

July/August 2009, Volume 6, Issue 4

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Editor's Note

A country can only export what it manufactures. That's a pretty basic principle. But now apply that principle to the topic of missions: if generations of American churches have been characterized by pragmatic church growth principles, what would you expect to see characterizing their overseas missions endeavors?



Okay, so maybe American missions work is driven by the same kind of pragmatism that characterizes so many American churches. Is that really such a big deal? Well, stop and consider the differences between planting pragmatically-driven churches in America versus planting them in most Majority World contexts. Such churches in America have the luxury of building themselves upon the foundations of a culture imbued with several hundred years of Christian influence and ethical norms. Fill a room with nominal Christians, as pragmatically-driven churches do, and you still have a dame that looks half way decent. She'll dress up alright.

Now build that same church with those same pragmatic principles, yielding once again a room filled with nominal Christians, but do it in a country with strong traditions in polygamy, or animal sacrifice, or ancestor worship, or Islamic chauvinism, or Hindu castes, or nepotistic social structures, or so on. Build it on the shoulders of leaders who didn't grow up in Sunday School and were not groomed in seminary classrooms with tall genealogical trees, where orthodoxy, even if it's doubted, has been defended in book after book after book. What should we expect of this church? I've been around the Majority World block enough times to suspect something very different, indeed.

Philip Jenkins and now others have checked the stats and told us that global Christianity is moving South and East. But are they talking about "Christians" saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? Some would probably tell me that these questions are rooted in arrogant, West-centric assumptions. But am I allowed to raise questions?

Andy Johnson kicks off this 9Marks eJournal by pointing to the problem of pragmatism in missiology today, which is the primary concern we want to raise. The pseudonymous "Ed Roberts" and "Doug Coleman," both workers in sensitive contexts, review popular but problematically pragmatic resources. Yet another anonymous overseas worker thoughtfully engages the related subjects of contextualization and lying. Both of these articles are highly recommended.

More practical matters are described in the articles on partnerships and what three churches are actually doing. Really practical matters are provided in the tool kit. Conrad Mbewe's especially is a must read.

In all this, we pray that these articles and the recommended resources help your church more faithfully engage with God's work around the world.

— Jonathan Leeman

THINKING CAREFULLY ABOUT MISSIONS



[Pragmatism, Pragmatism Everywhere!](#)

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You say you believe the Bible, but what's your bottom line for missions: biblical faithfulness or whatever works?

By Andy Johnson

[Putting Contextualization in its Place](#)

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A veteran missionary offers an in-depth synthesis of the biblical material on contextualization and then applies it to evangelism in the Muslim world.

By a missions strategist for Central Asia

[Lying, Hostile Nations and the Great Commission](#)

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Are you lying if you give some but not *all* your reasons for gaining access to a restricted nation?

By a missions strategist for Central Asia

MISSIONS PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN CHURCH AND FIELD



[Missions Partnerships from the Home Church's Perspective](#)

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Not all partnerships benefit the supported workers. Here's how one church tries to bless, not burden, their overseas partners.

By Andy Johnson

[Missions Partnerships from a Field Worker's Perspective](#)

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Can two walk together unless they be agreed? A veteran missionary looks at how much agreement is needed between a local church and a team on the field.

By Ed Roberts

HOW THREE CHURCHES PUT MISSIONS INTO PRACTICE



[Sending Missionaries in Community](#)

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If the world knows we are his disciples by our love for one another, why not send a whole team of Christians overseas to plant a church?

By George Tissiere and C. Bug



[Cultivating a Culture of Missions in a Small Church](#)

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Faithfulness in global evangelism isn't restricted to huge churches with huge budgets.

Small churches, too, can cultivate a big commitment to missions.

By Tom Ascol



[Developing Missions Networks Without a Denomination](#)

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Denominations aren't the only missions-sending game in town. A church can build more flexible networks without them.

By Jeremy Pace

A MISSIONS TOOLKIT



[How American Christians Can Help Christians in Zambia](#)

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An African pastor reminds American Christians to be a little quicker to listen and a little slower to speak.

By Conrad Mbewe

[How to Get Businesspeople into Missions](#)

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As the window for non-profit work as a platform for missions is closing, a window for business as missions is opening.

By the executive director of Access Partners

[Guidelines for Deciding Whom a Church Supports](#)

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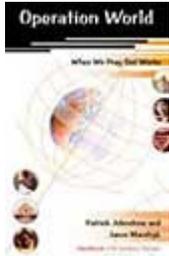
An internal Capitol Hill Baptist Church elders' memorandum by Andy Johnson

[A Church Questionnaire for Supported Missionaries](#)

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Used by Capitol Hill Baptist Church

RECOMMENDED MISSIONS RESOURCES



[9Marks Pastors' and Theologians' Forum](#)

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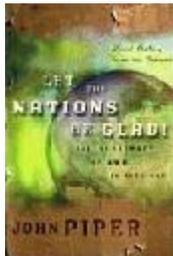
We asked a roundtable of pastors and theologians from around the world the question, "Do you like *Operation World*? Why or why not?"
Answers from Mark Dever, Matthias Lohman, Conrad Mbewe, Michael Oh, and Luiz Sayão



[Book Review: An Introduction to the Science of Missions, by J.H. Bavinck](#)

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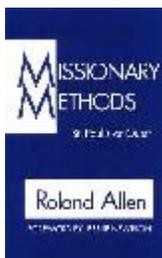
Reviewed by Andy Johnson



[Book Review: Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions, by John Piper](#)

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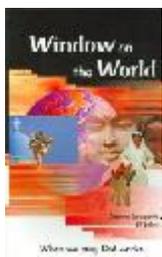
Reviewed by Robin



[Book Review: Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?, by Roland Allen](#)

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[Book Review: A Window on the World, by Daphne Spragget with Jill Johnstone](#)

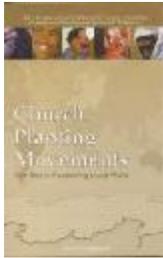
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Reviewed by Tim Cantrell



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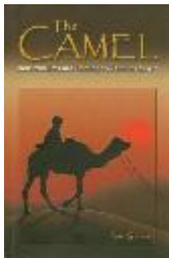
NOT-SO-RECOMMENDED MISSIONS RESOURCES



[Book Review: Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World by David Garrison](#)

Reviewed by Ed Roberts

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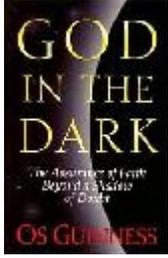


[Book Review: The CAMEL: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ by Kevin Greeson](#)

Reviewed by Doug Coleman

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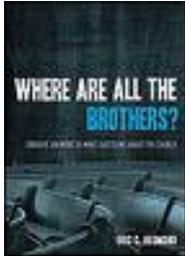
MISCELLANEOUS BOOK REVIEWS



[Book Review: *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt*, by Os Guinness](#)

Reviewed by Patrick Schreiner

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[Book Review: *Where Are All the Brothers?* By Eric Redmond](#)

Reviewed by Anthony Carter

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AUDIO—LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS



[Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa with Conrad Mbewe](#)

Posted on July 1, 2009

Zambian pastor Conrad Mbewe provides a firsthand look at the growth of biblical Christianity in his part of the world.



[Leading the Church Today with Aaron Menikoff & Friends](#)

Posted on June 1, 2009

Aaron Menikoff asks Mark Dever and the 9Marks team to provide “Church 101” for church members. Send it to your members today!

9MARKS ON FACEBOOK



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NEW TRANSLATIONS

The Korean translation of *Twelve Challenges Churches Face* by Mark Dever and *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* by Mark Dever can be purchased [here](#).

An English/Tagalog version of *What is a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever can now be obtained for free from [Action International Ministries](#).

UPCOMING 9MARKS EVENTS



[God Exposed: Awkward Preaching in an Age of Comfort](#)

SEBTS, Wake Forest, North Carolina

9/25/09 9/26/09

Mark Dever, Danny Akin, C.J. Mahaney, Thabiti Anyabwile, Michael McKinley



[Together for the Gospel 2010](#)

Louisville, Kentucky

4/13/10 4/15/10

Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, C.J. Mahaney, Al Mohler, Thabiti Anyabwile, John MacArthur, John Piper, and R.C. Sproul

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Pragmatism, Pragmatism Everywhere!

By Andy Johnson

A friend and I were riding in his car after lunch vigorously discussing a controversial topic in missiology, and with good reason. We served together on the board of trustees for a mission sending organization, and a number of board members had become concerned about a particular book on evangelizing Muslims. The book was popular, but it seemed to undervalue the Bible and be misleading in its treatment of the Qur'an.

These board members, myself included, worried that the book discouraged missionaries from plainly presenting the gospel from the Bible and making clear distinctions between Scripture and the Qur'an. I pointed my friend to a number of biblical passages like 2 Corinthians 4:1-2:

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

My friend seemed genuinely conflicted. He affirmed the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. And he actually agreed that the method advocated by the book seemed at odds with the passages we discussed. But then he said something that made my stomach sink: "Still, look at all the decisions they're reporting. Look at the numbers. How can you finally argue with that kind of success?"

It was one of those moments when you feel like someone has kicked your legs out from under you. I wondered what it meant for him to say Scripture was authoritative and sufficient, but that the Word of God couldn't compete with "that kind of success." Welcome to the world of evangelical missionary pragmatism.

A NEW BIBLICAL CRISIS?

I wish this conversation was a singularity, but I've been bumping into this line of thought among missionaries for more than a decade now. I'm not a vocational missionary myself. I've never lived overseas for more than six months. But even a regular guy like me can sometimes detect a trend.

I've begun to wonder if this story of my friend's confusion might not be emblematic of a much larger root issue behind many of the more obvious issues in missiology. Certainly the specific methodological questions are easier to get one's mind around:

- deep contextualization vs. cultural confrontation;
- Qur'anic bridges vs. Bible-based evangelism;
- rapid multiplication vs. careful training;
- orality strategies vs. biblical literacy.

All these sound like disagreements about methods, but are they really?[1] Could there be an underlying theological disagreement about which authority actually shapes and informs these methodological discussions? Could it be that, despite our formal commitment to the Bible's inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency, many in the work of evangelical missions have, like my friend, actually become evangelical pragmatists? Could it be that we who call ourselves conservative evangelicals have a new biblical crisis springing up in our midst?

Here's how Wayne Grudem defines the authority of Scripture in his *Systematic Theology*: "all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God." [2] And here's how he defines the sufficiency of Scripture: "Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and

that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.”[3]

Let me contrast Grudem’s definitions with my own definition for “evangelical pragmatism”: an approach to gospel work that values *results* more than *faithful obedience* to the Word, especially when the Word’s teaching may not be attended by immediate, visible fruit.

Now, I am not suggesting that everything we do which is pragmatic is ill-advised (taking airplanes overseas instead of boats, for instance). Rather, I’m talking about a willingness to overlook or even contradict what the Bible says for the sake of what appears to work visibly and immediately.

Furthermore, I’m not suggesting that most people in evangelical missions would deny Grudem’s two definitions. No, our problem is much more subtle and insidious. I’m talking about how many of us live and operate, not what we say, sign, or affirm. In this conversation, I feel kind of like Supreme Court Justice Stewart Potter who famously said of obscenity, “I know it when I see it.”[4]

Here are a few worrisome signs that we’ve become man-centered and wrongly pragmatic in our approach to missions and the Bible, so that we can know it when we see it

THREE WORRISOME SIGNS

Arguing From Results, Not Exegesis

First, I’ve noticed the exceeding popularity of books on missions that seem to argue their method based primarily on their results rather than on biblical exegesis. With some hesitation, I’ll mention a couple of examples of this pragmatic approach to missions, starting with a book written by a person with whom I’m somewhat acquainted and who evidences a great love for Jesus and the lost: David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (WIGTake Resources, 2003) [see the [review](#) in this eJournal]. Garrison uses the image of “reverse engineering” to describe with candor how he developed his CPM methods, not from Scripture, but by analyzing a movement that was producing the results he wanted. Or, for an example of this trend in a popular missionary journal see the April 2009 edition of the *Evangelical Missionary Quarterly*: John Tanner, “A Story of Phenomenal Success: indigenous mission training centers and Myanmar” *EMQ* 45(2), 152-157. Both works are written by self-professed evangelicals, but both base their arguments mainly on results, rather than on the biblical faithfulness of their approach.

Sadly, I could list dozens, maybe hundreds, of similar books and articles, especially on the topics of contextualizing the gospel, evangelizing Muslims, and planting house churches. The Bible isn’t rejected by these books, it’s merely regarded as if it doesn’t have much to say about the “how” of global evangelism.

Evaluating Numbers, Not Faithfulness.

Also, I’ve noticed a trend for mission organizations to focus on numbers of “responses” rather than the biblical faithfulness of their workers as their primary evaluative metric. Again, it’s not that these organizations are wholly unconcerned about theological integrity. They likely have their workers sign a doctrinal statement, and they might be quick to address open heresy. But at the functional level, they seem to assume their workers are faithful and then actually test them by measurable, immediate, visible results—“numbers.”

I don’t know of any organizations who say that numbers are their sole metric. But their published reports focus entirely on the number of Bible study groups formed, decisions made, baptisms performed, and churches planted. So you start to wonder.

Now, I trust that all true Christians would rejoice in numbers insofar as we know that they represent true converts and true churches. But we must also remember from Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-23)

that the number of immediate, visible responses can prove hugely deceptive over time. I often get the feeling that most evangelicals haven't internalized this warning and tend to think that the faithful ministry or method is the one that "works." It's as if we think numbers, not biblical faithfulness, vindicates methodology.

Assuming the Bible Is Silent About "How"

Finally, it seems to me that many assume the Bible is silent on practice—the "how" of evangelism and church planting. Books and leaders don't say this up front. But the fact that they do not carefully interact with Scripture to find, understand, and test missionary methods suggest as much. For example, if you never consult your Bible when changing the oil in your car it suggests that you don't believe Scripture addresses the topic. And you're right. Likewise, based on what's been written and spoken about missions, or not, I take it that many missiologists and missionaries assume that Scripture is largely silent on that topic of the "how."

Prior generations have made similar mistakes. We're not the first people to affirm the authority and sufficiency of the Bible yet deny them in our methods. In his classic work of 1954, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* the Dutch theologian and veteran missionary to Indonesia, J.H. Bavinck wrote,

The conclusion might easily be reached that the content of preaching is given in Scripture but that the manner of preaching, and the question of missionary approach, is a matter of personal tact and of applying oneself to the given circumstances.

He continues,

According to such a solution, the Bible provides the content, the "what" of preaching, but the manner, the "how" of preaching must be discovered otherwise.

But Bavinck calls such a solution "too simple" and suggests that

theoretical problems concerning principles, which can be answered by Scripture alone, lurk behind the countless practical problems which beset the church.[5]

When we deal with issues that touch on the heart of the biblical message (evangelism and the church) and yet act as though Scripture has little to say that's practical, haven't we fallen into the same error?

A DISCLAIMER

Of course, all three impressions are merely that—my impressions. They can't be proven in any objective sense, at least not by someone with abilities as limited as mine.

I considered specifically citing passages from popular books or organizational policies that I deem to be pragmatically driven, in the bad sense of the term. But I realized that even if I were to cite specific examples, another person could point to all the Scripture passages a book cites or the off-handed sentence which strongly affirms a desire to be Bible-based. My thesis here is hard to argue on the macro level because when we address evangelical pragmatism we are not dealing with an overt agenda but with a collection of unchallenged assumptions, with a culture, a disposition, and an unspoken worldview.

So is it even possible to discern these pragmatic idolatries in missiology books, in workers, in our churches and mission sending organizations? Or is this just one writer's unfounded opinion? Well, I certainly think there is ample evidence, but it's better that we first go looking for our pragmatic idolatry in the place we probably least want to look: in our own hearts.

Before looking elsewhere, we do well to examine our own unspoken assumptions about the authority and sufficiency of God's Word, whether we are vocational missionaries, church planters, pastors, or church

members. Three key areas that shed light on our functional authority may be helpful to consider: our attractions, our definitions and our sources. Let's take each in turn.

LET'S EVALUATE OUR FUNCTIONAL AUTHORITY

1. Attractions

First, it may help to ask some serious questions about what attracts us to our own favored methodologies:

- What is it that attracts you, personally, to the methods for evangelism, contextualization, church planting, or missions strategy that you favor?
- Do you find yourself attracted to a method because you honestly think the idea looks like a scripturally faithful way to approach missions, or did you first hear about something that "worked" and you found yourself drawn to the prospect of better and faster results?

This is important: what attracts us says a lot about the functional authority we are valuing.

- Are you drawn to a vision of biblical faithfulness that brings glory to God through your obedience, or to a vision of rapid, spectacular results flowing from some "key" methodology?

Not that we don't want to see people converted, but ultimately, at the bottom of your motivational structure, what is it that has had the most impact on your choices: faithfulness or results? If you answer "results," then it could be that your real authority is just human reason, your own analysis of "what will work," rather than the pattern and teaching of the Bible.

2. Definitions

Or consider your definitions, particularly your definition of "success."

- How would you define success in missions, evangelism, or church planting? Certainly we should all want to see people converted and rescued from hell. But is it finally just about numbers, more converts, more decisions, more new churches, and increasing baptisms?
- Or, while you pray and work for conversions, is your ultimate aim to see God glorified through faithful proclamation of his message?

This is a hard distinction for any lover of souls to parse out. But it's critical. You might have heard the truism, "What you measure is what you get." If we measure success in numbers, we'll get numbers. And whatever will get us numbers may end up as our rule and measure of faithfulness.

This is no small matter. J.I. Packer in his classic work *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* observes that "The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian church ever faces." [6] The New Testament writers were very concerned that churches would begin to reject Scripture and turn to a pragmatic focus on visible success, which would then prove disastrous to Christian obedience. The book of Hebrews seems to have been written in part to guard against pragmatism regarding avoiding persecution and to correct the tendency of some Christians to avoid making themselves distinct from the surrounding culture in pursuit of better results (see Hebrews 10:19-39).

Likewise, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in part to warn the Corinthians against reshaping the gospel in order to make Christianity more palatable and successful among wisdom- and rhetoric-obsessed Corinthian Greeks.

Later, Paul writes of this seductive danger in 2 Timothy 4:3 where he implies that a desire to gather a crowd by telling people what they want to hear will seduce many preachers in these last days.

In Matthew 15:11-13, Jesus' disciples urge Jesus to care more about how his message was being

received, saying it was offensive to the Pharisees. It goes without saying that Christ's response to this proposal was not very "pragmatic."

3. The Source of Our Methods

This brings us to our final consideration: the source for our methods.

- Where do you turn first and foremost to find your own missionary practice, evangelistic methods, and practices for the church? It's fine to look to the experience of other mortals and to glean from their observations and ideas, but where do you turn first? The latest popular book? Some colleague who is reporting results?
- When you do consult the Scripture, are you looking for direction or for permission? Not because you don't believe the Bible is God's Word, but maybe just because you don't think it has much to say about evangelism, missions and church planting. But wouldn't it be odd if the Bible didn't have anything to say about such things? Granted, the Bible doesn't say everything about everything. But aren't missions, planting churches, evangelism, and the gospel at the very center of what the Bible claims to be about? If it doesn't tell us what we need to know regarding its central aim, it's not really sufficient at all, is it?

These are just three simple ways to examine our own hearts. Once that's done, we should be willing to ask these questions about the culture of our own missionary organizations, books, partners, and even teams. What are they attracted to? How do they really define success? Where do they seem to look for the authority for their methods, good intentions notwithstanding?

The alternative is to stay uncritically on the treadmill of the search for the next "key" method to unlock the world to the gospel. We try something that at least seems biblically permissible (to those who bother to check), and then we look for quick results. No immediate, visible fruit? Must be a dud. On to the next "best practice." This may seem different than the simple, often slow, biblical focus on proclaiming the plain gospel, but that's okay...because we are doing this to win the lost. We even tell ourselves that the frenetic nature of our rotating search for the latest method proves our passion for evangelism. Surely the fact that we are motivated by a sense of evangelistic urgency will cover over any biblical missteps along the way. Surely God will be pleased with our evangelistic passion even if our method is largely of our own making. Or will he?

EVANGELICAL PRAGMATISM: AN OLD PATH TO LIBERALISM

It should never be forgotten that a passion for evangelism, and a seemingly genuine desire for a relevant Christianity that "worked," is what motivated Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of liberal Protestant theology. As best we can tell Schleiermacher did not labor away in some dark den of intrigue, intentionally plotting to ruin the faith of German Christians. No, his initial, 1799 publication was an evangelistic/apologetic book entitled, "On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers."

In the introduction to the 1926 edition of that work, Rudolf Otto writes, "The intention of the work is crystal clear. It aimed to recapture the position that religion had lost in the intellectual world where it was threatened with total oblivion."^[7]

But in Schleiermacher's desperate efforts to rescue the work of the church and make the Christian religion relevant to modern intellectuals, he devised a system that placed the locus of authority in "experience" or "piety" rather than in God's Word. He wanted an approach that would produce results among Enlightenment intellectuals. And it did work! His book was an instant sensation and many in his target people group responded visibly to his method. And the damage done to true biblical faith by this successful error has continued to cascade onward, wrecking souls and churches for more than two centuries now.

Would it not be ironic and deeply sad were we to discover years from now that many conservative

evangelicals have, in regard to missions, unwittingly gotten onto a similar downgrade? So absolutizing the goal of immediate, visible results that our locus of authority is shifting?

I am not saying that this kind of pragmatic thinking means that these brothers have lost the gospel, No. But I am saying that their pragmatic focus will almost certainly result in the eventual loss of the gospel among their progeny.

I call to witness...pretty much all of church history from Christ to today. A passion for evangelism, divorced from a passion for biblical faithfulness, almost always results in the loss of the gospel. The gospel is just too "prickly." It has too much to confront and irritate people in every culture. The Bible is too unpopular and has too much historical baggage. Maybe our pragmatism doesn't lead to heterodoxy right away, but if visible results are our goal, the orthodox gospel eventually has to give. As theologian David Wells has warned, "It is less that the truths of this orthodoxy are assailed than that they are seen to be irrelevant to the building of the church. They are, it is believed, an impediment to its success." [8]

But, even with all these musings, it is not my intention to write a fundamentally negative piece, though you might be forgiven for thinking I have thus far. I do think the times are dangerous—all the more so because well-intentioned Christians seem oblivious to their own peril. But I also think there is hope and—praise God—that hope is not rooted in my ability to figure out the next great evangelistic method. My hope is found in the great Shepherd who knows his sheep, who will send out a witness to all the earth, and whose true sheep will listen to him. Missions will succeed because it's the work of God!

Jesus will call his bride from every tribe, language, people and nation, and he will even have a useful place for us in this great plan. Even now I see plenty of hope, but it starts with a hard road.

A NEW CONVERSATION

If we want to rescue Western Christian missions from the corrosive effect of pragmatism, then we need to begin by talking about the elephant in our evangelical living room. Conversations about methods have their place, but at present that seems to be the only conversation we're having, at least on the popular level where folks like me operate. Far too many of our books, articles, training, and conversations seem to operate at the level of "what works" rather than "what is most faithful to Scripture."

I would suggest that we need to begin to have more conversations (verbally and in print) about the assumptions behind various methods and strategies. This will almost certainly seem rude. I suppose that's one of the reasons we aren't having them right now. To debate whether a method works is offensive enough, but to question the fundamental approach to Scripture that informs the method is often intolerable. But we need to get over that reaction. We need to ask the deeper, more uncomfortable questions politely, lovingly, and directly. It seems to me that we can no longer assume that formal affirmations regarding the Bible and the gospel translate into a God-centered, Bible-saturated approach to strategies. We need to be willing to ask questions like:

- What does this method imply about the state of mankind (dead in sins or needing education)?
- What does it assume about Scripture's teaching on the topic (irrelevant, insufficient, or controlling)?
- What does this organization assume about biblical teaching on the church (minimal or robust)?
- Where does this worker imply that power for conversion lies (psychological / anthropological method or God's Word)?
- What view of the Bible's authority is implied (culturally located or universal and self-validating)?

These are just a few examples of the kinds of questions we should be asking about missions movements, methods, and organizations. I trust a discerning reader could think of many more. We need more careful, biblical critiques and more books and articles extolling faithful methods deduced from the pages of Scripture. We need to be thinking about ways to evaluate our workers' performance more on their biblical faithfulness and much less on reported numbers of immediate, visible responses. We need to be more

diligent in encouraging thoughtful, faithful workers even if fruit is slow in coming to their ministry. Ultimately, we need to openly reexamine our actual commitment to the authority and sufficiency of the word of God.

This is a difficult analysis for me to articulate. I would be delighted if I were proved wrong in my assessment. My confidence comes not in the least because so many others have seen these trends in evangelicalism as a whole. But I also feel the weight of seeing the problems and yet knowing that I am so ill-equipped to address them.

I'd like to end with a plea to any qualified missionaries and theologians (of which I'm neither) who agree with my concerns to step more forcefully into this discussion. It often feels to me that in large part the missions journals, books, and resources have been abandoned to the pragmatists. Granted, new ideas sell, and it may be harder to write about exciting methods that essentially say, "Go carefully read your Bible."

But this conversation matters because God cares about both the "what" and the "how" of missions. So should we—passionately, urgently, faithfully, biblically. To quote J.H. Bavinck, "Answers can be given solely on the basis of Scripture. For the work of missions is the work of God; it is not lawful for us to improvise." [9]

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1. For an excellent consideration of many of these specific contemporary conflicts in missiology, see David Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006). Despite a slightly odd discussion in the first chapter that conflates Hyper-Calvinism and biblical Calvinism, overall the book gives a balanced and admirably biblical treatment of specific issues in missions and is well worth reading. And, to his credit and distinction, Dr. Hesselgrave doesn't hide behind academic neutrality but actually has the courage to come right out and tell us which side of most issues he thinks is most biblically faithful. Bravo!
2. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 73.
3. *Ibid*, 127.
4. From Judith Silver, "Movie Day at the Supreme Court or "I Know It When I See It": A History of the Definition of Obscenity." Findlaw.com Online Legal Library, 2009.
5. J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), xv and 80.
6. J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 42.
7. From Rudolf Otto's introduction to Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (Harper Collins, 1958), ix.
8. David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 14.
9. Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 5.

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Putting Contextualization in its Place

By a missions strategist for Central Asia

Contextualization is one of the hottest topics in missions today. Simply put, contextualization is the word we use for the process of making the gospel and the church as much at home as possible in a given cultural context.

American Christians have a tendency to think of contextualization as something missionaries and overseas Christians do "over there," and then they worry about how far non-Western churches go in their contextualization efforts. However, every Christian alive today is actively involved in contextualization.

EVERYONE CONTEXTUALIZES

Every American Christian worships in a contextualized church. As much as we like to think of our churches as "New Testament churches," there actually are no New Testament churches in existence today. Our cultural context is dramatically different from the world of the New Testament, and as a result, any modern church would look bizarre and alien to a first-century Christian.

This is true at every level. The first century church met in places like the Temple porch in Jerusalem, the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus, or most often in private homes. There were no church buildings during the New Testament period. Our buildings, with their modern construction materials, their style and appearance, and their electronic gadgetry, would look like they had come down from outer space if they were plopped into a first century setting.

Our seating arrangements, with people sitting on pews or chairs rather than on the floor, and with unrelated men and women sitting side by side, would seem strange (and perhaps a bit scandalous) to a first century Palestinian believer.

The programs that make up so much of modern church life – Sunday School, Youth Group, RAs and GAs, Awanas – all came into being in recent centuries, and were unknown to the early church.

The music we sing is based on a totally different tonality from that of the ancient Mediterranean world, and it uses very different instruments. (The piano was not invented until the modern era, and the organ was originally a Roman circus instrument, considered unfit for Christian worship.) Our music would have sounded strange and unpleasant to them, and vice versa. (It should be noted that all Christian music, at some point, has been "contemporary Christian music," and that even the most traditional songs today were probably regarded as risqué by somebody when they first came out!)

The language we speak did not even exist in biblical times. English as we know it developed during the Middle Ages, centuries after the New Testament was completed. First century Christians worshiped in Aramaic, Koine Greek, or Latin. And the social customs and cultural practices of the first century church were much closer to the modern culture of the Middle East or Central Asia than to contemporary North America.

Our culture is radically different from the culture of the New Testament, and, as a result, our churches are radically different from New Testament churches. In countless ways, every believer alive today, whether in North America or South Asia, contextualizes the gospel and the church. The question is not whether we're going to contextualize. The question facing every believer and every church is whether we will contextualize well. Anyone who fails to realize that they are doing it, and who fails to think it through carefully and biblically, simply guarantees that they will contextualize poorly. Syncretism can happen as easily in Indiana or Iowa as it can in Indonesia.

DEFINING DEGREES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Those working in the Muslim world have taken a variety of approaches to contextualization. These approaches are typically classified along a spectrum designated C1 to C5 (or sometimes C6). C1 is the label given to those who simply reproduce their own (foreign) culture on the mission field. If a foreign worker were to reproduce First Baptist Church of Anywhere, USA somewhere overseas, complete with architecture, hymnal, order of service, style of worship and teaching, and church programs, this would be an example of C1 contextualization. At the other end of the spectrum, C5 contextualization aims at a phenomenon sometimes referred to as an "insider movement." In this approach, new believers in Jesus are encouraged to maintain a Muslim community identity and to continue Islamic practices. Often, such movements affirm that Islam, its prophet and its book are of divine origin, but simply need to be completed in Jesus. C2, C3 and C4 represent intermediate stages between these two extremes.

This classification system is widely used, and it provides a useful common language for the conversation about contextualization. However, there is a problem inherent in this approach. This system implies that we Westerners are the standard. It measures the distance from us, as though the Western cultural expression of Christianity is what God actually intended, and others are to be evaluated by how much they are like us or different from us.

We have to admit that every Christian everywhere instinctively tends to think this way. What we have always done feels like the "right" way to do things, and we have a hard time not reading our own experience into the Bible. However, given the fact that all of us practice contextualization, we need to remind ourselves constantly that Scripture, not our experience, is the standard by which all things are to be evaluated. Scripture is inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient. Where Scripture gives a command, or a prohibition, or a binding model, the issue is settled. When Scripture sets a boundary, we may not cross it.

However, within those boundaries, there is nothing particularly sacred about our cultural ways of doing things. Throughout the ages and across the globe, there have been other cultural expressions of Christianity that are just as faithful to Scripture as our own. Indeed, in the case of the Muslim world, their culture is actually closer to the culture of the New Testament than is ours, so their churches may actually look more like New Testament churches than ours do. At the same time, every culture, including our own, has its besetting sins. In every setting, there are points where cultural orthodoxy contradicts the Word of God, resulting in cultural pressure toward compromise and syncretism. The key is to let the Bible be our judge, and for all of us to allow the global body of Christ to speak the Word of God into our particular blind spots.

CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE BIBLE

What does the Bible have to say, then, about contextualization? Are there grounds for it in Scripture?

In fact, the process of contextualization begins in the New Testament itself. There are several examples, and these examples both establish the legitimacy of contextualization and teach us something of how to go about it ourselves.

The Name of God

One of the most pervasive examples of contextualization in the New Testament is also one of the most subtle. It is the use of the Greek word *theos* to refer to God. *Theos* in origin was a thoroughly pagan word, used to refer to the capricious and immoral deities of the Greek pantheon. In content and conception, it was light years away from the biblical understanding of God.

However, when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in the centuries before Christ, *theos* was the word chosen to translate the Hebrew *Elohim*, and this choice was ratified (as it were) by the Holy Spirit when he inspired the writers of the New Testament to continue to use this word to refer to the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than transliterate a Hebrew word into Greek, or invent a different term altogether, the New Testament took the pagan word that was closest in meaning and infused new content into it.

Incidentally, this precedent should be a source of relief for all English-speaking Christians. Early missionaries to northern Europe took the Germanic word "god," which originally referred to the Nordic pantheon of deities like Wotan, Thor and Freya (whose names remain in the words Wednesday, Thursday and Friday), and infused that word with new, biblical content.

The example of the New Testament tells us that we can use a pagan word without necessarily falling into pagan idolatry ourselves.

The Apostle Paul

The apostle Paul gave an instructive example of contextualization in his sermon on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-30). First, Paul used a pagan altar to an unknown god as a bridge to talking about the true God. We already know from Acts 17:16 that Paul's spirit was provoked by the idolatry he saw in Athens. He certainly was not condoning a pagan altar, nor was he implying that the Athenians had been worshipping the true God without actually knowing it through that altar. Still, he felt free to use something in their (utterly wrong) religious system as a bridge to bring them along to accurate thoughts about the real God.

Second, he follows the reference to the altar by two different quotations from pagan poets: one probably from Epimenides of Crete, and the other from Aratus. Both of these quotations make reference to Deity, but the deity they had in mind was a mix of pagan Greek idolatry and philosophical Greek speculation. Paul felt free to take these quotations and connect them to biblical truth about the biblical God, even though the poets who wrote these words had a very different god in mind.

In similar fashion, when Paul wrote his letter to Titus, he quoted Epimenides of Crete again, calling him "a prophet of their own" (Titus 1:12). This time he is drawing a warning about Cretan cultural depravity from the writings of someone whom even a pagan Cretan would recognize as knowing what he was talking about. By calling Epimenides "a prophet of their own," Paul is not saying that he thinks that Epimenides was actually a prophet of the living God, nor that he thinks that Epimenides' words were given by inspiration from God. In fact, this is quite an insult. Greek culture in biblical times was not exactly noted for its moral purity. If even one of their own pagan writers, whom they regarded as a prophet, thought they were always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons, they must have been pretty bad! The point is that Paul knows pagan Greek culture, and he feels free to use it to his advantage to point people toward biblical truth.

PAUL'S PRINCIPLES FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY

Perhaps the most widely-quoted passage of Scripture that teaches about contextualization is 1 Corinthians 9:1-23:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife,¹ as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

8 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. 16 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

This text is worth close examination. In interpreting this passage, it is important to remember that Paul was a Hellenistic Jew working in a cross-cultural setting in Corinth. In fact, Paul in many ways is what we today would call a "Third Culture Kid." He grew up in the Greek culture of Hellenistic Tarsus in modern-day Turkey, but he grew up there as a Jew. He trained in Jerusalem as a rabbi and a Pharisee. He had a foot in both worlds. Corinth itself was a grossly immoral and idolatrous city. The church there faced issues that the church in Palestine would never even imagine.

The specific context of this passage is Paul's extended discussion of whether or not Christians should eat meat sacrificed to idols. This discussion could only arise in a Gentile setting like Corinth. The kosher laws of rabbinic Judaism would have made this entire issue impossible, so Paul was forced to deal with something for which his theological education gave him no training at all. He does so pastorally, in the context of what it really means to love our brothers and sisters, recognizing that some brothers and sisters have stronger consciences than others. In the process, he broadened the discussion to address how our freedom in Christ intersects the work of the gospel in a cross-cultural setting.

The key to understanding this passage is found in verse 12: "We endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." Paul's passion was the advance of the gospel, and he didn't want anything unnecessary to hinder that advance. This did not mean that he would compromise any biblical truth or biblical command in the process. Verses later on in the chapter make that clear. However, he was willing to endure any inconvenience or personal hardship that might enable the gospel to spread more effectively.

He expanded on that thought with some key principles for cross-cultural ministry.

1. Give Up Your Rights

First, Paul voluntarily chose not to make use of legitimate rights. He had a right to eat meat, to take along a believing wife, and to receive monetary support. He would not be sinning by doing any of those things. Indeed, such things would be considered normal and even expected, and other apostles apparently did them. Nevertheless, Paul gave up those rights in order not to put any obstacle in the way of the gospel.

We Americans struggle with this. We are raised to demand our rights. As a free American, I have a "right" to do a lot of things that would be offensive in my new cultural context: wear my shoes indoors, eat or touch someone with my left hand, put up a fence around my own yard without my local community leader's permission, or even leave a Central Asian birthday party before the rice is served! I have the "right" to dress how I want, eat whatever I want, and decorate my house how I want. However, at the same time, I do not have a biblical command to do any of these things.

The issue in exercising these rights is not obedience to God, but my own comfort and convenience. If anything that I do makes it harder for Muslims to hear the gospel from me, other than those things that Scripture commands me to do, I need to give them up voluntarily.

2. Become a Servant of Non-Believers

Second, Paul adopted a posture of servanthood toward non-believers. In verse 19, he wrote: "Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." Paul approached non-Christians with the mindset of a servant. It is clear that he is not talking here about serving Christians, because he is serving those who need to be won. So Paul not only chose not to make use of his rights, he went farther and chose to make himself the servant of those whom he is trying to reach with the gospel.

This idea also rubs our flesh the wrong way, especially when we are in the throes of culture shock. We want to set people straight, not serve them! Yet Jesus himself came not to be served, but to serve. He served people who were wrong, who were in rebellion against him, and who would eventually kill him. Paul understood the mind of his master well at this point.

The posture of servanthood reflects the character of Christ, shatters stereotypes of the ugly American, and causes barriers to drop. Servanthood is an essential characteristic of effective cross-cultural ministry, and it paradoxically defines how we are to make use of our freedom in Christ.

3. Adapt to Others' Lifestyle as Much as Possible Without Sinning

Third, Paul chose to identify with the people he was trying to reach, and to adapt to their lifestyle as much as he could without compromising the law of Christ (see verses 19-23).

Paul was a Jew. The Jews really were God's chosen people. If any culture had a right to consider itself intrinsically more godly than all others, it was Jewish culture. Paul certainly had a "right" to maintain his Jewish cultural heritage. At the same time, Paul had been set free from the burden of the law. He was certainly free from the rabbinic hedge around the law. He had a "right" to ignore any of the endless extra-biblical rules and regulations of Pharisaic Judaism. Yet, with Jews he acted like a Jew. With Gentiles he acted like a Gentile. With the weak – people with lots of scruples and hang-ups – he lived within their scruples.

He became all things to all people that by all means he might save some. He identified with the people he was trying to reach. He adapted his lifestyle to theirs in anything that might block them from hearing the gospel. He valued the gospel more than his own rights, more than his own comfort, more than his own culture. If there was any offense in the gospel, he wanted it to be the offense of the cross, and not the offense of foreignness.

4. Stay Within the Bounds of Scripture

Fourth, however, Paul insisted on staying within the bounds of Scripture. In the middle of his statement on identification and adaptation, he inserts an all-important parenthesis: "not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ."

Although free from the requirement of keeping the ceremonial law, and free from the penalty of failing to keep the law of God perfectly, and certainly free from the burdensome rabbinic superstructure of rules built around the law, he still very much regarded himself as under the authority of God expressed in his word. Scripture, in its theology, worldview, commands and principles, set the boundaries for his adaptation to the people he was trying to reach.

The same must apply to us. Every human culture reflects common grace, but every culture also reflects the fall. We must not adapt to that which contradicts Scripture.

Paul's understanding of this principle becomes clear when the entirety of his writings are examined. He refused to accommodate to the "wisdom" of the popular Hellenistic worldview around him, because he realized that it negated the gospel at its very heart, however sophisticated it might have sounded. Indeed, Paul never condoned diversity or accommodation in matters of doctrine. He did not accommodate the seedy practices of contemporary itinerate teachers. He most certainly did not accommodate the "acceptable" immorality of Corinthian society. Human culture and human tradition are negotiable. God's Word is not, ever.

Contextualization, then, is both unavoidable and good. The gospel can, and should, transform people in every culture. And we must identify with those we are trying to reach and adapt to their culture, no matter what discomfort it causes us. However, the gospel also challenges and condemns every culture at some points (including our own). Where the Bible draws a line, we must draw a line.

The point of contextualization is not comfort, but clarity. The gospel will never be completely comfortable in any fallen society or to any sinful human being. Our goal is to make sure that we do not put any obstacles in the way of the gospel, and that the only stumbling block is the stumbling block of the cross itself.

CASE STUDY: GUIDELINES FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD

How do we apply these principles to the work of the gospel in the Muslim world? Based on years of wrestling with the task under the authority of the Word of God, here are guidelines for our work in the Muslim world, founded on these biblical principles. The guidelines are grouped under three headings: the messenger of the good news, the message of the good news, and the church.

The Messenger of the Good News (with primary focus on us, the foreign workers)

- We must openly identify ourselves as followers of Jesus. Hiding our identity is out of bounds. Jesus made it clear that we must not deny him before men. Security concerns are real, and we need to take them seriously. However, we must never let security concerns drive us into hiding our identity as disciples of Christ. To be known as his is worth getting kicked out a country, and even dying.
- We should work hard to become part of the community we are trying to reach. We need to build relationships and put down roots among the unbelievers of our focus people group. We must beware of our team becoming our primary focus and primary community. Team is a means to an end, but it must never become an end in itself. In an age of email, SMS, and Skype, we also need to beware of excessive communication with the U.S. It is simply too easy to move overseas and

yet never bond with the people we are trying to reach, due to the possibility and comfort of maintaining our primary community with English-speaking loved ones. We must consciously invest in relationships in the community we are trying to reach, and that community needs to become our primary community, as much as possible.

- We should be lifelong learners of language and culture. Those who know the language best are those who want to keep on learning. Beware of getting stuck at a survival language level, and beware also of getting stuck in initial, superficial impressions about the culture. We communicate most effectively when we communicate in their heart language, and when we understand what they think and how they hear what we say. /ul>
- We should voluntarily give up freedoms that erect barriers to the gospel.
- We should choose our housing and decorate our homes in ways that are comfortable to those we are trying to reach, even if it is less comfortable for us.
- We should dress in ways that show respect for our host culture. We need to be appropriately modest, even if the weather makes us uncomfortable in the process. At the same time, we should be attentive to changes in the culture. Our aim is to be unremarkable in our attire.
- We should act in ways that show respect for our host culture. Find out what is and is not appropriate for anyone in that setting. Find out what is and is not appropriate for someone your age, gender, occupation, and station in life. Dig deep, and do not be content with superficial answers or with exceptions made for you as a foreigner. Things that might never occur to you as significant can have great significance in another culture. Watch closely, listen carefully, ask lots of questions, and ask lots of different people.
- We can, and should, distance ourselves from forms of cultural Christianity that dishonor God or that cause unnecessary stumbling blocks to our host culture. Christianity is often seen as a cultural or ethnic thing, and it is associated with colonial conquest and exploitation, or with the worship of images and drinking alcohol, or with the immoral behavior seen in movies and TV programs from the "Christian" west. It is perfectly appropriate that we *not* identify ourselves with that image! Instead, we should explain our identity in ways that point to Jesus and not to the unfortunate legacy of cultural Christianity.
- In this context, the word "Christian" can be particularly problematic. To much of the Muslim world, America, Europe, and Russia are "Christian" societies, and whatever is true for those countries is true of Christianity. Thus, when a Central Asian Muslim asks me if I am a Christian, what they mean by "Christian" is an alcohol-drinking, pornography-watching, sexually promiscuous, picture-worshipping Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic person who is part of the culture that has attempted to conquer and oppress them for centuries. Therefore, I never simply say yes. However, since Christian is a biblical word, neither do I say no. I define who I am in biblical terms apart from their historical experience.
- We should serve our host community. We should look for ways to be a blessing, on their terms and according to their understanding of their needs.

At the same time,

- We must never give the impression that we have converted to Islam.
- We should not deny the label Christian – we may simply need to redefine it in a biblical way.
- We should not contextualize ourselves more than the host culture requires. We need to understand where a culture is going as well as where it is, and make sure that we don't adapt ourselves to the past instead of the present.
- We must not adopt any local cultural practice or attitude that violates Scripture. In this context, we need to especially be careful about our attitudes. We can unconsciously pick up ungodly attitudes from our host culture (toward women, for example, or toward other ethnic groups).

The Message of the Good News

- We can use their book as a bridge to the gospel, as long as we do it in a way that does not imply divine inspiration or equality with the Bible.
- We can choose our terminology carefully, and delay the use of red-flag terms like "Son of God" in favor of other equally-biblical terms until we have reached the point where we can explain those red-flag terms biblically.
- We can and should utilize the full scope of biblical narrative to establish a worldview in which the gospel is intelligible. The Bible doesn't jump straight from the Fall of Man in Genesis 3 to the birth of Jesus in Matthew 1. God took centuries to establish who he is, what he requires, what humanity is like, and what he intended to do about it, before he brought Jesus onto the scene. The worldview of the Old Testament is essential to understanding the biblical gospel. Most Muslims who come to Christ do so after exposure to a broad scope of biblical revelation over a period of time. Take the long view. In each conversation, ask yourself, "What Bible/gospel content can I add to their understanding today?" In this context, and in the oral cultures that make up so much of the Muslim world, chronological Bible storying is a wonderful tool!
- We can and should utilize a variety of communication genres and media to communicate the message of the gospel. Some cultures revel in poetry, songs or proverbs, all of which are found in Scripture. Explore the internet, audio, TV, video, and print media. Find out what genres they use to communicate worldview truth. Find out what media they use and respond to the most. Use any and all genres and media that are appropriate.
- We can use whatever name for God is most appropriate in any given language, including Allah. Keeping in mind that our goal is always to clarify rather than confuse distinctions, we must import biblical content and correct past understandings with any word we use for God.
- We can utilize the Arabic forms of other names and terms in the Bible, rather than forms from other foreign languages like English or French or Russian or Dutch.
- We should stress that we are calling people to a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and not to ethnic treason and the abandonment of their cultural identity.
- We do not need to attack Islam directly.

At the same time,

- We must never downplay the central doctrines of the gospel – particularly those that contradict Islam or that cause offence to Muslims. Many examples could be given here, but in a Muslim context we need to take special care that we never deemphasize the deity of Christ, the reality of his death and resurrection, the necessity of his substitutionary sacrifice, salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, the integrity, inerrancy, and finality of the Bible, and the radical nature of conversion, which is so extreme that it can only be described in terms of death and new life.
- We must never downplay the necessity of repentance.
- We must never deny or excise any part of Scripture or any biblical terminology, including the term "Son of God."
- We must never construct a chronological Bible story set and call it an oral Bible. Chronological Bible story sets are wonderful tools for evangelism and discipleship, but only the full text of the Bible is the Bible, and an oral Bible must be the actual words of the Bible presented in audio rather than print format.
- We must never remove, substitute, or downplay the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- We must never give the impression that we believe that Islam, Muhammad, or the Quran are of divine origin.

The Church

- Muslim background believers in Jesus (MBBs) should be encouraged to remain in their community as much as possible.

- MBBs should be encouraged to maintain their ethnic and cultural identity as much as they can without compromising their obedience to Scripture.
- MBB churches should be encouraged to be indigenous in their expressions of their faith and worship, without compromising Scripture. This is particularly true in matters of style. The church should look, sound, and feel local, not foreign.
- New believers and churches should be pointed to the Bible, and not to the foreign expert, to answer their questions about Christian belief and Christian living.
- New churches should be encouraged to apply Scripture to the issues they face in their cultural setting, and to express their faith in ways that engage their culture directly. Their teaching and their confessions of faith should respond to the specific issues they face in their culture.
- New churches can utilize local cultural practices that are consistent with Scripture.
- New churches should be led by local believers and not by foreigners, as much as possible.
- New churches should be financed locally (in so far as they need financing at all), and not by foreign money.
- New churches should take full responsibility for the Great Commission from the start.
- A church can meet anywhere. Neither the presence nor the absence of a building belongs to the biblical essence of church.

At the same time, insofar as it lies with us,

- MBB churches must have a clear identity as belonging to Jesus.
- MBB churches should not present themselves as being still essentially Muslim.
- MBB churches should not teach or believe that Islam, its prophet, or its book are of divine origin.
- MBB church teaching, and church confessions of faith, should maintain as central that which is central in the teaching of the Bible. It is true that each culture and each generation raises different issues which the people of God must address from the Word of God. However, there are also core doctrines in the Bible which are central to the faith in every age and every place.
- MBB churches should seek to embody all of the elements of a biblical church.
- MBB churches need to be careful about the theological and spiritual baggage that local cultural and religious practices may carry.
- MBB churches need to recognize their connection with the global Body of Christ.

The author of this article is a missions strategist for Central Asia.

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Lying, Hostile Nations and the Great Commission

By a missions strategist for Central Asia

Can missionaries traveling to a country that's hostile to Christianity and the Great Commission lie about their reasons for coming? Can they point to a secondary purpose for coming?

Scripture consistently presents God as a global God with global purposes. But the missions task is far from finished. There are still thousands of people groups with no witness to the gospel whatsoever, and thousands more that have just barely been touched with the good news of Jesus. Particularly in Northern and Western Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, the magnitude of lostness is staggering. Over half of the world's population lives in these areas, but village after village, town after town, district after district, language after language, people after people have never heard the biblical gospel. In this window stretching from the Atlantic coast of North Africa to the Pacific coast of Asia, the church has largely failed to fulfill the command of Jesus in the Great Commission.

The difficulty, of course, is that these parts of the world that are least evangelized are also the areas that are most hostile to Christian witness. There is strong religious opposition to Christian missionary activity in these countries. This area is home to Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and these religions are deeply entrenched in the cultures of these nations. An attack on the religion is perceived as an attack on the people group, and leaving the religion is regarded as ethnic treason. There is also usually some level of political opposition to Christian missions.

The vast majority of countries in this part of the world either do not grant missionary visas, or else restrict missionary activity so as to preclude any attempt to convert members of the majority religion. In effect, human governments and human societies have stated their intent to veto the Great Commission.

HOW TO RESPOND TO HOSTILITY

How should the church respond to this opposition and hostility? Throughout much of the modern missionary era, evangelical churches in the West have allowed pagan governments to dictate the limits of their obedience to God. If the government of a particular country wouldn't grant missionary visas, that country was left unevangelized.

Such an abdication of responsibility, however, is nothing less than disobedience to Jesus. He did not say, "Go and make disciples of every nation that gives you a missionary visa." The church has an obligation to God to make disciples of all of the people groups in the world, regardless of whether missionary activity is welcome in a given country or not.

Non-residential Means

There are, obviously, non-residential means of getting the gospel into closed areas. Short-wave radio programming and satellite television can jump over borders. Internet evangelism is becoming prominent. Bibles and literature can be produced elsewhere and then brought into the country by various means. Churches can and should reach out to expatriates from these countries who live among them.

However, there are serious limits to these approaches. Radio, TV, and the internet can be blocked. Even if they get through, few people know about the programs or ever watch them. Bibles can be intercepted at the border and confiscated. If these are the only means used to get the gospel to unreached people, the vast majority will remain completely unreached.

Personal Witness

That leaves the most basic of all missionary approaches: personal witness. From the day of Pentecost until today, the gospel most often penetrates new ground through the lips and lives of believers who take up residence among those who have not yet heard, bringing the Word of God with them. The fact that they cannot come as missionaries simply means that they need to come as something else.

Different countries have different visa categories and residence requirements. There are legitimate ways for Christian believers to live in countries that do not allow missionaries *per se*, doing jobs that the country permits. Believers with professional skills or business experience are particularly suited for this type of work. They can take the gospel, as they are doing their job or running their business, into places where missionaries as missionaries are not allowed.

IS THIS HONEST?

Is this honest? Some Western Evangelicals find this approach to the Great Commission troubling. They feel that Christian workers who enter a restricted country by doing a secular job are somehow lying if their basic motivation for going is to share the gospel. Now if a Christian worker never actually does what the visa application said he or she would do, then the charge of dishonesty would be accurate. There is no excuse for lying. The end does not justify the means, and obedience to the Great Commission can never make it right to lie.

However, when workers show integrity by doing what they told their host government they would do, there is no dishonesty involved. In order to be considered "honest," we are not generally required to explain everything we could possibly say about our intentions every time we speak. Besides, every Christian should intend to share the gospel with unbelievers everywhere they go and in everything they do. The advance of God's kingdom should be the primary motivation behind every job or activity undertaken by any believer. Living for God's glory involves honestly doing what we say we are going to do. It also involves sharing the gospel, whatever our job title might be.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

The Old Testament offers an example of God himself commanding one of his people to go to a place and present a secondary purpose as his reason for coming in lieu of explaining the primary purpose. In 1 Samuel 16:1-5, the prophet Samuel went to anoint David as king, but he knew that Saul would be furious if he found out, and quite possibly lethally so. So God himself told Samuel to take a heifer with him to Bethlehem to offer there as a sacrifice in order to allay Saul's suspicions (1 Sam. 16:2). Samuel's primary reason for going to Bethlehem was not to offer that sacrifice—it was to anoint David king. Yet Samuel was not lying when he said that he had come to offer the sacrifice, and he was not lying when he did not explain that his real reason for coming was to anoint David.

Under God's explicit direction, Samuel honestly did one thing, which he talked about, in order to protect his ability to do something else, something commanded by God, which he did not talk about. This was not deception, but godly prudence.

BALANCING ETHICAL ISSUES

Taking the gospel to other countries forces us to balance a number of ethical issues. We can never lie. We must honestly do what we say we are coming to do. We can also never deny that we are followers of Jesus (Matt. 10:32-33). Believers should be bold about their identity in Christ wherever they are. Even in a restricted environment, believers cannot allow security concerns to silence them from sharing the gospel. There is no point in simply being there!

However, we can honestly do one thing, and talk openly about it, in order to protect our ability to do something else, which we do discreetly. We can and must fill secular roles in restricted countries in order to obey the Great Commission.

The author of this article is a missions strategist for Central Asia.

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Missions Partnerships from the Home Church's Perspective

By Andy Johnson

This is not a generation that likes institutional, impersonal connections. We like to be personally engaged, community-oriented, and connected.

Missions is no exception. Mission leaders today talk about the desire among churches for more direct, personal partnership with international gospel workers.

On the whole, I think such desires are very good. However, like anything in a fallen world, these partnerships can be done well or done poorly, resulting in fruit or frustration, respectively.

So I want to offer six principles for partnering with overseas workers for the purpose of global evangelism. But before we get there let me clarify what these principles are and what they are not. These are not things directly commanded by Scripture. Yet neither are they mere observations or best practices identified by looking at what makes partnerships work. Instead, these are examples of how one local church, Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, has tried to act in view of more general biblical priorities. Those general priorities include the importance of humility (1 Pet. 5:5; Phil. 2:1-11), the creating and shaping of God's people by his Word (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 4:1-3), the beauty of cooperation among churches in gospel work (3 John), and the gospel "rightness" of committed love for specific missionaries (Phil. 4:10-20). It's my hope that reflecting on our specific attempts to embody these broad priorities will help other churches to more carefully consider how they can engage humbly with global gospel work.

1. SERVANT-MINDED

Every missions partnership begins with the motivations that you bring to the table. Are you seeking to serve workers overseas or to be served by them?

God's redeemed people should always be marked by humility. It would be strange to want to labor in another culture to bring glory to Christ but to approach it with selfishness or pride. We should strive for humility in our international partnerships because we desperately need grace; in this as in all things, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

A servant-minded posture is especially important for churches who feel they have enjoyed a measure of "success"—read "rapid numerical growth"—in their ministry here in America. It's easy for even a good sense of thankfulness and confidence to translate into a prideful assumption that you know what's best in another culture. Too many times I've observed absurd conversations where a U.S. church leader who knows almost nothing of the language or customs of a culture try to "take charge" to "help" an overseas worker "do evangelism better" and to "grow the church." This advice has often been based on pragmatic, consumer-driven ideas, which are unbiblical and man-centered in any culture. But sometimes this advice would have been genuinely wise and biblical, if only the leader would not have pushed too quickly and carelessly.

It's better for your church to find people on the field whose judgment and theology you can trust and then submit to them. When making partnerships, especially those focused on church planting, you should not assume theological agreement but honestly discuss issues like evangelism, ecclesiology, soteriology, and more...*before* entering into a partnership. The fact that you both call yourself "evangelical" or belong to the same denomination may not be enough.

What does a humble, servant-minded partnership look like in practice? Well, it's a desire to do "the ministry of whatever." Being willing to do *whatever* the field workers or missions leaders deem helpful is

the right place to begin. It means saying, "What can we do to serve and partner with you? Nothing is too big and nothing is too small."

This willingness to start small and be faithful in an incrementally deepening partnership is hugely important for building trust. Many overseas workers have spent years learning a language and engaging a culture, only to have careless short-term teams from the United States come and blow up years of work. Their fear is legitimate.

As a church demonstrates a willingness to help foreign workers in even small, behind-the-scenes ways, like caring for children while the parents attend training meetings, they earn the workers' trust as well as the opportunity to gently propose biblically-based change.

2. PASTOR-LED

Second is the issue of pastoral leadership. Leadership begins not with the pastor's own passion for missions—which is great but insufficient—it begins with him regularly preaching through the whole corpus of Scripture, opening up the implications of the gospel Sunday after Sunday. God is a missionary God. He has a passion for the nations, and Scripture is full of that passion. From the books of Moses, through the histories, to the Prophets, and on throughout the gospels and epistles, God's passion to call worshipers from all languages, tribes, people, and nations is foundational. Check out Genesis 12:2-3, Isaiah 19:19-25, or Revelation 7:9-10 for just a taste.

Congregations whose shepherds regularly preach this rich biblical message will begin to have their worldview shaped by it. They will learn that the gospel is about more than merely growing "their" church. It's about more than their own culture or country. The gospel is for all people everywhere. And understanding both the urgency of the task—"How will they hear unless someone is sent?"—as well as the greatness and worthiness of God will fuel a pervasive passion that touches a whole congregation. Preaching like this, in fact, is the most foundational thing a pastor can do to lead his congregation in missions.

But a pastor must not only preach, he must pray regularly from the pulpit for the work of the gospel overseas. This instructs the hearts of his people, as they hear that God's kingdom is about more than just "our group." It exposes their minds to God's vast, global plan. Such prayer reminds them each Sunday that Jesus is Lord of the people of Tobago and Uzbekistan and Bhutan and of their home town.

John Stott, noted British pastor, once visited a small church in a British town. Upon hearing the provincial content of their pastoral prayer he summed them up, saying "I came away saddened, sensing that this church worshipped a little village god of their own devising. There was no recognition of the needs of the world, and no attempt to embrace the world in prayer." Prayers from the pulpit that embrace the global cause of Christ are one of the best antidotes to such God-belittling provincialism. They can wonderfully expand the hearts of a congregation.

Finally, a pastor who faithfully shapes his congregation's passions by the Word can then show them how to direct their passions by going out himself. And he should not go alone but take key leaders with him. When a pastor demonstrates the importance of cross-cultural gospel work by giving his own time to it, the impact on the congregation can be huge.

Our own congregation's current engagement with partnerships in Central Asia can, in part, be traced to a trip in 2000 when our senior pastor traveled to speak at a meeting of workers in Turkey. This pastoral example was hugely helpful in jumpstarting a partnership that has now grown to be the key missions engagement for our congregation.

3. RELATIONSHIP-BASED

Which brings us to our next point: the value of personal relationships in growing the missions engagement of a local church. So often we're tempted to think that we need to have our fingers in many places around the world in order to be faithful to the Great Commission. But keeping up with many contacts in many places often results in shallow and ineffectual relationships.

In most cases, I think churches would do better to pick a few workers and go deep in their relationship with their work. This kind of focus requires a humble admission that, while God is infinite, you and your congregation are not. And it requires the loving discipline to resist overextending your congregation into shallow, feel-good engagements every time you hear about some new opportunity. But the results for the kingdom can be striking.

When evaluating whom to invest in, three principles have proven helpful to our church. We try to partner with workers who are:

1. **Excellent in their work.** We want to partner with workers who seem to be doing work well and who are biblically thoughtful about how they do it. We want to know workers well enough to know that what they are doing is actually effective in making the gospel clear in their culture. Getting this level of information almost always requires spending time with them on the field among the people they are trying to reach.

2. **Strategic in their focus.** We want to partner with workers laboring in places where there is little gospel light. It's good for Christians to tell the gospel in any place, but time and money are limited. Sometimes we must choose between two equally good workers where one is in a Muslim nation with few Christians and the other is in a nation with hundreds of thousands of indigenous believers. In such a case we will almost always support the worker in the most unevangelized place.

3. **Widely known by the congregation.** We want to partner with workers who are known not just to the church leadership but who are known (or willing to do the work to become known) throughout the whole congregation. Naturally this means prioritizing workers that God may raise up from our own membership. If a member wants to go and you are not willing to partner with him or her long term, then you should at least consider whether you are right to send the person overseas at all. If more churches took their responsibility to send more seriously a great deal of heartache for workers and sending agencies might be avoided.

Also, if you are partnering with workers from outside your congregation, you should think about their level of relationship with your congregation at the outset. This may mean making a trip to visit them on the field before you officially partner with them. Ideally they could spend extended time living among your members. I'm not talking about a long weekend; I'm talking about months. Inviting a worker to spend their entire stateside assignment with your congregation and being willing to provide them free housing is a great way to do this.

In our church we generally won't officially partner with a worker until we have been able to spend extended time with them, forming relationships between them and the congregation. It may slow things down initially, but the long-term fruit in everyone's lives seems worth it.

4. COMMITMENT-CENTERED

Your church should also be willing to seriously commit to the workers with whom you partner. Workers tell all too often about churches who mean well but turn out to be fair-weather partners, or who lose interest in a partnership when situations on the field limit their involvement in short-term trips or projects. Instead, consider committing to one team of workers to serve them in any way they find helpful. Be willing to do trips if they find that helpful. And be willing not to come if the timing isn't right.

Being commitment-centered also means working with a long attention-span, for the long-haul. In good

years and bad. When your partnership is encouraging or just plain hard.

Finally, this commitment should show itself in a desire to celebrate thoughtful biblical faithfulness, even if fruit is slow in coming. By doing this you can help the workers with whom you partner to resist the seductive call of immediate, visible fruit that has caused so many workers to first tweak and then distort the gospel in pursuit of quick "success." Your clear long-term commitment can help your partnering workers to persevere in proclaiming the plain gospel message even when the results may be slow in coming.

5. CONGREGATION-WIDE

It also should come as no surprise that a healthy church partnership generally presumes that the church, not just a few leaders, actually own the partnership. When the average member of the church understands something of the focus and direction of the church's partnership then the ground is laid for a fruitful relationship. This can be encouraged by regularly updating the entire congregation on the church's international involvement. In our own church this is done through a short report during each of our six members meetings a year.

To get to this point in our own congregation we've tried to teach that missions (meaning a concern for the global advance of the gospel) is a normal part of the faithful Christian life, not an optional add-on. For us this has also meant eliminating special mission committees, and giving oversight of our missions efforts to the church elders themselves. This seems to have helped members see that missions is a core part of the ministry of the church, not one among many optional ministries on the periphery for certain people who are "interested in that sort of thing."

It's also important to involve the congregation in praying for missions. In our own congregation

- we hear a brief one to two-minute update every Sunday night for a worker we support (about fifteen in total), and then we pray for the worker.
- We regularly host workers when they are in town and interview them before the whole congregation. Then we pray for them.
- We print the names and general details of our supported workers in a prayer directory given to every member of our church.

As much as security concerns allow, we get the names and general locations of our workers in front of all the members, not just the "missions club."

6. LONG TERM-FOCUSED

Finally, it seems to me that fruitful and humble partnerships should be long term-focused. By this I mean that your church should work to cultivate long-term overseas workers from your own congregation. At the outset of a partnership, why not articulate the explicit goal that some of your own members will uproot their lives and plant them long-term in another culture for the sake of the gospel? The implications of this kind of thinking abound.

Being long-term focused may also mean doing even short-term trips with the long-term mindset. Rather than just providing "missions experiences," you might consider doing trips that support the work of existing long-term teams to whom you are committed. See your short-term work primarily as a way to support your long-term partners in whatever ways they need it, and secondarily as a way to raise up your own members to join with the work long-term. Workers on the mission field generally need more boots on the ground, day-in day-out, not just friends passing through.

CONCLUSION

Whatever your church's situation is, I hope that you'll consider carefully how your congregation is partnering with the work of global evangelism.

- Are your efforts characterized by humility?
- Are you being led by the glory of the gospel, taught and modeled by your pastor and elders?
- Are your relationships with overseas workers deep and meaningful?
- Are you willing to commit for the long-haul?
- Are your members personally knowledgeable about those with whom you want to partner?
- And are you hoping, praying, and working toward producing long-term workers from your own ranks to join the work?

Your church will have different resources, different timelines, and different needs than mine. You may think of better things to do than the specific examples in this article. But I hope the core biblical priorities of humility, Word-centeredness, cooperation and commitment are evident in your missions engagements, whatever that may look like in your context.

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Missions Partnerships from a Field Worker's Perspective

By Ed Roberts

Partnerships are all the rage these days. Churches want to partner with missionaries, and missionaries have reasons to partner with local churches. But how should churches and missionaries decide whom to partner with?

In order for there to be a healthy partnership between a local church and missionaries on the field, I propose that a church and a missionary must share fundamental agreement about theology and methodology. But before I dive into that, let me back up and examine the very idea of partnership first.

WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP?

One way to define a kingdom partnership would be to say that it's an intentional, biblically-driven, active, mutual cooperation between a local church and a cross-cultural field team to achieve common goals.

Missions strategist Luis Bush, who is a major advocate for partnerships, has helpfully defined partnerships like this (adapted slightly by me): *a partnership is a temporary, renewable, formal association of two or more autonomous and like-minded Christian bodies who have formed a trusting relationship and seek to fulfill agreed-upon expectations by sharing complementary strengths and resources to reach their mutual goals.*

ARE PARTNERSHIPS BIBLICAL?

The New Testament doesn't have much prescriptive teaching about formal partnerships. Depending upon your Bible translation, you might find the word partnership used in Philippians 4:18 to describe the impoverished, newly planted, still developing Philippian church's monetary and prayer support of the Apostle Paul's apostolic band of church planters. A close reading of Philippians leads us to conclude that, if this was partnering, it feels a little backwards compared to the partnerships that are popular today. Paul had no expectations or professed needs, and Paul's partner was a brand new, impoverished church.

As far as I can tell, the New Testament contains no examples of partnerships between a local church and a team or individuals in a distant field of cross-cultural ministry. Paul did have coworkers, and the personal greetings in Romans 16 clearly show that there were cooperative relationships between him and local churches and even other workers. Perhaps these indicated partnerships, but they seem to have been more organic arrangements than the definition of partnerships above describe.

Yet the fact that the New Testament doesn't appear to contain partnerships as I've defined them doesn't mean that Scripture forbids them, especially since we do see cooperative work for the sake of gospel extension in the New Testament, and we have plenty of scriptural guidelines on how relationships ought to work between professing believers, whether individuals or representatives of teams or local churches. In short, I would argue that partnerships as I've defined them are biblically allowable, and even encouraged, and that Scripture has plenty to say about how we should pursue such partnerships.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GOD-HONORING PARTNERSHIPS

Levels of Partnership

How much theological agreement is required between a local church and its partners on the field? Well, it depends on the goals of the partnerships. The closer the goals are to planting churches and developing leaders, the more theological like-mindedness is required. Partnering to feed starving people overseas

does not require the same degree of like-mindedness as partnering to train local leaders to start indigenous churches. Partnering to distribute copies of the Bible or to make an audio recording of the Scriptures in a foreign location requires less theological like-mindedness than partnering to plant churches in a pioneer area.

Local churches should probably sketch out their own two or three levels of potential partnerships, and then carefully consider what theological essentials must be embraced at each level of partnership. But I would urge caution at all levels, because our theological commitments have a way of "leaking" into all areas of ministry. It is possible to partner in good faith with those whose theological precision far exceeds their methodological integrity, only to realize that there is no real like-mindedness because of their methodological compromise.

Goals and Theological Agreement

What were Paul's goals in ministry? Paul's stated goals included:

- Preaching the gospel message of Jesus Christ, particularly to Gentiles (Rom. 15:16, 18). Paul seemed to have aimed to reach as many people as possible with this evangel (Rom. 1:14).
- Proclaiming this gospel to individuals and households so that they would be personally converted, and begin a life of following Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Thess. 1:9-10). He makes use of a variety of venues for proclaiming this good news, eschewing, apparently, only one: pagan temples.
- Beginning local churches, properly ordered communities of faith brought into existence by this gospel and ruled over by Jesus Christ himself (cf. Eph. 3, Titus).

These goals then informed his methods, methods which were more flexible for the sake of achieving the goals. (Admittedly, the Scriptures have much to teach us about aims of missionary work, but far less to say about methods. We test all methods by Scripture, discarding many, but at the end of the day there is more than one acceptable cross-cultural approach to planting a sound, biblical church. Partners do well to listen to and learn from one another, testing everything by the Word.)

How much theological agreement do I think Paul would propose for higher level partnerships, partnerships which aim at the goals I just described? Based on the content of his letters, as well as the other letters in the New Testament, theological agreement about the following matters would seem to be important:

1. The total trustworthiness and sufficiency of Scripture (e.g. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
2. The gospel and conversion: what is the gospel (e.g. Gal. 1)? What does God do in conversion? What does man do in conversion? (e.g. 1 Cor. 3:6; 2 Cor. 4-5)
3. Ecclesiology: what is a local church? How is it ordered? How does the church make decisions? Who has final authority in the local church? Who are the proper subjects of baptism? What is the relationship between sending churches and field teams? How do sponsoring church leaders relate to the field workers? How do field workers relate to sponsoring church leaders?
4. Contextualization: is the goal to clarify the gospel, including its challenging hard edges, or to remove any and all offense? (1 Cor. 9; Rom. 14)
5. Preaching, teaching and the ministry of the Word: there is more than one way to minister the Word effectively, especially in cross cultural settings. The Word can be taught effectively with or without a pulpit, in large and small groups, even apparently on the move (as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-27). But the Word *must* be taught. The New Testament places a heavy emphasis on teaching and teachers (1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Tim. 6:2-4; 2 Tim. 2:15; Tit. 2:1; Tit. 2:15). We need the same emphasis on good teaching!
6. Doctrine of sin and sanctification: this has huge implications for discipleship (e.g. Rom. 3; 2 Cor. 3).
7. Doctrine of success: faithfulness *is* success. This leaks into all church planting methods. (More on that below.)

8. Doctrine of accountability: leaders must be kept accountable to Scripture (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:15).
9. Doctrine of family: do you agree on what the Bible teaches about gender and family? Do you both understand how the gospel should transform family relationships? (e.g. Eph. 5:22-33).

THEOLOGY THAT'S FUNCTIONAL, NOT JUST CONFSSIONAL

Even if both sides of a partnership check all the above statement-of-faith boxes, it could be that one or both sides live and minister in a way that practically denies what they profess to believe. Theological agreement between partners must be functional, not merely confessional.

In Paul's epistle to Titus, he instructs Titus to watch his life and doctrine closely (Tit. 2:7-8), which seems to include Titus' methodology or at least his manner of living out his ministry in Crete. The letter to Titus isn't really about doctrine, *per se*; it's about teaching what accords with sound doctrine. In other words, the book of Titus is an entire New Testament document devoted to demonstrating how confessional theology should *work* in guiding the life of the church and its leaders.

Both sides of a potential partnership, therefore, should probe into how the other party's theology flows into practice. Here are some areas in which one's "functional" or "real" theology is particularly important:

Scripture

A church might ask a field team, "What role does God's Word play in your strategy? Can you explain to me how your methods are derived from Scripture and what role Scripture itself plays in those methods? How is your team "using" Scripture on a daily basis for ministry? Be specific."

A field team might ask a potential church partner to explain how Scripture informs their church's decision making process and to give a few specific examples from a "business meeting." That team might ask the church leaders to describe how the congregation approaches Scripture on a daily or weekly basis, not just in the sermon, but in their counseling, their "programming," or their gatherings generally. Is this a church really committed to the sufficiency of Scripture?

Evangelism

The potential partners might ask one another to describe how they "do" evangelism in order to learn about their respective doctrines of evangelism, repentance, and conversion. Two partners may share theological statements and missions goals, but each party's practices of evangelism in particular reveal whether or not one's confessional theology flows into one's practices. When they don't, there is no true like-mindedness, making partnering difficult and affecting trust in the relationship.

Success

How does the other side of a potential partnership define biblical success? Is it numbers or faithfulness?

Paul's theology of success is evident in his letter to the Romans (1:16) and Thessalonians (1:5-6; 2:13). He relied on the Holy Spirit and the truth of the gospel for success, not on particular methods or best practices. His was a God-centered ministry and he knew his success depended upon his God. Paul also knew that success depended upon the prayers of the churches to the living and true God (2 Cor. 1:11; 2 Thes. 3:1).

Paul does not advocate new best practices or methods guaranteed to succeed. He doesn't encourage Timothy to study the approach of these "winners." Instead, he says, "Continue in what you've learned. Persevere in all good work!" (2 Tim. 3:10-14; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim 3:10-14; cf. Heb 10:35-39).

A biblical doctrine of success will clearly state that faithfulness *is* success. That does not render accountability, evaluation, and adjustment unnecessary, but it does remind us that our responsibility is to be faithful in our life and doctrine. We should imitate Paul in our ministry (1 Cor. 11:1). Sometimes there was visible fruit and people were converted and churches were planted. Sometimes there wasn't. Always there was suffering. God is sovereign over the results. Our duty is to be faithful servants.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR PARTNERSHIPS

The Scripture's teaching on unity and godly attitudes should guide our partnerships (see Phil. 2:1-5), so that each side shouldn't be asking, "What can I or my team or my church get out of this partnership?" but rather, "What can I give? How can I serve? How can I be a blessing?"

With that in mind, here are some practical guidelines for developing God-honoring partnerships once theological agreement is in place:

- Communicate often and openly. Expect misunderstandings and try to ward them off by communicating freely and frequently.
- Seek to build a close, trusting relationship with several individuals in the partnership.
- Invest in the partners (the people) not just the goals of the partnership.
- Agree upon goals for the relationship as well as for the ministry. Be explicit about your side's goals. No hidden agendas.
- Talk openly about money and hold one another accountable as steward's of God's resources. Money alone rarely moves a partnership towards kingdom goals. Giving money without love counts for nothing according to 1 Corinthians 13.
- Aim for the long term, but begin with a short-term renewable partnership.
- Regularly evaluate and invite feedback from the partners in ministry.
- Continually clarify goals and mutual expectations, preferably in writing. Don't promise more than you can deliver.
- Adopt a learner's posture and expect to learn from one another. This takes humility, trust, patience and brotherly love.

At the end of the day, partnerships are between sinful, sometimes ethnocentric, occasionally stubborn individuals who nevertheless have the Spirit of God. He enables them to work together graciously, though not without effort and prayer. Wise partnerships will be characterized by level-appropriate theological like-mindedness, clearly stated biblical goals, and a godly approach to interpersonal relationships.

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Sending Overseas Missionaries in Community

By George Tissiere and C. Bug

If love for one another within a local church distinguishes us as Christ's disciples (John 13:35)...

if there is a uniqueness to the display of the gospel through the local church (1 Pet. 2, 1 Cor. 14)...

if we desire to model the communal elements of discipleship for new believers in unreached nations...

doesn't it makes sense to send people in community to engage in mission, even in overseas mission?

We at Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, thought so. We began a discussion in 2005 which culminated in the decision to send groups of members to two unreached overseas cities as church plants.

A NEW STRATEGY

The conventional approach to mission in our context has been for an individual to experience a call from God to engage a people group with the gospel after being sent out from a church through a mission board. We praise the Lord for sending out laborers in these ways.

But God began to open our eyes to the potential of approaching global missions in community, not merely as isolated individuals. Others have done this, but the idea was new for us. This discussion began with the conviction that global church planting is fundamentally a result of faithful biblical preaching. And this happens as local churches faithfully preach the gospel to their communities. Yet how do you reach a community where there is no church?

Our new strategy involves *being the church* as we seek to plant churches of indigenous believers. This allows unreached areas to see the power of the gospel *worked out amidst a people*. The team who goes does not necessarily need to follow all the forms of our gatherings in the United States because we want them to be culturally appropriate. But we do want them to show lost people the new corporate identity that comes with following Christ.

This community that Providence plans to send has been gathering regularly in the States for over a year now (minus a few who have already gone to the field). This time has been helpful to discern various gift mixes, deepen fellowship, engage in conflict resolution, and wrestle with theological, personal, and practical issues in order to be unified in preparation for the field.

The next step is to go. But where will they go? And what role will Providence play?

WHERE? WHERE THERE IS NEED AND GOOD LEADERSHIP

Two factors have influenced our thinking as to where we send missionaries: need and leadership. In terms of need we asked the question, which people groups still have no exposure to the gospel? The answer has led us to two cities with no missionary presence.

In terms of leadership we wanted to know who the sending agency would use to supervise our team overseas. What is their vision? Is it a good fit for our team?

We didn't need to fabricate chemistry among the team; God had already established our unified vision. Yet we have worked diligently to find the right "mix" between the sending agencies regional leadership

and our team by visiting the workers on the field. This has been incredibly important for us. Emails are convenient but cannot substitute for in-person interaction.

WHAT'S THE SENDING CHURCH'S ROLE?

There are four components involved in Providence Baptist's role as a sending church:

1. Giving the body at Providence opportunities to engage: The body at Providence can engage in the mission through short term trips each year. College students can participate in a five week projects. And different groups regularly pray for our workers. These opportunities expose our congregation to God's heart for this region and will hopefully raise up more laborers.

2. A commitment to informal and formal communication: As the sending church, we do not want to disconnect or distance ourselves from a team we send out, nor do we "hand them off" to someone else's care once they are officially part of the sending agency. Providence will take on a new role with them, just as parents do when their children leave the home and get married. We will counsel and care for each of them. They are an extension of us to this frontier region. Our commitment to the teams we are sending out is for life, and theirs to Christ is the same.

3. A commitment to prayer: What greater thing could we do daily than pray Ephesians 3:14-21 over them?

4. A commitment to shared resources in platform development: Because our missionaries are going to a country that doesn't grant missionary visas, they have begun to work on developing a legitimate business platform that will work in this foreign country. Most of this team has been trained in theology, but they have little experience in developing and managing a business. This is where the body of Christ, in all its diversity of gifts, can be a huge asset. A group of businessmen from Providence are currently training our team in business skills and have already started a legitimate business as a platform strategy.

God's desire is to reach the nations for his glory through church planting. May he find us faithful.

George Tissiere is the Associate Pastor of Missions at Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. C. Bug is the Assistant Pastor of College Ministries.

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Cultivating a Culture of Missions in a Small Church

By Tom Ascol

Pastor, have you ever thought to yourself, "My church is so small, we cannot do much for missions, especially overseas missions"?

If so, I have news for you. Small churches are not exempt from the work of missions, nor should they want to be.

My church, Grace Baptist, does not have all of the resources often associated with congregations heavily vested in missions. But, by God's grace, here's how we have become increasingly committed to advancing the cause of Christ around the world:

1) EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Scripture, of course, is filled with instruction to believers and churches about God's plan and our responsibility to spread the good news of salvation in Christ to the ends of the earth. As our congregation saw this repeatedly through expositional study of Scripture, we moved beyond theoretical agreement into thoughtful, practical engagement.

2) INTENTIONAL PRAYING

Next our congregation began to "pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). In the pastoral prayers during our worship gatherings, in our regular prayer meetings, and in smaller group settings, we began to pray this way. He has answered those prayers by calling some of our most faithful, gifted members to engage some of the most unreached peoples of the world.

3) FOCUSED STUDYING

Two books became instrumental in our church's pilgrimage into practical missions involvement. The first is Patrick Johnstone's *Operation World*. For more than a decade we have incorporated statistical and spiritual information on nations gleaned from this book into our weekly announcements and pastoral prayers. This has sensitized our members to people and places that we would otherwise ignore.

Also, one of the best things we ever did was to teach through John Piper's *Let the Nations be Glad* in our adult Sunday School. The vision of God's glory being magnified in the joy of yet-unreached people groups captured many of our members. It remains a favorite in the church.

4) PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Finally, our missions efforts began to practically take off through providential meetings and personal connections. One Southern Baptist missionary just back from four years in Afghanistan visited our church and told us first-hand accounts which made a lasting impact on our church: prisoners who starved to death due to his team's lack of funds to feed them; believers converting from Islam who were put to death or simply disappeared; and so forth.

This personal connection led us to adopt the unreached people group (UPG) in Central Asia that this missionary was targeting. We started learning about them, praying for them, and pledging resources to help reach them with the gospel. Ultimately God led us to send one of our deacons and his family to join the full-time work of those already working there.

Once our own members were living among our UPG, our interest in the work of the gospel in that part of the world increased significantly. Our prayers became more personal and fervent. Our giving became more meaningful and sacrificial. And our rejoicing was deeper and sweeter when a church was eventually established by God's grace among new converts from that people group.

Over the years we have sent four missionary units (three families and one single adult) to live in hard places to make Christ known. We have adopted another Muslim UPG in Central Asia and have rejoiced in the birth of another church.

A MISSIONS CULTURE

Through expositional preaching, prayer, and special study, God has cultivated a "missions culture" within our church. In addition to what I have already written, we do several specific activities to help promote that culture:

- We regularly schedule trustworthy missionaries to visit and tell about their work. We try to encourage them and give them gifts, especially good books.
- We get to know missionaries (sometimes by asking discerning friends), publicize their needs, and systematically pray for them.
- We give space for maps and displays of mission activities in our facilities.
- We remember the birthdays and anniversaries of missionaries and send thoughtful notes and gifts to them.
- We enlist members to correspond with missionaries.
- We encourage church members to read good missionary books, including biographies.
- We train and send members on short-term trips to assist overseas workers with special projects or simply to serve and encourage them. God used short-term trips to confirm his call in the lives of each of the missionaries we've sent out.
- We work to increase the amount of money the church designates for missions.

None of these things may seem very significant on their own. But collectively they can encourage a church to develop a global perspective concerning the advance of the gospel. Not only that, they are the kinds of things any church can do, regardless of its size or resources. A church with this kind of atmosphere can become a great breeding ground for the next generation of international missionaries.

Tom Ascol is the senior pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida.

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Developing Missions Networks Without a Denomination

By Jeremy Pace

I am not opposed to denominationalism. I can see its value in history and for the kingdom. However, the Village Church does not "do mission" primarily with a denomination, since we believe that Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and that the local church is the instrument by which that hope is made manifest.

It is my experience that the institutionalized structure of denominations actually removes, or at least lessens, the biblical responsibility of a local church to equip ministers of reconciliation with the message of reconciliation.

Who has primary responsibility for the mission? In a denominational structure the primary responsibility of mission is from the *top down*. The denomination collects funds, finds "missionaries," equips them, teaches methods, sends them, and provides for them. The denomination finds areas and people groups to engage nationally and internationally. In all this, the responsibility of the local church is minimized to "resourcing" mission, rather than being the mission.

We advocate a *bottom out* approach to the mission. This means The Village Church strives to engage, equip, and send our local church body into the world as ministers of reconciliation. We don't lead them into mission activities, but rather, as Ephesians 4 commands, we equip them to be what God through Christ has reconciled them to be, ambassadors.

God has given your local church all of the gifts, talents, and resources needed to fulfill his mission, just as Paul told the Corinthians that they did "not lack any spiritual gift" (1 Cor. 1:7). You might not be a "missions expert," but God has called your church to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:14-21). So equip and empower them to *lead out*.

This plays out in how our church engages the mission in our city, state, country and throughout the world. We call it *Church Development*: because of our theology of mission, we desire to raise up and develop the local church body or bodies in every area and people group we engage.

- Sometimes this means that we plant churches.
- Sometimes this means that we help undergird struggling churches.
- Almost always this means that we partner with existing churches.

What do you need to do missions without a denomination?

First, equip your members.

Second, learn how to partner and network with other churches. There is no one church that can effectively engage an entire community, nation, and the world. It is going to take a "cooperative program." This, I think, was what denominations intended to do, but they failed by removing responsibility from the local church. In fact, denominational agencies have begun to function as if local churches did not do mission. To counteract this, church networks have emerged that enable churches who share values to work together yet keeps responsibility for mission with each local church. Where the denomination assumes the local church is *not doing* mission, the networks assume they *are doing* mission. It will be through such partnerships that the mission continues to be realized in our generation.

By no means do I want to discount the work of denominations or historic cooperative programs. I am

simply advocating a change of focus. The local church has been given the responsibility to be on God's mission. If we lessen or abdicate that responsibility we shift the foundation of mission.

Jeremy Pace is Director of Missions at The Village Church in Highland, Texas.

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How American Christians Can Help Christians in Zambia

By Conrad Mbewe

American Christians are already doing a lot to help Christians in Zambia, for which we are deeply grateful. When we see the church in eternity, there is no doubt that the American church's contribution to missions will stand out like Mount Everest compared to contributions from any other parts of the world.

And Africa has been one of the greatest beneficiaries of this missions output from the American church.

So if this article sounds a little negative, it must not be seen as betraying a lack of gratitude. Rather, 9Marks has invited me to present the perspective of one beneficiary who wants to help American Christians ensure that their help is more effective.

1) LEARN THE ZAMBIAN CULTURE

It seems to me that the best place for American Christians to begin trying to better help Zambian Christians is for them to take time to understand African or Zambian culture. When Paul said, "To those under the law, I became like one under the law... To those not having the law, I became like one without the law..." (1 Cor. 9:20, 21), the least we can say is that he took time to understand how people in both cultures thought in order to win them to Christ.

Sadly, we have far too many well-meaning Americans who climb off the plane for the first time wanting to correct everything they see. They don't realize that the sensational view of Africa presented to the American people via CNN is often very superficial. A person needs to be on Zambian soil for some time, observing and asking questions about the presuppositions that make up African culture, before one can effectively minister here.

Space forbids me to apply this lesson to the huge area of modesty, decency, and propriety, especially when American young people are sent to Zambia on short-term mission trips. We often blush on your behalf!

However, let me say a little more about another area. Like most Africans, Zambians rarely want to give offence to anyone. Hence, when an American comes and appeals to his hearers to repeat a sinner's prayer, many Zambians comply merely out of a desire not to offend him. The deceived evangelist goes back to America with glowing reports of the number of converts he has left behind on African soil. But the truth is that no sooner was he on the plane crossing the Atlantic than his "converts" went back to their life of sin. They were not converted at all!

2) PARTNER WITH THE ZAMBIAN CHURCH

American Christians should also realize that the pioneer stage of missions in Zambia is largely over. The church of Jesus Christ has been firmly planted here. Therefore, American Christians should not do all their planning while in America, or try to do all their work through sending missionaries to Zambia. Instead, they should consult and plan with indigenous Zambian church leaders. Once this is done, it will soon become apparent that our greatest need is not for more missionaries from the West but for us to be challenged to send out our own missionaries (perhaps with your support).

I am not suggesting that there is no need for Western missionaries. We could do with many more hands! Rather, I am saying that if you plan with indigenous church leaders here the emphasis will certainly shift. It costs ten times more to send and keep a Western missionary and his family on

Zambian soil than it does to briefly support an indigenous missionary as he begins to minister among his own people. So, even from the angle of stewardship over the Lord's resources, the present emphasis needs to change.

3) DEMONSTRATE BIBLICAL CHURCHMANSHIP

Western Christians entering Zambia as missionaries are generally very good examples to us with respect to their personal and domestic lives. In these two areas, we see a very clear difference between them and their non-Christian counterparts from the Western world.

However, where we see no difference is in their commitment to the local church. Their church attendance is scanty to say the least. They do not join a local church. We do not know where they give their tithes and offerings. They are not involved in any local church ministries (except to preach when they are asked to do so), and so on.

As a result, our young professional Christians believe that this is enlightened Christianity. They also end up having a very loose relationship with the church. I really think that this has been the Achilles' heel of the work of Western missionaries in Zambia today. They are not good examples of biblical churchmanship!

We need to find a way in which Western missionaries can maintain relationships with their sending churches and at the same time exhibit biblical accountability to local churches where they labor, so that they can be good examples in this area to those whom they win to Christ.

4) ENSURE EQUITY IN CHRIST'S BODY

If American Christians are really going to help Christians in Zambia, one other area that needs some serious thinking is the price that your books cost when they arrive on this side of the Atlantic. They cost an arm and a leg!

The biblical principle is that "he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little" (2 Cor. 8:15). That is certainly not what is happening. Books are priceless when it comes to the work of ministry, and Zambian pastors need books just as much as American pastors. Yet in addition to the discrepancy in salaries between pastors there and here, add in the cost of transportation and the books become too expensive for the average Zambian pastor.

I do not want to be unfair to book publishers and demand a pricing system that will put them out of business tomorrow. All I am saying is that there is need to implement the biblical principle of equity in Christ's body if Christian books are not just to be a form of business but also a true spiritual ministry to the worldwide body of Christ.

5) COMBAT AMERICA'S CHIEF, AND WORST, SPIRITUAL EXPORT

As I close, I wonder whether Reformed and conservative American Christians are aware that the charismatic prosperity gospel is America's chief spiritual export to our shores. In Zambia, the only free television channel that we have twenty-four hours a day is Trinity Broadcasting Network. It is the most unhelpful thing you can give us!

As a result, the kind of preaching now taking hold in Zambian pulpits is being modeled after preachers like Joel Osteen. Preaching is fast becoming nothing more than motivational speaking. Reformed and conservative American Christians need to do more to be helpful to the church in Zambia before the damage presently being caused by America's chief spiritual export becomes irreparable.

As someone has rightly asked, "Why is it that false teaching is often halfway around the globe before truth finishes tying its shoes?" I hope the readers of this article will, therefore, not just sit there but do something about it!

Conrad Mbewe is the pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia.

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How to Get Businesspeople into Missions

By the executive director of Access Partners

Missions isn't just for pastors and missionaries. Missions should be supported by the whole church. God has gifted his church with a variety of gifts for carrying out the Great Commission and glorifying him.

Most churches already understand how they can support missions through prayer and financial support. Yet many churches overlook how members can put their business skills to work for the sake of overseas missions. Not only that, but it's the members with real business skills who may provide the best access for Christians to obtain access to closed or restricted countries.

Have you heard of something called business as missions?

WHAT IS BUSINESS AS MISSIONS?

What is it? Business-as-Missions (BAM) is about creating legitimate businesses that enable church planting in areas that would otherwise be closed to evangelism.

BAM is needed today because it is increasingly difficult for church planters to live and share the gospel in many countries around the world. Think places such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and China, where governments continue to crack down on mission work. If we make it our "ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named" (Rom. 15:20), then we need to help church planters find creative means for gaining access into these countries.

Fortunately, governments welcome business. They value the investment and the jobs that businesses bring. Being identified with a business also helps church planters to be more accepted in their community as they operate in cultures whose understanding of "missionaries" dates back to the Crusades.

HOW CAN LOCAL CHURCHES BE INVOLVED IN BAM?

Even as the task of church planting belongs to the local church, so the task of BAM also is one that is finally rooted in the local church. How can local churches get involved?

Raise up fruitful businesspeople who are passionate for the gospel

Churches should raise up mature and faithful businesspeople in their congregations, people whose lives are fruitful regardless of where they are in the States or overseas. Businesspeople should be discipled and encouraged to be discipling and sharing the gospel with others.

This doesn't mean developing a program *per se*, but rather cultivating a culture that encourages members as a whole in the task of missions. Concern for the spread of the gospel should not be limited to a missions committee or a few members; rather, the whole church should be involved in supporting their church planters.

At the same time, it is all too easy for businesspeople to think they are competent and qualified simply because they are good businesspeople. However, they will find out quickly that their experience, though helpful, is not directly transferable to BAM projects. Given the church planting focus of BAM and the fact that most restricted countries are usually developing countries with unfriendly business climates, businesspeople must be flexible and approach situations with a learner's attitude. Churches should thus filter their ranks of businesspeople for the right combination of experience and humility.

Involve businesspeople in specific opportunities

Businesspeople can be involved with BAM several ways. Let me highlight three. The first two can be done at home while the third, which is the most effective, must be done overseas.

1) Businesspeople can be **consultants for a business project**.

Church planting teams who desire to establish a business need help in developing a business plan, launching the business, and running the business. At **Access Partners**, a group that I work for which helps to foster sustainable business development for the sake of church planting in restricted areas, we have broken down the business development process for a BAM company into 6 discrete steps:

- Discovery: defining a potential business opportunity
- Exploration: determining the viability of such an opportunity (including a preliminary business plan)
- Pre-Launch: preparing for launch through doing paperwork, raising funds, and recruiting personnel
- Launch: beginning operations
- Growth: on-going support
- Transition: defining an exit strategy

Each step has a way to involve businesspeople. For example, a member of Solid Rock Church helped us develop a business plan for a training center. Another member of Covenant Life Church mentors a sales director for a coffee business that we support.

Consultation can occur from a person's home city or through a short-term trip. We have done both.

2) Business owners can **extend their operations overseas**.

Church planters need legitimate pre-existing businesses. It is difficult to start a new company in the U.S., one of the most business friendly countries in the world, it's nearly impossible in the kinds of countries that restrict the spread of the gospel, such as Pakistan, Vietnam, or Yemen. Such countries not only are developing, with limited infrastructure, but also have corrupt business practices and huge amounts of government red tape.

One solution is to partner with existing businesses to support these church planters. If you have business owners in your church, encourage them to look for ways to use their business in a way that supports church planters overseas. The goal is not for these new overseas branch offices to be wildly profitable; however, they should at least be close to breakeven in order that the business is able to support their on-going operations.

3) Churches can encourage their businesspeople to **move overseas and run a BAM company themselves**.

The biggest need in BAM is the right people. Too often, businesses are run by church planters who are both unqualified and not uninterested in running a business. We believe the solution is to recruit seasoned and experienced businesspeople who will go overseas.

At Access Partners, we have a Business Directors program in which we recruit such people. We look for businesspeople to partner with a church planting team and manage the team's business operations, freeing up the rest of the team to pursue their church planting focus.

A note of caution: filter the missions teams that you support so that you are sure they have a church planting strategy that is biblical. Simply because a team is doing business does not mean they should be

supported. We recommend establishing long-term relationships where you know the church planters personally. Ideally, you should help members of your church whom you have sent out.

A GOSPEL OPPORTUNITY

Given government restrictions at the present, BAM presents an opportunity to encourage new partnerships in our churches in an increasingly important and strategic way for the gospel. May God use the whole church to bring the whole gospel to the whole world!

The author of this article is the executive director of Access Partners. For more about Access Partners, visit www.access1040.com.

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Guidelines for Deciding Whom a Church Supports

By Andy Johnson

An internal Capitol Hill Baptist Church elders' memorandum

The following memorandum was unanimously affirmed by the elders of Capitol Hill Baptist Church as providing the criteria and "tiers" of support for CHBC church members who do overseas missions work.

Our goal in thinking through the issue of "how much" our church will support our members who move overseas is not to discourage people from taking the gospel to other cultures. Rather, it results from the fact that our resources are not infinite as well as the positive desire to help church members view their relationship with the local church as a significant, even essential, part of what it means to be *sent* with the gospel. We want our members to think not merely about how they can take the gospel overseas, but how they can serve and support their local church in where, how, and when they go overseas.

– *Andy Johnson*

Memorandum
August 19, 2008
To: CHBC Elders
From: Andy Johnson

Re: Levels of support for CHBC members headed overseas.

[In my capacity of overseeing our overseas missions work for our church,] one of my most significant challenges has been to help determine what level of relationship (pastoral, strategic, and financial) CHBC should have with various members hoping to work overseas. In this memo I want to lay out my current thinking and invite your questions and feedback.

BACKGROUND

In just the past 3 months I've had conversations about missions that have run the gamut from one person recently saying,

"I'm thinking more about God's glory among the nations. So I would like help thinking about how I can become better equipped to possibly serve overseas in the next few years. I want CHBC to help me determine if this is a good thing for me to do. And I would love to understand how I could best serve the gospel by joining with what my church and its leaders hope to do in missions,"

to a conversation with a member who said,

"I've decided to go overseas with a mission organization for a year. I've already applied with an organization, been approved and I leave in a month. I've never spoken to anyone at CHBC about this other than to inform a few friends of my plans. Since you are my "sending" church I would love it if you could "partner" with me financially and corporately support my ministry."

Obviously these two conversations reveal radically different understandings of what it means to be "sent out" by a church. And they show radically different understandings of whether missions is

the prerogative of individuals who are then supported by a church

or if missions is mainly

the responsibility of local churches who then involve the voluntary participation of members as they are caught up in the church's vision.

ADDITIONAL COMPLEXITIES

The reality of this continuum has caused me to think about how we can and should both send and support gospel workers from CHBC. Adding to the complexity are the small but growing number of CHBC members who are interested in being genuinely "sent" by CHBC—with all the attendant involvement in their life and decision making—but who are interested in going to areas and joining work where we as a church have no strong relationships.

For example, Tina R. [not her real name] is a sweet sister who wants to have CHBC leaders involved in her decisions about overseas work but who really wants to take a two-year position in Latin America. I have looked over the organization's job-request list with her, but there is no real potential for me to build the kind of relationships that will allow me to have much knowledge about any team she might join.

And there are additional complications. How should we think about supporting Tina (or others like her) if she ends up in Argentina or Chile? It's certainly not wrong for her to want to go to a Spanish-speaking nation, but should we be as committed to sending leaders to visit her and to trying to get members to partner with her work as we would for a person who might choose to join a team we know well and whose judgment and methods we already trust and are invested in? And how should our assessment of the strategic nature of work in Latin America (with some areas having tens of millions of evangelical Christians) affect our commitment of staff time and CHBC resources? How would trying to engage fully with workers in areas we find less strategic, with potentially theologically diverse teams, affect our congregation's focus and impact our training for missions? Finally, do qualified CHBC members have a right to expect full support from CHBC regardless of whether they go out in cooperation with or outside of CHBC's congregational plans, efforts, and overseas network of relationships?

FOUR PROPOSALS, FOUR TIERS OF SUPPORT

These are just some of the issues I've been thinking about lately. What follows is a tentative outline for how I propose we respond. I propose that we

1. Continue to have a proactive congregational focus on a limited number of relationships with teams we know and trust, in areas and among people that seem especially strategic.
2. Continue to cultivate groups of CHBC members that might go out together, or arrange placement for individual CHBC members with established team relationships we have cultivated.
3. Actively encourage qualified CHBC members to join these teams and not to strike out on their own with teams and in areas about which we know very little.
4. Articulate a four-tiered approach to official CHBC support for qualified workers who do go out from us as follows:

Tier #1 - CHBC Teams: these are groups of members counseled, trained, and sent out together by CHBC in support of planned CHBC engagements with specific regional teams we know and trust. Or to peoples and with regional teams we have identified as strategic and worthy of our cultivating long-term working relationships.

- i. Financial Support: Extensive, ongoing, and special projects.
- ii. Pastoral Support: Regular, annual visits by CHBC leaders
- iii. Strategic Support: Ongoing and CHBC member-wide
- iv. Prayer Support: Listed in directory and Sunday night rotation.

- v. Personnel Support: Continuous recruitment of other CHBC members to join with and support the team long-term.
- vi. CHBC Membership: Continued CHBC membership anticipated.

Tier #2 – CHBC Workers: individual members who are counseled, trained, and sent out by CHBC to support existing strategic workers or non-CHBC teams we know, trust and have ongoing relationships with. Or sent to strategic non-CHBC regional teams with whom we want to develop long-term working relationships.

- vii. Financial Support: Less extensive, ongoing, and special projects.
- viii. Pastoral Support: Regular, annual visits by CHBC leaders
- ix. Strategic Support: Ongoing and CHBC member-wide
- x. Prayer Support: Listed in Directory and Sunday night rota.
- xi. Personnel Support: None – no ongoing recruitment.
- xii. CHBC membership: Continues if worker desires.

Tier #3 – Independent Workers: members who seem well qualified and who involve the CHBC community in their plans, but who choose to join with workers we do not know and/or in areas where we do not have or desire to have significant, ongoing relationships.

- xiii. Financial Support: Occasional special projects only.
- xiv. Pastoral Support: Emails, Skype but no planned annual visits.
- xv. Strategic Support: Based on friendships, not CHBC wide.
- xvi. Prayer Support: Listed in Directory only.
- xvii. Personnel Support: None.
- xviii. CHBC Membership: May continue, case-by-case.

Tier #4 – We Won't Stop You: members who don't seem unqualified but who make largely independent decisions to work where they want to work without serious reference to the relationships, needs, or aims of CHBC.

- xix. Financial Support: None.
- xx. Pastoral Support: Emails with friends only.
- xxi. Strategic Support: Based only on friendships.
- xxii. Prayer Support: No organized, corporate prayer.
- xxiii. Personnel Support: None.
- xxiv. CHBC Memberships: Need to resign membership.

My hope in this is certainly not to discourage workers in Tier 3 and 4, but to acknowledge and communicate the reality that CHBC won't (and likely shouldn't) try to support all people equally. We want to encourage any good motive among members willing to uproot their lives for the sake of the gospel, but we also want to encourage getting wise counsel and working to serve the aims of CHBC, not just their own personal interests and desires. Likewise, just as we do in our financial support for seminary students, we don't want to communicate that agreeing to allow folks to go equals a commitment to provide ongoing oversight and support. I also think we will need to be humble in recognizing our church's limited size. We cannot give adequate attention to the whole world and to everyone who might choose to move overseas.

Andy Johnson is an associate pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church and a trustee of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board.

July/August 2009
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A Church Questionnaire for Supported Missionaries

In an effort to annually assess our missionary workers' needs and activities, Capitol Hill Baptist Church sends the following questionnaire to all of the workers it supports directly or indirectly through the International Missions Board. CHBC's overall evaluation of a missionary is based on lots of other factors, including our personal relationships with the workers. But this form helps inform us about special needs and changes in the workers' activities that we were not already aware of.

In other words, this is not an application which a CHBC church member uses to apply to become a supported worker with CHBC. Rather, it's an annual check-in about the circumstances and needs of workers we already support.

We send it early in the church's annual budget process, and we send it replacing the word "church" with "c" and the word "missions" with "m" for security purposes.

– *Andy Johnson, CHBC associate pastor*

Capitol Hill Baptist Church
525 A Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Worker Questionnaire 2008

Note: Please return an electronic copy of the completed questionnaire by September 01, 20-- at the latest. If you need to return a paper copy, please mail it to the address listed above.

Personal Information

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-Mail Address:

Skype Name (if applicable):

Date of Birth:

Spouse/Children's names and birthdays:

Supporting Agency Information

Name, Address and Telephone number of home Church in your country of origin:

Name, Address and Telephone Number of Board or Agency with which you serve:

Appointment date:

Number of years serving in your country?

Relationship with CHBC (attach additional sheets or expand space for responses as needed)

What was your initial connection with CHBC and with whom do you now have contact?

Who is your missions contact person at CHBC? (meaning the person responsible to keep CHBC updated on your life and work) If you're not sure who that is please tell us that, too.

Are there ways that CHBC members might be genuinely helpful to your work by visiting your country a short-term basis during 2007/08? (We understand that such trips may not be helpful for some workers in some contexts.)

Are there specific ways that you think CHBC could more helpfully partner with your work in 2007 and beyond?

For overseas workers only: If possible, we would love to have a leader from CHBC visit you in your country of residence during 2007. We would love to have the chance to know your work better, to see how you are doing, and to perhaps impart some encouragement to you. Is there a particular time during the year that might work best for this? Is there any reason why this might not be helpful?

Please list items that CHBC might provide that would enhance your work and/or family life. (Ex: Foodstuffs, educational aids, clothing, business/office supplies, toys, books and magazines, etc.)

Financial Information

What are your current budgeted financial needs?
(Example: \$1500/month)

What percent of your monthly budget needs are pledged?

From where does your giving come? Please fill in the chart below.

	Congregations	Individuals	Others
Percentage of Support from...			
Number of Entities			

Name and contact information for five (5) largest supporters. (optional)

This information will help us in the event you need help in an emergency or we wish to coordinate with others to provide assistance for a special project or special need.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How much financial support do you receive from the congregation of which you are a member? (total dollar amount or percentage of overall support)

Work's Strategic Importance (You may attach separate pages, if necessary)

Give a brief description of your present work: the people who benefit and the challenges you face.

Please give a brief assessment of your work's strategic importance.

Have there been any significant changes in your work in the past year?

How do you envision your work changing over the next year? Five years?

Corresponding with You

When do you plan your next home leave and where will you live during that time? (Please give name, address and phone number of the best contact for your stateside visit)

What is the best way for CHBC leadership to be in contact with you?

E-mail _____ Skype _____ Post _____

What is the most effective method for you to communicate to CHBC your current needs and activities?

E-Mail _____ Skype _____ Post _____

(Please advise us if any correspondence is sensitive due to your security concerns.)

Thank you for your time!

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9Marks Pastors' and Theologians' Forum

Do you like Patrick Johnstone's book Operation World? Why or why not?

Answers from

- [Mark Dever \(United States\)](#)
- [Matthias Lohmann \(Germany\)](#)
- [Conrad Mbewe \(Zambia\)](#)
- [Michael Oh \(Japan\)](#)
- [Luiz Sayão \(Brazil\)](#)

Mark Dever



I use *Operation World* regularly. When I'm composing my notes for my pastoral prayer I always consult *Operation World*. It gives me good suggestions for how I can more specifically pray for nations. So rather than simply praying for the gospel to spread in Germany (a fine prayer itself!), I can pray with a little more knowledge and thought about particular ways that Christians are doing this in Germany. Because it is a book, the information is sometimes dated, but periodicals and the internet can easily supplement that inevitable deficiency.

Mark Dever is the senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.

Matthias Lohmann



I can't think of any reason why you would not like *Operation World*. Sure, sometimes the "Answers to Prayer" could be better explained and more background could be given for some prayer requests, but no one forces me to pray for everything *Operation World* suggests and I can use other sources to learn more about certain things.

Ultimately, it is a blessing to have *Operation World*. My sinful tendency is always to limit my concern to things that impact me personally and immediately. Scripture, of course, is the primary source to correct this sinfully self-centered perspective. It turns our thoughts away from the here and now to eternal matters, from the self to God and others; still, I benefit from other sources that help me to grow in my concern for the whole world. *Operation World* is such a source.

Matthias Lohmann serves as pastor of the FEG Muenchen-Mitte in Munich, Germany.

Conrad Mbewe



I love Patrick Johnstone's *Operation World*. It reminds me of William Carey's 1791 *Enquiry*, especially the survey section where he dealt with the tragic statistics of the unfinished task of world evangelism. That effort gave birth to the modern missionary movement!

I find *Operation World* helpful not only for prayer but in giving me a snapshot of what is going on in various countries, spiritually speaking. Therefore, as I go to any country as an itinerant preacher, I am able to have on my fingertips some ideas about the kind of country I am visiting. I have found the information to be fairly accurate, within the author's limitations.

But like all human products it has its shortcomings. It is written from a broadly evangelical position, and so tends to be too generous in its definition of healthy Christianity. As long as I bear that in mind, I find it a helpful tool. Perhaps Christians in the Western world have better resources. As a pastor in the heart of Africa, I do not know of a better tool than *Operation World* for the purposes stated above.

Conrad Mbewe is the pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia.

Michael Oh



In earlier generations, Christians prayed for the global lost and missionaries based on biblical conviction, aided by at best an occasional prayer letter and a bit of imagination (often quite inaccurate) about the tribes, languages, peoples and nations of the world. In our generation there is no excuse either for a lack of biblical conviction in praying for the global peoples and the global church or for empty or uninformed prayer. *Operation World*, perhaps more than any other resource, has impacted the possibility and actuality of informed prayer for the world.

"God bless Japan" is, no doubt, a prayer that God can and does answer. But a person can pray more specifically and strategically for a nation like Japan when he or she has the opportunity to learn not only about Japan's political, demographic, and religious statistics but about Japan's greatest advances, needs, and challenges according to the collective wisdom of church and mission leaders. In general, this type of information helps to increase a Christian's understanding and passion for nations around the world.

Perhaps if we were as informed and deliberate about prayer for ourselves and our nation as *Operation World* has helped many to be about the world, the prayers of American Christians could advance beyond "God bless me," "God bless you," and "God bless America."

Michael Oh is the president of Christ Bible Institute and Seminary in Nagoya, Japan.

Luiz Sayão



Operation World is a very helpful handbook about evangelical Christian missions around the world. It is a global overview of the church situation in all countries.

The book is an invitation to alterity, to otherness. We are often egocentric, paying attention primarily to our needs and families and churches. To read *Operation World* is to be set free from this narcissism. It allows you to make a fascinating trip to the persecuted Church in North Korea and Saudi Arabia; to secularized countries of Western Europe such as the Netherlands and France; to the growing churches of Brazil, China, and South Korea; to the challenge of the spiritual awakening in Russia, Romania, and other Eastern European countries; to the suffering and poverty of millions in many countries of Africa.

Operation World is a wonderful opportunity to prepare our minds and our hearts for missions and to see the faces and feel the hearts of our brothers and sisters all over the world.

Luiz Sayão is a pastor, professor of Old Testament, and Bible translator in Brazil. He also translated Operation World into Portuguese.

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Book Review: An Introduction to the Science of Missions

By J.H. Bavinck

Reviewed by Andy Johnson

An Introduction to the Science of Missions

[Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960. 324 pages. \\$16.99](#)

The other night I told my wife I was going to begin this book review by asking the reader, "If you were going to be marooned alone on an island, what one book on missions would you take?" My wife, with her always-helpful, unfailing sense of logic, replied that a book on mission might not be the best thing to take if one were to be stuck *alone* on an island.



So, let's try this: If you were going to be sent out for the rest of your life as a missionary and could take along only one book on missions (in addition to the Bible), what one book would you take? Even though I don't like superlatives, I have little trouble naming that one book for me: *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* by J.H. Bavinck.

This is not the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, author of *Reformed Dogmatics*. This is his nephew, Johan Herman Bavinck. In J.H. Bavinck we find a writer who is able to draw on his experiences as a faithful pastor (a Dutch congregation in Bandung, Sumatra, 1919-1929), a passionate missionary (in Java, Indonesia, 1929-1938), and a serious biblical scholar (Professor of Theology and Missions, Kampen Theological Seminary, 1938-1963).

Yet it's not his pedigree or experiences that make me like this book so much. It's his biblical focus and his humble, common-sense discernment in the face of so many unsatisfying, man-centered, pragmatic alternatives. In a day when so many books on missions are about "ten research-tested and socio-anthropologically-approved steps to guaranteed missionary success," Bavinck's book is a tall glass of cool water.

WHERE'S THIS BOOK GOING? TO SCRIPTURE

You get a sense for where this book is headed in the introduction as he lists the questions he hopes to address. The list ranges from the foundational to the methodological:

- "What is the basis of missionary work? What position does it occupy within the total framework of Scripture's commands and promises?"
- "Is it permissible to accommodate ourselves to the spiritual heritage of the peoples among whom we work?"
- And "Ought missions be primarily concerned with calling individuals to repentance or should it give priority to the community, to the tribe, to a people?" (5)

What strikes me about these questions is how relevant they are to missions today, and this book was published in 1954.

But I think the secret to the timelessness of this book is exposed in this comment at the end of the introduction:

It is with such urgent questions that the theory of missions is concerned. Answers can be given solely on

the basis of Scripture. For the work of missions is the work of God; it is not lawful for us to improvise. At each step we must ask what it is that God demands. Although it will not always be easy to find the right course, our search must surely be led by what God has said in his word. The task of the theory of missions now clearly lies before us. (6)

Did you catch that? He said that "Answers can be given solely on the basis of Scripture." *That* is what sets this book apart from so many modern books on missions. This book is fundamentally rooted in the Bible, not in ideas taken from the author's experiences and observations on the mission field. Not that the book is not practical—it certainly is. But its practical ideas rise out of biblical texts, giving it an authority that I find lacking in most current, more-pragmatic books on missions.

And it's this biblical rooting, I think, that gives the book an almost eerily timeless quality. Reading it, I felt at times as if Bavinck had been reading our mail and was addressing current missiological controversies. Contextualization, heart-languages, bridging from non-Christian "scriptures," translation difficulties, orality, cultural imperialism, the role of social sciences, incarnational vs. representational ministry—all these "hot" issues and more are at least hinted at. Yet what's so helpful is that Bavinck doesn't have an axe to grind, since he's largely anticipating rather than participating in these debates.

But you'd be mistaken if you thought the book was merely a theological reflection on the idea of missions. Experience matters, and the fact that Bavinck spent twenty years in Southeast Asia as a pastor and missionary shows through. Yet instead of letting those experiences and observations form the foundation for his method, as so many other books do, he keeps those experiences in their place, always deferring to the authoritative and sufficient Word of God. They are permitted to raise their hands and ask question, as students do; they are not permitted to write out the course curriculum, as a professor does. The result is a book that addresses practical topics with sustained, careful, biblical reflection.

OVERVIEW

The book is divided into three parts. The first part addresses the theory of missions (foundation, approach, aim), much of which is a biblical theology of missions from Genesis to Revelation. For a book translated from the Dutch, this section is surprisingly heart-warming, offering an eloquent, at times soaring, meditation on the glory of God among the nations, which alone is worth the price of the book. The section also includes helpful meditations on how Scripture should shape our contextualization, and warns against minimizing the essentially confrontational nature of the gospel.

In the second part, Bavinck reflects on the convictional aspect of evangelism, what he calls "elenctics," which is from the Greek word *elengchein* meaning "to rebuke" or "to bring to shame." And he describes it as evangelism that labors, under the Holy Spirit, to bring "conviction of sin and a call to repentance." (222) Any who work among Muslims or among Hindus should find his consideration of bringing awareness of sin immensely useful, given that Muslims essentially view sin as ignorance while Hindus view it as illusory, self-misunderstanding. Bavinck is exhaustive in his reflections on how humanity tries to hide their sense of guilt (*a la* Romans 1) in false religious worship, and how we can lovingly expose it from Scripture.

The third part addresses the history of missions and his outlook for the future. The history section is perhaps the least extraordinary part of the book, having a bit of a tacked-on feel. But it's only 30 out of the book's 309 pages. And Bavinck's view of the future is simultaneously cautionary, dated, and optimistically biblical. He ends by saying we must have confidence in God rather than in our analysis or strategies:

We know that the missionary enterprise is not a human undertaking, in which we must take into account our forces and counter forces, but it is the work of Jesus Christ who will gather to himself, through our instrumentality, a congregation out of every nation. It is upon this that we base all our expectations. Here we feel that we are on the border of a miracle, and it is for this reason that at each moment great

surprises can overtake us. (308)

A FEW OBLIGATORY CRITIQUES

It should be obvious by now that I really like this book. Are there *any* downsides to it? Well, yes, as a humanly-authored book there are always some. The book is overly academic in a few places (at least for me), in part because it's responding to the works of a few dead Dutch guys I'd never heard of nor will probably read. But much of this discussion is mercifully short and is confined to the preface.

In addition, it took me a while to figure out just what Bavinck meant by "elenctics" and why it was so important, but he eventually won me over. Also, he seems a bit uncritical in the history section of the ecumenical trends in the European churches of the 1930s and 40s. Admittedly, not many of the worst fruits of that movement had materialized by the time he was writing, and he does sound a brief cautionary note about minimizing the gospel to maximize visible unity. All in all, the final history section is weak compared to the rest of the book and an anti-climactic conclusion.

WORTH THE WORK

Finally, this book may not be what some readers are looking for. Bavinck's effort to find missionary methods in Scripture is no mere cut-and-paste job, which means that reading this book takes thought, study, discernment, and prayer. If you are a pastor or missionary, putting this kind of book to work will take a lot of, well, work. It is not one of those "how to" books with clear methods, extravagant claims, and simple "proven" steps.

But if you want a book on missions that digs deep into the whole Bible to find its practical principles; if you want help placing your missions methods in a biblical context and drawing your methods from the Bible; and if you want a book that keeps God's glory in the gospel as the chief aim of missions, then this is certainly the book for you.

Andy Johnson is an associate pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church and a trustee of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board.

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Book Review: Let the Nations Be Glad!

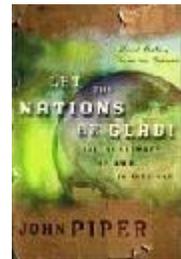
By John Piper

Reviewed by Robin

Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions

[Baker Academic, 2004. \\$14.99](#)

Growing up in the United Kingdom, I always had an interest in what God was doing globally, yet I was fairly ignorant of the "missions world." For the last five years I have served cross-culturally in a local church in South Asia, and they have been real eye-opening.



At one level it is exciting to see how God keeps his promise to bless the nations through Christ and uses wonderful people to do so. At another level, I have been alarmed to see how much of the missions field is obsessed with numbers, reliant on pragmatism, and virtually ignorant of the local church. Aren't all these characteristics evidence of a deep-seated man-centeredness? Perhaps this is because, apart from a few notable exceptions, "Bible believing" churches seem to send fewer people to serve cross-culturally than those churches which we would perceive to be weaker on Scripture. So much so, that I'm often left asking on the mission field, "Where are all the Reformed guys?"

First published in 1993, John Piper's book *Let the Nations Be Glad*, to my mind at least, remains both the best antidote to a man-centred approach to missions and the best challenge to the Reformed community to have a heart for global evangelism. Piper's passion stated in his preface is seen on every page and in every sentence: "My passion is to see people, churches, mission agencies, and social ministries become God-centred, Christ-exalting, Spirit-powered, Bible-saturated, missions-mobilizing, soul-winning and justice-pursuing" (9).

OVERVIEW

As part of his characteristic God-entranced view of all things, Piper roots mission in worship, prayer, and suffering. As he does so, he draws heavily not only on the Scriptures, but also on men and women down the ages who have obeyed the call of God to make the nations glad with the good news of the Saviour.

Missions for Worship

His opening chapter on worship contains much that will be familiar to Piper readers with its emphasis on the chief end of man being to glorify God *by* enjoying him forever. In this work on missions, that basic philosophy is put to work by making missions the servant of worship. Here's how he puts it: "Missions exists because worship doesn't....Worship, therefore, is the goal of missions" (17).

This is something understood by men serving in different places and different times, men such as William Carey, David Brainerd, and John Dawson.

Missions Through Prayer

Chapter two on "the supremacy of God in missions through prayer" is powerful enough to transform either an individual's or a church's prayer life. The Christian life is a fight, Piper explains. And the weapon of prayer is indispensable in the spiritual warfare of missions. Rebuking contemporary Christians for the absence of austerity and what J.I. Packer has so aptly dubbed "laid back religion," Piper points to why our prayer lives are often so lame:

Probably the number one reason prayer malfunctions in the hands of believers is that we try to turn a wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom. Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for. Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission...But what have millions of Christians done? We have stopped believing we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance. Just easy peace and prosperity. And what did we do with the walkie-talkie? We tried to rig it up as an intercom in our houses...not to call in firepower for conflict with the enemy, but to ask for more comforts in the den. (49)

The Puritan John Eliot, the martyr Jim Elliot, and orphan-lover George Mueller all understood the basic idea here, which is surely one of the reasons the Lord used these pray-ers so powerfully.

Missions and Suffering

At a time when very few churches or church members have a theology of suffering, Piper's third chapter on suffering is much needed. He explains Christ's call to follow him and die, and how God uses "the blood of the martyrs to be the seed bed of the church." He then shows us how the relationship between missions and suffering was fleshed out in the lives of people like Henry Martyn, Richard Wurmbrand, Charles Simeon, and, touchingly, the "five inspiring wives" of those who died taking the gospel to the Auca Indians.

We also read of how God has used the suffering of his people to "make people glad" in countries as diverse as the Sudan, Uzbekistan, Mozambique, and the South Sea Islands. The last of these nations was made glad by John G. Paton, who embraced the possibility of death by cannibalism because he had such a deep conviction of his own future bodily resurrection.

Engaging Current Missiological Issues

Part two of the book shows just how adept Piper is in engaging with current missiological issues. The chapter on why the Lord Jesus is the only way to salvation is the single clearest explanation on this subject that I have come across. If either you or people you know are unclear on this issue, this is the chapter to read.

Then Piper engages with the ethnology debate, making clear the biblical emphasis on the gospel going to every nation, tribe, people, and language. This then answers the question, "Is then the task of missions to maximize the number of people redeemed or the number of people reached?" (233). Piper's answer, based on the witness of Scripture, runs deeply counter to the current obsession in missions with numbers and people groups:

The Biblical answer is that God's call for missions in Scripture *cannot* be defined merely in terms of crossing cultures to maximize the total number of individuals saved. Rather, God's will for missions is that every people group be reached with the testimony of Christ and that a people be called out for his name for his name among all the nations... Our responsibility is to define missions his way and then obey. (233-234)

Edwards, God's Glory, and Compassion for People

No book by Piper would be complete without some direct engagement with his dead mentor Jonathan Edwards. Sure enough, he draws on Edwards' material in part three of the book. Specifically, he discusses the idea of the "unity of motives in world mission" in which Piper shows that there is no conflict between passion for God and compassion for people. In our day of "holistic mission" (which means different things to different people), this is an important contribution to the discussion.

WHOLE-HEARTED RECOMMENDATION

So I would unreservedly and wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone who desires to be a "world Christian," either as a sender or a goer. Given how much modern missions by-passes the local church, I would like to have heard Piper speak more of the centrality of the church in God's plan to bless the nations through Abraham's seed. So often in missions it feels like the organisations are the bride and the church is the bridesmaid. And it is interesting that the word "church" does not appear in the book's index. But that does not diminish this magisterial call to place God's glory once more at the centre of missions.

Robin, originally from the United Kingdom, is now pastoring a church in a South Asian metropolis.

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Book Review: Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?

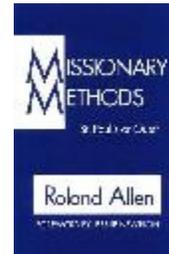
By Roland Allen

Reviewed by Scott

Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?

[Eerdmans, 1962. 188 pages. \\$15.00](#)

Roland Allen served as a missionary to North China with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel one hundred years ago. He had a passion to see healthy, lasting, indigenous churches established, which he thought would occur when two things happened: his contemporaries gave up their paternalistic ways and instead trusted the Holy Spirit to guide new churches, and their methods began to correspond with the Apostle Paul's. His observations and conclusions were published in 1912 as *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*



EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK'S CONTENTS

Why Paul's churches lasted

Allen believed there were two main reasons that the indigenous churches started by Paul were lasting: (1) he believed that the churches he planted really were local churches and (2) he trusted the Holy Spirit within these congregations. In other words, Allen believed that Western church planters needed to learn to rely less "upon our own exertions" and more on the Spirit of Christ (6).

Paul had no special advantages that are inaccessible to us; therefore we should emulate his methods

While we might be tempted to claim that such success was due to advantages we no longer possess, Allen argues just the opposite. Allen is convinced that Paul did not benefit from any advantage we lack, whether from the geography of the region he was preaching in, the class of his hearers, or the moral conditions of his target people. Therefore, Allen argues, we should make Paul's methods our own.

Big-picture view of Paul's methods

Paul would target a broad region and establish a center for the gospel with two goals in mind. First, the centers had to be outward focused. They were not to be places where people should come to hear the gospel, but places from which the gospel could spread out (16). Second, they were to be firmly rooted: Paul taught the gospel with the goal of establishing a strong local church that could reach the surrounding country with the gospel. Paul knew that he could not personally preach in every city and that there was nothing particularly virtuous about establishing a church in an important place unless that church was "possessed of sufficient life to be a source of light to the whole country round" (12).

How Paul differed from us: he didn't ask for or give money

In addition to pointing out the general principles of Paul's methods, Allen draws attention to certain Pauline practices that run deeply counter to modern missionary customs. For example, Paul never sought financial help for himself from those who listened to him, he never gave financial help to those who listened to him, and he never administered local church funds himself. In light of this, Allen wonders if the common practice of missionaries providing financial help to nationals has its roots in the wrong idea that "the stability of the church in some way depends upon the permanence of its buildings" or that "reverence and devotion depend upon expensive religious furniture to which our luxury has accustomed us" (52).

Paul's method of preaching

According to Allen, Paul's preaching principles are also worth emulating. Paul avoided the extremes of violently attacking the religious beliefs of his hearers on the one hand, and weakening his own message on the other (70). In doing so, he preached a gospel that was not an intellectual novelty, but that called for a changed life. Contrary to this principle, some church planters today have begun to think that their work is no longer "to call men from the heathen temple into the Church of God but to trim the dimly glowing lamp of God in the heathen temple, and to pour into it a few drops of the oil of Christian doctrine till it shines with a new radiance" (71). This kind of preaching does great damage to the church's mission and is never found in the New Testament.

WHY WE NEED TO READ ALLEN TODAY

Even though Allen wrote this book almost a hundred years ago, we still need to read his work because missionaries still struggle with the same issues. First, church planters still need to resist their own racial and religious pride. Second, church planters still need to trust the Spirit of God within national believers. While we are usually willing to do just about everything for young believers, we sometimes have a difficult time acknowledging their equality. We should trust the Spirit-equipped national converts as much as we would believers in our home country. After all, it would be much better "that our converts should make many mistakes, and fall into many errors, and commit many offences, than that their sense of responsibility should be undermined" (145). When we find ourselves trusting the Spirit of God only in ourselves, we are likely only trusting ourselves.

CRITIQUE OF ALLEN'S ANGLICAN VIEWS OF THE ORDINANCES

While Allen expressed pleasure that his work would be read by those outside his own ecclesiastical tradition, his Anglican training is evident at times, most notably when he refers to baptism and the Lord's Supper. But this should not deter the non-Anglican reader from benefiting from Allen's insights into Scripture. Plus, at other times in the book Allen's Anglicanism largely disappears: speaking of authority and unity in the church, he might even be mistaken for a congregationalist!

ONE THING TO WATCH OUT FOR

Another issue that requires caution is Allen's treatment of appointing leaders in chapter 9. While his argument for not delaying in establishing indigenous church leaders is a much-needed message (see pp. 100-107), the reader should be careful not to let Allen lead him too far in the other direction. If Allen saw missionaries waiting too long to hand the reins over to local leaders, today we often see just the opposite problem. If we uncritically apply Allen's arguments to current missionary practice, they could have the unintended effect of encouraging us to move faster in appointing new leaders when some of us are already prone to move too quickly.

CONCLUSION

Allen's book leaves us with a question: will we obey the apostle Paul's own command to follow him as he follows Christ? Paul carried "the daily pressure...of concern for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28). It was this concern for their well-being that led to him to exhort the believers in Corinth to "strive to excel in building up the church" (1 Cor. 14:12). It is my hope that Roland Allen's classic work will help today's missionaries and church planters do just that.

Scott lives in Asia and is a Ph.D. student at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Book Review: *Window on the World*

By Daphne Spragget with Jill Johnstone

Reviewed by Tim Cantrell

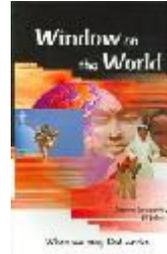
Window on the World

Authentic, 2007. 220 pages. \$16.99

One of the more worn-out books in our family library is *Window on the World*. For the past two years, we have read a few pages on Monday mornings to help our four young children (ages 3-9) and ourselves! It helps us think and pray less provincially and more globally.

This book must be the result of a massive labour of love, compiling as it does information from missionaries around the world. It is packed with perks such as,

- colourful pictures of over 100 of the most unreached peoples of the world,
- fascinating facts and helpful summaries of a country or region's history,
- maps,
- and lots of details about how to pray for these lost nations, for persecuted believers, and for the cause of the gospel in that location.



And all this is usually framed around a simple story of an imaginary child-evangelist sharing Christ with another child of that respective people group. What a great tool for raising up future missionaries in our homes!

Unintentionally, *Window on the World* is also a tool for training children and parents in discernment. This book unfortunately doesn't escape some of the typical trends toward theological shallowness in missions today. So my wife and I will do a bit of "editing on our feet," as we use its guidelines for prayer. For example, expect a few too many references to Jesus as our "special friend" rather than as Lord and King, and an overemphasis on the results of the gospel (internal peace) rather than the content of the gospel (forgiveness of sin).

Still, I know of no other tool that compares with *Window on the World* for teaching kids and parents to pray together with God's heart for the nations.

Tim Cantrell is the pastor of Antioch Bible Church in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Book Review: Church Planting Movements

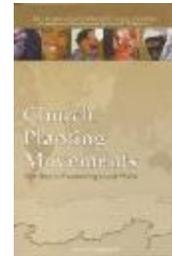
By David Garrison

Reviewed by Ed Roberts

Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World

[WIGTake Resources, 2003. 362 pages. \\$18.95](#)

Sometimes a book contains important biblical truths and helpful suggestions even though its theological methodology or hermeneutic is flawed. In that situation, I might recommend the book, but only if the reader has good biblical and theological instincts, and even then with all the requisite qualifications. At best, David Garrison's book *Church Planting Movements* falls into this category for me. And even then....



I cursorily checked online reviews of this book and found mostly uncritical, breathless accolades, probably because most readers want to celebrate God's work redeeming a lost world. I want to celebrate that, too. Nevertheless, this review will be more critical of Garrison's hermeneutic, his missiological pragmatism, his advocacy of rapidly reproducing churches, and the very thin ecclesiology of church planting movements (CPMs).

Church Planting Movements used to be required reading for all Southern Baptist Convention International Missionary Board personnel and is still read widely inside and outside of the IMB. Yet the book's basic strategy seems to be this: take a look at CPMs around the world; identify common characteristics of those movements; find some proof-texted biblical example of said characteristic and then dub the characteristics as "biblical"; and then urge church planting teams to adopt these best practices while avoiding the worst practices that hinder a CPM. Finally, you can say that all this will bring God glory.

I will begin with some positive aspects of the book and then consider some problems with Garrison's definition, methods, and approach.

WHAT'S GOOD

First, I should state that few people have as great a passion for seeing the lost reached as David Garrison, especially the remaining unreached people groups.

At the same time, he rightly notes in the first chapter that Church Planting Movements are not an end in themselves. The end of all of our efforts is for God to be glorified, which occurs whenever individuals enter into right relationship with him through Jesus Christ and are then incorporated into churches which enable them to continue to grow in grace with other like-minded believers. Any time a church is planted—no matter who does it—there are grounds for celebration (27).

Garrison has a zeal for evangelism and church planting that's infectious, and he is particularly good at challenging people to be more intentional about their evangelism and church planting efforts. Our evangelism should result in churches, he says. That's exactly right. And he's right to say that we cannot blame God or his sovereignty for our failures to see disciples made or churches planted.

Further, our church planting efforts should be regularly assessed and evaluated, says Garrison, for which I commend him. We who are cross cultural gospel communicators should welcome regular assessment of our tactics.

MISSIONARY PRAGMATISM?

Yet this book isn't all good. Many of the practices which he promotes are good and right correctives to more traditional, sometimes culture-bound, and extra-biblical ways of planting churches overseas. But the book still reads like a how to manual for missionary pragmatism. Despite his apparent stance for theological compatibilism, the author emphasizes CPM methods because they "work"—if only you will try them! And the reason we don't see CPM in some places is because we're not using the right methods.

To be fair, there are places where Garrison recognizes God's role in CPM, but at the end of the day, it's all about best practices. Garrison seems to strongly believe that a church planting team plays the decisive role in beginning and nurturing CPMs (see 287).

Furthermore, the book is heavily influenced by western cultural assumptions: faster is better, newer is better, bigger is better, more is better, simpler is better, and authority is bad (especially ecclesiastical authority). Ironically, the book makes these assumptions while ostensibly embracing a kind of primitivism that glamorizes the New Testament environment, a church environment that was anything but glamorous (hence many of the New Testament's epistles)!

More than that, the book is imbued with the triumphalism that presently characterizes much Southern Baptist Convention life, a triumphalism that would have seemed utterly out of place, I dare say, to the apostle Paul, who was happy to take his place at the end of the procession (1 Cor. 4:13).

FASTER IS ALWAYS BETTER?

According to Garrison, "A Church Planting Movement is a *rapid* and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment" (my emphasis). There is nothing unbiblical about the definition except for the emphasis on rapidity, which seems to be critical to CPM methods and strategy. According to the more fantastic case studies cited in CPM research, in fact, parts of Latin America, India, China, and Bangladesh are seeing multiplication that is much more rapid than anything described in the New Testament, or during the first three centuries before Constantine—by orders of magnitude! Here's a sample of Garrison on this topic:

First, a church planting movement reproduces RAPIDLY. Within a very short time, newly planted churches are already starting new churches that follow the same pattern of rapid reproduction. "How rapid is rapid?" you may ask. Perhaps the best answer is "faster than you think possible." Though the rate varies from place to place, Church Planting Movements always outstrip the population growth rate as they race toward reaching the entire people group. Once you've viewed a few of the case studies, you'll begin to get the idea. (21-22)

The real-life CPM studies and stories that Garrison recounts are all very encouraging, although the obsession with data and statistics is at first a bit off-putting, at least to this reader. Since part of the definition of CPM is rapid reproduction, CPMers must somehow document this rapidity, a term never defined as far as I can tell.

HERMENEUTICS 101?

The hermeneutic behind the CPM strategy is not without problems. Scripture is sometimes cited, and there is even an appendix providing a biblical rationale for CPMs. But Scripture is handled in a surprisingly cavalier fashion. Just take a peek at the appendix (331-342). Garrison should know better. Doesn't the New Testament have anything normative to say about church, church leadership, or how to plant churches?

In reality, Garrison doesn't look to Scripture, but to current or historical examples of CPM. He studies them and then marshals the stats. Then he assigns a cause and effect relationship—usually asserted not proven—between the methods he observes and the effectiveness of the CPM. Voila! Observations become causes.

To what extent is Paul's missionary example as recorded in Acts normative? Questions like this go unasked and unanswered. That's because Garrison doesn't begin with the Bible and ask what principles it might offer for church planting among unreached people groups. Instead, he ransacks it for proof-texts that support CPM ideas and methodology. This failure in hermeneutics leaves Garrison open to the charge of pragmatism: do whatever works and whatever works is right, and mostly do what is fast, because faster is better! Whatever hasn't worked or takes too long isn't right.

To the extent that he provides anecdotes from Paul's journeys, Garrison's only point seems to be that Paul's methodology gives us great freedom to try many things, *except* work hard to plant sound, biblically-ordered contextual churches, patiently equip and train indigenous pastors/elders, hang around for a decade or more in one area discipling new believers, and spend precious time encouraging spiritual maturity as well as reproductive outreach efforts. Whatever you do, don't do that! Garrison writes,

Some missionaries insist on taking the time to "lay a good foundation" with a small group, rather than sowing the gospel widely and expecting a Church Planting Movement. Time is not the precondition for a good foundation: sound doctrine and sound practice are. In fact, slow sowing and slow harvesting communicate to the hearer that the message isn't urgent so why bother responding to it? (244).

Patiently and carefully working the harvest slows down reproduction, so even if Scripture enjoins it, CPMers know better. They know that being careful takes time! Of course, it's not clear how sound doctrine and sound practice can be rapidly developed and reproduced. Paul's emphasis on doctrinal teaching seems to escape Garrison's attention. Didn't Paul actually stay in Ephesus three years? Was he in a big hurry?

RAPID REPRODUCTION? NOT SO FAST!

A careful reading of the chronology of Acts will show that, except for Pentecost, the church did not grow very rapidly in the New Testament. The verses cited for rapid growth in the book's appendix include Mark 2:2, Acts 2:47, Acts 14:21-23, Acts 16:5, and Acts 19:20. Only one of these—Acts 2:47, which says, "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"—might be hinting at some kind of rapid growth. The church did receive a kind of redemptive-historical jump start at Pentecost, but the other verses cited don't say anything about rapid reproduction.

During his public ministry, Jesus seemed more interested in clarifying the cost of discipleship than in rapidly multiplying his followers.

After his conversion, Paul was in no hurry, but spent a decade before being sent out by the Antioch church to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He did frequently have to move quickly to another location to carry on his ministry, but this was because of persecution. But rather than join hands with any and everyone who wanted to try out church planting, Paul was careful about whom he enlisted to join his apostolic church planting troupe. In his epistles, Paul also takes great pains to evaluate tried and tested workers before commending them to the churches.

Unfortunately, Garrison shows little interest in recognizing, equipping, and training local church leaders to shepherd the local flock, which is clearly a New Testament emphasis (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:2). Instead, he says that new converts should be given immediate responsibility by being trained to start new "churches" and then move on to start more. He offers no discussion of the qualifications for elders and deacons, or on the restriction of the role of elder to men. Apparently, all this would slow things down. Garrison does have a point about church planters holding onto the reins too long, or failing to train and "release" local leaders. The solution, though, is not to set aside culturally appropriate, biblical local church leadership. Healthy, exemplary local church leaders would seem to be essential to healthy churches.

THIN ECCLESIOLOGY?

When Garrison writes about the church, his ecclesiology is slim (242). Now that the IMB has embraced specific and biblical guidelines for church, I would hope future editions of the book would include those guidelines, at least as an appendix.

On the other hand, I would be more than surprised to see these guidelines included in CPM books, because those guidelines would interfere with more rapid reproduction, which is what makes CPM what it is.

NOT SO FAST CPM...MAYBE A GOOD THING?

Apart from the rapid reproduction, a CPM isn't objectionable. In fact it's a worthwhile goal.

At the same time, it's not something normative, not in the Bible or in church history. Among the ten universal characteristics of CPMs, several are basic, like prayer, abundant seed sowing, intentional church planting, scriptural authority, local lay leadership, and healthy churches. Garrison is correct to say that degrees and academic training are not necessary for church leadership, but he doesn't appear to value highly enough the importance of the elders' or leaders' doctrinal understanding. Hebrews and Paul's epistles, especially the Pastorals, all emphasize doctrine and Christian practice. Doctrine and Christian maturity belong together. In fact, Titus is written so that Titus will remind the Cretans of the doctrinal bases for living a godly, mature life. Teaching these things to budding leaders and a young church takes time, maybe less time than we think, but it doesn't happen overnight, either, not in the Bible I read. And given the number of follow-up pastoral letters in the New Testament, it would seem to be important.

But in this book on church planting, the emphasis on watching one's life and doctrine seems conspicuous by its absence.

Only three of the common characteristics strike me as discretionary or questionable: rapid reproduction, churches planting churches, and cell or house churches. But all of Garrison's other CPM characteristics are normative because Scripture says to do them, not because they are best practices teased out by Garrison and his investigators. And, please understand, these biblical characteristics don't guarantee a CPM as the assured result. God may or may not begin a movement in response to our prayers, seed sowing, and so forth.

SHOULD YOU READ THIS BOOK? PROBABLY NOT

In the end, Garrison's book may provide some helpful criteria for evaluating a church planting strategy for the savvy reader who matches this profile: a reader or church planter who already has a robust biblical ecclesiology and biblical theology; a reader who understands the centrality of training local church leaders and not just sending out inexperienced and immature church planters; a reader who is not particularly gullible; and a reader who is not likely to be fooled by bad hermeneutics, fallacious reasoning, or worldly (read pragmatic) assumptions that may lie behind an author's point of view. Certainly, the common characteristics of CPM which are biblical should be a part of every church planting effort. But then again, do we need this book to tell us that?

Eckhard Schnabel writes, "Just as tradition and reason can come into conflict with Scripture, so can experience. And just as tradition and reason need to be submitted to the witness of God's revelation in Scripture and to the truth of the gospel, experience never trumps the normative voice of Scripture."^[2]

For those readers who are infatuated with current business literature, with best practices, and with the triumphalism of mega-church life in the West; and for those readers who prefer a light hermeneutic (or none at all!), this book might end up affirming some very unhelpful and unbiblical tendencies. Hence, I would not recommend it. I appreciate the encouraging stories which have some motivational power as well as the emphasis on regularly assessing our church planting efforts, but the CPM book may not be very helpful to the church planter wanting to plant a church by the Book.

For a bracing challenge to traditional missionary church planting methods, read *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* by Roland Allen [see the [review](#) in this eJournal]. Or for a scholarly approach to Paul's church planting life, ministry, and methods, let me recommend *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods*, by Eckhard J. Schnabel.

Ed Roberts is a church planter in Central Asia.

1. For more on this, see Eckhard J. Schnabel's book *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).
2. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 380.

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Book Review: The Camel

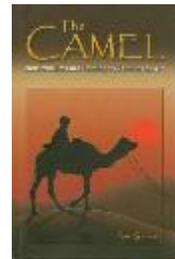
By Kevin Greeson

Reviewed by Doug Coleman

The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ

[WIGTake Resources, 2007. 210 pages. \\$18.95](#)

According to Kevin Greeson, an IMB missionary in South Asia, God is doing a new thing, evidenced by unprecedented numbers of Muslims in a particular South Asian country dramatically turning to Christ.



Reportedly one of the key elements in this movement is the CAMEL, a method of using Qur'anic testimony about Jesus to bridge to the New Testament. The concept of Qur'anic bridging is not new, as those familiar with mission efforts to Muslims know. Yet the publication of Greeson's *Camel Training Manual* in 2004 has generated great excitement about this movement and the CAMEL's supposed role in it among mission personnel and Christians in the United States. One missionary to the Arab world calls the CAMEL the closest thing there is to a "magic bullet" for Muslim evangelism (13).

Greeson published a revision in 2007 under the title *The Camel: How Muslims are Coming to Faith in Christ*, and the method continues to enjoy widespread popularity. Yet other than on a few blog sites, the CAMEL has received little critical analysis.

WHAT IS THE CAMEL?

Greeson claims to have learned the method from Muslim-background believers, examined it against the authority of the Bible, and found it to be a powerful tool for reaching Muslims everywhere. He is careful to note that the CAMEL's purpose is not to lead a Muslim to Christ from the Qur'an, rather to elevate Jesus using the Qur'an, draw out the person of peace, and bridge to the New Testament. By asking the Muslim a series of questions related to *surah* 3:42–55, the CAMEL seeks to emphasize three main points: 1) Isa is holy, 2) Isa has power over death, and 3) Isa knows and is the way to heaven. Greeson provides a helpful acrostic for remembering the content of the method:

C – Chosen (Maryam, or Mary, was chosen by Allah for a special purpose.)

A – Announced by Angels (Angels announced the birth of the Messiah to Maryam.)

M – Miracles (Jesus' power is revealed in his miracles.)

EL – Eternal Life (Jesus knows the way and is the way to heaven.)

Obviously, this acrostic is one of the sources for the method's name, the other being the legend that only the camel knows the one-hundredth name of Allah.

STRENGTHS OF THE CAMEL

Before noting some serious concerns with the method, I would like to commend several aspects of Greeson's work. First, the book's autobiographical anecdotes reveal his deep passion for seeing Muslims come to Christ. Second, Greeson affirms the inspiration and authority of the Bible, and acknowledges critical differences with the Qur'an. He also holds to the exclusivity of Christ, agreeing that salvation is found in him alone. Further, Greeson attempts to treat the Muslim context seriously, recognizing the primacy of the Qur'an for Muslims, the serious barriers to conversion, and many of the challenges involved in communicating the gospel to them. Finally, Greeson appears to seek biblical warrant for the CAMEL, finding precedent in Paul's ministry among both Jews and Gentiles. Some, including myself, find his conclusions about biblical warrant unconvincing, but his stated intentions are admirable.

THE CAMEL DRAWS WRONG COMPARISONS TO PAUL'S METHODOLOGY

One of my basic concerns with the CAMEL is Greeson's appeal to Paul's methodology among both Jews and pagans in order to justify making a bridge from the Qur'an to the New Testament. As Greeson points out, Paul often visited synagogues and reasoned with the Jews from their scriptures, the Old Testament. The dispute between Paul and the Jews, however, did not concern the *inspiration* of the Old Testament, but its *interpretation*. Evangelical Christians strongly affirm the Old Testament's inspiration, not the Qur'an's. As such, Paul's appeal to the Old Testament is hardly the same thing as any Christian appeal to the Qur'an.

Regarding this difference Greeson states, "Of course, Muslims are not Jews, and the Qu'ran is not the Old Testament, but the value of exalting Christ through the scriptures sacred to those we are trying to reach has a similarly powerful effect today" (Greeson 2007, 99). Greeson admits this critical difference, in other words, but he dismisses it based on pragmatic results, or "powerful effect."

Like others, Greeson also cites Paul's method at the Areopagus to justify Qur'anic bridging. Clearly Paul seeks a bridge to his audience. However, his method differs significantly from that of the CAMEL. First, Paul primarily concerns himself with correcting his audience's errors rather than affirming or augmenting their beliefs or practices. His main purpose for noting their altar to the unknown god is to demonstrate that idolatry is inconsistent with general revelation. In other words, the Athenians' problem is not ignorance but their failure to worship the God of creation rather than idols.

To further demonstrate their rebellion, Paul quotes their own poets as witnesses against them.

Three issues are particularly important here. First, rather than affirming the Athenians' philosophical systems, as the CAMEL does with critical points of the Qur'an, Paul employs their own poets as a means of demonstrating their comprehension of general revelation. He doesn't treat the poets as a *theological* starting point, or as a basis for Christian teaching or doctrine.[1] In other words, Paul does not find truth—other than general revelation—in these poets and affirm it as a bridge to more truth.

Second, Paul's manner of referencing these poets is significant. He introduces his quote with the phrase "as even some of your own poets have said." [2] With the words "your own," Paul distances himself from the poets and their systems. By employing the modifier "even," Paul seems to indicate astonishment, likely resulting from the incongruity between the quotations and the Athenians' idolatrous practices. It seems that Paul does not intend to affirm Stoicism or Epicureanism, but rather strongly critique them.

The manner of Greeson's appeal to the Qu'ran is paradigmatically different than Paul's appeal to the pagan poets. The CAMEL repeatedly suggests using an unqualified reference, beginning with such phrases as "According to the Qur'an..." or "The Qur'an says..." as if the Qur'an were a legitimate authority in its own right. Particularly troubling is one of Greeson's recommended questions for initiating conversation with Muslims: "I have been reading the Qur'an and have discovered an amazing truth that gives hope of eternal life in heaven. Would you open your Qur'an to *surah al-Imran* 3:42–55 so we can talk about it?" (Greeson 2007, 106) Such a question implies that "hope of eternal life in heaven" can indeed be found in the authoritative Qur'an. Not only will this create possible confusion regarding true authority on matters of salvation, but it also seems likely to raise questions of honesty and deception in the hearer's mind if we later uphold the Bible as God's unique revelation. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine Paul inviting his Athenian audience to open Aratus' poem for discussion because it "gives hope of eternal life in heaven."

Third, the Qur'an occupies the place of ultimate authority for Muslims, as anyone generally acquainted with Islam is aware. While the pagan poets might have served as sources of inspiration and guidance for the Athenians, it is difficult to conceive of any role for them remotely analogous to the Qur'an's role for Muslims. The New Testament never portrays Paul quoting any pagan source that claimed to be special revelation, such as the oracles (Schlorff 1984, 160). While the Areopagus event provides insight into

Paul's method of establishing contact with a pagan audience, it does not justify an unqualified appeal to the Qur'an among Muslims.

THE CAMEL APPEALS TO UNRELIABLE SOURCES OF TRUTH

Another troubling aspect of the CAMEL is that it appeals to unreliable sources of truth. For instance, the CAMEL introduces confusion in its handling of apocryphal material found in the Qur'an. In *surah* 3:49 the Qur'an mentions several miracles of Jesus, the first of which depicts him breathing life into a bird formed from dust. Greeson acknowledges that this story originates from the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, yet states,

You might say, "Isn't it interesting that this story says Isa created life out of the dust by breathing life into it? How did Allah create man?" Your Muslim friend may recall that Allah formed man from the dust of the earth and then breathed His life into man. "According to the Qur'an," you can say, "Isa was able to do the same thing by breathing life into birds made of dust. Isa had the power to create life." Then follow with, "Do you know of any other prophets who had this power to create life?" (Greeson 2007, 135)

Greeson clearly rejects the apocryphal account yet encourages employing it, not simply as a point of contact, but as a theological starting point—a basis for Christian doctrine—with the aim of establishing ontological truths about Christ.

It is certainly true that Jesus could have breathed life into birds made from dust. Such power would also seem to indicate something special about him. However, affirming a truth based on an apocryphal account repeated in the Qur'an—without reference to the Bible—raises two problems. First, this would give a Muslim listener the impression that we consider this account historical and reliable, which raises questions about the integrity of our witness. Second, this seems to ground truth claims about Christ in unreliable sources rather than explicitly in Scripture. The Qur'an and other extra-biblical sources may contain true statements about Jesus (such as affirming his virgin birth), but their reliability and accuracy can only be established from the Bible. Clarity on the issue of God's standard of authority—the Bible—is necessary in order for believers to be able to discern truth from error.

THE CAMEL GIVES AN OVERLY POSITIVE EVALUATION OF THE QUR'AN

Another problem with the CAMEL method is that it seems to rely on an overly positive evaluation of the Qur'an. Greeson obviously sees much that is commendable in the Qur'an and believes that it contains "enough flickers of truth to draw out God's person of peace" (Greeson 2007, 102). For example, he writes:

After reading *surah al-Imran* 3:42–55 and listening to you explain it, no Muslim will be able to honestly say that Isa was merely a prophet. From the text of his own Qur'an, he will see that Isa is far more than a prophet. Offering spiritual food will draw out a seeker who is spiritually hungry. *Surah al-Imran* 3:42–55 attests to divine attributes of Isa that no Muslim can deny. From this passage in the Qur'an he will see that Isa is holy, and all powerful, and can show us the way to heaven. Thoroughly discussing this passage will most likely trigger something in the heart of a Muslim who is already under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. (Greeson 2007, 103)

Granted, Greeson acknowledges some of the critical differences between the Qur'an and the New Testament, including the Qur'an's rejection of the Trinity and its inadequate teaching regarding salvation. These acknowledgements are commendable. Yet he neglects to discuss their implications for our approach to Islam in general and the CAMEL in particular.

Regarding the divinity of Christ, the CAMEL sends contradictory messages. On one hand, Greeson instructs his readers, "Your goal here is not to prove Christ's divinity through the Qur'an. The Qur'an is incapable of doing that; instead, you want to show that Isa's close association with Allah reveals Isa's

unequaled holiness" (Greeson 2007, 132). While this contains an implied contradiction (does not Isa's close association with Allah and unequaled holiness imply his divinity?), other statements more clearly illustrate the problem. For example, Muslim interpretations notwithstanding, Greeson claims that *surah* 4:171 bears testimony of Jesus' divinity and exalts him above every other "prophet" in the Qur'an (Greeson 2007, 131). Again, the CAMEL here employs certain passages in the Qur'an that resemble biblical teaching as unqualified theological starting points and seeks to build on those to establish ontological truths about Jesus.

THE CAMEL IMPOSES A FAULTY HERMENEUTIC ON THE QUR'AN

The CAMEL also employs a faulty hermeneutic of the Qur'an.[3] Essentially, this hermeneutic involves appealing to affinities with the Bible as a basis for eisegeting Christian meanings into the Qur'an. Such an approach leaves the CAMEL practitioner open to charges of ignorance or deception. Like Christians, Muslims possess a long history of exegetical and theological tradition. This tradition rejects many, if not all, of the interpretations suggested or implied by the CAMEL method. If the CAMEL practitioner employs these Christian interpretations due to unfamiliarity with Muslim traditions, he operates from ignorance. If he willfully ignores this exegetical tradition and proposes Christian interpretations, he leaves himself open to the charge of deception.

There are several places that Greeson does this. Let's consider his interpretation and use of the terms *kalimatullah* (word of Allah) and *ruhullah* (spirit of Allah) as an example of his flawed Qur'anic hermeneutic (Greeson 2007, 130–32). Greeson nowhere instructs his readers to state emphatically that these words imply Jesus' deity, yet he clearly interprets them as compatible with Christian concepts. He writes, "Point out that the Word and Spirit of Allah are part of Allah Himself. Just as you cannot remove a person's breath or spirit without destroying that person, so too, Allah's breath and spirit are part of Him" (Greeson 2007, 131). Greeson then instructs his readers to reference *surah* 4:171 which states, "Speak the truth; the Messiah, Isa son of Maryam is only an apostle of Allah and His Word which he communicated to Maryam and a spirit from him." Greeson acknowledges the Qur'an's intent to deny Jesus' divinity in this verse but continues, "What is useful as a bridge is the way *Christ's divinity still shines through*, as Isa is called a Spirit from Allah, *a testimony to His divinity* that is not shared by any other prophet in the Qur'an" (Greeson 2007, 131, emphasis mine). The unspoken claim, of course, is that when interpreted correctly, the Qur'an implies, supports, or is compatible with biblical Christology.

While some non-Muslim interpreters of the Qur'an may agree with Greeson, Muslim commentators would beg to differ. For example, Muslims understand the term "word" as referring to Jesus' creation or birth, not his person, and strongly deny any implications of deity (Ali 1993, 239). Furthermore, they do not consider these terms to be exclusive to Jesus but claim that other Qur'anic prophets may be considered a word or spirit from Allah as well (Naik). Also, non-Muslim writers recognize the drastic difference between Islam and Christianity on these points (Robinson 2003, 13–15).

This Christian hermeneutic of the Qur'an is deeply problematic for at least two reasons. First, interpreting Qur'anic data regarding Jesus with Christian meanings encourages a Muslim to continue approaching Qur'anic terminology and concepts as a theological starting point. In other words, giving Qur'anic data *biblical meaning* leads one to concentrate on theological similarities between the Bible and Qur'an—which in reality do not exist. Shouldn't one rather use similar terminology between the two books as a springboard for discussing the Christian meaning?

Second, this hermeneutic encourages a "fulfillment" approach to Islam. It affirms, implicitly or explicitly, much of what exists in the Qur'an and then seeks to expand it rather than transform it. However, if the Muslim understanding of Jesus is in fact radically different from biblical Christology, it seems that a Christian evangelist should seek to displace, not fulfill, what the Qur'an says. Paul was not interested in expanding or fulfilling Epicureanism and Stoicism but uprooting and replacing them.

Perhaps the ultimate question regarding this flawed hermeneutic concerns the issue of authoritative interpretation. Christians who have interacted with Islam to any significant degree are familiar with Muslim claims that the Bible prophesies Muhammad's coming. We often find these Muslim readings of Muhammad in the Bible offensive and conclude that presupposition, not exegesis, drives Muslims to their interpretation. However, CAMEL proponents often fail to see the same fault in their own hermeneutic of the Qur'an. Schlorff sums up the issue well: "Surely, if we who are evangelicals hold the principle that the Bible is its own interpreter and the final judge of the validity of every system of hermeneutics, so we must allow the Qur'an to be its own interpreter and the final judge of validity of every system of Qur'anic interpretation. When we do this we find that its tantalizing 'Christian potential' is only a mirage" (Schlorff 1980, 147).

IF NOT THE CAMEL, WHAT?

It's probably not possible or advisable to completely avoid the Qur'an when witnessing to Muslims. Therefore, it may be helpful to propose a few principles for referencing the Qur'an with Muslims. First, the terminology of the Qur'an may provide points of contact for discussing truth with Muslims. The Qur'an mentions a number of the Old Testament prophets, uses familiar terminology for Jesus, and refers to the "before books." The important issue here, however, is to avoid using these terms as theological starting points. In other words, missionaries must recognize the vast semantic differences between the biblical and Qur'anic terms and avoid unqualified use in conversation.

Second, like Paul in Acts 17, any appeal to the Qur'an must be qualified. Rather than simply introducing a statement with, "Well, the Qur'an says . . .," or "According to the Qur'an . . .," Christians should employ a qualifying phrase such as, "Your book states . . .," or "According to your own book. . . ." This provides a means of referencing the Qur'an while avoiding implication of authority.

Third, Christians may affirm statements in the Qur'an that are consistent with biblical truth, but should do so on the basis of biblical authority and, where necessary, attempt to communicate biblical meaning. If done sensitively, this may create opportunity for further discussion and an invitation to study the Bible.

For example, if a Muslim refers to Jesus as *mesih*, a Christian may reply, "We also believe that Jesus is the messiah because the Bible teaches us so. As far as I know, your book does not explain the meaning of this term. However, it is very significant and the Bible explains in great detail what it means. Would you like to look at the Bible to see what it teaches about the messiah?" If such an offer is accepted, the door is opened for discussing a full biblical theology of the identity, nature, and purpose of the messiah. This approach utilizes common terminology as a *conversational* and not *theological* starting point, references the Qur'an in a qualified way, affirms truth based on the teaching of Scripture rather than the Qur'an, and invites the audience to consider biblical claims. Similar approaches can be employed with other terms or concepts.

However, greater attention will be necessary in cases where the Qur'an is more explicit and the degree of theological difference more pronounced. This assumes, of course, that Christians avoid the flawed hermeneutic of some bridging approaches, familiarize themselves with Qur'anic interpretation and Muslim theology, and understand particular passages in light of the entire Islamic worldview.

THAT'S NOT ALL...

Space does not permit discussion of other concerns with the CAMEL such as the potentially deceptive nature of its response to the question of Muhammad's identity, or its failure to account for fundamental theological differences between Islam and Christianity, differences which require a rejection of substitutionary atonement. Again, Greeson's zeal for proclaiming the gospel to Muslims is commendable and hopefully the reported movement in South Asia is indeed theologically sound, as he claims in his book.

Some will likely view these criticisms of the CAMEL as theological nitpicking and evidence of greater concern for orthodoxy than the salvation of souls. However, Scripture encourages us to guard both our lives *and* doctrine closely. For workers among Muslims, this means thinking critically about their methodology, particularly on the issue of Qur'anic bridging.

Doug Coleman has served among Muslims in Central Asia for about ten years.

1. For more on the difference between theological starting points and simple linguistic points of contact see Schlorff, 1984, 150–64.
2. For further discussion of the importance of this qualifier, see Stonehouse, 1957, 27–29.
3. For the history of development of this hermeneutic, see Schlorff, 1984, 107–16.

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Book Review: God in the Dark

By Os Guinness

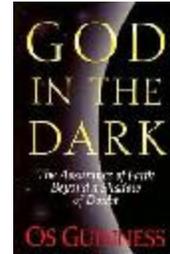
Reviewed by Patrick Schreiner

God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt,
[Crossway, 1996. 224 pages. \\$17.99](#)

Click [here](#) to listen to a 9Marks interview with with Os Guinness.

Why write—or buy—a book about doubt? For one, I know of very few good books about doubt. In addition, everyone has moments of doubt.

What exactly is doubt? How should we counsel someone who struggles with doubt? Should we be hard or soft on them? How did Jesus deal with doubt? are the questions Os Guinness seeks to answer in *God in the Dark*.



on

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Guinness says the reason to study doubt is because "a healthy understanding of doubt should go hand in hand with a healthy understanding of faith" (14). Yet the only way to battle doubt is to feed faith.

"Assurance of faith comes directly from knowing God and only indirectly from understanding doubt" (32).

ALL ABOUT DOUBT

Part one is about the nature of doubt. Guinness points out that doubt is not the opposite of faith, unbelief is. "To doubt is to waver between the two, to believe, and disbelieve at once and so be in two minds" (23). It's having a foot in both camps; it's having a divided heart; it's a halfway stage. This section provides a framework for the rest of the book.

Should Christians be hard or soft on doubt? Guinness said, "Doubt is not always fatal but it is always serious" (29). Doubt should never be treated as trivial, but it is also not quite unbelief. Doubt leads to unbelief, but it is not unbelief, so we should show compassion and understanding. Guinness closes the section about the nature of doubt by saying, "our examination of doubt will always tell us two things: the deficiency of faith that has caused the problem, and the sufficiency of God that is needed as the answer" (34).

Part two covers the seven most common categories of doubt. The first four result from deficiencies of faith in *coming* to believe: a person can doubt as a result of ingratitude, weak foundations, a lack of commitment, or a faulty view of God. The next three doubts involve deficiencies in *continuing* to believe: these are doubts caused by a lack of growth, unruly emotions, and hidden conflicts.

Finally, part three looks at two specific doubts: "Why, O Lord," and "How long, O Lord."

DOUBTLESS A GOOD BOOK

God in the Dark is a very insightful book, especially for those struggling with doubt and those looking for wisdom on how to counsel someone who is doubting. Guinness's tone is compassionate throughout. Clearly he has counseled many people who have gone through doubt and come out of it.

The book has many other strengths as well. Most importantly he gives biblical remedies to doubts, including examples of how Jesus dealt with doubters. One particular comparison was especially perceptive. When the leper came to Jesus in Matthew 8 he doubted Jesus' *compassion*. The leper says, "Lord if you will, you can make me clean" (Matt. 8:2). He doubts not the power of God but the mercy of God. In contrast, the father of the demonized boy approaching Jesus in Mark 9 doubts the *power* of God.

The father says, "But if you can do anything, have compassion on us" (Mark 9:22). Guinness remarks,

To the leper, who sensed his power but not his love, "Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him." But to the father who has little sense of his divine power, he replied, "If it is possible!...Everything is possible to one who has faith." Each had an incomplete faith because the aspect of truth he sensed was only a part of the full truth of who Jesus is. (71)

Guinness also engages the heart and mind when explaining doubt and providing remedies. He is empathetic and his goal is not to condemn doubt but feed faith. This empathy is evident in his advice about counseling someone who is doubting due to a lack of gratitude:

So we need to pray for the doubter as much as talk; raise questions rather than make statements, use the rapier and not the sledgehammer; care for him or her rather than judge. If we lecture people in doubt with a series of reminders, their defenses will be in place. But if we jog their memory, they will see our point before they can help it. (52)

Finally, Guinness poses heart-searching questions at the end of each chapter. He challenges the reader to consider deficiencies in their faith that might lead to doubt. In the chapter that deals with doubt from a faulty view of God, Guinness closes with the following questions.

What picture of God do you show in your beliefs? Is it sharp and clear or blurred and ill-defined? Is it something you have dreamed up? Or stuck together from various descriptions like an identikit picture? Or is it the picture God has given us of himself? Is it complete and whole? Or is part of it missing so that you trust what you know but wonder what the rest is like? (73)

Guinness challenges not only those who are struggling with doubt or counseling doubters but he admonishes those in the faith to ask themselves probing questions to strengthen their faith.

WHAT CAUSES DOUBT?

Guinness wisely walks the line on being too hard or too soft on doubt. Yet in discussing doubt he rarely points to the fleshly desires that can cause doubt. Pascal said, "For the Christian faith goes mainly to establish these two facts, the corruption of nature, and redemption by Jesus Christ" (*Pensees*, 3.194). Strangely, Guinness does not spend much time dwelling on the corrupt nature of man. In explaining doubt Guinness says, "Doubt is a matter of truth, trust, and trustworthiness" (14). But doubt is also a matter of sin. A wise friend asked me while I was reading the book the following question, "Did Jesus ever doubt?" The answer, I think, would have to be no. Guinness is trying to be "fair" to doubt because he believes that the major misconception about doubt is that most people think it always wrong (22). Guinness does not believe doubt is always wrong, but in wisely drawing our attention to this, he has inadvertently drawn our attention away from our corrupt nature that needs redemption by Christ's blood.

That said, in defense of Guinness I believe that he is primarily aiming at those who beat themselves up over sin. So while he does unhelpfully overlook some of the sinful causes of doubt, he is pastorally wise in his approach to those who are sensitive about their doubt. Moreover, Guinness recognizes that we will all struggle with sin until glorification. Yet there will be a day where there will be no more doubt, no more unbelief. Then all believers in Christ will live by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

TO STRENGTHEN FAITH

Guinness's goal in writing this book is to strengthen faith by looking closely at some common doubts. "The tension of faith results from its being stretched between God's promise and God's fulfillment...faith's task is to join hands with the past and the future to hold down God's will in the present" (200). In general, he seems to rightly hold the balance between being too hard or too soft on doubt. He takes it seriously,

but his goal is assurance of faith.

The book is a practical help to pastors, counselors, and doubters. Guinness divides his chapters topically so that counselors can have individuals read the sections applicable to their struggles. His writing style is easy to read, but his words are chosen carefully so that they deliver the message memorably.

Guinness has done the church a favor by taking a thoughtful and serious look at doubt and providing biblical answers to tough questions.

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Book Review: Where Are All the Brothers?

By Eric Redmond

Reviewed by Anthony Carter

Where Are All the Brothers?: Straight Answers to Men's Questions about the Church
[Crossway, 2008. 112 pages.](#)

We have all heard the excuses. "The church is full of hypocrites." "The Bible is just a book." "I'm not into organized religion."

Those of us who spend the majority of our time among African-Americans frequently hear these and a few more. "The church is for women." "Islam has more for black men." "The church is just in it for the money."



These excuses are found in a variety of places. Often we hear them as we sit and admire the hair carving skills of our local barber. Other times we are privy to them as we attend family reunions and dinners. Sometimes it's just the unexpected conversation of the person sitting next to us on the train, plane, or bus. Though the occasion may change, the excuses and questions seem to remain the same.

How often have we left those conversations wishing we had a resource to give to our skeptical friend or family member! Thankfully, Eric Redmond has helped us with this dilemma.

Eric Redmond, senior pastor of Reformation Alive Baptist Church in Temple Hills, Maryland, has given the body of Christ an excellent resource in *Where Are the Brothers: Straight Answers to Men's Questions about the Church*. In a terse yet engaging format, Redmond has reminded us that not only do our family, friends, and neighbors have legitimate questions, but we as Christians have sound, reasonable, and convincing answers.

Eric begins the book with an assertion that some will find hard to believe. He states, "Giving me ten minutes of your life for the next nine days could change your whole life." Eric makes this claim because he has written in the book in a usable format such that the chapters are to be read at a day at a time. The chapters deal with the following questions:

- Day 1. Isn't the Church Full of Hypocrites?
- Day 2. Wasn't the Bible Written by Men?
- Day 3. Isn't the Church Geared Toward Women?
- Day 4. Isn't the Preacher Just a Man?
- Day 5. Doesn't Islam Offer More for Black Men?
- Day 6. Aren't Some Churches Just After Your Money?
- Day 7. Is Organized Religion Necessary?
- Day 8. Jesus Never Claimed to Be God, Did He?
- Day 9. What to Look for to Find a Good Church

(There are also two appendices, one on *The Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecies about Christ in the New Testament* and a second on *The Church Does Not Welcome Homosexuals*. These easily could have been included as chapters, only the nine day the reader would have been challenged to do an eleven day exercise—still well short of the forty day fad. Yet this decision in no way takes away from the impact and import of this book.)

As Christians who love Christ and his church, we understand these questions are merely excuses and

even smokescreens. Yet we should give reasonable answers with care and clarity. Eric has done both. The little book is filled with pastoral and theological insight, challenge, and care. For example, in answering the question, "Wasn't the Bible Written by Men?" Eric establishes his answer upon the testimony of Scripture itself. He then concludes with these words:

Therefore, my brother, the truth—God's Word—is available and is not distorted by the hands of men. So find a copy of the Bible so you can read the written words of God. Therein you will find the message of life. The same God who worked through men to give you his very words became a man to address your need to know him through repentance from sin and faith in the Son of God and his work to pay for your sins and rose again to offer you eternal life. This is God's final word "written" for man.

Though Eric writes with a particular eye toward African-Americans, the scope of the questions and answers clearly apply to practically any cultural and ethnic context. Wherever these questions are found, this apologetic should be on hand.

So I strongly encourage you to read it. Read it because it can do nothing but bolster your own ability to give an answer for the hope that you have within you. Read it because, if we are honest, some of these questions creep into our own minds from time to time.

Once you have read it, give it away. Give it away because a biblical answer to one of these excuses may be the catalyst for calling a wayward sheep home. Give it away because Eric's answers will leave many without excuse and thus even more accountable before God. Give it away because someone may find reason to give God eternal thanksgiving for your gift.

And once you have given it away, buy some more and give them away as well. Who knows, maybe having them on hand will encourage us to engage with those who ask such questions. Maybe one day the question will cease to be, "Where are all the brothers?" Instead, we will look around our churches and ask, "Where did all the brothers come from?"

Anthony Carter is assistant pastor of Southwest Christian Fellowship, author of On Being Black and Reformed, and an organizing member of the Council of Reforming Churches.

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