

## Session 1

### Taking Our Context Seriously and the Bible Authoritatively

#### Realities as we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- The demise of colonialism
- The rise of nationalism
- The Cold War Thaws
- Emergence of global economy
- Continuing gaps between have and have-nots
- Religious militancy

#### Variant Views of the World

- **Globalization**—Thomas Freidman—*The Lexus and The Olive Tree—The World is Flat*
  - “The driving force behind globalization is free market capitalization.”
  - Globalization has leveled the competitive playing fields between industrial and emerging market countries.
- **Civilization**—Samuel Huntington—*The Clash of Civilizations*
  - “Culture and cultural identities are shaping patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflicts in post Cold-War World.”
  - Civilizations, Western, Latin American, African-Sub-Sahara, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, Japanese
- **11<sup>th</sup> Hour**—Lazarus Chakwara, Malawi
  - “The World sees Africa through eyes of tragedy, war and hopelessness. But we have been liberated to participate in the Harvest. The Bible says that the very fact that the world views us as last is the reason God wants us for this 11<sup>th</sup> hour in this end-time Harvest.”
- **The Next Christendom**
  - 5% non-western Christians in 1900 to 66%+ non-western in 2000
  - Non-western missions efforts-the object of missions is now partners with historic senders
  - Religious changes in the world are most significant
  - “European Christian civilization” has met its demise
  - To evaluate Christianity through such a lens is myopic
  - “As Southern churches grow and mature, they will increasingly define their own interests in ways that have little to do with the preferences of Americans and Europeans.
  - There can be no doubt the emerging Christian world will be anchored in the Southern continents.
    - Philip Jenkins—*The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*

#### A Haunting Question

In 1998, missiologist Ralph Winter queried whether or not the Christian world still takes seriously the maintenance of intentional evangelistic effort across geographical and cultural

barriers.<sup>1</sup> A related question does loom on the horizon as to what eschatological motivation may be present in this continuing zealous cross-cultural witness. Will the “this worldly” empowerment of the Pentecostal identity actually disconnect the “eternal perspective” from eschatological rootings?<sup>2</sup>

### ***Missio Dei as an Attempt to Bring Clarity to Mission***

*Missio Dei* was a term appearing in the 1950s, under the auspices of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council. It was a term that emerged to affirm that the true center of growth of mission was not the Church, but the self-revelation of the Triune God. The focus of the term was to be on everything God does in the communication of salvation. While well-intended, the politicizing of the term became evident in the decades of the 1960s-80s that featured a liberationist understanding of *mission Dei*.<sup>3</sup>

### **Who Gets to Narrate the World?**

“The loss of God’s narrative in the West does not mean that the outline of God’s narrative has been lost. What has been lost is, first, the full interpretation of the story that lies behind the narrative framework, and, second, the impact of this narrative on the forming of society.

In the Incarnation, God lifted up into Himself the entire creation, so that the redeemed Creation is once again, as in the Garden, the theater of his glory.

By the beginning of the twentieth century it was quite clear that a new narrative (or narratives) had emerged. The story of God, which had emerged out of the ancient period of history and had influenced the foundations of the Western world, has now been replaced by a secular narrative. Humanity—its origins, meaning and destiny—no longer believes it needs the divine narrative. Reason, science, evolution and progress—these ideas replace the old narrative of creation, incarnation, re-creation. The world can now be understood without God.”<sup>4</sup>

“There is an urgent need to restore this connection between the narrative, the church and its ministries. It is urgent because the church and its ministries are currently disconnected from the narratives. Leaders are confused about the topics the call addresses:

- What is God’s narrative?
- What is the church?
- What is theology?
- What is worship?
- What is spirituality?
- What is the life of the church in the world?

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph Winter, “The Meaning of Mission: Understanding this Term is Crucial to Completion of the Missionary Task,” in *Mission Frontiers*, vol. 20, no 3-4, (March-April 1998), 15.

<sup>2</sup>A most persuasive argument for the influence of eschatology on Pentecostal mission identity and strategy is made by D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Theology*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup>Tom Stransky, “*Missio Dei*” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicholas Lossky et al., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 687-689.

<sup>4</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World: Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 88.

When the church and its ministries are disconnected from God's narrative, they become subject to the whims of culture. So who then gets to define the church and its ministries? Culture? Philosophy? Sociology? Anthropology? Politics? Business? Marketing? Consumerism? The media?"<sup>5</sup>

"God's *narrative* is the one true story of the world.

- The church's *mission* is to be a witness to God's narrative of the world (*mission Dei*).
- *Theology* is the church's corporate reflection on God's narrative.
- *Worship* sings, proclaims and enacts God's narrative to the glory of God.
- Individual *spirituality* is the personal embodiment of God's narrative in all of life.
- Collective *spirituality* is the church's embodied life in the world."<sup>6</sup>

### ***Missional as a "dawning" category***

The Gospel and Culture Network is a North American attempt at clarifying the theme of mission. A synthesis of their priorities is as follows:

1. The missional church proclaims the gospel.
2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
3. The Bible is normative in this church's life.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.
7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.
9. The church practices hospitality.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
11. This community has a vital public witness.
12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 11-12. See also Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2006).

## Further Attempts at Missional Clarification

### A Biblical Theologian Speaks on Mission

Mission, then, in biblical terms, while it inescapably involves us in planning and action, is not primarily a matter of our activity or our initiative. Mission, from the point of view of our human endeavor, means the committed participation of God's people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation. The mission is God's. The marvel is that God invites us to join in. 'Mission arises from the heart of God himself and is communicated from his heart to ours. Mission is the global outreach of the global people of a global God.'

Putting these perspectives together, a missional hermeneutic means that we seek to read any part of the Bible in light of:

- God's purpose for his whole creation, including the redemption of humanity and the creation of the new heavens and new earth
- God's purpose for human life in general on the planet and of all the Bible teaches about human culture, relationships, ethics and behavior
- God's historical election of Israel, their identity and role in relations to the nations, and the demands he made on their worship, social ethics, and total value system
- The centrality of Jesus of Nazareth, his messianic identity and mission in relation to Israel and the nations, his cross and resurrection
- God's calling of the church, the community of believing Jews and Gentiles who constitute the extended people of the Abraham covenant, to be the agent of God's blessing to the nations in the name and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

### The Well of Thematic Resources

- **Apostolic**—Twenty-first century mission must still be a core in proclamation of the Gospel to places and people who are most resistant and have the least opportunity to hear the Gospel. Alan Johnson summarizes apostolic ministry well when he states that a new sense of missionary identity "should be formed around the notion of apostolic function. By this term, I mean that cross-cultural work should be framed around the understanding that apostles had of their work and the actual kind of work that they did. After reviewing the biblical material on apostleship, I agree that apostolic function must focus on the apostolic task of preaching the Gospel where it has not been heard, planting the church where it does not exist, and leading people to the obedience of faith so that they will express Jesus Christ in their social worlds and participate in God's global mission"<sup>9</sup>
- **Kingdom**—A fuller acknowledgment of the breadth of God's rule over His creation<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67-68. (Internal quote by John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 335).

<sup>9</sup> Alan Johnson, *Apostolic Function: The Paradigm of Missionary Identity J. Philip Hogan World Missions Series Monograph, Vol. 1* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2007), 50-51.

<sup>10</sup> Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Irvine, CA: Regnum Books, 1999), 11-75. For more information, see [www.ocms.ac.uk](http://www.ocms.ac.uk).

- **Pentecost**—The guarantee that God’s redemptive mission, fully actualized and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, continues today intact
- **Gospel and Culture**—*Kerygma*, *Koinonia* and *Diakonia*—Dynamics of the Gospel
- **Eschatology**—urgency and destiny lost as motivational factors
- **Church as the Hermeneutic of the Gospel**—Newbigin focused on the congregation “as hermeneutic of the gospel ... How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **Additional Resources**

- Personal website of Earl Creps [www.Earlcreps.com](http://www.Earlcreps.com)
- Peter Berger, “Religion in a Globalizing World” Electronic Pew Forum, <http://pewforum.org/events/?EventID=136> (accessed September 5, 2008).
- The Gospel and Our Culture Network [www.gocn.org](http://www.gocn.org)
- Future Church [www.futurechurch.com](http://www.futurechurch.com)
- Inaugural Lecture by Alan Johnson “Apostolic Function and Mission” Delivered at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary October 11, 2006. [http://www.agts.edu/faculty/faculty\\_publications/lectures/johnson\\_dr\\_lecture.pdf](http://www.agts.edu/faculty/faculty_publications/lectures/johnson_dr_lecture.pdf) John G.
- Stackhouse, Jr., “A Bigger—and Smaller—View of Mission” in *Christianity Today* [http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2007/06/a\\_biggerand\\_smallerview\\_of\\_mis.html](http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2007/06/a_biggerand_smallerview_of_mis.html)

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<sup>11</sup>J. E. Lesslie, Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227-232.