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Introduction

Gregory D. Mathias
Guest Editor

This volume of *STR* is dedicated to the theme of missions and evangelism. Three of the essays were first presented at a regional meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society in the spring of 2018 at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Rich missiology exhibits a symphonic relationship between biblical faithfulness, theological rigor, and practical application. Each of the essays seeks to demonstrate these characteristics.

The first essay in this issue is by Bruce Little, Retired Senior Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern. In his essay, "Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society," Little discusses the prevailing vision of reality in the West and the need for thoughtful evangelism approaches. He argues that within the current cultural climate evangelism encounters must overcome four major barriers: (1) the decline in conversation skills, (2) the loss of rational argumentation in public discourse, (3) the obsession with options, and (4) the fading sense of the sacred.

The second essay is by George Robinson, Professor of Missions and Evangelism and the Richard and Gina Headrick Chair of World Missions at Southeastern, and is a response to the first essay. In his response, Robinson employs the thoughts of Lesslie Newbigin as a counterbalance and anchor to the more philosophical ideals of Francis Schaeffer. He contends that in the current culture missionaries and evangelists need both academics and practitioners or bow ties and blue jeans.

In the third essay, Benjamin Merkle, Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern, asks the question, "Is the best translation of the Greek term πορευθέντες 'go' or 'as you go?'" Merkle argues for an imperatival force behind the term, while not surrendering the main point of the Great Commission—making disciples. He maintains that translating πορευθέντες in this way directly shapes how the church engages in the Great Commission.

In the fourth essay, Matthew Bennett, Professor of Missions and Theology at Cedarville University, cautions against the use of reductionistic phrases such as "Finishing the Task." He links phrases like this to Matthew 24:14 and asserts that using such phrases reduces the missionary task to one component. Matthew 28:18–20 demonstrates that obedience to Jesus' command is contingent upon the full scope of making disciples, not just world evangelism.

The fifth essay is by Sam Martyn, Church-Planting Team Leader in Central Asia. In this essay, Martyn interacts with forty-four conversion testimonies in order to evaluate the role of pre-conversion dreams and visions among believers from a Muslim background. He concludes that these dreams and visions, while preparatory, are not salvific, but due to their frequency in Islamic contexts (1) missionaries and others who minister to Muslim peoples should expect to encounter reports of dreams and visions, (2) believers from Muslim backgrounds must be encouraged to understand their dreams and visions in light of Scripture and equipped to submit these experiences to the authority of Scripture, and (3) dreams and visions should never serve as a primary focus of ministry to Muslims.

The final essay of this issue is an interview with George Braswell, former missionary to Iran and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Missions and World Religions at Campbell University and Southeastern. Braswell and his wife Joan served with the International Mission Board, SBC, in Iran from 1968 to 1974. He received a Bachelor of Divinity from Yale University Divinity School and an MA and PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society

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The thesis argued here is that understanding the implications of a culture's vision of reality shaping the intellectual life of any society is crucial to developing approaches for the proclamation of the gospel. A society's vision of reality determines what is deemed acceptable or important. The danger today in the West is how anti-metaphysical realism is leading to the receptivity of cultural possibilities that are destructive to humanity and subversive to historic Christianity. As a consequence, four challenges present themselves to Christian evangelism: (1) the decline in conversation skills; (2) the loss of rational argument in public discourse; (3) the obsession with options; and (4) the fading sense of the sacred. The conclusion is that Christian evangelism must be guided by a Medieval realism to avoid the current distortions and disorderliness created by aberrant visions of reality today that are inimical to our evangelism.

Key Words: conversation, evangelism, media technology, mediated reality, options, post-Christian, progress, rational, realism, sacred

The gospel no longer penetrates. We seem to be confronted by a blank wall. Now if we want to go further, either we must find a door, or we must break down the wall. But first we must investigate this wall, in order to find out whether there is a door: thus we need to explore this world in which we are living. If there is not a door (as seems to me to be the case) then we must find (or create) the instruments we need in order to make a breach in it.

~Jacques Ellul[1]

I came to know Christ in May 1965 just prior to entering the US military. The time of my conversion and baptism was the time of great social upheaval across Europe and America. Since the 1940s existentialism had been taught in universities in the West, and in the 1960s the logical conclusion of that view of reality broke forth with a vengeance upon the West. The denial of metaphysical realism and with it with denial of objective truth threatened the very foundation of western societies. It was a time of sexual, religious, educational, and political rebellion, an attempt to overturn the familiar, the very foundation of society itself. It appeared as an all-out attempt to bury the past and rebuild, but that was the problem—rebuild with what? There was no idea of what should follow other than the destruction of anything before them. Metaphysical realism was handed a pink slip. It was a rejection of a vision of reality that had a long history in the West from Augustine, through the Medieval period, and into the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, few evangelical churches understood what was happening on university campuses. Most did not understand why objective reality and objective truth had come under such fierce attack—why tradition and social order were so despised. Although evangelicals had the right message, they lacked a basic understanding of the shifting intellectual life of the West, which was fundamentally a shift in a vision of reality. In frustration, many evangelicals saw only two options. One was to ignore and/or denounce those in rebellion. The other was to accommodate the new way of thinking in hopes of reaching those by adapting to the new lifestyle—to accommodate the new mindset. Francis Schaeffer warned that this adaptation would, in time, result in a great evangelical disaster. He wrote: "It is so easy to be a radical in the wearing of blue jeans when it fits in with the general climate of wearing blue jeans."[2] He was right, and both options had undesired consequences for evangelicalism—consequences that continue to plague evangelicalism and the West to the present moment.

In the midst of this intellectual upheaval, Schaeffer, who was hardly known at that time in the evangelical world, was serving as a missionary in Europe. However, in 1965, he was invited to Wheaton College as the speaker for the spiritual emphasis week. In those meetings, many young Christians heard of a third option, namely, giving honest answers to honest questions—answers found in the Bible or what Schaeffer called historic Christianity.[3] He confronted them with Truth—Truth that could only stand within a Christian realism. Schaeffer died in May 1984. By then, anti-metaphysical realism was firmly entrenched in university curricula across America. It was death to metaphysical realism and everything that had been built on it.

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[1] *The Presence of the Kingdom,* 2nd ed., trans. Olive Wyon (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 115.

[2] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 4, *A Christian View of the Church* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 370.

[3] Os Guinness says that Schaeffer was the "most brilliant and compassionate face-to-face apologist I ever met" (*Fool's Talk* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015], 37).

Today, we are witnessing the West's attempt to maintain social order without any intellectual/spiritual foundation sufficient for such a task. It is an attempt to have social order without spiritual order. The search for meaning has turned inward, and mankind has lost his external reference point—God. Consequently, today's intellectual world courts two competing visions of reality that make the idea of God either unnecessary or implausible. First, there is the anti-realism of what is called postmodernity, where everyone is her own authority and personal happiness is the goal of living. Second, there is anti-metaphysical realism or naturalistic realism, which is the scientific vision of reality. This affirms objective reality but denies anything existing above experience, which, in the words of Richard Weaver, means that "man is the measure of all things."[4] Mankind is his own guide as well as his goal. There is no unifying principle of knowledge—fragmentation and individualization prevail. Into the intellectual/moral vacuum flowed ideas grounded only in the senses. In the end, there is no way to distinguish important matter from the trivial. Both visions of reality proved subversive to the Christian message. Today, we must understand what this means for speaking to the post-Christian mind. Fail here, and we will be like the Wright brothers, trying to build an airplane without understanding the basic principles of aerodynamics. We forget that Genesis comes before Matthew, and for theologically necessary reasons at that.

Understanding the predominant vision of reality must always stand at the beginning of developing evangelistic strategies. The evangelical world missed that truth in the 1960s and '70s, which, at least in part, led to the two fateful directions mentioned earlier. They only responded to the symptoms, not the underlying ideas. The lack of attention paid to the intellectual life of society handcuffed the good intentions of evangelicals and often confused the message when it was preached. It is true that following generations have tried to do better, which is commendable. There has been an attempt to relate properly to the world; yet in too many cases good intentions suffer from the same disinterest in understanding the vision of reality that determines what the society approves or denies.

The thesis I argue here is that understanding implications associated with the vision of reality controlling the intellectual life of any society is crucial to developing approaches for the proclamation of the gospel. It is not just understanding the vision of reality, but how society's vision of reality shapes what is acceptable and what is important. I am not speaking of areas of morality; they are easy to see. The real danger exists in how anti-metaphysical realism leads to the receptivity of possibilities that are

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[4] Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 4.

destructive to humanity and subversive to historic Christianity.

In general, this is a call for the evangelical world to think better philosophically than we have done in the past and to see its importance for our evangelism. I am thinking of something akin to the example of C. S. Lewis or Francis Schaeffer. George Sayer wrote of Lewis, "He devoted himself to developing and strengthening his belief, and, almost from the year of his conversion, he wanted to become an evangelist for the Christian faith."[5] In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrote, "The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose."[6]

I am not suggesting that every evangelist or missionary be either a professional philosopher or professionally trained theologian. But it is important that all think well and know scripture. All must understand the intellectual bent of the spirit of the age as well as the truth of the Word and, in particular, to understand the current vision of reality.

I suggest there are at least four cultural conditions that present a challenge and danger to evangelism. These conditions owe their success to two competing visions of reality that are complicit in shaping the minds of young and old: (1) anti-realism of postmodernity[7] and (2) anti-metaphysical realism of naturalism (naturalistic realism). For convenience I will collect both under one term—anti-Medieval realism. Neither caused the anti-Christian cultural conditions of today single-handedly; rather, the intellectual life they created weakened the idea of moral restraint and human responsibility. In addition, the technological/digital age that developed within these visions of reality gave people new ways to express their freedom from the realm of the transcendent. In turn, this changed the entire intellectual landscape.

As Neil Postman wrote: "New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think *about*, they alter the character of our symbols: the things we think *with*. And they alter the nature of community: the

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[5] George Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 138.

[6] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 155.

[7] Postmodernist poster child Richard Tarnas writes: "Properly speaking, therefore, there is no 'postmodern world view', nor the possibility of one. The postmodern paradigm is by its nature fundamentally subversive of all paradigms, for at its core is the awareness of reality as being at once multiple, local, and temporal, and without demonstrable foundation" (*The Passion of the Western Mind* [New York: Ballantine, 1993], 401).

arena in *which* thoughts develop."[8] Media technology has provided a way to create a mediated reality that gives us the sense of being our own god. No longer are we guided by the constraints of true community, rational discourse, or moral responsibility. We are free from the old traditional way of seeing things, the old traditions that gave security and meaning to society. Now progress through efficiency and convenience rule our choices, moral and otherwise. The dismissal of the transcendent realm done in the name of progress was cheered as good riddance. Now we must live with the consequences in our society.

The first cultural condition of concern is the serious decline in conversation skills, which has led to the avoidance of face-to-face conversation and proper understanding of community. This reveals a radical change in social activity that once re-enforced our human*ness*. Now conversation is only about conveying information (fact, not truth, is the subject), which does not require face-to-face encounters. Functionally, media technology provides the means whereby face-to-face conversation can be avoided. As Ellul notes, "We can no longer communicate with man, because the only intellectual method of expression is a technical one. Communication transcends technics because it can only take place where two human beings are fully engaged in a real conversation."[9]

Naturalistic realism leaves humanity as only another part of the big machine (naturalism); human*ness* is stamped out. This leads to a very functionalistic view of conversation. It has nothing to do with giving of oneself, as one has nothing to give but information.[10] We are not functionalists because we misuse technology; we misuse technology because we have come to view mankind only functionally. This is because of our anti-Medieval view of reality. When this happens, as Weaver says, mankind loses the conviction ". . . that man *is* somebody."[11]

While not restricted to what is now called the IGen,[12] young people

are the ones most defenseless to the dangers of media technology because they have been breathing the anti-Medieval realism air from birth. Sherry Turkel, Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, writes in a *New York Times* article, "It's not only that we turn away from talking face to face to chat online. It's that we don't allow these conversations to happen in the first place because we keep our phones in the landscape."[13] Her research confirms: "By now, several 'generations' of children have grown up expecting parents and caretakers to be only half there. . . . parents and babysitters ignore children when they take them to the playgrounds and parks. In these new silences at meals and at playtime, caretakers are not modeling the skills of relationship, which are the same as the skills for conversation."[14] As Turkel points out, it is not surprising that "children, too, text rather than talk with each other at school and on the playground. Anxious about the give-and-take of conversation, young people are uncertain in their attachments. And anxious in their attachments, young people are uncertain about conversation."[15] Think how this impacts what are called gospel conversations. We are not just giving out information. Christ is a person, not a product. If information is all there is to evangelism, then we can all stay home and evangelize from our computers. Of course, we do not believe that, but we must not give the appearance that we do.

Turkel's latest book, *Reclaiming Conversation*, is dedicated to exposing the growing flight from human conversation and considering ways to reverse the trend. Her well-documented book reveals not only her own extensive research but also that of many other professionals who confirm her findings and concerns regarding the decline of face-to-face conversation and the role technology plays. This also means a decline in any sense of community. Ellul echoes this concern when exposing the negative consequences of media technology and its impact on conversation. He writes, "No longer is any kind of relationship established. Henceforth the word is definitely detached from the one who speaks. Nobody is behind it."[16]

The Internet allows for disembodied communication, disembodied

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[8] Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 20.

[9] Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, 95.

[10] One of the best books on how this works is: Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015). I think she is too optimistic that technology can overcome the negatives in conversation, but her well-documented book raises the right questions. It is interesting to note that she is a visiting professor at MIT.

[11] Richard Weaver, *Visions of Order: The Cultural Crisis of Our Time* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1995), 38.

[12] According to Jean M. Twenge, "Born in 1995 and later, they grew up with cell phones, had an Instagram page before they started high school, and do not

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remember a time before the Internet" (*IGen* [New York: Atria Books, 2017], 2).

[13] Sherry Turkel, "Stop Googling, Let's Talk," https:nyt.ms/1VhHsVN. A version of this op-ed appears in print on September 27, 2015, on Page SR1 of the New York edition with the headline: "Stop Googling. Let's Talk."

[14] Sherry Turkel, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 27.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Jacques Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 157.

presence while pretending it is the same as face-to-face. Thomas de Zengotita calls this a "mediated reality."[17] This means we are losing the habit of reading the face both in terms of the other's person*ness* and responding to what is happening in the conversation.[18] As Christians, we must understand that this decline in conversation is directly related to a vision of reality that is quite contrary to Christianity.

It is possible, however, for Christians to make a difference here. The first suggestion is to bring the Christian vision of reality to bear upon the subject of relating to others. Another way is for Christians to rethink their uncritical use of digital possibilities and social media for evangelism in particular and Christian living in general. While social media may be an initial way to get somebody's attention, we must move away as quickly as possible and get to the business of face-to-face sharing. Of course, there are always exceptions, but let us not allow the exception to give way to the rule. This means rethinking our methods, church services, and expectations accordingly. This is not condemning all social media, but it strongly suggests we need to ask serious questions before blindly using it simply because it is a way to reach more people or it is more convenient. We must understand how it destroys the idea of community and humanity. Media technology is very much like Bilbo's ring in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*; it may provide a great convenience, but it comes at a great price—enslavement.

Interestingly Turkel suggests that "one start toward reclaiming conversation is to reclaim solitude."[19] Serious reflection is unique to humanity, and it is the way by which we are brought face to face with ourselves and things that matter. In this post-Christian society, humanity is smothered, and reflection denied by a world filled with noise. Furthermore, we must be intentional about engaging in face-to-face conversation in our homes, in our communities, and in the church.

We must help others to learn the importance of face-to-face conversation by our community living. This will include a commitment to raise a generation of young people who have a healthy view of technology and sacrifice. For this, Christian parents must train their children in the home

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[17] Thomas de Zengotita, *Mediated* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005).

[18] Some try to justify the use of media technology by redefining words. In order to continue an uncritical defense of what is happening with social media and conversation there has been an attempt to redefine words such as "relationship," "community," "friend," and "conversation." Of course, some words are redefined over time, but they are functional terms, not terms of agency. Redefining such words only masks the real danger facing us in the arena of conversation.

[19] Sherry Turkel, "Stop Googling. Let's Talk," *New York Times*, September 26, 2015, https://nyti.ms/1VhHsVN.

about the importance of conversation and the dangers of social media, taking seriously the word to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov 22:6) to mean more than learning Bible verses.

The second cultural condition is that rational argument is losing its place in private and public discourse. This also means the loss of civility. Often, arguments given are either unattached to the issue, or they are merely emotive rants. It is not only that rational argument has been spayed, but fewer and fewer people care about rational argument because there is nothing that really matters; there is no objective reality. Warring tribes only fight for their own rights to be right, regardless of the truth of things. Think of what that means for the gospel, either in witnessing or preaching in the church, if people cannot follow a line of reasoning. Giving up a Medieval vision of reality removes the grounding for rational argument, so we should not be surprised when our society today is being ripped apart by social tribalism. It is reminiscent of Lewis's words: "We castrate and then bid the gelding be fruitful."[20]

In her new book, Jean M. Twenge notes in the title that the IGen is "more tolerant" than those before them.[21] What is important to note is that they are not tolerant on principle, but rather because of indifference. They are tolerant because their vision of reality leads them to think that there is no way to say this or that is wrong—each is free to see things as it pleases her. Everything becomes self-referential; there are no restrictions on personal freedom and little attention to the facts. Thinking of our missionary activity, this may very well mean that most simply do not care about what we have to say as it is irrelevant to their view of things. It is not that they disagree with us because they have no basis for disagreement. In fact, they have no frame of reference for understanding what we are saying. Often, they just react in hostility because the Christian message conflicts with their vision of reality in practical ways, not philosophical ways. Likewise, many who reject Christianity have not rejected it based on some well-constructed argument. It is more herd instinct or bandwagon mentality.

If this is so, some of the time-tested theistic arguments may not be as persuasive today as in the past. In this case, we must learn to confront humanity with truth but in a way that recognizes the true nature of mankind and uses reality as the assayer of one's beliefs. Here I suggest it is important to begin by explaining a Christian vision of reality as Paul did

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[20] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 35.

[21] Jean M. Twenge, *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria Books, 2017).

on Mars Hill (Acts 17). This means re-acquainting them with concepts of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. This must be done in how we order our lives, develop our communities, and create our cultural artifacts. This may prove more fruitful evangelistically speaking than always attempting to correct the conclusions of the non-Christian.

Schaeffer suggests that when dealing with the non-Christian, "We ought not try first to move a man away from the logical conclusion of his position but towards it. . . . We should try to move him in the natural direction his presuppositions take him."[22] Here Schaeffer is certain that any non-Christian vision of reality will fail at the end when carried to its conclusion. Reality itself is the judge of the truthfulness of one's beliefs as we all live in the same reality.

The third cultural condition creating difficulty in evangelism is society's obsession with options. Naturalistic realism says technology is the way to happiness and happiness is the chief end of man. More options mean greater happiness. It is media technology through its mediated reality that cultivates and encourages this fantasy of options. Mara Einstein argues that it is advertising with the new power of media technology that keeps options ever present before us, ever feeding the insatiable desire for the next new option.[23] Living in a mediated reality may appear more exciting for many reasons, but it makes us less socially functional as well as less satisfied with everyday life. In fact, according to David Myers and Robert Lane, it destroys community as a living, vital relationship among human beings.[24] The truth of this point is incontrovertible.

Thomas de Zengotita writes, "Mobility among the options in a virtualized environment gives to human freedom a new and ironic character. You are completely free to choose because it doesn't matter what you choose. That is why you are so free."[25] That means we are always holding

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[22] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 1, *The God Who Is There* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 138.

[23] Mara Einstein, *Advertising: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 229.

[24] Sherry Turkel quotes David Myers and Robert Lane who "independently concluded that in American society today, abundance of choice (and this would apply to choices in products, career paths, or people) often leads to depression and feelings of loneliness. Lane points out that Americans used to make their choices in communities, surrounded by the 'givens' of family, neighborhood, and workplace."[24] According to Turkel, William Dereiswicz thinks "our communities have atrophied, . . . So, when we talk about communities we have moved 'from a relationship to a feeling'. We have moved from *being* in a community to having a *sense* of community" (Turkel, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 173).

[25] Zengotita, *Mediated*, 17.

out for a better option thinking it will increase happiness. Turkel makes a similar point quoting psychologist Barry Schwartz's "paradox of choice": "While we think we would be happiest if we had more choices, constrained choice often leads to a more satisfied life."[26]

The obsession with options undercuts the idea of commitment and sacrifice, something at the heart of Christianity. Why commit to anything today when maybe tomorrow a better choice will be presented? In fact, this obsession with choices weakens the very foundation of society itself. However, more concerning to Christians is that this is lethal to the call of Christ, who says take up your cross and follow Me (Matt 16:24). Christ is not one option among many; he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). Personal commitment and sacrifice are precisely to what we are called as Christians. It is counter-productive to Christian evangelism to share Christ based on a better option, so we must not think this is an acceptable way to reach the post-Christian society.

Here evangelicals must have a fierce commitment to the truth of what is, which means we begin with a Christian vision of reality. That is, greed and selfishness do not fit with the way the universe is, if humanity is to flourish. Christians must show the truth of single-mindedness by living against this spirit of the age. We must not allow our evangelistic methods or church life to encourage this lust for options. This would mean taking care in how we structure our church services or speak of Christ as just another option, as if he were a breakfast cereal. We must resist anything in our evangelism or our ministries in general that accommodates or encourages the present obsession with options—it is subversive to the calling of Christ on our lives.

The fourth cultural concern militating against evangelism is the fading sense of the sacred. Unfortunately, it naturally follows from anti-Medieval realism. Theologically, Medieval realism provided the grounding of the notion of the sacred. However, with anti-Medieval realism all that is left is nature—a nature that has been demystified, something under our control. Now science alone defines mankind and tells us what it is important. Furthermore, there is no foundation for making proper distinctions within society or treating humanity as ontologically unique. Diversity is championed without any understanding of unity, which results in warring tribalism. Lower order concerns replace higher order principles. Functionalism replaces Medieval realism.

The loss of the sacred has robbed humanity of any sustaining sense of significance and worth. Beyond this, the loss of the sacred means death

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[26] Turkel, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 182.

to the transcendent categories of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. One cannot fail to see the ugliness all about us and feel the oppression of the repudiation of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Christians stand in a unique position today to order their lives and community around Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. But where this is not understood, even well-meaning Christian art can be as ugly and meaningless as that of the world.

In general, it is not difficult to see where the loss of the sacred has led. For instance, marriage and even life itself are devalued on every hand. Everything is common. Respect, honor, and heroism are empty concepts, and hope rests in technology alone. We must resist the temptation to offer Christianity on functionalistic grounds—for example, that it gives you a better marriage or makes you a better worker. That may be true, but it is not the heart of the gospel. If we do that to fit with the intellectual form of the day, we must acknowledge we are betraying our own our vision of reality, which is to say our view of truth. When we fall prey to the functionalist view (not in principle, but in deed/method), we make Christianity just another new product on the market to be tried for increased sociological functional value.

The loss of the sacred has removed the idea of mankind's moral guilt before God. This idea that secular man has lost a sense of the sacred is pointed out in Stephanie R. Derrick's comments on C. S. Lewis's Christmas sermon:

> Real Pagans differ from post-Christians, Lewis continued, firstly in that they were actually religious: "To [the Pagan] the earth was holy, the woods and waters were alive." Secondly, they "believed in what we now call an 'Objective' Right or Wrong," that is, that "the distinction between pious and impious acts was something which existed independently of human opinions." Finally, Pagans, unlike "post-Christian man," had "deep sadness" because of their knowledge that they did not obey the moral code perfectly. To compensate for this shortcoming, the Pagan developed a wealth of ceremonies to "take away guilt."[27]

Lewis's point was that in a world of anti-metaphysical realism there is no sense of offending a higher power because none exists: the post-Christian person must first learn of the bad news, namely that he is a sinner, before considering the Good News. So today, with the loss of the sacred, we must begin with the problem before we get to the cure. This begins with

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[27] Stephanie L. Derrick, "Christmas and Cricket: Rediscovering Two Lost C. S. Lewis Articles After 70 Years," *Christianity Today*, December 15, 2017, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/december-web-only/christmas-cricket-lost-c-s-lewis-articles.html.

a proper vision of reality that restores the truth of the sacred. Furthermore, the idea of the sacred must return to the Christian home. Our children must be trained to live against the world in light of the sacred where loving God means not only keeping his commandments but also loving our neighbor. It means understanding sacrifice and commitment because of the higher order of things.

In conclusion, I have tried to point out the relationship between cultural conditions that make evangelism difficult in our day because of the reigning anti-Medieval view of reality. Along with this, I have also pointed to possible ways of overcoming these difficulties. Everything the church does must have evangelism in mind, but this means more than having a program. Fundamentally, this means the church must present to the world a community of people who think, act, and worship differently than the world. We must develop our Christian communities where a robust Christian culture is on display—where our music, literature, architecture, liturgy, and preaching all serve as an incarnation of a Christian vision of reality. This means our worship spaces should be places where the noise and cultural distractions are not welcome. This would give the world a living picture of how Christianity would order both one's personal as well as her corporate life. It means rejecting the disordering of the world and ordering life according to the spirit of Christ, not the spirit of the age. Such an instantiation of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty draws people to what is intrinsic to them as they are made in God's image.

Only historic Christianity provides the vision of reality that orders life the way the universe is. This truth explains why Christianity, when applied consistently, has encouraged science, uniquely cared for humanity, and birthed a culture marked by Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Metaphysical reality in Medieval terms confesses that created reality is only understood in light of the transcendent categories that undergird and order it. Our evangelism must be informed and guided by a Medieval realism lest we succumb to the distortions and disorderliness created by aberrant visions of reality today. By this we can confront modern humanity with the truth that fits who he is as understood in the transcendent categories of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. It is not coincidental that the Bible begins with Genesis and not Matthew; understanding a Judeo-Christian vision of reality stands before everything.

Bow Ties and Blue Jeans:
Philosophers and Missionaries Partnering
to Evangelize in a Post-Christian Culture

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What do we do with the masses in this post-Christian era who are not overtly asking the epistemological questions? Those masses are unanchored in a sea of ideas, adrift and rudderless. A lighthouse, like Schaeffer's L'Abri, is only effective when a ship is approaching the shore. It offers no hope to those adrift in the open sea. This rudderless, distracted generation necessitates a rescue mission. We should look to Newbigin and Schaeffer together as complementary prophetic voices. Schaeffer provides an intellectual apologetic for the skeptic, while Newbigin provides a missiological strategy to equip Christians for that open sea rescue mission. I embark on this endeavor, then, by weaving the complementary wisdom of the philosopher Schaeffer together with his contemporary Lesslie Newbigin, a renowned missiologist. I am convinced that it is going to take both bow ties and blue jeans, academics and practitioners, philosophers and missionaries working together in obedience to the Great Commission.

Key Words: apologetics, evangelism, missiology, missionary encounter, Newbigin, post-Christian, Schaeffer

I am blessed and honored to provide a response to the essay "Evangelism in a Post-Christian Culture," authored by my esteemed colleague, Dr. Bruce Little. Little is a brilliant Schaeffer scholar, and I have learned much from both him and his muse. To frame my complementary response, I will go back to a Schaeffer quote referenced in Little's essay: "It is so easy to be a radical in the wearing of blue jeans when it fits in with the general climate of wearing blue jeans." Here I sit in my office, a missionary wearing worn jeans—the dress code for the common man. On the other side of our campus, Dr. Little is most likely donning his fashionable suit complete with bow tie, not uncommon in the academy. Though our dress and our overall style may seem quite dissimilar, what we have in common beckons us to work together. Both "radicals," Little and I have devoted our lives to the spread of the gospel in this increasingly complex post-Christian culture.

I embark on this endeavor, then, by weaving the complementary wisdom of the philosopher Schaeffer together with his contemporary Lesslie Newbigin, a renowned missiologist. The apostle Paul made clear in Col 4:3 that we need to pray for an open door to communicate the gospel. Keep in mind that doors serve two purposes: to invite the seeker in, as Schaeffer did so well, and to beckon the Christian out, like Newbigin did, into a broken world where many may not even be seeking. Paul used the door both ways, and so must we. Thus, I am convinced that it is going to take *both* bow ties and blue jeans, academics and practitioners, philosophers and missionaries working together in obedience to the Great Commission.

By way of reminder, Little's thesis is "*that understanding implications associated with the vision of reality controlling the intellectual life of any society is crucial to developing approaches to the proclamation of the gospel.*" Schaeffer understood the intellectual currents of his time, which led him to provide an attractive safe harbor with L'Abri serving as a lighthouse. Maybe it was the fact that Schaeffer listened before speaking. Or that those he spoke with were seeking to be heard. By creating an open door through which they could have him as an astute audience, those seeking made their way to Schaeffer's "Shelter."[1] Five decades later, we still need compassionate Christian intellectuals, like Dr. Little, with a listening ear and an open-door policy. Some who are seeking will make their pilgrimage and engage, precisely because they are looking for answers and for meaning in life.

Yet we live in a time when fewer seem to be intentionally, or even consciously, looking for answers. The cultural zeitgeist leaves the masses looking for the meaning of a moment rather than the meaning of life. Randy Newman writes, "At times (far too many, I'm afraid), I've answered questions with biblically accurate, logically sound, epistemologically watertight answers, only to see questioners shrug their shoulders. . . . My answers had, in fact, hardened them in their unbelief rather than softened them toward faith . . . an answer can push them further away."[2] He continues, "Not all unbelief is intellectual at its core; therefore, reason alone will fail to sway such unbelief."[3]

What, then, do we do with the masses in this post-Christian era who are not overtly asking the epistemological questions to which Schaeffer and Little are so adept at responding? Those masses are unanchored in a sea of ideas, adrift and rudderless. This necessitates both understanding

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[1] *L'abri* is a French word that means shelter. See www.labri.org.

[2] Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017), 29.

[3] Ibid., 68.

and intentionality on the part of the minister. A lighthouse, like L'Abri, is only effective when a ship is approaching the shore. It offers no hope to those adrift in the open sea. This rudderless, distracted generation necessitates a rescue mission. And that is why I look to Newbigin and Schaeffer together as complementary prophetic voices. Schaeffer provides an intellectual apologetic for the skeptic. Newbigin provides a missiological strategy to equip Christians for that open sea rescue mission. The two approaches, I reiterate, are complementary—just like bow ties and blue jeans, just like Dr. Little and me.

So, who was Newbigin, and why is his voice relevant to this conversation on evangelism in a post-Christian culture? Lesslie Newbigin served as a missionary for decades in India, and on his return to Britain in the early 1970s, he recognized the philosophical shifts of his day necessitated a "missionary encounter" with the culture of his birth. Goheen notes, "A missionary encounter, for Newbigin, involves the recovery of three things: the public truth of the gospel, the missional nature of the church, and a missional analysis of Western culture."[4] Newbigin's concept of a missionary encounter addresses each of Little's cultural concerns regarding contemporary evangelism.

Newbigin's notion of "the public truth of the gospel" addresses Little's concern regarding "the serious decline in conversation skills" *and* "the loss of rational argument in private and public discourse." In a post-Christian society where the gospel is being increasingly marginalized, Newbigin would say that we must initiate and engage in intentional conversations, relating all things back to God.

Newbigin's understanding of "the missional nature of the church" is a response to Little's concern for "*the cry for community that boundless consumeristic options have destroyed.*" In a post-Christian society where we have moved culturally from the rocking chair on the front porch, to fenced in back yards, to living rooms staring at a big screen, to individual hand-held devices, Newbigin would say that Christ-followers must look up and around and be present in the broader community living as cultural exegetes.

Finally, Newbigin's "missional analysis of Western culture" confronts "the fading sense of the sacred" lamented by Little. In a post-Christian society, the church must live as though everything is sacred—because Christ has made it so. The grand metanarrative of the Bible, then, becomes our corrective lens both inside and outside of the church. How we live our part in God's story matters. All of it!

Schaeffer was masterful as a philosopher who understood the

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[4] Michael Goheen, "The Lasting Legacy of Lesslie Newbigin," Q Ideas, http://qideas.org/articles/the-lasting-legacy-of-lesslie-newbigin/.

worldview of his audience. As a result, he frequently brought truth propositions to bear on their thinking. As postmodernity spread, those propositions needed the canvas of story in order to connect with the masses who could not articulate the questions of philosophical or theological inquiry. Newbigin captures the dilemma of their day:

The way we understand human life depends on what conception we have of the human story. . . . In our contemporary culture . . . two quite different stories are told. One is the story of evolution . . . The other story is the one embodied in the Bible, the story of creation and fall, of God's election of a people to be the bearers of his purpose for humankind, and of the coming of the one in whom that purpose is to be fulfilled. These are two different and incompatible stories.[5]

If the church is to be faithful to its missionary calling, it must recover the Bible as one true story. Newbigin continues:

I do not believe that we can speak effectively of the Gospel as a word addressed to our culture unless we recover a sense of the Scriptures as a canonical whole, as the story which provides the true context for our understanding of the meaning of our lives—both personal and public. If the story of the Bible is fragmented into bits it can easily be absorbed into the reigning story of culture rather than challenging it.[6]

One contemporary evangelism resource taking into consideration the cultural/philosophical insights of Schaeffer and the missional impulse of Newbigin can be found at www.thestorytraining.com. Several fingerprints of both philosopher and missiologist can be seen in the methodology:

1. *We emphasize conversations, not presentations, making observation and listening primary tools.* By listening to and studying the person with whom we are communicating, we can discern the story by which they interpret all of life.

2. *We begin with universal worldview questions: How did it all begin? What went wrong with the world? What hope is there? What does the future hold?* Most conversations center on the good or bad in life, providing an

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[5] Michael Goheen, "Lesslie Newbigin and Reading the Bible as One Story," Newbigin House of Studies, http://newbiginhouse.org/2012/12/lesslie-newbigin-and-reading-the-bible-as-one-story/.

[6] Ibid. See also http://newbiginresources.org for full transcripts of interviews, speeches, sermons, etc.

opportunity to transition to the gospel by asking a worldview question surfacing their assumptions.

3. *We communicate the propositions of the gospel against the backdrop of the grand metanarrative of the Bible.* Stories have a way of taking truths on that formidable journey from the head down into the heart. We see this exemplified in the disciples' Emmaus Road experience in Luke 24, at the end of which was their declaration: "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road explaining the Scripture to us?" Eugene Petersen says, "Stories, in contrast to abstract statements of truth, tease us into become participants in what is being said. . . . We may start as spectators or critics, but if the story is good (and the Bible is), we find ourselves no longer just listening to but inhabiting the story."[7]

4. *We must become compelling storytellers by both embodying the transformative power of the gospel and intentionally communicating it in such a way that they wish it were true—because it is.*[8] Perhaps story is the very thing that helps the person far from God see the inevitable consequences of their worldview. Any worldview devoid of the sacredness of humanity will inevitably devolve into a "survival of the fittest" philosophy. The irony is that on the one hand culture eschews the sacred while at the same time it desires happiness. Little notes that our cultural zeitgeist has us "*always holding out for a better option thinking it will increase happiness.*" Schaeffer adds insight as to how evangelism begins with bad news producing the need for the good: "We ought not try first to move a man away from the logical conclusion of his position but towards it. . . . We should try to move him in the natural direction his presuppositions take him."[9] The true story of the whole world does not end with a cross or even an empty tomb. It ends with everlasting and indefatigable happiness.

5. *Invitation does not equal evangelism.* We must, like God, enter into the brokenness of those who are adrift and without hope and tell the

story that both shows them their need and meets it. In today's post-Christian culture, we must engage in a real "missionary encounter," making the gospel public truth. This will require the work of ministers acting both as lighthouses to the few still seeking and embarking on rescue missions that pursue those who are far from God where they are—without leaving them there.

In conclusion, I welcome Little's insight and am grateful for Schaeffer. My hope is that we add to them the likes of Newbigin, helping us to live like missionaries in the increasingly strange and disconnected culture we find ourselves a part of. In the end, we can trust that there is indeed power in the gospel message, whether emanating from the lighthouse or delivered on the rescue mission at sea. Both Newbigin and Schaeffer affirm that, as do Bruce Little and I—a philosopher and a missionary, bow ties and blue jeans can work together to evangelize in a post-Christian culture.

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[7] Eugene H. Peterson, "Introduction to the Book of Jonah," *The Message Remix*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 1352.

[8] Pascal argued for such an approach in his *Pensées*. He notes, "Men despise religion, they hate it and are afraid it might be true. To cure that we have to begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason. That it is worthy of veneration and should be given respect. Next it should be made lovable, should make the good wish it were true. Then show that it is indeed true."

[9] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 138.

Why the Great Commission Should Be Translated "Go!" and Not "As You Go"

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There has long been a debate as to whether the participle πορευθέντες in the Great Commission is best translated as an imperative ("go") or as a temporal adverbial participle ("as you go"). The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that the participle should be understood with an imperatival force by looking at other uses of the same participle in similar constructions in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, especially the Gospel of Matthew. What we discover is that this term is used consistently as an imperative but that stylistically in Greek it was often preferred to use one participle and one imperative instead of two consecutive imperatives. This does not mean, however, that "go" is the main focus of the passage. The main idea of the passage is still "make disciples," though the imperatival function of πορευθέντες suggests certain implications that will also be explored.

Key Words: adverbial, as you go, attendant circumstance, Great Commission, imperative, make disciples, participle, πορευθέντες, temporal

There is virtually unanimous agreement that the main command of the Great Commission is to "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε). But how should we understand the participle πορευθέντες? Is it best understood as a temporal participle and translated "as you go" or as a command, "Go!" In other words, are we to understand the verse as stating that our disposition as we go about our daily routine should be to make disciples? Or, is this verse stating imperatively that believers are commanded to leave their homes and go to a foreign land for the express purpose of making disciples? The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that the participle should be understood with an imperatival force by looking at other uses of the same participle in similar constructions in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, especially the Gospel of Matthew. What we discover is that it was common, even preferable (at least with certain verbs), to use a participle imperatively instead of using two consecutive imperatives.

The Evidence for "As You Go"

Some maintain that the aorist participle πορευθέντες should be viewed as a temporal (adverbial) participle and should therefore be translated "as you go." Grammatically, this is certainly possible and should not be dismissed too quickly. Temporal participles are very common and are sometimes viewed as the default category if no other category fits. In his grammar, Wallace notes that when an aorist adverbial participle (e.g., πορευθέντες) is related to an aorist main verb (e.g., μαθητεύσατε), the participle will often communicate contemporaneous time to the action of the main verb.[1] Therefore, if πορευθέντες is interpreted as a temporal participle, it could be rightly translated "when you go" or "as you go."

What would be the implications of such an interpretation? After noting that the main command is to make disciples, Robert Culver notes, "Presupposed by this basic command is the fact that Christian believers are already to be deployed on the scene of their missionary labors."[2] In other words, there is no commission to go, only a commission to make disciples. He continues by claiming that "the point of the great commission is that wherever they are they are to be carrying it out—making disciples. . . . Make disciples in the particular nation among whom you dwell. You need not go somewhere else to operate on the great commission program!"[3] His paraphrase of the verse also clarifies his position: "As ye go, therefore, and wherever you may be . . . make disciples of all nations. . . ."[4]

More recently, Marshall and Payne have made a similar argument. After affirming that "we should be sending out missionaries to the ends of the earth and seeking to reach the whole world for Christ," they raise the question: "But is that really what Matthew 28 is calling upon us to do?"[5] Here is (at least in part) their answer:

> Traditionally (or at least for Carey), this has been read as a missionary mandate, a charter for sending out gospel workers to the world. . . . But the emphasis of the sentence is not on "going." In fact, the participle is probably better translated "when you

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[1] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 624. It should be noted that Wallace does not think that in Matthew 28:19 πορευθέντες is a temporal participle.

[2] Robert D. Culver, "What Is the Church's Commission? Some Exegetical Issues in Matthew 28:16–20," *BSac* 125 (1968): 245.

[3] Ibid., 252.

[4] Ibid., 253.

[5] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and The Vine* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013), 11.

go" or "as you go." The commission is not fundamentally about mission out there somewhere else in another country. *It's a commission that makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple.*[6]

In addition, although it stands virtually alone as one among dozens of well-known and trusted English Versions, the International Standard Version (ISV) translates the participle temporally: "Therefore, **as you go**, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[7]

Studying the Greek of Matt 28:19 does not easily or quickly solve the issue as to how this verse should be understood. Some argue that the phrase is best understood as a temporal adverbial participle and therefore communicates the idea of "as you go." And although it is possible for the Greek participle πορευθέντες to be interpreted temporally, as we will see, such an interpretation is highly unlikely.

The Evidence for "Go!"

Most New Testament scholars, however, disagree with the above interpretation and favor taking the participle with an imperatival force.[8]

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[6] Ibid., 13 (emphasis original).

[7] See also God's Word translation: "So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations."

[8] Leon Morris correctly notes, "Where the participle is linked in this way with an imperative, it shares the imperatival force (cf. 2:8, 13; 11:4; 17:27). Jesus was commanding his disciples to go as well as to make disciples, though the emphasis falls on the making of disciples" (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 746n.30). Similarly, Osborne comments, "The circumstantial participle 'go' (πορευθέντες) followed by the main verb is a common Matthean stylistic trait, and it becomes in effect another imperative, 'Go and make disciples'" (Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 1080). Other commentators who follow this interpretation include: Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 431; Fredrick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28), rev. and exp. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 815; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *EBC* 9, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 666; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 3:667; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC 33B (Dallas: Word, 1995), 88, 886; Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 718–19; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1265n.65; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 951. See also Hal Freeman,

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In this case the participle is not interpreted temporally but as a participle of attendant circumstance.[9] This type of participle is coordinate or parallel to the main verb (in Matt 28:19 the imperative μαθητεύσατε, "make disciples") and thus takes on the mood of that verb. It is typically translated as a finite verb with "and" inserted between the participle and the main verb. Wallace lists five criteria that all occur in about 90 percent of the instances of attendant circumstance: (1) the tense of the participle is usually *aorist*; (2) the tense of the main verb is usually *aorist*; (3) the mood of the main verb is usually *imperative* or *indicative*; (4) the participle will *precede the main verb*; and (5) the participle occurs frequently in *historical narratives*.[10] Although the participle and the main verb are translated as parallel or coordinate verbs, the emphasis still falls on the main verb, with the participle being grammatically subordinate.[11] This use of the participle is confirmed by looking at similar constructions in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, especially the Gospel of Matthew.

First, there are several key texts in the Septuagint that demonstrate that the participle often functions imperatively.[12]

- Rebekah tells her son Jacob, "Your curse be on me, child, only obey my voice, and **go** (πορευθείς), **bring** (ἔνεγκε) them to me" (Gen 27:13 NETS; see also 27:9). Several items are worth noting here. First, this text closely resembles Matt 28:19 as we have an aorist participle (πορευθείς) followed by an aorist imperative (ἔνεγκε). Second, in the Hebrew text, both of these verbs are

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"The Great Commission and the New Testament: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16–20," *SBJT* 1.4 (1997): 17; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 104n.66; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 1, *Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 356–57. Schnabel states, "The participle *poreuthentes* cannot be denied an imperative sense" (356).

[9] See Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 336–37; David L. Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 212; Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 156; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 640–45 (esp. 645).

[10] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 642.

[11] Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer, *Deeper Greek*, 435–36.

[12] Many of the following examples are found in Cleon Rogers, "The Great Commission," *BSac* 130 (1973): 260–61.

imperatives, which means the translators of the LXX viewed the participle as having an imperatival function. Third, it would not make sense to translate the participle temporally ("as you go, bring . . .") since it clearly bears an imperatival force ("go, bring . . ."), which is confirmed by the Hebrew original.

- Jacob instructs his son Joseph, "**Go** (πορευθείς), **see** (ἰδέ) if your brothers and sheep are well, and tell me" (Gen 37:14 NETS). As with the previous example, the Hebrew has an imperative that the Septuagint renders as a participle.

- After they ran out of the food that they had brought from Egypt, Jacob orders his sons, "**go** (πορευθέντες) **purchase** (πρίασθε) a few provisions for us" (Gen 43:2 NETS).

- Pharaoh commands the people of Israel, "**Go** (πορευθέντες), and **get to work** (ἐργάζεσθε)! For the straw shall not be given to you, and you shall deliver the levy of brick-making" (Exod 5:18 NETS).

- The sons of the prophets say to Elisha concerning Elijah, "Please **let them go** (πορευθέντες) and **seek** (ζητησάτωσαν) your master" (2 Kings 2:16).[13]

- Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman, saying, "**Go** (πορευθείς) and **wash** (λοῦσαι) in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean" (2 Kings 5:10).[14]

The same type of construction (aorist participle + imperative) is also often found with the participle of ἀναλαμβάνω in the Septuagint.

- Pharaoh commands Joseph, "**bring** (ἀναλαβόντες) your father, and **come** (παραγίνεσθε)" (Gen 45:19).

- After the tenth plague (the death of the first born), Pharaoh orders Moses and Aaron, "**Take** (ἀναλαβόντες) both your sheep and cattle, and **get going** (πορεύεσθε)" (Exod 12:32 NETS).

- Jeremiah declares God's word of judgment to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "**Take up** (ἀναλαβόντες), and **flee** (φεύγετε) to Sion; hurry, do not stop" (Jer 4:6 NETS).[15]

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[13] All Scripture citations from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

[14] The Hebrew form is a jussive with an imperatival force.

[15] See also Jdt 12:11 ("**Go** [πορευθείς] and **persuade** [πεῖσον] the Hebrew woman," NRSV); Tobit 5:3 ("**go** [πορευθείς] and **get** [λαβέ] the money,"

The above texts are highly instructive because they confirm the use of the participle that functions imperatively.[16] Instead of using two coordinate imperatives, it was common to use a participle followed by an imperative. It was understood, however, that the participle mirrored the mood of the imperative, being taken as a command.

Other uses in Matthew's Gospel also confirm the attendant circumstance use of the participle. Not only does Matthew use this construction often, he uses the construction with the same verb (an aorist participle of πορεύομαι), followed by an aorist imperative.

- King Herod urgently commands the wise men, "**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **search** (ἐξετάσατε) diligently for the child" (2:8). There is no doubt that Herod was not merely stating "as you go" or "when you go." Rather, he was forcefully commanding them to go and search for the child.

- Jesus answers the Pharisees, "**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **learn** (μάθετε) what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice'" (9:13).

- Jesus declares to John's disciples, "**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **tell** (ἀπαγγείλατε) John what you hear and see" (11:4; see also Luke 7:22).

- Jesus instructs Peter, "**go** (πορευθείς) to the sea and **cast** (βάλε) a hook and take the first fish that comes up" (17:27).

- The angel at the empty tomb tells the women, "Then **go** (πορευθεῖσαι)[17] quickly and **tell** (εἴπατε) his disciples that he has

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RSV); 1 Macc 7:7 ("**let him go** [πορευθείς] and **see** [ἰδέτω]," NRSV). For a participle in construction with an indicative, see Gen 12:9; 27:14; 45:28; Num 13:26; Deut 29:25; Josh 2:1; Dan 6:20; Tobit 1:19; 1 Macc 9:59.

[16] The use of the participle as attendant circumstance should not be confused with the imperatival participle. The former is somewhat common, is used in construction with a main verb, and is found mostly in historical narratives whereas the latter is very rare, is used in a construction that lacks a main verb, and is found most in Romans 12 and 1 Peter (see Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer, *Deeper Greek*, 338–39; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 650–51).

[17] When Jesus meets the women in Matt 28:10, he instructs them to "**go** (ὑπάγετε) and **tell** (ἀπαγγείλατε) my brothers to go to Galilee." This time, the same message is communicated by two imperatives. Also, the parallel passage in Mark 16:7 also has two imperatives: "**go** (ὑπάγετε), **tell** (εἴπατε) his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee."

risen from the dead" (28:7).[18]

Again, the above texts demonstrate that the attendant circumstance was a common use of the participle in Matthew's Gospel (note that each text meets all five of Wallace's criteria).[19] In each case, it would not make much sense to translate the participle as "when/as you go" but instead the participle clearly functions with an imperatival force. Indeed, Wallace notes that "in narrative literature, in almost all of the aorist participle + aorist imperative constructions, the participle is attendant circumstance."[20] When the author wanted to convey a temporal function, the present participle is used.[21]

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[18] For more uses of the participle of attendant circumstance in construction with imperatives, see also Matt 2:13 ("an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, '**Rise** [ἐγερθείς], **take** [παράλαβε] the child and his mother'"; so also 2:20); 5:24 ("**leave** [ἄφες] your gift there before the altar and **go** [ὕπαγε]"); 9:6 ("**Rise** [ἐγερθείς], **pick up** [ἆρον] your bed and go home"); 22:13 ("Then the king said to the attendants, '**Bind** [δήσαντες] him hand and foot and **cast** [ἐκβάλετε] him into the outer darkness'"). For uses of the attendant circumstance in construction with indicatives, see Matt 2:14 ("And **he rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **took** [παρέλαβεν] the child"; so also 2:21); 8:26 ("Then **he rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **rebuked** [ἐπετίμησεν] the winds and the sea"); 9:7 ("And **he rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **went** [ἀπῆλθεν] home"), 19 ("And Jesus **rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **followed** [ἠκολούθησεν] him"); Luke 11:8 ("**he will rise** [ἐγερθείς] and **give** [δώσει] him whatever he needs").

[19] Examples of the participle of πορεύομαι with an indicative that are translated as attendant circumstance include the following: Matt 18:12 ("does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and **go** [πορευθείς] and **search** [ζητεῖ] for the one that is straying?" NASB); 22:15 ("Then the Pharisees **went** [πορευθέντες] and **planned** [συμβούλιον ἔλαβον] how to trap Jesus in conversation"); 25:16 ("He who had received the five talents **went** [πορευθείς] at once and **traded** [ἠργάσατο] with them, and he made five talents more"); 26:14–15 ("Judas Iscariot . . . **went** [πορευθείς] to the chief priests and **said** [εἶπεν]"); 27:66 (So they **went** [πορευθέντες] and **made** the tomb **secure** [ἠσφαλίσαντο]"). Cf. Matt. 21:6 which has two participles ("The disciples **went** [πορευθέντες] and **did** [ποιήσαντες] as Jesus had directed them").

[20] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 642n.71. One exception is Luke 22:32: "but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And **when** you **have turned again** (ἐπιστρέψας), **strengthen** (στήρισον) your brothers." Interestingly, the text includes the temporal adverb ποτε ("when") to clarify the temporal nuance.

[21] See, e.g., Matt 10:7: "And **as you go** (πορευόμενοι), **preach** (κηρύσσετε), saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Although most versions translate this verse temporally, the NLT interprets the participle with an imperatival force ("**Go** and announce").

Therefore, when we come to Matt 28:19 ("**Go** [πορευθέντες] therefore and **make disciples** [μαθητεύσατε] of all nations"), it is natural to take the participle imperatively. In Matthew's Gospel, every instance of the aorist participle of πορεύομαι preceding an aorist main verb is clearly attendant circumstance.

The same pattern found in Matthew is also consistent in the other Gospels.

- Jesus says to his disciples, "**Go** (πορευθέντες) into all the world and **proclaim** (κηρύξατε) the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

- Jesus responds to the Pharisees regarding Herod, "**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **tell** (εἴπατε) that fox" (Luke 13:32).

- After seeing some who chose the place of honor at a dinner party, Jesus teaches, "But when you are invited, **go** (πορευθείς) and **sit** (ἀνάπεσε) in the lowest place" (Luke 14:10).

- Jesus gives instructions to the lepers on how to become clean by saying, "**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **show** (ἐπιδείξατε) yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:14).

- "Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, '**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **prepare** (ἑτοιμάσατε) the Passover for us'" (Luke 22:8).[22]

The imperatival function of the participle is also confirmed by English translations. Every major English version translates πορευθέντες as an imperative in Matt 28:19. Interestingly, although the ISV obviously seeks to make a statement by bucking the trend of virtually every other English version, it does not consistently translate the same construction temporally. As with Matt 28:19 ("**as you go**, disciple people in all nations") and Mark 16:15 ("**As you go** into the entire world, proclaim the gospel to everyone") the ISV also astonishingly renders Matt 2:8 temporally: King Herod urgently commands the wise men, "**As you go**, search carefully for the child." It is extremely unlikely that the king is not issuing a command here, especially since they cannot search without going. Perhaps some felt this translation was necessary so that this

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[22] See also Matt 21:2 where Jesus instructs his two of his disciples to go into a village to find a donkey and a colt. He then adds, "**Untie** (λύσαντες) them and **bring** (ἀγάγετε) them to me" (cf. Luke 19:30). In the parallel passage in Mark 11:2, two imperatives are used ("**Untie** [λύσατε] it and **bring** [φέρετε] it"). This further confirms that the participle of attendant circumstance functions virtually identical to an imperative.

verse was consistent with the Great Commission.

Such consistency, however, was never achieved. There are a number of places where the same construction in Greek (aorist participle + imperatival) is translated with an imperatival force (attendant circumstance).

- Jesus answers the Pharisees, "**Go** and learn what this means: 'I want mercy and not sacrifice'" (9:13 ISV).

- Jesus replies to John's disciples, "**Go** and tell John what you hear and observe" (11:4; see also Luke 7:22 ISV).

- Jesus instructs Peter, "**Go** to the sea and throw in a hook" (17:27 ISV).

- The angel at the empty tomb tells the women, "**Go** quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead" (28:7 ISV).[23]

This inconsistency in translating similar constructions casts doubt on their rendering of Matt 28:19 as a temporal participle. Why are the same participles translated temporally but others imperatively? If it is so clear that the Great Commission should *not* be translated as "Go," then why are other texts not treated the same way?

Again, this does not mean that the participle is the main point. The main verb is "make disciples." And yet, simply because the participle is not the main verb it does not make it unimportant or dispensable. Instead, such participles are a necessary prerequisite to complete the main command. Rogers comments, "Without the action of the participle having taken place it would not be possible to carry out the command. The participle proposes the way for the fulfilling of the main verb and in this way also has the form of an imperative."[24]

The imperatival function of the participle πορευθέντες in the Great Commission is also confirmed by the immediate context. Jesus not only commands his disciples to "go," but he specifies that the location of their disciple-making includes "all nations" (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). "Without the going," explains Rogers, "the making disciples is not possible, and especially when 'all nations' is the object."[25] Schnabel similarly notes,

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[23] All of the texts in the Gospel of Luke cited above are also translated as imperatives in the ISV: Luke 13:32 ("**Go** and tell that fox, 'Listen!'"); 14:10 ("**go** and sit down at the place of least honor"); 17:14 ("**Go** and show yourselves to the priests"); 22:8 ("**Go** and make preparations").

[24] Rogers, "The Great Commission," 261.

[25] Ibid., 262. Rogers concludes that this "construction indicates that 'going'

"The participle is implicitly imperatival; the Twelve can reach 'all nations' only if they leave Galilee (or Jerusalem) and go beyond the confines of Judea to other regions and other cities."[26] Thus, the imperatival function of the verb fits the global context of the command.

Finally, the imperatival function of the participle πορευθέντες is also confirmed by the comparison of the Great Commission with the other commissions given by Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and Acts.

- "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

- "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46–48).

- "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21).

- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).[27]

Schnabel concludes, "The missionary commission of Jesus is extant in other formulations. . . . It is quite a stretch, therefore, to minimize the significance of 'going' in Jesus' directive."[28]

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is an integral part of making disciples and is to be translated as an imperative" (266). Carson adds, "In a context that demands that this ministry extend to 'all nations,' it is difficult to believe that 'go' has no imperatival force" ("Matthew," 666).

[26] E. J. Schnabel, "Mission," in *DJG*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 607.

[27] Cf. Matt 4:19 ("And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'"); 10:16 ("Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"); 13:38 ("The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom"); 24:14 ("And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come").

[28] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 356–57.

The Implications of the Imperatival Force of πορευθέντες

The following implications are based on the view that the participle πορευθέντες should be interpreted (and translated) with an imperatival force in Matt 28:19. First, the church must be *intentional* about reaching the nations. If the command is to go into all the nations and make disciples, then that would seem to require a plan to make sure the church is fulfilling Jesus' commission. Leon Morris notes, "From this fact [i.e., because "go" is a participle and not an imperative] some have drawn the conclusion that Jesus did not command his followers to go; all that they were to do was make disciples of such people as they happened to encounter." He rightly adds, however, "Jesus was commanding his followers to go as well as to make disciples, though the emphasis falls on the making of disciples."[29] It is appropriate (and even mandatory) for the church to prioritize reaching all of the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to make disciples.

Second, the church must be willing to invest its resources (time and money) to fulfill Jesus' commission. It would be tragic if Jesus' final commission to the church was ignored or minimized. It is far too easy for churches to get consumed in extending their local kingdom while failing to extend the world-wide kingdom of God.

Finally, going is the not goal; making disciples is. Although I argued that the participle πορευθέντες is imperatival in function, the Greek has only one main verb, the imperative "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε). Thus, the heart of the Great Commission is to make disciples. The three other verbs, which are all participles (go, baptizing, teaching), are all subordinate to this main idea. Going is merely a means to an end.

Summary

Although some maintain that the aorist participle πορευθέντες is best interpreted as a temporal (adverbial) participle and should therefore be translated "as you go," the best evidence supports taking it as a participle of attendant circumstance. As such, the participle mirrors the main verb which, in this case, is an imperative. This usage is common and is consistently used with aorist participles in construction with aorist (and sometimes present) imperatives in narratives. Especially with certain verbs (like πορεύομαι, ἐγείρω, and ἀναλαμβάνω), ancient Greek stylistically often preferred to use one participle and one imperative instead of two consecutive imperatives. Indeed, the aorist participle of

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[29] Morris, *Matthew*, 756.

πορεύομαι in construction with an aorist imperative is never used temporally in the New Testament and always carries an imperatival force.[30] Thus, Matthew's use of the participle does not mitigate the force of the imperative but was merely a stylistic variation that still carries an imperatival force. Consequently, the participle should be translated imperatively ("Go"). Wallace summarizes, "There is no good grammatical ground for giving the participle a mere temporal idea. To turn [πορευθέντες] into an adverbial [temporal] participle is to turn the Great Commission into the Great Suggestion!"[31] Those who prefer to translate the text "As you go" misunderstand the original Greek and thereby weaken the force of Jesus' commission.

Of the twelve uses of the aorist participle πορεύομαι (when preceding an aorist imperative) in the Gospels, not one of them is normally interpreted as a temporal participle. Of the twelve major English Bible versions consulted, not one translated the participle πορευθέντες temporally in the Great Commission. Of the twelve commentaries consulted, not one argued for a temporal meaning. Additionally, the imperatival function of the participle is especially obvious in the context of the Great Commission which includes making disciples of *all nations*. Finally, the other commissions given by Jesus to bring the gospel to all the nations further confirm imperatival force of πορευθέντες. So, while we acknowledge that the participle πορευθέντες is not the main verb (and thus not the main command) in the Great Commission, without doubt it carries an imperatival force ("Go!"). Consequently, the church is given a command to go to the nations in order to make disciples.

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[30] The same is true with the participle of ἐγείρω before an aorist imperative.
[31] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 645.

Finishing the Task?
A Cautionary Analysis of Missionary Language

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Since the beginning of the twentieth century, technological advances and transportation opportunities have made it conceivable for the first time in history that a single generation of Christians might be able to both access and evangelize all of the world's peoples. To this end, missionary agencies have employed mottos such as "Finish the Task" to rally Christians to complete the work of world evangelization. Often such efforts are connected to Matt 24:14 where Jesus promises that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all nations before the eschaton. Such mottos imply that the missionary task is coterminous with world evangelization. Yet the Great Commission of Matt 28:18–20 will not allow for such a reduced conception of the essential missionary task. While world evangelization is a vital component of the Great Commission, missions strategies must not allow the promise of Jesus to distract from full obedience to his command.

Key Words: disciple-making, Great Commission, irreducible missionary task, missions, world evangelization

Introduction

In Genesis 12 Abraham receives the promise that his offspring will be a blessing to the nations. Revelation 7:9 provides a picture of the future consummation of this promise. In this passage, men and women of every nation, and all tribes, peoples, and languages surround God's throne shouting praises to him whom they call "our Lord." This vision is part of the great Christian hope that has sustained believers from the earliest days of its writing. It is a vision that many have expected to dawn in their day. Today, many continue to expect the Lord's imminent return, suggesting that the Great Commission might soon be finished and will usher in Christ's return.

In the foreword of his book *Then the End Will Come*, Jim Montgomery, founder of DAWN ministries, writes, "For as I look at what is happening in the Church and in the world, I feel the prophetic word welling up within me that the consummation of the age is at hand. It is within our grasp to actually complete the Great Commission and thereby pave the way for the return of the Lord."[1] In similar fashion, Steve Smith, the author of T4T, writes, "The completion of Mt. 24:14 is approaching: This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and THEN THE END WILL COME!"[2]

These sentiments are pervasive in missions literature through the words of prolific theologians, missiologists, and missions strategists who espouse similar ideas about the completion or finishing of the task of the Great Commission.[3] With all of the information, technology, and transportation available to believers today, it is not only conceivable that every people group might be reached, but actually possible for perhaps the first time in history.[4] It is hard not to join wholeheartedly in the excitement of these men and women as they urge the church forward, just as a marathon runner who can see the finish line approaching summons all her reserves of energy, in order to finish the evangelization of the world with a flourish.

However, a caution might yet be in order. The church has not been given the task of mere world evangelization. Grander than this, she has been given the task of making disciples of all nations. Mathew 24:14, the verse cited by Smith above, promises that world evangelization will occur, yet the completion of world evangelization is not coterminous with the completion of the missionary task left to the church. Matthew 28:18–20 calls the church to a task that cannot be completed until Christ's return. This paper will argue that confusing the promise of Matt 24:14 with the command of Matt 28:18–20 can result in a diminution of the missionary task. To this point, it would seem that missions mottos such as "Finish the Task" and "Bring back the King" could distract from the essential

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[1] Jim Montgomery, *Then the End Will Come* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997).

[2] Steve Smith, "No Place Left Novel: Hastening," noplaceleft.net, http://noplaceleft.net/tag/steve-smith/.

[3] Cf. John Piper and David Mathis, eds., *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 531–46; Edgar J. Elliston and Stephen E. Burris, eds., *Completing the Task: Reaching the World for Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995); Rondal Smith, "Finishing the Task," in *Completing the Task: Reaching the World for Christ*, ed. Edgar J. Elliston and Stephen E. Burris (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 115–36; Montgomery, *Then the End Will Come*.

[4] Winter and Koch, "Finishing the Task," 531–46.

missionary task as given in the Great Commission.[5]

In order to demonstrate this claim, a brief historical survey of missiological developments since 1900 will be conducted. Following the survey, this paper will investigate what is written in Matt 24:14 and Matt 28:16–20. Finally, this study will conclude with some suggestions as to how missiological tools and strategies might be analyzed, not for their capacity to complete the Great Commission, but for their contribution to Great Commission obedience.

"Finish the Task": Historical Development

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, great effort has been directed toward the completion of world evangelization. A grassroots movement calling itself the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) began around the motto, "The evangelization of the world in this generation."[6] Around the same time as this missions emphasis was developing, the Scofield Reference Bible was published.[7] Partly due to the popularity of this dispensational study of the Bible, various influential voices in the United States wed the concepts of world evangelism and dispensational premillennial eschatology.[8] This particular view of the end times expects the imminent return of Christ prior to the thousand-year reign of Christ's kingdom on earth. One of the signs of Christ's coming is world evangelization, as promised in Matt 24:14.[9] Thus, some efforts towards world evangelization simultaneously became efforts to "Bring back the King."[10]

While not all those focusing on world evangelization were premillennialists, nor were all premillennialists dispensationalists, this theological perspective paired particularly well with missions excitement such that, "It is impossible to fully appreciate the twin emphases on world evangelization and the Second Coming in closure strategies of the nineteenth

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[5] David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 288. Hesselgrave is here citing a list of such mottos as compiled by Todd M. Johnson, director of the World Evangelization Research Center.

[6] Ibid., 282.

[7] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 455.

[8] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 284.

[9] McGrath, *Christian Theology, 455.*

[10] David M. Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 18. Sills notes that entire strategies focus on the idea that reaching all people groups will bring Jesus back.

and twentieth centuries apart from dispensational premillennialism."[11] The excitement of seeing Christ proclaimed in every territory in the near future coupled with the idea that world evangelization would "bring back the King" led many missionaries and missions agencies to put their resources exclusively towards "providing all people with the opportunity to hear the Gospel."[12]

Unoccupied Fields

Building on this growing interest in missions, a major conference was held in 1910 in Edinburgh, bringing missionary delegates together representing missions work around the globe.[13] This conference focused on "unoccupied fields" that would need to be targeted in order to finish the job of world evangelization.[14] The conference resulted in a fresh effort among missions agencies to establish a Christian presence in lands and territories that currently had none.[15]

πάντα τὰ ἔθνη

In the years between the Edinburgh 1910 conference and what would be another landmark conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974, many missions agencies advanced into territories formerly unreached with the primary goal of evangelization.[16] However, as would be pointed out by Ralph Winter in Lausanne, the Greek root translated "nations" (ἔθνη) in both Matt 24:14 and 28:18–20 means much more than the individuals living within geo-political boundaries: "[ἔθνη] points to the ethnicities, the languages and the extended families which constitute the peoples of the earth."[17] Geo-political territories often contain many of these people groups, each of which must be able to receive the gospel in a linguistically and culturally meaningful way.

Ever since Winter brought this ethno-linguistic, relationally-based "people group" concept to the fore of evangelical missiology, much time and research has gone into the process of charting the number of those

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[11] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 283, 286.

[12] David J. Hesselgrave, *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1988), 49.

[13] Zane G. Pratt, Michael David Sills, and Jeffrey Kirk Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 127.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 396.

[17] Winter and Koch, "Finishing the Task," 533.

people groups who are yet unreached.[18] Organizations like the Joshua Project have provided the world with an up-to-date listing of known people groups along with noting which are engaged with the gospel, which have been "reached" with the gospel, and which remain without a known gospel witness.[19] These are all helpful developments that bring clarity to the cultural and ethnic realities present in the world in which we live. The Joshua Project sheds light on the peoples of the world—wherever they are and whoever may surround them—who are yet in need of the gospel and the opportunity to become disciples of Christ.

Matthew 24:14 and the Missionary Task

Despite this appropriate enthusiasm for the idea that the ends of the earth could soon hear the gospel, there remains a troubling conflation of promise and command in some of the literature. This conflation can lead to an overemphasis on rapidly reaching the unreached with the gospel, often at the expense of full obedience to the command to make disciples and to teach them to obey all that Christ commands.[20] The missionary task becomes reaching, with robust teaching being jettisoned as of secondary priority. In part, this may be due to missions strategies that root themselves in Matt 24:14, seeing in it a command to evangelize all the earth's peoples.

Winter provides a clear example of this conflation when he writes, "What matters most is not that the peoples can be *counted*, but that God has given us a task that can be *completed*."[21] Again, he states, "Matthew 24:14 makes it clear that we must make it our first priority to see that every people has a living testimony of the gospel of the kingdom. . . . [the irreducible, essential mission task] is in fact the only task given to his people that actually has a completable dimension to it."[22] Here, in a discussion

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[18] Harold Fickett, "A Genius for God: Ralph Winter's Recasting of World Evangelization," *Int. J. Front. Missiology* 31.2 (2014): 85; Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 188–92.

[19] The Joshua Project, "Bringing Definition to the Unfinished Task," https://joshuaproject.net.

[20] Cf. Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 15; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 397; Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 78. Contra Garrison, Ott and Wilson prioritize healthy over merely rapid reproduction of churches.

[21] Winter and Koch, "Finishing the Task," 533.

[22] Ibid." 534, 539. It should be noted that Winter is here speaking of a people-movement to Christ, which is a forerunner to the idea of CPMs. Elsewhere Winter is more robust in his understanding of the missionary task, but in this article

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of Matt 24:14, Winter refers to the task left to the church to complete: evangelization of the world's peoples. As this essay intends to demonstrate, however, world evangelization is but a partial aspect of the missions task given in the Great Commission.

This survey has shown that the trend toward using Matt 24:14 as a chair text for evangelical missions began long ago. As David Bosch records, "During the second half of the nineteenth century several missionary leaders and the mission organizations they founded . . . began to use Matthew 24:14 as the major 'missionary text'. Christ's return was now understood as being dependent upon the successful completion of the missionary task."[23] One sees this trend, then, in the progression from the SVM and dispensational premillennialism through Edinburgh and to Lausanne. Still today, a global network of missions agencies called "Student Volunteer Movement 2" (SVM2) exhibits this tendency clearly, claiming that "the fulfillment of the Great Commission centers primarily around Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24:14."[24]

Surely evangelism is a first step toward discipleship, church planting, and teaching believers to obey all that Christ commanded. Likewise, it is right that Christians should be motivated to go anywhere to bring the saving gospel of Jesus to all who are perishing without it. It is fitting that urgency to proclaim God's goodness to everyone should undergird strategy. However, if, in an attempt to hasten the promise made, one's strategy or method drifts abroad of robust obedience to the full command given in Christ's commission, readjustment is required.

Exegesis: Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:18–20

For evangelicals committed to a high view of biblical authority, it is of utmost importance that one looks closely at the texts employed to set one's missiological strategy. The following exegetical summary will investigate the two pertinent passages in Matthew referenced in this discussion in order to determine what each might have to offer to missions strategy.

The Promise of Matthew 24:14

καὶ κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ τότε ἥξει τὸ τέλος.

This passage is one that rightly evokes excitement and gratitude in a

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he draws it, troublingly, from Matt 24:14.

[23] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 316.

[24] "Student Volunteer Movement 2," *SVM2.com*, http://www.svm2.net/about-us/what-is-the-great-commission/.

Christian reader. God is not willing that the end might come prior to the gospel of the kingdom being proclaimed throughout the whole world and to its people. In the midst of the dark picture of the future that Jesus paints surrounding this passage, there is yet this ray of hope demonstrating that he is sovereign. For anyone moved with compassion over the plight of those who are without a chance to hear, this message gives solace.

It is no wonder that this passage finds a place in missiological writings and missions text books. However, what is seen here is a promise of what will be, not a command. Likewise, this verse gives one of the larger pericope's nine necessary conditions that will precede the return of the Lord, but it does not necessarily exhaust the sufficient conditions, nor does it require the immediate return of the Lord upon its completion.[25] A brief discussion of the passage will reveal that it is not intended to bear the weight of the missions mandate left to the church by Jesus.

The Promise

In Matt 24:3–14, Matthew records Jesus' answer to his disciples' question, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matt 24:3b). Jesus proceeds to list nine types of events that will mark the period before Jesus' return. Eight of these signs are negative, ranging from "wars and rumors of wars" to false teachers and even to individual persecution and martyrdom of believers (Matt 24:4–14). However, ending this list of negative signs, Jesus includes the bright hope that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world. It is important to note that the word κηρυχθήσεται is a future passive verb meaning "will be proclaimed."[26] As a passive verb, this indicates a condition which will attain while not focusing on the causal agent.

In Matthew, one can see a progression from Jesus' own preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the preaching that will occur within the ". . . postresurrection ministry of the disciples."[27] Although this is true, the disciples are not given their commission to preach the gospel to all nations, nor the instructions as to how they are to go about making disciples, until Matt 28:18–20.[28] Here in Jesus' pre-crucifixion answer to his

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[25] Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 356. Blomberg claims that in fact, all nine of the "signs of the times" had occurred by AD 70.

[26] Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 855.

[27] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 966.

[28] In fact, in Matt 10:5–15, as Jesus sends the disciples out to proclaim the

disciples, his answer is given as a foretelling of what will happen, not yet as a command that his disciples obey. In fact, in his commentary on Matt 24:14, John Nolland shows that "the emphasis falls on the place of the preaching in the unfolding of the destined future rather than on the responsibility of the disciples for the preaching (contrast 28:19–20)."[29] That responsibility, and the means by which it is to be carried out, is yet to come in Jesus' final instructions given in the Great Commission.

The Kingdom, the Testimony & the Nations

Another issue for consideration in this passage is the content that will be proclaimed. Jesus says that the gospel of the kingdom (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας) will be preached as a testimony to/against the whole world (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν).[30] Much ink has been spilled in an attempt to explain what exactly the kingdom is. However, it will suffice to say that the gospel of the kingdom contains much more than evangelism often includes.[31]

Around the time of Lausanne, the idea of the kingdom was much debated as to whether it was primarily concerned with the spiritual condition of humankind or the physical and social conditions.[32] Although much more needs to be said regarding this point, it seems best to recognize that the gospel of the kingdom as demonstrated and proclaimed by Jesus will not permit such a division and requires "a full-orbed gospel of the irrupting reign of God not only in individual lives but also in society."[33]

Thus, even if this passage were to be construed as a missions mandate, the content of gospel of the kingdom must be such that it starts with, but goes far beyond, personal salvation. It must also speak to all areas of life, private and public, forming churches that serve as kingdom communities where disciples are made and equipped to be disciple makers and kingdom

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kingdom of heaven, they are explicitly told not to go to the Gentiles/nations (εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθητε).

[29] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 966.

[30] Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary 1 (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 399. "The testimony served two purposes simultaneously: (1) it could win the listener over, and (2) it could condemn the guilty."

[31] Cf. Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

[32] Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 400.

[33] Ibid.

citizens.[34] The proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom is thus all-encompassing. Missions methods and strategies that would strip away non-essential elements in order to increase speed and spread must wrestle with this reality as they seek to discover an irreducible definition of missions.

Additionally, Jesus' promise may not be as wholly positive as it is sometimes portrayed. The construction of the phrase "as a testimony to all nations" (εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) contains a dative preposition (εἰς) which can be rendered "to" or "against."[35] While there is likely a dual sense to this idea of witnessing to and against the nations, it must be noted that Jesus' promise does not here give any indication as to how the nations will receive the proclamation. This proclamation to the whole inhabited world may be effective in winning the nations over, yet it could be seen to justify the condemnation of the guilty.[36]

Through all of this analysis, it remains clear that Jesus' message is one of promise. Amid the trials and tribulations which are to be expected, God's justice will be upheld and his goodness will be proclaimed throughout the world by way of the gospel of the kingdom. While there will be tasks given to Jesus' disciples that may play a role in God's orchestration of these events, they are not given here in Matt 24:14.

And Then the End Will Come

Finally, one may yet wonder if the phrase "and then the end will come" (καὶ τότε ἥξει τὸ τέλος) means that Christ's return will immediately follow the evangelization of the final people group. Does Matt 24:14, then, give the church a mandate for world evangelization as a way as to "Bring back the King?" Or, as Hesselgrave quips, "If we go in force, will He come in haste?"[37]

Several commentators claim that it is not necessary to see this statement as indicating an immediate sequence of events following some final evangelistic encounter. As Nolland writes of this phrase, "Clearly there is nothing here that is intended to have predictive power. . . . The concern is rather to assert the Matthean understanding that the significance of the

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[34] Bruce Riley Ashford, "The Church in the Mission of God," in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed. Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 260. Ashford uses the analogy of a wheel wherein the hub of the wheel is evangelism and the rim is social engagement. Both are necessary for the church's holistic, "gospel of the kingdom" mission.

[35] Osborne, *Matthew*, 877.

[36] Weber, *Matthew,* 399.

[37] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 279.

period between the resurrection and the Parousia is a period defined by universal mission."[38] In other words, Jesus is not telling the disciples about a sequence of events that will cause a chain reaction. Much less can he be seen to be instructing them as to how to affect his return. Instead Jesus' intent is to reveal that the "end of the ages" is to be a time that will be marked both by tribulation and by universal mission: "This does not mean that all the nations will be converted before the end can come but rather that the universal proclamation will continue until the end."[39]

Agreeing with this, several authors see the events predicted by Jesus as having already occurred in history. Eckhard Schnabel observes, "The church today is not waiting for these signs to begin to appear. They began in the first century, already observed by Jesus' disciples."[40] Craig Blomberg states, "All nine of these preliminary events in fact occurred before A.D. 70, though most if not all have recurred many times since then as well."[41] Schnabel sees the evangelism of the known world at the time as the gospel of the kingdom had reached Spain in the west, Scythia in the north, India in the west, and Ethiopia in the south.[42] Blomberg cites Paul's claim in Rom 10:18 that the gospel had already reached the whole inhabited world as being sufficient to meet the criteria of Christ's promise in Matt 24:14.[43] Jesus, then, could return at any time.

Ultimately, even if one were to read this verse as a key to "Bringing back the King," the point remains that Jesus has not here instructed his disciples to pursue or effect his return. Much more clearly, Jesus has spoken of the mysterious timing of the Parousia (cf. Matt 24:36, 44; 25:13). Much more clearly has he spoken of the command and commission he intends for his disciples to obey (Matt 28:18–20). Preaching the gospel to all nations is a part of that which is eventually commanded at the end of Matthew's Gospel. It is the first stage in the more extensive, ongoing task of making disciples of all nations and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commands. As a part of a larger command, then, its completion does not

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[38] Nolland, *Matthew*, 967.

[39] Osborne, *Matthew*, 877.

[40] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *40 Questions about the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 47.

[41] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 356.

[42] Schnabel, *40 Questions about the End Times*, 38.

[43] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 356. While contemporary understandings of "people groups" would likely consider Paul's statement to be hyperbole, Blomberg does well to call the reader's attention to Matt 24:34, where Jesus says that these things will happen before this generation passes away, saying, "It is crucial to observe the fulfillment of all these preliminary events prior to A.D. 70. This fulfillment will explain how 24:34 can be true."

exhaust the task to which the church has been called.

Matthew 24:14 is a promise, not a command. As a promise, it gives strategists and missionaries sure knowledge that disciple-making labor among the nations is not in vain. Yet it behooves the missionary, missiologist, and pastor to consider this passage as it stands and for what it is prior to building strategies thereupon. The command given to the disciples—and the means by which the promise of Matt 24:14 might be realized—comes after Jesus' resurrection, four chapters later in Matt 28:18–20. To that command this paper now turns.

The Command of Matthew 28:18–20

καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς. ¹⁹ πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, ²⁰ διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ᾿ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

Long considered to be a key text in evangelical missiology, the so-called Great Commission as stated in Matthew is often cited as the chair text for missions work, though it is certainly more than a proof-text.[44] As noted by David Mathis, Matt 28:18–20 "is part of a biblical symphony spanning the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. From creation, God has been concerned with 'all the nations.'"[45] While the Great Commission may not exhaust the mission for which the church remains on earth, the church's mission is certainly not less than what is contained therein. To that end it this paper will investigate the passage in order to illumine something of a minimum definition of the church's role in order to determine whether or not the missions motto, "Finish the Mission" is appropriate in light of Matt 28:18–20.

The Command

The central verb in this famous verse can at times get lost in the English translations. Where the English versions tend to place the aorist participle "go" (πορευθέντες) prior to the imperative "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε), the command to "make disciples" is in fact the main

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[44] David Bosch, "The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 218–20.

[45] David Mathis, "Introduction: Remember, Jesus Never Lies," in *Finish the Mission*, ed. John Piper and David Mathis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 18.

verb.[46] As disciple-making is the task given here, Weber explains, "At the heart of our mission is the reproduction in others of what Jesus has produced in us: faith, obedience, growth, authority, compassion, love, and a bold, truthful message as his witnesses."[47]

On this grammatical basis, some argue that the English verb should be "going" as a reference to one's everyday activities as the context for one's obedience to the main verb, "make disciples."[48] However, as explained by Köstenberger and O'Brien, "The aorist participle 'go' (*poreuthentes*) modifies the aorist imperative 'make disciples' (*matheteusate*) as an auxiliary reinforcing the action of the main verb" and in so doing, it contains a "mild imperatival force."[49] Likewise, Osborne notes Matthew's habit of pairing a participial "'go' as an introductory circumstantial participle that is rightly translated as coordinate to the main verb."[50] Thus, "Jesus was commanding his followers to go as well as to make disciples, though the emphasis falls on the making of disciples."[51] Indeed, as this passage includes the phrase "all nations" (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη), "going," at least for some, will be a necessary aspect of obedience.

The command to make disciples is clearly given, though its implementation is no simple thing.[52] Qualifying this main verb is another participial phrase, "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you."[53] Köstenberger unpacks this, saying, "Mission entails the nurturing of converts into the full obedience of faith, not merely the proclamation of the Gospel."[54] Where some missiologists would separate the task of "discipling" from the process of "perfecting," this passage will not admit of this distinction.[55] As disciples themselves are ever-growing, so might the task

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[46] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

[47] Weber, *Matthew*, 484.

[48] Morris, *Matthew*, 746n.30.

[49] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter Thomas O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 103–4.

[50] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

[51] Morris, *Matthew,* 746n.30.

[52] Paul Borthwick, *Western Christians in Global Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 50.

[53] Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 105.

[54] Ibid., 104.

[55] Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: Friendship Press, 1981), 15. McGavran divides these concepts; Bosch demonstrates the division to be untenable in "The Structure of Mission," 221.

of making disciples be seen as a process that will not end until Jesus returns.

While this command, then, certainly includes both "go" and "proclaim" elements, it is not limited only to these, but it insists on the making of disciples, the planting of churches, and the teaching of obedience to all that Jesus has commanded. This teaching includes Jesus' central teaching on the kingdom of God, which cannot simply be understood as the message of how one might find personal salvation.[56] An investigation of the rest of the passage will bear this out.

The Content

As noted above, Jesus' command to "Go and make disciples" is not a bare command given devoid of content. Matthew 28:18–20 includes two additional participial clauses that shed further light on how one is to make disciples: baptizing (βαπτίζοντες) and teaching (διδάσκοντες). Clearly, as those discipled by Jesus themselves, the eleven disciples understood something of what making disciples might entail. While an investigation of the narratives of the disciples' personal experiences of being discipled by Jesus might prove fruitful, this study will limit itself to the implications of these two participles and the phrases of which they are part.

Baptism and Ecclesiological Implications. The first participial clause that sheds light on how the eleven disciples are instructed to "Go and make disciples of all nations" is "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος). The Trinitarian formula identifies clearly the fact that this is explicitly Christian baptism, a symbol of entrance into the people of God by way of God's own tri-personal name.[57]

As a sign or sacrament symbolizing the entrance into God's family, baptism implies an intimate relationship with the community of God's people. Indeed, many see this command to baptize disciples as being directly tied to churches into which the new disciples are baptized and integrated.[58] With this understanding in mind, then, Russell Moore can claim that "a theology of the Great Commission is inextricably tied up with a

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[56] David J. Bosch, "The Structure of Mission," 246.

[57] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 230. McGrath shows that this formula itself was cited in the formulation of the Trinity by Athanasius and others.

[58] Cf. John Hammett, "The What and How of Church Membership," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Jonathan Leeman and Mark E. Dever (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 192.

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theology of the church."[59] Likewise, Köstenberger and O'Brien emphasize that in the New Testament, "conversion to Christ meant incorporation into a Christian community."[60] The command to baptize, here, as an ordinance of the church, can be understood to assume church formation and planting as a part of the Great Commission itself. The second participle gives even further instructions on disciple-making.

Teaching Total Obedience. The addition of the phrase, "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν) sets the disciple-making and church planting standard. Jesus does not give his disciples permission to set aside aspects of his teaching in order to streamline their task or to speed its spread. Instead, as Jesus himself claimed that his own ministry would not allow a jot or a tittle of the law to fall away, he holds his disciples as disciple-makers to the same standard of upholding his commands (Matt 5:18).

This is not always reflected in missions strategies. Often, between the difficulty of inter-cultural communication and the desire for reproducible models that rapidly multiply, aspects of Jesus' teaching go unaddressed.[61] For example, in Donald McGavran's influential early work, *The Bridges of God*, McGavran puts off much of Jesus' ethical teaching by distinguishing between "discipling" and "perfecting." He describes this division by saying, "In discipling, the full understanding of Christ is not the all-important factor, which is simply that He be recognized by the community as their sole spiritual Sovereign."[62]

In so doing, McGavran—and many who follow in his stead—declares the discipleship stage to be finished (and thus "finishable") once Jesus is seen as a community's leader. The assumption, then, is that the work of the Great Commission is done among this people, and sanctification (or "perfecting" in McGavran's terminology) will continue either with or without the missionary's teaching.

There is, however, no textual warrant for redefining discipleship or for the bifurcation of discipling and perfecting. This is not a tenable position when considering the command of Matt 28:18–20, particularly in light of

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[59] Russell D. Moore, "Theology Bleeds: Why Theological Vision Matters for the Great Commission and Vice Versa," in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Charles E. Lawless and Adam Wade Greenway (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 117.

[60] Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth,* 268.

[61] Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 32.

[62] Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: Friendship Press, 1981), 15.

the second clause, which requires teaching total obedience.[63] Contra McGavran's definition of discipling, David Mathis writes, "'Disciple' refers not merely to conversion and personal spiritual maturity but to the personal investment of the discipler's life in others."[64] Likewise, Chan and Beuving explain that "teaching people to obey Jesus's commands is an enormous task. . . . We are never really 'done.' . . . We never finish the discipleship process."[65] Despite the grand scope of the process of making disciples, Matt 28:18–20 insists that this is the task to which the church has been commissioned.

David Sills summarizes well what has been seen in this study, saying, "The Great Commission is not just about witnessing or church planting. Jesus said to *make disciples* of the ethnic groups of the world, and to do so *by teaching them to observe all that He commanded us* (Matthew 28:19–20)."[66] Evangelism, church planting, discipleship, and teaching total obedience are bound up together in the command left to the church in the Great Commission. It might be noted that there is more that can be said biblically regarding the mission of the church. However, as the church strategizes about how to make disciples of all the peoples of the world, she will do well to remember that her task is not less than full obedience to the Great Commission.

Summary

To the degree that the pursuit of world evangelization is a first step, leading to deep, full disciple-making discipleship and consequent church planting of "kingdom outpost" churches, let the church throw herself towards the strategic targeting of the unreached. However, to the degree that world evangelization as a task draws the church's attention away from the robust disciple-making process of the Great Commission, let the church reconfigure her methodologies to reflect the command with which she has been entrusted rather than the promises which are God's to ensure. Likewise, if missions mottos serve to give the impression that the task of missions is less than making life-long disciple-makers, the mottos too must be discarded.

As has been shown, if Matt 24:14 is taken as the basis for missions strategy, one runs the risk of screening out the emphasis Jesus puts on

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[63] David J. Bosch, "The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 46.

[64] Mathis, "Introduction: Remember, Jesus Never Lies," 18, 20.

[65] Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 32.

[66] Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 29).

discipleship, church planting, and teaching. While world evangelism should certainly be part of the goal of missions strategies, the whole command of Matt 28:18–20 given to the church must be taken into account in assessment of appropriate tools, strategies, and methodologies. Though world evangelism might move faster from a human standpoint if strategies are stripped of the expectation of substantive teaching and life-on-life discipleship, it would do so at the expense of Great Commission obedience. Having studied the relevant texts, it will now be helpful to consider some practical aspects of missions strategy in light of Matt 28:18–20.

Methods, Tools, and Strategies

At this point one might claim that very few, if any, missiologists would hesitate to endorse discipleship as a centerpiece of missionary strategy. That may be true. In fact, many of those most concerned with rapid reproduction within church planting movements readily use the family of words related to "discipleship." However, as noted above, occasionally one sees a redefinition of the word "disciple" so as not to impede the speed of a movement.[67] This essay has taken the position that such a move is unwarranted and untenable.

The process of discipleship is ongoing and life-long. Believers will only complete their discipleship upon death or the return of Christ.[68] Likewise, while locations and people groups may change throughout one's life, the Great Commission call to be a disciple-maker is also endless. One day, prior to the return of Christ, the gospel of the kingdom will have been proclaimed throughout the whole world and to its peoples. Yet even then, if the Lord tarries, the church must be about the ongoing task of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in God's tri-personal name, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded.

It remains, however, to answer the question, "How might one assess various tools, strategies, and methodologies for their Great Commission appropriateness?" While this essay must leave the analysis of particular strategies and tools to individual practitioners, it will seek to offer some

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[67] Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake, 2011), 35–36. Smith and Kai advocate for changing the word "disciple" to the word "trainer" as it more accurately fits their understanding of what a disciple should do. Likewise, as noted above, McGavran had long ago bifurcated discipleship and what he called perfecting, allowing a much faster, though unfortunately shallower, understanding of discipleship to pervade his suggestions in *The Bridges of God*, 15.

[68] Chan and Beuving, *Multiply,* 32.

guiding questions that will aid in such assessment. At the very least this essay has two remaining questions to answer: What is the role of the cultural outsider? How does one equip a people sufficiently to carry on the discipleship task itself?

The Role of the Cultural Outsider

As the church obeys the Great Commission, at least some will be sent to peoples of the earth who are currently far removed from the opportunity to become disciples of Christ geographically, culturally, and religiously. Though this cultural distance will undoubtedly complicate the relationships between such missionaries and the people to whom they are sent, worship of God by way of obedience to the Great Commission is sufficient warrant for embracing the challenge. Having determined that intercultural missions is theoretically appropriate, one must now begin to work practically toward Great Commission obedience.

One of the first questions to be asked is, "What role should a missionary play in the disciple-making and church forming process?" Some strategies treat missionaries merely as trainers or managers who are tasked with finding pragmatic ways of passing on information and seeing that it is disbursed quickly and efficiently by trainees.[69] As the missionary goes out in obedience to the Great Commission, however, it is not only the method and tools, but also the understanding of the missionary's role, that must align with the Great Commission.

A much more appropriate alternative to the pragmatist or paternalist options mentioned above is Lesslie Newbigin's perspective on the role of a missionary as the initiator of a trialogue between "the traditional culture, the 'Christianity' of the missionary, and the Bible."[70] While various mod-

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[69] Paul Borthwick, *Western Christians in Global Mission: What's the Role of the North American Church?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 126. Borthwick highlights Western pragmatism saying, "Westerners are more likely to be eager to do things speedily. . . . I think we are too readily seduced by the worldly and in fact humanist assumption that we can fix everything through our own efforts." Likewise, David Bosch maligns this kind of thinking pointing out that much of the contemporary evangelical missionary atmosphere is the result of the Enlightenment-born optimism which saw unreached peoples as "solvable" projects and problems (*Transforming Mission,* 343). See also Andy Johnson, "Pragmatism, Pragmatism Everywhere!," *9Marks*, http://9marks.org/article/pragmatism-pragmatism-everywhere/.

[70] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 97.

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els of initiation exist, the basic idea charts a middle way between the missionary as a manager or trainer and the missionary as an authoritarian.[71] This trialogue allows the Bible to have ultimate authority and the missionary to engage life-on-life with the local disciples, and it teaches basic hermeneutical skills through the ongoing three-way conversation between two cultural representatives who are sitting under the Bible and allowing it to shape them as they discuss its meaning and implications together.

Perhaps one helpful guiding question that a missionary might ask of his or her strategy is this: "Does this strategy allow me a role in which I can disciple local believers in a contextually appropriate and biblically faithful way so that they are developed, empowered, and released as disciple-maker makers?" It is imperative that the tools used in discipleship are neither so complex nor so simplistic that the new believers and newly forming churches cannot use them to develop as disciples on their own. Rote learning and training will not suffice. Disciples need to be equipped to study, understand, and broadly apply the Scriptures and the kingdom principles found therein to their lives, their churches, and their communities. This study will conclude by offering some initial questions with which to assess various missions methods and tools.

Minimally Trained or Sufficiently Equipped

One contemporary concern is the use of methodology that utilizes minimalistic content to achieve maximum spread. David Sills cautions against a strategy that prioritizes speed over total obedience: "When speed becomes the driving force and heartbeat of a strategy, and expediency rules decision making, nonessentials are jettisoned as impediments to progress."[72] Sills goes on to give an illustration whereby he compares strategies based on speed to jet-boats and Great Commission strategies as freighters. While a jet-boat can cover a lot of territory, it does so at the expense of an ability to carry needed freight.

As has been the burden of this essay, a primary question to ask of any potential methodology is this: "How faithful is this tool in helping me to obey the Great Commission and to disciple others to do likewise?" Several additional questions will offer more specific help in answering this larger question.

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[71] A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012). For the missionary interested in a full treatment of this topic, Moreau's book is to be commended.

[72] Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 32.

Does This Method Produce Churches of Disciple-Making Disciples?

This study has sought to show that Matt 24:14 and the completion of world evangelization are not sufficient to exhaust the church's mission. Strategies geared toward reaching the world's last UPGs must result in making disciples among them, baptizing them into churches, and teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded. Failing to equip and empower new converts to deepen in discipleship raises the alarming question,

> What if we reach all the people groups that we consider to be un-reached and yet He [Jesus] delays His return for fifty years, or five hundred years, or five thousand years? What will happen to all of the people who have heard the gospel, raised their hand to pray a prayer, and then watched the dust of the missionary's vehicle as he sped away to the next people group?[73]

One must assess a potential strategy or tool by its capacity to generate healthy and holistic disciples that make disciples.

As these disciples grow in number, a Great Commission-based method will also form churches, baptizing new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a church of true disciples that will bring about well-rounded disciple-making communities who bring king-dom influence to bear on their society. Bill Hull and Renault van der Riet see the whole church as necessary in the process of discipleship, saying,

> No individual can fully disciple another, because no one has the full arsenal of spiritual gifts and wisdom to adequately bring an-other to maturity in Christ. . . . Only the body of Christ can provide an environment that gives the full range of experiences and chal-lenges I need.[74]

To this point, Great Commission-based church planting models should encourage a whole range of gift-development within the churches planted. This diverse, corporate development may not occur if the tools employed only equip the evangelists and those with apostolic tendencies.

Does This Method Teach and Equip for Total Obedience?

This Great Commission calls the church to teach obedience to every-thing Jesus commanded. This requires a minimum of two things: (1) he or she must teach an attitude of obedience to Jesus grounded in gratitude for grace; and (2) the methods he or she uses must equip local disciples with the necessary tools for engaging, understanding, and applying the Word of God so that they might have access to all that Jesus commanded.

Additionally, obedience to Christ involves participation in the king-dom of God. As Howard Snyder points out, "Jesus defines making disci-ples as 'teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you' (Matt. 28:20). What Jesus taught, above all, was the kingdom of God."[75] To this point, some have adopted the language of "kingdom outposts" as a component of the very definition of church.[76] While the church must never neglect its role as a worshipping community, it is also a social com-munity tasked with bringing the kingdom to bear on the communities in which its people live. A missionary must consider whether or not a method contains encouragement to local churches to invest in kingdom projects and to apply the gospel within their communities.

Therefore, prior to employing a method, strategy, or tool, a missionary should ask, "Will this approach eventually result in disciples that can deepen in their understanding, teaching, and application of Scripture without my further input?" While this question deals with the end of one's ministry, it should be asked from the beginning in order to ensure that the outcome of the missionary's labor, as far as it depends on human ef-fort and strategy, is disciples who are no longer dependent on the mis-sionary for spiritual growth and ongoing disciple-making.

Finally, as with all theology, a particular method or tool for missions work must be assessed based on its ability to bring out the beauty of the gospel.[77] The Great Commission involves bringing the greatest news to those who need it in order that they might become the disciples of Jesus the Savior. Dean Flemming, in his book *Why Mission,* explains the beauty of the Great Commission task saying,

> Mission leans into God's future. Jesus' charge to make disciples 'until the end of the age' (Matt 28:20) means that *we*, the church in mission, are drawn into Matthew's story. *We* are the disciples who are sent, with the abiding presence of the authoritative Lord, to form communities of disciples who embody the life of Jesus, even as we await the day when God's kingdom comes in its fullness, on

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[73] Ibid., 19.

[74] Bill Hull and Renaut van der Riet, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 35.

[75] Howard Snyder, "A Renewal Response," in *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views*, ed. Elmer L. Towns and Gary McIntosh, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 63.

[76] Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 8.

[77] David Bently Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 21.

earth as it is in heaven![78]

Stated this way, the church is not left with a task that she can complete, but a story in which she might participate until Jesus' return. Let it be that her missions methods might fully embody and display that story and, in so doing, invite others into complete participation therein.

Conclusion

Matthew 24:14 expectantly records the Lord Jesus' promise that "the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" before the end will come. It is his sure word, and in it his people have confidence. However, as has been demonstrated in this paper, his people also have a commission that is grander than this promise. Matthew 24:14 will be fulfilled in the Lord's timing as he uses his people to obey the command with which he has left them in Matt 28:18–20. Only upon Jesus' return might it be said that the work of the Great Commission is finished.[79] This will not be completed because of something the church has done to hurry him along, but because Christ has ceased to tarry. In the interim, as has been demonstrated, the church is called to make disciples, not to make Jesus come back.

Let it not be that, in right compassion for the lost and unreached among the nations, missiologists develop strategies and tools that fall short of full obedience to the command by which the Lord has commissioned his people to expand his kingdom. To that end, this essay humbly suggests that missionary tools, methods, and strategies be assessed not by their potential to "Finish the Great Commission," but by their potential to "Obey the Great Commission."

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[78] Dean E. Flemming, *Why Mission?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 22.
[79] Hull and van der Riet, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 21.

The Role of Pre-Conversion Dreams
and Visions in Islamic Contexts:
An Examination of the Evidence

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Dreams and visions in Islamic contexts are sometimes put forward as evidence for salvific revelation occurring apart from encounters with human gospel messengers. Reports of pre-conversion dreams and visions among Christians from a Muslim background suggest that while such experiences play a crucial role in conversion, pre-conversion dreams and visions contain little gospel content and play either a preparatory or confirming role for more substantive encounters with Scripture or Christian believers. To assess their common themes and patterns, the writer examined forty-four previously published conversion testimonies containing reports of pre-conversion dreams and visions. People ministering to Muslims and in Islamic contexts can benefit from understanding clearly the role of experience in Muslim conversions and how they can address experience pastorally.

Key Words: Acts 9–10, dreams and visions, Islam, missions, Muslim conversion, revelation

Introduction

In an interview in October 2011, pastor and theologian John Piper was asked what Christians should make of Muslim conversion stories involving dreams of Jesus.[2] He responded, "Jesus coming to them in their head, preaching the Gospel to them that they have never heard of before, and believing and being saved . . . that I am suspicious of . . . big time."[3] Nevertheless, he allowed for the possibility of "Cornelius type dreams" (Acts

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[1] Sam Martyn is a pseudonym due to the sensitive nature the work.

[2] Though aware of the significant differences between the Christian Jesus and the Muslim Isa, this writer will use the name Jesus to refer to Jesus in both his Christian and Muslim contexts, as most Muslims who have dreams and visions are unlikely to distinguish between them. An analysis of these differences is beyond the scope of this article.

[3] Anugrah Kumar, "Why John Piper Doubts Muslims Having Jesus Dreams,"

10:1–48), which are accompanied by gospel proclamation through a human messenger. Piper continued, suggesting interest in the phenomenon of Muslim dreams of Jesus represents a "wave" or a fad among evangelicals that is likely to pass away with time.[4] Piper's response typifies the response of many evangelicals, which reflects both their eagerness to affirm God's activity in the world to save sinners and their ambivalence concerning claims God is active in ways that could subvert the authority of his revealed Word. Meanwhile, an essential question looms over the discussion: What do Muslim conversion testimonies actually suggest about the role of dreams and visions?[5]

General revelation inclusivists, (soteriological) agnostics, and some special revelation exclusivists[6] have pointed to dreams and visions as evidence for the possibility of salvific revelation apart from a natural encounter with the gospel through a human messenger.[7] In the book *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, responding to such a claim made by Alister McGrath, call for an examination of the evidence regarding dreams and visions among Muslim converts to Christianity. Geivett and Phillips protest, "[W]e are not familiar with the evidence for the claim that many Muslims have come to faith in Jesus Christ without the influence of any human agent. Even if dreams or visions are instrumental in the salvation of some, their precise role in the process of salvation would have to be investigated."[8] By examining the

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[continuation] *Christian Post,* http://www.christianpost.com/news/why-john-piper-doubts-muslims-having-jesus-dreams-59988/.

[4] John Piper, "Let the Nations Be Glad!: Q&A," *Desiring God* video, 40:17, http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/let-the-nations-be-glad-q-a.

[5] This article uses the terms "dream" and "vision" according to their denotations in common parlance. The former refers to an experience while sleeping, the latter refers to a similar experience while awake. These definitions differ from how the terms are used in some English translations of the Bible.

[6] This paper will use the taxonomy in the inclusivism and exclusivism debate outlined in Christopher W. Morgan, "Inclusivisms and Exclusivisms," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism,* ed. Christopher W. Morgan, Robert A. Peterson, and Andreas J. Köstenberger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 26–36.

[7] Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 200–1; Alister E. McGrath, "A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World,* ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 179.

[8] R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, "Response to Alister McGrath," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World,* 196.

role of dreams and visions in Islamic contexts and Scripture as well as the testimonies of Muslim converts to Christianity, this article aims to offer a modest contribution in response to Geivett and Phillips's appeal.

This article argues that while pre-conversion dreams and visions of believers from a Muslim background (BMB)[9] involving Jesus or Christian themes should be wholeheartedly affirmed, they are not salvific and are best understood as acts of providence that either confirm the gospel or prepare Muslims to receive the gospel. BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions should be taken seriously. Such reports are too widespread and too numerous to be dismissed casually. The testimonies of these Christians offer compelling evidence that God uses such experiences in the process of conversion. Christians ministering to Muslim peoples will need to hone their theological understanding of such phenomena to avoid seeming reactionary on the one hand, and undiscerning on the other. Moreover, Christians should not be surprised by the prevalence of pre-conversion dreams and visions in Islamic contexts.[10] Such cultures place a much higher emphasis on the authority of personal experience than do Western cultures. Finally, while BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions do not fall in the category of general revelation, they should not be understood as examples of special revelation that are salvific on their own. The evidence demonstrates BMB dreams and visions of Jesus generally do not occur apart from prior encounters with Christian believers, the gospel, or Scripture. They contain little to no gospel content. Thus, they mitigate neither the biblical expectation of a human gospel messenger nor

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[9] This article focuses on pre-conversion dreams and visions because of their relevance to the discussion regarding pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism. Post-conversion BMB dreams and visions are a similarly prevalent phenomenon with important implications for such issues as the authority of Scripture in discipleship. In addition, this article uses the abbreviation BMB as opposed to the more common MBB (Muslim background believer). Some BMBs have expressed dissatisfaction with the abbreviation MBB once they learn of it because it seems to root their spiritual identity in their former identity as Muslims.

[10] The importance of pre-conversion dreams and visions in Islamic contexts has long had the attention of Christian missionaries serving among Muslims. C. E. Padwick, "Dream and Vision: Some Notes from a Diary," *International Review of Mission* 28.2 (1939): 207–16, reported on the phenomenon of Muslim dreams of Jesus while serving as a missionary in the Middle East. For her article, she drew on dream testimonies recorded in the diary of another late missionary to Algeria, Lilias Trotter, and classified the various dreams according to types she found patterned in the New Testament: moral warning (Matt 27:19; Acts 26:14), guidance (Matt 1:20; Acts 10:3–5), encouragement (Acts 18:9–10; 23:11), and presence (Acts 7:55; Rev 1:17–18).

the expectation that those who believe in Christ will come to faith in response to gospel proclamation.

Dreams and Visions in Islamic Contexts

The first place to turn to understand BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions is the cultural and religious framework from which they emerge. Dreams and visions have played an important role in Islamic societies since the time of Mohammed. In one sense, Islam began through a series of ecstatic visions of the angel Gabriel experienced by Mohammed, culminating in Mohammed's reception of the Qur'an ("The Recitation").[11] One hadith, recorded by Musa b. 'Uqba, teaches that Mohammed's initial revelations came in a dream or a vision while he slept.[12] The same source, along with al-Bukhari and Zuhri, even records a vision Mohammed had while circling the ka'ba in which he saw Jesus (Isa b. Maryam) between the two thieves with whom he was crucified.[13]

Following the teaching of the Sufi mystic and philosopher Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) and the philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), dreams in Islam traditionally have been categorized into three types: clear dreams providing "true knowledge, guidance, and inspiration," allegorical dreams containing symbols needing interpretation, and confused dreams having "no meaning and . . . merely sent to tempt and mislead the dreamer."[14] Only dreams that come from Allah or from Satan are deemed to have spiritual significance. With respect to the third category, dreams are ruled by interpreters to be untrue if the message or content they contain runs counter to the Qur'an or the Hadiths.[15] This tradition is clearly relevant for Muslims who have dreams in which Jesus appears. The natural question for the Muslim who has such a dream would be whether Satan had sent the dream to mislead the dreamer. On the other hand, there is a hadith in which Mohammed says, "Whoever has seen me in a dream, then no doubt, he has seen me, for Satan cannot imitate my shape."[16] For Muslims

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[11] Kelly Bulkeley, *Dreaming in the World's Religions: A Comparative History* (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 192–93.

[12] Bill Musk, "Dreams and the Ordinary Muslim," *Missiology* 16.2 (1988): 165.

[13] Ibid., 164–65.

[14] Bulkeley, *Dreaming*, 212.

[15] Iain R. Edgar, "A Comparison of Islamic and Western Psychological Dream Theories," in *Dreaming in Christianity and Islam: Culture, Conflict, and Creativity*, ed. Kelly Bulkeley, Kate Adams, and Patricia M. Davis (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 190.

[16] Bukhari, *The Translations of the Meanings of Sahihal-Bukhari,* trans. M. M. Khan

who interpret this hadith to apply to the other prophets of Islam, Jesus' appearance may be understood as an authoritative message from God.

In addition to categorization, other Muslim teachings concerning dreams are part of a very complex tradition. Manuals for dream interpretation have been compiled over centuries, including more than sixty—equal in production to the number of commentaries on the Qur'an—which were compiled in the first five centuries of Islam.[17] Morton Kelsey notes that the scientific approach to dream interpretation in Islam distinguishes it from the prophetic approach to interpretation found in the Bible and the early church.[18] Dream practices such as *istikhara* developed as well. *Istikhara* refers to a practice of dream incubation whereby Muslims strive through rituals and prayer to elicit dreams from God.[19] In addition to practices sanctioned in classical Islam, dreams serve numerous functions in contemporary folk Islam. Dreams are used for divination, diagnosing ailments, healing, personal instruction, communicating with the dead, and previewing fated events.[20]

The point of the preceding discussion is to demonstrate the ubiquity and importance of dreams and visions for Muslims. As Bill Musk notes, "They are not optional; they are a meaningful component of life."[21] Consequently, dreams are likely to play an important role in Muslim conversions, regardless of what Christians think of them. Muslims expect to have dreams about the things which are most important to them. Indeed, it is reasonable to surmise that Muslims pondering conversion may even take a lack of dreams as evidence they should not convert. This is likely to make many Western evangelicals nervous. To the extent Western evangelicals' concerns are motivated by a desire to subjugate personal experience to scriptural authority and to teach the same to new Christian converts from Islam, they are unquestionably right. To the extent they have absorbed the anti-supernatural bias of the modern spirit that is rooted in Aristotelian assumptions about the world, however, they do well to recognize that Muslim cultures seem much more reflective of the world of

(Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, 1979), 9:104, quoted in Edgar, "A Comparison," 190.

[17] Rick Kronk, *Dreams and Visions: Muslims' Miraculous Journey to Jesus* (San Giovanni Teatino, Italy: Destiny Image Europe, 2010), 68.

[18] Morton T. Kelsey, *God, Dreams, and Revelation: A Christian Interpretation of Dreams* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973), 162.

[19] Bulkeley, *Dreaming*, 205–7.

[20] Musk, "Dreams," 165.

[21] Ibid., 164.

the Bible with respect to dreams.[22]

Dreams and Visions in Christianity and the Bible

The next direction for exploring BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions involves discerning where they should be located in terms of Scripture and the Christian tradition. Put differently, are there resources within Christianity to help us grasp what is happening in this widespread phenomenon? Turning to Scripture, more than seventy passages in the Bible refer to dreams and visions. Dreams are understood to be vehicles for God's self-disclosure in both the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, such experiences constitute the main initial modality by which God reveals himself in Scripture. Revelations obtained through experience are only later inscripturated. As John Sanford comments, "Viewed from this perspective the entire Bible is the story of God's breakthrough into man's conscious mind via the unconscious."[23] The importance of dreams to the cultural world of the New Testament is reflected in the number of words available to refer to them.[24] Dreams and visions even make their way into the church age, with numerous examples occurring in Acts among five individuals: Stephen, Paul, Ananias, Cornelius, and Peter (Acts 7:56; 9:4–6, 10–16; 10:3–6, 10–16; 12:7; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17; 23:11; 27:23–24). This is not to suggest that in the age of a closed canon, dreams and visions function similarly to the way they functioned in biblical times. The New Testament offers clear warnings about such visions (e.g., Gal 1:8). Still, a wholly negative attitude that dismisses any role for experience outright is clearly inconsonant with Scripture.

Such an attitude also diverges from the understanding of dreams and visions that dominated the early church. Kelsey notes that nearly every

[22] Kelsey, *God, Dreams, and Revelation,* 67, comments regarding Aristotle's view of dreams, "According to Aristotle man is in contact only with the world of sense experience, which he comes to understand through his reason. Since there is no experienceable non-physical world from which dreams may emerge, they cannot be seen as anything but residual impressions left upon the soul by the previous day's activities."

[23] John A. Sanford, *Dreams: God's Forgotten Language* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1968), 116.

[24] Kelsey, *God, Dreams and Revelation*, 81–85, lists several of them: ὄναρ ("dream"), ἐνύπνιον ("vision seen in sleep"), ὅραμα ("vision"), ὅρασις ("vision"), ὀπτασία ("vision"), ἔκστασις ("trance"), γίνομαι ἐν πνεύματι ("to become in the Spirit"), ἵστημι ("to stand by"), βλέπω ("to see" or "to perceive"), ἀποκάλυψις ("revelation").

major figure in the first millennium of Christianity—the apostolic fathers, Justin, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome—expressed a positive attitude toward the role of dreams in the Christian life.[25] Kelsey contends that a shift only began to take place with the recovery of Aristotle in the theology of Aquinas. Aquinas, who was pulled between Aristotle's naturalistic understanding of dreams and the tradition of the church's positive teaching regarding dreams, simply opted to avoid the phenomenon. And so it has continued in the church to the present day.[26]

Christians are not obligated to embrace an unrestricted continuationist understanding of New Testament signs and wonders in order to accommodate BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions. It is sufficient to believe God may reveal himself in any way he chooses, but that human experience must be subordinated to his "more fully confirmed" prophetic Word (2 Pet 1:19). Scripture and tradition permit a more open and positive—if cautious—attitude toward dreams and visions than is typically afforded to them in Western Christianity.

Characteristics of BMB Pre-Conversion Dreams and Visions

The best way to understand better BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions is to examine closely BMB testimonies that mention them. This writer examined more than 120 BMB conversion testimonies. Among these, forty-four testimonies included reports of pre-conversion dreams and visions. These testimonies were drawn from eleven different sources, including the writer's own newsletters. Roughly half of the testimonies are first-hand accounts, with the other half being second-hand accounts drawn directly from interviews with BMBs. Relying on previously published accounts rather than a methodical collection of testimonies is admittedly less than ideal. Nevertheless, these accounts share consistent features between them, and they contain ample information to draw some conclusions.[27] Further original research incorporating qualitative interviews would enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of dreams and visions.

The most distinguishing characteristic of pre-conversion dreams and visions among BMBs is that these experiences occur subsequent to meeting Christian believers and to reading or hearing the Bible. In twenty-four of the forty-four documented cases surveyed by this writer, converts report having encountered *both* Christian believers and Scripture prior to their dream or vision experiences. In twelve of the cases, BMBs report having interacted with *either* Christian believers or Scripture prior to their experiences. In only two cases did it seem clear that no such interaction had occurred.[28] These findings dovetail with the personal experience of William Barrick, a missionary to Bangladesh for fifteen years, who observes that all those he interacted with who claimed to have dreams about Jesus had previously had contact with Christians, the gospel, or the Bible.[29] Most BMBs describe the encounter they had with Christians as evangelistic in nature; that is, the Christians they met sought to persuade them with the gospel message. Others note how they were attracted to the moral consistency evident in the lives of the Christians they knew. In terms of their interaction with Scripture, twenty-eight individuals report having read or heard part of the Bible, and most of those had received a copy of the Bible or the New Testament from a Christian contact. Additional research corroborates that Scripture plays a far more important role in Muslim conversions to Christianity than do dreams and visions. One researcher reports that according to nearly two hundred interviews with BMBs, "the Bible figures centrally in over 90% of those conversions. In research terms, this is awesome."[30]

A lack of gospel-specific content marks another feature of BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions. Themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration are generally absent from these experiences. There is no allusion to sin and the just penalty for rebellion and little reference to salvation and justification by faith. A small handful of the dreamers report an offer of forgiveness through faith in Jesus, but even dreams and visions in which Jesus appears as crucified usually do not include a theological

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[25] Kelsey, *God, Dreams, and Revelation*, 102–63.

[26] Ibid., 173.

[27] A brief word on how such testimonies can be assumed to be reliable is appropriate. Phillip H. Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 98–99, points to two principles that undergird the legitimacy of taking personal experiences such as dreams or visions seriously: the principle of credulity and the principle of testimony. The former refers to the idea that barring some previous experience of a person's testimony being unreliable, "if something seems present to a person it

probably is." The latter refers to the idea that a person's descriptions of their experience should be taken at face value, "revealing the way things appeared to them at the time." To the best knowledge of the writer, testimonies used in this article meet the standards required by these principles.

[28] The remaining testimonies did not address this issue clearly.

[29] Dennis McBride, "An Evaluation of Muslim Dreams and Visions of Isa (Jesus)," 18, http://www.yoyomaster.com/ministry.file/IsaDreams.pdf.

[30] George H. Martin, "The God Who Reveals Mysteries: Dreams and World Evangelization," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8.1 (2004): 69.

interpretation of that image. Randal Scott, a missionary serving among Muslim peoples, confirms this lack of gospel content: "Dreams prepare people to believe and repent; however, they never (in my experience) contain a clear gospel message."[31]

A third feature of BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions relates to Jesus' presence, his physical appearance, and the percipients' intuitive knowledge of Jesus' identity. Jesus is present in the dreams and visions of twenty-eight of the testimonies surveyed. His physical appearance across these experiences is relatively consistent. He is usually robed in white and illuminated with white light.[32] In a few of the dreams, Jesus is seen hanging on the cross. When Jesus speaks in the dream or vision, he is most likely to tell the dreamer that he loves him or her, to declare the truth of his way, or to invite the dreamer to come to him or to follow him. What is most remarkable about appearances of Jesus in these experiences is how he seems to be recognized intuitively. On rare occasions, Jesus declares his identity, or his identity is not recognized until later. Most often, however, his identity is clear to the percipient. Jesus is a significant figure in Islam, so it could be that BMB dreamers recognize him on the basis of their preconceived imagination of his appearance, but as Phillip Wiebe, whose own research focuses on visions of Jesus in a Western context, remarks, "This [intuitive recognition] is quite inexplicable, suggesting a kind of experience that is self-disclosing or revelatory."[33]

A final feature of BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions is their relative frequency. In a survey of 750 BMBs between 1991 and 2007, 27 percent reported dreams and visions prior to their conversion and 40 percent at the time of their conversion.[34] Rick Kronk cites a second-generation missionary in Turkey who alleged "all of the Turkish Christians that he had met in his growing up years in Turkey had come to faith in Christ as a result of a dream or a vision."[35] This writer's personal experience

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[31] Randal Scott, "Evangelism and Dreams: Foundational Presuppositions to Interpret God-given Dreams of the Unreached," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 44.2 (2008): 183.

[32] Interestingly, C. E. Padwick, "Dream and Vision: Some Notes from a Diary," 206, noted similar reports of Jesus' appearance in BMB dreams in the 1930s.

[33] Phillip H. Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 204.

[34] J. Dudley Woodberry, Russell G. Shubin, and G. Marks, "Why Muslims Follow Jesus: The Results of a Recent Survey of Converts from Islam," *Christianity Today*, October 2007, 82.

[35] Kronk, *Dreams and Visions*, 46.

from six years ministering among evangelical BMBs in Central Asia affirms the percentage is very high.

The reasons for the frequency of dreams and visions are difficult to pinpoint. The most likely reason seems to be the normative role of personal experience in Islamic contexts. Dreams in these contexts are so ordinary they sometimes merit less attention from the BMBs who experience them than they do from Western theologians and missiologists who investigate them. In his study of Palestinian and Israeli BMBs, Anthony Greenham observes that even among converts to Christianity who had experienced dreams or visions, many do not mention them in their spiritual testimonies unless prompted to do so. Furthermore, "The experience of a conversion-related dream (or dream-like event) was not automatically of high significance."[36] From a theological perspective, Christopher Little speculates God may use dreams to trigger a spiritual breakthrough. "When God's human messenger or his written word is rejected outright because of an inherent prejudice on the part of an individual who happened to grow up in an environment hostile to Christianity, God may decide to use a dream to get through to that person and lead him or her toward beginning the process of converting to Christ."[37] Negatively, Dennis McBride, who is suspicious of BMB dreams of Jesus, cites missionary William Barrick who reports that many dreams and visions of Jesus are fabricated so BMBs will have "a viable [in their opinion] response to those who accuse them of abandoning Islam."[38] Because dreams are considered authoritative in Islamic contexts, claiming a dream as a reason for conversion could mitigate a convert's persecution. This theory has merit but requires further investigation.

Theological Evaluation of Pre-Conversion Muslim Dreams and Visions

Comparison of BMB Pre-Conversion Dreams with Acts 9–10

Evaluation of BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions should begin

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[36] Anthony Bryan Greenham, *Muslim Conversions to Christ: An Investigation of Palestinian Converts Living in the Holy Land*, Evangelical Missiological Society Dissertation Series (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, 2004), 210.

[37] Christopher R. Little, *The Revelation of God among the Unevangelized: An Evangelical Appraisal and Missiological Contribution to the Debate* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001), 126; cf., Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Called from Islam to Christ: Why Muslims Become Christians* (Crowborough, UK: Monarch, 1999), 223, who writes, "God's call is being repressed and pushed back into the subconscious. As a result, it has to 'raise its voice' to make itself heard."

[38] McBride, "An Evaluation of Muslim Dreams," 18.

with Scripture. To frame the discussion, one should ask whether BMB experiences have any precedent in the New Testament. The texts most likely to provide answers to this question are accounts of conversions involving dreams and visions. The New Testament contains two conversion accounts involving dreams: Saul in Acts 9:1–19 and Cornelius in Acts 10.

In Acts 9, Saul is confronted with a bright, powerful vision of Jesus who asks Saul why he is persecuting him. Several aspects of the account stand out. First, together with Stephen's vision of Jesus in Acts 7:56, this is the only appearance of Jesus outside of Revelation to occur after his ascension, so the nature of his appearance is presumably different from that which the disciples experienced after the Resurrection. Jesus' appearance is so intense, Saul prostrates himself before Jesus. Other verses in Acts reference visions, especially "the Lord" (ὁ κύριος) speaking, but the identity of Jesus in these visions is not as clear and the experiences described are not as intense (Acts 12:7; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17; 23:11; 27:23–24). Second, Saul is clearly awake during the encounter. Third, Saul and Jesus are enveloped in a "light from heaven" (Acts 9:3; αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Barrett notes that φῶς connotes "inward illumination–salvation," and that "Paul understood the event as revelation (Gal. 1.12, 15), but not in the gnostic sense."[39] Fourth, it is interesting that in the account, no one communicates the content of the gospel to Saul, neither in the vision nor after his arrival in Damascus. In Gal 1:12, Paul claims to have received the gospel by revelation rather than through a human teacher.[40] Fifth, though Saul uses the term κύριε, he does not immediately recognize who Jesus is. Rather, Jesus identifies himself to Saul (Acts 9:5–6).[41]

Both parallels and differences emerge between BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions and the account of Saul's conversion in Acts 9. In many BMB dreams, Jesus appears bathed in light in ways very similar to the account recorded in Acts 9. In one modern account, a man named Khaled AbdelRahman, an Iraqi persecutor of Christians, describes an experience closely resembling Paul's encounter. He reports Jesus asking him in a dream, "Son, why do you attack my sheep?"[42] Modern accounts also differ from the Acts 9 account. Though some BMBs experience pre-conversion waking visions, most of the reports include dreams. Though Saul did not recognize Jesus immediately, most BMB testimonies report the percipients' knowing Jesus' identity intuitively. Though Paul immediately

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³⁹ C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles,* ICC 1 (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 449.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 443.

⁴¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 358.

⁴² Stan Guthrie, "Doors into Islam," *Christianity Today,* October 2002, 40.

had personal interaction with a Christian believer, Ananias, Paul claims to have received the gospel through this revelatory encounter (Gal 1:12). By contrast, BMBs report hearing the gospel either prior to or after their experience, but not through the experience itself.

A second conversion experience connected with a dream occurs in the following chapter, Acts 10. In this account, a centurion named Cornelius receives a visit from an angel who instructs him to retrieve Simon Peter from the house of Simon the tanner in Joppa. One unique feature of this account is Luke's description of Cornelius's character. In addition to describing him as "God-fearing" (Acts 10:2; φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν), Luke uses a word meaning "devout" (Acts 10:2; εὐσεβής), which is used in only one other place in the New Testament, 2 Peter 2:9. Luke also reports that Cornelius gave generously to the poor and prayed constantly. Cornelius even experiences the vision as he is praying (Acts 10:30). Clearly, Luke means for the reader to understand that God has been at work in Cornelius's life prior to the experience of this vision. At the same time, the controversy that ensues over Cornelius's conversion indicates he was not a full proselyte to Judaism.[43] Another aspect of the account that stands out is that the angel gives Cornelius instructions but does not reveal spiritual information to him. Later, the reader discovers that the directions were meant to bring Cornelius into an encounter with the gospel (Acts 11:14). Presumably, the angel could have proclaimed the gospel to Cornelius directly but chose instead to work through a human mediator, Peter.

Once again, parallels with the accounts of BMBs are evident. As in Cornelius's life, the reports of BMBs indicate that God has been at work in their lives prior to experiencing dreams and visions. In addition, nearly all BMB reports of pre-conversion dreams and visions indicate subsequent interaction with a human gospel messenger, just as had occurred with Cornelius. Some dreamers even report being given instructions that lead them to the gospel messenger.[44] It is worth mentioning, based on Acts 10, a lack of gospel content in dreams does not mean pre-conversion dreams should be suspect.

To summarize, significant parallels emerge between contemporary BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions and the conversion accounts in Acts 9 and 10. This lends credibility to the notion God is at work in the pre-conversion dreams and visions of Muslims since such experiences are not unprecedented in the New Testament age. To say such experiences are lent credibility by their parallels with New Testament accounts is not

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⁴³ Bock, *Acts,* 385–86.

⁴⁴ M. D., "Unable to Hold It In," *Silkroaders Newsletter,* March 2017.

to suggest they should be expected as normative. The intent is not to erect a missiological rubric by which BMBs' conversion accounts can be judged authentic. It is merely to say such experiences should not be dismissed as demonic or bizarre, and they should not be viewed as threats to the authority of Scripture in themselves. To the contrary, they typically support the Bible's clear teaching on the primacy of gospel proclamation and the role of a human gospel messenger, and they demonstrate continuity between how God has worked to bring people to himself in the past and how he does the same today.

Are Revelatory Dreams for Today?

Some people are not so convinced of God's involvement in Muslim pre-conversion dreams and visions. Dennis McBride is typical of a cessationist approach that rejects a continuing role for dreams and visions in the life of the church. McBride is concerned to uphold the uniqueness of Scripture as God's revelation against any claim of continuing revelation. While he maintains that he distinguishes between a "dream about Jesus, even a Spirit-directed dream," and "Jesus revealing himself in a dream," his approach leaves little room even for the former.[45] What McBride finds most disturbing about BMB dreams is the presence of Jesus himself. His *a priori* conviction that such appearances cannot happen outside of the apostolic age constrains him to conclude that such "extra-biblical experiences [are] generated from sources other than the Holy Spirit."[46]

McBride even makes reference to "supporters of Muslim dreams," as if it were possible to encourage the prevalence of the phenomenon. The issue is not whether Christians serving in Islamic contexts should promote dreams and visions of Jesus in order to facilitate Muslim conversions. It's hard to imagine how that could even be possible. Dreams and visions of Jesus *are* occurring and Muslims who experience them *are* converting. The issue is what Christians who have the privilege of serving their BMB brothers and sisters should make of these experiences and how they should counsel those who have them. Would cessationists have such Christians explain to the potential convert that the invitation of Jesus to follow him in a dream is likely the invitation of a demon?

McBride takes issue with the use of Joel 2 in Acts 2:17 as an explanatory text for the phenomenon of dreams and visions. He argues that the passage is only fulfilled in the immediacy of Pentecost and at the Second Coming, but not in between. As proof, he argues that if dreams and visions described in the passage continue during the church age, the cosmic

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signs described in the passage should continue as well. Since such signs do not continue, neither should the expectation of dreams and visions. Samuel Storms offers a helpful response to such approaches to the Joel passage in Acts 2. He writes,

> The cessationist is asking us to believe that the long-awaited promise in Joel 2 of the unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit on "all people" (Acts 2:17), with its resultant revelatory activity of dreams, visions, and prophecy, was exhaustively fulfilled in only a handful of individuals whose gifting functioned in an exclusively foundational, initiatory, and therefore temporary fashion! Does this theory adequately explain the text? The revelatory and charismatic experience of the Spirit, foretold by Joel and cited by Peter, can hardly be viewed as exhaustively fulfilled by a small minority of believers during a mere sixty-year span in only the first century of the church. It seems rather that Joel 2 and Acts 2 are together describing normative Christian experience for the entire Christian community in the whole of the new covenant age, called "the last days."[47]

Indeed, such a position not only struggles to explain the text adequately, it struggles to understand how God is actually at work in the Muslim world. One need not give herself over fully to a Third Wave charismatic understanding of the sign gifts to appreciate that God is giving people dreams and visions that prepare them to receive the gospel or confirm the gospel they have already heard. She can use caution while classifying BMB dreams and visions into the appropriate theological categories in order to uphold the authority of Scripture, while at the same time recognizing God is at work in ways she may not expect.

Neither General nor Special Revelation

If one allows for God's involvement in BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions, the question shifts to what sort of revelation they constitute. Are BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions evidence of special revelation in the pattern of how God revealed himself to Old Testament saints, for example? Does their ubiquity indicate they are examples of general revelation that is not salvific, but nevertheless discloses knowledge of God? Are they something else entirely?

Many theologians have noted the inadequacy of the categories of general and special revelation to account for such phenomena as the dreams

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[45] Dennis McBride, "An Evaluation of Muslim Dreams and Visions of Isa (Jesus)" 8, http://www.yoyomaster.com/ministry.file/IsaDreams.pdf.

[46] Ibid., 9.

[47] C. Samuel Storms, "A Third Wave Response to Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views,* ed. Richard B. Gaffin and Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 79–80.

and visions described in this article. For example, Daniel Strange argues that "while this separation and distinction [between general and special revelation] is absolutely necessary, there is a sense in which it is somewhat abstract and artificial. Our theological categorization of revelation, general and special, as hermetically sealed compartments can be shown to be rather inadequate."[48] Similarly, Robert Johnston argues for a more expansive understanding of general revelation that "would recognize that God reveals himself not only through Scripture and in the believing community but also through creation, conscience, and culture."[49] Peter Jensen seems to go so far as to stretch the category of general revelation to include "experiences of God," and he cites Cornelius as an example.[50] Gerald McDermott, asserting the existence of "a revelation of a sort in at least some of the religions," argues for a category he calls "revealed types."[51] It is "not 'general revelation,' because it was not available to all; nor was it 'special' revelation of the covenantal kind, because it did not point to salvation."[52] Terrence Tiessen proposes a category he calls "particular non-universally normative revelation" to cover the phenomenon of prophecy as well as, presumably, dreams and visions.[53]

One is not constrained, therefore, to choose between categorizing BMB pre-conversion dreams and visions with unsatisfactory categories such as salvific acts of private special revelation, general revelation about God that comes to all in some way but is only perceived by some, meaningless projections of the psyche, or demonic manifestations. Instead, we can say several things. First, we can affirm God's involvement in dreams and visions as acts of his providential direction. God has long used dreams and visions as vehicles for communicating with his creatures, and there is no reason to suppose he would not use them as a condescension to the

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[48] Daniel Strange, "General Revelation: Sufficient or Insufficient?" in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism,* ed. Christopher W. Morgan, Robert A. Peterson, and Andreas J. Köstenberger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 72.

[49] Robert K. Johnston, *God's Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 8–9.

[50] Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, Contours of Christian Theology Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 139–40.

[51] Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 13.

[52] Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 116.

[53] Ibid., 120–22. Tiessen goes on to suggest that the existence of such a category means that God not only might reveal himself to individuals salvifically apart from normative special revelation, he does reveal in this way.

Muslim worldview in order to authenticate his gospel. Second, we can attest that such experiences are not salvific as they generally contain no gospel content. Just as in the case of Cornelius, it is the message of the gospel that is the power of God to the salvation of Muslim dreamers. In Peter's report to the church in Acts 11, he recounts the angel's words to Cornelius, who was told that Peter would come to declare a "message by which you will be saved" (Acts 11:14; ῥήματα πρὸς σὲ ἐν οἷς σωθήσῃ).[54] Third, we can affirm that such dreams and visions prepare Muslims to receive the gospel or provide experiential confirmation of the gospel they have already heard. As preparation or confirmation, BMB dreams and visions lie between the categories of general and special revelation, in what Herman Bavinck describes as the "progressive approach of God to his creatures."[55]

Insufficient Evidence for BMB Pre-Conversion Dreams as Special Revelation

Some general revelation inclusivists, agnostics, and special revelation exclusivists have pointed to pre-conversion BMB testimonies of dreams and visions as evidence of personal non-normative salvific revelation. For example, Alister McGrath writes,

The doctrine of prevenient grace has been severely neglected in our theology of mission, so that we have overlooked the simple yet glorious fact that God has gone ahead of us, preparing the way for

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[54] As John Piper points out, σωθήσῃ is future. This means Cornelius was not saved prior to his encounter with Peter, contra some inclusivists' claims about him. See Little, *The Revelation of God*, 159.

[55] Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 27–28, describes the relationship between general and special revelation, "The foundations of creation and redemption are the same. The Logos who became flesh is the same by whom all things were made. The first-born from the dead is also the first-born of every creature. The Son, whom the Father made heir of all things, is the same by whom he also made the worlds. Notwithstanding the separation wrought by sin, there is a progressive approach of God to his creatures. The transcendence does not cease to exist but becomes an ever deeper immanence. But as a disclosure of the greatness of God's heart, special revelation far surpasses general revelation, which makes known to us the power of his mind. General revelation leads to special, special revelation points back to general. The one calls for the other, and without it remains imperfect and unintelligible. Together they proclaim the manifold wisdom which God has displayed in creation and redemption."

those who follow. In the harshly intolerant cultural climate of many Islamic nations, in which the open preaching of the gospel is impossible and conversion to Christianity punishable by imprisonment or death, many Muslims become Christians through dreams and visions in which they are addressed by the risen Christ. Perhaps we need to be more sensitive to the ways in which God is at work and realize that, important though our preaching may be, in the end God does not depend on it.[56]

To be sure, God is not dependent on anything to accomplish his purposes, much less the preaching of his servants. However, the actual evidence supplied by BMB testimonies fails to support McGrath's claim. Dreams and visions are not being reported as happening in place of gospel proclamation when no such proclamation can occur but as supplemental to it. Nearly all who report dreams and visions claim they occurred after having contact with Christian believers or with Scripture, and many experience them *after* hearing the gospel message.

Similarly, after admitting that all known cases of dreams or visions involve people who later had contact with the gospel through a human messenger, Tiessen asks if we can assume this is always the case. He writes, "We commonly hear of people who come to believe in Jesus as God as a result of a dream or vision that convinced them of this truth. This seems to be particularly true of Muslims, for instance."[57] The answer to his question, based on the evidence, is that not only can we expect God to provide follow-up through a human messenger after a Muslim's experience of a dream or vision, in most cases we can expect there will be contact with a human messenger *before* the experience of a dream or vision. Even in the one case Tiessen cites of a Muslim experiencing a dream that led him to faith in Christ, the man had interacted with Christians who had discussed spiritual matters with him.[58]

Put simply, the dreams and visions occurring among converts in the Muslim world do not support the claims often made about them. If anything, they support the burden of Rom 10:14–17, that those who can call on Christ have faith, those who have faith have heard, and those who have heard have heard because a human messenger went to them with the gospel, just as Peter went to Cornelius. Nevertheless, a caveat is in order at this point. Just because BMB dreams and visions do not provide

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[56] Alister E. McGrath, "A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World,* ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 179.

[57] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 116.

[58] Ibid., 200–1.

evidence that God is at work revealing salvation apart from a human messenger, does not mean it is impossible he is doing such a thing. That is, the arguments of special revelation particularists are not undone by the realities of BMB dreams and visions; they are merely set back to the extent such phenomena do not provide the hoped-for evidence. And we must still allow for the possibility that we only know a segment of BMB testimonies because these individuals were acquainted with Christians who led them to take the next step in their conversion. Theoretically, there could be many Muslims who have received dreams and visions apart from any contact with Christians and Scripture, have remained ignorant of traditional appropriate responses to such revelation, and have therefore remained unknown. Although, amid the inter-connectedness of the Information Age, this seems increasingly implausible.

There may be other reasons to remain positive about the possibility of personal special revelation. Christopher Little, following Bernard Ramm, argues for multiple modalities of special revelation, of which he identifies seven: oral tradition, miraculous events, dreams, visions, angels, human messengers, and the written word of God.[59] By pointing to these modalities, Little contends God has numerous means for getting his message through to those he wishes to hear it. He argues,

> We must recognise that God is not limited either by the activity of the Church or the spread of the Bible to accomplish His redemptive purposes in history. Just as He employed the modalities of special revelation throughout redemptive history as recorded in Scripture, He is able to utilize them today in view of His desire to call a people unto himself (Rev. 5:9). As Alister McGrath explains, "God's saving work must never be exclusively restricted to human preaching, as if the Holy Spirit was silent or inactive in God's world, or as if the actualization of God's saving purposes depended totally on human agencies. The Creator is not dependent on His creation in achieving His purposes."[60]

Bruce Demarest agrees with this view, suggesting, "Through a special revelatory initiative, God could disclose Himself to a sinner and so move

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[59] Little, *The Revelation of God*, 119–30; Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 45–51; Strange, "General Revelation," 75–76.

[60] Christopher R. Little, Toward Solving the Problem of the Unevangelized," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 21.1 (2002): 45–62 quoted in Strange, "General Revelation," 75–76.

upon his heart that the person who had no contact with the explicit message of the gospel would respond to God with faith and trust."[61] Thus, if we expand McGrath's statement to say that God's saving work must never be restricted to human preaching *and* dreams and visions among Muslims, the possibility of God working through other modalities still remains open.

Implications for Missiology and Ministry

Several missiological and ministry implications emerge from the foregoing study. First, missionaries and others who minister to Muslim peoples should expect to encounter reports of dreams and visions. They will need to demonstrate openness toward understanding the phenomenon. They will also need to think through how they will respond in a pastorally sensitive manner when confronted with experiential claims. Second, BMBs need to be encouraged to understand their dreams and visions in light of Scripture and be equipped to submit their experiences to the authority of Scripture. Third, dreams and visions should never serve as the focus of ministry to Muslims. Karl Barth warns about the desire to trade a focus on Scripture with a focus on personal experience. He writes, "We may be tempted to find in this material addition of an immediate spiritual inspiration the very essence of the divine conviction. But if we are, . . . we are trying to find a something better which God might have told us, instead of looking at the supposedly less good which He has actually told us."[62] Many Christians have prayed for and have called others to pray for Muslims to have dreams and visions to lead them to faith. Perhaps a better prayer would be to ask God to send laborers to the harvest (Matt 9:38). Regardless, even if Christians "pray that the Lord would send dreams and visions to religious others to arouse curiosity in Christ, . . . only the poorest and laziest of mission strategies would end there."[63]

Conclusion

Dreams and visions are a part of the warp and woof of the worldview in Islamic societies. They impose their authority onto the daily lives of

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[61] Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 260.

[62] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God,* vol. 1.2, ed. Thomas F. Torrance and Geoffrey William Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 236.

[63] Todd L. Miles, *A God of Many Understandings? The Gospel and a Theology of Religions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 336.

ordinary Muslims, offering guidance, direction, and warning. It is not surprising, therefore, that the same God who is providentially involved in the waking lives of all his human creatures is also involved in their non-waking lives, using their experiences to draw them to salvation. When Muslims experience dreams and visions leading them to faith in Christ, they experience them within the context of God's providence, already active in their lives. They may hear the gospel over a glass of tea with a new Christian friend. They may view an Internet video such as the film series *More than Dreams*, produced by a Christian ministry to Muslims. They may sit down on a bed next to a dresser containing an Arabic Bible. When they do these things, God may intervene in their dreams to confirm the message they have heard or to prepare them for the experience of having their lives changed for eternity.

Interview with Dr. George Braswell, Former Missionary to Iran and SEBTS Professor of Missions

Gregory D. Mathias
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Dr. George Braswell and his wife Joan were appointed missionaries to the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention on August 17, 1967.[1] Dr. and Mrs. Braswell served as the first Southern Baptist missionaries to Iran from 1968 through 1974. After returning from Iran, Braswell served as a professor of missions at SEBTS from 1974–2004, and then at Campbell University from 2004–2016. He has authored eleven books including To Ride a Magic Carpet, which gives a more detailed account of his experience in Iran.[2]

He and his wife now reside in Wake Forest, North Carolina, where they are members of Wake Forest Baptist Church. Throughout their lives, George and Joan Braswell have exhibited a tenacious trust in the Lord and a fervent missionary spirit. They take every opportunity to inspire people towards missions in general and Iran in particular.

Below is an edited excerpt from an extended interview conducted with Dr. Braswell in June of 2018.

Tell us about how God called you and your wife into missions.

Our journey into missions started in many places, among many peoples, with many prayers. Let me give you a little background of where I grew up and then tell you about my wife and me together. I grew up in Emporia, Virginia. It was a rural agrarian town: cotton, peanuts, and tobacco. I grew up in the '40s and '50s, a much different time and culture than now. The reason I say that is because in the 1940s World War II ended. My father and grandfather were builders and I would work with them in the summers, but I also knew that I would be the first one in my whole family to go to college.

Growing up I had two families in a sense—my immediate family and my Christian family. My immediate family did not regularly attend church, but I did. I went to Sunday school and worshipped. In those days we also had Baptist Training Union on Sunday evenings. In a real sense, the church became my second family. Main Street Baptist Church in Emporia, Virginia, nurtured me along. I remember Sunday School lessons when we studied the Old Testament and figures like King Cyrus, King Artaxerxes, Esther, and Daniel. All of these figures were associated with Persia—modern day Iran—and that excited me. I think God was speaking to my youthful mind through these teachers. My church would regularly invite a foreign missionary to come and be with us for the whole week and preach revival services. Later in life who could have guessed that George Braswell would become the first Southern Baptist Missionary to Persia, to Iran. These early days at church were formative.

I graduated from high school and felt a call to the ministry. At this point I did not necessarily feel called to missions. So, I came to a little town called Wake Forest, where Wake Forest College was located in North Carolina. Now I'm a native Virginian, so traveling a hundred miles from my home was a big adventure for me. I'm thankful for this adventure because during my sophomore year I met my wife to be. We were both sophomores on campus and we began to date. Wake Forest College relocated to Winston-Salem in 1956 and was renamed Wake Forest University. Joan and I graduated from Wake Forest University and were encouraged to pursue master's degree work at Yale University Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. In fact, my former professors at Wake Forest helped secure a three-year full scholarship for me so that I could attend Yale. While there, I majored in missions. The course that changed everything for me was World Religions. The professor spent his sabbatical in Iran and he lectured to us about the worldview and religion of the Magi. I said, "Oh me! My Sunday school teacher, Miss Margaret, way back when I was 8 or 9 years old mentioned the Magi. Now, here I am at Yale University studying under a man who's been to Iran and met the Magi." So, I majored in Christian missions and cemented my love for the people of Iran.

Towards the end of my time at Yale, Joan and I were asking the question, "What should we do with our lives?" In the midst of struggling through that question, I was reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. That book influenced me as I graduated from Yale. We still were not quite sure what God wanted to do with us, but I then became pastor of Cullowhee Baptist Church in Cullowhee, North Carolina. Since Western Carolina University is located in Cullowhee, this was a university church. One of my practices during this time was to take my youth group to the Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly. In the 1960s and 1970s Ridgecrest

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[1] In 1997 the Southern Baptist Convention voted to change the name of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) to the International Mission Board (IMB).

[2] George W. Braswell Jr., *To Ride a Magic Carpet: How One American's Fascination with Old Persia Leads to Genuine Communication with Modern Iranians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977).

was a meeting ground for Southern Baptists. Every year they dedicated one week as their Foreign Mission Week. During this week, they would have hundreds of missionaries from around the world come, wear their national dress, and share about their experiences. Dr. Baker James Cauthen, President of the SBC Foreign Mission Board from 1954–1979, preached throughout the week's events. The continuous call was for people to give their life to foreign missions. While I thought perhaps some of our students would consider foreign missions, you know who walked down the aisle? Joan and me. My wife and I walked down the halls of Ridgecrest in the summer of 1966, and we gave our lives to foreign missions. That is how God called both of us into missions.

Iran is regularly in our news cycle, but most Americans do not really know much about Iran. Why did you go as a missionary to Iran?

As I stated earlier, we walked that aisle at Ridgecrest and gave our lives to foreign missions. Now it's referred to as international missions, but then it was foreign missions. So, we wrote to the FMB that day and said we're ready to give our lives to foreign missions. They wrote us back and said, well, Mr. Braswell, fill out this form. Within a week, we received a response from the Personnel Committee letting us know that due to us not attending a Southern Baptist Seminary they could not accept us. Maybe the Lord was leading me to be more of a maverick, I don't know, but I wrote back to the FMB in Richmond. In my letter, I thanked them and went on to remind them that I attended Yale University Divinity School. I spent my three years there studying under Richard Niebuhr, who wrote *Christ and Culture*; Brevard Childs, who taught me Old Testament; Dr. Roland Bainton, who wrote the book on Luther, *Here I Stand*; and Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette. If you are questioning my commitment to missions or Baptist life, then perhaps there are other mission boards that might be interested in helping Joan and I answer the call to missions. The letter was bold, and I shouldn't have said or written all of that, but I received a response within a week. In this letter they asked us to continue in the process with the FMB, so we did.

By the summer of 1967 we were part of a group of one hundred who were commissioned as missionaries with the FMB. We were then part of the first class of guinea pigs to live at Ridgecrest for sixteen weeks of orientation. At the end of that time, we received a visa to go to Iran and we packed up. They gave us 120 pounds of air freight. That was for me, Joan, and our three children. We left for Iran in January of 1968, departing from New York City on a ship.

We made our way across the Atlantic and joined some other missionaries in Rome. From there we flew over to Beirut, but once there they let

us know they loved us, but that we were on our own in Iran. There were no Baptists there to meet us. So, we went on to Iran on our own and with a sense of calling. The Foreign Mission Board provided us a great opportunity, but nobody with the FMB had ever been to Iran. We said, yes Lord, we will go to Iran.

What are three lessons that you learned during your time serving in the Iran?

Let me set the stage a bit. Before leaving for Iran, the Foreign Mission Board gave us opportunity to study Farsi. They recommended two places, Princeton or University of Texas at Arlington, where they would send our family for one year. We prayed about that and decided the best place for us to learn Farsi was in Tehran, if we could obtain a visa. Well, we did receive a visa and so went to Iran. We were thankful for the opportunity to get to Iran in order to study the language and not to spend another year in the States.

The first thing we learned was the tremendous hospitality of Iranian people. Iran was at that time around 98 percent Shi'ite Muslim. That's overwhelming. But, we learned that they loved Americans. We found that if we were kind, loving, and outgoing then they would return in kind.

The second thing I learned is how God gives *kairos* moments in history. These are special times in history where God acts, and if we trust Him and act, He will do incredible things. Remember, this was a 98 percent Shi'ite Muslim culture. We initially had three months on our visa to stay in Iran, but I desperately needed a work permit. If I didn't get a working residence permit, the whole family would have to leave. While there were no Baptists in Iran at the time, there was a Presbyterian mission. One of the Presbyterian missionaries there wanted to introduce me to the dean of the Muslim Seminary of the University of Tehran. It is called *The Faculty of Islamic Theology of the University of Tehran*. This faculty awards masters degrees and PhDs to Muslim clerics.

I learned that there were 600 students studying for masters and PhD degrees at the university. We went to meet the dean, and there was a line at the office; this line consisted of about twenty chairs with what looked to be Ayatollahs sitting in almost every chair. We proceeded to sit in the last chair since that was the Iranian way. My friend had called ahead and made an appointment. In a few minutes the dean raised his head and saw us and motioned us to come to the front of the line. I said, "Thank You Lord." The dean was fluent in English, so the conversation started: "Who are you? Where'd you go to school?" I said, "I went to Wake Forest University," which he had never heard of. I then said, "I went to Yale University." He replied, "Oh that's like Harvard?" Our conversation proceeded and ultimately, he liked me. Through the work of the Holy Spirit

and my connection with Yale, the dean gave me a position and work residence permit for me to teach at *The Faculty of Islamic Theology of the University of Tehran.* I was the only Christian professor at a Muslim seminary. Only God could orchestrate this incredible event.

The third thing that stands out to me is when I met a Muslim man who lived next to the Caspian Sea and he wanted to know Christ. His family was Iranian, and his father was a Communist, while his mother was a practicing Muslim. This man had obtained a Bible and through reading it wanted to know more. I was able to help lead him to Christ. I call him Cyrus. To see God move in this man's life and in so many other Iranian lives was a wonderful gift. Continue to pray for Iranians like Cyrus.

What advice would you give someone who's considering either going directly overseas as a missionary or getting some seminary training and then heading overseas?

You need to be very open to everything around you regarding missions and opportunities. Just be inquisitive, learning everything you can about global missions. Do a lot of reading. Read missionary biographies. Read about William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Lottie Moon, and many others. Be available to what God is teaching you and the Holy Spirit is leading you to do. Remember, the missionary life is a tremendous calling but also it can be a very rigorous life. I would also advise you to talk to missionaries, seek them out. Get in a place where you can drink some coffee and tea with them and have honest conversation. The missionary life is not an easy life.

In summary, study, pray, and talk to missionaries. Get to know actual missionaries and talk with them. God will use your time in your church and at seminary to inspire and equip you to go to the nations.

What is your prayer for Iran and Persian peoples today?

William McElwee Miller, a Presbyterian evangelist in the early 1900s, started some amazing indigenous work in Iran. The Iranian evangelical church, small as it was, came out of those roots. I pray for that work continuously because I witnessed some of that work when I was there. They have persevered. It is hard, but I understand now that there's a lot of gospel movement in Iran. There are many Iranian Muslims coming to Christ. I am glad for that and continue praying for that. I'm pleased that Southeastern has the Persian Initiative. As far as I know, it is the only initiative like this in the world. I believe that the day is coming when Iran will be more open to the gospel message. I also personally believe, having taught at the University of Tehran, and meeting a lot of young people, that the youth are key to the future of Iran. We have to be prepared for this time. I'm an old man but I am hopeful and prayerful that this day will

come soon. In my day, we so desperately wanted students to come and minister with us. There were over 25,000 students studying at the University of Tehran and there were openings for more missionaries to come, but nobody did. I pray that never happens again.

My prayer for Iran and Persian people is as it's always been. It is for the Christians there to remain faithful, and for Christians here to pray for their Iranian brothers and sisters.

George Braswell has ministered and taught for over fifty years. His love for Iranians is evident even if one spends only a few minutes with him. His hope is for the gospel to continue going forth among the Iranian people. It seems appropriate to conclude this interview with Braswell's concluding anecdote in *To Ride a Magic Carpet:*

> There is a mystery to the mazeway of the beats of life in Iran. On a hot summer's afternoon deep in the bazaar of Tehran, I ran across a silk carpeted tapestry, startling in its composition. The portraits of the Shahenshah and his Empress had been woven on the right and left sides of the carpet, and in between them there was the figure of a man with long, flowing hair. My first thought was that someone must be out of his mind to put anyone between the Shah and his consort. And then I looked for a Qur'an which would identify the face with the prophet Mohammed, and there was not one. I glanced for a sword which would say that he was Ali. But to no avail! I thought all along that it was a portrait of Jesus Christ. But that would be impossible! So I asked the owner of the shop and he confirmed that it was Jesus Christ, and would give no further details except to say, "let it be!" And the beat goes on.[3]

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[3] Braswell, *To Ride a Magic Carpet*, 140.

Book Reviews

This book is a collection of previously published essays by Andreas Schüle. Schüle is the chair of Theology and Exegesis of the Old Testament at the University of Leipzig. In the introduction, Schüle argues that the initial chapters of Genesis are "the front portal through which every interpreter of the Pentateuch and also the Old Testament/the Hebrew Bible as a whole must enter. What one finds here are profound theological statements clothed in images and symbols from the world of antiquity which every interpretation has to take into account" (p. 1). Therefore, one expects *Theology from the Beginning* to focus on the theology found in the Primeval History of Genesis 1–11.

Schüle's essays are divided into five major sections: The Image of God, Evil, Law and Forgiveness, God, and Ethics. The first subject receives the majority of Schüle's attention in this volume—more than double the other sections in this book. Five of Schüle's essays focus on the "Image of God," the first two containing the most significant contribution to Old Testament studies.

In the first essay, "Made in the 'Image of God,'" Schüle argues that Genesis uniquely presents the divine image in a way staggeringly different from its ancient Near East context. While other ANE texts present the image of the gods as lifeless physical material, Gen 1–11 presents the image as a living, relational being. Humanity, not wood or stone, stands as God's emissary and representative here on earth. As representatives, humanity's primary role is to bring out God's dominion on the earth. According to Schüle, the primary way that humanity accomplishes this is through suppression of violence.

In his second essay, entitled the "Reluctant Image," Schüle argues that "the Primeval History prefaces the following narratives in a way that directs the readers' attention to the ambiguous relationship between divine intentions and human behaviors as a leitmotif in the Pentateuch" (p. 29). In other words, Schüle argues that the Primeval History presents a struggle between God's intentions for humanity and humanity's intentions. Schüle accepts the more recent trends that place the addition of the J and E sources after the P source (see pp. 38–40). In this view, J and E are critiquing the view put forth in the Priestly source. The J and E sources are much more explicit in their presentation of humanity as the reluctant image of God.

One of the drawbacks with this volume is that not all essays directly relate to or discuss the Primeval History. As the quote in the first paragraph of this review indicates, the collection of Schüle's essays should focus on the theology of Genesis 1–11. However, a number of essays do not have any connection to the Primeval History. For example, "Transformed into the Image of Christ" interacts more with the notions of identity and personality found in the works of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Peter Berger, A. N. Whitehead, and D. Parfit. The only Old Testament passage referenced in this essay is from Song 8:6.

Editorially, there are a number of errors in the work that hamper smooth reading. For example, in an enumerated list, "fourth" and a few more words, are missing from the initial sentence of a paragraph (p. 12). Also, there are times, even within the same essay, when some words appear in Hebrew and at other times are transliterated (see pp. 20, 41).

Despite these criticisms, the work is still beneficial for scholars and students alike. Schüle provides many useful exegetical observations concerning the biblical text. For example, he compares various texts that mention the image of God in Gen 1–11 to show the different nuances of God's relational image in humanity. Relational aspects are highlighted when the image of God is mentioned in regards to male and female (Gen 1:27), parent to child (Gen 5:1–3), and person-to-person (Gen 9:4–6).

Schüle also provides his readers with detailed readings of ANE sources beside biblical texts. For example, he compares the similarities and differences between the *mīs pî pīt pî* ritual and Gen 2:5–3:24, concluding that the author has reassigned the role of God's image from those found in other ANE contexts. Where other ANE texts end their telling of the creation of the image, Genesis "inserts that Adam is longing for another human being made of his own flesh and blood" (p. 19). The image as it is presented in Genesis relates to God in a way that other images do not in the ANE texts. In fact, the similarities to the *mīs pî pīt pî* ritual suggest that the image of God is in the process of being made in the Garden in Gen 2–3.

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Tremper Longman, III. *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017. 311 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0801027116. $32.99.

In 2017 Tremper Longman III retired as Distinguished Scholar of Biblical Studies at Westmont College. He taught at Westmont for 19 years, and previously at Westminster Theological Seminary for 18 years. During his teaching career Longman has been one of the most prolific evangelical Old Testament scholars of this generation. As examples, Longman has contributed an introduction to the Old Testament; guides for interpreting books like Genesis, Exodus, and Psalms; commentaries on Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Daniel, and other books; and theological works on subjects like worship and warfare in the Old Testament. Through such publications Longman has proven to be a trustworthy voice among Old Testament scholars.

Many people will be helped by *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom*. It is the best book on the subject this reviewer has seen. It is not a commentary, nor is it a terminological study focusing on words like "wisdom" and "fear." Rather, it is a conceptual study, similar to a study of concepts like holiness or mercy in the Old Testament. To examine the concept of Israelite wisdom, Longman begins by considering the contents and major themes of the biblical books typically referred to as "wisdom" books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. In addition, Longman considers the theme of wisdom in books like Deuteronomy, Psalms, Song of Songs, the prophets, and the Joseph and Daniel stories.

In antiquity the cultures on either side of Israel, namely Egypt and the Mesopotamian cultures, nurtured their own wisdom traditions and produced wisdom documents. To what extent were such documents similar to the wisdom books of the Bible in form and content? What difference does the answer to that question make in our interpretation of the biblical wisdom books? These are important questions, and Longman explores them judiciously by considering the primary literature and the contributions of contemporary scholars. He does not shy away from the similarities between, for example, Proverbs and its Egyptians parallels, and he points out the parallels to readers. However, he proceeds to demonstrate the uniqueness of the wisdom tradition reflected in the Bible. Longman believes Israelite sages must have valued Egyptian wisdom since they wrote similar documents and referred positively to Egyptian wisdom. However, because of the ultimately theological foundation of true wisdom (the fear of the Lord), Longman concludes that the Israelites must have concluded that the Egyptians were not wise in any meaningful sense. "After all, since they did not recognize the most important truth about

the cosmos, they were ultimately fools" (p. 116).

Longman's book is ambitious in scope. Not only does he address the biblical wisdom books but also the evidences of wisdom elsewhere in the canon, including the New Testament. He also reviews the theme of wisdom as reflected in the Apocryphal books and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Longman even devotes an appendix to a consideration of the relevance of biblical wisdom for today's world. The reviewer published a book applying the book of Proverbs to contemporary life (*Living Well*), and access to Longman's work would have improved it.

Longman demonstrates his extensive scholarship primarily in the footnotes, and the body of the book is accessible and well-written. Therefore, this work will be helpful to lay readers, and scholars will benefit from Longman's interaction with contemporary academic literature. Longman's description of biblical wisdom as practical, ethical, and theological seems particularly helpful. Longman returns to this three-fold rubric several times throughout the book, showing how it applies to the breadth of biblical wisdom. Longman also asserts that the most fundamental concept of the Israelite wisdom tradition is the fear of the Lord. Readers will gain a greater understanding of the meaning of that phrase by reading this book.

Reading more extensive commentaries is an essential part of preparing to teach or preach from any biblical book. However, before Bible students can interact with textual commentaries intelligently we need to understand more general issues by reading at least one good introduction to the Old Testament and at least one book like this one. By doing so, we gain a greater understanding of the biblical wisdom tradition as a whole. Because of the nature of Longman's work, this book will also help us think theologically and canonically about wisdom. Therefore, I recommend it as a way to grow in the knowledge of wisdom in the Bible.

Allan Moseley
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James M. Todd, III. *Sinai and the Saints: Reading Old Covenant Laws for the New Covenant Community*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017. x + 224 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0830851621. $21.60.

In *Sinai and the Saints*, James M. Todd (a lecturer of biblical studies at College of the Ozarks) offers an introductory text for students in an attempt to elucidate the purpose and function of Old Covenant laws within the biblical story and in the lives of New Covenant members (i.e., Christians). He contends New Covenant members are no longer under the authority of Old Covenant laws because (1) these laws are part and parcel

of a temporary covenant (i.e., the Sinai covenant) intended to set Israel apart from other nations and (2) Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant in his ministry, sacrificial death, and resurrection.

Todd begins in chapter one by limiting the focus of his study in two ways. First, he broadly defines the Hebrew term *torah* ("law") as general and particular instruction, fixing his attention on the latter. Second, he narrows his study to the particular instructions contained in Exod 20–Deuteronomy. In chapter two, Todd situates his thesis amid three prevalent proposals for the role of Old Covenant laws in the Christian life: "Moral Law Christians" (pp. 33–37), "Ten Commandments Christians" (pp. 37–39), and "No-Old-Law Christians" (pp. 39–42). While he identifies strengths in each proposal, their respective weaknesses lead him to offer another way to conceive of the role of Old Covenant laws in the Christian life. He locates his position as a subdivision of the "No-Old-Law Christians" position, seeking to avoid either the tendency to devalue the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture or the tendency to postulate a law/gospel dichotomy.

In chapters four and five, Todd argues that the Old Covenant laws must be read within the context of the Pentateuchal story, with particular attention given to how the Pentateuch's storyline informs one's understanding of the particular instructions of the Old Covenant. Within the Pentateuch's storyline, Todd contends that the Old Covenant and its stipulations were temporary and only for Israel—in order to set them apart as YHWH's possession; that Israel's sin increased under these laws as they gave the people additional opportunities to transgress; that God's wrath increased along with Israel's increased sin; and that Israel's inability to keep these laws indicated the need for God to intervene.

Todd addresses in more detail the claim that the Ten Commandments function as a moral guide for the Christian life, to which he demurs. First, he argues that the Ten Commandments are anchored in a particular historical context within the storyline of Scripture. This is by means of the reference to the redemption from Egypt (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6), Israel's past bondage as motivation for the Sabbath (Deut 5:15), and the promise of long life in the land (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16). As a result, the Ten Commandments are not applicable beyond this context. Second, he treats the Sabbath command as a linchpin for his argument, contending that since Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath and since Paul does not see the Sabbath carrying over into the church (Rom 14:5; Col 2:16–17), then the Sabbath command in particular and the Ten Commandments in general are no longer authoritative for the Christian life. Third, the New Testament presents the Christian under the authority of the law of Christ and not the Ten Commandments.

In chapters seven and eight, Todd handles two questions that often arise when one claims that Christians are not under the authority of Old Covenant laws: Does this mean I can do whatever I want? and Why should I read the laws? In response to the first, he claims that the law of Christ—i.e., to love God and neighbor self-sacrificially—prohibits the Christian from doing whatever she/he wants. In addition, he argues that the overlap between the law of Christ and the Old Covenant laws arises from God's "natural law," which is woven into the fabric of creation, and as a result, the similarities that may exist between the two do not support the claim that Old Covenant laws are authoritative for the Christian life. In response to the second question, Todd contends Christians should read the Old Covenant laws because they present significant thematic and plot threads that run through the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament, such as sacrifice, holiness, sanctuary, and kingship. In the final chapter, Todd presents the hope of the Pentateuch, which he sets on the theme of the coming king (Gen 3:15; 49; Num 24). He concludes by turning to the New Testament to confirm his thesis, finding support in James's ruling at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), which does not require adherence to the moral laws of the Old Covenant or the Ten Commandments.

Todd certainly accomplishes his stated purpose to provide an introductory text for students concerning the role of Old Covenant laws in the Christian life, and as a result, *Sinai and the Saints* is a welcome volume. He writes in an engaging manner that maintains interest throughout by drawing analogies and illustrations for his arguments from modern literature and film. His thesis is well argued given his stated audience and offers a nuanced position that respects the distinct witness of the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture. However, Todd dismisses too quickly the role of Old Covenant laws and the Ten Commandments in the Christian life and catechesis, engaging only modern interlocutors. The *Didache of the Apostles* demonstrates a catechetical use of Old Covenant laws in the late first or second century. While I warmly recommend *Sinai and the Saints*, I would also recommend supplementing it with an engagement with the rich history of reception which the Old Covenant laws in general and the Ten Commandments in particular have received within the church.

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Dirk Jongkind and Peter Williams, eds. *The Greek New Testament.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2017. viii + 526. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433552175. $ 39.99.

Since the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* and the United Bible

Society's *Greek New Testament* began to share a common text (26th and 3rd ed. respectively), their common text has become known as the "standard text." This designation is unfortunate since it runs the risk of establishing this text as a new *textus receptus* and could be understood as implying that ongoing research into text-critical questions is unnecessary. Fortunately, the last decade has witnessed the publication of two new critical texts, which will remind pastors and students that differences of opinion on important text-critical issues continue despite the vast amount of manuscript evidence that has been amassed over the last two centuries. In 2010, the SBL Greek New Testament appeared. Edited by Michael Holmes, this text differed from the Nestle-Aland edition in 540 variant units. Just seven years later, another edition of the Greek New Testament has appeared. This text was edited by Dirk Jongkind and Peter Williams of Tyndale House in Cambridge.

Several features of the THGNT are distinctive. First, the text is a revision of the edition produced in the nineteenth century by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. Tregelles emphasized the oldest evidence in his effort to reconstruct the earliest attested form of the New Testament books. Likewise, except in cases where this is unfeasible (such as the Book of Revelation for which few early manuscripts are extant), the editors have chosen readings that appear in multiple manuscripts, with at least one dating to the fifth century or earlier. This approach will set the THGNT apart from future editions of the Nestle-Aland text since the *Editio Critica Maior* of the Catholic Epistles has exhibited an increased respect for later Byzantine manuscripts.

Second, although other editions of the Greek New Testament are concerned almost exclusively with the wording of the text, this new edition seeks to restore the order of NT books, spelling and orthography, and paragraph divisions of the early manuscripts. The "standard text" places NT books in the order that was most popular in the Latin-speaking church, which is also the order in which the books typically appear in English Bibles. This text arranges the major groups of New Testament books in the order in which they appear in the early Greek manuscripts and Greek-speaking church fathers: Gospels, Acts, General Epistles, Paul's Epistles (including Hebrews), and Revelation. Most modern editions use standardized spellings of Greek words. However, standardization of the spelling of Greek words did not occur until the Renaissance. This edition seeks to restore the spelling, breathing marks, and accents utilized in the early manuscripts. This edition bases its paragraph divisions on evidence from ancient manuscripts and even uses *ekthesis* (first line of the paragraph juts past the left margin), the device commonly employed

by the early scribes to break the text into sense units, to mark these divisions.

Third, the editors of the THGNT viewed the text, rather than the apparatus, as their major contribution. Thus, textual notes have been kept to a minimum. The brief apparatus only lists (1) variants that were supported by evidence almost as strong as the variant given in the text, (2) variants of great exegetical significance, and (3) variants that serve as helpful illustrations of early scribal habits. In most cases the apparatus lists only papyrus and majuscule witnesses, plus minuscule 69 and 1424. An additional seven minuscules are cited for 1 John 5:7 and an additional two for Hebrews 2:9. The editors also refrained from placing text-critical sigla in the text. This allowed for an uncluttered presentation of the text that aids in undistracted reading.

At times, the textual decision reached by the editors was puzzling and seemed contrary to the principles on which the text was based. An example is John 1:18 in which ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός rather than μονογενὴς θεός is the adopted reading. However, the editors promise, "We will seek to give further transparency to our editorial reasoning in a textual commentary to be published subsequent to this edition" (p. 506). Many users of the new edition will anxiously await publication of that textual commentary. A thorough textual commentary could prompt many users to prefer the new edition to the SBLGNT for which no textual commentary has yet been published.

Many will appreciate other characteristics of this edition as well. Although the "standard text" generally comes with a blue or red cover, this edition generally has a black cover so that it looks more like a traditional Bible. While the "standard text" has the title etched in gold on the front cover, this edition has the title only on the spine (along with a handsome staurogram) so that a student may carry his Greek testament to church or Bible study discretely. Finally, the Smyth-sewn binding and the hardy cover will likely ensure the durability of the volume despite heavy use.

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Michael Bird. *An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. xii + 310 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0802867698. $28.00.

With this volume Michael Bird offers a fresh analysis of Paul with a specific focus on his "Jewishness." Bird considers how Paul, while "thoroughly Jewish," could still "become a figure of notoriety and controversy

among his Jewish compatriots" (p. vii). The answer is that he was "anomalous, a strange figure with a blend of common and controversial Jewish beliefs that brought him into conflict with the socioreligious scene around him" (p. vii). This portrait of Paul is developed in an introduction and five chapters, with chapters one, four, and five being expansions of previous publications.

In the introduction, Bird investigates Paul's self-identity as a Jew, arguing that while thoroughly Jewish, Paul understood his "identity and vocation as indelibly connected to Israel's sacred history" (p. 7). His Jewish identity was not totalizing; rather, his identity and calling were "determined more properly by his connection to Israel's Messiah" (p. 7). Bird surveys several scholarly assessments of Paul's Jewishness, and he finds Barclay's description ("an anomalous Diaspora Jew") most acceptable, while qualifying it by relating Paul both to Diaspora and Palestinian Judaism (p. 26). Paul's anomaly operated at the "convictional level," namely his "apocalyptic interpretation of the Messiah's death and resurrection," which caused him to read Scripture in a new way (p. 28).

After the introduction, Bird relates Paul's soteriology to "common Judaism" (p. 31). He surveys and critiques various proposals concerning the Judaism with which Paul dialogued (pp. 32–47). Significantly, Bird maintains that Paul faithfully represented Judaism (p. 37), that there were some perspectives within Judaism that treated Torah obedience "as a pathway to eschatological life" (p. 39), and that in certain socioreligious situations some Jews emphasized human initiative for receiving divine blessing (p. 40). Bird questions whether "covenantal nomism" adequately describes Paul's pattern of religion (p. 41), asserts that Paul's critique of Judaism cannot be restricted to Jewish exclusion of Gentiles alone (p. 42), and affirms that Paul's "anthropological pessimism" drives his understanding of the Torah's limitations (p. 46). For Paul, being "in Christ" "transcends" and "relativizes" his Jewish origin but does not negate it (p. 52), and he critiques Judaism because it "looks to the Torah rather than to the Messiah for the revelation of God's righteousness" (p. 68).

The second chapter concerns Paul's apostleship. Bird argues that while Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, earlier in his career he evangelized the Jews and continued to do so when given an opportunity later in life (pp. 70–71). The incident at Antioch represents a turning point that forced Paul "to socially separate his Gentile-believing majority assemblies from Jewish communities" (p. 95). The anomalous part of Paul's career is his simultaneous protection of Gentiles converts from Jewish proselytism and his continual evangelism of Jews and bridge-building among Jewish-Christian communities (p. 104).

In the third chapter Bird engages the longstanding debate regarding

whether Paul's theology is apocalyptic or salvation-historical. Bird offers a *via media* with his apocalyptic and salvation-historical reading of Galatians. Paul communicates justification using apocalyptic imagery directed at a "concrete social reality" (p. 146); however, rather than rejecting salvation-history, Paul's argument in Galatians 3–4 is "premised upon it" (p. 160). Furthermore, Paul's Christ/Law antithesis relates primarily to the Law's social role in defining Israel and its "limited role" in salvation history (p. 168).

In the fourth chapter Bird analyzes the Antioch incident. At issue was not the "food" but the "company" (pp. 187, 193). Paul opposed Peter's pragmatic withdrawal from table fellowship since it undermined the gospel message that "God accepts Gentiles as Gentiles on the basis of faith" (p. 201), and for this reason he was unwilling to accept such an "equal but separate" compromise (p. 203). Bird understands the aftermath as a "parting *in* the ways," leading to a very real but "not absolute" fracture between Paul and the Jerusalem church (p. 202).

In the fifth chapter, Bird considers Paul and the Roman Empire. He summarizes the balance of evidence for and against anti-imperial readings of Paul (pp. 205–17) and the state of the debate in the letter to the Romans (pp. 217–23). While cautious against parallelomania (p. 224), Bird identifies passages in Romans that potentially illuminate Paul's stance toward the Empire and compares their language with known Roman artifacts (pp. 223–52). He concludes that while Paul's theology was "pastoral," it was not "divorced from the sociopolitical realities" of the day (p. 253). The "totalizing vision" of Paul's gospel competed with that of the Roman Empire (p. 253).

This book is a rewarding read and showcases two of Michael Bird's key strengths as an interpreter. First, Bird's work is well-written and thoroughly-researched; he critically engages a wide variety of scholars and illuminates the key data and issues for his readers. Second, he combines charitable discourse with common-sense analysis. Not only does he judiciously assess the strengths and weaknesses of the positions he critiques, but he provides his readers with helpful criteria for evaluating the myriad of positions in Pauline scholarship. For example, with simple brilliance, his insistence that any depiction of Paul must explain why he was persecuted by his Jewish contemporaries offers some clarity in the debate over how Paul stood in relationship to Judaism (pp. 15, 24).

One possible critique of this book is that the discussion regarding the "anomalous" nature of Paul's theology could be more extensive. Bird addresses this matter briefly in each chapter; however, in a few places this seems underdeveloped. For instance, chapter five devotes one sentence to the theme (p. 206). Despite this minor weakness, the book is a valuable

resource for studying Paul, and it will no doubt contribute to ongoing debates regarding Paul's relationship to Judaism and Gentiles.

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Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink. *Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. xiv + 806 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0802872654. $45.00.

"Christian dogmatics" can be a wax-nose kind of phrase, but two contemporary Dutch theologians have chosen it as an accurate title for their survey of systematic theology for a very simple reason. In *Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction*, they wish to convey what the church has to say about "the momentous news of God's intervention in Jesus Christ" (p. ix)—that is "dogmatics"—in such a way that situates it within their own Reformed tradition and also for "the entire [Christian] faith community" (p. ix).

The authors thus survey each of the dogmatic loci, with a commitment to being what they call "loyally orthodox." That is, the authors "seek to connect with the teaching tradition of past centuries but simultaneously try to be open to those who claim to have a better understanding of certain issues" (p. xi). They consider themselves to be receivers of the Christian tradition, while at the same time those called to speak to the present generation of Christians, in light of our contemporary context. Their primary intended audience is students, although they hope the book will also benefit pastors, scholars in related but distinct fields, and journalists who wish to learn about the Christian faith and its theological grammar. It is important to realize at the outset, then, as the authors make clear, that they are writing as Dutch Reformed theologians, within the contexts of the Great Tradition but also of the modern West, with students in mind.

The structure of the book is fairly straightforward in that it is similar to other systematic theologies. Prolegomena comes first, followed by the doctrines of the Trinity and theology proper, then later revelation, creation, anthropology, sin and evil, Israel and the covenants, Christology, pneumatology, Scripture, ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology. In the introduction (p. xii), the authors make particular note (and so should we) of two important aspects of the outline. First, the inclusion of a chapter on Israel and the relationship between the covenants is unique compared to many systematic theologies. While the impetus for such a chapter, namely the events of the twentieth century and particularly the *Sho'ah*, are discussed by other contemporary theologians, Van der Kooi and Van den Brink's book is distinct in dealing with those issues in a chapter all by

itself.

A second feature of the outline comes in the placement of the doctrines of revelation and Scripture. Their separation and their absence from the chapter on prolegomena indicate something of the authors' understanding of these doctrines. Regarding revelation, the authors are concerned to structure the book in such a way that it mirrors "the actual practice of faith," namely that a personal encounter with God precedes our epistemological explorations of what he has revealed to us (p. 163). Or, to put it in more classical terms, faith precedes understanding. Likewise, the placement of the doctrine of Scripture after Christology and pneumatology is not intended to minimize its importance, but to indicate what the authors believe is the proper context for understanding God's inspired Word: It is about Christ and inspired by his Holy Spirit.

Aside from these unique aspects of the outline, the book is a fairly standard introduction to systematic theology. Each chapter provides an overview of the history of a particular locus, introduces readers to the traditional grammar for that locus, gives an overview of contemporary debates related to the locus, and provides a list of recommended resources if students wish to study it further.

Christian Dogmatics treats each dogmatic locus with judiciousness. It is careful to present the terms of debate within each locus fairly and only to represent the best arguments for each perspective in those debates. On the one hand, this allows the student to gain an accurate view of the breadth of Christianity and of Christian reflection on dogmatic loci. So, given the book's intended audience, one could say it succeeds in being a proper introduction to Christian theology. However, on the other hand, this judiciousness sometimes results in the authors taking an overly cautious approach on certain issues. For instance, the chapter on the Trinity does not include their understanding of social Trinitarianism but instead merely presents the arguments for it and against it, as well as the prospective positives and negatives of adopting it. Something similar happens in the chapter on anthropology, where the authors attempt to construct a theological framework for how to understand sex biologically and in terms of sexual attraction, but then they punt, so to speak, on the issue of same-sex attraction and same-sex marriage. Such extreme caution allows the book to be used by Christians from a wide variety of theological traditions. And that might be a positive element, at least in terms of its distribution and use among a broad audience.

For this reviewer, though, such extreme caution, even if it potentially broadens an audience, also means that the book does not do something that systematic theologies should do—shape and form their readers *systematically*. Or at least, it does not do it in places where it may matter most.

Many of the issues on which Van der Kooi and Van den Brink choose to "plead the fifth" are not *adiaphora*, tertiary, or ancillary. On the contrary, many of them stand at the heart of the Christian faith (the Trinity) or at the center of public discourse (sex and gender). For this reason, rather than being what others may consider a main strength of the book, this reviewer regards the authors' overly cautious approach on matters of great importance to be a fundamental limitation.

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John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds. *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2017. 1024 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433545917. $60.00.

Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth is the latest contribution originating from the ministry of John MacArthur. Co-edited with Richard Mayhue, this volume is a substantial systematic theology that includes detailed exposition of theological positions for which MacArthur and The Master's Seminary have become known: a presuppositional approach to Scripture, young earth creationism, Reformed soteriology, cessationism, elder-led free church ecclesiology, gender complementarianism, and futuristic dispensational premillennialism. Especially for those who share all or a significant portion of those beliefs, this will be a welcome resource.

The editors suggest the volume be used in conjunction with several related resources that share these commitments: the *MacArthur Study Bible*, the *MacArthur Topical Bible*, and the *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series (p. 27). The lack of an Old Testament commentary series in this collection is an unfortunate gap.

Biblical Doctrine follows a traditional evangelical ordering of theological topics and includes several helpful features. Each chapter begins with a traditional hymn text and includes a bibliography of several systematic theologies and topic-specific resources. There are both general and scripture indexes. The editors emphasize the need for theology to be practical and to result in proper worship and obedience. There are also brief discussions of important contemporary cultural issues like race and gender, though they are lightly sourced and the bibliography on these issues is extremely limited.

The preface suggests *Biblical Doctrine* was designed with multiple audiences in view, ranging from seminary instructors to lay people (p. 26). This was perhaps too ambitious a goal since those various audiences have different needs. Because of this, the work imperfectly meets the need of

each of those audiences. For many lay persons, at over 1,000 pages, this will likely to be too demanding a work. This is why comparable theologies like Erickson's and Grudem's have abridged versions (and in Grudem's case, an abridgement of the abridgement). Nevertheless, for the pastor or motivated layman who shares the book's theological framework and is willing to engage its depth, it will be a useful work.

Biblical Doctrine has some significant limitations for academic settings. Its confessional commitments will make it a difficult fit in some institutions. Even more problematic is the way that it handles alternative views. In most cases it describes alternative positions but frequently fails to develop the views or their arguments in sufficient detail. The bibliographies at the end of each chapter, while helpful for those agreeing with *Biblical Doctrine's* conclusions, in most cases provide limited or no details on resources articulating those alternative views.

For seminary purposes, the limited range of resources and the lack of interaction with contemporary theologians like VanHoozer, McGrath, Bloesch, Pannenberg, Moltmann, and others, will limit its usefulness as a primary text. Barth, for example, is mentioned only twice. Similarly, there is a very Western focus to resources and issues addressed. Modern theological movements like liberation theology and process theology are not covered. Nor is there any significant interaction with theologians outside the Western tradition. These limitations will not be a major hindrance for many evangelical users, but those interested in a more global theological focus will need to look elsewhere.

Perhaps *Biblical Doctrine*'s most distinctive contribution among comparable evangelical theologies is its approach to eschatology, providing a helpful contemporary statement of futuristic premillennialism. It advocates a new creation eschatology rather than a spiritual vision focus. It provides a vigorous defense of futurism, premillennialism, the future fulfillment of Daniel's seventy weeks, and a pretribulation rapture. Advocates of these views will appreciate this clear and coherent exposition. But the shortcomings noted above are evident. For example, the discussion of covenants and views of prophetic fulfillment (about 15 pages of text) includes only four footnotes to articles from the *Master's Seminary Journal*, from which some of the material was adapted. The lack of sustained interaction with the most current resources for alternative positions is unfortunate and will limit its impact in academic settings.

There is also at least one idiosyncratic feature of the book. It has two general editors, but no authors. The preface does mention some Master's Seminary faculty who contributed (and several sections reference faculty articles published elsewhere as significant resources), but it is unclear who assisted with what sections. I would prefer clearer credit be given to those

who contributed.

Despite these limitations, we should welcome *Biblical Doctrine* as a work which will draw attention to and encourage reflection on important theological themes. For that we give thanks and hope that this volume will spur further efforts to make theology relevant to the church.

Carl Sanders
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David L. Allen, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood, eds. *Anyone Can Be Saved: A Defense of "Traditional" Southern Baptist Soteriology.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. xii + 193 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1498285155. $24.00.

Anyone Can be Saved is a defense of the Traditionalist Statement, a 2012 document defining the traditional soteriological view of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and thus the corresponding Traditionalist position on soteriology. The authors of this edited work argue they are attempting to build a doctrine of salvation that arises from the Bible alone, rejecting common presuppositions and definitions from the Calvinism-Arminian debate.

Eric Hankins's chapter on savability lays the foundation for the rest of the book. He provides the context of the soteriology debate and explains how he believes Southern Baptist theology fits into it. He argues the ten articles of the Traditionalist Statement "are simply an expression of the various implications of the belief that anyone can be saved forever" (p. 11). Hankins asserts that because of the SBC's "commitment to biblical authority, to simplicity and praxis, and to passion for missions," an explanation is due on what Southern Baptists mean when they say "the gospel is for all" (p. 11). After this introduction, the book follows the Traditionalist Statement article by article, explaining each tenet of the document. It concludes with a defense against charges of semi-Pelagianism and an overview of various views of divine sovereignty and human freedom.

One of the strengths of this work is the authors consistently return to Scripture to try to rightly interpret its soteriological passages. The authors should also be lauded for their passion to see every person saved and their dedication to this end. Unfortunately, many of their arguments are overshadowed by the book's weaknesses.

One of the main weaknesses of the book is its vague terminology. The contributors need to define several terms they use regularly to provide clarity in the work. The first term requiring definition is the "plain meaning of Scripture." An explanation would help the reader to understand the hermeneutic that the contributors are using because it is such a central

part of their argument. The contributors also need to provide a consistent definition of "Calvinism." In some instances, it refers to five-point Calvinism; in others it refers to a moderate form of Calvinism.

The authors also need to express care in defining their own view. The release of the Traditionalist Statement sparked debate over the issue of semi-Pelagianism. One of the final chapters of the work is a defense against the accusations that those who adhere to the Traditionalist Statement are semi-Pelagians, and while the authors offer a defense against these accusations, there are instances in this work where they get uncomfortably close to that position. This should be remedied in the future if a second edition is released.

Another area lacking refinement is the use of terms such as "many" or "most." In multiple instances, a contributor uses one of these terms without any citations to verify his statements. In his chapter on the free will of man, Braxton Hunter states that "most Southern Baptists find compatibilism to be an unsatisfactory theological explanation" (p. 121). While he may be correct in this statement, he needs a citation to demonstrate this claim.

In the same vein, the contributors make several faulty assumptions and generalizations, implying that the SBC is more cohesive than it actually is. Eric Hankins, for example, states, "For almost a century, Southern Baptists have found that a sound, biblical soteriology can be taught, maintained, and defended without subscribing to Calvinism" (p. 17). Yet, *The Abstract of Principles* (1858), which is still affirmed by some Southern Baptists today, clearly demonstrates affirmation of Calvinist views of soteriology within the SBC. Statements like Hankins's appear throughout the book and present a skewed view of Southern Baptist history. That assessment applies to some Southern Baptists, but certainly not all of them—there is no singular expression of Southern Baptist theology, and there never has been. If the authors desire to use such language they must qualify what they mean and provide evidence.

Finally, the contributors harbor harsh assumptions of Calvinism. There are better ways to critique a position with which one disagrees than by making judgments such as "some of the harsh realities of Calvinism are contrary to the clear teachings of scripture" (p. 77). Statements such as this assume Calvinists care more about their system than trying to rightly interpret Scripture.

To conclude, the editors desire to "contribute to the peaceable, ongoing, convention-wide conversation on the doctrine of salvation" (p. xi). The authors argue they are looking for the common ground they have with Calvinists in the Convention, that Calvinists should not be run out

of the Convention, and that there is a need for mutual respect amid disagreement. Unfortunately, the tone of many of the chapters does not live up to this desire. The overtly anti-Calvinist sentiment hinders the authors' desire to find common ground to work together. While this work desires to promote a dialogue, it fails in this regard. For those who read it and are already convinced of the authors' position, the book will solidify their beliefs. But those who hold to a different position will not be persuaded by its arguments.

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Thomas Dekker. *Four Birds of Noah's Ark: A Prayer Book from the Time of Shakespeare,* ed. Robert Hudson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. 167 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0802874818. $17.99.

Robert Hudson brings Thomas Dekker's collection of prayers, not published since 1924, into the hands, hearts, and minds of twenty-first-century readers. Hudson makes these 400-year-old prayers accessible to today's readers through careful editing and modernization of the original text. However, the original organization is maintained with four birds "to comfort [readers] with four different messages" (p. 19). Hudson's reintroduction of this prayer book gives these emotional and thought-provoking seventeenth-century prayers an opportunity to resonate with Christians today.

Hudson does not simply republish Dekker's work, but he takes accessibility a step further by modernizing the spelling, syntax, and grammar to make the prayers easier for modern readers to understand. He also adds explanatory endnotes for clarity. Some of the longer portions of Dekker's original prayers have been cut and others paraphrased for twenty-first-century readers. Through all the revisions Hudson attempted "to adhere to the high-mindedness of the original" (p. 15). He describes his changes and provides some biographical information about Dekker in the introduction. One of the most helpful revisions is Hudson's division of the prayers into short lines, grouping similar ideas together to encourage the reader to linger over these "stanzas" and meditate on God's provisions. He also adds references to Bible passages with each of the fifty-six prayers for readers who would like to use this edition devotionally. While the table of contents provides only the section headings, a helpful list of all of the prayers is printed at the end of the text.

Hudson follows Dekker's original division of the prayer book into four sections—the dove, the eagle, the pelican, and the phoenix—and concludes with Dekker's collection of pithy quotes. Each bird represents

a different kind of prayer. The dove section focuses on prayers for working people like farmers, apprentices, merchants, sailors, and even school-children. Prayers for royals and rulers make up the eagle section. The pelican and the phoenix represent Christ who shed his blood for his children and rose from death to life. The pelican prayers include prayers against the seven deadly sins, and the phoenix prayers focus on thanksgiving "for the benefits we receive in the death and resurrection of Christ" (p. 123). The final section of the book, "Feathers," is a collection of short quotes from early church fathers which may be used as meditations to accompany the prayers.

Although these prayers were written over 400 years ago, they are strikingly modern in topic and tone and may be used to encourage the prayer life of Christians today. The dove prayers can be used for personal supplication or on behalf of others. For example, "A Prayer for a Chambermaid" could be applicable to any young person who would pray, "As I grow up in years, let me grow up in grace" (p. 35). "A Prayer for Sailors in a Storm at Sea" is not limited to actual sailors but may be prayed for anyone in the midst of the storms of life. Many of the prayers might also prompt readers to pray for those for whom they do not often pray, like people who visit the sick or prisoners in jail. "A Prayer for Those Who Work in Dangerous Places" could be applied to today's politicians, school teachers, or students who have just earned their driver's license. Those in dangerous places are led to pray, "guard me while I lay asleep—oh, let the same watchmen protect me now I am awake" (p. 57).

The prayers for rulers in the eagle section can easily be applied to today's government leaders. There are also prayers for the church and clergy, the courts and judges, the city, and the family. As readers seek to expand their circle of prayer, this section leads them to pray globally for areas of famine and Christians experiencing persecution. In addition to the prayers against the seven deadly sins, the pelican section begins with "A Prayer for the Morning" and ends with "A Prayer for the Evening." Readers are prompted to rise with thanksgiving looking forward to "rising from the grave, when the last trumpet shall sound" (p. 101). When going to bed they are reminded to forgive others as God as forgiven them. The last prayer section, the phoenix, is also encouraging to the modern reader who is reminded of various benefits of Christ's death and resurrection that are taken for granted all too often.

This book contains blessings and solicitations relevant to the twenty-first-century Christian and would serve as a useful instrument in the prayer warrior's tool belt. Pastors, Sunday school teachers, or other church leaders may choose to use this text as a resource to help their flock in the discipline of building a consistent prayer life. Hudson's edition is a

blessing to modern readers because these prayers are as comforting and inspiring today as they were 400 years ago.

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Douglas L. Winiarski. *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England*. Williamsburg, VA: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, and Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. xxiv + 607 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1469628264. $49.95.

Over the past decade, Douglas Winiarski has published a series of groundbreaking articles that have caused historians to reconsider widespread assumptions about the nature of revival in Colonial America and the ministry of Jonathan Edwards. As it turns out, these articles were part of a larger project that has culminated in Winiarski's new book, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England*. It promises to be the sort of work that reframes a field.

Over the course of five extensive "parts" (Winiarski eschews chapters), *Darkness Falls* recasts the story of the First Great Awakening as a radical religious movement, shaped far more by lay sensibilities than the sermons and writings of elite clergy. It upended the conservative sensibilities of New England Congregationalism and fostered a more conversionist, egalitarian religious paradigm that came to be associated with evangelicalism. Rather than seeing the mid-eighteenth-century revivals as the last days of Puritanism, the awakenings marked the transition—even the death knell—of Congregationalism's near-hegemony over New England religion, replacing it with an individualistic pluralism that became part and parcel of religion in the emerging nation. To make his case, Winiarski scoured an epic number of archives in an effort to focus on the lived religion of everyday believers who rejected their Puritan inheritance for an evangelical outlook. The result is a new grand narrative of the Great Awakening "from below" that demonstrates just how much revival was a challenge to Christian culture.

Winiarski argues that pre-revival New England was a conservative culture that emphasized nurture more than conversion. The world of the New England Puritans was a "Land of Light" where adults who had been raised in the church typically sought communicant membership once they had children and often never experienced full assurance of their salvation. Clergy shepherded generations of family members in parish churches whose attendance—and gradually membership—roughly coincided with

the local community. That changed when the revivals demanded Damascus Road–like conversion experiences of all would-be members, often collapsing assurance into conversion. The "Whitefieldarians"—Winiarski's name for radical evangelicals—emphasized the new birth more than church membership, countenanced personal revelations and impressions alongside belief in biblical authority, affirmed exorcisms and miraculous healings, and focused their preaching and teaching on election and conversion rather than a more fully orbed approach to doctrinal formation. Even when moderate (or repentant) Whitefieldarians sought to reign in the more radical elements of the emerging evangelicalism, laypeople remained attracted to the new movements—and the preachers who continued to embrace them.

The Congregationalist parish system gradually collapsed as the revived—almost all of whom were already church attenders and often communicant members—began to abandon their churches for New Light congregations that were more amenable to the Whitefieldarian ethos. Not a few of the radicals rejected the most important visible sign of the Holy Commonwealth—infant baptism—and embraced believer-only baptism as evidence of conversion and the pathway into communicant membership. Radical preachers and periodicals fed the Whitefieldarian tendencies on the left while conservatives, many of whom later became Unitarians and Universalists, rejected revival as religious enthusiasm that threatened the social order itself. Moderates such as Edwards—himself a chastened radical—tried to mark out a middle ground, though most pro-revival New Englanders moved in an increasingly radical direction. The Puritans did not become Yankees—they became evangelicals. And for evangelicals, conversion was normative, meaning arrangements that downplayed transformational encounters with Jesus Christ were actually a threat to authentic religion rather than evidence of a Christ-centered culture.

Darkness Falls on the Land of Light makes a signal contribution to our understanding of the First Great Awakening by focusing on the stories of laypeople and lesser-known pastors and casting the era as one of radicalism as much as revivalism. The scope of Winiarski's research is remarkable, far surpassing the work of other historians before him. While Winiarski's interpretations tend toward a secularist, "closed universe" account that explains away spiritual phenomena as the results of natural causes, he is respectful of the theological convictions of his subjects. Most of the readers of this journal are Baptists, and Winiarski's insights into the ethos of the radical Separate Baptists is an important corrective to the overemphasis on alleged doctrinal and liturgical differences between the ascendant Separates and the older Regular Baptists. Coupled alongside Robert Caldwell's impressive new work *Theologies of the American Revivalists* (IVP

Academic, 2017), which focuses on the thought of revival elites, Winiarski's narrative will shape the way a generation of historians thinks about the history of the First Great Awakening.

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Jarvis J. Williams and Kevin M. Jones, eds. *Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention.* Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017. xvii + 179 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433643347. $24.99.

For years, many leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) have worked diligently to change the popular perception of the denomination as a racist organization of churches born out of a defense of slavery and consisting primarily of white southerners. Despite the daunting task before them, these leaders set out to ensure that no other Protestant denomination in twenty-first-century America would come close to matching their efforts in denouncing racism and promoting genuine racial reconciliation. This effort began in earnest in 1995 when the SBC passed a resolution publicly repenting of its historic connections to both slavery and racism and reached a major milestone in 2012 with the election of an African American, Fred Luter, as the president of the SBC. Despite this aggressive campaign, and its notable accomplishments, the SBC and its churches continue to be looked upon with suspicion by non-whites. Although the SBC can lay claim to be the most ethnically-diverse Protestant denomination in America, it is still a predominately white, southern denomination. In addition, the recent actions of some of its leaders have caused some minorities to question the SBC's commitment to ethnic diversity. In 2016, a number of prominent individuals associated with the SBC, such as Jerry Falwell, Jr., and the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Robert Jeffress, championed the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump, whose campaign was widely viewed as driven by racist rhetoric. Likewise, in 2017, the SBC was widely criticized when it stumbled in passing a resolution condemning the white-supremacist-tainted Alt-Right movement because some questioned the wording of the resolution.

This new book, edited by two African-American professors at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is a collection of essays written by black and white SBC leaders explaining the racist roots of the denomination, identifying the progress it has made, and most importantly, providing suggestions for moving forward. While the essays are uneven in length, quality, and substance, there are some common themes found throughout the book. Every contributor obviously longs for the day when racism no longer exists in the SBC, but none of them believe this goal has

been met. Several contributors reference relatively recent accounts of racism in the SBC. Some are examples of enduring racist policies, such as an SBC church not allowing the body of a biracial child to be buried in its cemetery (p. 132), while others reveal lingering racist attitudes, such as when, in 2012, a high-ranking administrator in an unnamed SBC seminary made it clear to Dr. Walter Strickland of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary that he did not consider the works of African-American theologians to be "real theology" (p. 54).

Another discernable theme running through the essays is that white members of the SBC generally (though not universally) possess noble motives when it comes to racial inclusion, but that it will take more than mere sentiments and statements to achieve their goals. What is ultimately needed is for the SBC to perceptibly practice racial inclusion rather than continue to reflect the majority culture. Fortunately, contributors to this book provide concrete steps to take to ensure the SBC will one day look more like the Bible's revelation of heaven: a gathering of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation worshipping God together as one.

The two primary steps identified in this book, from the bottom up, are: (1) white pastors should demonstrate their commitment to racial unity not only through the content of their sermons but also by ensuring that non-whites are found among their friends and staff members, and (2) SBC entities, including state conventions and agencies such as the IMB, NAMB, and LifeWay, should employ non-whites and provide products and services that will be welcomed by non-whites. Curricula and books published by LifeWay should not assume a white audience, depicting whites in pictures or exclusively featuring white authors. Seminary faculties, as well as the readings that faculty members assign their students, should also reflect greater ethnic diversity. And finally, non-whites should occupy prominent positions of power and influence in these various entities. In short, if the stain of racism is ever going to disappear from the SBC, then SBC churches, associations, conventions, seminaries, and agencies must indicate by their actions that they are not run by and for whites. Such change requires nothing short of a cultural shift in the SBC, whereby the thoughts, words, and actions of the whites who currently dominate the convention are guided not by the default majority white culture, but rather by one that is multi-ethnic, multi-racial, biblical, and inclusive.

Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention demonstrates that the SBC has made great strides in repudiating its racist heritage but shows that there is still much work to be done. By God's grace, the matter is not left there. Instead, those who contribute to this timely and helpful book explain what can and should be done to bring the Southern

Baptist Convention into conformity with God's vision for the church.

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Jeremy M. Kimble. *40 Questions About Church Membership and Discipline.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017. 272 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0825444456. $14.99.

Since the publication of Mark Dever's *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* virtually two decades ago, the topics of church membership and discipline have generated important discussions within many local churches. For several reasons, however, many of those churches are still unclear on exactly how to go through the distinct processes of church membership and discipline. Jeremy Kimble has done a fantastic job of assembling a straightforward and practical guide for local churches to address and practice these matters. Defining his target audience and purpose in the opening sentence of the introduction, he states: "This book is intended to assist Christians, pastors, and churches to rightly understand and apply biblical truth regarding church membership and church discipline" (p. 9).

Kimble's book is part of a continuing 40 Questions series. Much like the entire series, this volume is not intended to be a scholarly work. Rather, it is written as a handbook for pastors and church members and written on a layman's level. As the title highlights, Kimble has assembled forty questions regarding church membership and discipline. Each question is subsequently answered in a chapter that is approximately six to eight pages in length, making the entire book a total of 272 pages (including preliminary and supplementary material). Each chapter begins with the primary question as its title, then, typically, has a short introductory paragraph that provides the outline for the forthcoming response. The argument is presented and is followed by a succinct summarizing paragraph to draw the chapter to a close. Each chapter has approximately five "Reflection Questions," which are remarkably helpful for the intended audience. These questions are excellent tools to help churches and leaders apply the biblical truths that have been outlined.

While the book is divided into four parts, each segment is not equally weighted. Part One has four chapters, dealing with "General Questions about Membership and Discipline." Parts Two and Three are constructed and outlined in similar fashion and make up thirty-four chapters of the book (sixteen chapters and eighteen chapters respectively). Part Two is titled "General Questions about Church Membership" while Part Three is "General Questions about Church Discipline." Each of these parts is then divided into three sections dealing with: A. Theological Questions,

B. Ministry Questions, and C. Practical Questions. Part Four contains two chapters that connect membership and discipline to the broader picture of theology and everyday Christian life.

Let it be clearly stated that the strengths of this book are too numerous to list in this brief review. Kimble presents a practical, easy-to-read guide on these issues. He has certainly done his homework, as he includes an Old Testament perspective on both topics, which many books with similar discussions omit. Kimble is also willing to deal with difficult texts (e.g., Matt 7:1, on judging, p. 208) and offers practical suggestions for the modern local church, recognizing that his perspective may not be agreed upon by all readers. Finally, Kimble has carefully woven the issues of membership, discipleship, discipline, and ecclesiology into the larger framework of the Kingdom of God.

There are relatively few weaknesses and it seems hypercritical to highlight them. While most of the book is well organized, its concluding section is disproportionately brief. The breadth of material that Kimble has managed to cover in the previous thirty-eight questions is significant, so to conclude with two rather inconclusive and non-comprehensive questions ("What is the Significance of Church Membership and Discipline for Theology?" and "What is the Significance of Church Membership and Discipline for the Christian Life?") leaves the reader feeling that this discussion has yet to be finalized. Additionally, since Kimble uses several images to describe the church (p. 22), it is surprising, considering his ecclesiology, that he does not provide a description of the church as the "bride of Christ" (see Rev 21). Finally, Kimble uses the words "commitment" and "covenant" synonymously in his definition of church membership. It is my perspective that those terms have nuanced definitions, and church membership should be viewed and examined as a commitment (see Matt 5:37), not a lifelong covenant.

In conclusion, *40 Questions About Church Membership and Discipline* is an excellent contribution to the discussion of ecclesiology, not to mention the 40 Questions series. Kimble's submission should be on the shelf, and perhaps required reading, of every local church pastor. At the very least, it should be easily accessible when such issues arise within the church. While this book may not show up on a best-seller list, Kimble thoroughly accomplished his goal of assisting churches and pastors by applying biblical truth to the areas of membership and discipline.

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G. Geoffrey Harper and Kit Barker, eds. *Finding Lost Words: The Church's Right to Lament*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017. xvii + 287 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1532617478. $36.00.

Finding Lost Words (hereafter *FLW*) is a timely work on a neglected topic in the Christian church: lament. According to the editors, two underlying convictions and two general aims guide the volume. The two convictions are that "the church needs to rediscover lament" (p. 2) and that "there is a felt need to bridge the gap that exists between biblical scholarship and the church" (p. 3). *FLW* aims "to make recent development in Psalms scholarship accessible to pastors and students, and to assuage the loss of lament in the life of the church" (p. 3). It carefully defends these convictions and pursues these aims. It is an erudite combination of breadth and depth. It covers enough material to proffer a thorough argument, but it also provides such detailed argumentation that the relevant issues are adequately assessed. In the following paragraphs, I provide positive feedback and constructive criticism of *FLW*.

I focus on outlining four positive aspects of *FLW*, primarily by evaluating representative chapters. My explanation of the positive elements of the book, through the lenses of these individual chapters, hopes to elucidate the overarching contribution of this volume. First, the comprehensiveness of *FLW* is its greatest strength. In one volume, the authors engage in various fields of study such as the history of interpretation, speech act theory, theological interpretation, textual criticism, canonical theory, translation theory, pastoral theology, homily, and psychology, to name just a few. Each field is adeptly utilized, and the chapters carefully organized to defend, invite, and explain the place of lament in the contemporary church. *FLW*'s comprehensiveness and clarity make it a welcome contribution to the topic of lament. It is an exemplar of interdisciplinary biblical and theological research.

Second, *FLW* provides a potent argument for the revival of lament in the church. The authors make this argument from numerous angles, but one angle is particularly salient. David Burge shows that Jesus, Peter, and Paul lamented and even commended lament for later generations of Christians (pp. 116–29). Suffering was a common experience of these three figures and this led them to lament (e.g., Jesus' lament from the cross, Peter's bitter weeping after denying Christ, and Paul's unceasing anguish for the Jews in Rom 9:1–3). Christians sometimes think that lament is unacceptable because the New Testament teaches that suffering produces endurance and joy. Burge draws attention to the other side of the coin. Suffering also leads to lament in the New Testament, especially in the lives of these central figures.

Third, multiple chapters of *FLW* utilize reception history to defend their thesis. One chapter is particularly illuminating. Ian Maddock analyzes the reception of Psalm 77 in the preaching of John Calvin, Matthew Henry, John Wesley, and Charles Simeon (pp. 24–36). Simeon argued that Psalm 77 serves as an example of distrust in God while Henry emphasized that the psalm ends on a note of trust. For different reasons, they both believed that lament reflected faithlessness rather than faith. In contrast, Calvin and Wesley contended that Psalm 77 reveals a deep trust in God's faithfulness. Maddock uses these varied interpretations of the biblical text in times past to instruct the contemporary church in the practice of lament. Maddock commends the way of Calvin and Wesley rather than the way of Simeon and Henry. His use of reception history is keen and instructive.

Fourth, *FLW* untangles the thorny problem of imprecatory prayers. This problem arises in multiple chapters, but Kit Barker's explanation represents the balanced approach that the entire volume takes towards this delicate issue (pp. 94–107). Barker makes three points about imprecation: imprecation is not about personal vengeance but about entrusting vengeance to YHWH, it is an act of faith in YHWH's sovereignty, and it is an act of loyalty as it reveals that we are a part of YHWH's camp. This careful, balanced thinking pervades Barker's chapter on Psalm 69, and it characterizes much of the book.

These are a few examples of the general orientation of *FLW*. Overall, this volume is a clear, balanced, and timely approach to a neglected subject. It is not flawless, however. The flaws are not characteristic of the entire volume but rather of the individual chapters. Two examples are salient. First, David Cohen argues that the lament psalms attempt to leverage favor with God amid trying circumstances (p. 70). However, it is more likely that the lament psalms attempt to motivate divine action rather than leverage divine favor. Second, Andrew Shead uses meter in his (otherwise helpful) translation and analysis of Psalm 80 (pp. 175–88). This approach is undesirable since James Kugel (*The Idea of Biblical Poetry*) and others have shown that biblical Hebrew poetry is not metrical.

In conclusion, this book deserves a hearing in the academy and the church today because it adequately addresses a neglected subject.

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Mark A. Maddix and James Riley Estep, Jr. *Practicing Christian Education: An Introduction to Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 192 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0801030963. $22.99.

For some, the words "Christian education" conjure images of flannel graphs or poorly lit Sunday school classrooms with complimentary bad coffee. This sort of thinking is unfortunate if the goal of Christian education is to "[form] an environment wherein believers are instructed, equipped, and nurtured for a life of faith in the real world" (p. 6). So, given the importance of Christian education in the life of the individual Christian, the local church, and one's community, Mark A. Maddix and James Riley Estep, Jr. have written *Practicing Christian Education: An Introduction for Ministry*.

Practicing Christian Education provides a thumbnail sketch of Christian education, particularly as it relates to the life of the local church. It does so over seventeen brief chapters, each of which concludes with reflection questions and suggestions for further reading. Some chapters include appendices. The authors draw on Christian theology and the social sciences to develop a practical guide to education that is Christian (p. 37).

In chapter one, the authors describe education, apply it to Christian education, and briefly state why it is necessary for the life of the local church. The authors rightly note that "wherever learning is occurring, education is occurring" (p. 2). This insight leads them to approach Christian education from a holistic perspective (p. 3).

Chapter two is a study of biblical principles for practicing Christian education. The authors cover several of the relevant texts (Deut 6:4–9; Matt 28:19–20; and Acts 2:42). They also look to Ezra's example (in Ezra 7:10) to highlight four characteristics of effective Christian educators (p. 12): "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel" (ESV).

The goal of chapter three is to provide "an overview of the primary theological doctrines and their relationship to Christian education" (p. 15). Because of the brevity of the section on theological doctrines, the authors' descriptions tend to be reductionist.

In chapter four, the authors focus on the historical development of Christian education until the present day. Included in this chapter are two extremely helpful tables ("Precursors to Christian Education" and "Rise of Christian Education"), giving a historical overview of Christian education (pp. 28–29, 30–33).

In chapter five, Maddix and Estep define Christian education and introduce and explain three approaches to theology and education: exclusivity, primacy, and an integrative approach, which they favor (pp. 43–44).

Chapter six addresses the place of Christian education as a church-related ministry. After briefly describing what the New Testament says about ministry in general, the authors outline the defining marks of a Christian education pastor (pp. 48–50).

Chapter seven overviews three ways people learn and begins to think through how this might look in a Christian context. According to the authors, people learn through conceptual development, experiences, and skill learning (pp. 53–59).

In chapter eight, the authors discuss the place of Scripture in the formation of a Christian. Since Christian education is concerned with the formation of people into the likeness of Christ and because Scripture is "an indispensable element for practicing Christian education" (p. 63), they address three formative Bible practices related to Christian education: *lectio divina*, small group inductive Bible study, and corporate worship. However, the authors' support of the Catholic practice of *lectio divina* is problematic due to its highly subjective nature.

Chapter nine explains congregational formation and how it is accomplished in the life of the local church. Chapter ten naturally follows with the "what and how" of Christian formation, particularly as it is facilitated in the local church (pp. 87–89).

Chapter eleven focuses on developmental theories and how they relate to learning and spiritual growth. To reach this goal, the authors discuss three theories of human growth: cognitive, moral, and faith development (pp. 92–96). The following chapter continues the theme with a discussion of human development, particularly as it relates to stages of life.

Chapters thirteen through seventeen are more practical in nature, as they discuss what a Christian education pastor does, namely, teaching, administrating, curriculum evaluation, and equipping believers for Christian service. Chapter sixteen would be particularly helpful for anyone who teaches in a local church setting, especially one who has little or no formal background in Christian education.

Maddix and Estep are to be commended for tackling as broad a subject as Christian education in a book of this size. Alongside the theory of Christian education, they add much practical wisdom that should encourage and equip Christian educators in their ministry. This book would be an ideal text for an undergraduate course on Christian education and could also be used in a foundations course for a graduate program in Christian education, since almost all of the topics covered in the text are generally covered in greater detail as part of a program's scope and sequence. The book, however, is heavily influenced by Wesleyan teaching on Christian education and Wesleyan theology. That is not necessarily a

bad thing. It must simply be recognized.

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Ayman S. Ibrahim. *The Stated Motivations for the Early Islamic Expansion (622–641): A Critical Revision of Muslims' Traditional Portrayal of the Arab Raids and Conquests*. Crosscurrents: New Studies on the Middle East. New York: Peter Lang, 2018. xxiv + 242 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433135286. $99.95.

It is no secret that studies of Islamic origins are characterized by a good deal of ferment in our day. Whereas some engage in wholesale efforts to question the foundations of Islamic historiography, Ayman Ibrahim, an Egyptian Christian and director of the Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam, draws on Islamic sources to raise two related questions: What can account for the rapid, early expansion of the Islamic Umma in the early decades of Islam? What were the motives of the generals and leaders under Muhammad and his successors as they engaged in one of the most rapid military expansions the world has ever seen?

Limiting himself to Islamic historians and chroniclers, and preferring the earlier ones when possible, Ibrahim examines what Muslims had to say about this rapid expansion. Of course, like anyone engaged in Muslim-Christian dialogue or Muslim evangelism, Ibrahim knows the standard apologetic line: The rapid expansion of *Dar al-Islam* was due to the sincere, spiritual desire of the Muslims to liberate communities living under the benighted practitioners of disbelief (*kufr*) and association (*shirk*). However, is this supported by the evidence?

With very extensive footnotes the author chronicles event after event—the extermination of the Jewish tribes of Medina, Muhammad's raids, the wars of apostasy, the conquest of Syria, the conquest of Egypt—and shows that in reality the principal motives of the conquerors had little or nothing to do with any spiritual endeavor. In fact, they were almost always dominated by the desire for spoils and slaves, and sometimes by a desire for political advantage. After outlining his methods and sources, he devotes the bulk of the book to examining the sources.

Chapter five is valuable enough to stand alone for researchers, since here the author explores some important—and controversial—terms in the Qur'an, namely *jihad* (struggle or strive) and *qital* (fighting). He also tries to discern to what extent the People of the Book (i.e., Christians and Jews) are to be fought against. Are all of them unbelievers by virtue of having rejected Muhammad? Or is it rather the case that only a *portion* of

the People of the Book are to be the objects of jihad, fighting, and killing? His painstaking treatment of the topic seems to presuppose that the Qur'an consistently and systematically sticks to this or that term. However, a strong argument can be made that the choice of vocabulary in the Qur'an has more to do with rhythm, rhyme, and oratory than any sort of grammatical consistency. Nevertheless, chapter five concludes with an interesting evaluation of certain verses that are commonly cited to assure the world that Islam is a "religion of peace."

A minor weakness of the book is Ibrahim's use of the term "traditional interpretation" of Islamic expansion. By this he means the standard exculpatory narrative, that the Islamic conquests were not carried out for the sake of booty but for the sake of spiritual "striving." In our own times when the public image of Islam has been tarnished in the eyes of many, it is not surprising that such an apologetic should become commonplace. It would be preferable though to refer to this "traditional interpretation" as the "apologetic interpretation," since the word *tradition* has a very specific meaning in Islam and can refer to the Sunna of Muhammad himself. And in fact, Ibrahim cites this very body of work at times to *refute* the "traditional interpretation." There are also a number of small grammatical and punctuation errors scattered throughout *The Stated Motivations*, and at times I felt like the text had been edited and re-edited by so many people that a clear line of argument was difficult to discern.

Nevertheless, Ibrahim's inclusion of Arabic phrases from the original (i.e., historical and qur'anic) texts is appreciated (albeit in the modified Latin alphabet). This is important because words in Arabic may have slightly different meanings than their English translations. Moreover, Ibrahim is clearly successful in his main endeavor—demonstrating that the apologetic reading of Islamic expansion finds no support at all in the words and texts of the earliest Muslim witnesses and their historiographers.

I certainly hope that Muslim scholars and apologists will carefully engage with this book. My own work on converts from Islam to Christianity points to the reality that when Muslims delve deeply into their own history and the biography of Muhammad, they often seriously start to question the rosy claims of the local imam. On the other hand, my years of experience in communicating with Muslims make me a little hesitant. As I've said in so many lectures and classes to Christians and secular people: What matters is not what actually happened at the birth of Islam; what matters is what Muslims *believe* happened.

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Terryl L. Givens. *Feeding the Flock: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Church and Praxis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. xi + 410 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0199794935. $34.95.

Feeding the Flock: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Church and Praxis by Terryl L. Givens, a prolific and brilliant Latter-day Saint scholar, is the second of a two-volume set that explores the development and contemporary shape of Mormon thought and practice. (The first volume, *Wrestling the Angel*, lays the theological foundation necessary for this survey of Mormon practice.) Givens' work is unique in that he is careful not to create another commentary on the historical and contemporary Mormon experience (i.e., Mormon sociology) but steadfastly contrasts Mormon thought with its praxis (i.e., Mormon ecclesiology).

Feeding the Flock is a survey of an interconnected landscape of theology, sacraments, religious authority, ecclesiastical structure, and worship. Givens begins his survey with a foundational question: What is the LDS Church and why is it necessary? He prefaces his answer by acknowledging that the LDS Church in some ways mirrors Christianity while in other ways stands in stark contrast to it. Above all, on the heels of *Wrestling the Angel*, the LDS Church is Mormon thought incarnate. To Givens, it is a community of God's literal offspring journeying through faith-based and sacramentally-driven sanctification toward an exaltation of theosis so that the "New and Everlasting Covenant"—preached from time immemorial, lost to humanity through sin, and restored by Joseph Smith via prophecy and the Book of Mormon—may be fully realized.

This community is bonded together by a single covenantal system established by God and maintained through ordained authorities and divine sacraments. The theme of covenantal community, the flock of God, is woven throughout the entire book. Regardless of the flavor or mode of practices, covenant community is the sinew that holds Mormon praxis together. It is noteworthy that Givens juxtaposes Mormon communitarianism and Protestant individualism in a critique of the latter that, admittedly, I found a bit stale. He rightly notes that Protestantism (especially in America) has historically emphasized individual salvation. However, in recent years, a shift away from individualism has occurred that Givens does not address thoroughly. He acknowledges movements like the "New Perspective on Paul," but only in passing (p. 18). This shift away from individualism, I believe, warrants more treatment than it receives. Just as Givens is criticizing Finney's anxious bench, American Protestantism is loosening it from the church floor.

In any event, what is the purpose of Mormon sacraments? Unique,

and different to most Christian soteriology, Mormonism holds a paradoxical hope that the covenant community encompasses more than is contained within the borders of Temple Square. Through Mormon sacramentalism, practicing Latter-day Saints and the entire family of humanity are invited into a soteriological progression that extends itself beyond space and time. The sacraments are performed in sacred spaces in the here and now by Latter-day Saints but also include people who have passed on without the possibility of participating in their lifetime. Givens argues that these sacraments (e.g., eternal marriage, family sealing, signs and tokens, esoteric knowledge, baptism for both the living and the dead, etc.) are constitutive of, but not prerequisite to, salvation. This point seems contradictory. After all, how can an ordinance such as baptism be constitutive of salvation and yet not a requirement for it? The answer, I suspect, lies in the enigmatic relationship between Mormon exceptionalism and its welcoming of pluralistic (or, better, *inclusivistic*) means of sanctification. Regardless, Givens rightly stresses that the LDS Church conceptualizes its core function as a "portal of salvation" (not a repository of salvation), sustained by a soteriology that envelops all humanity, living and dead, to varying degrees of glory (p. 29).

The LDS Church practices this sacramental system on the basis of priesthood authority. Having once been lost from the earth, the restored priesthood is a two-tiered order of authority (Aaronic and Melchizedek) whereby all members, not merely men, are invited to cooperate with the Holy Ghost in advancing the project of humanity's mortal probation toward exaltation. Givens tackles the contemporary issue of women and the priesthood by bifurcating priestly roles from ecclesiastical offices, where the former are open to all genders while the latter are reserved only for men. His defense for the LDS Church's policy is clear and succinct but, I imagine, far from being settled.

With restored priesthood authority comes the giving of spiritual gifts. Personal revelation—the internal subjective verification of Mormon truth claims—is, perhaps, the most well-known among non-LDS, but other gifts play a significant, albeit discrete, role in contemporary Mormonism as well (e.g., visions, prophetic testimony, healing, tongues, discernment, and exorcism). Givens concludes his survey by considering the role of the Mormon canon in the life of the LDS Church and by exploring its weekly liturgical worship, prayer, catechism, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines.

This work is yet another testament to Givens' considerable ability of distilling a mind-numbing amount of information into a masterpiece that speaks effectively to both experts and general readers. In short, Givens has done it again. *Feeding the Flock* makes for the perfect (even *necessary*)

companion volume to *Wrestling the Angel*, filling in what little theological blanks remained and opening new and interesting questions on Mormon praxis to advance the conversation. Together, these two volumes will serve non-LDS readers well in helping them to understand the thought and practice that drives Mormonism.

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