

# IJFM

Int'l Journal of Frontier Missiology

The Journal  
of the International Society for  
Frontier Missiology

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January–March 2020



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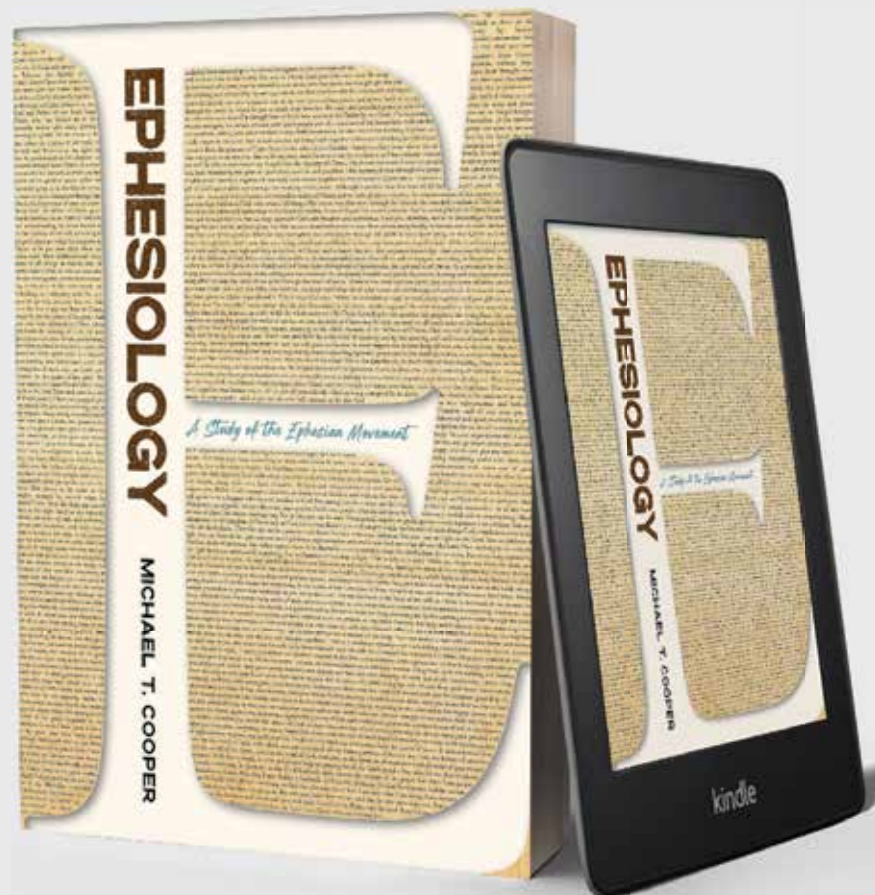
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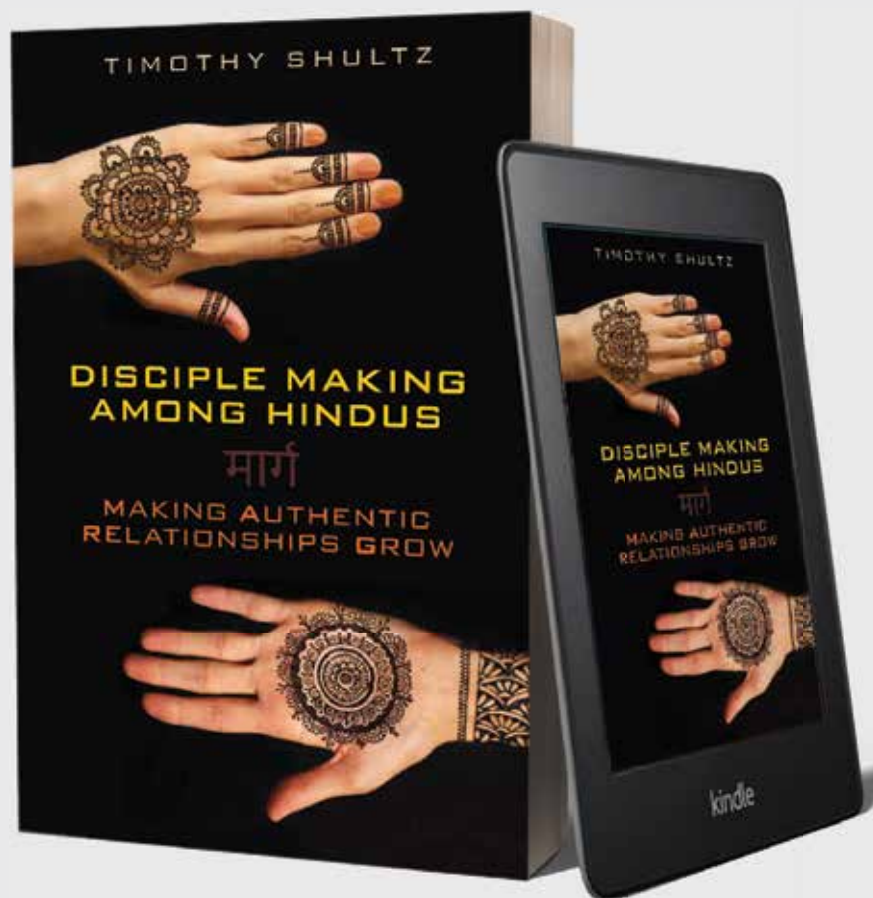
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## The Undeniable Place of Disruption in Biblical Missiology

Our publication schedule has been disrupted and we apologize. While the consequences of a global pandemic are still rolling out, the disorder comes at a time when church and mission organizations were already scrambling to survive the tectonic shifts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We're all feeling the tremors. Disruption forces us all to look below the institutional cracks to the deeper fissures in organizational design. What was good yesterday may not be sufficient for tomorrow.

But the torture of disruption can open us to new perspective. A couple of years ago, Fuller Seminary asked their biblical scholars to reflect on the disruption caused by their plan for relocation<sup>1</sup>—themes like “disruption and resurrection,” “shaken to remain,” “exile or exodus,” “divine disruption,” and “Jesus the disruptor” emerged from their biblical search for resilience. Disorder molds an experience that then launches new biblical excursions.

That biblical reflex is what you see in our four articles and four of the book reviews in this issue. They are biblical perspectives in response to the predicaments we face on cultural and religious frontiers. Barriers of resistance, miscommunication, and prejudice create their own kind of disturbance. The surprises, the anomalies, and tensions destroy any missiological homeostasis, but they fuel a fresh biblical awareness that you read in these articles and reviews.

According to Bosch's historical analysis, each era of mission history tends to herald a particular biblical theme. He recognized the modern emphasis on the Great Commission (Matt. 28) and surmised that a new mission paradigm was emerging.<sup>2</sup> All this global disruption could speed that up. While we don't jettison these fundamental biblical texts, they can appear insufficient for our modern conditions. Other portions of scripture beckon us as we minister on the frontiers.

Colin Yuckman's exegetical study of the mission commission in Luke-Acts would have us consider the narrative of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 (p. 5). Luke's pivotal treatment of this encounter provides a model for the way God reveals himself to both the church and the world. Could it be paradigmatic for the frontiers today? Can God's work in Cornelius, or we might say in today's “religious other,” help the church-in-mission recognize the way it places boundaries on God that then limits its witness on these frontiers?

I think Pascal Bazzell nailed the reason Acts 10 appears so relevant: it speaks to the way a go-between God will reveal himself in today's sensitive inter-religious frontiers.

Editorial *continued on p. 4*

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The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal's editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology, or the society's executive committee.

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The problem of our increasingly pluralist world, as he sees it, is that the gospel has been tainted.

Where initially the missionary was challenged to not bring a double-sided gospel—the gospel of Jesus Christ and his own culture—today's challenge includes not affirming the negative historical and contextual connotation of the gospel in a particular locale.<sup>3</sup>

Something has gone before us and created “negative connotations” to the gospel—it has tainted the gospel. Less frequent are contexts like Paul on Mars Hill among those Greeks who had never witnessed any “Christian” reality. The world more often seems aware of an enculturated caricature of the gospel—that rival religious culture known as Christianity, a reality warped by local rumor and social media. Millions of people in the world have already decided, “We don't want that.” This reality—this tainting of the gospel—is just one of the many missiological barriers that motivates a fresh biblical search for relevant models.

Each of our articles addresses the biblical presuppositions of our present models. Paul Pennington examines the

tainting of our biblical terminology—words like “gospel” and “kingdom”—and promotes the “cultural non-specificity of the gospel” we find in scripture (p. 15). Dave Shive transcends a gospel that merely offers the remedy for sin and presents a biblical basis for mission rooted fundamentally in God's nature and being (p. 25). Bob Sluka is searching for that strategic intersection of creation care and frontier missiology, and he delivers an insightful critique of our modern dualism (p. 33).

Our book reviews reflect new, emerging biblical interpretation. The continuing rise of movements to Jesus today (1300 at last count<sup>4</sup>) can also foster fresh biblical eyes. Michael Cooper's broad exposure to these movements helped him discover the dynamic “Ephesiology” of a New Testament movement (p. 45, and see ad p. 1). The systematic theologian Amos Yong rides a global Pentecostal wave with his study of the *missio spiritus* from Genesis to Revelation (p. 48). Jackson Wu brings an Eastern sensibility to the study of Romans which represents new biblical interpretation that resonates with Asian religious worlds (p. 46).

Finally, this year's EMS/ISFM gathering (October 9–10) is also disrupted and will be entirely an online event. This virtual platform increases the global range of our presentations and respondents, so we hope you'll join for this two-day event. Registration and the program are available at [emsweb.org](http://emsweb.org).

In Him,



Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> “Disruption,” *Fuller Seminary Magazine* 12, 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 1991).
- <sup>3</sup> Pascal Bazzell, “Who is Our Cornelius? Learning from Fruitful Encounters at the Boundaries of Mission” in *The State of Missiology Today*, ed. Charles E. Van Engen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 107–124.
- <sup>4</sup> *Mission Frontiers*, 42, no. 4 (July–August), 2020, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/>.

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

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

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

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

# The “Grace Commission” Intercultural Witness According to Luke

by Colin H. Yuckman

In studies of Bible and mission, most often the focus turns to Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus’ so-called “Great Commission.” Jesus’ mandate has exerted inestimable influence on modern, Protestant mission, at least since the days of William Carey and his treatise on Christian missionary obligations (1792). Carey offered the decisive interpretation of Matthew 28:18–20 for the emerging Protestant missionary age. In the Great Commission, modern Christians have found solid biblical warrant, especially for the practice of foreign missions.

Focus on the final three verses of Matthew’s gospel has seemingly led to a corresponding neglect of Luke’s “Commission” text(s). This oversight is all the more surprising since the Lukan Commission (Luke 24:46–48; cf. Acts 1:8) provides the linchpin of a two-volume work, Luke–Acts, that comprises about twenty-eight per cent of the whole New Testament. A significant portion of the New Testament, therefore, remains underappreciated for its contributions to a vision of intercultural witness<sup>1</sup> today. By studying the Lukan Commission, and the narrative portrait of its fulfillment in Acts, we can recover Luke’s important voice in the study of biblical mission. The Lukan vision, moreover, offers fresh insights into questions of human agency and participation in the proclamation of salvation to all nations. Luke’s perspective on intercultural witness counters some of the colonialist tendencies characteristic of the Protestant missionary age, which traditionally conceived of mission as evangelistic outreach from the West to the rest. A robust understanding of Luke’s vision of witness affirms the contemporary importance of intercultural witness while also challenging the historical excesses of Christian mission that occasionally reappear in practice today.

My analysis of the Lukan vision of intercultural witness will broadly follow the study of Acts as a narrative portrait of the fulfillment of the Lukan Commission (Luke 24:46–48). While I obviously cannot attend to every passage of Acts in detail, analysis of representative passages (e.g., Acts 2, 6–8, 9, 10–11, and 15) will supply the backdrop against which the rest of Acts can come into focus.

*Editor’s Note: This article was originally presented at the International Society for Frontier Missiology 2019 (a track of EMS 2019), Dallas International University, Dallas, TX.*

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The necessarily brief treatment here may at least provoke further reflection and study. One way to narrow the focus is to pay special attention to the Lukan motif of apostolic agency, since the question of how Luke-Acts might inform mission practices today hangs on the assumption that what the risen Lord expected of the earliest apostles applies *mutatis mutandis* to modern Christians.

### *The Lukan Commission (Luke 24:46–49)*

As he was talking with his disciples, Jesus told them,

This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and/for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:46-49)

vision of mission, our findings must be anchored, inexorably, in what the narrative of Acts depicts.

A closer examination of Luke 24:46–49 as a commission and preface to Acts will show Luke's distinctive vision of participation in the spread of salvation to all nations. As a framework for understanding the Lukan vision, three interrelated aspects of the Lukan Commission deserve special attention: (1) the ambiguous characterization of the apostles as agents of fulfillment, (2) the christological accent of the commission, and (3) the bookend formed by Luke's near-exact repetition of Luke 24:46–48 in Paul's final major speech in Acts (26:22–23).

### *Ambiguous Apostles*

Syntactically, the grand scriptural vision of the Messiah's death, resurrection, and proclamation in his name assigns the apostles a passive role. In Luke 24:46–49, the apostles are never the

**The book of Acts turns the commission appearing  
at the end of Luke's gospel into a kind of introductory frame for what follows.  
In this respect, the Lukan Commission comes closer to prophecy  
than Jesus' "last will and testament."**

It is most natural to begin an investigation of a biblical book's vision of mission by turning to the commission text(s) that anchor(s) that vision. In Luke's case, that passage is Luke 24:46–49 (cf. Acts 1:8) in which the risen Jesus makes a final statement in anticipation of his ascension to heaven (24:50–51; cf. Acts 1:9–11). Taken in isolation, such a commission could be compared with equivalent passages in Matthew, John, and Mark. Yet Luke's commissioning passage stands out, if for no other reason than it is followed by a whole book narrating what those who are commissioned actually do—hence the title "acts of the apostles." The other evangelists, by virtue of concluding their respective works with Jesus' parting words, lend their commissions a certain tone of finality. Luke's unique second volume hermeneutically alters the complexion of the Lukan Commission. That is, the book of Acts turns the commission appearing at the end of Luke's gospel into a kind of introductory frame for what follows.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the Lukan Commission comes closer to prophecy than Jesus' "last will and testament," in part because Luke reiterates the commission at the beginning of Acts (1:8) and in part because the exalted Lord continues to speak and appear (cf. Acts 1:1) throughout the book.<sup>3</sup> Readers are led to expect that the book of Acts will be a *narrative representation* of the fulfillment of the Lukan commission. In the quest to understand the Lukan

nominal agents of active verbs. Instead they are positioned as the object of verbs or subject of *passive* verbs: ("you are witnesses of . . .," "I am going to send you . . .," and "until you have been clothed with power . . ."). Even the promise that "repentance and forgiveness will be preached to all nations" is ambiguous. While the statement is often taken as a direct command to the apostles—i.e. "*you* are to do the proclaiming"—Jesus technically does not say that in Luke 24. It may be the influence of the more direct Matthean Commission that tends to inject clarity into Luke's ambiguous sentence structure.<sup>4</sup> Without Matthew's influence, however, "repentance and forgiveness to be preached to all nations" (v. 47) cannot be equated entirely with "you are witnesses of these things" (v. 48). In fact, it is grammatically possible, likely even, that the task assigned to the apostles to be witnesses refers to the more passive (*eye*)/witnessing of another's proclamation to all nations. As we will see, the narrative of Acts bears out this initial observation.

Many have noted, for instance, that while the apostles achieve many "conversions" in Jerusalem (Acts 1–5), it is Philip who first evangelizes Samaria (8), the exiles from Jerusalem who reach non-Jews in the Diaspora (11, 13), and Paul and his co-workers who do most of the proclamation of the gospel among Gentiles (13–21). While Luke greatly emphasizes the Peter and Cornelius incident as the beginning of Gentile outreach (Acts 10–11, 15), even this event comes as a great surprise to



the apostle Peter who was supposedly commissioned to do this very thing. Moreover, after Peter's initial encounter with Cornelius' Gentile household—and his repeated testimony about the incident to his fellow Jewish believers—Luke does not relate any further outreach by apostles to non-Jews. A tension that should not be too quickly overlooked: the Lukan Commission is given to the apostles and yet in the ensuing narrative the apostles play a surprisingly limited role in its fulfillment.

There have been two primary ways of explaining this tension. The first view holds that Acts is a triumphalist narrative in which characters march unerringly toward the ends of the earth, like puppets on a string.<sup>5</sup> On this view, Luke's accent on divine superintendence empties the question of human agency of any real significance. But the second view—that the apostles and witnesses are poor models who must be chided and goaded every step of the way<sup>6</sup>—is no better. It overlooks the important fact that nowhere does Luke characterize the apostles in a negative light. A more precise account of the agency of human witnesses in Acts notes both the triumphs and moments of incomprehension, great acts of courage paired with incomplete understanding. How are readers to understand a vision of participation in universal witness that oscillates between the triumphal spread of the word and a partial comprehension of the manner by which that spread occurs?

### *Jesus the Primary Witness*

In light of the preceding analysis of the Lukan Commission and the general portrayal of the apostles in Acts, the question arises: who is to do the preaching to all nations “in his name” (Luke 24:47)? One way to answer this question, and bring us to the second major point, is to note that Luke pairs the ambiguity of the apostles' role with an accent on the Messiah's role. That is, throughout this commissioning scene Jesus remains in charge, serving as the nominal agent of verbs and issuing a prophecy in which his own identity remains central. By implication, universal outreach after his ascension remains about Jesus—carried out *by him* even (cf. Acts 26:23)—rather than simply about what others do in his absence, as is traditionally assumed. The Lukan Commission disrupts conventional definitions of “commission” as one person (e.g., Jesus) designating others (e.g., apostles) for a special task. In addition, Jesus' parting words in Luke's gospel convey an overriding sense of promise (“you are/will be witnesses”), de-emphasizing its imperative force. Stronger than the sense of what Jesus' followers *should do* is the motif of what *Jesus* has done and will do. To summarize, in a statement in which one might expect to find a strong directive to act (“Go, make disciples . . .”) one finds instead an emphasis on Jesus'

scriptural identity, the task of universal proclamation given without an explicit agent of fulfillment, and the ambiguous commission of the apostles: “you are/will be witnesses of me/these things” (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8).

Without recognizing the ambiguous agency of the apostles in Luke 24:46–48—how it privileges the role and identity of Jesus—it is easy to misunderstand the beginning of Acts. For example, a common translation of Acts 1:1 refers to “all that Jesus did and taught *from the beginning* [περὶ πάντων . . . ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν]” (NRSV, NJB; cf. NAB). Yet the syntax is more straightforward: the gospel was written “concerning all . . . that Jesus *began* to do and teach” (NIV, KJV). Differences in translation in this instance hang on a larger view of Luke–Acts, specifically how one conceives of the role of the exalted Lord after his ascension. That is, if one supposes that Jesus' ascension to heaven removes him entirely from the narrative foreground, then it follows that Jesus' deeds and teachings conclude with Luke's gospel (or Acts 1:9). But, if one notices Luke's clues about the ongoing agency of the Messiah and Lord in Acts, straightforward statements like Acts 1:1 anticipate all that follows. If this were correct, we would expect to see Jesus continuing to act and teach in Acts.

But where in Acts does Jesus preach salvation to Jews and Gentiles? Is it merely a figure of speech, ascribing to Jesus what is surely the responsibilities of those orphaned by his ascension? Isn't Acts really a “succession narrative”? Indeed, a long tradition of interpretation<sup>7</sup> holds that after Acts 1:10, Jesus effectively departs from Acts. On this view, the Christology of Acts can be labeled “absentee” or “diastatic.” While it is true that Luke emphasizes Jesus' departure from the earth (1:11) and that universal restoration awaits his return (3:21), Luke does not characterize the ascension of the earthly Jesus at the expense of any implicit or explicit claims about his ongoing activity. The common judgment that Luke's narrative assumes a “delay” in the *Parousia* often presumes that Jesus' earthly absence *in* the narrative effectively requires his total absence *from* the narrative. This presumption confuses the historical and literary dimensions of Acts.

It is beyond the limits of this paper to lay out all the evidence, but several basic observations attest Luke's emphasis on Jesus' abiding presence in Acts:

1. In Acts, Jesus speaks—and even appears—more often *after* his ascension than before,<sup>8</sup> a phenomenon anticipated already by Luke's gospel (see the “Spirit-Christ Doublet” in Luke 12:11–12; 21:12–15).<sup>9</sup>

8 The “Grace Commission”: Intercultural Witness According to Luke

2. Peter’s Pentecost speech (Acts 2:14–36) connects the giving of the Spirit (Joel 3) with Jesus’ exaltation to God’s right hand (Acts 2:33), thereby ascribing to the exalted “Lord” Jesus responsibility for the outpouring of the Spirit throughout Acts.
3. Repeated narration of Paul’s Damascus experience (9:1–20; 22:6–16 [17–21]; 26:12–18) and various direct appearances to Stephen (7:55–56) and Paul (22:17–21; 23:11) further the impression of Jesus’ ubiquity.
4. Most notably, Luke emphasizes the “activity” of the exalted Lord and the Holy Spirit *after* Acts 8 (8:29, 39; 9:31; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2, 4; 16:6–7; 20:22–23; 21:4, 11) as the Christian movement spreads beyond Jerusalem and beyond Jewish communities. The increase in movement by Lord and Spirit coincides with the apostles *remaining* in Jerusalem while all others are exiled (8:1). This characteristic reflects what has been called “the Spirit-izing of the Christ and the Christ-ifying of the Spirit,”<sup>10</sup> culminating in the use of the phrase “the Spirit of Jesus” in Acts 16:7.

The cumulative evidence suggests that Jesus is hardly an “absentee” Lord in Acts. Rather, precisely *by means of* his exaltation to heaven Jesus assumes the role of giver of the Spirit, able to appear virtually anywhere to anyone, his activity identified with that of the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 24:46–48 and Acts 26:22–23**

Thirdly, Luke confirms this account, when Paul concludes his final major speech with essentially a summary of all of Acts. Paul ends his defense speech before Agrippa (Acts 26:2–23) with a statement paralleling Jesus’ words in Luke 24:44–48. See the table below.

Acts 26:22–23 reiterates the “Lukan Commission,” echoing Jesus’ claims from Luke 24:46–47—that the Messiah must die and be raised from the dead (Luke 24:46a; Acts 26:23a) and that salvation is destined to reach all peoples (Luke 24:47; Acts 26:23). Luke frames both passages as the fulfillment of scriptural promise (Luke 24:46a: “Thus it is written . . .” [and v. 44]; Acts 26:22: “saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place . . .”). By restating the “Lukan Commission,” essentially at book’s end, Luke indicates its importance for understanding Acts as a whole. And because only these two passages in Luke–Acts include this threefold scriptural claim with such specificity, Luke implies that they face each other. Jesus’ framing words in Luke 24 anticipate Paul’s retrospective words in Acts 26. In this way, Luke concludes both Jesus’ and Paul’s parting words with a summary claim about the identity of the Messiah and his relationship to universal salvation.<sup>12</sup>

On the one hand, as already noted, Luke 24:47 leaves ambiguous who will do the proclaiming of salvation to all nations; on the other hand, Acts 26:23 makes it clear that *Jesus himself* “would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.” That is, in a speech summarizing *Paul’s* participation in events, Paul emphasizes how it has been the Messiah Jesus who has carried out the responsibility Luke 24:47 had earlier left ambiguous. Paul’s statement in Acts 26:22–23 effectively clarifies the christological thrust of Luke–Acts: *Acts is as much about the fulfillment of the Messiah’s mission to bring salvation to the ends of the earth as it is about the witnesses who participate in that mission and interpret its unfolding.* Of course, the mission of Jesus and that of his witnesses cannot be entirely extricated, but the traditional reading of Acts as *what human witnesses do in Jesus’ absence* is, in view of our findings, largely inaccurate.<sup>13</sup>

Table 1: Parallel Statements in Luke 24 and Acts 26

Luke 24:44–48 <sup>11</sup>	Acts 26:22–23
<p><sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that <i>everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.</i>”</p> <p><sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,</p> <p><sup>46</sup> and he said to them, “Thus it is written, <i>that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,</i></p> <p><sup>47</sup> and that <u>repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations</u>, beginning from Jerusalem.</p> <p><sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.” (NRSV)</p>	<p><sup>22</sup> “To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying <i>nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place:</i></p> <p><sup>23</sup> <i>that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead,</i> he would <u>proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.</u>” (NRSV)</p>

## *Apostolic Participation in the Fulfillment of the Lukan Commission*

The tension identified by the preceding sections—between the ambiguous role played by the apostles in Acts and Luke’s accent on Jesus’ identity unfolding in universal proclamation—invites further explanation. If Luke intends neither to denigrate the apostles nor assign them total responsibility for fulfilling Jesus’ commission, then how are we to understand their role in the unfolding of universal salvation? The remainder of this essay will show how this tension allows Luke to make a missiological point, namely that through the act of (intercultural) witness, followers of Jesus (especially the apostles) can discover the fuller identity of Jesus as Lord of all by recognizing his work beyond their limited horizons. Traditionally, Jesus’ mandate has been the focus of studies on biblical mission; but an important part of the fuller picture is Luke’s emphasis on the necessity of intercultural witness for the formation of those witnesses.

The exegetical case for this can be made with respect to representative examples (Acts 2, 6–8, 9, 10–11, and 15). It has often been taken as a matter of great obviousness that Acts, prefaced by Acts 1:8, unfolds in lockstep with Jesus’ final words: “in Jerusalem” (chs. 1–7), “in all Judea and Samaria” (8–15), and “to the ends of the earth” (chs. 16–28). But the tidy “table of contents” is, upon further examination, less obvious in its governance of the book’s plot. More than one scholar has noted that much that happens in Acts is not explicitly anticipated by Jesus’ parting earthly words in 1:8.<sup>14</sup> Luke the storyteller further disrupts expectations with the election of Matthias (1:12–26). Even though great care is taken to tell the story of Matthias’ selection (over Joseph and his three names!) to replace Judas—thereby reconstituting the Twelve—readers never hear from either figure again. In the only event Luke narrates between Ascension and Pentecost, Luke subverts expectations about what is to come and the role these Twelve play in it.

### *Acts 2: Spirit of the Lord, Lord of the Spirit*

While the push towards “all nations” (Jews and non-Jews) first occurs in Acts 2, when “Jews from every nation under heaven” (2:5) witness the Spirit’s gifts upon the early disciples, the universal scope of salvation is only declared, not yet realized. As Peter’s speech makes clear, his audience is comprised of Jews or, at most, “Jews and proselytes” (2:10). The “ends of the earth” are present in Jerusalem in only a representative sense. Nevertheless, Peter’s speech makes it clear that the core of the gospel is the intercultural announcement of God’s deeds in Jesus Christ. By citing (LXX) Joel 3:1–5a (Acts 2:17–21) to interpret the arrival of the Spirit as the fulfillment of prophecy, Peter indicates that the outpouring of the Spirit is integrally related to the identity of Jesus as “Lord.” With the recognition

of Jesus’ exaltation to God’s side, Peter concludes, Jesus has received the Father’s promise (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5) and now pours out the Spirit, the very action which Joel had assigned to Yahweh (Acts 2:33; 2:17–18; LXX 3:1–2). Luke effectively transfers the title of Yahweh from the OT (“Lord”) to Jesus. Jesus’ name, therefore, is the “name of the Lord” upon whom *everyone* must call to be saved (Acts 2:21, 38).

On yet another level, Luke associates the emergence of Jesus’ identity as Lord (of Israel) with the bringing together of different ethnic and cultural identities (“everyone”), even if

**Through the  
act of intercultural witness,  
followers of Jesus  
can discover the fuller identity  
of Jesus as Lord.**

Gentile inclusion as Gentiles is chapters/years away at this point. Jesus is both “Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:39) in that people from every nation (including Israel) are called to submit to his Lordship through repentance, baptism, and reception of forgiveness and the Spirit that he bestows (2:39). The oneness of the Lord of all people and Messiah of Israel echoes in the promise of the unity of Jew and Gentile under his Lordship.

### *Acts 6–8: Apostles Who Don’t Preach, Deacons Who Don’t Serve*

The intercultural portrait develops with the description of early Christians as *ὁμοθυμαδόν* (“of one mind”; Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; cf. 15:25), so unified in mind and spirit without being uniform. Luke reinforces this picture by showing how the church was immediately confronted, in its diversity, with the question of cultural difference. Acts 6 begins by saying that with growth, and a growing diversity of peoples, some Greek-speaking widows (despite the Pentecostal miracle) were being neglected in the distribution of food (6:1). This major cultural disturbance went to the heart of the identity of Jesus. If, as Peter had indicated by appealing to Joel 3, Jesus was to be identified with the “Lord” of the OT, then the universality of his Lordship was both affirmed by a diversifying of the composition of God’s people (“all *nations*”) and also thrown into question when these differing peoples received uneven treatment in the community (“*all nations*”). Luke adds a twist to this story. Even though the apostles arrange for the election of the Seven so that, specifically, they do not have to “neglect” the word in order to “wait on tables,” ironically it is the Seven who proclaim the word (the apostles’ *diakonia*) while

not—according to Luke—actually waiting on tables! Among these Seven with Greek names, Stephen bears witness most prominently by delivering the longest speech in Acts (cf. Luke 12:11–12; 21:12–15), and Philip evangelizes all of Samaria (8:5–14; cf. 1:8) as well as the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26–40).

Though apostles reappear in Acts 8:15–25—in the form of Peter and John—they do so, notably, only as confirmers of the outreach already being conducted there. As Joel Green notes, the presence of Peter and John in Samaria is arguably part of their "conversion" to the new thing God is doing in the world and doing through the medium of other witnesses.<sup>15</sup> Apostolic recognition of the conversion of Samaria also recalls Jesus' own promise: "you will be my witnesses . . . in all Judea and Samaria" (1:8). Very likely, the conversion of Samaria symbolized for Luke's audience the restoration of the historical Northern (Samaria/Israel) and Southern (Judah/Judea) kingdoms. Israel's restoration and the salvation of all nations went hand in hand. In addition, Peter's witnessing God's acts in Samaria prefaces his experience of the Spirit at work in Caesarea two chapters later, where he is again a passive witness, at least in part.

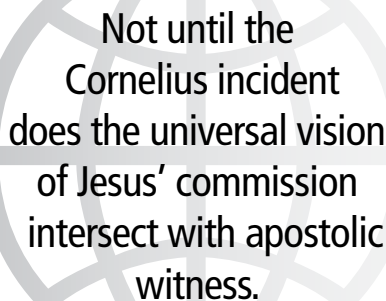
The Greek-speaking believers first named in Acts 6 are—according to Luke—at the heart of the group expelled from Jerusalem in Acts 8 and begin proclaiming the word abroad while the apostles, Luke emphasizes, are the only ones that stay behind (8:1). The storyline of these believers, interrupted in a way by the Cornelius incident (10:1–48; 11:5–17), is picked up again immediately afterwards (11:19).<sup>16</sup> This group preaches the gospel to Greek-speaking Jews but also to Gentiles, preaching the "Lord Jesus." Crucially, it is not the apostles but this band of Greek-speaking Jewish exiles whom Luke identifies with the founding of the Antioch community and the recognition of Paul's leadership. Paul's ministry is therefore rooted in an intercultural fellowship centered on the "Lord" Jesus, while the Jerusalem apostles, it would seem, must wait to discover the link between Gentile salvation and Jesus' identity. The common life of Jews and Gentiles together in effect expresses socially the universal Lordship of Jesus. To be able to recognize this ministry and community is to be able to recognize that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Specifically the apostles must learn this lesson, according to Luke—in a small and symbolic way in Jerusalem at Pentecost, in another way among the Greek-speaking widows, in their receptivity toward the Samaritans, and finally in recognizing the preeminence of the Spirit's work in Caesarea and in Paul's ministry in Acts 15.

### *Acts 9 (13, 22, and 26)*

Paul is Acts' preeminent protagonist. Some comment is needed about Paul's "conversion-commission" in Acts 9, which proves so consequential for Acts. Not only does Luke tell the story of Paul's Damascus road experience three times (Acts 22:6–16; 26:12–18), like Peter's Cornelius encounter, but he introduces Saul-Paul in a way that depicts the fulfillment of his Jewish identity in outreach to and the conversion of Gentiles (9:15–16; 22:14–15, 21; 26:17–18, 20). Paul himself becomes a leader of the intercultural community formed in the wake of the persecution he instigated (13:1–3). Indeed, Paul's commission—framed in the language of Isaiah 49:6—is to bring salvation "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47), with a special emphasis on reaching Gentiles. Paul's appeal to Isaiah makes it clear that Jesus is Israel's Servant (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30), commissioned to bring the light of salvation to Jews and Gentiles (cf. Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 22:21; 26:23). Paul (along with Barnabas) plays the role of the Servant's servant (13:47) and witness (20:21; 22:15; 23:11; 26:16, 22),<sup>17</sup> especially in extending that light to Gentiles. On no less than three occasions Paul confirms the appropriateness of "turning" to the Gentiles by pointing out the resistance of the Jews toward his message (13:46; 18:6; 28:28). In a remarkable twist, Paul points to the receptivity of Gentiles to the gospel as a kind of model for Jews to obey. The conversion of Gentiles helps underscore the identity of Jesus as Messiah and Lord of all. Gentile receptivity to Jesus, therefore, does not contradict the claim that he is Messiah; it confirms it (Isa. 49:6).

### *Acts 10–11*

Not until the Cornelius incident (Acts 10:1–11:18) does the universal vision of Jesus' commission (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) intersect with apostolic witness, which is why Luke gives the episode almost unparalleled emphasis (cf. 11:5–17; 15:7–11). With this event Luke climactically connects christological identity and universal witness, culminating in Peter's declaration that Jesus is πάντων κύριος, "Lord of all" (10:36).<sup>18</sup> Luke situates this exclamatory recognition in a detailed account of the giving and receiving of witness between Peter and Cornelius' household, an account in which Peter's transformation is the primary focus. Peter is paradigmatic of the notion that Jesus' identity is learned through participation in witness and specifically in the context of an encounter with the (ethnically) "other" (ἄλλόφυλος, v. 28). The Cornelius incident instructs Peter in God's impartiality, in Jesus' claim to be Lord of all nations, confirmed by the Spirit baptism of



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the Gentiles. Not quite the image of an apostle boldly going, discipling, baptizing, teaching—Peter hesitates, is instructed by the work of the Spirit, ends up ordering Gentile baptism only *after* the Spirit has already come, and *learns* as much as anyone else in the story about God in Christ (Cornelius' characterization is, in contrast, remarkably static). The very encounter we might call a clear-cut case of “mission”—Peter bearing witness to Cornelius' household—subtly but suggestively focuses on the transformation that the *witness* himself must undergo. It is no exaggeration to say that until Peter's Cornelius encounter, he could not grasp fully what God was doing among “the nations” and therefore what “all” in “Lord of all” meant.

That Peter is in the process of “catching up” with God is plainly evident in the fact that the Spirit falls on Cornelius' household before Peter is able to order their baptism (10:44–48). Without the witness of the Spirit in Cornelius' life,<sup>19</sup> Peter's own sense of who Jesus is remains narrow. This theological breakthrough lies behind Paul's outreach in the Diaspora and finds expression in the makeup of the Syrian Antioch community (11:19–26; 13:1–3), itself the basis for Paul's outreach to Jews and Gentiles everywhere. The Cornelius incident is indispensable to our understanding of how mission unfolds in Acts, especially under Paul's leadership.

## Acts 15

Luke frames the Jerusalem meeting as a way to unify the fronts of the church around the question of the salvation of the Gentiles apart from full Torah observance. Acts 15 crucially shows apostolic affirmation of Paul's outreach and Peter's experience. Of course, it is pivotal from the perspective of church unity, but it is much more than that—it is a question of who Jesus is. Is Jesus truly Lord of all (Jews and Gentiles equally) or not really Lord of all (Messiah for some, but not for others)? The answer to this question comes in the form of an agreement about who is to be admitted into God's people and on what conditions. Jesus' Lordship is very much at stake in who God's people are. Christology and missiology are mutual coefficients, so to speak. If this study has shown that Acts does not always make that connection explicit, it is nevertheless true that Luke assumes such a connection and periodically brings that assumption to the surface of the narrative. The importance of this recognition is also indicated, perhaps, in the fact that after the apostles have reached this agreement about Gentiles in Acts 15, they all but depart from the story. It was the conversion of their imagination that was needed to recognize Paul's ministry as the future of Christ's work. Until this “conversion,” their work had been incomplete;

missing had been the recognition of both the significance of Peter's experience for who Jesus is and who God's people are.

Taken as a whole, Acts 1–15 appears to portray the experience of the apostles as a form of learning or discovery of the new things God is doing. In Jerusalem, Samaria, and Caesarea, especially Peter—the book's representative apostle—must “catch up” to how salvation in Jesus' name unexpectedly reaches all nations. Participation in witness, at least according to the first half of Acts, is dependent on the prevenient work of the exalted Lord Jesus. In a way, Paul's encounter with the exalted Jesus is a discovery, for himself and for readers, of the close ties between universal outreach and Jesus' identity as universal Lord. So tightly bound are the two—from Luke 24:46–48 to Acts 26:22–23—that one undergirds the other. To accept one is to accept the other; to reject one is to reject both. Just as Peter understands God's purposes with a retrospective glance at his Cornelius encounter (15:7–11) so Paul recognizes the scope of Jesus' Lordship as he reviews the scope of his own ministry (Acts 26:19–23).

## Implications for Intercultural Witness

In attempting to hear the unique voice of Luke within the harmonious sounds of the biblical canon and free from the sometimes sharp dissonant notes of interpretation history, this study has disclosed several implications for how we approach the question of intercultural witness:

First, the overall portrayal of apostolic witness in Acts is less a triumphant tale of world-beating personalities than a story in which, sometimes subtly, God in Christ and by the Spirit directs the spread of the word with and without the help of the first generation of witnesses. This is an important observation in light of the way in which Christian missionaries have been characterized over the last several centuries—as lone, intrepid explorers blazing trails for Christ. And because mission history has been read onto the pages of Acts,<sup>20</sup> the standard by which readers have recognized “mission” in Acts has generally conformed to the model of missionary work that evolved over the last three centuries.

Luke sets up the apostles as those who will go “to the ends of the earth,” only to have them (only Peter really) reach one Gentile household (cf. Acts 10), and even then in exceptional circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Their supposedly exclusive task falls almost entirely to others who were not originally or expressly so commissioned. As a result, readers are led to the retrospective conclusion that Jesus' charge, “you will be my witnesses,” may very well mean “you will *become* witnesses to what *I* will do in the future” as much as it means, traditionally, “you will bear witness on my behalf when I am gone.” The implications for frontier outreach should be fairly straightforward.

Jesus himself is the primary missionary who goes ahead of his followers, and the task of “witness” is as much about discovering new frontiers of his present activity as it is about introducing him in places where he is allegedly absent.

Second, and following from the first: participation in the mission of the Messiah regularly affords an opportunity to discover the full(er) identity of Jesus as universal Lord. This conclusion finds confirmation throughout the first half of Acts and, in a different way, in the ministry of Paul. The inclusion of Gentiles in outreach in Acts is more than a turn to unreached peoples; it is the crucial issue in response to which the church and Jesus’ witnesses are transformed. While it is not inaccurate to assert, as is commonly done, that “the ‘conversion’ of the messenger must precede the conversion of those who are lost,”<sup>22</sup> the preceding reading of Acts goes further. It underscores the capacity of the apostles and Paul to learn from Gentile conversion about who Jesus is: messianic Lord of all. The revelation of Jesus’ identity to his witnesses comes about because of intercultural contact among Gentiles reached by the “Spirit of Jesus.”<sup>23</sup>

Third, and following from the second point, the Lukan vision undermines to an extent the binaries associated with the history of modern mission (and the history of interpretation of Matt. 28). Protestant mission since William Carey’s day has largely been unidirectional, characterized by fairly static binaries—missionary/missionized, saved/lost, knowledgeable/ignorant, haves/have-nots. Undeniably, Luke still thinks in terms of those who have repented, been baptized into Christ, and received the Holy Spirit, and those who have not. Nevertheless, the Lukan portrait at least complicates the traditional binaries by showing how the great apostles must “catch up” to what God is doing at nearly

every turn. The traditional ways in which mission practice over the centuries has divided peoples into discrete categories faces resistance in Acts, where Jesus proclaims salvation, Peter receives testimony from Gentiles, and Paul confirms the Messiah’s identity by the fact that pagans embrace him before most Jews. By showcasing the transformation required of Jesus’ witnesses, Luke suggests that an exclusive focus on the “conversion of the nations” misses the point.

These initial observations—and they are little more than that—suggest that modern intercultural outreach should not be governed by a single conception of mission, but rooted in the complementarity of Jesus’ words from Matthew and Luke (and John, etc.). In fact, the Lukan vision of mission—in good canonical fashion—restores the clarity of the Matthean commission. Namely, Jesus remains the active subject of universal salvation even when his disciples participate in witness. Luke’s can reasonably be called the “Grace Commission,” in which Jesus himself (by and with the Spirit) is the primary witness—himself the commissioned Servant of Israel—and the apostles the ones who are transformed in the process of participating in that witness as his co-workers. It is precisely in the effort to reach unreached peoples that new discoveries about Jesus are made rather than that static truths are simply disseminated.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the impetus for contacting unreached peoples may have less to do with the conventional question—“how will they be saved if we don’t tell them?”—than with the question this essay has framed: “how will we, or anyone, know Jesus and his fullness unless we bear witness to and receive the witness of those among whom the exalted Lord is already at work?” As a biblical warrant for mission, this question makes intercultural encounter crucial to being a Christian disciple. It is also what makes such encounters so urgent for our time. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See the important caveats about “mission” language in Michael Stroope’s recent article, “Reimagining Witness beyond Our Modern Mission Paradigm,” *IJFM* 36:4 (Winter 2019): 163–168. His essay builds on his larger argument in *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017). For this reason, wherever possible my argument employs Luke’s own language of “witness” rather than the extra-biblical terminology of “mission.” I add the modifier “intercultural”—used in lieu of “mission” in some circles (see Fuller’s “School of Intercultural Studies”)—as a way to name the inescapable context of witness. See, e.g., Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 3 vols. (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016–2019). While “intercultural” helpfully names the process or method of “witness,” it does not indicate the theological foundations (“missio Dei”) and therefore remains in itself an insufficient replacement for “mission.”

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Christopher J. H. Wright, “Truth with a Mission: Reading Scripture Missiologically,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15.2 (2011): 6: “Luke shapes his two volume work in such a way that the missionary mandate to the disciples to be Christ’s witnesses to the nations comes as the climax to the gospel of Luke and the introduction to the book of Acts.”

<sup>3</sup> Curiously, in Acts Jesus “speaks” four times as many words *after* his Ascension than before. Of these roughly 285 post-Ascension words, about half (135) are recalled by the narrator (half spoken to Paul in 9:4–6; 18:9–10; 23:11; and half spoken to Ananias in 9:10–12, 15–16) and just as many Paul recounts as the Lord’s direct speech to him (22:7, 8, 10, 18, 21; 26:14–18). Of a slightly different sort are (presumably) pre-Easter sayings of Jesus recalled by Peter (11:16) and Paul (20:35).

<sup>4</sup> We can draw out the contrast between commissions by noticing that whereas Matthew’s Jesus says, “go,” Luke’s Jesus says “stay”!

<sup>5</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956): 315.

- <sup>6</sup> Martin H. Franzmann, “Word of the Lord Grew: The Historical Character of the New Testament Word,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 30.8 (August 1959): 563–581.
- <sup>7</sup> Hans Conzelmann is rightly recognized as the originator of the idea of an “absentee christology,” in the sense that his work is most responsible for its popularity. Cf. *Theology of Luke*, 186: Jesus is “a figure from the past by means of the picture of him presented by tradition.” His broader thesis holds that the crisis in the delay of the *Parousia* has prompted Luke to “periodize” history and portray the gift of the Holy Spirit as the assurance of salvation which believers require in Jesus’ absence. Yet, when the term “absentee” is cited, it is usually C. F. D. Moule who is associated with the term’s popular usage (“The Christology of Acts,” 165)—e.g., MacRae, “Whom Heaven Must Receive,” 158. Jervell merely echoes these earlier claims (*Theology of Acts*, 33): “In Acts, the exalted Christ is a remarkably passive figure and it is hard to see that he has any real function.” Bo Reicke has alternatively called the same general idea Luke’s “diastatic christology.” Cf. “The Risen Lord,” 161–162: “. . . Luke has a certain tendency toward diastatic Christology so that Christ is not very often represented as being personally active, but mostly supposed to act through his Spirit or his Angel. For in this context the Spirit or the Angel are nothing but the representatives of the risen Lord himself.”
- <sup>8</sup> The emphasis on Jesus’ presence-via-speech is confirmed by a simple quantitative analysis of Jesus’ spoken words in Acts. Naturally, the most obvious place his words of direct address appear in Acts is in the introductory verses (1:4–8), prior to his ascension. The risen Lord speaks about sixty-two words to his apostles in anticipation of his departure. As much as we are right to emphasize the peculiar weight of Jesus’ last earthly words (Acts 1:4–5, 7–8), it should be remembered that these words represent, statistically, less than a quarter of the recorded speech of Jesus in Acts. Moreover, the majority of the speech attributed to the ascended Jesus concerns Paul’s commission (about 70%, if we include the thrice-narrated Damascus encounter as separate instances). I take the repeated accounts of Paul’s Damascus road encounter as separate, statistically, because each contributes to the overall impression of Jesus’ continued presence in Acts. In addition, Luke’s attention to Jesus’ words sets Jesus’ pre-ascension commission to his apostles in parallel with Paul’s reception of a commission directly from the Lord. Jesus’ speech, in other words, helps establish continuity between the apostles and Paul with respect to the one universal mission. But speech is not the same thing as action or narrative presence, it might be argued. His words may be recalled but they are no substitute for Jesus’ active presence itself. And yet, except for two (presumably) pre-ascension sayings of Jesus later recalled by Peter (11:16) and Paul (20:35), all the cited speech of Jesus after Acts 1:11 is purportedly delivered by *the ascended Jesus himself*. Past statements of Jesus are recalled, but most often as statements earlier spoken *in Acts*. Perhaps it is even a testimony to the strength of Luke’s conviction that Jesus remains active that he recalls in Acts very few of Jesus’ words from the third gospel. Based on this view, Luke need not quote the pre-Easter Jesus because the post-ascension Lord is *still* narratively speaking (cf. Acts 1:1).
- <sup>9</sup> Unique among the evangelists in this respect, Luke includes *two* statements by Jesus about divine guidance for his disciples experiencing persecution after he is gone (Luke 12:11–12 and 21:12–15). Though Jesus’ statements are nearly identical, one difference between them is especially illuminating. In the first saying, Jesus says “the Holy Spirit will teach you . . . what you ought to say” (12:12). In the second, Jesus says, “I will give you words and a wisdom” (21:15). Because the passages essentially say the same thing—about how disciples persecuted in the future will receive divine inspiration—we can understand “Holy Spirit” and “the (ascended) Lord Jesus” as acting in concert, according to Luke. Moreover, following the logic of this “doublet,” if we understand the speeches by disciples in Acts delivered before “rulers and authorities” (12:11) and before “kings and governors” (21:12), it would follow that most of the speeches recorded in Acts are, at least indirectly, words given by the Lord Jesus himself (cf. Acts 6:56–60)!
- <sup>10</sup> Moule, *Origin of Christology*, 105: “die Vergeistigung Christi und die Christifizierung des Geistes.” H. Douglas Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke’s Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 202: “Because Luke at times so closely parallels the work of the Spirit and Jesus in the church’s mission, τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ can rightly refer to the combined activity of both.”
- <sup>11</sup> In table 1, concepts shared between Luke 24 and Acts 26 are underlined while linguistic matches between Luke 24:47 and Acts 26:23 are italicized.
- <sup>12</sup> For this point, and its initial development, see Jacques Dupont, “La portée christologique de l’évangélisation des nations d’après Luc 24.47.” Pages 125–143 in *Neues Testament und Kirche: für Rudolf Schnackenburg* (J. Gnllka, ed. Freiburg [im Breisgau]; Basel, Wien: Herder, 1974).
- <sup>13</sup> If Acts narrates the continuation of Jesus’ deeds and teachings (Acts 1:1), then it can reasonably be claimed that Luke and Acts *together* unfold the identity of Jesus (Luke 24:46–48; Acts 26:22–23). Too much weight should not be placed on the traditional title associated with Luke’s second volume: “the Acts of the Apostles.” If Jesus’ initial commission is left ambiguous, the Twelve are absent for the whole second half, and Paul’s retrospective summary concerns the work of *Jesus* to fulfill the prophetic commission, then the story is hardly a straightforward depiction of the “acts of the apostles.” Though the end of Luke’s gospel appears to assign the apostles responsibility for proclaiming universal salvation, the end of Acts clarifies—in the explicit absence of the apostles—that Jesus himself proclaims the light of salvation to all people (cf. Luke 2:39).
- <sup>14</sup> J. Bradley Chance, “Divine Prognostications and the Movement of Story: An Intertextual Exploration of Xenophon’s Ephesian Tale and the Acts of the Apostles,” in Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins (eds.), *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998): 219–234. Cf. 231–232: “But while this broad outline is helpful, readers who attempt to squeeze the outline of Acts into rigid conformity with the outline of Acts 1:8 inevitably experience frustration. . . . For example, is the prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit really to be understood as referring quite narrowly to Pentecost? Or are we not to see the consistent reports of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in such texts as 8:15–17 (Samaritans), 9:17 (Paul in Damascus), 10:44 (gentiles of Caesarea), 13:52 (disciples of Antioch of Pisidia), and 19:6 (disciples of Ephesus) as linked to this prophecy? Are we required to conclude that the Ethiopian is not a gentile, that he is in some sense Jewish or Samaritan, since the witness to him takes place during the Judean/Samaritan mission and before the “real” gentile phase begins with the preaching to Cornelius? And where in Jesus’ prophetic outline of 1:8 do we fit Paul’s

preaching to the Jews of Damascus in Acts 9? And what do we make of the fact that when we are now in the “ends of the earth” phase of the outline in the last part of Acts, Paul regularly preaches to Jews and even returns to Jerusalem where, we are told by a revelation of the risen Jesus, Paul has offered testimony for Jesus (Acts 23:11), supposedly long after “the Jerusalem phase” of the story should have ended?”

- <sup>15</sup> Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 154: “Another, more helpful way to make sense of this puzzle [the delay of the Spirit’s advent in Samaria] is to focus on the apostles who for the first time journey from Jerusalem to Samaria—in spite of the clear mandate in 1:8 to witness to Jesus “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” as well as Luke’s testimony that Stephen’s execution resulted in the scattering of the church throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1). From this vantage point, the apparent delay in the outpouring of the Spirit in Samaria serves to assist in the ongoing conversion of Peter and John, so that they finally engage in a ministry among the Samaritans (8:25), and to prepare for the Jerusalem Council, where those gathered come to recognize that the chasm between Jews and Gentiles (and thus also between Jews and Samaritans) is bridged ultimately by God (15:8–9).”
- <sup>16</sup> See Craig Ott, “Diaspora and Relocation as Divine Impetus for Witness in the Early Church.” Pages 87–108 in Wan E (ed.), *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies).
- <sup>17</sup> See Dennis Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997): 32–52.
- <sup>18</sup> There is some debate whether Peter’s name for Jesus (Lord of all) comes in a parenthetical comment or as an emphatic exclamation. The disruptive syntax draws attention to the phrase, making it appear more like a climactic statement than an aside.
- <sup>19</sup> In Acts 10:5, the angel tells Cornelius to send men to Caesarea (cf. 10:10), yet in 10:20 the narrator tells us it is the Spirit who says “I sent them...” It is easy to miss how shocking it would have been, at this point in the story, for an unbaptized (unrepentant?) Gentile to be a vehicle for the Spirit and accomplishment of God’s will, but the Lukan narrator goes further and *identifies* Cornelius’ action (sending the men) with that of the Spirit!
- <sup>20</sup> The many scholars of mission who have appended the book of Acts to the end of Matthew’s gospel (rather than Luke’s) include William Carey himself (*An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* [1792], 14–28), Lamin Sanneh (“Should Christianity Be Missionary? An Appraisal and an Agenda,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40.2 (Summer 2001): 86), and even Gustav Warneck (“Zum Jubiläumsjahr der evangelischen Mission,” *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift* 19 (1982): 3–4).
- <sup>21</sup> I am well aware of later texts attributing the spread of Christianity to other apostles—for example, Thomas and Bartholomew evangelized India and Matthew Ethiopia (Acts of Thomas, Rufinus, Hist. Eccl. 1.9–10), etc.—but these traditions lie outside the book of Acts and therefore outside the sweep of the present argument about Luke’s vision.”
- <sup>22</sup> Harold Dollar, “A Biblical-Missiological Exploration of the Cross-Cultural Dimensions in Luke-Acts.” PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990, 147.
- <sup>23</sup> This has the effect of both reinforcing the importance of intercultural encounter and tempering our habits of imagining mission in unidirectional terms—i.e., what we do to others with the gospel. I have elsewhere called this aspect of the Lukan vision a “Christology of intercultural interdependence.” See “Mission and the Book of Acts in a Pluralist Society,” *Missiology: An International Review* 47.2 (April 2019): 104–120.
- <sup>24</sup> This is to say nothing about the uniqueness of the Christian religion. It is simply an assumption in this discussion, as it was surely for Luke, that “there is salvation in no other name” and the book of Acts both reflects this conviction and narrates the implications of this conviction for Jews and Gentiles alike. Jewish unbelievers, in fact, were newly thrust into the position by apostolic preaching of needing to repent and essentially convert, not unlike the pagan Gentiles whom they judged to be at the other end of the spectrum of piety. The shocking undertone of Luke’s story is that not only is repentance and forgiveness only possible through the Messiah Jesus, but that Gentiles are given new access AND even Jews must—on the model of Gentiles!—enter in by a receptive faith and the gift of the Spirit.



Biblical Ventures  
"The Bible Says"  
Scriptural Questions about Common Missiological Assumptions

by J. Paul Pennington

Over three hundred years of Protestant mission theology, mobilization, and practice, Christians have developed deeply entrenched narratives about what the Scriptures say about their global mission. These narratives provide the motivational and practical foundation for what people do as they develop and pursue their mission strategies and methodologies.

I have spent most of my sixty plus years living in and with these narratives. I have been a missionary kid, a missionary, and served for seventeen years as a Professor of Intercultural Studies. Until recently, I served as Vice President for Academic Affairs with William Carey International University.

In spite of my long connection with the mission world, I have had, for some time, a nagging sense that our missiological narratives around key scriptural terms do not actually represent what Scripture tells us about them. If our understanding of terms like "kingdom," "gospel," and "disciple" reflect inadequate scriptural understanding, it is likely that both our missiology and the praxis derived from it could prove faulty. The prevailing missiological narratives about biblical terms could actually keep us from reading and listening to Scripture carefully and following what it actually teaches.

If we want to be faithful to Jesus and his Word in our missiology, it is essential that we re-read Scripture for what it actually says, rather than what our mission narratives tell us. And if we are serious about pursuing the commission of Jesus in ways that are faithful to him and his Word, in ways that don't unnecessarily alienate people on the frontiers from Jesus, we must help believers wrestle with how Jesus wants to be represented and served on the edges, fringes, and frontiers. This research agenda is not a matter of academic pedantry or irrelevant etymology. The way that we use, or possibly misuse, scriptural terms at the core of our mission pursuits has had eternal consequences for millions of people.

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In 2016, Mike Rynkiewich published an article in *IBMR* entitled "Do Not Remember the Former Things."<sup>1</sup> Based on Isaiah 43:18, Rynkiewich suggested, "Repeatedly in salvation history God moves faster than his people can keep up."<sup>2</sup> The author then contended that "*missiology continues to be hindered by outdated theories of culture and theologies of mission*" (emphasis mine) and called for deep reexamination of core assumptions in the face of globalization, urbanization, migration, and post-modernism.

Tite Tiéno, in his *IBMR* response to Rynkiewich's article, noted that he had also "*questioned the ideologies that were present in mission thinking, promotional literature, and strategy*" (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup> Tiéno then called for a more disruptive review of mission tradition:

It is indeed time to reconsider the assumptions operating in missiology and the categories used by mission practitioners and strategists. Such a task is long, difficult, and perilous because too many people and powerful organizations have a vested interest in perpetuating marketable rallying cries, slogans, and plans.<sup>4</sup>

After noting the difficulty of such re-examination, Tiéno concluded, "We should . . . not be surprised that strategic categories continue to prevail in mission. *Perhaps what is needed is a new articulation of the very nature of Christian mission.*"<sup>5</sup> (emphasis mine)

In the past year, I have also been engaged in multiple conversations around Mike Stroope's recent book *Transcending Mission*.<sup>6</sup> Stroope, by his own admission, in a private conversation, has sought to provoke deeper reconsideration of the historical and terminological foundations of the "mission" paradigm. Stroope's analysis joins the voices of Rynkiewich and Tiéno in calling for deeper reflection on how Jesus wants his followers to serve and represent him globally.

Rynkiewich observed in the conclusion of his article:

Our understanding of the world, our set of categories—our worldview, if you will—leads us to see what we expect to see, but they deceive us so that we miss what we do not expect to see. The name for this practice is *hubris*; it is a lack of epistemological humility. (italics original)<sup>7</sup>

If Christianity, church, or mission are founded upon this hubris, this lack of epistemological humility, we might actually find ourselves pursuing missions, purposes, and agendas that are out of line with or even counter to the mission and purpose of Jesus and his Father. The only cure for hubris, is the humility to set aside our epistemological certainty and to listen deeply to corrective voices—voices that can help us hear what Jesus wants and what he is doing in the

world—but voices that, if we listen carefully, will challenge our missiological and mission hubris.

Of all the voices we need to consider, I am deeply concerned that we aren't always paying careful enough attention to the voice of Scripture, what it tells us about Jesus' priorities, and how he wants us to go about the task he has set us. So let me first make some general observations about how we should listen to Scripture. I will then illustrate the challenge of using scriptural terms in unscriptural ways by exploring three representative examples: "kingdom," "gospel," and "disciple."

### *Listening to Scripture*

In our own incarnational journey, my wife and I have noticed rather often that when Christians assert, "The Bible says . . ." they are often unaware of how they are actually citing their own tradition's narrative about what the Bible says, or are demonstrating that common tendency of "misreading scripture through Western eyes"<sup>8</sup> or through some other cultural lens.

Some Christians would even argue that there is little or no room for innovation in mission. If Jesus is "the same yesterday, today, and forever," they argue, then we just need to keep preaching the same, simple "gospel" in the same way we have done.

I would counter, however, that such a naïve and simplistic view of Jesus and his good news is challenged by the New Testament itself. One thing that never changes about Jesus is his constant desire to incarnate his way—his life—within the families, cultures, communities, and societies of this world. And that incarnational spirit leads to variety and adaptability in the New Testament, not systematization and conformity.

A few years ago, I was involved in an email discussion where one participant asked for assistance in identifying "biblical culture." Our divisions would be solved, the writer indicated, if all believers would simply follow the "biblical culture" presented in the New Testament. I myself come from a Christian tradition where our religious forebearers claimed to have found the "New Testament pattern" that all believers should follow in order to be faithful to Jesus and Scripture.

However, as I have reflected on that idea of "biblical culture" or "New Testament pattern" I have become increasingly impressed by a unique feature of the new covenant Scriptures—I have come to term it the "cultural non-specificity" of the New Testament. As we review the commands and instructions from Matthew to Revelation, it is amazing how many of them do not provide enough cultural detail—enough form or structure—for us to replicate the

command in the same way in every instance, much less across cultures and times.

The Mosaic Law, in contrast, provided specific rules for what to eat or not eat, material for clothing, rituals and festivals, even hair cutting. While the Jews did not always follow these commands, they did follow enough of them to become a separate nation, somewhat distinct from those around them.

In stark contrast, the New Testament Scriptures provide little cultural form for any required practices or rituals. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, while obviously practiced, are not given enough specificity to know precisely how they were conducted, who was permitted to administer them, or when they were performed. We have no "order of service" from the New Testament era to serve as a blueprint for later liturgies. Every modern worship service depends on a form and order invented after or beyond what is recorded in the Scriptures.

This pervasive cultural non-specificity has to be intentional, not accidental. Why would Jesus lead his people to not record the specific forms they used for essential practices and commands? I am convinced that this non-specificity is, in fact, due to the incarnational spirit of Jesus and his new covenant. Given a choice, Jesus wants to incarnate his life, his good news, his ekklesia, his teaching into the cultural forms and expressions of families, communities, and peoples. He does not want his followers to standardize one cultural form as normative for all believers in all contexts.

So for me, at the outset, we must first listen to this incarnational voice of Scripture, its cultural non-specificity. This is the foundation for the disruptive innovation we need to consider, particularly in frontier missiology. It is important that we understand a corollary principle to the cultural non-specificity; if the New Testament does not specify cultural forms for its commands, then it is necessary for believers to invent a form in order to obey the command or to perform the essential function. Once created, however, those forms are only normative for the believers who created them in a specific context. Believers should never assume that the forms they created are "biblical" and thus normative or necessary for any believers in any other culture or community. The function is normative, but the invented form is almost always constructed, contingent, and contextual—that particular form is not essential for the function.

I have come to the conviction that terms like "Christianity," "church," "mission" themselves are all cultural constructs, laden with cultural baggage and accretions. Some were legitimate "incarnations," cultural inventions within a particular context. Some have been human departures from or even unwarranted additions to the way of Jesus. Jesus is not bound by or to any

Christian, church, or mission forms, no matter how sacrosanct or hallowed in the eyes of their partisans. While perfectly appropriate in the settings where they were created, those forms are not necessary or normative for believers in other contexts, especially in the most challenging frontiers, edges, fringes, and margins that have proved most impenetrable to traditional Christian mission forms.

In new contexts, Jesus, if he is given his choice (not our conformity), wants new wineskins, not cosmetically enhanced old ones. He wants new forms and new expressions that are as natural to that context as our adaptations were to our ancestors when they invented them.

## I became increasingly impressed with the cultural non-specificity of the gospel.

Frontier missiology needs to encourage this incarnational spirit into the next generation. It requires a radical reexamination of our propensity to standardize and essentialize the forms and expressions of one culture for another community of believers. At this higher level, we need to teach our students to listen to the incarnational, innovative voice of Scripture instead of teaching forms, structures, and traditions that are the accumulated accretions of cultural inventions from other communities.

Additionally, in order to better root our frontier missiology in Scripture, I propose that we also need to listen more carefully to what Scripture says about the foundational concepts that have been deeply woven into our missiology and practice.

The incarnational spirit of the New Testament is marked by variety and flexibility in expression and form in contrast to the one-size-fits-all conformity and standardization often followed by mission theorists, strategists, and practitioners. Frontier missiology particularly must encourage practitioners to reflect on incarnational adaptation of the New Testament—to listen more deeply to Scripture, not just to the parts we culturally prioritize and emphasize.

So let me explore this challenge of listening more deeply to Scripture, of using scriptural terms in scriptural ways through three representative examples. They will illustrate how claims to "biblical missiology" can actually ignore fundamental

principles that Scripture articulates about how we should understand and use "kingdom," "gospel," and "disciple."

### Excessive Emphasis on Kingdom

Let's first consider the pervasive use of "kingdom" language in mission and missiology today. Significant ink and breath have been expended on the need to "bring the kingdom," "advance the kingdom," "expand the kingdom," "spread the kingdom," or "build the kingdom." Countless mission conferences and consultations have utilized the phrase in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come," as a paradigm for their mission emphases, but will often ignore or at least minimize the two other petitions that open that model prayer, "Your name be honored" and "Your will be done."<sup>9</sup>

He knew that Jesus had spoken often of the kingdom. He was there when those conversations and sermons had occurred. So what would lead the man arguably closest to Jesus to mostly leave out that overt kingdom language in his telling of the story? We are not told why. But, John's reduction of the "kingdom" theme cannot be accidental. However, given John's obviously intentional decrease in "kingdom" language, our missiology should at least ask why one of Jesus' dearest witnesses would tell the whole story of Jesus without feeling the need to front "kingdom" language to do so? Was John being unfaithful to Jesus? Absolutely not.

The incarnational Jesus, for whatever reason, led John, inspired him in fact, to tell the whole story without hardly a mention of

## The incarnational Jesus, for whatever reason, inspired John to tell the whole story without hardly a mention of the kingdom of God.

Obviously, Jesus spoke a great deal about the kingdom (kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven)—some eighty times in fact. Given this prevalent theme, some Western Christians particularly have developed whole systems of "kingdom" teaching and paradigms that have woven deeply into their missiology. They have then exported their kingdom emphasis globally as part of their packaging of the good news of Jesus, teaching kingdom seminars, developing kingdom ministries, and pursuing all sorts of kingdom agendas and schemes. Those who create these emphases claim the Bible as their justification.

But I contend that, in creating these paradigms and packages, we have not paid close enough attention to how the Scripture uses the kingdom motif. The excessive use of kingdom as an essential paradigm that all believers in all places must adopt and utilize is actually challenged by Scripture. Frontier missiology especially needs to wrestle with this overemphasis on kingdom from both scriptural and practical perspectives.

Consider, first of all, the evidence of the Gospels themselves. Yes, the kingdom theme occurs eighty times in the Gospels. But seventy-five of those are in the synoptics. When we turn to John's gospel, something remarkable happens. The idea of God's kingdom is referenced only five times there, twice in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (John 3), and then not again until three times in Jesus' conversation with Pilate (John 18). That's it!

John was the "disciple whom Jesus loved," the one who had a unique relationship with Jesus, and who knew his heart well.

the "kingdom of God." The incarnational Jesus was modeling the level of variation and adaptation that his believers should follow when presenting his life and authority. Our missiology is limited and truncated if we simply and uncritically gravitate to kingdom emphases and language without considering this important direction that John took for the audience to whom he was writing.

Can you proclaim Jesus without emphasizing "kingdom" everywhere you go? John apparently believed so. And our missiology should examine both why that might be necessary and how it might be faithful to Jesus to reduce kingdom language in certain contexts. I'll return to that in my practical considerations in a moment.

We must consider a second scriptural phenomenon in the use of kingdom. In summarizing the forty days of Jesus' appearances after his resurrection, Luke says that during that time Jesus was "speaking of the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Reading that phrase one would expect to find prevalent and constant references to this theme in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. So, read through Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20–21? How many times does "kingdom" occur in those chapters? Not once!

This is even more telling than John's omission. The evidence of Scripture seems to indicate that Jesus himself was adept at speaking about his understanding of the "kingdom of God" without feeling the need to use that precise phrase or

language to do so. Those who recorded his last conversations certainly felt no compulsion to insert it into each account.

The third consideration is Jesus' last conversation with his disciples before he ascended to heaven. He had gathered them together on the Mount of Olives. They asked him a question, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" What was Jesus' answer? "That is none of your business! God is in charge of that."

So Jesus basically says, "The kingdom is none of your business. That's God's. Your business? You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In other words, the last thing Jesus said to his disciples was, "Don't get hung up on kingdom! Focus on being my witnesses." And the rest of the New Testament indicates that they took him seriously. From the prevalence of "kingdom" language in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the book of Acts reduced references to kingdom to sixteen times in twenty-eight chapters.<sup>10</sup> Likewise Paul emphasized other aspects of the authority and lordship of Christ and God and referenced "kingdom" much more sparingly (only once per epistle, except 1 Corinthians). It's there, but not nearly as frequent.

I suspect that there are two cultural dynamics that play into the reduction in kingdom language. It was an important concept for 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews who had developed a number of paradigms around God's messianic kingdom. That language resonated with their aspirations, even as Jesus tried to correct the expectations to a more internal, spiritual reign of God within. At the same time, the imperial authorities found talk of an alternate kingdom potentially seditious. Given these Jewish and Greco-Roman dynamics, Jesus led his followers to speak of his transformational life and his authority using metaphors and expressions that did not emphasize "kingdom" to the same extent he did when alive in a Jewish context.

This reduction in kingdom language, then, is actually initiated and inspired by the incarnational Jesus himself as he leads his people to live out his way and life in the Gentile world.

Innovative frontier missiology, I suggest, must wrestle with why the New Testament reduces kingdom language. And it must grapple with the implications of this reduction in the contexts where using "kingdom" could actually be problematic.

So let me briefly shift from scriptural to practical concerns about kingdom.

From one perspective, when Christians tout their kingdom agendas and programs in nations that were once subject to Western imperial and colonial rule, their message often

sounds like a desire to reinstate that foreign imperial and colonial control. Wrapping Jesus too tightly in "kingdom" garb can actually create an impression that his incarnational spirit wants to avoid.

At the same time, we should also ask, why some Western Christians love "kingdom" language and paradigms so much? Sadly, that language may resonate with their own cultural history of power, control, domination, and subjugation. Subtly, yet with significant hubris and arrogance, some Christians pursue their "kingdom" agendas with too much of that spirit in mind. Recently, in reading of a "union mission" that once existed in Benares (Varanasi), India, I was struck that one of the partners was actually named World Dominion Mission. Whatever the founders and members thought of that name, most Indians then and now would understand such words to refer to foreign dominion and subjugation, not the humble, compassionate reign of Prabhu Yesu (Lord Jesus).

So both from a scriptural and practical perspective, future missiology needs to challenge existing "kingdom" paradigms and encourage students and practitioners to listen more carefully to what Scripture actually says about how the early followers of Jesus understood and represented Christ's authority and rule in the world. And it needs to challenge believers to nuance situations, contexts, and communities where kingdom language ought to be reduced or de-emphasized just as the New Testament actually demonstrates.

### Hiding Good News behind "Gospel"

The gospel obviously presents a foundational concept for our missiology. It is the person and work of Jesus, the good news of what he has done for sinful humanity. All too often, though, Christians have created standardized packages and truncated presentations of what their version of the gospel entails. Some Christians, in fact, assert that cultural considerations are irrelevant; that we just need to "preach the simple gospel." Or as we've heard from Indian Christian friends in our early explorations, "Christians have been taught, 'You don't need to worry about relationships or culture, just give them the gospel.'"<sup>11</sup>

The New Testament, in contrast, demonstrates considerable variety and flexibility in how the good news, the wonderful story of Jesus, is told. The four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) all tell the story of the one Jesus, who is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Yet they present that same story in different ways for different audiences and communities.

John's gospel presents Jesus with significant variation from the Synoptics. In addition, it is important to note that John never uses *euangelion* ("gospel," good news) in either his gospel or his letters. It does occur a single time in Revelation 14:6. As

we saw with "kingdom," John was led by Jesus to tell his story without feeling the need to slavishly use "gospel" to do so. Is it possible to recount the life and significance of Jesus without ever using "gospel" (euangelion, good news) to do so? John apparently thought so.

In so doing, he challenges us to consider a level of variation and adaptation in our own telling where "gospel" might, for some reason, represent inappropriate or confusing language to our hearers. John wanted to present the good news of Jesus to his readers, and for some reason declined to ever use "gospel" to do so. Our missiology ought to be nuanced and deep enough that we wrestle with why and where our own presentation of the good news might also demonstrate such variation and flexibility, instead of slavishly using "gospel" because Christian tradition says we must.

In addition to the variation in the four gospels, Paul's epistles include enough of his presentation to provide what amounts to a fifth "gospel." Paul tells the story at times in words and with explanations not found in any of the four gospels. Yet Paul specifically asserts, "The good news that was announced by me is not of human origin, for I neither received it nor was I taught it, but I received it through revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11–12; author's translation from Greek). Paul specifically claims that his varied presentation of the good news came directly by revelation from Jesus, not from a human source. So the different expressions and explanations he uses he attributes to the revelation of Jesus, not his own invention.

Additional early historical evidence also testifies to the varied presentation of the good news in the New Testament era. Eusebius cites a report from Papias regarding Mark:

Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doing.... *Peter used to adapt his teachings to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings....*<sup>12</sup> (emphasis mine)

In fact, the Book of Acts reflects this variation in presentation. Of the eight sermons in Acts, no two are the same. The occasion, the audience, the cultural and religious backstory all lead the speakers to tell the story of the same Jesus in different ways. The incarnational Jesus leads them to communicate his good news with adaptation and variation, not a standardized, one-size-fits-all package.

Given this significant variation in gospel presentation, frontier missiology must fundamentally challenge Christian

tendencies to standardize the gospel into truncated, one-size-fits-all presentations that claim to be "biblical" while ignoring the Bible's rich, varied, and diverse telling of the multifaceted, multidimensional good news of Jesus. The earliest witnesses of Jesus were led by his Spirit to adapt and vary their presentations to their audiences. If we listen carefully to Scripture, our missiology should inculcate this incarnational ability to understand and present the good news of Jesus in varied ways as we encounter radically different contexts from those in which we created our "gospel" packages.

Why is this so critical? Enoch Wan has offered a cogent critique of the "simple," guilt-based gospel presented by so many. He articulates why we need to listen more carefully to how early believers adapted instead of standardized the good news, and how we should still do so today in non-Western contexts, if not in the West itself.

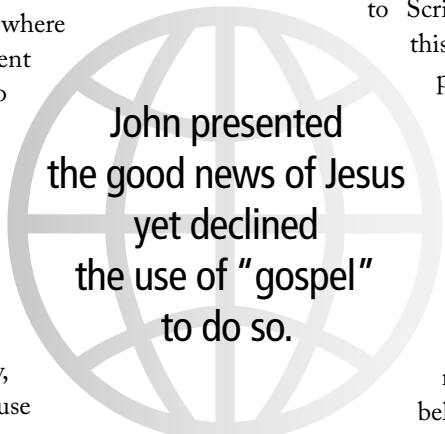
Of course, the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) should be taught eventually in a discipleship program. But nobody should be alienated from the Kingdom of God [note the intersection with our last term] because they are culturally unable to grasp the overemphasized "forensic" aspect of the gospel and therefore unprepared to accept the "penal substitution of Christ" as presented by Anglophone Caucasian Christians [and, I would add, their foreign proselytes] in evangelism.<sup>13</sup>

Our understanding of and presentation of the good news of Jesus, especially on the frontiers, desperately needs to challenge the prevalent standardization, systematization, and industrialization of gospel and evangelism. Frontier missiology must listen more carefully to the incarnational voice of Scripture, and challenge common narratives and methodologies that claim biblical justification, while ignoring the deeply incarnational and adaptive spirit of the good news of Jesus.

### Ignoring the Disappearance of "Disciple"

A final example further illustrates how we must listen more carefully to all that Scripture says rather than creating theologies, missiologies, and then strategies based on an incomplete reading of Scripture.

Without question the Gospels place great emphasis on a discipling model for maturing and multiplying followers and leaders. The field of missiology has consumed immeasurable ink and paper just on discussing the meaning and application of Jesus' instruction in Matthew's version of the Great Commission—that his followers should "make disciples of



John presented  
the good news of Jesus  
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to do so.

all nations.” Some would argue that since Jesus told us to do it, then of course we should not only obey his command but should use the term he chose as we do so.

So based on this partial, simplistic analysis of Scripture, Christians and missions have created a plethora of discipleship theologies, discipleship programs, discipleship ministries, and discipleship strategies—all claiming to represent Jesus biblically. Yet, when I read the New Testament, the pervasive addiction to a “discipleship” narrative and paradigm is again challenged when we listen more carefully to the Scriptures.

In Acts, two terms for the followers of Jesus predominate, “disciples” (27 times) and “brethren” (32 times). Once an identity was established to that extent, Christians would tend to standardize practice and continue using that term. We should expect to find a similar pattern in the rest of the New Testament regarding disciple, an even distribution between it and brethren (*adelphoi* could mean brothers and sisters, siblings of any gender).

Instead, a shift in terminology occurs that is unexplained, but undeniably significant. After the end of Paul’s third journey (Acts 21:16), and through the rest of the New Testament, the name “disciple” is completely dropped. Mike Breen has called this *The Great Disappearance*.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, brother or brethren occur 183 times in the rest of the New Testament after Acts.<sup>15</sup>

Paul never calls believers disciples, never speaks of disciple-making (although Luke speaks of such work in Paul’s first journey—Acts 14:21). He never utilizes disciple language in his extensive writing. I regularly hear Christians and missionaries talk about Paul “discipling” while they ignore this significant shift in Paul’s own terminology and methodology.

Was Paul being unfaithful to Jesus by not using the D-word to describe his ministry? Was he being disobedient to the Matthean version of the Great Commission? Not at all! He was familiar with the “disciple” paradigm; he was, after all, a disciple himself of the Rabbi Gamaliel. He associated with the disciples after his conversion in Damascus (Acts 9). And he was in Antioch serving the fledgling congregation with Barnabas when the “disciples” were first labeled “Christians” (Acts 11:26). So his prevalent use of brother/brethren (in continuity with Acts) while completely dropping “disciple” terminology is a significant feature of his ministry that demands greater missiological attention.

In this important shift, Paul models an incarnational (or innovative) impetus in serving Jesus. He is committed to fulfilling the command and purpose of Jesus. Yet, led by the Spirit of Jesus, he feels no compulsion to perpetuate the Jewish Rabbi/disciple model to do so. Yes, the Greco-

Roman world also had disciples. students of philosophers and teachers. But for some unexplained reason, Paul seems to have determined that “disciple” terminology was not appropriate for the contexts in which he worked.

Make no mistake, Paul is committed to the function of maturing and multiplying believers, the purpose of the Great Commission. He is constantly accompanied by a team of partners (e.g., Silas, Timothy) and continually is training and deploying them in service just as Jesus did with his disciples. But instead of using the “disciple” term for doing so, Paul emphasizes at least three alternative models for his obedience to Christ’s command.

- Parent/child
- Coach/athlete
- Equipper (trainer)/worker (or Master/apprentice)

Paul maintains his commitment to serving the key mandate of Jesus, but he adopts different metaphors and models in his context for how he does so. And he exhibits the utmost confidence and assurance that he is maturing and multiplying believers in obedience to Jesus.

## What is Jesus saying to peoples who are following Jesus without adherence to traditional Christian forms and assumptions?

So again, we need to listen more carefully to what Scripture says. Paul’s shift away from “discipleship” models and language has significant implications for the future of missiological education. We should challenge students and practitioners to stop creating artificial, often Western-laden “discipleship” models that claim to be scriptural while they actually export foreign emphases, packages, and explanations.

### *Conclusion*

So where does this reflection on what Scripture says lead us? Frontier missiology, to be truly faithful to Jesus and the Great Commission, should encourage practitioners to follow the Spirit-led adaptations reflected in the New Testament. We must teach a new generation to not slavishly develop standardized, simplified methodologies that claim to be biblical while they actually ignore the incarnational variation and adaptation that Jesus and the Apostles modeled.

The questions I have raised regarding “kingdom,” “gospel,” and “disciple” are only representative samples of the foundational reflection and innovation we must pursue as we

more carefully consider frontier missiology. Jesus is actively shaping new wineskins today. The next generation will not be able to follow his incarnational lead unless they learn to listen to Scripture with much greater discernment and sensitivity, while also listening far more deeply and responsively to the contexts and communities they are called to serve.

If we want to be used effectively by Jesus to help shape the new wineskins in the remaining frontiers, frontier missiology must challenge us all to listen afresh to Jesus, Scripture, and the Spirit. One way for this to happen is to listen deeply not just to "Christian" perspectives of what Scripture says, but also

to the incarnational communities of Jesus followers among Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other peoples. What is Jesus saying to these peoples who are following Jesus without adherence to traditional Christian forms and assumptions?<sup>16</sup> How might we actually hear the Lord's voice more clearly from them than from 1900 years of Christian tradition?

Combine those two voices (from both Scripture and incarnational communities), and the incarnational Jesus will call his servants to imagine, envision, and shape disruptive innovations in mission, those radical new wineskins that are called for on the remaining and challenging fringes, edges, margins, and frontiers. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Michael A. Rynkiewich, "Do Not Remember the Former Things," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 4 (2016): 308–17.
- <sup>2</sup> Rynkiewich, "Do Not Remember the Former Things," 308.
- <sup>3</sup> Tite Tiénou, "Reflections on Michael A. Rynkiewich's 'Do Not Remember the Former Things,'" *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 4 (2016): 319.
- <sup>4</sup> Tiénou, "Reflections on Michael A. Rynkiewich's 'Do Not Remember the Former Things,'" 319.
- <sup>5</sup> Tiénou, "Reflections on Michael A. Rynkiewich's 'Do Not Remember the Former Things,'" 321.
- <sup>6</sup> Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017).
- <sup>7</sup> Rynkiewich, "Do Not Remember the Former Things," 315.
- <sup>8</sup> E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* (IVP Books, 2012).
- <sup>9</sup> The English rendering and recitation of the Model Prayer (Matthew 6) obscures the fact that Jesus taught a threefold petition, not two-fold as traditionally recited:  
 Our Father who is in heaven,  
 May your name be "hallowed" (honored, revered) [*hagiasthētō to onoma sou*]  
 May your reign come [*elthetō hē basileia sou*]  
 May your will be done [*genēthētō ton thelēma sou*]  
 As in heaven so on earth.
- Both the reign (kingdom) and will are means to the end of his name being honored. When we overemphasize "kingdom" as if it is the primary issue, we can fail to keep all three in balance, and miss the fact that his name is first in the list, and likely of primacy over the other two in Jesus' own priorities and values.
- This is an example of how church tradition, insisted on in Scripture translations, hides what Jesus actually said and taught, and leads to misplaced emphases as a result.
- <sup>10</sup> Luke's usage shift is particularly significant. "Kingdom of God" occurs thirty-seven times in Luke, half of the seventy-five total occurrences in the synoptic gospels. But after the ascension, Luke only refers to the kingdom sixteen times (less than 50% of his usage in Luke). If Luke were intent on pushing a "kingdom gospel" as some contend, then we should expect him to continue that agenda in the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of his series. After all, he is talking about what Jesus continued to do in his people after the resurrection and ascension. So the substantial decrease in kingdom language by Luke is especially striking and demands greater missiological reflection. As the followers of Jesus move away from Jewish contexts, kingdom language declines noticeably. In Acts it is still primarily used in contexts where Jewish believers are present. This demands further research, exploration, and whatever kingdom theology we follow should reflect this scriptural balance.
- <sup>11</sup> See J. Paul Pennington, *Christian Barriers to Jesus: Conversations and Questions from the Indian Context* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017), chapter 4, starting on p. 85, for examples and discussion of this spirit of "giving the gospel" with disregard for culture or relationship.
- <sup>12</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, translated by G. A. Williamson, revised (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1989), 103–104.
- <sup>13</sup> Enoch Wan, "Ethnic Receptivity and Intercultural Ministries," *Global Missiology* 1, no. 2 (2004), 3.
- <sup>14</sup> Mike Breen, *The Great Disappearance* (Exponential Resources, 2013).
- <sup>15</sup> W. F. Moulton, A. S. Geden, and H. K. Moulton, eds., *A Concordance of the Greek Testament*, Fifth ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 19–21.
- <sup>16</sup> Two influential voices in my own journey have been Dayanand Bharati (Hindu follower of Jesus) in *Living Water and Indian Bowl* and his blog, *Dialog of Life*, as well as Richard Twiss (First Nations follower of Jesus) in *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*. Both books can be a painful read for Christians, but their articulation of the deep cultural, relational, and even psychological harm their people have experienced demands that we listen sincerely and repentantly to Jesus' challenge through them to those who serve and represent him. We must not ignore, dismiss, or disregard their challenging critiques if we genuinely want to follow the incarnational way of Jesus.



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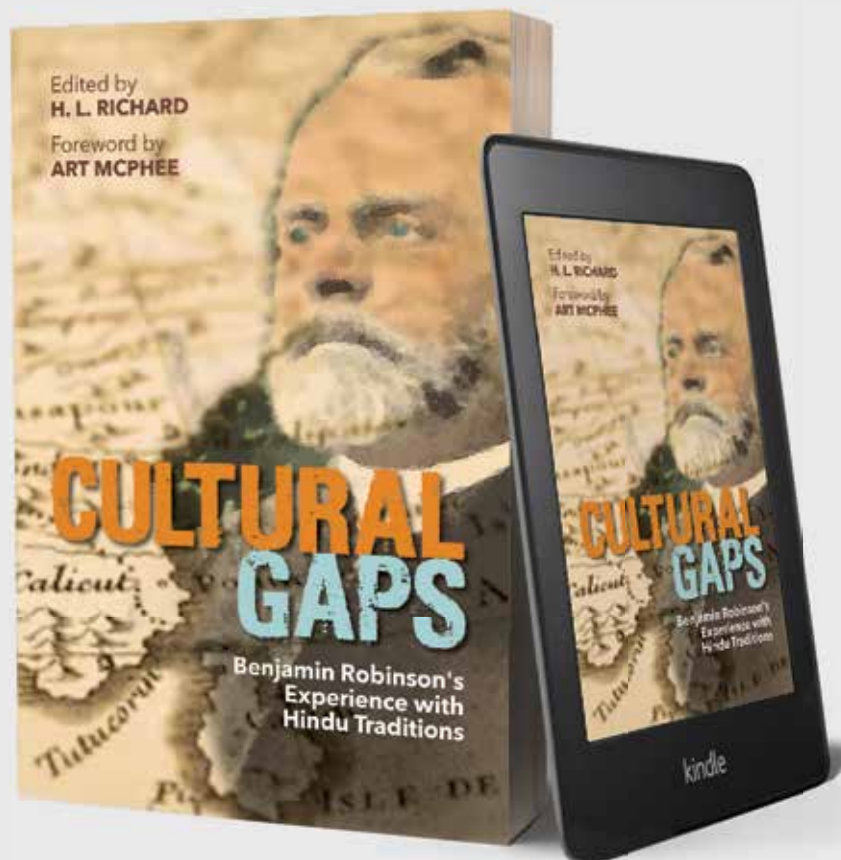
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# Rethinking *Missio Dei*: Temporally Remedial or Eternally Doxological?

by Dave Shive

**M**y suspicion arose late. It was that gradual sense that something was missing. I didn't suspect the evangelicalism that has shaped my missiology. I'll always be grateful for an evangelical<sup>1</sup> community environment where missions was treated as a high priority. My father was a pastor, my parents loved God with all of their heart, and our home was saturated with God's Word and a deep interest in missions.<sup>2</sup> My college and seminary education were also spent in evangelical institutions, and for almost half a century my vocation has found me in evangelical ministries. But I later discovered that something was missing and I've invested the final chapters of my life searching out that "something." It has required a fine-tuning of my theology of mission.

## *A Thesis on God's Intentions*

I want to begin by stating a thesis, one that at first may appear obvious to any evangelical, but which I believe can lead us deeper into God's intention for mission today.

*It is axiomatic that the church is to be gripped by the purposes and passions of God.<sup>3</sup> Alignment with God's intentions and motivations must be the foundation of all worship. If the God who created heaven and earth is on a mission, the scope and objectives of that mission must be universal, comprehensive, and eternal. His mission must possess a magnificence of scope that should stagger the imagination. The missio Dei centers on the most intense zeal and grandest intentions embedded in the mind of the creator God. Discovery of the full dimensions of such a mission is the greatest ambition laid before those who love Jesus Christ.*

This essay proposes to offer a panoramic vision of the *missio Dei* in the hope that others might be encouraged to consider the one whose depth of wisdom and knowledge is both incomprehensible and worthy of our pursuit.

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### *Traditional Evangelical Missiology*

I slowly began to perceive a fundamental problem. The prevailing evangelical view of God's work in the world is simply that missions is both temporal and remedial. To say that it is *temporal* means that evangelicals view missions as limited to a time period, having a beginning (usually in Gen. 3) and an end (often in Rev. 19–20). The term *remedial* suggests that missions is viewed primarily as intending to fix what is broken. In this view, the need for “repairs” arose in Genesis 3 and the necessity of remediation will no longer exist after Revelation 19–20. In essence, evangelical missiology holds that when things went bad in the Garden of Eden, God initiated missions. And when all enemies will be finally subjected to the Son's regal authority (i.e., 1 Cor. 15:23–28; Rev. 19:6–10), missions will be complete. While not every evangelical believes exactly this way, it is safe to say that this is a fairly standard evangelical missiology.<sup>4</sup>

Three providential occurrences prompted a rethinking of my own traditional evangelical missiology. First, I enrolled in the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course<sup>5</sup> and shortly thereafter embarked on a long career as an instructor in that same program. But like many pastors, I had been satisfied with my missiology and felt no need to take any further missions course. Though my missiology was biblically inadequate, God was gracious and the church I was pastoring was somehow innovative, creative, and passionate in its missions effort. During my hours of study and preparation for teaching in that course I found my presuppositions challenged and my missiology began evolving. The idea of a “Living God as a Missionary God” (lesson 1 of this course) had shattered my assumptions and I began to undergo a paradigm shift regarding the passions and purposes of God as revealed in Scripture.

Second, I acquired an additional graduate degree (this one in Biblical Literature from Baltimore Hebrew University). This unique academic exposure provided needed motivation for me to begin taking the Old Testament more seriously. This proved essential to my quest for a more wholistic “Genesis-to-Revelation” missiology.

Third, I discovered that a more thoughtful reading of the Bible was required, and that realization led me to the crucial idea of “the Bible as story.”<sup>6</sup> This dramatically altered how I approached the grand drama of Scripture and ultimately led to a reshaping of my missiology.

I have been on a three-decade journey to expand my thinking on this more traditional *temporal/remedial* perspective of God's mission. My purpose has been to foster breadth of understanding on the *missio Dei*, thus allowing the

incorporation of the brilliant biblical themes that provide a window into the heart of God and his deepest passions.

### *Restoring a Christological and Doxological Foundation*

Having taught the lessons in the biblical portion of the Perspectives course hundreds of times, my passion has increased to see the evangelical heart and mind move beyond the limited (i.e., temporal, remedial) understanding of the purposes of God to the broad, magnificent cosmic plan of the triune God to “sum up all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). Rather than adhering to a micro view of missions which focuses on particular subplots of God's story (e.g., man's redemption, deliverance from sin, our eventual place in heaven, etc.), the great need is to discern the macro overarching trajectory of the divine narrative in Scripture. When the arc of God's story is grasped, multiple adjectives such as “majestic, cosmic, global, universal, comprehensive, grand” are required to adequately explicate God's wonderful story.

The hegemony of the temporal/remedial approach to missions produces the unintended consequence of engaging in missions with an incomplete theology that then produces an inadequate missiology. The temporal/remedial missiology inevitably diminishes the missional priority of the majestic glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. When this shift occurs, the human sin problem and human efforts to resolve that problem are magnified to dominate missiological thinking. Wright alludes to this more limited view of missions as the “. . . persistent, almost unconscious paradigm that mission is fundamentally and primarily something we do—a human task of the church.”<sup>7</sup> This, of course, is an insufficient missiology. The priority of God's purposes will tend to decrease as the focus on our efforts increases. Piper posits a similar idea when he states that “compassion for the lost is a high and beautiful motive for missionary labor . . . But we have seen that compassion for people must not be detached from passion for the glory of God.”<sup>8</sup> Dearborn corrects a skewed perspective on our importance in the work of God with his assertion that “it is insufficient to proclaim that the church of God has a mission in the world. Rather, *the God of mission has a church in the world*”<sup>9</sup> (emphasis original).

There is a desperate need to restore the *christological* (Christ at the center) and *doxological* (worship as the intended process and outcome) *missio Dei* as the thread that holds the fabric of Scripture together from Genesis to Revelation. While it is right to embrace the words of Jesus as contained in the Gospels, I find a fragmented missiology will result if we neglect the *entirety* of Scripture with its relentless emphasis on Christ's presence and ongoing influence in the lives of characters and events from Genesis to Revelation.

## *From Eternity into Time and Space* Mission in the Pre-Creation

It may sound counter-intuitive to go backwards from Genesis 1:1, but the flashback<sup>10</sup> device so common in literature is also frequently employed in the Bible. Failure to allow the Bible's "foundation of the world"<sup>11</sup> vocabulary to impact our missiology has the unintended consequence of a diminished missiology. An anemic curiosity concerning the frequent allusions in Scripture to the triune God's activities before Genesis 1:1 will result in a drift from the christological-doxological foundation of the *missio Dei*.

## An anemic curiosity concerning the frequent allusions in Scripture to the triune God's activities before Genesis 1:1 will result in a drift from the christological-doxological foundation of the *missio Dei*.

Reeves considers this issue important enough to give an entire chapter in his short volume the title "What was God doing before creation?"<sup>12</sup> And Snyder concurs: "God's eternal plan predates both the Fall and the creation; it existed in the mind of God 'before the creation of the world' (Eph. 1:4)."<sup>13</sup> God's mission must have eternal scope and grandeur far exceeding anything our minds can comprehend.

Just two of the many "pre-creation" texts are needed to make the case. Both are found in the prayer in John 17 as part of Jesus' conversation with his Father the night he was betrayed. This prayer is theologically dense, practically rich, and missiologically insightful. In John 17:5, Jesus prayed to his Father: "Now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you *before the world existed*." And in verse 24: "... For you [Father] loved me *before the foundation of the world*" (emphasis mine).

These two statements are an "insider's report" on the ongoing activities in the eternal heavenly temple<sup>14</sup> before creation. There the triune God was dynamically active. This is noteworthy for a robust missiology because, as will be demonstrated, what was taking place in the eternal heavenly temple prior to creation provided the impetus for what would follow: the creation of the universe, an earthly temple to serve as Jesus' residence.

As John 17 indicates, God was acting in the heavenly temple in accordance with his divine nature by displaying his extraordinary glory and exercising his incomparable love. Because the Father delighted in the glory of his Son, the Son's radiance was just too good to not share on a wider platform. Then and there a plan was settled upon to create a massive venue (e.g., the universe) that would serve as a "staging

ground" so that the Son's glory could be exhibited and the love of God might be exercised.

Four primary decisions were made before Genesis 1:1 which then led to the creation of a new universe to extend God's pre-creation mission into space and time. First, it was determined that the universe would belong to the Son.<sup>15</sup> Second, this new creation would be the platform for the display of God's glory.<sup>16</sup> Third, creatures who could appreciate this marvelous exhibition of glory would be made in the Son's image. They would reside in this new earth, enabled to respond in worship

and adoration of the Son. Fourth, the Son would take up residence in the new universe.<sup>17</sup>

God's purpose and passion surface clearly in these texts that flash back to the pre-creation heavenly temple. If he was intentional and zealous before creation, then God's missional activities were ongoing before Genesis 1:1.

### Mission in Creation

The fact that the Bible begins (Gen. 1–2) and ends (Rev. 21–22) with identical themes stands as yet one more clue that the Scriptures were indeed written as story. The *inclusio*<sup>18</sup> linking the opening and closing of the Bible points in the direction of a grand theme of God's mission: the triune God loves a heaven and an earth that functions in shalom.<sup>19</sup> Shalom is the perfect picture of God's preferred universe in Genesis 1–2 and his mission moves relentlessly toward the restoration of shalom in Revelation 21–22.

The creation event provokes the missiological question: "Why did God create a universe?"—especially with the advance knowledge that his creative work would be sabotaged. It seems that an informed answer to this question is essential for a vigorous missiology.

Factoring in these four primary "pre-creation" decisions (see above) is foundational to answering this question and constructing a biblically wholistic missiology. A missiological reading of the creation account material directs the inquisitive student towards a meaningful *missio Dei* answer. As Stevens points out, "if the only possible explanation for God's motives in creating the world is egomania or loneliness, as some might

assume, then that shows how incoherent the rest of the story must be.”<sup>20</sup> Yes, we must do better!

Clues provided in the “pre-creation” flashbacks suggest God’s purposes and passions were eternal. Thus, it is only natural that the term “blessing,” so prominent later in Scripture in relation to the *missio Dei*, should surface in Genesis, chapters 1 and 2 (1:22, 28; 2:3). Creation was intended to do something; thus, it was blessed. Recognition of this factor prepares the student for the re-emergence of blessing ten chapters later in the call of Abraham.

Creation blessing enables the achieving of two missional objectives. First, Psalm 19:1 informs the reader that “the heavens disclose God’s glory.”<sup>21</sup> It was the Creator’s intention that his glory be displayed and that the new universe would be the platform for its demonstration. Second, this creation was intended for Christ (“all things were made for Him,” Col. 1:16). Confusion and ambiguity about the role of Genesis 1–2 is resolved with the realization that the universe was for Jesus’ purposes. These two missional ideas are vital to avoiding a distortion of the *missio Dei*.

Wright is correct in noting that mission begins with the triune God: “Mission is grounded in an intra-trinitarian movement of God himself . . . mission flows from the inner dynamic movement of God in personal relationship.”<sup>22</sup> The creation of a universe was missiologically central to God’s purposes and passions. God values his Son and his Son’s glory and so he created a universe. Without a universe, there could be no wider display of God’s glory, no place for creatures to reside who were made in the Son’s image, and no venue where Jesus could take up residence. Stevens summarizes the matter:

Without a motivation rooted in his nature—not because of some circumstance or consequence of creation—nothing would have moved God to take on the task of creation. Creation must have arisen because of the way it accomplishes something God values. By creating the universe, God essentially made the well of his own creativity overflow by seizing the opportunity to demonstrate his creative and conceptual genius. It was an occasion for God to indulge himself in an artistic explosion of sorts, and things like his power, wisdom, prudence, goodness, and truth could be put on display. God is excellent, and our existence grows out of his desire to give his excellence a greater audience, so this makes creation a gracious decision.”<sup>23</sup>

### Mission in Genesis 3–11

A biblical missiology is needed that carries the reader to Abraham. The vast expanse between Genesis 1–2 and 12:1–3 provides needed background to get to Abraham. If the Bible

is to be read as a story, the intention behind the narrator’s use of nine chapters that link creation to Abraham must be revealed. It is Genesis 3–11 that sets the stage for the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>24</sup>

Budding missiologists must go beyond the entrance of sin in Genesis 3 if the early chapters of Genesis are to be integrated into a broader missiological thinking. When we recognize the massive bridge (i.e., Gen. 3–11) that links the creation account to Abraham, critical missiological information can be acquired.

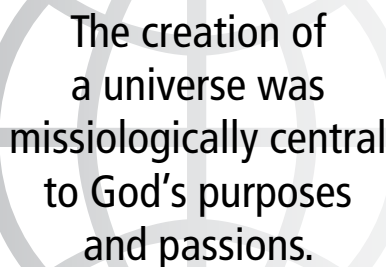
Why would the narrator choose to use comparative lexical sparsity (56 verses) in recording the stupendous creation account while allotting considerably more space (242 verses) to the generally “ugly” narratives of the Fall? Two answers surface. First, the fact that chapters 3–11 contain four times the quantity of material found in chapters 1–2 suggests that God wants those who read his story to grasp the enormous disaster caused by sin’s entry into Jesus’ universe. Second, after the creation account has been read, the narrator will bring the reader to Abraham by going through chapters 3–11. The story of the fall (Gen. 3–11) injects complication and creates tension in the narrative. The story is crying out for resolution, and Abraham will provide what the story demands.

Six observations will expand the reader’s understanding of the missional thrust of Genesis 3–11.

First, there are three vignettes: the Fall (chapters 3–5), the Flood (chapters 6–10), and the Flop (i.e., Babel; chapter 11). Each of the three has its own internal 3-part cadence: sin, judgment, and genealogy. The idea becomes inescapable that the narrator was intentional in the organization of this material. There is purpose here that suggests these chapters play a vital role in the unfolding of God’s missiological drama.

Second, each of the three vignettes concludes with a genealogy (normally avoided by Western readers). Fully one-third of Genesis 3–11 is composed of genealogical material. These genealogies prove to be a major piece of the puzzle that illuminate how God intends to accomplish his mission: through a godly line running continuously from Adam to Abraham.

Third, the text alerts the reader to the problem that may have troubled Eve: “If Adam and I together could not resist the wiles and force of the serpent, why would anyone think we can produce ‘seed’ that will have the power to crush the serpent’s head?” The genealogies provide the answer to Eve’s musings



The creation of a universe was missiologically central to God’s purposes and passions.

by indicating that God intended to preserve a godly line from Adam to Abraham (the three genealogies, while perhaps having gaps, are nevertheless continuous) so that “Seed” could be produced capable of crushing the serpent’s head.

Fourth, the allusion in 3:15 to the woman’s “seed” piques the curiosity. Clearly, men—not women—have seed. The term “seed,” occurring as it does in Genesis 3:15, signals the fact that something exceptional is afoot. While “seed” may be subsequently translated “descendants” in later chapters of Genesis to refer to Abraham’s offspring, its appearance in chapter 3 as a referent to a woman’s reproduction is unusual. The narrator’s decision to connect this term to a woman in Genesis 3:15 is as provocative and momentous for the modern reader as it was to Eve or for Paul in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (see Gal. 3:16–29).

Fifth, apparently, Eve got the general idea. She may have been thinking in Genesis 4:1 that Cain might be the promised head-crushing “seed,”<sup>25</sup> the one who would crush the head of the serpent. While she couldn’t have been more wrong about Cain, her intuition was correct in looking for a son to be the “seed.” In the same chapter Eve comments upon the birth of Seth, “God has appointed me another seed in place of Abel,”<sup>26</sup> implying she was expecting one of her sons to be the one who would crush the serpent’s head. Her ruminations may have gone something like, “Maybe Abel . . . No, sadly it wasn’t Abel . . . Maybe Cain . . . Oh no. Definitely not Cain . . . Maybe Seth . . .”<sup>27</sup>

This emphasis on “crushing the seed” may prompt the reader to recall Paul’s 1st century AD foreshadowing to the Roman church of the “crushing” of the serpent’s head: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20).

Sixth, if “blessing” in the creation account means something like “enrichment and empowerment to achieve one’s potential,” then “cursing” is its opposite (“the weakening or limiting of the ability to achieve one’s potential”).<sup>28</sup> The allusions to “cursing” in 3:14, 19, and 5:29 could not have been clearer. Having glimpsed the wonderful blessing in creation on days 5, 6, and 7, the occurrence of cursing at this juncture should jar and disturb the reader.

Exploring the text of Genesis 3–11 can supply what the reader desperately needs: a bridge that provides a meaningful transition from creation to Abraham. The narrative flow of these chapters can greatly augment one’s understanding of mission in the Old Testament. The student will be growing in love and appreciation of the text of Scripture and of the genius of the God who oversaw the compilation of these amazing nine chapters. The unique portion of Genesis 3–11 is meant to lead us to Abraham’s

“God-encounter” in 12:1–3. And Abraham’s meeting with the God of Genesis 1–11 is vital to the remainder of the story.

### Mission in Genesis 12:1–3

God intended that the creation account would point the reader toward what would follow. The vital connection between Genesis 1–2 and 12:1–3 is chapter 3–11. To the question, “Why does Abraham need blessing?” the answer has been provided in the narrative of chapters 3–11. Genesis 12:1–3 establishes the theme that will nuance the rest of the Bible: God intends to restore blessing to all creation.<sup>29</sup> Many are surprised to learn that such a “missiological” conversation occurred with Abraham 2000 years before Jesus gave the Great Commission.<sup>30</sup>

Since the root of the term “bless”<sup>31</sup> was used five times in just two verses (i.e., Gen. 12:2–3) when dispatching Abraham on a mission, grasping the meaning of the term “bless” becomes a crucial issue. Definitions surface as different authors attempt to explicate its meaning: “enrichment” and “divine enablement;”<sup>32</sup> “filled with the potency of life, overwhelming defeat and death . . . enabling humanity to achieve its destiny;”<sup>33</sup> “endowment;”<sup>34</sup> “God’s provision for human flourishing;”<sup>35</sup> and “increase”<sup>36</sup> (i.e., multiplication, spreading, filling, abundance). A plausible definition of the term in light of its Pentateuchal usage (particularly in Genesis) is “enrichment and enablement to reach one’s potential.”

It becomes quickly apparent that beginning one’s missiology in Matthew 28 is inadequate for grasping the *missio Dei*. It is equally obvious that a full appreciation of the narrative of God’s story cannot be gained by beginning in Genesis 12. After all, who skips the first eleven chapters when starting to read a story? Studying Genesis will open up the thinking to the idea that the Bible is a narrative<sup>37</sup> that began in Genesis 1:1 and continues through Revelation 22:21. If this background in Genesis 1–11 is mastered, the fundamental

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occurring as it does in Genesis 3:15,  
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exceptional is afoot.**

character of God’s conversation with Abraham is given a broader narrative context. In the words of Christopher Wright,

Genesis 12 comes after Genesis 1–11. This innocent observation not only relates to . . . the pivotal nature of the opening verses of Genesis 12. It also reminds us of the importance . . . of paying attention to the context of any text.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

In spite of the fact that Matthew 28 is commonly viewed as “Ground Zero” for missions in the Bible, it is clear from eternity past to eternity future that God is missional. This enlarged grasp of the stunning dimensions of the *missio Dei* means that the Great Commission in Matthew 28 cannot suffice as either starting point or terminus for one’s missiology.<sup>39</sup>

In his essay, “The Scope of Mission,” Dwight Baker offers a most profound proposition:

*Missio Dei*, or God’s mission, is rooted in the character of God and God’s intent—present and active *from eternity past*—to make God’s love and grace known. Whatever contravenes or is inconsistent with the character of God is not part of authentic Christian mission. The *missio Dei* is both well-spring and motivating force from which all authentic Christian mission flows. Mission is not merely remedial. Mission as *missio Dei* began long before the fall of mankind. The *missio Dei* continues far beyond getting people born again. It extends all the way to the point at which every person comes to maturity in Christ Jesus and God is all in all. (1 Cor. 15:28, “from eternity past,” emphasis mine).<sup>40</sup>

Here Baker denies the idea that the essence of God’s mission is “remedial” and “temporal.” His essay provides three foundational premises with which I wish to conclude this essay.

*First, God’s mission is rooted in the character of God and God’s intent, present and active from eternity past.* Biblical allusions to God’s activities prior to Genesis 1:1 are not obscure, and these references and their implications should merit greater missiological consideration.

*Second, mission is not merely remedial. God’s mission began long before the fall of mankind.* We cannot afford to make the error of beginning our thinking about the *missio Dei* with Genesis 3 simply because the necessity of remediation arose at that point. Though we should be grateful that God “fixes broken things,” Scripture does not permit a diminishing of the *missio Dei* to a “Genesis 3 to Revelation 20 divine corrective project.” Rather, our imagination—our missiological thinking—must be captivated by God’s eternal gracious cosmic intention of bringing all things in subjection to his Son.

*Third, the *missio Dei* extends far beyond getting people born again. It reaches all the way to that place where every person comes to maturity in Christ Jesus and God is all in all.* One of the unfortunate results of the traditional evangelical paradigm of mission which starts with Matthew 28 is that many sincere believers in good churches are unable to consider the massive scope of God’s intentions in Christ. Too many have missed the magnificence of the grand plan of the ages whereby we are joined eternally with the loving “community of the divine family.” We should be startled to discover that Jesus’ taking

us as his bride is missiological. The divine invitation for us to reign with him as his bride and share as co-heirs with him in all that he inherits is pure *missio Dei*.

Baker’s essay is clearly articulated, his thesis virtually unassailable, and the implications profound for our missiology. It is time for individual believers in the evangelical community to be given adequate opportunity to rethink the nature of the *missio Dei* and arrive at such exciting and motivating biblical deductions.

For those in positions of influence in churches and mission agencies, the need is clear. We must allow the Scriptures and the Spirit of God to captivate our hearts with the wonder

**The *missio Dei* continues  
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It extends all the way  
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and God is all in all.**

of an eternally missional triune God who determined that the Son was worthy of exaltation to the highest place in the eternal heavenlies as well as throughout space and time. The Son’s glory is unparalleled, and he is so replete with love and grace that his glory generously overflows in abundance with creatures made in his image. The Father intends to bring all of creation—not just believing human creatures, but all of creation—under the authority of this Son so that the triune God may be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). This is the christological, doxological, universal, eternal *missio Dei*. It should galvanize us as instruments of his mobilization, to bring his church to full maturity in Christ, that believers may marvel at the magnitude of God’s plan for the ages. **IJFM**



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> In this essay, the term “evangelical” refers to those who affirm the doctrinal framework of the Lausanne Covenant, particularly the purpose, power, and being of God; the authority and power of the Bible; and the uniqueness and universality of Christ. These elements are the *sine qua non* of all biblical mission. See “For the Lord We Love,” the Lausanne Movement, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Three terms will be used here in regard to what is generally referred to as “missions.” The word “missions” is restricted to the prevailing approach in evangelical churches of taking the gospel to those in spiritual darkness. On the other hand, “mission” (without the “s”) refers to God’s eternal doxological and christological quest to display the Son’s glory throughout the universe. See Wright, *Mission of God*, 61–62, 67, for a defense of this distinction. “Mission” and *missio Dei* (Latin for “the mission of God”) are used interchangeably. In addition, the term “missiology” denotes “the study of both missions and mission.”
- <sup>3</sup> Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: The Study Guide* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009). Consideration of these two aspects of God’s missional approach (purpose and passion) first came to me through this study guide. They are the “key words” for lessons 1 and 2 in that course and profoundly sum up the two basic requirements for any missional activity. To be on mission, one must have purpose and passion. God is the exemplar of both and thus can be called “the quintessential missionary.” Recognizing this about the Triune God is key to a healthy engagement in God’s mission.
- <sup>4</sup> For a clear analysis of this *temporal/remedial* issue, see Dwight P. Baker, “The Scope of Mission,” *The Covenant Quarterly* (Feb. 2003): 3–12.
- <sup>5</sup> For more information on this course, see [www.perspectives.org](http://www.perspectives.org). In addition, it would be hard to overstate the significance of Christopher Wright’s magisterial *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). This volume may well be the best biblical analysis in print on the topic of God’s mission.
- <sup>6</sup> For a thoughtful discussion of the idea of Bible as narrative, see Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).
- <sup>7</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 61.
- <sup>8</sup> John Piper, “Let the Nations Be Glad,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 68. See also Hawthorne’s similar emphasis, “The Story of His Glory,” 61, in Winter and Hawthorne: “Mission efforts which draw their motivation from compassionate response to human predicament will only go so far. Guilt-based appeals to care for hurting or lost people continue to soften our hearts a little. In practice, however, they weary and harden believers to a minimal token obedience.”
- <sup>9</sup> Dearborn, “Beyond Duty,” 70, in Winter and Hawthorne.
- <sup>10</sup> “Flashbacks” interrupt the flow of a story to point the reader to a prior unknown incident. Information contained in the flashback offers nuance to provide the reader with background for current narrative events.
- <sup>11</sup> “Before the foundation of the world, before the world existed, hidden from ages past” are similar “flashback” expressions that can be found in Matthew 13:35; 25:34; John 17:5, 24; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:3; 3:4, 8; Colossians 1:26; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20. These all open the window to consider the eternal missional passions and purposes of the Triune God.
- <sup>12</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 19–38.
- <sup>13</sup> Howard A. Snyder, “The Church in God’s Plan,” 154–158, in Winter and Hawthorne. Snyder references Matthew 13:35; 25:34; John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 4:3; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8 and comments that “these passages make it clear that Christ was appointed as Savior from eternity and that God’s kingdom plan is eternal.” See also Ben Stevens, *Why God Created the World: A Jonathan Edwards Adaptation* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014).
- <sup>14</sup> See Hebrews 8:2, 5; 9:11, 23–24.
- <sup>15</sup> “. . . All things were made for him . . .” (Col. 1:16).
- <sup>16</sup> “The heavens declare the glory of God . . .” (Ps. 19:1). Wright references the idea of “God’s glory as the goal of creation.” Christopher J. H. Wright, “Mission and God’s Earth,” 27–33, in Winter and Hawthorne.
- <sup>17</sup> Reference to “the Lord God walking in the garden” (Gen. 3:8) is presumed to be the first christophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God).
- <sup>18</sup> “Inclusio” is a literary device also known as “bracketing” or an “envelope structure” where similar material at the beginning and ending of a section serves as “bookends” for the entire section (or book).
- <sup>19</sup> Plantinga, Cornelius, Jr., *Not the Way it’s Supposed To Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995). Plantinga describes *shalom* as “universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights,” 10.
- <sup>20</sup> Stevens, *Why God Created the World*, xiv.
- <sup>21</sup> Note also the same intention declared in passages like Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19; Isaiah 6:3; 11:9; and Haggai 2:14.
- <sup>22</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 62–63.
- <sup>23</sup> Stevens, *Why God Created the World*, 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 16–17.

- <sup>25</sup> In favor of this thesis, see Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 16. Contra this view, see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 156, Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 96, and Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 32. The consensus seems to be that Eve felt she had synergistically made a great accomplishment; e.g., “with the help of the Lord I have done this.”
- <sup>26</sup> See Genesis 4:25. It is unfortunate that most major English translations have adopted the word “descendant” or “offspring” to occasionally translate the Hebrew *zera* in 4:25 and 3:15. While “offspring” or “descendant” is a suitable translation in many contexts, Genesis 3:15 and 4:25 deserve special treatment due to: (1) the close proximity to “seed” in 3:15; (2) Paul’s linking of this text to the 1st century church in Romans 16:20; (3) Paul’s use of *sperma* in passages like Galatians 3:16ff. when quoting Old Testament texts that refer to Abraham’s descendants; and (4) John’s vision in Revelation 12:9 of the seed as representing both the people of God and the Messiah. It thus seems preferable to retain the terminology “seed” both in 3:15 and 4:25 to reflect Eve’s thinking in context that she (*vis a vis* her *plus* Adam) would produce the head-crushing seed.
- <sup>27</sup> Implicit in Laban’s mysterious comment in Genesis 5:29 is the same kind of thinking that was in Eve’s mind. Laban named his son “Noah” (rest) thinking, “*Rest* will give us *relief* (a word-play in Hebrew) from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed.” Laban apparently expected his son to be a key player in the grand drama of the crushing of the head of the serpent.
- <sup>28</sup> Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 145: “banishment from the place of blessing.”
- <sup>29</sup> These three verses provide the impetus and foundation for Perspectives lesson 1 which is titled “The Living God is a Missionary God.” Given the general assumption among evangelicals that God’s mission is temporal and remedial, it is helpful to note the title of the lesson and then inquire: “What would lesson 1 be emphasizing if the title were “The Living God *Became* a Missionary God””? Discussion may ensue around the issue of whether the point of the title is that God is *currently* a missionary God (with the inference that he may at one time *not* have been on mission but now *is*), or if God is *eternally* a missionary God (with some rather obvious and profound implications).
- <sup>30</sup> The Perspectives Reader offers a veritable treasure trove of outstanding material to navigate these missiological waters. For example, John R. W. Stott, “The Living God is a Missionary God,” in Winter and Hawthorne, 3–9, Kaiser, “Israel’s Missionary Call,” 10–16. Kaiser focuses on three primary Old Testament texts (Gen. 12:1–3; Ex. 19:5–6; Ps. 67) to buttress his claim that Israel had a missionary calling. These same three passages serve as the biblical core of lesson 1 in the Perspectives course.
- <sup>31</sup> Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 16–18. Kaiser points out the importance of blessing in the creation account as a foundation for what will happen in 12:1–3. See also G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 86. Beale sees the blessing of humanity in Genesis 1:28 that contains the implied promise that God will enable humanity to carry it out. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 68–69, says that “The seventh day is infused with procreative power . . . Blessing is God’s gift of potency and power.” See Sarna’s, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 15. Sarna states that the seventh “day becomes imbued with an extraordinary vital power that communicates itself in a beneficial way.” *The NET Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 72, notes that God’s blessing of Jacob in Genesis 32:29 means “the Lord endowed Jacob with success; he would be successful in everything he did . . .”
- <sup>32</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 113, 263.
- <sup>33</sup> Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 63, 67. In regard to Abraham, Waltke suggests that “blessing brings the power for life, the enhancement of life, and the increase of life,” 205.
- <sup>34</sup> Sarita D. Gallagher and Steven C. Hawthorne, “Blessing as Transformation,” in Winter and Hawthorne, 34–41.
- <sup>35</sup> Richard Bauckham, “The Story of Blessing: Prevailing Over Curse,” in Winter and Hawthorne, 38–39.
- <sup>36</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 209
- <sup>37</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 63ff.: “The Bible presents itself to us fundamentally as a narrative, a historical narrative at one level, but a grand metanarrative at another.”
- <sup>38</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 195.
- <sup>39</sup> In John 12:41, the fourth gospel states that in Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6, the Old Testament prophet actually saw the preincarnate Christ. This lends credence to the view that it was indeed the preincarnate Christ who met with Abraham in Genesis 12 to initiate the missional covenant. That this might actually be a christophany is supported by the observation that both Genesis 12:1–3 and Matthew 28:19–20 are remarkably similar in that both contain the same five elements for a missional call: (1) a command to go; (2) a missional task assigned; (3) a comprehensive scope; (4) an ethnic target; and (5) God’s assurance to accompany both Abraham and the disciples on their daunting mission.
- <sup>40</sup> Baker, “The Scope of Mission,” 3.

# Creation Care and Frontier Missiology

by Robert Sluka

While walking a beautiful, palm-lined beach in a remote part of the Maldivian Islands, my friend Mohammed informed me that we were going to collect some coral to use as building material for a house. That presented me with an uncomfortable predicament. I knew that this kind of coral mining was impacting coral reefs in the Maldives, since my visa to work in the Maldives focused on researching these coral reefs and associated fish species.<sup>1</sup> In my halting Dhivehi (language learning resources at the time being more readily available in Klingon than for this ancient language) I asked him, “Isn’t that illegal?” Mohammed’s reply was to peer around and ask, “Who would see?” In a desire to open up evangelistic opportunities, I replied, “God is watching.” Mohammed just gave a little smile, and we turned around and walked back towards the village.

I could feel the pleasure of God in my small attempt at sharing my faith among a highly restricted Muslim people. As one of the least reached countries in the world, and still without any movement to Christ in their history, the Maldives remains high on most lists of places to send teams. What I gave no thought to at the time, but which now occupies much of my thinking and ministry, is an additional question: Was God as pleased with my small attempt at pointing Mohammed to the need to care for coral reefs? Or to frame this in other ways: Was God as interested in my presence and work in the Maldives as a marine biologist as he was in my presence as a Christian witness there to share my faith? Was my marine research and advocacy work also an aspect of bringing about God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven? Is conservation and care of creation an expression of the “Good News”?

The goal of this article is primarily to help those with a calling to unreached people groups understand how creation care can integrate with that calling. Mission sending agencies don’t find it easy to graft these together. An example is the recent email I received from a team seeking to bless an unreached

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Muslim people group by helping protect seagrass beds, which when healthy can provide abundant food. These habitats were not healthy and the team, which is also seeking to see a community of Jesus followers develop, was unsure whether their efforts were in accord with our current ecological understanding. They were looking for a greater capacity or expertise to help integrate this aspect of their kingdom work.

After offering a short introduction to creation care, I will examine just how creation care can facilitate the way we engage unreached people groups. I also want to challenge us to make sure we aren't hurting these same people groups by the way we live in relationship to the natural world. The intersection of creation care principles with frontier missiology will form the bulk of the article,<sup>2</sup> but I want to describe this intersection through the paradigm shift I experienced personally while living out my calling to unreached peoples. Ultimately, I want us to rethink how our current practice of reaching the unengaged is actually limiting God's work among the nations.

## The laser-like focus of UPG mission agencies means that issues like creation care are dismissed as either a tangent or potentially leading to mission drift.

### *Creation Care*

Creation care is a gospel issue under the lordship of Jesus Christ—so states the Cape Town Commitment arising from the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in 2010.<sup>3</sup> Early in the history of the Lausanne Movement, at the same time Ralph Winter delivered his game-changing lecture on unreached peoples, there was significant division over the relationship of what I will term “loving your neighbour” and evangelistic proclamation.<sup>4</sup> Though the tension and integration of proclamation being both in word and deed is not new, in recent decades we are learning to extend this discussion to include its implications for the wider creation. The 2010 Cape Town meeting extended our missiology further by including creation care as integral to the gospel and not simply fulfilling our stewardship mandate.<sup>5</sup> Many think the seminal biblical text on creation care makes this abundantly clear: “*all* things are made by and for Jesus and *all* things are reconciled to him on the cross.” (Col. 1:15–20, emphasis mine)

Where is the vision for the future of unreached people groups laid out in the Bible? If pressed, I would have us consider Revelation 5:9 and the magnificent vision of all nations, tongues and tribes before God's throne. This verse was fundamental to my missiology, and it became the basis for the Vision 5:9 movement among Muslim peoples. It's a vision that moved me to get involved in the beginning of this movement, and subsequently to serve in their Fruitful Practices research

project. Yet, I had failed to notice that just a few verses later, that same vision is embellished in further detail:

Then I heard *every creature* in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13, emphasis mine)

This verse astounded me. It says, “every creature.” God used it to help me see what the true greatness of “the multitudes” actually means: not only every nation, tribe and tongue, but every species as well.

Often when we think of the theme of creation care, we utilise the metaphor of stewardship and find the biblical basis for it in the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 (1:26–29 and 2: 8, 15). Yet, many have warned that the language of “stewardship” can be misconstrued, that this motif of “stewardship” can fall into an anthropocentric worldview which opens us as humanity to hubristic illusions.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of which

metaphor we use, from beginning to end, Scripture makes clear that all of creation matters to God.<sup>7</sup> In Genesis 1, God declares (repeatedly) that creation is good. We are to value creation because God does—creation has theocentric value, given to it by God declaring it good. The mandate of rule that God gives to humanity in 1:28 is given in this context. And the nature of our rule? Made in God's image we are to be God's appointed rulers of God's beloved creation. While this rule (stewardship) involves using creation for human wellbeing, it is clear, too, that creation has value in and of itself, not merely for its usefulness to humanity.

Indeed, creation's purpose, as is ours, is to praise and glorify God. Paul reminds us that this praise of creation, its witness, leads people to an understanding about God that is sufficient for them to face judgement (Rom. 8).<sup>8</sup> This praise of all creation culminates in the heavenly chorus of all creatures above the earth, below the earth, on the sea, and under the sea, praising God alongside those nations, tribes and tongues! As glorious a vision as it is to think of all UPGs before the throne, Revelation 5:13 offers us an even vaster, more glorious, and destabilising vision. It is not just our species, but all species standing in worship before the throne. One response that is commonly heard is a visceral one—that God's love and provision for all creation and the role of other species as fellow worshippers diminishes our special place as humanity.

This reaction betrays our inherent anthropocentrism. For it is not humanity, but rather the slain Lamb who is at the centre of this vision.

### *Mission Drift Versus Opportunity*

The modern unreached people group movement often traces its beginning to Ralph Winter's Lausanne presentation in 1974.<sup>9</sup> This led to the growing number of mission agencies taking up this mandate, most of whom still seek to help the church live out this missiological understanding of the Great Commission. These agencies were inspired with a simple, though difficult, vision. The laser-like focus of UPG mission agencies means that issues like creation care are often dismissed as either a tangent, bolt-on extras, or more likely labelled as potentially leading to mission drift.<sup>10</sup> I will argue later that integrating creation care into our mission, far from causing mission drift, is actually a corrective to our current dualistic models.<sup>11</sup> We will examine below some of the implications for missiology and praxis, but for the moment let's see how creation care is an opportunity to achieve our goal of reaching the unreached.

Many, if not most, church planters come from a lifestyle of disconnection from land and sea. While we might go to parks or go camping for recreation, we obtain our daily bread from the local supermarket. However, among rural peoples, the land or the sea still provides food security in the form of small-scale farms or subsistence fishing. In the case of Maldivians, this island nation still depends upon the sea for much of its food resources. Tuna fishermen start out early each morning and collect bait fish—small reef-associated fish which are then used to attract tuna. The fishery is highly admired and promoted worldwide due to their method of using poles with barbless hooks which catch fish one by one, eliminating wasteful catching of “bycatch” (e.g., turtles, dolphins) in large nets. Fishermen return home to process the fish on the beach—which, interestingly, has in and of itself changed the nature of nearshore areas through increased nutrient input from the discarded parts of the fish.<sup>12</sup> The fish are eaten fresh, smoked, or dried. Some are canned and sent off to supermarkets across the world (like the can we discovered in a local village shop while living in rural England). If we are to love Maldivians, we must also love the sea. Their lives are so intertwined with their environment that to engage meaningfully in culturally appropriate ways necessitates addressing their relationship with the ocean. Additionally, their livelihoods depend on the productivity of the sea—to love our Maldivian neighbour, we must take care of (rule or steward) the fish in the sea.

The Jamaican Call to Action, developed as a follow-up conference to the Lausanne 2010 focus on creation care and

the gospel, calls on Christians to develop “environmental missions among unreached people groups.”<sup>13</sup> Opportunities abound for loving our neighbour and showing the love of Christ through caring for the world—their world—so that it provides for the people we are called to serve. If we love the people we are trying to serve and they are severely impacted by a plethora of environmental issues (i.e., climate change, deforestation, overfishing, and pollution), we must act on these issues to serve them. Migration patterns due to climate change and environmental refugees are increasingly becoming a reality.<sup>14</sup> Even in urban situations, there is abundant evidence that access to green space improves mental health.<sup>15</sup> Without a connection to non-human creation, we suffer mentally. Recent evidence suggests the important role that water plays in this process. Being in, around and near water (lakes, rivers and particularly the ocean) results in better health, both physically and mentally.<sup>16</sup> The call to action states:

We participate in Lausanne's historic call to world evangelization, and believe that environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ and plant churches among the unreached and unengaged people groups in our generation.<sup>17</sup>

### *Creation Care at Home—its Impact on UPGs*

In looking at the list of environmental impacts which are affecting unreached people groups, it becomes obvious that we could be spending significant efforts to send a team to a particular people group while at the same time hurting that same people group through our daily lifestyle in our remote home countries. Consider again the Maldives and the example of tuna. Each time you buy a can of tuna, you are on the end of a chain of blessing or a curse: a blessing to those on that Maldivian boat that leaves early before dawn to catch fish in a sustainable way—but which may cost you a bit more to purchase; or a cursing to those who are modern day slaves on a factory boat that uses huge nets to scoop up all the fish surrounding the tuna, killing endangered species and providing a pittance to fishermen among a people we've been sent to bless—but you do get your tuna cheap. These two different food chains offer an extreme contrast, and both the solution and the situation are usually in the middle. Nevertheless, it provides a real example that someone sitting in America or Europe is impacting an unreached people for good or bad by what he purchases.<sup>18</sup>

We could follow with other examples, but my encouragement is to think through your life, your home, the things you wear and eat, your church's energy and plastic use, your mission agency office/headquarters, and your travel. In short—everything! How we live at home matters to the rest of the world through chains linking us ultimately—through markets

and global transport—to someone who has to farm or harvest what you are eating, to make what you are buying, or who is impacted by your activities through global geo-chemical cycles and ocean currents. We need to link our lives in our home countries to the care of God’s world in such a way that we are blessing the nations.

### *Creation Care and Frontier Missiology*

God’s kingdom did not begin with “let us make man . . .” (Gen. 1:26) but with “let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). Biblically, we must maintain a radically theocentric—even christocentric—perspective on the kingdom of God. As frontier missionaries, we are not bringing God’s kingdom to an unengaged people group. All creation already declares his kingdom. Paul makes it clear that if we don’t speak, the rocks themselves will cry out. This is no hyperbole. The totality of Scripture indicates that all of non-human creation is praising God and bearing witness to its Creator. We can think of creation as an orchestra—each species giving its voice of praise, making the whole much more than the sum of the parts.

Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God—yet we have filled the skies with so much of our own light that God’s glory is diminished. We now have to declare Dark Sky Parks at special places in the world where we can see that glory revealed in the night sky. The dodo, the Caribbean monk seal, and Steller’s sea cow—all species that have gone extinct—no longer praise God. The global orchestra of God’s praise is diminished, and the implications are greater than just poor stewardship. A biblical interpretation keen to the opening order of creation may help us realize that we are making the task of reaching the unengaged more difficult. The background music of our world is meant to point people to God and his kingdom. In many ways we could see reaching unengaged people groups as helping people to understand the voice of creation which has been pointing them to the Creator from their youth—the witness to Christ in each and every place where our human voices have yet to join in.

I had the privilege of working with the Fruitful Practices research team, studying how believers come together and churches are formed across the Islamic world.<sup>19</sup> There were many valuable insights, but one which applies particularly in this case is the importance of modelling by workers.<sup>20</sup> Churches planted or movements started tend to reflect the priorities of those who started those fellowships. The implication is this: it is unlikely that a congregation of

believers will care for creation unless this commitment is modelled by the church planter. Another model is more likely demonstrated in our engaging of unreached peoples, one that is dualistic, anthropocentric and a “staged” view of witness: first we need to get people into the kingdom, organised in some sort of community, and then we can worry about these other aspects of God’s kingdom. The new community of believers will imbibe this perspective and reflect these same underlying principles.

**“For all these decades, missionaries never told us that God was concerned about how we managed the forests. Why?”**

One member of a team amongst a UPG was once asked (by a new believer) the rather innocent question, “What do you eat for breakfast?” The answer was breakfast cereal or some other Western fare. The new believer in Christ, unbeknownst to the team member, began to change his diet because this is what Christians eat! We pass on much more than we intend to communicate. Particularly in the regions of the world with the highest numbers of UPGs, holism—that interrelationship of all reality—is inherently more natural. We, in our own Western thinking, end up, inadvertently, importing an ideology that reflects more the priorities of a pagan Greek dualism than a true biblical theology.

That is quite an accusation! It emerged from assessing my own unawareness and the wider implications of my own insufficient understanding of God’s plan for all of creation. I had minimized my membership in what theologian Richard Bauckham calls the “Community of Creation,”<sup>21</sup> that basic dichotomy between Creator and created. I am of the latter, along with all of creation. Yes, we can point to Genesis 1:26–28, that we are made in God’s image, that mankind is given a special relationship with him; yet, we are not the Creator—we are not omnipotent nor omniscient. We are matter—made of the same stuff as the rest of the world—and even in the new creation, we will not be God. There is a fundamental divide, which we can bridge through Christ, but that is not of our doing or because we are in some way special. It is a gift of God due to his death on the cross. So, the Scripture teaches us, sometimes vividly (i.e., the last few chapters of Job and Ps. 104), that we are fundamentally part of creation. Because of the incarnation, matter matters.<sup>22</sup> If we, in our attempts to engage the unengaged, do not understand and teach this wider picture, we leave the fledgling community

with a priority system and a theology that does not equip them to build God's kingdom in a fully biblical manner.

Kenya provides an interesting case study of this failure: of why the initial development of a community of believers and only later the introduction of biblical concepts (such as creation care) is ineffective in changing practice. Craig Sorley, who works among peoples in the famous Rift Valley of northern Kenya, relates a story about his experience as a missionary with Care of Creation Kenya.<sup>23</sup> He describes the area as "once carpeted by a lush cedar and African Olive forest, feeding streams into the valley, [yet] most of this escarpment now lies completely denuded of all forest cover."

As he taught about the biblical basis for creation care an old man asked him, "Why is it that for all these decades the missionaries right here have never told us that God was concerned about how we managed the forests?" Sorley indicates that this points to the fact that

something has been missing in our efforts to advance the gospel. We have shown little regard for what God has made and most of us have overlooked the wonderful truth that caring for creation is an excellent means of loving both God and people.<sup>24</sup>

He points out that this area has been reached with the gospel for decades and the majority of people attend church. But the damage is done, and *all* creation suffers in that place. I suspect that a major cause of this suffering is because of the truncated, dualistic gospel that was originally preached.

But there is hope. We don't have to repeat the Kenyan situation where the work of caring for people and for non-human creation is made so much more difficult because of our past teaching and actions. We can develop communities of believers who understand holistically God's wider intentions for *all* creation and that his kingdom is one that transforms *all* relationships, not just those between God and humans. Sorley concludes his chapter this way:

By integrating creation care into the cause of evangelical ministry, we bring good news to a world that strives to wrestle with this problem in its own strength—a world that normally leaves God entirely out of the environmental picture. Caring for creation can be a wonderful way to love God and to meet the needs of others.<sup>25</sup>

The radical implications of this involves a paradigm shift that is already occurring in many mission communities.<sup>26</sup> But it must reorient our Christology and our understanding of the kingdom. A quick examination of recent contributions to frontier missiology will note how Gill's commentary on Colossians introduces the central role of Christology in Paul's missiology.<sup>27</sup> But the creation care theological community would suggest that Colossians does more than

Gill suggests. What Paul provides in chapter 1:15–20 is not only an amazing vision of the Christ we are to preach but encapsulates his kingdom work in *all* its glory, in all creation, among all creatures. In an accompanying article David Lim attempts to define our vision of the kingdom,<sup>28</sup> but he also neglects the wider work of Christ on the cross—that of reconciling *all* things, including non-human creation and the socio-political-cultural institutions that humans create. Lim notes the intrinsic value of creation, but then turns it into resources to be used by humans. He points out the stewardship mandate, but then turns it quickly into the valuation of human work and production—an instrumental value. He notes the fall, but then neglects its impact on non-human creation and limits the work of the cross to one species. This is an insufficient vision of the kingdom of God. And as Gill points out, the theological understanding of these issues impacts dramatically our missiology and practice.

My own experience is one of continuing to discover my anthropocentric tendencies. I might be considered an amateur theologian who's just "doing theology from the ground up."<sup>29</sup> However, I do not merely want an environmental "religiousness" to inform our theological reflection. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury once reflected, we do not care about the environment because there is an environmental crisis, but because of our understanding of Scripture.<sup>30</sup> So, my own discovery and my challenge to the reader is to confront our radical anthropocentrism by embracing a Christology that so lifts up Christ that his love is higher, greater and more encompassing than we could ever have imagined. And if that encourages a greater humility for us, that is certainly profitable.

**Most of us have  
overlooked the wonderful truth  
that caring for creation is  
an excellent means  
of loving both  
God and people. (Sorley)**

But is creation care "frontier mission"? R. W. Lewis helpfully recounts the development of that terminology and suggests that it is currently being diluted.<sup>31</sup> If we use her definition of frontier mission as "the task facing those going to people groups 'where Christ has not been named . . . [and] not building on another's foundation,'" then indeed the most creation care can do for those called to frontier mission is to love those people groups more effectively.<sup>32</sup> Creation care can help "catalyse self-sustaining indigenous movements to

Christ in every people group that does not yet have one.” Yet, I’m suggesting that missiology must adapt once again as it brings the interpretation of Scripture into dialogue with today’s ever-changing world. Bradford Greer helpfully points out that frontier missiology is situated in time and space, and these interpretations and adaptations in frontier missiology can divide us as they cut into our “most cherished beliefs, assumptions and values.”<sup>33</sup> We are in a new time and space in relation to the state of our planet and our theological understanding of God’s intentions for *all* creation and human beings’ relationship with non-human creation. Therefore, I believe that though the above definition of frontier mission was incredibly useful, evidence is mounting that it is time for a paradigm shift. As Greer states, we must “raise our level of awareness and increase our capacity for reflection.”<sup>34</sup> Revelation 5:9 does not define our goal, but Revelation 5:9–14 could. Though, of course, Genesis 1 to Revelation 21 is a comprehensive vision that should define our goal—one of *all* creation before God’s throne, of *all* relationships healed at the foot of the cross, and *all* glory due to God.

<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased for God  
persons from every tribe and language and people  
and nation.

<sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

<sup>11</sup> Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. <sup>12</sup> In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!”

<sup>13</sup> Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!”

<sup>14</sup> The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.<sup>35</sup>

Revelation 5:9–14 New International Version (NIV)

### *Creation Care as Frontier Mission*

There has been significant theological research and missions practice in the area of creation care to which my article only gives a brief glimpse.<sup>36</sup> While people group missiology was

immensely strategic for missions practice, I have argued that it is an incomplete missiology. Integral or holistic mission missiology, as well as observations from groups such as the Fruitful Practices research team, demonstrate that an exclusive focus on seeing churches started was incomplete and lends itself to an anthropocentric and dualistic biblical interpretation.

**Delving into  
creation care theology  
helps us to see ourselves  
in a much broader  
story of God’s glory  
which began  
before the arrival of humanity.**

The Cape Town Lausanne meeting helped the global Christian community recognize and affirm its call for the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. Creation care helps us to move towards a theocentric vision of mission with God’s glory and kingdom at the center. Far from diminishing the value of reaching unreached peoples, it helps us to see them as God intended, as people made in God’s image, loved deeply by their creator and placed in a location where they and the land/sea are meant to thrive. Perhaps our modern lack of rootedness to place has blinded us to this intimate connection between people and the land/sea.

Delving into creation care theology helps us to see ourselves in a much broader story of God’s glory which began before the arrival of humanity. God declared creation good and called us to care for it in the way he does. Christ’s death and resurrection, Scripture tells us, puts *all* things right. Creation fell, and Romans tells us it awaits the children of God (humans) to liberate it from its bondage. Creation waits for us! Too often we have concluded abruptly our reading in Scripture at that cosmic picture in Revelation 5:9. The heavenly vision before the throne is *all* creation praising and worshipping God. Creation itself is now witnessing to that extensive list of unengaged people groups. Perhaps our focus on a particular extra-biblical phrase such as “The Great Commission”<sup>37</sup> may inhibit a full biblical understanding of mission. At risk of electing another single verse here in Revelation as a more appropriate image of mission, this



cosmic picture clarifies and promotes our participation in the reconciliation of all things in Christ. It means that creation care is mission.

To conclude, let me push the boat out a bit further and challenge our current understanding of UPGs as *the* frontier of missions. Emerging mission sodalities, such as A Rocha with whom I work,<sup>38</sup> do biodiversity conservation as an act of worship and mission. They represent real hope of an integrated and effective approach to the transformation of peoples and places.<sup>39</sup> Given our understanding of God's plan for *all* creation; and given the opportunities and obligations to both unreached peoples and the created order; and given our broader vision of who God is and what his kingdom entails, I would propose the following: we need to replace the "P" in UPGs with *Place* rather than *People*. This would focus our efforts holistically, not *only* on specific language and culture groups, but also on the species, habitats, ecological

and social systems that integrate with those people groups.<sup>40</sup> The argument for extending to social systems has been made elsewhere, so my focus for this challenge is that we must extend Jesus' call to love our neighbour beyond our own species.

We have remade the world in our own image, not in God's. Recent research reveals that 96% of the biomass of mammals globally are either humans or livestock—meaning only 4% represent wild mammals.<sup>41</sup> Seventy percent of all birds in the world are chickens or other poultry destined for our consumption! No longer does the dodo bird praise God—we extinguished its praise some 350 years ago. Species extinction and habitat loss are gospel issues and our missionary enterprise must not only work towards reaching all people groups, but towards the transformation of those places where those people groups live. The entire planet is a part of God's kingdom work, and it is essential to frontier mission. It must be reflected in our frontier missiology.<sup>42</sup> **IJFM**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> M. W. Miller and R. D. Sluka, "Coral Mining in the Maldives," *Coral Reefs* no. 17 (1998): 288. I eventually published a short paper on the topic.
- <sup>2</sup> I will give special attention to articles in this *IJFM* journal and to commentary on Revelation 5:9–13.
- <sup>3</sup> "Cape Town Commitment," Lausanne Covenant, accessed June 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctcommitment>. The entire transcript of the Commitment is available on the Lausanne website.
- <sup>4</sup> Colin Bell and Robert S. White, eds., *Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing LLC, 2016). A consultation was held in Jamaica in 2014, two years after Cape Town 2010, which resulted in this book, an important landmark in our theological, scientific and practical understanding of creation care and missions.
- <sup>5</sup> I am avoiding using the terms social justice and integral mission as they can be loaded terms for American evangelicals. Both of these, I believe, are rooted in God's command to love our neighbor and so I am choosing for this audience not to use that terminology.
- <sup>6</sup> This thinking did not, of course, begin in 2010! A history of Christian thinking on the environment is not within the scope of this article.
- <sup>7</sup> R. J. Berry, ed., *Environmental Stewardship* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).
- <sup>8</sup> David Bookless, "Creation Care and the Evangelical Understanding of Mission," in *Creation Care and the Gospel*, ed. Bell and White. The literature on creation care, both theological and practical, is rich. Bookless's chapter is very helpful in reviewing some of the history of evangelical engagement and biblical sources and theologians grappling with this issue of creation care.
- <sup>9</sup> We are wrong when we believe that testimony to God to UPG is solely dependent upon our presence—creation has been there all along as a witness (Rom. 1:20).
- <sup>10</sup> Ralph D. Winter, "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism," Lausanne Movement, accessed May 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/the-highest-priority-cross-cultural-evangelism>. Paper delivered at 1974 Lausanne Congress.
- <sup>11</sup> My own experience is one of belonging to a gracious organization which endorsed the value of my work as frontier mission and generously supported me when I transitioned into my new role with A Rocha. However, it was also clear that such a shift was necessary in that the laser-like focus on MUPGs made it impossible to develop a creation care ministry underneath their umbrella.
- <sup>12</sup> Here I am primarily thinking of uplifting of "spiritual" matters over and above "physical" matters. While Scripture clearly teaches us to have an eternal perspective, it also clearly values the here and now. Our eternal perspective instructs us on how to live each day, with teachings such as Matthew 25 clearly warning us of the perils of "being too heavenly-minded we are no earthly good." This dualism has its origin in Greek philosophy which highly denigrated the physical forms. A more-Hebrew approach to concepts such as Shalom and even the original blessing given to Abram are always both physically and spiritually orientated. We must, like other seemingly polar opposite biblical concepts like law and grace, keep these ideas in tension and so not elevate one biblical principle over another.
- <sup>13</sup> M. W. Mille, and R. D. Sluka, "Patterns of Seagrass and Sediment Nutrient Distribution Suggest Anthropogenic Enrichment in Laamu Atoll, Republic of Maldives," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* no. 38 (December 1999): 1152–1156.
- <sup>14</sup> Lowell Bliss, David Bookless, and Jonathan A. Moo, "Call to Action and Exposition," in *Creation Care and the Gospel*, ed. Bell and White, 7–14.
- <sup>15</sup> "In Others' Words," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 36, no. 2 (July 2019): 106.

- <sup>16</sup> “WHO: Urban Green Spaces,” *Tashkent Times*, <http://tashkenttimes.uz/world/157-who-urban-green-spaces>. There are numerous scholarly references that can be accessed online to delve into this topic. The World Health Organisation states: “Green spaces also are important to mental health. Having access to green spaces can reduce health inequalities, improve well-being, and aid in treatment of mental illness. Some analysis suggests that physical activity in a natural environment can help remedy mild depression and reduce physiological stress indicators.”
- <sup>17</sup> Wallace J. Nichols, *Blue Mind: The Surprising Science that Shows How Being In, On, or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected, and Better at What You Do* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014).
- <sup>18</sup> Bliss, Bookless, and Moo, “Call to Action and Exposition,” 9.
- <sup>19</sup> Leah Kostamo, *Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling and Community* (Eugene Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013). This book is a narrative of one attempt at living the creation care mandate out in community. Leah documents her time with A Rocha Canada at their center near Vancouver.
- <sup>20</sup> John Becker and Gene Daniels, “Abide, Bear Fruit: Combining the Spiritual, Strategic, and Collaborative Dimensions of Reaching the Muslim World,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 39–41. This article, by Becker and Daniels, documents the later 2017 conference of the Fruitful Practices team. The original 2007 consultation and development of the Fruitful Practices team, of which Becker and Daniels were an integral part, also produced the book *Seed to Fruit* and subsequent articles in mission journals.
- <sup>21</sup> Eric Adams, Don Allen, and Bob Fish, “Seven Themes of Fruitfulness,” *Mission Frontiers* 26, no. 2 (2008): 75–81.
- <sup>22</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2010.)
- <sup>23</sup> David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2008). David Wilkinson who has PhDs in both theology and astrophysics has written an insightful book in which he meditates on themes of creation in Scripture.
- <sup>24</sup> Craig Sorley, “Creation Care and the Great Commission,” in *Creation Care and the Gospel*, ed. Bell and White, 71–85.
- <sup>25</sup> Sorley, “Creation Care and the Great Commission,” 83.
- <sup>26</sup> Sorley, “Creation Care and the Great Commission,” 83.
- <sup>27</sup> Already TEAM, Wycliffe, and Charstar, to name a few, have developed specific creation care efforts. In 2018, Frontier Ventures hosted a conference entitled, “Creation Care at the Frontiers of Mission.” The talks can be downloaded at <http://www.creationcaremissions.org>.
- <sup>28</sup> Brad Gill, “A Christology for Frontier Mission: A Missiological Study of Colossians,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 34, no. 1–4 (2017): 93–102.
- <sup>29</sup> D. S. Lim, “God’s Kingdom as Oikos Church Networks: A Biblical Theology,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 34, no. 1–4 (2017): 25–35.
- <sup>30</sup> Brad Gill, “From the Editor’s Desk: Patrick, Muhammad, and ‘Thinking the faith from the ground up.’” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 2 (2018): 1–2.
- <sup>31</sup> I took my ten-year old son to hear Archbishop Rowan Williams speak at Southwark Cathedral for Operation Noah’s annual lecture in 2009. We sat in the front row and I was enthralled—but not sure how much my son picked up! He was the only child in the audience. Afterwards, the Archbishop shook his hand and made conversation with my son, a highlight for me, but it was probably lost on my son. I’m also reminded of the time I tried to read the Pope’s recent encyclical *Laudato Si* to the kids for our family devotions—I wept with the amazing vision of the Christian life Pope Francis presented, but the kids slept! The text of this lecture can be found at <http://operationnoah.org/resources/operation-noah-annual-lecture-2009-rowan-williams/>.
- <sup>32</sup> Rebecca Lewis, “Losing Sight of the Frontier Mission Task: What’s Gone Wrong with the Demographics?,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 1 (2018): 5–15.
- <sup>33</sup> I argue above that there is, in fact, no place where we are not building on creation’s foundation of witness.
- <sup>34</sup> Bradford Greer, “Starting Points: Approaching the Frontier Missiological Task,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 3 (2016): 93–100. If you re-read Greer’s article in light of our current context environmentally and also with a good grasp of creation care theology, the article I have written may be much more convincing. One interesting example of anthropocentrism from Greer’s article is the reference on p. 96 to “the subsequent covenant with Noah.” We may have interpreted too literally the extra-biblical heading in our Bibles which labels the Noah narrative as “God’s covenant with Noah” in the NIV version. Read the story again—God made a covenant with *all* creation! This is detailed very specifically multiple times.
- <sup>35</sup> Greer, “Starting Points,” 93.
- <sup>36</sup> Note that only one of the faces of the four living creatures is that of a human. Revelation 4:7–9, New International Version (NIV): “<sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’” <sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, . . .”
- <sup>37</sup> Bell and White, *Creation Care and the Gospel*. This book resulting from the “Jamaica Lausanne Creation Care” conference provides a number of case studies of creation care in mission practice.
- <sup>38</sup> Notice, too, that most prefer the Matthew 28 version of the Great Commission rather than Mark’s “preach the gospel to all creation” version!
- <sup>39</sup> A Rocha’s focus is on biodiversity conservation and creation care in general, not the developing of fellowships of believers. See the final endnote for more reflection on this, but there is a need for specialised sodalities—that is their niche by definition. There is a great need, therefore if we take this more holistic way of thinking seriously, for better partnerships and perhaps some development of specialists within organisations, an approach some have already taken such as Charstar, TEAM, and Wycliffe.

<sup>40</sup> Fortunately, there are already systems in place to help us measure our success in maintaining and restoring God's praise amongst all creation. The secular conservation equivalent of the Lausanne Movement is called the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. They publish a Red List of Threatened Species which details the state of populations of many species. They classify species on a continuum from least threatened to extinct. This gives us a measure of where to focus conservation efforts and to chart our progress. Moving species from more threatened categories to the category of "least vulnerable" is a measurable task which can help us to guide our efforts to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>41</sup> Damian Carrington, Environment ed., "Humans Just .01% of All Life But Have Destroyed 83% of Wild Mammals—Study," *The Guardian*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/21/human-race-just-001-of-all-life-but-has-destroyed-over-80-of-wild-mammals-study>.

<sup>42</sup> As a worker, I was always reminded to begin with the end in mind. It is not enough to have gathered believers in each UPG—a statement to which I know most involved in frontier missiology would also give assent. This is the beginning of a conversation—hopefully. There is much to be discussed in terms of modalities and sodalities, how to structure and equip teams, accurate data gathering, etc. How do organisations work together to achieve transformation of people and places?

## Suggested Books on Creation Care for Further Exploration

The following are a few of the many books available and are a good place to start if you want to explore this topic further.

Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2010.

Bliss, Lowell. *Environmental Missions: Planting Churches and Trees*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013.

Bookless, David. *Planetwise*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Bouma-Prediger, Steven C. *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Moo, Douglas J., and Jonathan A. Moo. *A Biblical Theology of Creation Care*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018.

Wilkinson, David. *The Message of Creation*. Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002.



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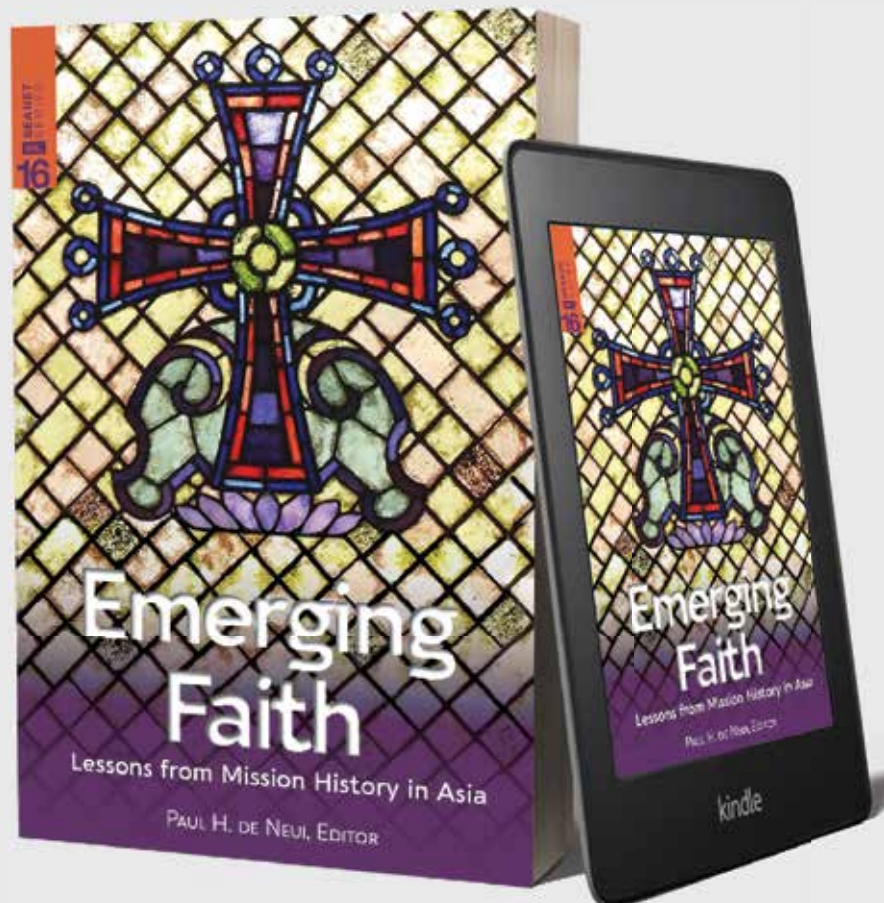
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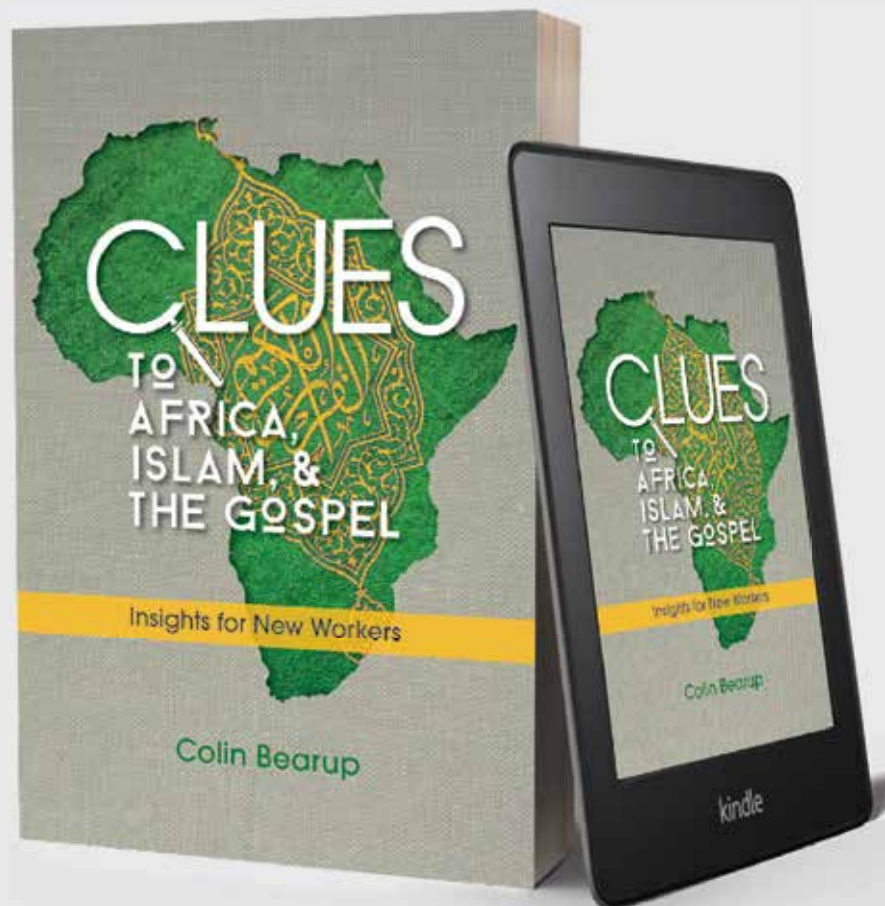
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# Books and Missiology

## Missiological Ventures with Scripture

*The Jesus Documents*, by Alan R. Tippett

*Ephesiology: A Study of the Ephesian Movement*, by Michael T. Cooper

*Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission*, by Jackson Wu

*Mission After Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*, by Amos Yong

— Reviewed by Brad Gill

Biblical study by those on the frontiers of mission may not be exceptional, but their contexts can make it extraordinary. They bring to Scripture their experiences, questions, predicaments, successes—all the exigencies of their concrete situations. They venture in pursuit of greater understanding and confirmation of God's ways in mission. They share the normal tendency to graft their experience inordinately onto the biblical narrative; but the sound and thorough study of biblical disciplines have trained their eye and yield greater awareness of all God intends on mission frontiers.

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*The Jesus Documents*, by Alan R. Tippett, *The Missiology of Alan R. Tippett Series*, eds. Shawn Redford and Doug Priest (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishers, 2012), xiii + 116 pp.



SOME OF US LIKE OLD BOOKS, AND Doug Priest and Shawn Redford have done us a great service to edit and publish posthumously the works of Alan Tippett. This Australian mission anthropologist was a Methodist missionary who served in the Fiji Islands and eventually taught at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary during its inaugural years (1965–1977). Tippett had worked in and around people movements to Christ in Polynesia, and the study of this phenomenon required the disciplines of an ethnohistorian. He heralded the addition of ethnohistory to the corpus of missiological study, and in the mid 70s he turned that lens to a study of the four gospels in *The Jesus Documents*.

Tippett had a refined sense for the tribal world. Following in the train of Malinowski and the early masters of anthropological science, he applied that tribal acuity to our understanding of how these four gospel writers cast their genre. It was an anthropological approach rather than a critical approach to the biblical records, an attempt to reach out *symbiotically* and add his discipline to theirs. Darrell Whiteman, one of Tippett's students who shared a similar Pacific island experience, pointed out that Tippett wanted to get behind biblical literary criticism and its tendency towards a patchwork of gospel fragments (ix). Tippett thought critical scholarship had obscured the true nature of the Gospels

by shifting the focus from the character and purpose of the Gospels to the synoptic problem—a useful but thoroughly Western tool, problem-oriented and analytical at the expense of function and wholeness. (23)

As an ethnohistorian, Tippett insisted “that each Gospel must be read whole,” and only then would we “discover the cultural relevance and literary holism of the Gospels” (ix). Thus Tippett has offered more of a “question to the critics than a criticism of them” (7). His conviction is that his method can help us “discover the contours of the essential configurations that hold each document together as a unique thing in itself” (6).

His ethnohistorical approach, then, requires you absorb his introduction, “An Anthropologist Looks at the Jesus

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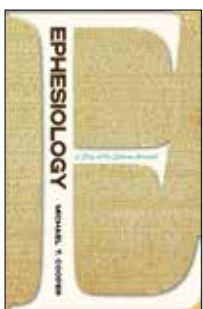
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Documents.” He situates his method as a “configurational anthropology” that identifies how the components of each gospel relate to the overall meaning intended for their respective audiences. Their distinct styles are captured in their titles: “A Tract for Our Times” (Mark), “The Historical Monograph” (Luke), “The Saga” (Matthew) and “The Sacred Drama” (John).

In particular, I noticed the value of Tippet’s anthropology in “the saga quality” of Matthew’s gospel. His description and framing of the saga recalls Tolkien’s epic tales, which were themselves modeled on the great northern European sagas. This epic style forces the reader to notice “a hero who fulfills the ancient traditions of his people, establishes a kingdom and rule, and sets up the ideal criteria and pattern for living” (51). Matthew is “the saga par excellence,” but this saga of Jesus is not “just another mythological record, or a philosophical allegory for noble living” (56). Tippet moves beyond simple cultural relevance and notes that the saga of Jesus is “also a current and continuous operation . . . the message is supracultural and the Hero or Key Personality is the Eternal Contemporary to all who believe” (56). The saga motif also frames the missiology of this gospel: the sublime uniqueness of the hero; a mission rooted in the themes of cultural tradition; the emergence of the missionary band and a great commission; and the transmission of a value system.

Since Tippet framed this anthropological treatise in the 70s, there has been a legion of biblical research that either confirms or challenges the interpretations of this ethnohistorian.<sup>1</sup> You’ll note that Tippet repeatedly suggests that the Gospels were a *new* literary genre, a common perception in biblical scholarship. But the recent work of Craig Keener suggests that the writers of the canonical gospels followed the literary practices of the classical biographers, whose writing was more historically grounded than the imaginative epic poetry of that day.<sup>2</sup> Those who studied under Tippet know that he would have warmed to the idea that the gospel writers had adapted a cultural form for their purposes.

*Ephesiology: A Study of the Ephesian Movement*,  
by Michael T. Cooper (Littleton, CO: William Carey  
Publishers, 2020), xv + 226 pp.



MICHAEL COOPER HAS EXPERIENCED Christ-centered movements and he can see many of those same dynamics reflected in the pages of the New Testament. From the different epistles, gospels, historical material (Acts) and John’s Revelation, he teases out aspects of a Christian movement that emerged out of Ephesus in those early decades. A

single biblical book or epistle is unable to capture the breadth and genius of that diachronic movement, but by grafting in a lens from his modern experience, Cooper is able to pull from a cross-section of New Testament materials. He draws a remarkable portrait of a movement that began in Ephesus and spread throughout the province of Asia—the dynamics represent, in his terms, an “Ephesiology.”

Like many others of a missional orientation, Cooper is motivated by the unfortunate results of a Western institutional method “that squelched what the Holy Spirit was doing.” He’s seen too much of ecclesiastical structures going to and fro throughout the earth propagating their “correct” model for Christianity. His biblical corrective begins with an assessment of church planting movements in the book of Acts (chapter 2). In his analysis, he weaves together social science, statistics and the biblical text to confirm a very different ecclesial dynamic. He invites the reader to listen carefully to the texts associated with the town of Ephesus, and to hear them (exegetically) in their cultural context.

## Cooper’s own research into contemporary paganism sensitized him to Paul’s approach to the religious world of Acts 14 and 17.

He channels the more typical methods of contextualization into a biblical method he calls “missiological exegesis” (chapter 3). The launching of a movement requires an indigenous gospel, and Cooper unpacks this by studying the way idolatry was first encountered. Cooper points out a remarkable assessment of Paul’s gospel by the town clerk of Ephesus who, when Paul’s disciples Gaius and Aristarchus were embroiled in a riot, said to the rioting silversmiths, “these men are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess [Artimas]” (Acts 19:37). Cooper’s own academic research took him deep into contemporary paganism, and it sensitized him to Paul’s approach to the religious world of Acts 14 and 17. This missiological exegesis requires we see from the get-go the value of dialogue, the observation of culture, and the study of history as necessary for an apologetic that interlaces the story of God into the stories of other religious worlds.

Cooper then takes a further step of “missiological reflection” which will develop into a “missiological theology.” This reflection is “the intermediate step toward the intersection of this (initial) exegesis with a theology that will connect with culture.” Cooper begins on the pages of the New Testament, with Paul and John, but then reaches into the succeeding centuries to illustrate the important function of the

missiological theologian (e.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, Origin, Augustine, Vincent of Liens). I felt suddenly lifted out of those early years of this Ephesian movement. This shift to successors in the 2nd century—to their issues of heresy, hermeneutics, theological consistency and consensus—raises the question as to when missiological theology really crystalizes. (Isn't that like studying 21st century theologians to understand the actual dynamics of the 19th century Second Great Awakening in America?) But, aha! In his circuitous way, Cooper makes some vital points that boomerang back to the apostle John, a missiological theologian whose first-century biblical corpus reflects the dynamics of the Ephesian movement. He contends that careful historiography (Irenaeus, Polycarp, Cerinthus, Eusebius) establishes that John wrote his Gospel from Ephesus with particular sensitivity to that context.

The Fourth Gospel is an evangelistic presentation focused on addressing the religious and philosophical systems of Asia, and specifically those associated with the goddess Artemis and the god Dionysus, as well as the philosopher Heraclitus . . . it was a message that would have connected with a people who were proud to live in the city of a wonder of the ancient world, where "all Asia and the world worship" Artemis (Acts 18:27). (87)

In chapter 6, Cooper finally steps back to the epistle of Ephesians, for what he calls the "grounding of a movement." Rather than John's theology in the latter part of the century, Paul is the apostle who builds the early foundation of the movement. Paul's understanding of adoption and identity "in Christ" (Eph. 1:1–4) is a vital theocentric focus that takes precedence over any sociological factors in the movement; it is here that the battle for the movement will be fought (Eph. 6). Cooper focuses on all the relational (versus institutional) dynamics of this theocentric movement, which then leads him in chapter 7 to describe the nature and essential *diakonia* (service, ministry, diaconate) of leadership in this nascent fellowship of believers.

In his treatment of leadership (from primarily the pastoral epistles), Cooper quite suddenly begins to use the term "structures." Prior to this, and at times throughout the book, the term "institution" is used to speak of a movement's attempt to organize and systematize. As is so typical in nomenclature today, structure is a positive term, while institution is a more negative one. Structure has life, the latter is deadening, as in "institutionalization." Terminology must not obscure the fact that movements will develop simple institutions, simple structures, to establish their perpetuity. They are relational, as Cooper points out in his exegesis of Ephesians, but they have structure (i.e., deacon, bishop, elder); they are institutions that have yet to over-institutionalize, yet to suffocate under an overly rigid structure. Cooper states clearly that "we should fully expect some sort of institutionalizing of leadership . . .

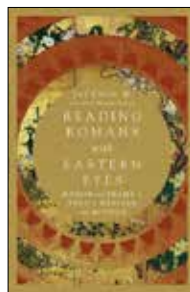
[that] structures help provide order, and there is little doubt that the early church did likewise." Movement and institution are in tandem through these final chapters as the leadership structure matures and the multiplication of a movement extends (chapter 8). Finally, in "sustaining of movement" (chapter 9), Cooper shows us that this Ephesian movement had to address the different challenges of institutionalization in the life of the seven churches of Revelation (which includes Ephesus and other cities in this Ephesian movement).

Cooper has provided us with an anatomy of a movement here in the New Testament—its characteristics, framing and indigenous features (chapter 10). In one last salute to his initial insistence on missiological exegesis, he quotes Ralph Winter's insight into indigeneity:

The New Testament is trying to show us how to borrow effective patterns; it is trying to free all future missionaries from the need to follow the precise forms of the Jewish synagogue . . . to allow them to choose comparable indigenous structures . . . (184)

Movements, indeed, will do a lot of borrowing. He quickly suggests the *oikos* (household) model as one of the prevalent social patterns that is borrowed in movements across the world.<sup>3</sup> But to *borrow patterns* requires a further sensitivity to contextualization, and that we find in the biblical lens of our next author.

*Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission*, by Jackson Wu (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), xiii + 231 pp.



JACKSON WU HAS EMPLOYED AN Asian lens to the book of Romans, specifically the honor-shame sensibility of a Chinese Confucian world. The modern consciousness of Western readers can fail to appreciate the way they have grafted their own socio-cultural values onto Paul's letters, and Wu wants to re-contextualize Romans by using a more compatible

Eastern perspective. Whether one agrees with his hermeneutical slant or not, this cultural sensitivity—so thoroughly engaged with biblical scholarship—is a model that can begin to equip the church to minister across the frontiers of Asia.

He begins by offering an apologetic for this Eastern perspective (chapter 1, "How to Read with Eastern Eyes"). It's unavoidable that we read the Bible through some sort of lens, that our cultural assumptions shape our perspective. But his conviction, which is fundamental to all his exegetical efforts, is that the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures of the biblical world resonate with the honor-shame perspective



of the East Asian world. Citing key scholars, Wu interprets Paul's use of *glory* (*doxa*, Gr.) not so much as splendor but rather as denoting honor, as in the exalted status of a king. The glory of the believer "is being placed in an exalted status or status of honor associated with a position of authority or rule" (23). These cultures stress tradition, relationship and hierarchy, and he believes their values of collectivism, social identity, loyalty, and personal worth are embedded in the cultural ethos in which Paul wrote Romans.

view of power and authority in Romans 13. And the Eastern manner of *guanxi* (the relational reciprocity of obligation) can help us understand Paul's exhortation in Romans 14.

"We who are strong have an obligation ["are indebted"; *opheilo*] to bear the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rm. 15:1). Why do they have this debt? Paul has an Eastern view of relationships. He understands they entail mutual obligation. Having God as Father (Rm. 15:6), Christians are "debtors" (Rm. 8:12). In Rm. 13:8, their debt is to love one another.<sup>4</sup>

## Wu claims a Confucian view of human nature can make us more sensitive to what Paul is saying in Romans 7; an understanding of the nature of ancestor veneration can help us interpret Paul's view of power and authority in Romans 13.

Wu claims that behind Paul's framing of his Roman letter is an Eastern sensitivity to "saving face" (chapter 2). Paul's motivation is pragmatic, and in Romans 1 and 15 he bookends his epistle with his mission: gaining the support of this Roman church for his future apostolic effort to minister in Spain. But, there's a problem. From the very beginning, Wu understands Paul is addressing a Greek "cultural centrism" (Wu's terminology) which will inhibit that church's participation in his mission. In an indirect Eastern manner, Paul addresses this problem more subtly in the way he frames his entire exposition. Wu sees evidence of this in Paul's precise use of terms like "Greek" and "barbarian," in his choice to use the example of Jewish superiority in circumcision (Romans 2), and in Romans 7 with his use of the personal pronoun "I" to indirectly address Israel's failure. Paul had an Eastern manner of speaking truth.

Honor and shame are indicative of more hierarchical societies, and the modern Western mind will tend to minimize their relevance to biblical interpretation. The Eastern way of estimating collective human worth, that fundamental value Wu calls "collective identity," shapes Paul's treatment of his great theological themes throughout this letter. Sin is framed as the dishonoring of God and ourselves, of diminishing his glory (*doxa*), and it is only Christ who saves God's "face." Justification is recast "as a way of recognizing a person's honorable status." And the hope of glory (honor) comes through suffering, but "whoever believes will not be put to shame."

The various realities of honor-shame societies peek through chapter after chapter. The concept of the Filial Son—the faithful one—is an Eastern perspective on Jesus in Romans 5 and 6. Through a Confucian view of human nature, we become more sensitive to what Paul is saying in Romans 7. An understanding of the nature of ancestor veneration helps us interpret Paul's

Wu also addresses the recent controversy surrounding Paul's theology of justification from his honor-shame perspective, and he interacts with scholars like N. T. Wright and the "new perspective" on Paul. Wu proves he is not just conversant with New Testament scholarship, but he is able to build on this scholarship. For instance, he dovetails with John Barclay's recent study of Paul and the way his anthropology of human "worth" in first century society complements an Eastern perspective.<sup>5</sup> Yet, with all due respect to his command of recent scholarship, Wu is more likely to cite the Psalms and the book of Isaiah in forging a biblical basis for Paul's honor-shame outlook.

Wu's commentary is a bit like commentaries can be—weighty and dense in style. His scholarship is impressive and indicates he's not superficially grafting an Eastern perspective onto the text. Let's face it—with his choice of Romans, Wu has gone where angels fear to tread, and the technicality requires the reader slow down and absorb the intricate way Wu weaves context and text into a fresh missiology.

As a Western reader, I found Wu's re-contextualizing of Romans quite beneficial, both personally and missiologically. For starters, it applies a fairly heavy torque on an unexamined modern consciousness. His exegesis of another kind of "social self" in Romans, one embedded in the institutions of honor and shame, forced me as a Western reader to reexamine human worth and human collectivity in a fresh way. As I write this review, my country (USA) is experiencing unprecedented public protests that declare "black lives matter"—human worth is at stake. Wu's commentary, like the many placards one sees on these streets, calls for a reexamining of any "cultural centrism" that could inhibit justice and equity.

Second, Wu helps moderns face how they may have lost a sense for the *real* biblical context. It was Barclay who pointed out

the Reformation's impact on our understanding of Paul (and Romans), how that modern reformation 500 years ago provided a European re-contextualization of Paul's missionary concern.

The *originating context* of Paul's theology—the Gentile mission that dissolved the distinction between Jews and non-Jews and relativized the Torah—became a matter of merely historical interest to later theologians.<sup>6</sup> (emphasis mine)

In that more Christianized context, we modern Europeans began to appropriate Paul's theology for “the inner reform of the Christian tradition.” Wu's treatise is a further step towards rectifying this modern tendency, and his honor-shame perspective recovers Paul's missiological concern.

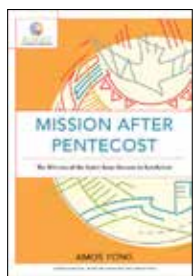
Yong has now published a biblical study of the Holy Spirit and mission. The *missio spiritus*, what his earlier writings have coined, the “missiological spirit,”<sup>8</sup> is evident from Genesis to Revelation, and Yong believes it is the place to begin as we construct a missiological paradigm for the 21st century.

His motivation for this study arose from what he understands to be our contemporary missiological situation. First, he wants to address the predicament—the demise or the collapse—of the modern mission paradigm. Second, he wants to add his perspective to “the revitalization of the theology of mission” (a sub-field of missiology). And, third, he wants to resource missiology with an emerging “pneumatological interpretation of scripture.”

## Yong's canonical approach forces us to exegete more inconspicuous passages—who would have thought that the book of Ecclesiastes would display a facet of the Spirit that speaks to the ephemeral and transitory nature of mission institutions today?

But, third, I had to tap the brake pedal a bit. While Wu's Eastern lens reestablishes the missiology of Romans, we must remember that this letter is focused on correcting and mobilizing the church for mission. It is not to be confused with the missiological apologetic we see in Paul's witness on Mars Hill in Acts 17. I suspect that readers of Wu may gloss over the differences. If the contextual reality of honor-shame is determinative, then so are the different contexts of church and mission field. Different contexts will accentuate different theology and different missiology. As John Flett has pointed out, the cultivation of the faith (Romans) can easily establish a range of controls over the communication of the faith (Mars Hill).<sup>7</sup> Romans asserts that our collective identities are reoriented “in Christ” and for the “glory of God.” But Paul's way of prioritizing truth is not the same when communicating in a frontier mission context. As has been said, context is everything.

***Mission After Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*, by Amos Yong (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), xx + 300 pp.**



THE SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN AMOS Yong, now Dean of the Schools of Theology and Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary, uses another lens to frame a fresh biblical venture. A prolific Pentecostal scholar who has wedded theology studies with the inter-religious dynamics of Buddhist-Christian witness,

Yong employs a “triangulation” of lenses in approach to scripture, his term for the interface of theology, pneumatology, and missiology. His theological interpretation of Scripture is “bifocally mediated” through his missiological and pneumatological lenses. The missiological optic is the reimagining of Christian witness in light of the demise of a modern missionary enterprise. The pneumatological lens—the study of the Holy Spirit as divine wind or breath (*ruach*, *pneuma*)—provides the biblical starting points for reimagining a fresh missiological paradigm for today's world.

Yong uses a canonical approach, moving methodically from Genesis to Revelation and only engages those points where the “spirit” emerges in the text. This method of understanding *missio spiritus* sabotages our more familiar theological framing of the Spirit's manifestation in scripture. This singular textual focus forces us to exegete more inconspicuous passages—to be more comprehensively biblical. I found this to be stretching and refreshing, and especially so in his treatment of Old Testament portions (which take up a good half of the book). We confront what Yong calls the “ambiguity of mission” as the Spirit emerges in the period of the Judges and the early monarchy (“The Spirits of Ancient Israel,” chapter 2). While Yong faithfully tours the familiar turf of the great writing prophets, the chapter on “The Post-Exilic Ruah” offers surprising insights on the way the Spirit emerged in wisdom literature (Chronicles, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes) that were reappropriated in that broader Near Eastern context. Who would have thought that the book of Ecclesiastes would display a facet of the Spirit that speaks to

the ephemeral and transitory nature of mission institutions today? There's a startling relevance that begins to convince the reader that Yong's pneumatological approach to scripture is an excellent and very necessary venture for revitalizing our theology of mission today.

The frequent appearance of the *pneuma hagios* in the New Testament requires that Yong cover more pneumatological ground. He becomes more selective and examines "where pneumatology and missiology most directly intersect," and is guided by "those pneumatological passages that invite fresh consideration of *others*." To this missiological study of the mediatorial "go-between" Spirit, this author brings his deep sensitivity to religious pluralism, interreligious dialogue, comparative theology, and theologies of the unevangelized (especially Buddhist peoples). The evangelistic Spirit of the Gospel narratives and Acts, the Pauline testimony to the Spirit of apostolic mission, and the Johannine portraiture of the Paraclete, are all viewed through Yong's triangle of lenses. But, again, his canonical approach requires we look at the more marginal and intra-ecclesial books of Hebrews and the General Epistles.

These apocalyptically dominated epistles might be found to have missiological significance, not based on modernist notions of sending and going, but based on apostolic considerations of how to understand the time of the divine spirit in anticipation of the coming judgement. (228)

I have found that Yong's canonical process of applying a pneumatological lens to the biblical text, along with his use of original terminology, can lift one out of fixed missiological paradigms. His method of looking through three lenses is effective, and it creates a liminal space in which we can explore new biblical materials for reframing mission today. He alerts us to the range of ways the Spirit meets us on historically difficult frontiers.

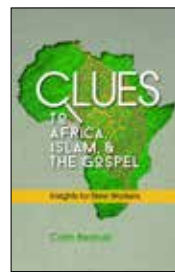
Tippett, Cooper, Wu, and Yong each bring their own missiological selectivity to the Bible. Tippett and Cooper both experienced movements to Christ, "people movements" and "church planting movements" respectively, but it was Cooper who chose to use that experience to frame his biblical study. Wu and Yong are both professors who scan the Asian frontiers, but Wu uses a Confucian lens while Yong's Asian sympathies lie with the inter-religious challenge of Buddhism. Like the cut and polished faces of a gemstone, their experiences reflect sparkling biblical facets of today's mission.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> One immediately thinks of the work of Kenneth Bailey in his *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976) and *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), or the work of Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
- <sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2019).
- <sup>3</sup> For multiple articles on this *oikos* phenomenon see [http://ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/34\\_1-4\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_34\\_1-4-EntireIssue.pdf](http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/34_1-4_PDFs/IJFM_34_1-4-EntireIssue.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> Jackson Wu, *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 184–185.
- <sup>5</sup> John M. G. Barclay, Chapter I: "The Anthropology and History of the Gift," *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 11–65.
- <sup>6</sup> Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 570.
- <sup>7</sup> John G. Flett, *Apostolicity: The Ecumenical Question in World Christian Perspective*, Missiological Engagements (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 16.
- <sup>8</sup> Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

*Clues to Africa, Islam and the Gospel: Insights for New Workers*, by Colin Bearup (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2020), vi + 110 pp.

—Reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith



Colin Bearup concentrates a lifetime of missionary experience in Africa into 110 pages, covering the fundamental cultural traits of the continent and applying them to missionary endeavours to Muslims. The clue to how he accomplishes this task is in the subtitle, "Insights for New Workers."

Though concise in his introductory approach to Islam in Africa, and latterly to each cultural trait, he does manage to provide thorough theological reflection. This makes the book interesting to weathered practitioners among Muslims as well as to beginners.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the purpose of the book, "To prepare the Christian worker to engage fruitfully with people who identify themselves as Muslims raised in Africa."

Chapter 2 explores expressions of Islam in Africa, making the point that community cohesion rather than doctrine identifies Muslim communities. Throughout the book Colin

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emphasises that, “In traditional Africa, religion is inseparable from life. It is not a subject to be taught but a reality to be lived. The natural and the supernatural are not separated.” As such, Islam has contextualized itself, being flexible in its local expressions and often unusually tolerant of other faiths, animism or Christianity.

A brief historic overview of the distinct African geography of Islam is given in chapter 3. A recurring concern of Colin’s is that we ask the questions, “How is this or that perceived? How does it colour the understanding and interaction between Western Christian workers and indigenous peoples?” Globalisation is but another expression of neo-colonialism and the Western Christian comes encumbered with the baggage of cultural individualism. Background study is not an optional extra for the academic but essential for all Christians planning to minister cross-culturally.

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Chapter 4 is entitled, “The African Incarnation of Islam.” Colin begins to help us get under the skin of African Islam and its distinctives. He spends time unpacking Sufi-style Islam which has found a resonance in the tradition of “shamanism,” i.e., the providing of tools to control the supernatural. Since my working with Nigerian Christians, I have always wondered why African Muslims are resistant to the gospel without being hostile to Christians. Now I know; diversity and the power of kinship normally trumps militant confrontation.

Handling the invisible world dominates chapter 5. Colin uses Scripture extensively to help the reader negotiate a subject which still embarrasses some Western Christians: “signs and wonders.”

In chapters 6 through 9, the author focuses on the distinctive African cultural traits that influence Islam and the Westerner’s interaction with Africans, Christian and Muslim. He draws from a deep well of personal experiences to illustrate his points, often humorously. Tables compare Africa to the West, Individualism with Collectivism and High Context with Low Context societies. In chapter 8, law-guilt, honour-shame, and

power-fear are discussed. Colin never lets us off the hook and frequently applies the theoretical to real-life situations, especially how the explanation of these traits impacts evangelism and church planting. He is refreshing and insightful.

Having been the beneficiary of, and the victim of patronage, I found chapter 9, “What are friends for?” particularly helpful. A list of proverbs pertinent to relational interdependence reminds the reader of another window onto culture. It is a salutary warning to know that the terms “brother and sister” carry a much greater implication in Africa than they do in the West. Privacy does not exist.

Chapter 10 is a theological discourse on 1 Cor. 1:23, “We preach Christ crucified.” Drawing on the cultural markers of African society and the Church Fathers, Colin considers how this verse can be explained to Muslims. The next chapter follows a similar path and Colin illustrates two ways of using the Scriptures to communicate the good news: the first, Paul’s teaching about Christ and Adam; and the second, Christ healing the unclean.

The final chapter is how to “do church” with Muslim-background believers. This is full of sound advice and he touches on familiar current issues, like the Church Planting Movement and the place of Discovery Bible Studies, to establish communities of believers.

The book lacks an index or a separate bibliography. However, every chapter, apart from the last, ends with a couple of recommended texts. These “weaknesses,” if they be that, are far outweighed by the penetrating questions appended to each chapter with space for handwritten notes. These can be used personally, but their benefit would be greatly enhanced by group study.

This is a “must buy” for anyone considering or planning ministry with Africans. Churches and individuals supporting Christian workers in Africa would find it extremely informative. Personnel, African and non-African, involved in regional partnerships would benefit greatly from its joint study.

This book would certainly have helped me as Director of Global Mobilisation for AWM. I thank all my African colleagues who taught me so much. **IJFM**

# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, websites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase.*

## When the World's on Lockdown, What Happens to the Poorest of the Poor?

### Urban slums

Over one sixth of the world lives in an urban slum; a third of the world is now classified as urban poor; and 56% of the world's people now live in cities. (See ["Status of Global Christianity in 2020"](#) from the [Center for the Study of Global Christianity](#).) One long-term question that has gone unanswered is: how have these massive demographic changes affected social constructs such as identity, ethnicity, and religion? More research is needed. For a deep dive into how migrants are impacting cities and vice versa, check out the World Economic Forum's report on [Migration and Its Impact on Cities](#).

But a short-term question staring us all in the face is: how have the urban and rural poor been impacted by covid-19? Some mitigation efforts, such as social distancing, have turned out to be ones that only wealthy nations can adopt effectively.

Health spending per head in Pakistan is one two-hundredth the level in America. Uganda has more government ministers than intensive-care beds. Throughout history, the poor have been hardest-hit by pandemics. Most people who die of AIDS are African. The Spanish flu wiped out 6% of India's entire population. (["The Coronavirus Could Devastate Poor Countries,"](#) March 26, 2020, *The Economist*)

Don't miss the eight practical yet urgent recommendations for mitigating covid-19 in urban slums in the April 24th article, ["Slum Health: Arresting COVID-19 and Improving Wellbeing in Informal Urban Settlements,"](#) in the *Journal of Urban Health*.

### "The financial engine for half the world's jobs is about to seize up . . ."

Unemployment has skyrocketed globally. But what about small businesses and even the micro businesses of the very poor in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia? *The Economist* reports:

The microfinance arm of BRAC, a vast Bangladeshi NGO, says that in all seven countries in Africa and Asia where it works, it has suspended lending, collections and charging interest. "The financial engine for half the world's jobs is about to seize up," argues Michael Schlein of Accion, a Massachusetts-based financial-inclusion non-profit group, in a blog post. The World Bank estimates that small concerns (or "MSMEs"—micro, small and medium-sized enterprises) represent about

90% of businesses and more than 50% of employment worldwide. (["For Microfinance Lenders, Covid-19 is an Existential Threat,"](#) *The Economist*, May 5, 2020)

See also, ["Millions Had Risen Out of Poverty, Coronavirus is Pulling Them Back,"](#) the *New York Times*, April 30, 2020.

## From the cities to the villages: the largest mass migrations in India in generations

No one anticipated India's lockdown (the ["harsheset lockdown in the world"](#)) would spark [the largest movement of people since the Partition in 1947](#). Pictures and [videos](#) began pouring out of India (*BBC's* ["Coronavirus: India's Pandemic Lockdown Turns into a Human Tragedy,"](#) March 30, 2020). Some authorities estimate there are up to 140 million internal migrant workers in India for whom

the epidemic is much more than a threat to their health—it endangers their very economic survival... They predominantly earn daily wages, with no prospect of job security, and live in dirty, densely populated slums, saving money to send back home. (["Special Report: India's Migrant Workers Fall through Cracks in Coronavirus Crackdown,"](#) *The Guardian*, April 25, 2020)

Take a look also at the article entitled, ["I Will Never Come Back: Many Indian Migrant Workers Refuse to Return to Cities Post Lockdown,"](#) (Scroll.in, May 30, 2020). Also read ["Over 10 Agonizing Days this Migrant Worker Walked or Hitched 1250 Miles Home. The Lockdown Gave Him No Choice,"](#) *CNN*, May 31, 2020.

## Plight of migrants spurs Indians to extravagant acts of kindness

Dismayed by the videos of millions walking home with no food or water, people, NGOs, and charities have sprung into action all over India. Lawyers chartered plane flights; a rickshaw driver used his wedding savings to give out food. See ["India's lockdown caused untold hardship. It also inspired extraordinary generosity,"](#) *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2020. Two young men in Bengaluru set up a WhatsApp group called Loving the Migrant Worker.

Hundreds of migrant workers were fed, provided transport and given dry ration kits in just three weeks since it was set up... Most people in this group... don't know each other but what they have in common is that they are all Christians attached to different churches and denominations across India who have come together to help migrant workers in whatever way they can... In just one week after the *Loving the Migrant Worker* group was formed, Christians from over 50 different cities in India joined the group. ([Firstpost, June 9, 2020](#))

## Global remittances evaporate

The number of remittances sent home all around the globe [has plummeted](#), causing food insecurity to rise sharply.

One in nine people globally—some 800 million—benefitted from international remittances in 2019, according to IFAD. In addition, a similar number of people send remittances within countries,

said the World Bank's Ratha. ("[Emergency for Millions as Coronavirus Severs Remittance Lifeline](#)," *Reuters*, April 30, 2020)

In East Africa, for example, "almost half of all households in Somalia rely on remittances to cover basic needs such as food, water, health care and education" ("[African Migrant Workers are Unable to Send Money Home](#)," *CNBC*, May 29, 2020).

## How Will the Virus Affect Food Insecurity and Supply Globally?

### Some good news statistics

But the unsung star of 21st-century logistics is the global food system (see [article](#)). From field to fork, it accounts for 10% of world gdp and employs perhaps 1.5bn people. The global supply of food has nearly tripled since 1970, as the population has doubled to 7.7bn. At the same time, the number of people who have too little to eat has fallen from 36% of the population to 11%, and a bushel of maize or cut of beef costs less today than 50 years ago in real terms. Food exports have grown sixfold over the past 30 years; four-fifths of people live in part on calories produced in another country. (*The Economist*, "[The Global Food Supply Chain is Passing a Severe Test](#)," May 9, 2020)

### And a triple whammy

COVID-19, combined with the effects of ongoing civil conflicts, hotter and drier weather in many areas, and an unfolding locust invasion in Africa and the Middle East, could cut off access to food for tens of millions of people. The world is "on the brink of a hunger pandemic," according to World Food Program (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley, who warned the United Nations Security Council recently of the urgent need for action to avert "multiple famines of biblical proportions." ("[COVID-19 Could Exacerbate Food Insecurity Around the World, Stanford Expert Warns](#)," *Stanford News*, May 5, 2020)

Enormous swarms of desert locusts are stripping everything bare as they advance relentlessly across East Africa, Iran, [Pakistan and India](#). (See the horrifying images in "[Gigantic New Locust Swarms Hit East Africa](#)," *National Geographic*, May 15, 2020.)

A swarm containing an [estimated 200 billion locusts](#) was recorded in Kenya, and each insect can eat its own weight in food. That equates to about as much food as 84 million people a day, according to a [UN briefing](#). (*Business Insider*, "[Swarms of locusts forced Somalia to declare a national emergency](#)," February 28, 2020)

## Religion and Pandemics

### A global evaluation

In an excellent article in the *World Politics Review*, May 26, 2020, the authors look at global expressions of religion and how they have interfaced with pandemics in "[What Religion Can Offer in Response to Covid-19](#)." They comment:

During previous outbreaks of HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and around the world, and of Ebola in Central and West Africa, the strengths of religious communities were rarely incorporated into public policy. The successes and failures of these pandemic responses offer five pertinent lessons on why [barriers between religion](#)

[and government](#) can detract from effective public policy, as well as [positive paths toward constructive engagement](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## A church movement responds to Ebola: a 2014 West African case study

Missiologist Warrick Farah in his blog *Circumpolar*, reminds us how a group of church fellowships in West Africa voluntarily responded to the 2014 Ebola epidemic:

One relevant case study is a West African movement that was featured in [Miraculous Movements](#). When the Ebola epidemic began in 2014, they were planting 2,000 churches per year. It decreased to 200 per year during the 18-month crisis. But the movement met needs that the government was unable to . . . These volunteers built such goodwill with those communities that many churches were planted after the epidemic ended in 2016, and the movement continued. We could draw similar examples from the early church's growth during the plagues in the Roman Empire. Such a loving response requires a robust theology of suffering. We will need to learn to pray. The marginalized and the invisible in our communities will be the most vulnerable. ("[A Missiology of Social Distancing: Ministry Innovation in the Midst of Biosecurity Events](#)," *Circumpolar*, March 20, 2020)

## Implications of the virus for global mission

Jason Mandryk's 53-page free e-book: [Global Transmission, Global Mission: The Impact and Transmission of the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) is excellent: objective, full of helpful links, resources, and forward thinking.

In compiling this analysis, the Operation World team interacted with ministry and mission leaders in every region of the world, getting input on how to pray for different nations afflicted by covid-19 as well as strategic considerations from a wide array of missiological contexts. ([operationworld.org](#))

## China's religious groups offer covid-19 assistance to Wuhan

Ian Johnson, Canadian Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who lives in Beijing, noticed that religious groups of all kinds were offering assistance to the desperate people of Wuhan—to the tune of \$30 million.

In temples, mosques and churches, China's religious believers have jumped into the national battle against the coronavirus. They have offered prophecies and prayers, ceremonies and services, as well as donations totaling more than \$30 million. Their efforts reflect the country's decades-long religious revival, and the feeling among many Chinese that faith-based groups provide an alternative to the corruption that has plagued the government. ("[Religious Groups in China Step into the Coronavirus Crisis](#)," *New York Times*, February 26, 2020)

## Covid-19 and religious volunteerism around the world

For some of the possible effects of covid-19 on volunteer religious activity around the world, see *Christianity Today's* "[Canceled Mission Trips Expected to Have Longterm Fallout](#),"

March 22, 2020. What might tourism look like in this brave new world post coronavirus? See [“Coronavirus: What Global Travel Might Look Like Ahead of a Vaccine,”](#) *BBC*, May 3, 2020. See also [“When Will We Start Traveling Again?”](#) *CNBC*, May 5, 2020. And lastly, for a look at some startling graphs predicting changes in travel, check out [“Covid-19: Outlook for Air Travel in the Next Five Years,”](#) *IATA*, May 13, 2020.

## Taliban and thermometers

Many terrorist groups have reinvented themselves as social service organizations. Witness  [Hamas](#) in Gaza and  [Hezbollah](#) in Lebanon. But the Taliban?

Social-media accounts that usually crow about killing government soldiers instead showed the militants handing out masks and advice on public health. One video purported to show Taliban health-workers kitted out in white suits, taking people's temperatures and squirting disinfectant about... The most helpful thing the Taliban could do, however, is the one idea they have rejected outright. The militants have spurned calls for a ceasefire to allow the government and aid agencies to fight the virus unhindered. Instead, while offering Afghans advice on how to keep themselves safe, they have also been killing lots of them. Taliban attacks rose by more than 70% year-on-year in the six weeks after they signed a peace deal with America in Qatar at the end of February. ([“The Taliban are Joining Afghanistan's Fight Against Covid-19,”](#) *The Economist*, May 9, 2020)

## Muslim revival movement a superspreader

What have been the biggest venues for the spread of the virus? A [football stadium in Northern Italy](#), a [church service in South Korea](#), and in Asia, extremely [large gatherings of a Muslim movement](#) known as the [Tablighi Jamaat, some 80 million strong](#), all appear to have been super-spreaders.

Thousands of [Tablighi Jamaat] members had traveled from across India and abroad to the event at the Nizamuddin Markaz mosque—the group's global headquarters—in central Delhi. After the event, delegates—who had dispersed—began to fall sick with Covid-19 and Indian officials embarked on a widespread effort to trace, identify and test attendees and their families. As of Saturday, 4,291 cases had been linked to the gathering, across 23 states and union territories, according to health authorities. That amounted, as of April 20, to nearly a quarter of all Covid-19 cases reported so far in India. ([“India's Muslims Feel Targeted by Rumors They're Spreading Covid-19”](#) in *CNN*, April 23, 2020)

## “A Muslim person's blood plasma can save a Hindu person's life”

Going on the offensive, hundreds of recovered Tablighi Jamaat covid-19 patients in New Delhi began donating plasma to help others. However, many Hindus were repelled at the thought of being given “Muslim blood.” From a *BBC* article the end of April:

Meanwhile there have been apprehensions that Hindus would reject the plasma donated by the Tablighis, prompting Delhi Chief Minister Aravind Kejriwal to emphasise that “when god created

earth, he just created human beings. Every human has two eyes, one body, their blood is red...” ([“India Coronavirus: Tablighi Jamaat Gives Blood for Plasma Therapy,”](#) *BBC*, April 28, 2020)

The *Hindustan Times* went on to quote the Delhi Chief Minister as saying,

God did not differentiate between individuals. It is us who have started to differentiate between humans based on faith. Coronavirus disease can happen to anyone irrespective of one's faith... A Hindu person's blood plasma can save a Muslim person's life and a Muslim person's blood plasma can save a Hindu person's life. But, why have we created walls? At least, the virus has taught us that if we stand united, nothing can defeat us. And if we are divided among ourselves, we shall lose the battle. While donating plasma, one should not think on such (religious) lines. ([“200 Tablighi Jamaat members, who have recovered, pledge to donate plasma,”](#) *Hindustan Times*, April 28, 2020)

## Religion and Violence

### They came to kill the mothers . . .

Mid May, 2020, the world was rocked by [the scenes of a deliberate massacre of mothers](#) and babies in a maternity hospital in West Kabul. By the end of the massacre, twenty-four mothers, babies, and nurses were dead.

“What I saw in the maternity demonstrates it was a systematic shooting of the mothers,” Bonnot, Head of Programmes for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Afghanistan, said. “They went through the rooms in the maternity, shooting women in their beds. It was methodical. They came to kill the mothers.” ([“Afghan Maternity Ward Attackers 'Came to Kill the Mothers',”](#) *BBC*, May 15, 2020)

Read the powerful response by a group of professional Afghan women in *NPR's Opinion* [“We Shouldn't Have to Ask that Women and Babies Not Be Killed, Yet We Must,”](#) May 16, 2020.

## Identity in India amid polarization and religious violence

Religious violence was already at record levels in India before covid-19 hit. Back late February, fifty-three people were killed in New Delhi in religious riots with Hindus attacking peacefully protesting Muslims. See the article entitled [“Delhi death toll climbs amid worst religious violence for decades,”](#) February 26, 2020 in *The Guardian*, that details the reasons for the countrywide marches protesting the unconstitutional citizenship bill enacted December 2019.

Don't miss Indian journalist Aatish Taseer's eloquent article in the May 2020 issue of *The Atlantic*, [“India is No Longer India: Exile in the Time of Modi.”](#) In this very personal essay, Taseer looks at the reasons for his own blacklisting and then exile from India, his homeland. It's an insightful article about identity and free speech, in the midst of religious/political polarization. This same gifted author has also written a [beautiful account of his trip from Tashkent to Khiva](#) in Uzbekistan as part of a broader [New York Times' Style series on the Silk Road](#).

## *China Slaps New Security Law on Hong Kong*

The People's Republic of China handed down a new "national security law" for Hong Kong, May 21st. "The sweeping proposal . . . bans secession, subversion of state power, terrorism, foreign intervention and allows mainland China's state security agencies to operate in Hong Kong" (*CNN*, "[UK Considers Opening Citizenship 'Path' for 300,000+ Hong Kong Residents . . .](#)," May 28, 2020). This decision appears to be a direct violation of the terms of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 between the UK and China with regard to Hong Kong. (Don't miss: "[How Hong Kong's Complex History Explains Its Current Crisis with China](#)," *National Geographic*, August 2019.) See also the very perceptive article called "[Hong Kong and the Price of Freedom](#)" (*The National Review*, May 29, 2020), that links the drop in Hong Kong's percentage of the Chinese GDP (20% in 1989 down to less than 3% in 2020) to the Chinese Communist Party's willingness to crush Hong Kong's semi-autonomy for political control.

**"Rule by fear is about to begin."**

In an article May 28th in *The Economist* entitled, "[China Has Launched Rule by Fear in Hong Kong](#)," the editors argue that this new law bodes ill not only for the region but for the world.

The people of Hong Kong want two things: to choose how they are governed, and to be subject to the rule of law. The Chinese Communist Party finds both ideas so frightening that many expected it to send troops to crush last year's vast protests in Hong Kong. Instead, it bided its time. Now, with the world distracted by covid-19 and mass protests difficult because of social distancing, it has chosen a quieter way to show who's boss. That threatens a broader reckoning with the world—and not just over Hong Kong, but also over the South China Sea and Taiwan.

On May 21st China declared, in effect, that Hong Kongers deemed to pose a threat to the party will become subject to the party's wrath. A new security law, written in Beijing, will create still-to-be defined crimes of subversion and secession, terms used elsewhere in China to lock up dissidents, including Uighurs and Tibetans. Hong Kong will have no say in drafting the law, which will let China station its secret police there. The message is clear. Rule by fear is about to begin.

### **We are all dissidents**

What does this new law portend for Hong Kong's Christians, especially given some of their involvement with the protests? See "[As protests continue in Hong Kong, Beijing's criticisms of churches grows louder](#)," *America: The Jesuit Review*, January 2, 2020. See also an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 2020: "[Without justice, there is no peace: Tiannanmen memories spark resistance in Hong Kong](#)."

But for Uighurs, "locking up dissidents" has meant the detention of millions. A third new cache of leaked documents arrived in the West, February 2020. These written directives

detail both the extreme surveillance of all 11 million Uighur Chinese citizens as well as the systematic detention and torture of close to two million. See "[Watched, Judged, Detained](#)," *CNN*, February 2020.

### **Many Protests Became Riots: Why?**

In the aftermath of the tragic murder by a police officer of [George Floyd](#), an unarmed African-American in Minneapolis, hundreds of cities across the country and [around the world](#) have been roiled by protests against police brutality and racism. Most of the [protests were peaceful](#) but hundreds of small businesses (many owned by immigrants or minorities) were destroyed by looting and riots no longer connected to the call for justice. (See "[Looting Devastates Businesses Already Shaken by Virus](#)," *AP News*, June 2, 2020.) For an article that looks at whether political causes always trend towards violence, see the [Winter 2019 issue of Comment magazine](#). Scroll down to the second one listed which examines ideologies that demand justice and why they can become violent and repressive. See "[Habits for Ideological Times](#)." Also check out the first article which is an eloquent essay on American fractured identity, called "[The Tribes that Bind](#)." Christians across the world are examining their own hearts and grieving the senseless murders and violence. For an excellent historical perspective, see "[A Call to Conversion](#)," in *First Things*, June 1, 2020.

### **China claims America has double standard on protests**

Chinese officials are taking advantage of what they are claiming is [the hypocrisy of US](#) support of Hong Kong protesters for democracy and human rights.

The Chinese government, in its first official statement on Mr. Trump's move against Beijing's national security rules, directly called out the United States for hypocrisy. A spokesman for China's foreign ministry, Zhao Lijian, noted on Monday how American officials have portrayed protesters in their own country as "thugs" but glorified Hong Kong protesters as "heroes." (See "[As Protests Engulf the US, China Revels in the Unrest](#)," in the *New York Times*, June 2, 2020)

### **Are Followers of Jesus in Muslim Contexts Hiding the Light?**

Also published on Warrick Farah's *Circumpolar* blog March 17, 2020, is a guest post by Kevin Higgins called "[Hills and Hiding: A Response to Travis Myers](#)." Written last year but never published until this March, his short article carefully takes up and replies to Travis Myers' five charges leveled against what some have called Insider Movements. Travis Myers' article was posted at Desiring God and entitled "[A City Under a Hill: Five Problems with Insider Movements](#)." Higgins, currently General Director of Frontier Ventures, lived for 17 years in South Asia and has been personally involved with four different movements to Christ in Muslim peoples. **IJFM**





Whether you're a Perspectives instructor, student, or coordinator, you can continue to explore issues raised in the course reader and study guide in greater depth in **IJFM**. For ease of reference, each **IJFM** article in the table below is tied thematically to one or more of the 15 Perspectives lessons, divided into four sections: Biblical (B), Historical (H), Cultural (C) and Strategic (S).

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**Articles in IJFM 37:1**

	<i>Lesson 1: The Living God is a Missionary God (B)</i>	<i>Lesson 2: The Story of His Glory (B)</i>	<i>Lesson 4: Mandate for the Nations (B)</i>	<i>Lesson 5: Unleashing the Gospel (B)</i>	<i>Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)</i>
<b>The "Grace Commission": Intercultural Witness According to Luke</b> Colin H. Yuckman (pp. 5–14)			X	X	
<b>"The Bible Says": Scriptural Questions about Common Missiological Assumptions</b> J. Paul Pennington (pp. 15–23)			X	X	X
<b>Rethinking <i>Missio Dei</i>: Temporally Remedial or Eternally Doxological</b> Dave Shive (pp. 25–32)	X	X	X		
<b>Creation Care and Frontier Missiology</b> Robert Sluka (pp. 33–41)	X				X

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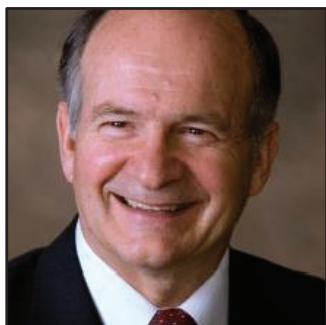


# The Past & Future of Evangelical Mission

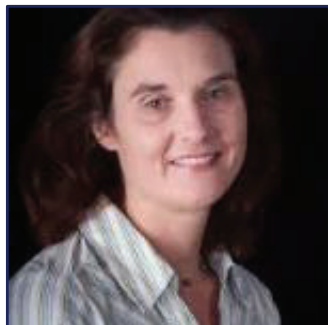


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