

*Bible and Mission:
Missiology and Biblical Scholarship in Dialogue*

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1. Introduction

I remember well my first course on biblical foundations for mission.¹ We moved rather quickly through the Old Testament since there was not much missionary gold to be mined there—or so we believed. Somehow the extermination of the Canaanites just didn't seem to fit our view of mission. We dealt with Jonah, Ruth, and Isaiah 40-66 since they fit more readily. The New Testament more promptly yielded its missionary gold but there were still favourites—'go and make disciples', 'you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth', and so forth. The problem was that sitting in that evangelical Bible college, situated as it was in the revivalist tradition of the early 20th century, we all knew what mission was. All we needed was a biblical foundation to justify it. Our point of departure was an already existing missionary enterprise, to which we all joyfully offered our commitment. Through this lens we looked for missionary texts and found those that fit our paradigm, that is, a geographical expansionist understanding of mission that highlights sending from one (Christian) place to another (pagan) place. It didn't matter that on closer scrutiny Jonah didn't really fit in any other way beyond crossing the water or that the 'go' of the Great Commission wasn't an imperative at all.

These comments are not meant in the least to be disparaging. My point is simply that when we examined the Bible's teaching on mission our pre-existing understanding or our anticipatory fore-structures of mission dictated what we saw in the Scripture. Thus we did not bring our missionary practice to the Bible to be critiqued, shaped, and developed. Rather endeavours familiar to all of us were legitimized by divine authority. I want to make clear I am not interested in joining the bandwagon that bashes the modern missionary movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. I am grateful for what was accomplished and believe there was much biblical about it. My purpose is to raise at the beginning of this paper the hermeneutical issue that "where we stand helps to direct our gaze and influences what we see in Scripture."²

Interestingly, if mission advocates saw a unidirectional, geographical mission enterprise, it seems that many in the guild of New Testament studies saw nothing, or very little, about mission in the Bible. At least that is what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza observed thirty years ago.

Exegetical inquiry often depends upon the theological and cultural presuppositions with which it approaches its texts. Historical scholarship therefore judges the past from the perspective of its own concepts and values. Since for

¹ See David Bosch, Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission, in James Phillips and Robert Coote, eds., *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 175-178.

² Joel Green, *Recovering Mission-Church: Reframing Ecclesiology in Luke-Acts*. Unpublished lecture given at the Epworth Institute, 2003. Accessed at <http://www.confessingumc.org/cmnewsso03.html> on 20 June 2007.

various reasons religious propaganda, mission, and apologetics are not very fashionable topics in the contemporary religious scene, these issues have also been widely neglected in New Testament scholarship.³

However, things are changing today. Throughout the 20th century numerous factors have challenged this view of mission. Perhaps the two most important factors are the dramatic rise, growth, and vitality of the Majority World church with its various expressions of the gospel, alongside the parallel marginalization of the church in the West. In the International Missionary Council world conferences between Tambaram (1938) and Willingen (1952) each of the fundamental assumptions that undergirded a colonialist view of mission broke down. The separation of mission and church was challenged; it was advocated that the church is missionary by its very nature. The division of the world between the Christian West and the pagan third world dissolved; the West is as much a mission field as the third world—mission is in all six continents; mission as geographical expansion gave way to an understanding of mission as the task of the whole church wherever it was to witness to the whole gospel in the whole world.

With these changes it is not surprising to see the importance of a return to Scripture to inquire anew about what the Bible says about mission. This book is part of a growing recognition of the need to return to Scripture afresh to bring our thinking and practice of mission under the authority of God's Word. Can our new situation enable us to see dimensions of mission in Scripture we have not seen before? Nicholas Lash has suggested that

If the questions to which ancient authors sought to respond in terms available to them within their cultural horizons are to be 'heard' today with something like their original force and urgency, they have first to be 'heard' as questions that challenge us with comparable seriousness. And if they are to be thus heard, they must first be articulated in terms available to us within *our* cultural horizons. There is thus a sense in which the articulation of what the text might 'mean' today, is a necessary condition of hearing what that text 'originally meant.'⁴

Our interpretation of the past is made possible by anticipatory fore-structures that are oriented to present concerns. This orientation opens up interpretive categories that allow us to interpret the text, and understand the original concern of the author who is likewise engaged with the self-same matter at hand. Perhaps with our "raised consciousness of mission"⁵ we can see themes in the biblical text we did not see before. Joel Green speaks of a "missional reframing." What he asks about Luke-Acts can be asked about the whole of Scripture.

With the image of "reframing" I want to call to our attention the way picture frames draw out different emphases in the pictures they hold. Similarly, even if the essential nature of the church has not changed, new frames bring to the

³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miracles, Mission, and Apologetics: An Introduction, Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, (ed. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 1.

⁴ Nicholas Lash, *What Might Martyrdom Mean?*, *Ex Auditu*, 1, 1985, 17-18.

⁵ Lucien LeGrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible* (trans. Robert R. Barr; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), xiv.

forefront of our thinking and practices fresh emphases. If we take seriously the missional orientation of the work of Jesus and his followers as these are narrated in the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles, what do we see? ⁶

With an older understanding of mission inadequate, and a growing awareness of our missionary calling in our own culture, what do we see?

This paper will engage the preceding chapters in this book on Bible and mission. I will dialogue with key themes mentioned in the papers that are important in missiological discussion.

2. *Participating in the Missio Dei*

Perhaps the first question that we need to ask is what do we mean by mission? The word itself does not appear in the Bible. In fact, the Jesuits were the first to use the word in its Latin form (*missio*) to describe the work of spreading the Christian faith among people (and this included Protestants!) who were not part of the Roman Catholic church. From that point on the word became primarily associated with the spread of the Christian faith from the Western world to the non-West. By the early 19th century, this kind of “foreign missions had become the new orthodoxy.”⁷ Under the weight of the factors mentioned above—growth of the Third World church, the decline of the Western church, the fall of colonialism—this view of mission has come under attack. From the 1950s on, coinciding with this attack, has come a striking increase in the use of the term ‘mission’, and a broadening of its meaning. We might well ask is the word useful?

Recognising the dangers of anachronism, Cynthia Westfall asks in her chapter whether or not the current use of the term ‘mission’, found in the contemporary language of ‘mission statements’, language that speaks of purpose and identity, might not be a helpful starting point.⁸ To use my language, would this be a helpful anticipatory fore-structure or interpretive category that would enable us get hold of Scriptures’ teaching?

Christopher Wright believes it is. In his forthcoming book on the mission of God, perhaps a book that has taken us further down the road of a missional hermeneutics than any other to date, Wright speaks of God’s mission as the long-term purpose or goal of God to renew the creation. Our mission is to participate in God’s redemptive purposes for the sake of the world. Wright puts it this way: “*Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission, within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.*”⁹ So it is playing our part in the purpose of God narrated in the Biblical story that gives us our identity as God’s people.

Wright draws on a shift that has taken place in the latter part of the 20th century in missiology toward understanding mission as the mission of the *triune God*. The emphasis is on what God is doing for the redemption of the world. Thereafter, consideration is given to how the

⁶ Green, *Rediscovering Mission-Church*.

⁷ J. A. Andrew, quoted by William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Missionary Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 60.

⁸ Cynthia Long Westfall, *The Hebrew Mission: Voices from the Margins?*, page number in this volume.

⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, forthcoming 2006), 22-23. His emphasis.

church participates in God's redeeming mission. Karl Barth was the first modern theologian to connect mission with the intra-trinitarian sending of God—the Father sends the Son, the Father and Son send the Spirit, Jesus sends the church to continue his mission in the power of the Spirit. This sending of God was an old theological theme that went back to Augustine. Now it was connected to the church's mission. It became popular in mission circles after the Willingen ecumenical missionary conference in 1952. Its most famous statement reflects this: "There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world. That by which the church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world mission. 'As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.'"¹⁰ Following that conference Karl Hartenstein coined the term '*missio Dei*' to refer to this connection of mission to the Trinity. Its use, while understood in different ways, has become widespread in missiology throughout all the confessional traditions of the church.

Michael Knowles builds his paper on mission in Matthew and Mark on the notion of the *missio Dei*. The burden of Knowles' paper is to emphasise that mission is first of all God's activity, and to relativise the church's role in the spread of the gospel by highlighting the failure and weakness of the disciples: ". . . the 'gospel' of God's kingdom flourishes and bears fruit in spite of them."¹¹ This is an important insight in view of the anthropocentric and triumphalist way mission has been understood and practiced for the last two centuries, shaped as it has been by the Enlightenment. In fact, this is the primary reason the language of *missio Dei* has emerged.¹² I believe Knowles' emphasis is correct, although I would want to make sure that emphasizing the failure of the disciples does not provide an excuse for the church today to fail in its call to be a living embodiment of God's salvation. In fact it is in Matthew where the theme of faithful obedience finds its strongest expressions.

I want to flag, however, important insights in Knowles' paper that may not be the main burden of his argument but are integral to his discussion, and are important themes in current missiology surrounding God's mission, Jesus' mission, and the disciples' mission in the gospels.

- To understand our ecclesial and missional identity it is essential to return to the historical origins of the disciple community in Jesus' mission. The story told in the gospels is our story; the disciple community formed in the gospels is the nucleus of the church.
- The first sending is the sending of Jesus by the Father to make known the kingdom of God in word, deed, and life to Israel. Jesus' mission is rooted in God's mission.¹³

¹⁰ Norman Goodall, ed., *Missions Under the Cross. Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements Issued by the Meeting* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953), 190.

¹¹ Michael Knowles, *Mark, Matthew, and Mission: Faith, Failure, and the Fidelity of Jesus*, [page number in this volume](#).

¹² "To understand this new development [of the *missio Dei*], it is necessary to go back to the Enlightenment which, for the first time in history, did not regard mission as God's very own work but as a purely human endeavour. Thereafter, a very anthropocentric theology emerged, which intentionally severed the . . . strong link between mission . . . and the doctrine of the Trinity." (Jan Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science, and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Part II*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Press, 1997, 60).

¹³ Cf. Knowles, *Matthew, Mark and Mission*, [page number in this volume](#).

- In the context of this kingdom mission, Jesus calls and forms a disciple community. That disciple community is first the *object* of God’s missionary concern and only after that do they participate as *instruments* of his mission.¹⁴
- From the beginning, calling, discipleship, and mission belong together. This community is called to participate in Jesus’ mission by imitating and continuing the mission of Jesus. Thus mission is central to the identity of this community from the start.¹⁵
- This mission to make known the gospel of the kingdom of God is thus broader than evangelism. Their mission is to follow Jesus in the breadth of his mission. It involves witness to the salvation of God’s kingdom in word, deed, and in communal and individual life.¹⁶ It is to “merely live out a new identity as companions of the Messiah, witnessing God’s inbreaking reign, those who learn by following, watching, and receiving for themselves all that they will later offer to others.”¹⁷
- The gospels are not bare or neutral historical narratives but crafted to equip the church years after Jesus’ life and work to carry out its missional calling. They are products of the church’s mission that aim at missional faithfulness.

3. *Missionary Dimension and Intention*

The *missio Dei* (God’s mission) offers us a perspective to understand the *missio ecclesiae* (church’s mission). Our identity is shaped by our participation in God’s redemptive purposes. Three further distinctions may also be helpful in negotiating the tricky terrain of the nature of mission. We begin by noting what, at first blush, appears to be a tension between Stan Porter’s and Cynthia Westfall’s understandings of mission. Westfall points out that much discussion of Christian mission begins with a more narrow definition. She takes Köstenberger and O’Brien to task for defining mission too narrowly as a “conscious, deliberate, organized and extensive effort to convert others to one’s religion by way of evangelization or proselytization.”¹⁸ Porter on the other hand, defines mission (quoting Plummer approvingly) as “the attempt to convert non-Christians to the Christian faith, regardless of any geographical or cultural considerations.”¹⁹ Porter’s definition sounds much like Köstenberger and O’Brien’s which Westfall finds too narrow.

This is not mere wrangling over terms; our understandings have consequences. On the one hand, Porter points out that a definition reduced to cross-cultural mission may eclipse missionary endeavour at home, and a too broad understanding may justify business-as-usual in non-missional, non-evangelistic, ingrown churches. On the other hand, Westfall notes that

¹⁴ Cf. Knowles, *Matthew, Mark and Mission*, page number this volume.

¹⁵ Cf. Knowles, *Matthew, Mark and Mission*, page number this volume.

¹⁶ Cf. Knowles, *Matthew, Mark and Mission*, page number this volume.

¹⁷ Knowles, *Matthew, Mark and Mission*, page number this volume.

¹⁸ Westfall, *Hebrew Mission*, page number this volume. Quoting A. J. Köstenberger and P. T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (NSBT 11; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 254.

¹⁹ Stanley E. Porter, *The Content and Message of Paul’s Missionary Preaching*, page number this volume. Quoting R. L. Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (PBM; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), 1.

reducing mission to evangelism may mean that other dimensions of the church's mission to make known the good news, especially the suffering that comes from a missionary encounter in public life, might be missed. Indeed, our preunderstandings will affect the way we read Scripture and what we understand to be obedient practice. Do Westfall's and Porter's concerns stand in irreconcilable tension?

Perhaps the first distinction, between missionary dimension and missionary intention, is helpful here. Lesslie Newbigin made this distinction in 1958 in an important booklet entitled *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, and it has never left missiological discussion. The background of this distinction was a growing consensus in ecumenical circles that mission is as broad as the Christian life—all of life is mission. The trouble was, for Newbigin, that this had the potential of marginalizing the intentional evangelistic and missionary task of the church. Yet he acknowledged the importance of the insight that the whole life of the church is the visible means through which the Holy Spirit carries on his mission to the world, and that therefore the whole of the church's life partakes of the character of witness or mission. Thus there is justification in using the word 'mission' in a broad way. He says: "The whole life of the church has a missionary *dimension*, though not all of it has mission as its primary *intention*."²⁰

The church's missionary dimension will evoke specific, intentional acts and words that directly engage the unbelieving world with the gospel. "While all the activities of the Church have a missionary *dimension*, there are needed specific activities which have the *intention* of crossing the frontier between faith and unbelief—and that frontier is no longer the old geographical one, but runs through every land."²¹ He presses further saying that (and I hear Porter echoing this concern) "unless there is in the life of the Church a point of concentration for the missionary intention, the missionary dimension which is proper to the whole life of the Church will be lost."²² This distinction enables us to affirm the validity of evangelism and intentional missionary activities as an essential and yet distinct activity within the total mission of the church.

4. Mission and Evangelism

A second distinction, common in mission studies, is between mission and evangelism. This distinction has been a special concern of David Bosch for years.²³ For Bosch, mission is wider than evangelism: "Mission denotes the total task God has set the church for the salvation of the world"²⁴ and "embraces all activities that serve to liberate man from his slavery in the presence of the coming God."²⁵ Evangelism is a central and indispensable dimension of the

²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today*. (London and New York: International Missionary Council, 1958), 21.

²¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Expanded and revised edition, 1993), 155.

²² Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 43.

²³ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 411-420.

²⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 412.

²⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press Publishers, 1977), 10.

church's mission that involves a (verbal)²⁶ witness to what God has done, is doing, and will do in Jesus Christ. It aims at a response, inviting people to respond to the gospel. Yet there is more to the church's mission than evangelism. To simply note three of Bosch's observations:

- Evangelism cannot be separated from the corporate witness of the church's life: "*Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelizes—the church—is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle.*"²⁷ This emphasis on a communal embodiment of salvation as the most powerful witness is an increasingly frequent theme in missiology today. The announcement: 'Good news: The kingdom of God has come' may evoke the question 'where?' That announcement carries power only as the life of the church substantiates those words. In fact, Newbigin suggests (on the basis of his understanding of Acts) that the reason Paul does not exhort his churches to evangelism is that their attractive life provoked questions about its source. Evangelistic proclamation was the response to their questions.
- Evangelism cannot be separated from the calling of the church in the public life of culture to pursue mercy, justice, and reconciliation.: "*. . . evangelism cannot be divorced from the preaching and practice of justice.*"²⁸
- And finally, evangelism as verbal proclamation cannot be separated from deeds that authenticate that announcement: "*The deed without the word is dumb; the word without the deed is empty. Words interpret deeds and deeds validate words . . .*"²⁹

Defined this way Porter's primary concern is for evangelism, and his chapter offers helpful insight into Paul's evangelistic message. One set of questions that Bosch might pose to Porter is this: Is reconciliation the only image interpreting what God has done in Jesus appropriate to Paul's evangelistic proclamation? If this is the heart of Paul's evangelistic proclamation, and he instructs his congregations to proclaim it as well, is he privileging only this image in evangelism? It would seem that reconciliation would be one powerful image to speak to the Corinthian church. But are other images that interpret God's work in Christ equally valid in other contextual settings? Would Paul instruct the church in the 21st century to use this image or to find another that interprets the fullness of salvation that has come in Christ that would speak in fresh and powerful ways today? How do we contextualize Paul's message today? All these questions are concerned with the issue of how to relate Porter's meticulous exegesis of Paul's message in 2 Corinthians 5:20 to our evangelistic task today.

5. *Mission and Missions*

²⁶ Newbigin narrows evangelism to verbal witness while Bosch includes the witness of word and deed (See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 420; For Lesslie Newbigin's view of evangelism see Michael W. Goheen, "*As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You*": *J. E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2000), 278-291.

²⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 414. Emphasis his.

²⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 418. Emphasis his.

²⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 420.

A final distinction, again made by Newbigin, is between mission and missions. This distinction is tied to the concern mentioned previously, that is, the broadening of mission and the eclipse of intentional missionary endeavour. Newbigin was editor of the leading missionary journal of the time, the *International Review of Missions*. There was strong pressure to remove the ‘s’ from missions in the title of that journal since, it was believed, everything the church did was mission. He steadfastly refused, insisting that maintaining the ‘s’ would distinguish the task of missions from the more comprehensive mission of the church.³⁰ Mission is the all-embracing term which refers to “the entire task for which the Church is sent into the world”³¹ while the plural or adjectival form, missions, refers to the more specific task of making Christ known where he is not yet known. He believed it important “to identify and distinguish the specific foreign missionary task within the total mission of the church.”³² He defines missions as follows: “Missions [are] particular enterprises within the total mission which have the primary intention of bringing into existence a Christian presence in a milieu where previously there was no such presence or where such presence was ineffective.”³³

This understanding of mission in Acts is supported by Porter and Westfall’s paper on Acts especially as they consider the strategy of Paul’s missionary journeys. The scattering of believers from the Jerusalem church under heavy persecution produced an enormous missionary expansion. There was, however, no missionary intention on the part of the church. In Acts 13.2-3 we find something different. The church in Antioch laid hands on Saul and Barnabas and ‘sent them off’ to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. Here the missionary intention is fundamental. In Antioch there is for the first time “a concerted and planned act of outreach.”³⁴ So this text constitutes “the central New Testament paradigm for missions.”³⁵ The Spirit moved the church to set aside some men for a specific purpose of taking the gospel to places where it was not yet known. The continuing story of Acts shows that when Paul established an authentic witness in a place, he moved on and, as it were, said to the church “Now you are the mission in this place.” (This, in fact, is what a missionary bishop in India used to do. He would have the whole church put their hands on their heads and say “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel of Christ.” Then the bishop would say, “Now you are the mission in this place.”)

In terms of the distinction between mission and missions Eckhard Schnabel’s chapter offers insightful perspectives on missions from Paul’s missionary strategy. Schnabel reflects on Paul’s words in Romans 15:15-21: “Paul describes himself as a pioneer missionary: ‘I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do

³⁰ I am reminded here of the difference one letter made in another debate in church history with much more at stake. The Nicene Council, led by the youthful Athanasius, confessed that Jesus was *homoousios* (of the same substance or essence) as the Father over against the Arians who used the term *homoiousios* (of similar substance or essence). The Roman historian Gibbon mocked at the spectacle of Christians fighting over a diphthong! Yet one letter (in Greek)—an iota no less—protected the confession that Jesus was God and not just very much like God. I wish, incidentally, that some professor during my seminary days had told me that this Nicene formulation was the product of a missionary encounter with neo-Platonic culture, a classic example of faithful contextualization in making the gospel known in a culture very different from Jewish culture.

³¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 121.

³² Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission and Missions*, *Christianity Today*, 4, 22, (1 August 1960), 911.

³³ Lesslie Newbigin, *Crosscurrents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 6, 4, 149.

³⁴ Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Chord of Three Strands: Mission in Acts*, [page number in this volume](#)

³⁵ Newbigin, *Crosscurrents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission*, 150.

not build on someone else's foundation' (15:20-21). As an *architektōn* moved from city to city working on major building projects, Paul travels to regions in which the gospel had not been preached and to cities in which no churches had yet been established."³⁶ Schnabel notes again: "Paul understands his task to be that of a missionary called by God to 'plant' (3:6) and to 'lay the foundation' as a 'skilled master builder' (*sophos architektōn*; 3:10), i.e. to establish new congregations. In other words, Paul is a pioneer missionary who travels from city to city proclaiming the message of Jesus Messiah, Savior and Lord, before audiences who had never heard the message before." As they respond to the gospel they are gathered into "a new community of people who meet regularly, representing God's presence in the world as his 'temple' (3:16)."³⁷ Note the progression Schnabel recounts: Paul as a pioneer church planter forms a church in a new place; then that church represents God's presence to the people in that place.³⁸ I believe this perspective can also help us to understand the missional concern of Paul in his letters.³⁹ He is concerned to nurture churches to carry out their calling of representing the good news to their contemporaries.⁴⁰ Paul is both a pioneer missionary and a missionary pastor.

Similarly Porter and Westfall's chapter on the book of Acts offer helpful insight into missions by tracing the strategy, approach, and content of Paul's missionary journeys. For example, consideration of Paul's evangelistic speeches continues to be helpful for missionary communication today.⁴¹ Where there is knowledge of Scripture evangelism tells the story of Jesus as the fulfilment of that bigger Old Testament story. Where there is no knowledge of Scripture, as is usually the case in missions, Paul carefully proclaims the gospel building on their common humanity and religious experience with both continuity and discontinuity, fulfilment and challenge. Hendrik Kraemer has called this way of proclaiming the gospel 'subversive

³⁶ Eckhard, J. Schnabel, *Paul's Missionary Strategy: Goals, Methods, and Realities*, page number this volume.

³⁷ Schnabel, *Paul's Missionary Strategy*, page number this volume.

³⁸ In *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* Roland Allen analyses the success of the church's mission in the book of Acts. First churches were planted, witnessing communities established in places of importance. It was then the attractive life of the community and spontaneous evangelism of common members that led to "the spontaneous expansion of the church." He summarizes: "This then is what I mean by spontaneous expansion. I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the Church explaining to others the Gospel which they have found for themselves; I mean the expansion which follows the irresistible attraction of the Christian Church for men who see its ordered life, and are drawn to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to share; I mean also the expansion of the Church by the addition of new churches" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 7.

³⁹ See, for example, Herman Ridderbos' discussion in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 432-435. He says: "This grand vision of the world-encompassing significance of the gospel and of the expansion of the church causes him furthermore to involve the church that has already been brought to salvation in this missionary work in a great many ways, and to awaken the church itself to a missionary attitude" (433). He notes at least three ways the church became involved in this mission: in its enablement of Paul's missionary work; in a more indirect way by manifesting the gospel in its life, commending it to outsiders; in more direct, deliberate evangelistic endeavours. Ridderbos comments on the second of these: "This motif recurs throughout all the epistles of Paul in various nuances and elaborations: the life of the church must be a recommendation of its faith, in conformity with, 'worthy of,' the Lord (Col. 1:10) and the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27). In this last point the missionary element is very clear." (434). He goes on to tie the upbuilding of the church for this expressly missional calling.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 107, 132.

⁴¹ Porter and Westfall, *Mission in Acts*, page numbers in this volume

fulfillment⁴² while Lesslie Newbigin following A. G. Hogg has termed it ‘challenging relevance’,⁴³ and J. H. Bavinck ‘possessio.’⁴⁴ What each is doing with differing terminology is noting the way in which missionary communication today, as was the case with Paul in Lystra and Athens in his day, will proclaim the gospel as the fulfilment of common human aspirations and religious longings while at the same time challenging the idolatry that twists those aspirations and longings with a demand for repentance and conversion.

Many questions remain about how to use Schnabel’s and Porter and Westfall’s thorough analyses today. How does Paul function as a model for a church living in very different settings? To take one example: Can advocates of urban mission today simply embrace his strategy? Schnabel is not so certain, as my old professor Harvie Conn was, that today’s urban missionary strategy can be drawn from Paul’s example. How does Paul’s strategy to go first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles relate to today’s missions? What parts of Paul’s mission remain normative? How can we appropriate and continue Paul’s missionary concern in imaginative and creative ways in new contexts and cultural settings?

These questions like the ones earlier posed to Porter probe the contemporary relevance of ancient Biblical texts. It is interesting to note that some missiologists trained in biblical studies like Bosch,⁴⁵ Johannes Nissen,⁴⁶ among others believe a problem exists in the dialogue between mission and Biblical scholars. To put it (perhaps too) starkly: Biblical scholars, oriented to the original meaning of the text in a very different setting, are reticent to draw any kind of direct connection between the text and our situation. Thus they “frequently fail to show whether, and, if so, how, the Bible can be of significance to the church-in-mission and how, if at all, a connection between the biblical evidence and the contemporary missionary scene can be made.”⁴⁷ By contrast missiologists, seeking contemporary relevance, frequently fail to respect the cultural distance between text and context, and thus read their own concerns back into the biblical text. Sometimes they are guilty of simplistic or obvious moves from the New Testament to our missionary setting in an attempt to make a direct application of Scripture to the present situation. The problem is how to merge horizons of the ancient text and the contemporary setting with integrity, or to co-ordinate the concern of missiologists to be relevant today with the concern of biblical scholars to be faithful to the divine authority of yesterday.

But, at the very least, the affirmation of pioneer missions is important today. In some ecumenical parts of the church embarrassment about the colonial missionary enterprise of the past two centuries coupled with a loss of confidence in the truth and universal validity of the gospel has led many to the abandonment of missions. Conversely in some evangelical parts of the church it is business as usual: missions continues to be defined simply as cross-cultural. Any

⁴² Hendrik Kraemer, Continuity and Discontinuity, in *The Authority of the Fatih: The Madras Series, Volum 1*. (New York, London: International Missionary Council, 1939), 2-4; *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: The Edinburgh House Press, 1938), 351-352.

⁴³ A. G. Hogg, *The Christian Message to the Hindu* (London: SCM Press, 1945), 9-20; Lesslie Newbigin, Christ and the Cultures, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31, 11-12; and Mission in the 1980’s, *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4, 4 (October), 155. Cf. Goheen, *As the Father Has Sent Me*, 356-361.

⁴⁴ J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (English Translation by David H. Freeman; Phillipsburg N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1960), 121-190. This term is used and explained on pages 178-179.

⁴⁵ David Bosch, Mission in Biblical Perspective, *International Review of Mission* (October 1985), 531-538; 1986. Toward a Hermeneutic for “Biblical Studies and Mission”, *Mission Studies* III (2), 65-79.

⁴⁶ Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang), 13-15.

⁴⁷ Bosch, *Mission in Biblical Perspective*, 532; *Toward a Hermeneutic*, 66.

money that is given for people who are ‘overseas’ is missions. Bryant Myers notes the serious problem with this: “Christians are allocating only 1.2% of their mission funding and their foreign missionaries to the 1.1 billion people who live in the unevangelized world.”⁴⁸ He calls the disproportionate allocation of monetary and human resources a “scandal.” In this situation a distinction between mission and missions, with the insistence of taking the gospel to places where there is no witnessing community, remains important.

But the importance of Paul’s pioneer missions work goes beyond simply maintaining the task of taking the gospel to people who have not yet heard it. Missions expresses also the ultimate horizon of God’s and, therefore, the church’s mission—the ends of the earth. All nations and the ends of the earth is the horizon of God’s mission through Israel. As Mark Boda has pointed out on the Psalms and Craig Evans on the servant songs of Isaiah, in the Old Testament, since there is one God, his rule is to be recognised by all peoples “to the ends of the earth.”⁴⁹ This horizon remains in the New. Jesus says, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). This theme is explicit in the structure of the book of Acts as Westfall and Porter point out in their chapter.⁵⁰ The risen Christ says to the apostles that they will be his witnesses beginning in Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria and on to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Put this way missions is not just another part of mission that stands alongside of others but is the ultimate horizon of the whole missionary task of the church. Mission without missions is an emaciated and distorted concept. As Newbigin puts it: “The Church’s mission is concerned with the ends of the earth. When that dimension is forgotten, the heart goes out of the whole business.”⁵¹

6. *The Centrality of Mission to the Biblical Story*

We have discussed the mission of the New Testament church as it continues to the ends of the earth. This mission is rooted in the Old Testament. While there is a growing recognition among many in mission studies of the importance of the Old Testament,⁵² it still remains relatively underdeveloped.⁵³ Mark Boda’s chapter is an excellent addition. Boda’s summarizing sentence at the end of his first section is a good place to start: “The ‘meaning’ of Israel’s

⁴⁸ Bryant L. Myers, *The New Context of World Mission* (Monrovia: World Vision, MARC, 1996), 48.

⁴⁹ Cf. , for example, ‘the ends of the earth’ in Ps 72:8; Zech 9:10; Mi 5:4; Ps 2:8; Is 49:6.

⁵⁰ Porter and Westfall, *Mission in Acts*, page numbers in this volume

⁵¹ Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 27.

⁵² A couple of classic older books on the Old Testament and mission include H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Press, 1944); Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962). A couple of helpful recent books are: David Filbeck, *Yes, The God of the Gentiles Too: The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL; Billy Graham Center, 1994); Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). Other books treat the Old Testament along with the New Testament: Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, 25-71; Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983, 9-138. See also Wright’s book *The Mission of God*.

⁵³ In *Transforming Mission* Bosch devotes about 184 pages to developing a biblical foundation for mission. Only four pages are devoted to the Old Testament, and his approach is to elaborate themes important for mission to the nations. Bosch quotes Rzepkowski approvingly when he says: “The decisive difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is mission. The New Testament is essentially a book about mission.” Chris Wright counters this in his *Mission of God*.

existence is the mission to the peoples.”⁵⁴ It is clear, Boda points out, especially in Psalm 67: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us—*so that* your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. . . . May God bless us still, *so that* all the ends of the earth will fear him.” (Ps 67:1, 6).⁵⁵ I have often used the language we find here and elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the community God chooses as a ‘so that people.’ That is, we exist *so that* the nations might come to be blessed. At the end of his essay Boda notes that the psalms are part of a greater narrative. He notes among the high points Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 19:4-6, and the prophets vision for the nations.⁵⁶ Taking only those texts we see the thread of the Old Testament missional narrative.

Against the dark spread of sin along with its terrible consequences as narrated in Genesis 3-11, God chooses Abraham. He promises to make him into a great nation and bless him. But the blessing on Abraham is *so that* all the peoples on earth will be blessed through him (Gen 12:1-3; Cf. Gen 18:18-19). William Dumbrell comments on this verse: “What is being offered in these few verses is a theological blueprint for the redemptive history of the world . . .”⁵⁷ How that blessing would flow to others is articulated in God’s call to Israel in Exodus 19:4-6.⁵⁸ Israel is called to be a priestly nation, that is, to play a priestly role among the nations. John Durham relates the purpose of this call in Exodus 19 when he comments that Israel was to be “a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people.”⁵⁹ In the later language of Isaiah, Israel is to be a light to the world. Georg Vicedom notes a consensus among a number of mission scholars on Israel’s election. He says: “Israel’s election was a call to service. She was to impress the world so that, by the example of Israel, the rule of God would become evident to the nations.”⁶⁰ Dumbrell notes the significance of this call for the rest of the Old Testament: “The history of Israel from this point on is in reality merely a commentary upon the degree of fidelity with which Israel adhered to this Sinai-given vocation.”⁶¹

We see this theme strongly in the psalms, as Boda has noted well, because the psalms, as the hymnbook of Israel, nourished Israel in her missional calling. But alas Israel failed. Israel’s failure did not mean God’s redemptive purposes for the world failed. The prophets looked to the future and promised that one day he would restore Israel to her missional role among the nations. We might describe the importance of the prophetic message with Lucien Legrand as an “eschatological, centripetal universalism” that is “brought to complete expression in the New Testament.”⁶²

One of those prophets, of course, was Isaiah. Craig Evans’ chapter helps to see how Luke makes extensive use of Isaiah 40-66 throughout his books to interpret both the mission of Jesus

⁵⁴ Mark Boda, “*Declare His Glory Among the Nations*”: *The Psalter as Missional Collection*, [page number this volume](#). Boda is quoting H.-J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans. K.R. Krim; Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Augsburg 1986), 59.

⁵⁵ Boda, “*Declare His Glory Among the Nations*”, [page number this volume](#).

⁵⁶ Boda, “*Declare His Glory Among the Nations*”, [page number this volume](#).

⁵⁷ William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 66.

⁵⁸ We note in passing that this missional role of Israel has been transferred to the New Testament church. Cf. 1Peter 2:9. See Westfall, *The Hebrew Mission*, [page number this volume](#).

⁵⁹ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 263.

⁶⁰ Georg Vicedom, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission* (trans. Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 94.

⁶¹ Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, 90.

⁶² LeGrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 3.

and the mission of the church. Perhaps one of the most helpful images that shows us the thread of mission in the biblical story is taken from the phrase from Isaiah 42:6, the title and theme of Evans' chapter, 'a light to the nations.' These words are spoken of the Lord's servant. Who is that servant? Evans shows us that Luke depicts Jesus as the one who comes to fulfil the calling of the servant in Isaiah.⁶³ Further we see that Luke also formulates his version of the concluding missionary commission to the apostles (Luke 24:44-49) with the servant of Isaiah in mind. Paul is not hesitant to apply the words to the missionary ministry of him and his colleagues (Acts 13:47).⁶⁴ In this way the mission of Jesus is connected to the mission of the church: both discharge the ministry of the Isaianic servant to be a light to the nations and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Thus, in the words of Thomas Moore, Luke "used the Servant concept not only for his Christology, but also for his missiology." Consequently as "followers of Christ, believers today are privileged to be commissioned by Him to take up the mission of the Servant."⁶⁵

But the connection can be made not only forward from Jesus' mission to the church's mission, but also back from Jesus' mission to Israel's mission. Not only does the church continue Jesus' mission, Jesus fulfills Israel's mission. The servant songs of Isaiah must be placed in the broader Old Testament story of a people called to incarnate as a community the redemptive purposes of God in the midst of the world for the sake of the nations. Isaiah's promise comes in the midst of Israel's failure to be the faithful servant and looks forward to one who will arise out of Israel to fulfill her mission to be a light to the nations. Jesus comes as "one who fulfills Israel's destiny." When "Israel's role of world mission . . . was forfeited through disobedience" that role pictured in the servant is "transferred in the Gospels to Jesus."⁶⁶ The Servant will also gather a renewed Israel who will continue the Servant's mission. Thus we see a missional connection between the roles of Israel, Jesus, and the church as each participates in the missional purpose of God.⁶⁷

Porter and Westfall add an important distinction. The burden of their argument on mission in the book of Acts is that there is a connection between the mission of Jesus, the Jewish mission, and Paul's Gentile mission. They point out further that in Paul's mission his strategy was to proclaim the gospel first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.⁶⁸ In his brief biblical theology of mission, J. H. Bavinck points out that the Old Testament prophets promised that when God ushered in the new age, the "first condition for the fulfilment of this promise is the genuine conversion of Israel itself."⁶⁹ God would transform Israel first to fulfill their missionary calling. This condition could only be fulfilled in connection with the work of the Messiah. It is only then

⁶³ Cf. Thomas S. Moore, The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaianic Servant, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (January-March 1997), 47-51.

⁶⁴ Moore, *The Lucan Great Commission*, 51-58.

⁶⁵ Moore, *The Lucan Great Commission*, 60.

⁶⁶ Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 49-50. The role is not only transferred in the gospels but already in Isaiah. Commenting on Isaiah 49:1-6 Brevard Childs speaks of a servant that arises within Israel 'as a faithful embodiment of the nation Israel who has not performed its chosen role (48:1-2)' (*Isaiah*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 385).

⁶⁷ It is important, of course, to note both the continuity and the discontinuity between Israel's and the church's mission. But it is not true that the "decisive difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is mission. The New Testament is essentially a book about mission." (H. Rzepkowski, *The Theology of Mission, Verbum SVD*, 15, 1974, 79-91. Quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 17).

⁶⁸ Porter and Westfall, *Mission in Acts*, pages in this volume

⁶⁹ Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 19.

that salvation of the nations can take place. Israel's mission and failure in the Old Testament, the mission of the Messiah, Israel's renewal to take up her mission again, the salvation of the Gentiles and incorporation into the new Israel and her mission—this is the redemptive-historical sequence of the prophets and the missional thread that runs from Israel to the nations.

It is this overarching missional purpose of God that must be grasped for a consistent missional hermeneutic. Wright puts it strongly,

To read the whole Bible in the light of this overarching perspective of the mission of God, then, is to read 'with the grain' of this whole collection of texts that constitute our canon of Scripture. In my view this is the key assumption of a missional hermeneutic of the Bible. It is nothing more than to accept that the biblical worldview locates us in the midst of a narrative of the universe behind which stands the mission of the living God.⁷⁰

7. Missionary Encounter with Culture

Faithfulness to our mission to make known the good news of the kingdom in life, word, and deed will mean a missionary encounter with our culture. In his well-known and important book, *The Mission of God*, written in 1957, Georg Vicedom ends his book with a section entitled 'The Church of Suffering.'⁷¹ He argues that suffering is the normal experience of a faithful church as it carries out its mission among powers that oppose the Lordship of Christ. He finds it "peculiar" that theology of missions hardly enters the discussion of the missional significance of suffering.⁷² Since that time that topic is much more present in missiological literature.

An incident that occurred less than ten years before Vicedom penned these words, impressed on Newbigin the close connection between a faithful missionary church and suffering. After independence the government of India required all elementary schools to switch to the Gandhian model of education. Hindu syncretism was built into the program. The teachers were to be tightly knit communities that engaged in daily acts of worship that acknowledged all religions to be equally valid paths to God. A village boy who took up a teaching position in Madurai lost his teaching certificate rather than participate in syncretistic worship. Newbigin reports the result: "The costly witness of a village boy who was willing to lose his teaching certificate rather than compromise his faith so shook the whole institution that I was soon baptizing students within the college campus."⁷³ This event—and others like it—convinced Newbigin of three things: the incompatibility of the gospel with the dominant doctrine shaping public institutions, the cost of faithful witness to the gospel, and the power of suffering to draw others to Christ. Suffering comes in a missionary encounter with the idolatrous powers at work in a culture. Newbigin explains:

⁷⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology, *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, (eds. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, Robin Parry; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 134-135.

⁷¹ Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, 136-142.

⁷² Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, 139.

⁷³ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 120.

No human societies cohere except on the basis of some kind of common beliefs and customs. No society can permit these beliefs and practices to be threatened beyond a certain point without reacting in self-defense. The idea that we ought to be able to expect some kind of neutral secular political order, which presupposes no religious or ideological beliefs, and which holds the ring impartially for a plurality of religions to compete with one another, has no adequate foundation. The New Testament makes it plain that Christ's followers must expect suffering as the normal badge of their discipleship, and also as one of the characteristic forms of their witness.⁷⁴

Cynthia Westfall, in her chapter on the Hebrew mission, calls attention to this theme in a number of books including Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Revelation, and links it with their missional calling.⁷⁵ Westfall finds herself in company with others considering this theme.⁷⁶ The book of Revelation, for example, places the church's mission in the context of a cosmic battle. Dean Flemming comments: "John is convinced that when the church prophetically testifies to God's truth against the idolatry and injustice of Rome, against its claims to ultimate allegiance, the result may be the shedding of the blood of the saints."⁷⁷ He continues: "But Revelation also gives its readers the confidence that the saints faithful testimony even to the point of death will have magnetic effect of drawing people from the world's nations to worship the one true God (Revelation 11:3-13; 15:1-4; cf. 5:9; 7:9; 14:6; 21:3, 24, 26). Courageous witness is a powerful instrument of mission."⁷⁸ Richard Bauckham treats this theme in his commentary on Revelation. In his book *Bible and Mission* he employs this theme again to urge the church in the West today to take up its missional call to embody the good news of the kingdom and to resist the idolatrous power of the story of global capitalism.⁷⁹

Bauckham's prophetic call takes us to the heart of Brian Irwin's chapter. Our discussion of missionary encounter thus far has highlighted the *negative* side of the church's relationship with its cultural context. That is, because the whole seamless texture of culture is stained by rebellious idolatry, the gospel speaks a 'no', a word of judgement on the sinful twisting of all

⁷⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission* (Richmond: John Knox Press), 42.

⁷⁵ There is a difference in how 1 Peter is treated. Both Nissen and Senior and Stuhlmüller contrast 1 Peter and Revelation in their approaches to culture. "It is interesting to compare the book of Revelation with 1 Peter on the issue of mission. These two works are radically different in form and tone, but both share a concern with witness in face of the Greco-Roman world" (Senior and Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 302). Nissen summarizes this difference: "Common to 1 Peter and the Book of Revelation is the call for witness. In the case of 1 Peter it meant the active participation in the structures of society, in the case of Revelation it meant the active withdrawal" (*New Testament and Mission*, 151). Conversely, both Westfall, and Köstenberger and O'Brien call attention to the fact that these books both view mission in terms of suffering in the midst of a hostile world. (Westfall, *The Hebrew Mission*, page numbers this volume; Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 232-233). Perhaps the difference can be explained in terms of the fact that 1 Peter views mission in terms of suffering, but it is suffering as one participate in the public life of culture, while in Revelation, the opposition of a hostile state precludes this.

⁷⁶ For example, Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 143-156; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 83-112; Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 266-295.

⁷⁷ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 281-282.

⁷⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 283.

⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 83-112.

cultural customs, symbols, institutions and systems. The church, then, finds itself in a stance of opposition to its culture, and in the process, sometimes suffers. Yet, the church's relation to the dominant culture is not only to "resist the idolatry of the pagan state and pagan society"⁸⁰ but also that "good citizenship was also a missionary strategy which commended the gospel to those of good will."⁸¹ There is thus a *positive* side to the church's mission to its culture. Judgement and opposition is not the only word. The gospel also speaks a 'yes', a word of affirmation on cultural development as a good part of God's creation. The church, then, finds itself also in solidarity with its culture, participating fully in the unfolding of culture in keeping with God's creational intentions.

From the 1950s on, the emphasis on the calling of the layperson in the world of public life as central to the church's mission has made a resolution to this issue urgent. On the one hand, how can the church live in solidarity with its culture without falling into syncretistic accommodation or uncritical domestication, taking the form of a chameleon? On the other hand, how can the church stand in opposition to the idolatrous twisting of its culture without falling into a repellent sectarianism or polemical confrontation, taking the form of a ghetto? Both must be avoided if the church is to mediate good news. Wrestling with this question has become important in contextualization studies in missiology.

Irwin begins his paper with a reference to Douglas John Hall. Hall has taken a certain stance on this issue that has become common among some in the missiological tradition that have occupied themselves with a missionary encounter with Western culture. Stephen Bevans, in his well-known book on contextualization models, terms this the 'counter-cultural model.'⁸² Hall believes that because of a long Christendom arrangement between the church, gospel, and culture in the West, the church has lost its critical, prophetic stance in culture. He is in fundamental agreement with Newbigin who said that the Western church is in "an advanced state of syncretism."⁸³ Therefore, it is the side of opposition to culture, the gospel's word of judgement on idolatry that must be stressed.

There is a range of positions, however, within this counter-cultural model. Some, like Hall, stress the negative side of the church's engagement with culture to the degree that the positive side is almost eclipsed. To illustrate: About the same time Newbigin delivered the paper *Can a Modern Society Be Christian?*,⁸⁴ offering his agenda for the pursuit of this goal, Hall made the comment at a 1996 Gospel and Culture Conference that it is wicked to seek a Christian society.⁸⁵ For Hall cultural formative power for the Christian community was the problem of Christendom. For Newbigin cultural formative power is good, and part of our mission; the problem comes when we lose the prophetic, critical dimension.

I believe the emphasis on the critical side of the church's calling in culture is a much needed emphasis today for the church in the West. But I share Irwin's concern with Hall's over-

⁸⁰ Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 92.

⁸¹ James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 679-680.

⁸² Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, Revised and expanded edition, 2002), 117-137.

⁸³ Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 67.

⁸⁴ Unpublished address given at Kings College, London, 1 December 1995, as the Second Annual Gospel and Culture Lecture.

⁸⁵ See Douglas John Hall, *Metamorphosis: From Christendom to Diaspora*, in *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, (ed. Craig Van Gelder; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 73.

emphasis on the church's negative stance for a number of reasons: it offers no help for a church that must participate in its cultural development; it doesn't recognise the great gains of the Christendom period that we are still enjoying because the gospel salted Western culture; it takes a cultural strategy or emphasis appropriate at one point in history and makes it normative for all situations.

It is this last concern that motivates Irwin's chapter. He rightly notes that to "apply the wrong model may lead to ineffectiveness in engaging culture or an unwarranted pessimism when imagining the Church's future."⁸⁶ His analysis of Daniel rightly shows that there are different ways that the church engages society. Sometimes a faithful missionary stance enables the church to participate in structures in a transforming way; other times they will be opposed by a hostile state and their witness will be one of suffering martyrdom.⁸⁷

8. Conclusion

When theologian Lash addressed members of a New Testament seminar he commented that while Biblical scholars attend the meetings with their festal robes of professional exegesis he felt a little naked unable to suitably attire himself in such garments. As one trained in theology and not Biblical studies he wondered what he was doing there.⁸⁸ I feel a little bit like Lash; my work is not in the area of Biblical scholarship but worldview and missiology. I cannot adorn myself with a fitting wedding garment at the feast of Biblical scholarship. Yet Lash's further hermeneutical reflections encouraged me to accept the invitation to contribute to this volume.

According to Lash's model, the relationship that exists between Biblical scholarship and missiology is often conceived in terms of what he refers to as the 'relay-race' model. It is a relationship of one-way dependence: the Biblical scholar determines what the text originally meant and then passes along the complete package of original meanings to the missiologist who in turn transposes those meanings into the contemporary situation rendering the text relevant to

⁸⁶ Brian Irwin, *Old Testament Apocalyptic and the Roots of New Testament Mission*, page number in this volume

⁸⁷ Irwin notes that "there is nothing to say that the available models should be limited to the two that have been outlined here" (page number in this volume). In fact, if we look at the church in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, we can see that the church there has engaged society in at least three models. Before communism the church was in a Christendom situation where the state was relatively friendly, and the church was able to participate freely in the structures of society. After Lenin the church faced a hostile state in which the costly witness of Revelation was more appropriate. With the fall of communism, and the incursion of liberalism, the church is now ignored or simply relegated to the private realm. Each of these situations present different challenges. See Michael W. Goheen, *Building for the Future: Worldview Foundations of Sand and Rock*, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, 20, 5, (October 2000), 30-41, for a brief description of these three models in the church of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. See also the insightful discussion of Dean Flemming of two differing models of mission in Romans 13 and Revelation 13. He affirms that "different contexts call for different responses" to the Roman Empire. While the contexts differ, the key is that in both situations the church is called to witness to God's kingdom: "Both, in fact, engage their public worlds with a missional goal, but they do so from alternative angles." The book of Romans seems "to encourage Christians to positively participate in the life of society in redemptive ways." On the other hand, Revelation takes a more sectarian stance because of the demonic depths idolatry has reached. Thus Revelation "launches a countercultural critique" and calls the church to a "prophetic and costly witness."⁸⁷ In Romans and Revelation "we discover two different but complementary theological visions. Each spotlights one side of the church's relationship to the Empire; each shows sensitivity to the particular needs of the communities they address." (*Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005, 288-291.)

⁸⁸ Lash, *What Might Martyrdom Mean?* 14.

the missionary task of the church in the present. Contrariwise Lash believes there needs to be a two-way dialogue. The biblical scholar Marion Soards agrees. He notes four themes in current New Testament scholarship that are important for mission today.⁸⁹ He recognizes that Biblical studies can help to bring the light of Scripture to bear on our current mission practices. But he also believes that it is not only missiology that needs biblical scholarship; it works the other way as well. He says: “Mission studies should remind Biblical scholars that many of the writings that we study (often in painstaking and even painful detail) came to be because of the reality of mission. An awareness of, and a concern with, the key issues of mission studies may well help biblical studies find foci that will bring deeper appreciation of the meaning of the Bible.”⁹⁰ For the sake of faithfulness to our call to participate in God’s mission in a changing time, I hope that at least something of that dialogue between biblical studies and missiology has taken place in this volume.

⁸⁹ The four issues are first-century Judaism, the life of Jesus, Pauline theology, and the character of the early church.

⁹⁰ Marion Soards, Key Issues in Biblical Studies and Their Bearing on Mission Studies, *Missiology* 24, 1996, 107. Chris Wright notes similarly: “So a missional reading of such texts is very definitely not a matter of (1) finding the “real” meaning by objective exegesis, (2) cranking up some “missiological implications” as a homiletic supplement to the text itself. Rather, it is to see how a text often has its *origin* in some issue, need, controversy, or threat that the people of God needed to address in the context of their mission. The text in itself is a product of mission in action” (*Mission of God*, 49).