Reimagining Frontier Mission

Moving Beyond:
Frontier Missions in Our Postcolonial World

by Bradford Greer

Editorial note: This article was first presented to the faculty and student body of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

Pietism mixed with the freedom to innovate has been the strength of the evangelical experiment both here in the US and in the global missions movement. For 129 years the Asbury alumni have featured these two characteristics in their own worldwide influence. It is indeed an honor and a privilege to address you today, and to try to supplement this institution's formative influence on both Christian piety and mission innovation. Thank you, Dr. Okersson, Dr. Kima and Dr. Sam for this opportunity to address your student body.

I know that "pietism" and "innovation" are words that can raise eyebrows. There have been plenty of bad innovations in missions over the years, drawn largely from methods and strategies that reflect corporate cultures more than they do the kingdom of God. In contrast, the innovations I am addressing today are simply those of being open and responsive to the Spirit's working in new, unanticipated ways.

By pietism, I mean experiencing, knowing, and meaningfully walking with the Lord; in other words, being filled with and led by the Spirit in alignment with God's Word. Our faith is not merely a set of beliefs that we need to articulate accurately (although it is important to know what we believe); it is fundamentally living in the presence of God and allowing him to work in and through us, blessing us, and making us a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

Pietism shapes Asbury and is an integral part of your history. In fact, Asbury was the center of two significant moves of God during my own lifetime, one in 1970 and another in the mid-1990s. But Asbury has experienced quite a number of powerful moves of God over its history.

Innovation is also an integral part of your history. One of your alumni, J. Waskom Pickett, was a heavyweight in missions from 1920 to 1960. His friend, colleague, and fellow Asbury alumnus, E. Stanley Jones, is more well-known, but Waskom Pickett was also highly innovative and very influential.

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His innovation was seen in his openness and responsiveness to what God was doing among the Dalits in his area of India. One of your seminary graduates, Arthur McPhee, who has served on your faculty, did his PhD dissertation on Pickett and that dissertation morphed into his book, *The Road to Delhi*.[1]

Not only did Pickett respond to what God was doing among the Dalits, he took the time to research their mass turning to Christ in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He published the findings of this research in the book *Christian Mass Movements in India*.[2] Up until that time there had been a significant amount of resistance in the Church to these people movements, but Pickett's research provided the validation that they needed.

One of the men involved in Pickett's research team was Donald McGavran, the father of the Church Growth Movement. The missiological principles unearthed in Pickett's research provided the foundational thinking behind the Church Growth Movement. Out of the Church Growth Movement came the Unreached Peoples Movement and out of that came Frontier Missions. Due to this, Pickett helped shape the missiological thinking of the church from the second half of the 1900s till now. And I haven't even mentioned the global influence of E. Stanley Jones.

Third, Asbury's impact continues through your faculty. You have a faculty who are devoted to the Lord and demonstrate academic excellence. They serve here so that pietism and innovation may continue to shape missions across the globe.

And if we are going to see the kingdom of God take root and spread among the peoples of the world religions, pietism and innovation are essential. We need to keep our roots firm in Jesus Christ as we attempt to move beyond where we have been. So, let me unpack what I mean by this.

Pietism Is the Foundation of All Mission

Let's be honest, without pietism there can be no missions. In order for missions to happen we have to personally encounter the Lord and out of that encounter move on to love him and please him in all we do. In that movement, the Lord directs his people to learn what he is up to in the world. As we learn, we are to respond by offering ourselves up to serve his purposes. As we respond to the Lord and since he is the overseer of his mission, he dispenses gifts as he wills, directing us to where he wants us to serve.

So, I think the calling to serve outside of one's first culture is the result of

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an interactive process, the result of God's moving upon us along with our responsiveness to his moving. This responsiveness is crucial for all missions, but it is particularly crucial for frontier missions. By frontier missions I mean the particular focus within global missions on the peoples of the world's religions, that is, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Shinto peoples.

Why is this responsiveness particularly crucial for frontier missions?

This is a time of innumerable opportunities in all of missions, not just frontier missions. We live at a time when we can travel the world. We can get to Thailand from Kentucky in

about 24 hours. For US passport holders, there is almost no place we cannot go and the opportunities to serve are innumerable.

Yet, these opportunities for frontier missions are being overshadowed by the challenges. Most of the areas where the peoples of the world religions are found are difficult to enter and work in. Governments restrict access; and community resistance to the gospel is tangible. In addition, many of these areas are mired in conflict. Here are some examples of the difficulties working in these areas. Last year, Christian workers were expelled from China, India, Pakistan, and Egypt. In one country from 2007 to 2017, twenty-seven individuals connected to the Christian community were murdered by extremists. Four kidnappings occurred during that period as well.

It is so much easier to go to the parts of the world that are somewhat Christianized.

Yet, what is the dire need in global missions? Approximately 87 to 90% of all Christian workers work either among Christians or in areas where Christians exist in significant numbers. Approximately five to seven percent of Christian workers work with tribal groups. That leaves only about five percent of all Christian workers to focus on the peoples of the world religions who comprise almost 30% of the world's population. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, 86% of all Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus do not personally know a Christian, that is, any kind of Christian, nominal or devoted.[3] With this statistic in mind, how are the vast majority of these peoples ever going to meet someone who can embody and explain the gospel to them? They won't.

The only way we are going to see this unbelievable imbalance in the global mission effort change is if the Lord's people take Paul's prayer in

Ephesians 3:14–21 seriously and make it their own:

> …¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (NRSV).

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would come to know the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love—the love that embraces them and all the peoples of the world.⁴ Paul could not have been referring to a cognitive knowing because he says it surpasses knowledge. He was referring to an experiential knowing that happens through the working of the Spirit within us, a working of the Spirit that shapes who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we live out our lives in the world.

When Paul's prayer becomes our prayer and when it begins to be realized in our hearts, the love of Christ will compel us to offer ourselves to go to the peoples of the frontier regions so that they may know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

Pietism is one of the foundation blocks for all missions. Without the dynamic interplay of God moving upon us and our responding to what he is doing, frontier mission simply will not happen.

Innovation Is Essential In Frontier Missions

And yet, pietism is not enough. Those who go need to be properly prepared so they can be open to what God is doing as the Word of God moves into new areas and among new peoples.⁵ Innovation has always been an essential component of frontier missions. Even though God has chosen to use us, his people, to advance his kingdom, our own inclinations can hinder us from properly responding to what he is doing.

The book of Acts and Paul's letter to the Galatians shows us that the Word

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of God does not cross social, cultural, and religious boundaries easily. The apostles were charged to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Yet, they were slow to respond. It appears that their Jerusalem-centered perspective impeded their grasp of the charge. It was Phillip, a Hellenistic Jew, who was used by God to open the door to Samaritans and to those excluded due to physical disability (the Ethiopian Eunuch).⁶ Subsequently, God used Peter to open the door to the Gentiles; yet, Peter's actions at Cornelius' house received strong objections (Acts 11:2). Even when mentally acquiescing to uncircumcised Gentiles being included, it appears that Jewish communities were slow to understand its full implications. Luke tells us that even after the Cornelius event, the diaspora Jews only took the word to other Jews (Acts 11:19).⁷ It was believers from Cyprus and Cyrene in Antioch who moved the gospel forward among Gentiles as Gentiles (Acts 11:20).

Yet, even after what God had done in Antioch and through the apostolic ministry of Paul and Barnabas, God's inclusion of the Gentiles as Gentiles received significant opposition.

As we see in Acts, in Galatians, and throughout mission history, in our eagerness to be faithful to God, some of us can end up resisting and opposing what God is doing. Innovation in mission is essential; yet, it can be problematic when it happens.

I would like to point out four areas where innovation is needed today— where the contexts of frontier missions call us to move from where we are to spaces that will facilitate the growth of the kingdom in and among the peoples of the world religions.

Moving beyond Systematics to Text-sensitive Readings

The western church has a deep historic and cultural attachment to systematic theology. As a result, our systematic theologies shape teaching and training in churches, Bible schools, and seminaries. Two of the movements in the USA church today, the New Calvinist movement and the Acts 29 movement, are both centered around systematic theologies. And this is not to mention the way they shape our denominationalism.

Systematic theologies are beneficial because they provide internally coherent systems, making the faith easier to understand. They remove a vast amount of ambiguity and provide a safe structure for those who operate within them. They are easy to teach and learn and they make people feel competent and confident in their faith. In addition, these are valuable cultural artifacts arising from particular times and places that express the story of the church throughout the ages.⁸ Finally, "these are part of the chorus of the saints who have gone before us."⁹

Yet, with regard to mission, these systems have three fundamental weaknesses. The first weakness is that they are situated; each one arose in a particular time and place. Thus, they are culturally bounded,¹⁰ addressing questions and resolving issues that a particular group of people within a particular culture was asking and facing. These questions and issues are not ones that other groups are asking or facing, or at least, not in the same ways.¹¹

The second weakness is that each of these systems become the prism through which the Scripture is read. From a missional perspective, this is problematic.

Whether we like it or not, the Bible was written with an intentional level of ambiguity. Ancient Jewish rabbis were fully aware of this ambiguity and this is why different schools of *halakhah* arose to address it.[12] For example, all Jewish people knew that circumcision was a requirement to be carried out on the eighth day. But, the particulars about how to carry out the circumcision were not included. Questions arose as to "the instrument to use; whether it is to be a private rite or performed in community; the type of excision; and the liturgy." For all these questions *halakhot* had to be created. We have this same ambiguity surrounding baptism and the Lord's Supper.

From a missional perspective, this ambiguity is beneficial. It enables the gospel to be actualized in a variety of ways as it enters vastly different cultures. Since one of the functions of a systematic theology is to reduce ambiguity, each system is a bit reductionistic. When the systems reach the popular level, the systems are expressed through a series of schemata, which are even more reductionistic.

The third weakness is how we use systematic theologies. The systems typically end up being exclusive. The adopted system is "right" which by default renders the other systems "wrong" even though they are held by many in the body of Christ.

Many, if not most, of today's mission force have downloaded these systems and exported them. This exporting has characterized the global missions movement since the 1700s. This exporting leads to a number of problems, five of which I can quickly suggest:

1. the systems set the nature of theological discourse, a discourse that does not necessarily connect intellectually or emotionally with the intended communities;[13]

2. the gospel as presented is culturally bounded and is thus perceived by the intended communities as irrelevant;

3. irrelevance leads to marginal responsiveness;

4. irrelevance leads to a high degree of syncretism among those who convert;

5. and since adherence to a particular set of doctrines and an ecclesiology is vital, sectarian divisions and denominationalism are the natural result.

If we are going to see the gospel enter and transform communities of the world religions, the missions force needs to move beyond our allegiance to and the exporting of our theological systems. Overseas workers need to learn how to read the Scripture in text-sensitive ways, paying attention to the historical and literary contexts of

A transcultural metatheology makes the entire process of contextualizing the gospel appear safe.

each of the books. When this happens, frontier workers will not be trying to teach systems; rather, they will be trying to get their friends and colleagues to read the Scripture with their own eyes from their own vantage points, seeking to discover how the text answers the questions that they are asking, and receiving guidance for their real-life situations. Asbury's faculty is well equipped to enable people for this.

Moving beyond Contextualization to Releasing Local Theologizing

This recognition of different vantage points in textual reading of the Scriptures leads us to turn to the crucial

subject of contextualization. Hesselgrave and Rommen recognized that the gospel needed to be relevant, so they advocated for the contextualization of the gospel, which they put forward as a model of *critical contextualization*.[14] Paul Hiebert capitalized on this model and moved it a bit further with his proposal of a *metatheology*,[15] which would inherently be transcultural.[16] These missiologists were moving in the right direction, yet I perceive their models had two basic problems.

Beyond Metatheology

The first problem was this: the notion of a transcultural metatheology is comforting because it makes the entire process of contextualizing the gospel appear safe. The metatheology would provide a recognizable standard by which to measure the contextualized outcome.[17] Yet, they did not ask who had the authority to determine the content of what constituted the metatheology.

How do we determine what content constitutes the metatheology?[18] First, I think we will all agree that the books of the Bible were intended to move across cultures. Yet, even though we confidently assert that these books were written for us, we know that they were not written to us. We were not the intended recipients of those documents by their human authors.[19] Therefore, even the biblical texts are historically and culturally framed and must go through a translation process. This is not a process of just translating words, but it is a complex process of translating ideas and concepts.

Second, we will all agree that the content of all theology should arise from the biblical texts and that our commitment to being Bible-centered, Christ-centered, cross-centered, conversionist, and missional, should precede and shape any theologizing.

Beyond that, when we begin to suggest content for the metatheology, problems arise. For example, I am sure we

would all agree that the Christ-event is transcultural. Yet, even the ways different faith communities exegete the meaning of the Christ-event varies according to culture.[20] As a result, the notion of a metatheology is flawed.

Beyond Coloniality

This leads us to the second problem with the model of critical contextualization. For all practical purposes, outsiders assume the position as the final arbiter of "truth" and exercise a degree of control and authority over the contextualization process and outcomes.[21] This means that the outsider's perspective and theological positions are privileged. Yet, we also know that all "knowledge claims" are limited in perspective; and no knowledge claim is 100 percent objective.[22] So, to place the final authority in the hands of outsiders seems like a vestige of colonialism.

Now, colonialism is a political term that described historical events from the 1500s to the 1960s. Colonialism is strictly speaking a thing of the past. So, it appears inappropriate to use this term in our current mission contexts; however, certain characteristics of colonialism remain. Due to this, the preferred term currently used to refer to this privileging of one's cultural perspective is coloniality.[23] It identifies the tendency towards a culturally bounded theology and the subsequent exercise of authority in the critical contextualization process.

The problem of coloniality surfaced with the Son of God translation fiasco some years back. The very fact that the WEA formed an independent panel of outsiders to assess this issue and that panel subsequently appointed a team of outsiders to exercise final authority over locally run translation projects demonstrated this problem of coloniality inherent in the critical contextualization model.

Coloniality is simply not appropriate in our postcolonial world. So, we need

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to move beyond critical contextualization as a model to a more intentional releasing and empowering of local theologizing.

However, when we release and empower local theologizing, we lose control over the outcomes. If our goal is seeing the peoples of the world religions turn to Christ, we need to give up control and imitate Paul, who had full confidence in the working of the Holy Spirit.

Moving beyond the Stoicheia (στοιχεῖα) *of Our Worlds to Faith and Freedom*

This problem of outsiders exercising authority and control is not new. Paul faced it with the circumcision groups. These groups asserted that the Gentiles needed to meet certain criteria (be circumcised and follow the injunctions of the Torah as they interpreted them) in order to solidify and continue on in their covenant relationship with God (Acts 15:1–2). To add complexity to the matter, their criteria was drawn from Scripture. With regard to circumcision, it was Yahweh who said: "So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:13b NRSV). Notwithstanding, Paul knew the understanding of the circumcision groups was flawed. This was one reason why he was so pointed in his rebuke of them in Galatians 1:6–9.

Paul went so far as to label the circumcision groups' understanding of the Torah as the *stoicheia* of the world (Gal. 4:3), which he placed on the same footing as the Galatians' pagan stoicheia of the world (Gal. 4:3, 9).[24]

So, the question is: What did Paul mean by the *stoicheia* of the world? It appears that the stoicheia referred to the ways that people in the Jewish and

Gentile worlds thought and constructed their world,[25] the ways that they shaped and organized themselves, including their assumptions, values, narratives, and folklore.[26] It included the religious, social, and political dimensions of their world because in their minds these would have been seamlessly intertwined.[27] Thus, Paul was saying that the fundamental assumptions and values, as well as religious practices, of these circumcision groups, even though they were shaped by their allegiance to God and understanding of the Torah, were as disadvantageous for following Christ as the fundamental assumptions, values, and practices of the pagan Galatians. Paul had discovered this from his own experience. Having been zealous for the law, he ended up completely misguided, seriously persecuting the church as a result.[28]

Since Paul was casting off the circumcision groups' understanding of the Torah—which provided guidelines for how to live before God, protected the Jewish people, and ensured their ongoing acceptance with God (Gal. 3:24a)—what then was the guarantee for Paul that the Galatians would remain acceptable to God? Paul knew that Torah-sanctioned rules, regulations, and customs would in the end lead the Galatians away from Christ. Paul realized that the Torah could no longer be "the authoritative cultural frame of the good news."[29] Its severe limitation had been expressed when Peter and the others pulled away from table fellowship with the Antiochian Gentiles. Paul knew that

> Jews and non-Jews are "called" by an incongruous grace into common belonging to Christ. Their previous evaluations of one another and of their traditions based on the cultural norms of ethnic distinction, are

subverted by an event that has paid no regard to pre-constituted criteria of value. They are therefore drawn into an association of mutual recognition that is blind to ethnic evaluations, as to other differentials of worth. To reinstate a Jewish rule of sociality would be to condition this association by a differentiating norm that is not derivable from the "truth of the good news." In fact, the good news is good precisely in its disregard of former criteria of worth, both Jewish and Gentile: the gospel stands or falls with the incongruity of grace.[30]

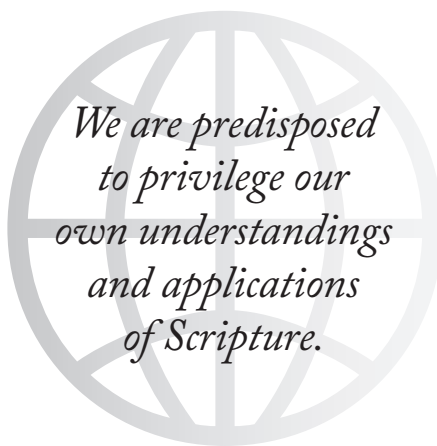Now that Christ had come, these Torah standards of the circumcision groups could only be classified as weak and worthless stoicheia of the world; and the threat was that the Galatians would follow these rather than Christ.

The advantage the Galatians had over the understanding of circumcision groups was that their faith in Christ had enabled them to be born of the Spirit (Gal. 4:29) and have Christ living in them (Gal. 2:20). The indwelling Christ and Spirit, therefore, could be depended upon to properly guide and shape them.[31] Jesus had set the Galatians free from the present evil age (Gal. 1:4). Being alive in Christ they were empowered to turn from the obvious works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–20) and follow the Spirit who gave them life (Gal. 5:16, 18, 25). The clear guidance they already had was that they were to seek to live out Christ's sacrificial love in their relationships (Gal. 5:6, 13–14), and by doing so they would fulfill the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).[32] Love for Paul was not a generic nebulous feeling, but it was to be defined and characterized by Christ's self-sacrificial death (Gal. 1:4, 2:20, 3:13, 5:13).[33]

The concerns and fears of the circumcision groups revolved around the fact that the lifestyles and standards of the Galatians were different—and offensive. Paul understood that the Galatians would never look or act like their Jewish sisters and brothers because

the Galatians' world was different. Nevertheless, the Galatians and the Jewish believers were one "family"; and the family resemblance would be seen through their shared ultimate loyalty (to Christ and the Word) and their character (the fruit of the Spirit).

Times change but people don't. We as humans are limited in our understanding and we are predisposed to privilege our own understandings and applications of Scripture. That which caused the concerns and fears of the circumcision groups and the tensions they created for Gentile churches persist into our own day, especially in the frontier mission areas. So, this letter, even Paul's stinging rebuke, was written for

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us. If we do not take proper care in reflecting on just what the gospel is, we will attach our culturally bounded understandings and applications of Scripture to the gospel. These in Paul's terms can be viewed as our law and stoicheia. When we do this, we end up preaching a gospel contrary to the one Paul preached and we open ourselves to Paul's sore rebuke.

To advance the gospel in frontier areas, we need to take Paul's admonition and teaching seriously. We need to move beyond exporting our culturally bounded applications of the gospel. We are to move beyond feeling the need to guarantee what being a follower of Christ looks like and

move into a place of faith and trust in Christ, his Spirit, and the Word. This leads to an immense amount of freedom for our friends who have turned to Christ and for us. Their response to the gospel resulted in Christ living in them. They should be encouraged in their earnest desire to learn how to live by and follow the Spirit as they study the Word of God made intelligible in their language.

Moving beyond Separatism to Remaining within One's Community

One of the ways our stoicheia of the world manifests itself is in our approach to the communities of the world religions. Our evangelical roots seem to be shaped by Anabaptist sentiments and the fundamentalist movement of the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Rich as Anabaptist theology is and the fundamentalist movement was, they both lead us toward taking a separatist approach to communities and culture.[34]

A conversation with a colleague exemplifies this. We were talking about how a Muslim should respond to his community when coming to faith in Jesus. His definitive answer was: "The Scripture says: 'Come out from among them and be separate.'"

This pervading but unrecognized separatist drive influences us to view other cultures as non-, pre-, or post-Christian. If a culture falls into one of these categories our tendency is to view many if not all of the aspects of those cultures as deficient or evil and in need of transformation. When doing so, what we do not realize is that we are subconsciously elevating our "Christian" cultures as superior. Bosch recognized this back in 1991 and wrote:

> Surveying the great variety of ways in which Western cultural norms were, implicitly or explicitly, imposed upon converts in other parts of the

world, it is of some significance to note that both liberals and conservatives shared the assumption that Christianity was the only basis for a healthy civilization; this was a form of consensus so fundamental that it operated mainly on an unconscious, presuppositional level.[35]

Thirty years ago, Bosch framed this as a western problem. However, in the contemporary missions environment, this problem surfaces wherever Christians reside, whether they be Christians from the West, or from East Asia, South Asia, North Africa, or the Middle East.

This separatism has other consequences. It influences some to demonize the world religions, or at minimum to demonize their practices. One colleague asserted that every Muslim coming to faith needed deliverance from the spirit of Islam. A few years back I was in Pune, India, attending a church and Diwali (their festival of lights) was to begin the following day. A leader in the church exhorted everyone in the church to stand and pledge they would not text congratulations to their Hindu friends when Diwali began because Diwali was demonic. They as Christians needed to maintain a visible separation from that evil.

When we view God as actively involved historically and currently in and among each people group, this opens the door for viewing fallen, human cultures and their practices, even religious ones, in a more nuanced manner (Greer 2016, pp. 96–97). We can view these cultures like we perceive the moon. The moon has a bright and dark side. Since all cultures exist in a fallen state ("For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Rom. 3:23), we can confidently assert that each and every culture has a dark side. Yet, this is only half the story. If we perceive God as actively working in and among any given culture, ensuring that things exist within these cultures so that people will seek for him, it can change the way we view many of their

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cultural and even religious forms. It was Paul who said:

> From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being;" as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring." (Acts 17:26–28 NRSV)

When we understand that God has been at work among a people, we are released to acknowledge a bright side exists. In this light we are free to intentionally look for the bright spots, the bridges to God that he has mysteriously provided within each culture—including religious ideas and forms—that can be used to draw people to him.

I left Pune on the first day of Diwali and flew to Delhi. There I stayed with a family, the husband of which was Hindu in background. He had small, flickering oil lamps inside and outside his house. He was celebrating Diwali because Diwali was an integral part of his culture. His reasoning was Diwali was a festival of lights. Since Jesus is the light of the world and we are called to be his lights in the world, it was totally appropriate to use the forms of Diwali to celebrate what he believed.

The assumptions that drive our negative perceptions of culture create the need to put up strict boundaries in order to maintain a clear separation from evil. These are simply an extension of our own stoicheia of the world, and these sentiments mirror those of the circumcision groups in Paul's day. Richard Bauckham indicates that those groups sought to identify the

boundaries for followers of Christ and how moral purity would be attained and maintained. The circumcision groups regarded

> circumcision and observance of the whole Torah as essential for Gentile sinners to become righteous, since it is these that separate people from the contamination of the pervasive idolatry and immorality of non-Jewish society.[36]

Our desire for separatism creates a serious impediment. When your own alumnus Wascom Pickett was researching the mass movements to Christ in his day he discovered that group movements to Christ prevented social dislocation. From his research Pickett discovered that the separation of converts from their communities was more harmful than helpful. He observed something vital about the individual convert, that

> single conversion unfortunately leads usually to a complete break of the convert with his group. This involves him in economic loss and mental anguish and deprives him of valuable restraints upon wrong-doing and supports to right living.[37]

The Church has seen a serious level of recidivism among converts across the Muslim world. People are encouraged to take a bold stand for Jesus and declare that they have become Christians. This typically leads to immediate persecution and eventual social dislocation.[38] Many are not able to withstand their continued alienation and isolation from their communities. It takes exceptionally strong people to stand apart from their communities throughout life; and they are the few. Though the recidivism may not be as high among Hindu background believers as Muslims, I am aware that the isolation created by this separation is just as heart-breaking.

Pickett's research shows us that people are more likely to remain in the faith if they remain in their communities and are then able to see family members or larger units turn to Christ in their communities. Thus, it is best in frontier missions that we move beyond separatism to releasing and empowering followers of Jesus to learn from the Spirit how they can remain within their communities so others will encounter and follow the Lord. We may be uncomfortable with how that looks at the outset, but we need to remember that everyone is on a journey—and the Spirit is guiding that journey. How things look today may not be how they look in the future.

Conclusion

Pietism is one of the foundation blocks for all missions. Without pietism there is no mission. The natural corollary to pietism is innovation, which is an openness to God's working in new and unexpected ways. We need this openness and responsiveness if we are going to see the kingdom of God take root and spread among frontier peoples. We have enough evidence that the exportation of our culturally bounded, well-honed theological systems, church infrastructures, and "Christianized" behaviors has been seriously problematic.

Yet, innovation is unsettling. When the Lord calls us to journey out into new areas, we find ourselves facing uncharted territory. We discover that many of our conceptions of the gospel, church, worship, prayer, and ethics are culturally bounded and not applicable in those contexts. This takes us out of our comfort zones.

We have two choices when faced with this discomfort: stay within our comfort zones, or choose to live incarnationally,[39] growing in our understanding of the world of our hosts, and flowing with the Spirit. As we learn how their world functions, we will end up welcoming things that appear

wrong to those outside those contexts. We give up our secure systematics and seek to read the Bible in text-sensitive ways along with its apparent ambiguity. We realize that this ambiguity creates a flexibility that enables the gospel to be meaningfully expressed in ways that affirm and challenge the cultures of those who receive the gospel. We, thus, release and enable our friends to read the text with their eyes so they can discover through the Spirit what the Scripture is saying to them. They can discover how they can apply the biblical truth in their world so that Christ may be formed in them.[40] We also refrain from imposing our standards and ways upon them because Christ has called them to freedom from the *stoicheia* of

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our foreign world as well as from their familiar world. Finally, we allow them to discover how they can remain in and honor their communities so that their communities may encounter and be transformed by our Lord.

Mission must move beyond in this postcolonial world. Yet, any innovation on the frontiers, in those contexts beyond the familiar modality of a home church, where our established forms of pietism appear insufficient, will create a tension for cross-cultural agents of the gospel. People outside these contexts, our friends, family and even our colleagues, typically cannot understand all that God is doing within them.[41] But the biblical record makes it clear that we

cannot avoid this tension. God knows we cannot avoid it on the frontiers, but he calls us to join him and live in that tension with the love of Christ. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Arthur McPhee, *The Road to Delhi: J. Waskom Pickett and Missions in the Twilight of the Raj and Dawn of Nationhood,* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press), 2012.

[2] J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India,* (New York, Cincinnati: Abingdon Press), 1933.

[3] "Global Evangelism: Christianity in Context 2015," Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, accessed August 30, 2019, https://gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/1Evangel ismInfographic.pdf.

[4] Though some might point out that Paul does not mention "all the peoples of the world" in this prayer, in the antecedent passage to this prayer (2:11 to 3:13) Paul speaks of the inclusion of the Gentiles, which encapsulates all the peoples of the world.

[5] David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 150–159. For the significance of the journey of the Word, especially in how this can inform our big picture view of global mission.

[6] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. Volume 2: 3:1–14:28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1727–1730. God had moved slowly to prepare the Jewish believers for the inclusion of the Gentiles as Gentiles. The first step was at Pentecost where peoples heard the praises of God in foreign languages. The second is the identifying of one of the seven deacons, Nicolaus, as a proselyte, indicating he was a Gentile in background (Acts 6:5). The third is the word coming to the Samaritans, and then to the Ethiopian Eunuch. The Ethiopian Eunuch was a devout, God-fearing Gentile who was deeply committed to the Jewish faith according to Keener in *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol 2,* 1566–1567. Being a eunuch, he could not have been a proselyte. The fourth is God appointing Peter to go to Cornelius, who was a devout, God-fearing Gentile. The final step is Jewish believers from Cyprus and Cyrene going to the Gentiles as Gentiles in Antioch. This gradual progression from Diaspora Jews in Acts 2 to uncircumcised Gentiles in Acts 11 was God's gracious step-by-step process to help smooth the way for the full inclusion of Gentiles as Gentile.

7 F. Spencer points out that we are not informed of any "further work among the Gentiles of Caesarea. The gospel road ha[d] been paved to the Gentiles, but the traffic remain[ed] sparse." F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 129. In contrast, Keener points out in *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 2*, 1830 that "some scholars even suggest that the process of reaching Gentiles probably began as soon as Hellenists left Jerusalem, and not just in Antioch."

We are sorely limited in our historical data on this innovative process; so, our reconstructions are limited. With this caution in mind, I proceed. I suggest it wise to factor into our reconstructions how difficult this paradigm shift would have been for Jewish believers: to include unreservedly uncircumcised, non-Torah following Gentiles as Gentiles into the fold.

The narrative of Peter in Acts 10 gives us a picture into these Jewish sentiments. Peter had three visions in succession to enable him to begin to make this shift and go to Cornelius' house. Upon entering the house, Peter informed everyone that Jews and Gentiles do not mix. It can be that God's acceptance of Cornelius was a sensitive, gradual step, not a radical one, in moving His people forward toward accepting Gentiles as Gentiles into the one body of Christ. This is because Cornelius is portrayed as a "God-fearing Gentile," which is a category that already had existed in the Jewish mindset. Accepting those like Cornelius and his household without compelling circumcision would have been easier for Jewish messianic communities to accept than for a Gentile who didn't fall within that category. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 2*, 1754–1755.

That being said, even with that personal experience, we see that Peter separated himself from table fellowship with the Antiochene Gentile believers. Barnabas and the other Jewish believers separated themselves as well (Gal. 2:11–13). The text indicates that coming to understand and adapt to what God was doing with the Gentiles as Gentiles was a process for them all, not an instantaneous event. It also appears that the decree in Acts 15:19–21 was a compromise, another step for the Jewish community, charting their gradual movement toward full inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles. See Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 3: 15:1–23:35* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2258–2268. Though this is a subject of debate, it seems plausible that making this paradigm shift

was also a process for Paul. When did Paul come to a full understanding of the implications of the inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles? Was it immediate? During his time in Arabia? Both are possible. However, if God was moving his church gradually to accept the inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles in the church, it seems unlikely. In addition, when Paul returns to Damascus, he is recorded as reaching out to Jews not Gentiles (Acts 9:22). That being said, Paul knew from his interaction with Jesus on the Damascus Road that his ministry was to be among the Gentiles; yet, he may not have started that kind of ministry until his return to Tarsus. Whether he started in Arabia or not, his ministry among the Gentiles at that point was likely not very effective. It simply is not mentioned. Nonetheless, even with a ministry to Gentiles in Tarsus, it is entirely possible that Paul did not grasp the full implications of the inclusion of the Gentiles as Gentiles until he saw what God was doing among them in Antioch. Though Lamin Sanneh is likely overstating here, he sees Paul's experience in Antioch as necessary for Paul to come to a full understanding of what God was doing: "The experience of the Gentile church brought Paul to the radical edge of his own tradition. His religious sentiments were progressively adjusted by the exposure to the Gentile movement; mission does not spare its own founders." Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture.* Second Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 33.

Having come to terms with the full ramifications of Gentile inclusion may explain why Paul made a trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus toward the end of his time in Antioch and before his first missionary journey. David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians. The New International Commentary on the New Testament,* ed. Joel Green (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 49–58. In contrast, looking at this Jerusalem trip as the Acts 15 meeting, see Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 6–13. This radical paradigm shift—even with the revelation he had received—may explain why Paul wanted to consult with the leaders of Jerusalem in private, to ensure that he was on the right path. He writes: "I laid before them…the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain" (Gal. 2:2 NRSV). Why is this important? Making paradigm shifts are difficult for us as well. These shifts typically happen gradually.

8 For how the church has looked culturally diverse across the ages, see Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1996), 3–15.

9 Christopher M. Currie, Personal Communication in 2019.

10 With regard to how systematic theologies are culturally bounded, see Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* revised and expanded edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 32.

11 For examples of this see: Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Theology,* second ed. (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2013), accessed on Kindle; Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame,* EMS Dissertation Series, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2013); and Mark Baker and Joel Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

12 Phillip Sigal, *The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew* (Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 15–17. In an earlier book, Phillip Sigal defines halakhah in this way: "I use the term both to describe a general process and an individual norm of conduct. To be halakhic, therefore, means to affirm the idea that right conduct is significant in the religious life. Furthermore, the term applies both to conduct pertaining to the human's relationship with God, (ritual) and the human's relationship with other humans, ethics. And finally, one may express oneself in moralistic tones without invoking the more precise language of halakhah, what to do now and how to do it, and yet be engaged in halakhic method by virtue of the implications of one's moralistic sermon on one's wisdom discourse. The Book of Wisdom and Proverbs are not generally regarded as halakhic works. But they are every bit as significantly halakhically as long exhortative passages of Deuteronomy." Phillip Sigal, "The Halakhah of James," in *Intergerini Parietis Septvm (Eph. 2:14): Essays Presented to Markus Barth on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday,* Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series #33, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 1981), 338.

13 Sigal, *Halakhah of Jesus, Matthew,* 16. Postcolonial theological discourses help us reflect on how we have privileged the ways we think and talk theologically. Steve Hu

sensitizes us to the significance and impact of these discourses: "I've discovered that postcolonial discourse grants me voice and allows me to speak so that I can be heard by those sitting at the theological roundtable, a table that long has been the domain of Westerners and privy only to those who can speak its predetermined discourse. This table has been so embedded in Western forms and categories that when I attempt to converse, my words, as Tite Tiénou notes, 'are perceived as threats to orthodoxy.'" Steve Hu, "The Importance of Postcolonial Evangelical Conversations," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha and L. Daniel Hawk (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 196–203, Kindle.

[14] David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989).

[15] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 98–1

[16] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 217–219.

[17] What also feeds into this idea of a metatheolgy is what some assume to be a single biblical worldview—that a biblical culture exists. The Scripture does not appear to speak of a single redeemed culture. It speaks of a single body of Christ that will ultimately be comprised of every people, tongue, and nation (Rev. 5:9–10). Revelation 21:22–26 appears to indicate that cultural diversity will continue in the new heaven and earth. The Scripture seems to create an image of the singular body of Christ being a commonwealth of nations, where the nations (ethnicities, people groups) maintain their cultural distinctives while coming together under the Lordship of Christ. Paul's use of the word *politeuma* in Phil. 3:20 also points us in this direction (see C. H. Dodd, *The Meaning of Paul for Today* [London, UK: Fontana Books, 1958], 48–50.) It seems more appropriate to speak of biblically informed cultures or biblically informed worldviews rather than a biblical culture or biblical worldview. It should also be understood that being biblically informed is a constant journey, never a destination.

[18] Melba Maggay writes: "A longtime missionary in India, for instance, has asserted that one can only proceed from a 'dogmatic contextualization,' which he defined as 'the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in the separate cultures and within their particular existential situation.' The trouble with this definition is that it assumes that the task of contextualization is, at bottom, merely adaptation; it consists mostly of finding 'dynamic equivalencies' for propositional truths systematized by theologies developed in the West and deemed universal . . . this is an unsafe assumption. It is true that there is an unchanging 'deposit of the faith,' but this comprises more than propositions. And while it may be said to be 'supracultural,' our knowledge and access to it is always culture-bound, and the theologies that arise out of the historic contingencies of a given context are always local." Melba Padilla Maggay, "The Task of Contextualization: Issue in Reading, Appropriating, and Transmitting the Faith" in *The Gospel in Culture*, ed. Melba P. Maggay (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature and Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, 2013), 6–7.

[19] John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 5.

[20] Simon Chan, Hwa Yung, and Jackson Wu point this out in their books: Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014); Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?;* and Wu, *Saving God's Face.* For more on how culture impacts meaningful presentations of the gospel, see Jason Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016); Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World* (Scottsdale, AZ: Mission ONE, 2015); and Bradford Greer, "Toward More Meaningful Interaction: Rethinking How We Articulate the Gospel," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 1 (2009): 37–43.

[21] Even though I highly value Bauer's exceptional description of the problem of syncretism, this issue of outsiders as final arbiters and authority remains. For an example of how this looks, see Bruce L. Baeur, "Avoiding Comfortable Syncretism by Doing Critical Contextualization," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies,* Vol. 1, no. 2 (2005):18–33, https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1166&context=jams.

[22] For a fuller development of this, see Bradford Greer,"Starting Points: Approaching the Frontier Missiological Task," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 3 (2016): 94–95.

[23] Robert Heaney defines coloniality as "a state or process of subjugating culture and/or agency by incursive cultural and theological discourses." R. S. Heaney, "Prospects and Problems for Evangelical Postcolonialisms," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations,* ed. Smith, Lalitha and Hawk, 392–393, Kindle.

[24] Keener, *Galatians,* 358. Explaining Paul's overall position on the Torah is very difficult to do. Suffice it to say, Paul knew that the time for the Torah as "law" for Jews and Gentiles had come to an end. He also knew that the Torah's function as "instruction" would remain because the Torah was still Scripture (see footnote 22).

[25] Paul uses the word *stoicheia* here in Galatians 4:3, 9, and adds the verb *stoichōmen* in 5:25 and then *stoichēsousin* in 6:16. The usage of these may indicate that Paul's focus when using *stoicheia* was the ways of their world that they followed.

[26] David deSilva described these *stoicheia*—these elementary principles—as those which "divide the world and all that constitutes it, creating the categories, hierarchies, and evaluations that guide, limit, and constrain human beings in their thoughts, behaviors, and interactions, keeping them in a form of ideological and systemic bondage." DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians,* 353.

[27] Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013). In the first century perception, there was no divide between culture and religion. It was all integrated. Thus, the discussions about discerning whether Paul is speaking of elementary *principles* or elementary *spirits* appears a bit off the mark. Conceptually separating religion from culture is a modern convention.

[28] Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 66–67.

[29] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 374.

[30] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift,* 369–370.

[31] N. T. Wright writes: "The divine life itself is transforming believers, shaping them from the inside out according to the pattern of the Messiah." Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God: Book II: Parts 3 and 4* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 781.

[32] Paul knew that the study of Torah would continue as it was God's revelation

(2 Tim. 3:16–17). Nonetheless, he also knew that the approach to Torah had changed with Jesus. In this light he uses this phrase: "the law of Christ." Describing this change, Keener writes: "the law as interpreted in light of Jesus, especially the love command in [Gal.] 5:14, and now lived out through the Spirit of Christ living in believers (5:18, 23), in a way that includes bearing one another's burdens." Keener, *Galatians,* 540. Barclay describes this as "the law as redefined and fulfilled in Christ." John M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Vancouver, British Columbia:Regent College Publishing, 1988), 134.

[33] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1996), 46.

[34] For one person's reflections about separatism, see: David Fitch, "Finding Things to Love About Reformed People: An Anabaptist Dialogues with a Reformed," MissioAlliance, February 6, 2017, https://www.missioalliance.org/finding-things-love-reformed-people-anabaptist-dialogues-reformed/?fbclid=IwAR3aw2nVXaxqfUoLApTI5z1UVPa1PO65wDM-_W0RbwHmQCmcGV7MxX7u-u8.

[35] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 296.

[36] Richard Bauckham, "James, Peter, and the Gentiles," in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity,* ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 118.

[37] Arthur McPhee, *The Road to Delhi: J. Waskom Pickett and Missions in the Twilight of the Raj and Dawn of Nationhood* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2012), 230.

[38] In some rare cases it can lead to death. Persecution and isolation are typically the result in our era.

[39] Some have objected to the use of the term "incarnational" in this manner. John Cheong has provided a solid rebuttal to their objections. John Cheong, "Reassessing John Stott's, David Hesselgrave's, and Andreas Kostenberger's Views of the Incarnational Model," in *Missionary Methods: Research, Reflections, and Realities,* ed. Craig Ott and J. D. Payne, Evangelical Missiological Society, Book 21 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 39–60.

[40] In saying this, it needs to be recognized that these groups are not operating in a vacuum. They will be operating in a globalized context and where the Scriptures have already been translated, where members of their communities have been discipled and are in ongoing relationships with believers from outside their communities.

[41] In studying the history of mission movements, Ralph Winter identified that a consistent pattern of tension existed between established churches which he referred to as modalities, and new churches that were being formed in new cultural contexts, which he referred to as sodalities. This tension existed because the new churches did not function in the same way as the established churches. Such change (innovation) was consistently resisted by the modalities. See Ralph D. Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader,* Third Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 220–230.

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