: “How should beauty, what is awe inspiring, and what is fascinating in other religions be understood?” His answer goes back to basic Christian theology, that God’s ways are higher than ours.

expect that Wrogemann will not provide a neat definition. Indeed, “*the task of theological theory is not to offer clear-cut explanations but to help interpret ongoing ambivalences*” (424, italics original). What is God doing in the world of multiple religions? A very helpful point in this exposition is that “*positive things can also bring on a trial of faith: How should beauty, what is awe inspiring, and what is fascinating in other religions be understood?*” (424–5, italics original). Wrogemann’s answer here goes back to basic Christian theology, that God’s ways are higher than ours and we are to live in humble praise towards him.

Then the reality of other religious traditions no longer has to be made to fit into a coherent systematic interpretation of the world; instead, we can once again entrust the both fascinating and unsettling experience of difference to God himself. (426)

Up until then [the end of time], the confession of Christ, the search for unifying truths, and the (salutary) admission of ignorance continue to be subject to the reverential recognition that God’s counsels remain hidden to us in many respects. (427)

### *Shifting Mission Studies*

Part 6 concludes the book (and a three-volume study) with three chapters that summarize intercultural theology, mission studies and religious studies. One theme appearing here again which this review has thus far not highlighted is that Christianity is now a global phenomenon and has many varying expressions that need to be accounted for. The lived experiences of these local traditions should be central to this discussion rather than a focus on Western ratiocinations.

It is almost impossible for this reviewer to say too many positive things about this stimulating study. A trifling objection is the constant use of italics, as illustrated in many of the quotes above. This felt like the writer did not sufficiently trust the reader to understand his points. Once again in the closing chapter the nagging problem of religion raises its head, as Wrogemann expresses concern that “the definition of religion is also in danger of being eroded” (458). Well, the data in this book has not only eroded but even exploded much popular thought about world religions. A better way ahead needs to be found regarding this particular paradigm and terminology. Yet this blemish takes nothing away from the liberating perspective that Wrogemann introduces into the worlds of mission studies and theology of religion. May we live worthily in the holistic ambivalence of discipleship to Jesus in the twenty-first century.

*Seeking Church: Emerging Witnesses to the Kingdom*, by Darren T. Duerksen and William A. Dryness, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), x + 212 pp.

—Reviewed by Brad Gill



**T**his month we welcomed the announcement of the third edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.<sup>1</sup> Its overwhelming data and quantitative analysis cause us to expect rich diversity, surprising growth and recession, and huge gravitational shifts. And we can anticipate a wide variety of scholars to continue to

assess the data. The authors Darren Duerksen and William Dryness may find more evidence for what they see as a “crisis of church.” In their new book, *Seeking Church: Emerging Witnesses to the Kingdom*, they identify a certain confusion about the church across such a diverse Christian movement. They believe we require greater discernment as the church emerges in our day. They press us beyond traditional ecclesiology, beyond present missiological analysis, beyond any one method or strategy, and offer a new approach to interpreting the church as it arises on the frontier.

The combination of these two authors, both professors and both experienced inter-cultural practitioners, provides the reader with insights from their years of theological, religious and anthropological scholarship. They are uniquely qualified to infuse different disciplines into their missiological purpose.

The focus of this book is theological reflection on the socio-cultural formation and growth of communities that follow Christ, or in some particular ways are drawn to Christ... [W]e want to approach this in terms of emergence theory, which stipulates that social communities arise over time in ways that reflect their interaction with specific historical and cultural dynamics. (25)

*Emergence theory*, drawn from the pool of recent anthropological studies, is their answer to what they see as a very wide confusion concerning the church. First, they lay out the actual problem it addresses. In their first chapter they display their command of theological and historical tensions surrounding “Church and Kingdom” and “Church and Mission.” But it’s the missiological lens they apply to more recent developments in global mission (Church and Religions, Church and Culture) that helps the reader begin to see the problem and the need for a new theoretical vantage point.

**M**uch of our missiological perception over six decades was built on the general framework of communication theory. In the dynamic equivalence theory of translation, the crux of the problem lay unnoticed.

The authors identify two flawed assumptions they believe warrant this new analysis of the church. First, the increasing globalization of religious worlds challenges the way we understand religion: “From a social science perspective the category (religion) itself is an elastic concept and is not as self-evident as is often assumed” (18). Secondly, and I believe more crucial to the overall crisis of church, is “the assumption that the church somehow exists above and apart from culture” (60). They contend that even with all the efforts of contextualizing the church over the past half a century that “cultural analysis was not used to consider the nature of the church in particular cultures” (20). That’s quite a charge. Why was that the case?

The church was considered an abstract theological reality rather than an actual community of people necessarily existing as a subculture within a larger social group. (20, italics mine)

This predicament, the assumption that the church is above culture, really propels the entire thesis of this book. With all due respect to the contributions of Andrew Walls, Eugene Nida and Charles Kraft, the authors believe we need to reframe the questions for mission anthropology. They claim that much of our missiological perception over six decades was built on the general framework of communication theory. In the dynamic equivalence theory of translation, the crux of the problem lay unnoticed.

But, important as this advance was, it carried limitations; the church does not exist like a text waiting to be communicated. It is rather a *dynamic, culturally situated emergent reality* that is formed under multiple influences. (20, italics mine)

They have culled through that theoretical jungle of recent anthropological studies and in chapter 3 they offer a new tool in emergence theory (“Emergent Ecclesial Identity and Mission”). They don’t swallow this theory uncritically, but they use it to explain how the church is a “process of interaction between a context and persons and what results out of that interaction” (65).

They offer four case studies of how the church has culturally manifested across the globe (chapter 4) which make it crystal clear why this is a key textbook for frontier missiology. They combine their research and experience in Japan, Indonesia, South Asia and Philippines to “discover and interrogate ways in which those settings have encouraged or obstructed the emergence of a stable entity that can

reasonably be called a church.” (83) These cases show that context matters:

This review carries forward the assumption we are making that the possibilities for the emergence of the church in any place are dependent in large part on reigning assumptions of what human community looks like—its limits and its possibilities. (83)

But in the second half of the book, the authors assure us that this emergent process is nourished by similar biblical sources and expresses some general characteristics. A subtheme of the book is to provide “a process of discerning where the church exists” (25), so the authors devote chapters to common “Biblical Metaphors for Church” (chapter 5), the origins of “Theological Practices of Church” (chapter 6), and the “Markers of Transformative Church” (chapter 7). They also claim that an eschatological vision will play into the emergence of church (chapter 8).

Throughout the book, they view this emergence perspective from complimentary disciplines—an integration which is the very warp and woof of missiology. This weaving together of theology, history, anthropology and actual ministry contexts catalyzes insights for the reader, especially those ministering in frontier situations where an initial turning to Christ is taking place. Insights seem to almost pop out at the reader. I will highlight just two examples:

First, their theological command is apparent in chapter 6 where they address the origins of theological practices (baptism, eucharist, etc.) in any new context. In dealing with the biblical metaphor “body of Christ” in chapter 5, they make a quick reference to Miroslav Volf who “argues that the ‘body of Christ’ should be interpreted from the perspective of the man and woman becoming one body” (117). Rather than the typical emphasis on the organic unity of the different parts of the body, the body metaphor speaks of the emergence of a new entity as in a marriage becoming one body, a new entity, a new unity, a new communion of persons. “For Paul, being ‘united in the same mind and for the same purpose’ (1 Cor. 1:10) is not about being a part of the same ecclesial body but about being in communion with Christ and each other” (117).

They believe Volf’s emphasis resonates with emergent theory. The reader senses the compelling theological relevance for any frontier situation: initial believers in unreached contexts emerge first of all as a new communion of persons.

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*Brad Gill is Senior Editor of the International Journal of Frontier Missiology. After assisting in the founding years of the US Center for World Mission in Pasadena, now Frontier Ventures, he served in North Africa for 13 years. He is currently President of the International Society for Frontier Missiology*

**O**ne hears a rationale for the way new movements today emphasize obedience to the Scriptures. Who would have thought unpacking the Reformation with a reverse hermeneutic would transform our understanding of these movements?

Their communion in the Spirit is what constitutes a new entity (church), not a certain type of organic unity. “For Volf, each local church is a church and is connected to the entire communion of those ‘in Christ’ as an anticipation of ‘the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God’” (117).

A second example is the way historical perspective buttresses their cultural analysis. They map out “The Church as an Emergent Phenomenon in History” (chapter 2) by reinterpreting familiar eras of church history (the first century, the Reformation) with their tool of emergence theory. They apply a “critical realism” that appreciates both the influence of human agency (the Apostles, Calvin) and of unique social conditions (Greco-Roman associations, Church and State). It’s in this kind of dialectic that they introduce what they call a “reverse hermeneutic.”

Hermeneutics has traditionally described the process of drawing out meaning from Scripture. What if we were to reverse this hermeneutical direction and use the values and insights of culture to illuminate aspects of Scripture? Alternatively, how might these serve to obscure or distort those readings? . . . We make use of the idea of reversing the hermeneutical flow in order to illustrate *the way historical forms of church have necessarily reflected, for better or worse, prevailing cultural forms and practices.* (28, italics mine)

Admittedly, for some this reverse hermeneutic is simply a new label for the cultural influences they’ve recognized all along in church history. However, these authors demonstrate how a reverse hermeneutic can help explain a World Christianity that extends in such diversity today.

In their short section, “Hearing and Obeying Christ” (154–157), one can’t help but hear a rationale for the way new movements today emphasize *obedience* to the Scriptures. One thinks of the global phenomena of Disciple-Making Movements (DMM) and the *obedience-based discipleship* so fundamental to their growth. But who would have thought unpacking the Reformation with a reverse hermeneutic (39–51) would have any relevance to our understanding of these movements? These authors begin and end their argument over four centuries of church history, and they interlace biblical and anthropological perspectives in re-establishing “hearing and obeying Christ” as a true marker of the church. I would summarize their argument as follows:

- **Historical:** The socio-religious conditions of the Reformation led the reformers to emphasize the church as a “Word-event,” as a “creature of the word,” and established preaching and proclamation as one of the markers of a true church.
- **Linguistic:** A “cargo” mentality of communication became the prevailing paradigm in evangelical mission,

one in which the message was packaged according to the presenter’s understanding. Receivers then had to be educated to understand it. In the mid-twentieth century Eugene Nida introduced his dynamic-equivalence theory and this began to shift the paradigm to a receptor-oriented communication.

- **Anthropological:** We understand we’re not just delivering a package, but we’re engaged in a process. E. Daniel Shaw claims we must go beyond contextualization and focus on the “cognitive apparatus” that hears and processes the Word-event.
- **Biblical:** We see this process displayed in Acts and in Paul and the concern with what the receivers do with the Word. Abraham is the paradigmatic example of this “positive reception,” and his faithful obedience is the primary sign of his identity with God and His covenant.
- **Hermeneutical:** Again, by using a reverse hermeneutic, David Bosch notes that over the last 150 years Western evangelicals have desired to counter relativistic theologies by preaching salvation. Consequently, the emphasis on “going” and preaching to the nations in the Great Commission of Matt. 28: 19–20 eclipsed the second part of that command (“teaching them to *obey* everything I have commanded”).

A reverse hermeneutic makes clear how the prevailing cultural conditions of a Reformation period helped shape an emphasis on hearing the Word (word-event), and how there was a gradual clouding of our ability to discern obedience as a genuine marker of a transformative church.

Duerksen and Dyrness have contributed a very effective tool for sharpening our missiological discernment. Their cultural analysis is a fresh way to perceive the past, study the present, and aim into the future. It comes at an appropriate moment, when we still face a huge proportion of unreached peoples and populations. Emergence theory should be deployed in our approach, and not wait till our methods and strategies are unfruitful—when the open and voluntary church meets closed communities; when churches fail to fully incorporate back-row believers; when the relational flow of a disciple-making movement is inhibited by an urban jungle. It certainly answers any confusion about the church on today’s frontiers. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Gina Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), This item is not yet published. It is available for pre-orders and will ship on 01 February 2020. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/world-christian-encyclopedia-9781474403238?cc=us&clang=en&#>.