

# Radical Contextualization:

Relevant Articles by Ralph D. Winter

*“We began to realize that it’s not just how many unreached peoples are left, but also that some large blocs of peoples are superficially touched by gospel witness—and that some “reached” peoples aren’t really reached. ... We will often need to go beyond radical contextualization—to recognize that some people around the world will choose to go beyond current expressions of biblical faith now recognized as ‘Christianity.’”—Ralph D. Winter*

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## **The Bible, Reformation and Modern Missions**

*(Mission Frontiers, September-October 1996).*

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-bible-reformation-and-modern-missions>

This three-page article presents what may seem to be a new perspective on the Bible, the Reformation, and Missions, and provides the basis for the unusual theme of this whole issue.

I learned in Sunday School that “Jesus died on the cross to save me from my sins.” I accepted him as my personal Savior. I learned that Jesus sent His followers to all the world to preach the Gospel. I saw how Paul actually went out and did it. And that's how Christianity began!

Great! But what was not clear to me for an embarrassingly long time was that Paul's chief contribution was to make the Gospel into a runaway best seller by detaching it from the Jewish cultural tradition--just as Luther later by detaching the Gospel from the Latin tradition.

I did not realize the extent to which the massive Jewish community within the Roman Empire (about 10%), had been a quiet testimony for many decades. The Empire had accorded them special favors because of their exemplary behavior. They even sent out missionaries a hundred years before Jesus was born. Jesus spoke of some of them, “travelling over land and sea to make a single convert” (Matt 23:15;). They did not fail, exactly, but they sometimes attempted to make Greeks into Jews instead of believers. That did not succeed very well.

What Paul did was to release the Gospel from its Jewish clothes. What Luther did was to release the Gospel from its Latin clothing. What is about to happen on a global level is the release of the Gospel from its distinctively Western clothing.

This is an incredible, world-level “reformation” which apparently must happen, is mainly yet to occur and will radically change our understanding of the Hindu and the Muslim challenge.

### **The Bible Revisited**

But to be absolutely sure of what we are looking for in a “reformation” in missions today, let's revisit the New Testament.

First of all, the Bible emphasizes all the way through that the only Jews who were pleasing to God were those who were Jews inwardly, not just outwardly. Thus, to any clear thinking person, it would do no good for the Greeks and the Romans to become Jews outwardly. Not everyone understood this. Jesus' complaint in the verse just mentioned (Matt 23:15) was that outward converts were simply not good enough.

What was the coming “reformation” back then? It had to come. It took a long time. What led up to it?

The Jewish people, migrating out through the Roman Empire mixed among the Romans for many decades. Many were high minded and godly people and as a result quite a few Romans and Greeks became followers or seekers. The Jews called them “God fearers” or “devout persons.”

But for every Roman who became resigned to putting on Jewish clothing (taking over customs like circumcision and dietary regulations), there might have been ten or

twenty or 100 who devoutly sought the God of the Jews while being unconvinced about the outward clothing. Something had to give.

God told Peter to go to the home of a nasty dirty Gentile Roman. At first he objected, but God insisted. And (Peter could hardly believe it) God made clear that Gentiles were acceptable to Him if their hearts were right—whether or not they put on Jewish clothing. Was God changing the rules? Was He launching a new deal? Did He really prefer the faith in Greek clothing? Cornelius really wasn't nasty and dirty, except ritually. He was in fact widely recognized by many Jews as a devout person, a God-fearer, along with his whole household. He was generous to the poor and a man of prayer (Acts 10:2). In this dramatic moment Peter discovered, at God's insistence, the explosive truth that “in every nation such people are welcome to God” (Acts 10:35).

Such people? Such people had heard the word through Jews—people who were foreign to their culture. They had heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His redeeming death and His glorious resurrection. They recognized that the Jews had been ordered to preach this Gospel and to testify of Jesus (Acts 10:36-43) .

Seeing all this, Peter crumpled in a moment of new awareness—God would accept these people. He stammered out, “Why, these people ought to be baptized!” The gifts of the Spirit were apparent, the breakthrough had come. A significant "reformation" had taken place. It was now clear that Gentiles did not have to become Jews outwardly. The important thing was that they have an inward faith--like all those in the Old Testament who were “Jews inwardly.” So, you can imagine, the word quickly spread that “the Gentiles also had received the word of God” (Acts 11:1).

But some of the folks back home complained. “Are you telling us, Peter,” they glared, “that you went to uncircumcised men and ate with them?” Peter numbly recalled how repulsed he had been by the other culture. So he simply fed back the details. The complaining group was quieted, and they glorified God saying, “Yipes! God has allowed the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:2-18).

But this was only the beginning.

The word travelled: Greeks in Antioch began to repent and believe “in considerable numbers” (multitudes it says in the margin). Unbelievers among the Greeks razzed these new Greek followers of Christ, calling them “Messiah-nuts” (the Greek word was Christians) Acts 11:24, 26—see also 1st Peter 4:12-19.

This new, fast-growing, divergent group in Antioch soon sent Paul and Barnabas on to spread the word further. On return, some visitors to Antioch from Jerusalem were scandalized (Acts 15:1). So Paul and Barnabas checked all this out with the Council in Jerusalem. This council was considerably wiser (and more godly) than the bunch in Rome in the time of Luther, who deliberated on that “atrocious German monk's antics.” And, probably quite a few years passed before these new, unJewish Greek and Roman believers in Christ were willing to adopt for themselves the derisive term “Christian.”

The key point was not what they were called but whom and how they believed.

Just imagine, these strange, repulsively non-Jewish heathen had come to God through authentic repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Historians wrestle with the details. While there were perhaps a million Jews still in Palestine, there may have been eight million throughout the Empire in thousands of synagogues where the scriptures were preached. Let's guess that only 100,000 Greeks

and Romans had joined them by fully shifting gears culturally into the Jewish way of life by becoming “proselytes.”

But perhaps one million Greeks and Romans were like Cornelius, devout persons who had not really ever become Jews outwardly. They had the essence of the Jewish faith, but not the clothing. The new message to them became “the good news” that God would welcome them, as Gentiles, without the Jewish clothing!

Sad to say, some of these new Gentile believers apparently ridiculed the Jews who believed in Christ for not switching over to Greek clothing, to the Greek way of life (Rom. 14). These Jewish believers still followed many of the Jewish ways. The new Greek believers, some of them, may have thought that God was now throwing in with the Greeks and leaving the Jews out!

By contrast, the Greek believers weren't upset at all about meat that had been offered to idols. They looked down on Jewish believers for being prudish about such things. Jewish believers in Christ were hesitant, profoundly concerned about anything to do with idols. Paul defended them and their way of life (Rom 14). His point: repentance and faith does not require Jewish clothes, neither does it require Greek or Roman clothing! Not every believer in every culture will ever catch on to this fact.

In Sunday School, you may have even received the impression somehow that the Jewish way of life was no longer valid. Some leaders in ancient times thought so. Marcion is the one famous for this, but his ideas were not approved of by most of the rest of the leaders. He threw out the whole Old Testament as being too Jewish. He did not realize that rightly understood, it too, emphasized that “circumcision is of the heart” (Deut 10:16, Jer 9:25).

### **Ours is a multicultural faith!**

Down through history, as we shall see, many followers of Jesus Christ have become caught up with a single cultural formulation of the faith and have doubted the real faith of all others. But now the “first reformation” was complete. Now let’s look at another major reformation.

Did you learn this about the Reformation in Sunday School?

Hang it all, why couldn’t more of us have expected that this whole drama—this whole New Testament “reformation”—would be replayed again and again as the Gospel went to the ends of the earth?

Jesus had said that the gate was narrow and few would find life. And sure enough, many Jews and many Gentiles wore religious clothing but did not go on to find eternal life through genuine repentance and faith. In fact, those who clung to outward forms and technical verbal formulations often panicked at the slightest variation.

In the August 12th issue of Christianity Today (p. 8), Timothy George, the Dean of the (Southern Baptist related) Beeson Divinity School, takes another eminent evangelical theologian to task for whittling our definitions too closely as to who is right on. He came out with a classic statement:

God justifies by faith alone Roman Catholics, among others, whose understanding of justification is different from mine and (the mature) Martin Luther’s. To think that Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, to go no further, are all consigned to perdition because they do not properly define justification in precise Reformation terminology is to deny both the grace of God and the sovereignty of

God. It is, in short, to turn justification by faith alone into justification by doctrinal erudition alone, which is another form of justification by works.

Thus in Luther's day the same issue surfaced again as in other times and places many times before then.

The Germans had fought off Roman power successfully. The legions had given up in the 5th Century A.D. From then on German followers of Christ no longer had any military apprehensions when they took on the Latin language and Roman Catholic traditions.

But all this foreign clothing of the Gospel eventually did not seem so desirable. While the Roman military power declined, the Roman church gained momentum. By 1200 A.D. it had parted ways with Greek "Eastern Orthodox" followers and was now bossing around everyone in Europe--with both financial and spiritual intentions, of course.

By Luther's time, 1517, one of the most reputable popes, Leo X, although named a cardinal at the age of 14, had grown into a man of high minded integrity. But, he presided uneasily over a church bureaucracy that was shot through and through with carnality.

Luther didn't object to Leo X as a person, but to the implications of his position. Luther, and virtually the whole German nation, gradually decided that the Latin tradition was not for them. Would God allow German clothing for the faith? Should German pastors have to give an oath of allegiance to a corrupt Italian bureaucracy?

Note that the reaction was not just to the corruption but also to the Italian cultural vehicle. We are often confused about the Reformation if we think it was just a reaction to corruption or wrong doctrine. We are confused if we conclude that the Roman believers were wrong and the German believers were right. Church corruption was rampant in Germany as well as in Rome, both before and after the Reformation. There are no completely white knights!

The more basic reality is that neither Roman nor German church clothing could save you--any more than Jewish or Greek clothing could save you. The Gospel in NT times, in Reformation times and today, owes none of its power to its cultural vehicle. And this leads us to the impending reformation of the 1990s.

### **In Sunday School did you hear about an astonishing "new reformation" coming up in global missions today?**

Most Sunday School publishers apparently don't dare print lesson materials on anything but the Bible itself. They are afraid that they couldn't sell their goods widely and have everyone agree on anything except the Bible. So the history of the impact of the Bible following the Apostle Paul usually gets left out of what is taught in Sunday School. I got interested in history because of one sermon about the Reformation. Couldn't Sunday School materials at least talk about the Reformation without reducing market share?

Less common still are Sunday School materials which let their students in on the incredible story of modern missions. But here it is.

The Jews sent missionaries—Jesus referred to them. The Hellenized Jews sent their "new reformation" missionaries. Did the new Greek and Roman believers send missionaries to still other strange cultures? Unfortunately, although this does not come up in Sunday School, the deliberate carrying of their faith to other peoples on the part of the



new Greek and Roman believers is a fairly bleak picture. In many cases, they were just happy to be cut in on eternal life and get what the Jews got.

But they eventually did send missionaries of their own. Roman missionaries eventually made their way up into middle Europe and England. (Celtic missionaries had been there first. But the Romans considered them heretical because, ironically, they followed Greek customs more than Roman customs.) This Roman missionary effort was not very successful until the Roman military legions had long gone.

This is why the number and vitality of mission field Christians of our time took a great leap forward after World War II when the colonial powers withdrew their troops.

Roman missionaries tried but did not effectively succeed in giving away their faith to other cultural traditions. For example, for more than a thousand years they couldn't imagine the mass being translated out of the Latin. They accused even the Celtic believers of heresy despite the high quality of their theological tradition and their assiduous study and transmission of the Bible.

In the same way modern missionaries in Africa, Asia, and among the aboriginal peoples of the so-called New World have not been altogether successful in giving away their faith. They too have wondered about the initial theological understanding of literally hundreds of “new movements” which derive from the missionary movement. Some of these are terribly heretical yet zealously study the Bible. Others are not so bad yet have no use for the Bible and thus are not likely to level out. As in Paul’s day, people “back home” often unaware of all this.

In the four largest “blocs” of Hindus, Muslims, Chinese, and Buddhists our missionary impact is barely discernible. Is a “Reformation” soon to appear? Are we ready for it? Will we be on speaking terms with its leaders? Ninety percent of all remaining frontier mission work depends on the answers.



## **Horizon Five: DeWesternization/DeContextualization DeWesternization Tomorrow**

(*Mission Frontiers*, September-December 1998)

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/horizon-five-dewesternization-decontextualization-dewesternization-tomorrow>

### **Are we really ready for tomorrow's Kingdom?**

A Jewish rabbi in Los Angeles has thrown down the gauntlet to wayward Westernizing Jews. He claims that his own Orthodoxy is the only genuine form of the Jewish faith. Conservative and Reformed Jewish congregations have gone the way of "Christianity!"

The idea is that the true faith can only be contained in a certain, specific true culture, the original culture.

Holding on to a "true culture" is not very likely to succeed if only because we can look around and see that Jewish Orthodoxy is a very small piece of the global pie even of all those who think they are holding on to the true Biblical faith, and even among those who specifically hold on to a Jewish culture of some sort.

OK, so the Roman socialites threw rice at a wedding. Do Jews who live in Rome have to do that? So the Romans had a big party, giving gifts to each other on December 25th. Should Jews take up the practice? Well, not even Greek Christians took up the 25th of December. To this day they are not impressed by what was in Jesus' day the Roman pagan holiday for Saturn—the "Saturnalia."

More ironic still is the plain fact that much of Jewish Orthodoxy today consists of large and small additions over the centuries since the Christians grabbed the faith and ran with it, certainly long after the sacred days of Hebrew culture. And, when was that? In King David's day, in Moses' day, in Abraham's day? Wow! Not even the Jewish Bible portrays a single cultural way of life.

It would seem that God has determinedly been kicking people out of one culture into a new one (Abraham to Canaan, to Egypt, to the dispersion of the Northern tribes, to the booting out of the Judean tribes, on and on). What is going on? It looks as if God wants them to learn how to carry their faith into different cultures, not just preserve a given way of life within a discordant culture. The Bible, as a whole, would seem to sit in judgment upon every human cultural tradition, no matter whether it is Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidian, first century Jewish, Paul's mixture with Greek elements, Roman-Latin, Germanic, Anglo-saxon, or what.

Now then, is "God's culture" fixed as an evangelical American pop culture with its CDs, DVDs, television, horrifying divorce rate, childcare centers, etc?

Quite honestly, are our missionaries—any of them—now assuming that the ultimate achievement of the Biblical faith is what we have today in evangelical Christianity?

If not, when are we going to seriously contemplate the future form of what we call the Christian faith?

OK, forget the turgid theologies of contextualization. Take a look for just one second at the actual global record. It is not too early to recognize that the largest growing edge of Biblical faith is not Jewish Orthodoxy, not Roman Catholicism, not Eastern Orthodoxy, not German Lutheranism, not Anglicanism, not American “mainline” denominationalism, not Evangelicalism, not Pentecostalism, not the Charismatic renewal, etc.

What is it? It is the often ignored but vast company of those “outside and beyond” what we usually call Christianity. In Africa it is the 32 million “African Initiated Churches.” In India it is a phenomenon perhaps the same size which is arising within the 600 million caste sphere, where “Christianity” by that name is virtually absent. In China it is the “house church” movement which, up to this point, we in the West like to call Christian, but at closer look might not fit very well at all.

The fact is that anything Western has its attractions and detractions, and while most cities of the world are superficially Westernized, Western Christianity has really only successfully lapped up minorities around the world, peoples who had nothing to lose by opting for an outside, foreign culture as against an oppressive majority culture. This is most obvious in India. It is perhaps true in China. It is true in much of Africa. The growing edge may more and more be the kind of thing we would call cultic or at least anomalous in this country.

Are we prepared for that? Does our attitude towards “home grown” aberrant forms of basically Biblical faith in this country match what is needed in the rest of the world? Can we trust the Bible eventually to balance out these thousands of new, “out of control” movements? Can we digest the plain fact that the entire Islamic tradition is, like Roman Catholicism, full of “non-Christian” elements which we despise, yet is clearly the product of the impact of the Bible (unlike Hindu culture)? What do we do with such forms of quasi-Biblical faith?

## **Editorial Comment on Converting Muslims**

(*Mission Frontiers*, September-October 2003).

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment34>

Dear Reader,

TIME's June 30 cover demands to know, "Should Christians Convert Muslims?"

Amazingly, this cover story in TIME mentions us four times, directly or indirectly. Also, my son-in-law, Dr. Todd Johnson, the Director of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's new Center for the Study of Global Christianity, was interviewed at length by the writers of this cover story.

And it is nice that we are not being criticized in all four cases--only in one of them. All in all, it is a fair and accurate article, even if embarrassing at points. TIME'S story is mild compared to the earnest diatribe from India summarized on page 11—in that mirror you may not easily recognize what you see.

Certainly the most deadly accusation the story makes of Christian missions to Muslims in general is that while missionaries generally love the people with whom they work, many of them also seek to "replace" Islam--not just the faith but the very cultural tradition of Muslims.

It is sort of a "love the people, hate the religion and culture" situation. But is that okay?

Do you know what? Lots of people also hate Christianity as a religion, and in fact the Bible itself is highly critical of "religious rituals." Read Isaiah chapter 1 for one of the most harsh description of religious formalities in all the world's literature.

However, the incessantly inconvenient problem is that Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. are not just religious systems, they are also highly elaborated, major cultural traditions.

Saudi Arabian leading families know that. They may hate the U.S. military as well as Christianity, but they nevertheless seek to send their young people to Harvard and Princeton. They apparently are aware that Christianity as a religion is not the same as Christianity as a cultural tradition.

But some terrorists equate the two. They may want to destroy Harvard and Christianity-the whole Christian culture.

Do missionaries to Islam equate the two? Do they wish not only to change the faith of their "converts" but to "replace" the entire Muslim cultural tradition?

Yes, some of them do.

Should they?

No.

The New Testament portrays uncompromisingly the fact that Greeks could adopt the vital, spiritual faith of the Old Testament (and later New Testament itself) and stay within their elaborate, Hellenistic cultural tradition. This was early opposed by Jewish followers of Christ, who insisted that Greeks be "converted" to Jewish culture, not just "converted" spiritually.

From this it is perfectly clear (but to many missionaries not obvious) that becoming a true, heart-follower of Jesus Christ does not require a cultural "conversion." It does require a conversion of the heart, but only Evangelical speakers of English talk like that!

Yet, this simple fact has ultra-profound significance for missions. Missionaries struggling mightily to be effective embroil themselves in language and cultural learning, which is often so difficult as to be described as “culture shock,” and even after they have been years on the field they have (to quote Charles Kraft) “culture fatigue.”

Curiously it is even harder for Muslims, Hindus, etc. to give up their culture than it is for missionaries to become accustomed to their culture.

Point One, then, is that it is better to concentrate on the Biblical, spiritual aspects of conversion than to try to extract people from their background. It is hazardous to build on a few individuals who want to break away from their culture.

This is far easier said than done, of course. Point Two is that unknowingly the missionary quite often goes carrying with him preconceived ideas about what “a church” looks like. It is not necessary to impose an American-style church. (By this I refer to the practice of collecting together fragments of extended families and virtually ignoring the need for worship on the family level.)

True, the great twentieth-century missiologist, McGavran, taught missionaries that evangelism is not good enough. People won to Jesus Christ need accountable fellowship as well. Thus “church planting” become the almost universal rallying cry, largely in place of mere evangelism.

However, what if our American idea of “a church” is itself extra-biblical? Allowing people to remain within their Muslim culture may seem impossible if an American-style church is going to be necessary.

It isn’t necessary! Once again we have to go back to the Bible. The so-called “churches” of the New Testament were worshipping households--like that of Cornelius, Lydia, or Crispus. They were what are nowadays called house churches. This precisely means that we do not have to compete with mosques.

Point Three: It is not necessary to assume that our instant-conversion salvation formulas are entirely faithful to the Bible. We need to look for those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, not those who are basically seeking adventure in Western ways. We need to reread the New Testament emphasis on salvation as growth in grace over time.

Thus, much of the futility and confusion in outreach to Muslims (and Hindus, et al.) is due to common failure to understand these three points. But there is a fourth.

The Fourth Point, which the TIME article brings up strongly is the simple fact that most secular observers of mission work value more highly what they can see as visible, outward, physical, “humanitarian” endeavors. They then tend to measure the worth of missions by such external activities.

They are dead wrong on this score. By comparison, nothing, nothing outweighs the value of a life transformed from deceit, hate, pride, and greed to honesty, loyalty and love. More crucially scarce on the “mission field” are transformed people than all the powdered milk in the world.

On the other hand, if we want truly to transform people, to win them to our Lord and to our God, we cannot ignore the fact that we are basically in the business of glorifying that Lord, and that the glory of God cannot be fully appreciated unless we can demonstrate God’s concern for suffering and pain, for disease, darkness and poverty.

This is the most important rationale for what is often dismissed as “social action.”

That is, we may indeed win people to ourselves by meeting their “felt needs.” But that does not necessarily win people to God and His Kingdom. To do that we must deal effectively with people’s real problems—in the name of Christ. People must understand and be attracted to the kind of God we preach, not just to a kind of heaven-procuring “deal” He offers. His glory must be seen, not just heard. We heal people not because that will get them to heaven but because it can introduce both them and onlookers to the full scope of the love of their Father in heaven. The Bible says plainly, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matt 5: 16).

## Twelve Frontiers of Perspective

(2005) (*Frontiers in Mission*, 28-39).

### Perspective Four: Failure with the Large Groups and the Off-setting Trend to “Radical Contextualization.”

The third shift had to do with the fact that we had been focusing primarily on smaller groups around the world. This was because all the major groups had already been, supposedly, breached by Christianity in one form or another. We had rather highly Western beachheads in them, and our globalized culture was permeating them, but, in the main, the major groups were continuing to be rather awesomely unfriendly to the Western form of Christianity. For example, Hinduism as a whole and Islam as a whole just aren't breached in any major way at all. We only have relatively small beachheads in these blocs. So we began to think, “Well, maybe we've got the wrong approach; we're not contextualizing sufficiently.”

So here comes the idea of radical contextualization, and all of a sudden our eyes are opened to what is already happening. In Africa, 52 million people in the African Initiated Churches movement have radically contextualized (and by many are not considered valid Christians). Another example is India. According to *Churchless Christianity*, a book by Herbert Hofer, the Missouri-Synod Lutheran theologian/missionary, in the largest city of South India maybe four times as many Hindus are devout followers of Christ as the number of devout believers who are affiliated with the official Christian churches. In China, 50-80 or more million people in the so-called unofficial churches do not fit the pattern that we would consider normal Christianity. And in Japan, there are only 300,000 Christians out of 130 million people in the country. Apparently, there isn't a truly Japanese church yet, there is just a Western church.

Thus, the idea of *radical contextualization* is an incredibly new frontier. It's not just how many minority peoples are left. It's how many large blocs are still untouched or unchosen. It's how many peoples which are supposedly already “reached” are not really reached.

Is it possible that within these large blocs of humanity we have achieved (with trumpets blaring) only a form of Christianity that ranges from sturdy and valid but foreign, to maybe superficial or phony? Something which, from the point of view of these large blocs has been acceptable only to a minority and is not going anywhere? What is the meaning of the oft-quoted statement that Christianity in Africa is “a mile wide and an inch deep?” (Isn't that true in the USA too?)

Isn't it getting clearer that we're never ever going to persuade all the Muslims to call themselves Christians, and this itself is a very peripheral issue? Can't we recognize that it's not important, nor helpful—not merely impossible—to make many Muslims identify with the cultural stream called “Christianity”? If someone is a born-again believer, isn't that enough?

Take, for example, the 19th-century Protestants in this country. As the Catholics streamed into this country after 1870, the Protestant churches spent about \$500,000,000 to win Catholics, and yet after 50 years of sincere home mission work had only won a handful of families. That is, we can't realistically set out to win over people to a new



faith if we include the requirement that they identify with a different community in a substantially different culture. Thus, we can't make Catholics into Protestants in large numbers. And, apart from those who want to be Westernized, we can't readily make Muslims or Hindus over into our cultural form of Christianity.

This gives rise to the idea of a "Third Reformation." The first reformation was the shift from Jewish clothing to Greek and Latin clothing. A second happened when our faith went from Latin Christianity to German Christianity. This "second" reformation is the Reformation that everyone talks about, of course.

But now Western Christianity, if it really wants to give away its faith, is poised to recognize (and to become sensibly involved with) something already happening under our noses—a Third Reformation. Sorry to say, as before (both in the time of Paul and in the Reformation), this rising phenomenon will probably involve astonishment and antagonisms. The Bible itself describes vividly the profound antagonisms between Jewish and Greek forms of the faith. History records vividly the same tensions between Latin and German forms of the faith. In each case the burning question has been "Just how Biblical are these various forms?"

## **Editorial Comment on Insider Movements**

(*Mission Frontiers*, September-October 2005).

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment21>

Dear Reader,

This time you must learn a new phrase: Insider Movements.

This idea as a mission strategy was so shockingly new in Paul's day that almost no one (either then or now) gets the point. That's why we are devoting this entire issue to "Insider Movements." That's why the 2005 annual meeting of the International Society for Frontier Missiology is devoted to the same subject. (See [www.ijfm.org/archives.htm](http://www.ijfm.org/archives.htm))

First of all, be warned: many mission donors and prayer warriors, and even some missionaries, heartily disagree with the idea.

One outstanding missionary found that even his mission board director could not agree. He was finally asked to find another mission agency to work under. Why? His director was a fine former pastor who had never lived among a totally strange people. After a couple of years of increasingly serious correspondence between the director and the missionary family, the relationship had to come to an end.

Okay, so this is serious business. Why is Insider Movements such a troubling concept?

Well, everywhere Paul went "Judaizers" followed him and tried to destroy the Insider Movement he had established.

Some of those Judaizers were earnest followers of Christ who simply could not imagine how a Greek – still a Greek in dress, language and culture – could become a believer in Jesus Christ without casting off a huge amount of his Greek culture, get circumcised, follow the "kosher" dietary rules and the "new moons and Sabbaths", etc.

The flagrant language of Paul's letter to the Galatians is one result. The very serious text of his letter to the Romans is another. Years ago the scales fell off my eyes when I read that "Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it ... Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works" (Rom 9:32 NIV).

Paul was not saying the Jewish religious culture was defective or that the Greek culture was superior. He was emphasizing that heart faith is the key element in any culture—that forms were not the key thing but the faith. Greeks who yielded in heart faith to the Gospel did not need to become Jews culturally and follow Jewish forms.

Paul said, in effect, "I am very, very proud of a Gospel that is the power of God to save people who obey God in faith, no matter whether they follow Jewish or Greek customs" (Rom 1:16).

But the real trick is not simply for people of faith in every culture to stay and stagnate in their own cultural cul-de-sac, but both to retain their own culture and at the same time recognize the validity of versions of the faith within other cultures and the universality of the Body of Christ.

Different sources of European Christianity flowed over into the United States, producing some 200 different "flavors" of Christianity—some born here (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses), some quite Biblical, some not so Biblical, some very strange.

The same thing happens on the mission field: a lot of different movements emerge. The ideal is for the Gospel to become effectively expressed within the language and culture of a people and not just be a transplant from the missionary's culture.

H. Richard Niebhuur's famous book, *Social Sources of Denominationalism*, is known for pointing out that different denominations did not just have doctrinal differences (often very minor) but usually reflected, at least for a time, social differences that were the real difference. Note, however, the Christian faith was in many cases an "Insider Movement" and was expressed within different social streams, taking on characteristics of those different streams.

But, back to missions. The Jewish/Greek thing is far more and far "worse" than the differences between Methodists who pray that their trespasses be forgiven and Presbyterians who pray that their debts be forgiven!

No, in Paul's day circumcision was undoubtedly a major barrier to adult Greek men becoming culturally Jewish followers of Christ. Another sensitive point was the question of eating meat that had been offered to idols, and so on.

Later in history, the Jewish/Greek tension was paralleled by a Latin/German tension. This time, we see a profound difference in attitudes toward clerical marriage vs. celibacy and the use of Latin in church services.

For centuries Latin was the language of Europe, enabling ministers, attorneys, medical doctors, and public officials to read the books of their trade in a single language. That lasted a long time! For centuries a unifying reading language did a lot of good. But the Bible did not come into its own until it was translated into the heart languages of Europe. The deep rumbling that modernized Europe was the unleashed Bible.

It is an exciting and maybe disturbing thing—the idea that Biblical faith can be clothed in any language and culture. Witness the awesome reality in the so-called mission lands today. Whether Africa, India or China, it may well be that the largest number of genuine believers in Jesus Christ do not show up in what we usually call Christian churches!

Can you believe it? They may still consider themselves Muslims or Hindus (in a cultural sense).

Alas, today Christianity itself is identified with the cultural vehicle of the civilization of the West. People in mission lands who do not wish to be "westernized" feel they need to stay clear of the Christian Church, which in their own country is often a church highly Western in its culture, theology, interpretation of the Bible, etc.

For example, in Japan there are "churches" that are so Western that in the last forty years they have not grown by a single member. Many astute observers have concluded that there is not yet "a Japanese form of Christianity." When one emerges, it may not want to associate with the Western Christian tradition except in a fraternal way.

In India we now know that there are actually millions of Hindus who have chosen to follow Christ, reading the Bible daily and worshipping at the household level, but not often frequenting the West-related Christian churches of that land.

In some places thousands of people who consider themselves Muslims are nevertheless heart-and-soul followers of Jesus Christ who carry the New Testament with them into the mosques.

In Africa there are more than 50 million believers (of a sort) within a vast sphere called "the African Initiated Churches." The people in the more formally "Christian church" may not regard these others as Christians at all. Indeed, some of them are a whole lot further from pure Biblical faith than Mormons. But, if they revere and study the Bible, we need to let the Bible do its work. These groups range from the wildly heretical

to the seriously Biblical within over ten thousand “denominations” which are not related to any overt Christian body.

Thus, not all “insider” movements are ideal. Our own Christianity is not very successfully “inside” our culture, since many “Christians” are Christian in name only. Even mission “church planting” activities may or may not be “insider” at all, and even if they are they may not be ideal.

Around the world some of these movements do not baptize. In other cases they do. I have been asked, “Are you promoting the idea of non-baptized believers?” No, in reporting the existence of these millions of people, we are reporting on the incredible power of the Bible. We are not promoting all the ideas they reflect or the practices they follow. The Bible is like an underground fire burning out of control! In one sense we can be very happy.

**To the New Asian Society of Missiology: Greetings from the West**  
(2007) (Foundations Reader, 247-51).

*5. The Mistake of Insisting that Devout Followers of Jesus Call Themselves “Christians” and Identify with the Western Church*

Congregations may find it easy to believe that their people can win converts to Christianity in a ten-day short-term mission. But what very few congregations in America are prepared to understand is that dragging people out of their culture and converting them to what they think a “Christian” should look like, is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible talks of our conveying a treasure in earthen vessels. The earthen vessels are not the important thing, but the treasure is. The new vessel will be another very different earthen vessel. This is what happened when the faith of the Bible was first conveyed to Greeks. In that case the treasure of Biblical faith in an earthen Jewish vessel became contained in a Greek earthen vessel. Later it went to Latin vessels and to Germanic vessels and to English vessels, and is now contained in Muslim vessels, Hindu vessels and Buddhist vessels.

It is just as unreasonable for a Hindu to be dragged completely out of his culture in the process of becoming a follower of Christ as it would have been if Paul the Apostle had insisted that a Greek become a Jew in the process of following Christ. Amazingly, there may be more Muslims who are true, Bible-believing followers of Christ, than there are Muslims who have abandoned their cultural tradition in the process of becoming Christian. There are already more Hindus who are predominantly Hindu in their culture but who are Bible-reading believers in Jesus Christ, than there are Hindus who have abandoned their culture and become “Christian.” In the New Testament there was no law against a Greek becoming a Jew. However, Paul was very insistent that that kind of a cultural conversion was not necessary in becoming a follower of Christ.

## The New Beginning of the Global Mission

(2008) (Foundations Course, Lecture 8).

In our topic you note that we are speaking of a new beginning not the beginning. It is not as though God's plan for the globe was a NT invention. It was a continuation and heightening, and an unprecedented "lateral" shift of truth-in-culture, but it was not a total new beginning.

In fact, however, it had so many new features in it that a loud clamoring among scholars has been going on for centuries to the effect that the Apostle Paul invented a different religion from that of Jesus. Such scholars focus on the fact that the form of faith Paul promoted does seem in some ways like a distinctly different religion. Jews think so to this day. But not just Jews; such discussions take place among Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical Bible scholars, pastors, and theologians. One of the more famous books on this subject that of J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*.

However, it may just be that all such thinkers are working with an artificial problem because they are simply not thinking missiologically. Like the dispensational scholars who produced the classic *Scofield Reference Bible*, they can be praised for picking up the numerous differences between eras and taking them seriously. However, some of them have felt they were forced to make the New Testament into a radically different "new dispensation," one in which even the Gospels are not completely part of the so-called "church age," and the book of Acts is seen as a mere "corridor" of transition from one dispensation into another, and unreliable for the formation of doctrine. Doesn't that very conservative dispensational perspective seem similar to the more blatant liberal insistence that Paul invented a new religion?

I do think that there is at least one important difference between the kind of changes that took place over time within the Biblical stream of the Old Testament, on the one hand, and the kind of change we see in the New Testament shift from Jewish culture to Greek culture. Obviously, right within the enormous span of time covered by our Bibles, we are able to read of several different epochs:

- 1) Abraham's form of faith—which did not involve either circumcision or the Ten Commandments
- 2) the form of faith, whatever it was, while the "children of Abraham" were slaves in Egypt
- 3) the form it took when Moses tried to lead the ragged refugees in the wilderness
- 4) the new circumstances of the period of the Judges
- 5) the later period of the Davidic Kingdom
- 6) the period of Solomon's temple worship
- 7) the radically new situation in the Babylonian and the Persian captivities when the synagogue was invented and Satan was recognized.
- 8) the different dress in the new Palestine of Greek and Roman occupation, which we see in the New Testament
- 9) only to be modified greatly after the New Testament with the invasion of Titus—the exhaustion of Roman patience—and the definitive destruction of the Temple
- 10) the ensuing development of "rabbinical Judaism"
- 11) still later versions reaching down to our day in Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed Judaism, and even Political Judaism in Israel.

All of these particular substantial changes, being within the same ethnic stream can be called diachronic—they take place within the same people over time. Note that we are talking about changes throughout 4,000 years.

However, the basic Biblical faith has not changed over time. The heart-faith and obedience God favors—the “fear of God that is the beginning of wisdom”—has not changed. We still quote with approval such verses as

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths (Prov. 3:5-6).*

And we still gain insights from the period of Abraham and his faith. In Galatians 3 Paul actually speaks of the Gospel that was preached before Christ to Abraham, meaning the information (good news or bad depending on your viewpoint) that God intended to reconcile all nations, not just the lineage of Abraham.

It could be said that one of the main functions of a Biblical record spanning so much time is to make crystal clear that the same expectations of faith could weather all of these diachronic changes of culture and continue to do so in the future! Note that these changes were not necessarily sudden. No doubt in many cases there were “before” and “after” versions side by side, as with the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, or today between the contemporary and the traditional worship protocols. This kind of change is still a diachronic pattern.

But when the New Testament portrays a major, fairly sudden shift of faith from one ethnic community—the (Semitic) Jews, to the (Indo-European) Greeks and Latin Romans—we are dealing with a significantly different kind of shift. This kind of shift is a major phenomenon which the Bible teaches us in the New Testament especially. This second kind of change could be called synchronic instead of diachronic. But I would rather call it a lateral shift when it’s from one cultural basin to another, not within the same cultural basin.

With either kind of shift there is no denying that there may be many disturbing differences, just as Judaism in Joshua’s day was quite different from the Judaism of Jesus’ day. We have to admit that taking such diachronic differences seriously is to the credit of the so-called dispensational school of interpretation.

But such shifts are mainly the result of the significant fact that times change and culture changes. In Paul’s case, however, it was not merely a diachronic shift over time but also a lateral shift from one cultural basin to another. When the Jerusalem council met in the book of Acts and decided that there were indeed certain things about the Jewish form of the faith that ought not to change in the switch to Hellenistic (Greek) culture, they were not dealing with new or old diachronic change but lateral change. The “new 38 rules” did not necessarily apply to Jewish believers in Christ but to those Greek and Latin believers, called “devout persons” who were not following all of the Jewish customs.

Realistically, then, whether we are studying a diachronic or a lateral shift, we need to expect significant differences of wrapping paper for the Biblical faith. We also need to be aware that even though such changes are inevitable the changes may not be all to the good. Some of the new versions of the Christian faith in Africa, as in the Tai Ping movement in China, or the novel Christian Science and Mormon traditions in the United States, are new combinations of culture and faith that incorporate significant error. To a lesser extent this incorporation of error has taken place in Roman Catholic, Muslim, and, yes, Protestant religious traditions. That is what syncretism is.

Note, furthermore, that in all cases, whether diachronic or lateral, there are multitudes of people who become caught up in a religion or behavior that may contain very little if any true heart faith, but that in the new composite there may as well be truly devout souls whose genuine response to God contains significant, true faith.

Furthermore, after the Biblical faith survived the shift from a Semitic to an Indo-European culture, the new combination of faith and culture also began to move through diachronic shifts. Constantine's era was substantially different from Paul's era, and is where the word "Christianity" comes into the picture, since that was Constantine's political designation. After his 45 years as emperor, the label was soon to become the accepted term for the official religion of the empire. [And thus those employing that label outside of the empire were immediately persecuted. This fact eventually led to the term "Muslim" in the areas of Semitic substratum.]

Later, in the Reformation, we see the lateral shift from the Roman, Mediterranean culture to the Germanic. In this new shift all of the complexities and misunderstandings are present which the Book of Acts so helpfully predicts but were lamentably unexpected and disturbing when they came. We see each side questioning the validity of the other. We see both sides involving multitudes with nominal faith as well as many devout souls.

The Reformation was a massive lateral shift and interestingly took place at the time when the older Mediterranean form of faith was already undergoing significant diachronic shifts, due to the unleashing of the Bible in the Gutenberg era. People in Luther's day, all over England, France, Spain, Italy, and Germany were studying the Bible as never before. That process no doubt contributed to the thought that there could also be a totally independent German form of the faith.

The most important thing NOT to believe is that the polarization we see in the New Testament (impending between Jewish and Greek carrier vehicles of the faith) portrayed one false, older religion with a new, pure, ideal religion. Or, that there is an inherent difference between the kind of heart faith intended in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

It simply is not true that the Jews, on the one hand, represented a religious tradition in which there never had been any basic component of grace and faith, while the Greeks represented a completely new and genuine grasp of both grace and faith.

True, both Paul and the author of Hebrews make many statements comparing a true walk of faith to a sterile legalism. However, that kind of a comparison can be made within every single emergence of a new combination of faith and culture. All forms of Jewish and Christian culture embody both nominal and spiritual followers.

The new, stupendous reality in the New Testament was not the sudden invention of grace and faith, and a passing from a defunct religion of works to a religion of spiritual reality, but the appearance of God Himself in the person of Jesus, who lifted the reality of God from the pages of scripture and literally acted out the will of God. In the face of Jesus, we see the glory of God the Father. This was an absolutely and totally unique gift to both Jews and Gentiles. Note that the name of Jesus is blasphemously employed today by some of the very same people who are supposedly part of the new religious tradition, while it is cautiously on the lips of some of the people who are supposedly part of the old religious tradition.

Thus, as zealous as we wish to be in getting people to (as we say) "accept" Jesus Christ as their Savior, in the last analysis we must recognize that no process through



which we lead people, emotional or intellectual, can be an infallible test of the true heart faith which the Bible constantly emphasizes.

Our lack of infallible criteria is frankly as inconvenient as it is embarrassing. But that lack is apparently as God intended, as we read in the Parable of the Tares. However, the common tendency is for those in one composite of faith and culture to exclude those of all other composites, all other forms, and often earnestly to do so, because for us as humans there does not seem to be any other way to separate the sheep from the goats, even though in the Bible that kind of separation is clearly in God's hands.

When any of us adopts one of these re-clothings of the faith we must relentlessly resist the temptation to overly exalt our own culturally wrapped Gospel and be unable to see the validity of any other form. I will never forget in my seminary days how offended mainland Chinese believers were by the practice in the USA of passing an offering plate in front of each person. They do it differently (at the front door). I was surprised by my own surprise at their surprise!

We all know how many different forms of the faith are swirling around in the United States, and some of the adherents of each one probably think all others are invalid.

There was a time when some Pentecostals insisted that speaking in tongues was an indelible evidence of salvation. Earlier for some pre-pentecostal Evangelicals there was a similar insistence on the necessity for salvation of what has been called "a second work of grace," quoting the verse "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), equating one of their evangelistic protocols with the meaning of the word "holiness" in this verse.

Probably the most wide-spread breakdown of understanding is the lateral kind of shift, whether in Paul's day, Luther's day, or in India today with those who see things as does the Missouri-Synod Lutheran theologian/missionary, Herbert Hoefler. This movement of millions of believers in India, who retain much of their Hindu culture, is scorned and denounced—expectedly—by both some Western Christians in America and in India by many who are followers of Christ in a Westernized form of faith. Similar breakdowns of understanding can be seen in attitudes toward some of the African movements that are not tracking with Western Christianity. There are now in Africa more than 50 million in this category.

We should not be surprised when after 400 years Protestants and Catholics are still confused over the difficulty of distinguishing between the faith that works and the works of faith. Will we ever accept the simple Biblical statement that "faith without works is dead"? There has always been common ground between true believers in both Catholic and Protestant camps. The unmodifiable sticking point then and now is the divergence of the two cultures, Mediterranean and German. In Romans 1:5 Paul spoke of bringing about "the obedience of faith" among all Gentiles. It is as though the Protestants accused the Catholics of believing in obedience without faith while the Catholics felt the Protestants were promoting faith without obedience. These are the kinds of theological fine points which lateral shifts often involve.

On the one hand, for Luther there was the unavoidable chasm between the best German spirituality and the worst of the city of Rome's carnal, commercialization of religion plus its cultural stress on celibacy. On the other hand, for the highly spiritual Catholic NT scholar Johan Staupitz, whose fervent preaching on the Pauline epistles jerked Luther out of spiritual depression, there would have been an unavoidable chasm

between the best of Roman spirituality and the worst of German nominalism plus the “carnal” desire of German priests to marry.

What was not the case in Luther’s day was the often mentioned issue of supposed restrictions on the vernacular translation of the Bible. Luther’s superb translation was the 14th full Bible to be translated into German from the Latin, and the previous versions were all done during the previous era of Roman Catholicism in Germany.

Then, as now, it is the obvious Biblical emphasis on faith not culture which is the great enemy of those who wish to canonize a particular type of Christianity. As we reflect in this lesson on the enormous significance of the New Beginning portrayed in Paul’s ministry, a lateral shift from Jew to Greek, we must ruefully acknowledge at the same time that the many diachronic shifts in our precious Bible cause lots of problems for merely religious people whether they shift or not!

## **The Carolingian Renaissance**

(2008) (Foundations Course, Lecture 11).

The period from 400 to 800 AD does not merely begin in chaos and end in a renaissance of faith in a new cultural basin. It does that, and in that sense it is parallel to the other 400-year periods. However, two major events do not fit that pattern: the steady rise of Celtic Christianity even early in the period, and the competitive rise of Islam toward the end.

The most significant thing in any case is the rise of the “barbarians” themselves and their conversion by the end of the period. By “barbarians,” in this context, reference is made to the mainly Gothic peoples. They were forced by the terror of the Huns pressing in from the East to invade and eventually conquer the city of Rome, which had been the seat of the Empire until Constantine moved it to what is present-day Istanbul in Turkey.

The barbaric invasions are commonly associated with the fall of Rome. They at least caused the fall of the city of Rome. They were not really the end of the Empire since the seat of Empire had long since been transferred to Constantinople and the empire continued with vigor for centuries—even if biased Western scholars have generally renamed the eastern continuation the Byzantine empire.

Furthermore, the fall of the city was not uncontested. The continuing empire sent army after army to recover it during a century-long warring seesaw that reduced the population of the Italian peninsula by 90 percent. The seriousness of that conflict can be seen if compared to the ten-year seesaw of the Vietnam war during which the population of both the North and South did not diminish but doubled.

Also, the new owners of the city of Rome were at least partially Christianized “barbarians.” They attempted seriously to continue the functions of the western half of the empire. They soon adopted Catholic theology over against their previous Arian theology. The Benedictine movement proceeded to move north, establishing monastic centers and taking over former Celtic outposts, making about 800 monastic centers in total—centers of literacy, art, the maintenance of Roman technology and science.

In any case, the collapse of Roman military power in the West allowed remaining “real” barbarians, the Germanic Angles, Saxons and Frisians, to pounce into southern England as the Roman legions began to withdraw to defend their eastern borders around 440 AD. Later called Anglo-Saxons, these invaders, too, were eventually converted, first by the Celtic Christians they displaced and later, and gradually, to the outward formalities of the Roman version of Christianity.

Even today, the Anglican archbishop of York (in the north) wears the characteristically Eastern Orthodox vestments (Celtic Christianity came from the eastern end of the empire) while the archbishop of Canterbury (in the south) wears Roman garments. Not for another 1000 years did the Celtic Irish fully embrace Rome. When that happened it was their way of maintaining a cultural distance from the hated Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere in England, which had just recently broken with Rome (under Henry VIII).

Meanwhile, during the entire 400–800 AD period, the “mission-field Christians” of the Celtic sphere possessed the most advanced scholarship of the Christian tradition, and in a significant sense “saved civilization” as Thomas Cahill’s book puts it.

But this is not the way the Roman tradition has even wanted things to be described. We saw in the last lesson how the advanced scholarship of the Celtic movement was manifested in the person of Pelagius as early as 380 AD. As late as the very end of our period Charlemagne needed over 3,000 Celtic teachers for schools on the continent.

What has been said to be history's most detailed artwork is to be seen in the Celtic practice of "illuminating" Biblical manuscripts out of reverence for their content. The "Book of Kells" is today perhaps the world's most valuable piece of art.

The Celtic movement is famous for its austere penalties (remedies) for sinful conduct. These were contained in a substantial book which had a remedy, often fearsome, for everything from pride to adultery. This feature of their version of the faith impressed the Romans and became the so-called "the Roman confessional."

Their divergent haircut ("tonsure") was never claimed by the Roman church, but "the Roman collar" was originally Celtic just as was the entire lower-case set of letters in the so-called "Roman alphabet," which we employ to this day.

From the perspective of missions, one of the most illuminating events in the entire period was the outcome of the eagerness of the Roman tradition to move north in Britain and thus seek to "convert" the Celtic movement to Latin Christian customs and dates. This was, in effect, the belated attempt for the Roman party to force a mission-field movement to accept the culture of the Mediterranean missionaries.

But to do this was inherently difficult. The Celtic movement was well established, as already noted. Many things were different between eastern and western Mediterranean Christianities, that is, Greek and Latin. It would have been easier to forge a bond between Greek Christianity and its derivative Celtic version. The Latin vs. Celtic divide ran superficially from differences of tonsure to differences of their Easter date, but much more profound were the basic differences of radically different language and culture, and even worse, the differences of invaded and invaders—Celtic and Anglo-Saxon.

Popular lore, especially in the Roman tradition, has it that this whole tension was resolved by the Synod of Whitby, a forest gathering of both Roman and Celtic leaders convened by Wilfred in about 663 AD. But in fact it was by no means actually resolved. Bede's description of that meeting over a century later loyally reports the Roman customs gaining acceptance, but even more than a century later you can tell that Bede felt that the Roman emissaries were haughty while the Celtic leaders were humble and that it was a superficial victory.

In actual fact a truly significant chain of events took place, not unlike the wisdom of the Jerusalem council in choosing the bicultural Barnabas to go to Antioch. Rome in an impressive stroke of wisdom found a new man, Theodore, to be archbishop of the Anglo-Saxon Christians. He was a bicultural who hailed from Tarsus in the East but who happened to be loyal to Rome. After delaying three months in Rome to allow his hair to grow out in the Latin way, he was sent off to England at the age of 66 to see what he could do with the irreconcilability of the two forms of Christianity. Augustine of Canterbury (not to be mistaken for the North African bishop,

Augustine of Hippo, the influential theologian) apparently did not have the missiological and contextualizing insights of his superior, Pope Gregory the Great, and thus had not laid a foundation (six decades earlier) which was conducive to yielding to

Celtic culture. His assumption was that since there was “one baptism” there should be oneness of customs as well.

Wilfred, who had pushed for the Synod of Whitby and its pro forma decision for the Roman way, was, by the time Theodore arrived, bishop of a huge territory. Theodore chopped it into four, incurred the wrath of the much younger Wilfred whose opposition to Theodore resulted in Wilfred’s expulsion from Britain more than once. Theodore’s logic was to recognize monastic centers more than municipal boundaries so as to harmonize both Celtic and Roman customs.

A second, Theodore-sponsored synod, convened in about 668 AD, actually accomplished much of that for which Whitby is noted. Theodore’s influence was secured partly by the fact that, although he began his post at 66, he held it for more than twenty years. Intelligent, decisive, and insightful, his role both highlights the never-quite resolved divergence of two cultures but also the very real flexibilities of compromise. Today, well over a thousand years later, the phrase “first among equals” may derive from the fact that of the two archbishops of the Anglican Church, York and Canterbury, the latter is said to be the first among equals.

It is interesting that while the Celtic and Roman spheres were miles apart culturally, the differences never led to the massive military collision we see a few years later as Islamic armies crossed over the Pyrenees with a view of converting all of Europe to Islam.

In this picture we see three different “earthen vessels” in which the treasure of true faith is carried, the Latin Roman, the Celtic, and the Semitic (Islam). All lean back to some extent on the Bible. Using different words, they nevertheless all recognized the same God. The Islamic movement represented a culture in which plural marriage was acceptable but not homosexuality. The Greek and Roman were the opposite. The Islamic inherited far more of the advanced civilization of Rome than remained in the western Mediterranean once overrun by the Goths. But in its early days it inherited a distinctly defective form of Christianity and only parts of the Bible. The Celtic scholars were advanced in Biblical studies but far removed from the sophistication of the Mediterranean. Of the three, Islam’s chief drawback was less contact with the Bible.

All are flawed, and their cultures are all very different from one another. What we see is clearly a recipe for misunderstanding and mutual opposition, but at the same time the very possibility of our faith being carried in quite different “earthen vessels” shines through giving Christianity (and to a less extent Islam) today unique advantages over all other major religions.

By contrast, when people within any tradition propose that their own earthen vessel over all others should command the stage, then that very advantage is lost. Thus, when people speak of the extinction of the Christian church in North Africa that way of saying it does not make clear that for most of the constituents it was simply a case of exchanging an ill-fitting (and dangerous) Roman garment for a safer and more readily fitting Semitic garment. The New Testament presents the lateral shifting of the faith from one culture to another. There was nothing inherently contrary to that New Testament process in the fact that Mohammed founded a culturally Semitic tradition. There was nothing wrong in the use of Arabic or praying to Allah, or praying five times a day or belief in the virgin birth of Jesus. Actually all those things Mohammed borrowed from the Christians. Arabic Christians were praying to Allah for 500 years before Mohammed

was born. Today around the world there are 30 million Christians who still pray to Allah and see the same word in their printed Bibles.

What was profoundly unfortunate in the case of Islam is that the Christians with whom Mohammed was in contact possessed only parts of the Bible, and, in fact, had a faulty view of the Trinity (which he rightly rejected).

The Qur'an is at least as deficient as the Book of Mormon, even though many have been led to Christ by reading the Qur'an. Worse still are the additional and later writings and traditions. Much of the things that are objectionable in Islam developed either later than Mohammed or are merely features of Arabic culture, in the same way as much of Christianity cannot be blamed on the Bible and developed later, or merely represents Mediterranean culture (such as celibacy and homosexuality).

It would be alarming if the faith had been watered down when it went into Greek culture, further diluted going on into Latin culture, further still when it was passed on to German culture, and so on. However, the consistent remedy for that kind of watering down is that eventually each new cultural group replaces the missionary version of the message with knowledge gained directly from the Bible itself. All church movements thus should eventually have direct access to the Bible.

For example, in the 400 to 800 AD period the Celtic movement did have direct, serious contact with the Bible, while Muslims did not. Today, Muslims still primarily need contact with the Bible. Urging them to "accept Christ" and call themselves "Christians" is not good enough. The name change is not even necessary while effective contact with the Bible is.

In the first volume of Winston Churchill's four-volume History of the English-Speaking Peoples, he makes the comment that in the eighth century settled Europe was subjected to "two smashing, external assaults."

He referred to the huge army of the Saracen Muslims which crossed the Pyrenees from Spain into today's France, and was barely defeated in 732 at the Battle of Tours in south France. He also referred to a far worse onslaught from the north—the "Norsemen"—the Vikings—pouring into middle Europe from today's Scandinavia for 250 years. But that second assault falls into the 800 to 1200 AD period.

The most permanent "assault" upon the Gothic sphere was the quiet, non-military infiltration of first Celtic and then Benedictine centers—the 800-some centers mentioned earlier. These centers were the result of a peculiar phenomenon called monasticism in which unmarried men, forsaking marriage (yielding to the Mediterranean respect for celibacy) banded together for various reasons: devotion to Christ, safety and security, evangelism, and in a turbulent age, the desire to preserve Roman literature and technology.

Perhaps their most significant characteristic was their high respect for the Bible. They copied it painstakingly, sang their way through the Psalms each week, and made it the focus of their existence. Were it not for these devout and energetic centers we would know next to nothing today about either the Roman empire or the Bible.

Other than those documents copied and handed down in these monastic centers only four manuscripts survive from Roman times. Today, virtually all of the major cities of Europe were once tiny points of light—just as cities in this country like Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, were once Moravian mission-established towns planted in the forests of North America.

You may hear these days what a mistake it was to plant “mission stations” and expect the people in surrounding areas to adapt to the implanted culture from afar. But that is what happened in many places. It did work. That is why the Latin language was the uniting language of Europe and America for so many centuries continuing even after the emergence of printing and the literary use of the vernaculars. Latin continued to be taught widely in American schools as late as the 1940s. It continues to be the uniting language of the Roman Catholic church.

Once the threat of the Roman legions was no longer the case, it is not surprising that the Roman language and culture of the Benedictine movement became the preferred pattern over the much more austere Celtic tradition, due to the long remembered prestige of the Roman empire. But note that Rome had to fall for its religion to spread, just as modern colonialism had to collapse for national churches to really grow. However, the extensive influence of Celtic Biblical sophistication cannot be overestimated.

It was the grandfather of Charlemagne that stopped the Muslim invasion of France. Charlemagne himself, according to some scholars, was the most influential ruler on earth for 1,000 years before and after his life. But, remember, he is the one who needed to bring 3,000 Celtic teachers into his realm to establish schools for common people. He is the one who adopted their orthography—called the “Celtic minuscule,” which today forms our lower case alphabet (even though it’s called Roman).

The final century of the 400 to 800 AD period well deserves the label scholars have given it: the Carolingian Renaissance. This is one of the chief reasons to abandon the later snobbery of the label “Dark Ages” after the fall of the western Roman sphere. The Carolingian Renaissance was the pinnacle of light and lift to the tribal, “barbarian” region of Europe. Too bad that much of it was to be destroyed by the Vikings. But that is the story of the next 800–1200 AD period.

## The Renaissance Proper, 1200–1600 AD

(2008) (Foundations Course, Lecture 13)

By 1200 AD all of Europe, southern, middle, and northern, had gained a common written language, Latin. That link existed very specifically due to the Christian faith. That faith was the Roman formulation—the earthen vessel—in which the treasure of Biblical faith was precariously carried. The Roman earthen vessel would not forever dominate Europe but it did last long enough to give it a single language that endured as a vehicle of scholarship many centuries after the somewhat superficial unity it had at 1200 AD.

Many new and unprecedented events emerged which together defined the increasing momentum. We saw in the last lesson how the final years of the 800 to 1200 period were bursting with new vitality—the first appearance of universities, cathedrals, crusades and, above all, the new pattern, the Friars. Still other evidences of mounting vitality, such as the Albigenses, the Cathari, and the Waldensians, were brutally crushed.

At the same time, the most powerful Pope of all time, Innocent III, was able to excommunicate rulers and interdict whole countries in order to establish morality and justice as he saw it.

But moving into the 1200 to 1600 period, the Friars—the Franciscans and Dominicans—very soon became a truly major additional force, not politically, militarily or, at first, even ecclesiastically, but spiritually. Within a few years there were 60,000 followers of Francis. Their evangelists blanketed and greened Europe, and thus the Twelfth Century Renaissance flowed over into the next period. The emergence of the Friars could well have been the most important event as we enter the 1200–1600 period.

This was also the period in which the Black Plague took the lives of one third of the people in Europe. It is believed that 20,000 Franciscans (as well as many more others) died in Germany alone—because they intentionally, despite the known risk, tended the sick.

There was also the curious and amazing phenomenon of the Crusades. While they began in the previous period they caused much of their disturbance in the 1200–1600 period. On the one hand they certainly reflect the increasing momentum of both civilization and the official Christian faith in the West. Some were launched as a direct result of sweeping spiritual revival. On the other hand, they betrayed the still-savage background of the majority of the now-Christianized Goths and Vikings. The Crusades were a combination of prayerful dedicated believers and crude adventurers. All were led by former Vikings.

At this stage the Islamic tradition was by comparison much more “civilized” than the middle and northern European “Christians.” If a crusader went out of his mind, the common remedy would be to gouge a cross in his scalp and pour molten lead into it. By contrast, the Muslims possessed far more sophisticated understandings of physical and mental illness—as well as literature, science, philosophy and political science.

In the 14th century a leading Christian library north of the Alps might have 400 books while, an Islamic library down in Córdoba, Spain had 400,000 books.

Meanwhile, there was also the comparative magnificence of the Chinese civilization under the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan as reported by Marco Polo. Marco Polo's father and uncle had been in his court earlier. At that time the Khan, whose mother



was a Nestorian Christian, asked them to relay to the Pope his request for 100 missionaries who could teach science and theology. After delivering this amazing message to the Pope, the two brothers returned to Europe, now with the 15-year-old Marco. They had been able to recruit only two Dominicans, who turned back when things got scary.

However, the Polos did arrive. Marco Polo who was favored by Kublai Khan stayed in China 17 years working closely with the emperor. He later wrote up his experiences back in Europe. He was most surprised by the Mongols' use of paper money, coal for heating— not just wood—and a postal system which was something like the pony express which functioned briefly in the American expansion to the West.

Just before 1300 AD a Dominican finally arrived in the court, but after the death of Kublai Khan. Despite the intense opposition of the Nestorians there, he did gain a following of some 6,000.

The general acceleration of things was vastly spurred on by one of the side effects of the Crusades—a greater acquaintance with the Greek and Roman classical world over which by this date the Muslims were the main custodians. This “rebirth” of the classics gave the general name “Renaissance” to a period that in fact was actually less of a renaissance than either of what scholars refer to as the Carolingian Renaissance or the Twelfth Century Renaissance. These two earlier renaissances (and we could add what I have dubbed The Classical Renaissance of the Fourth Century) more profoundly affected society than did THE Renaissance of the 15th Century which involved mainly artists and scholars.

The Wikipedia states,

Historians now point out that most of the negative social factors popularly associated with the “medieval” period— poverty, ignorance, warfare, religious and political persecution, and so forth—seem to have actually worsened during this age of Machiavelli, the Wars of Religion, the corrupt Borgia Popes, and the intensified witch-hunts of the 16th century. Many of the common people who lived during the “Renaissance” are known to have been concerned by the developments of the era rather than viewing it as the “golden age” imagined by certain 19th century authors. Perhaps the most important factor of the Renaissance is that those involved in the cultural movements in question—the artists, writers, and their patrons—believed they were living in a new era that was a clean break from the Middle Ages, even if much of the rest of the population seems to have viewed the period as an intensification of social maladies.

The most reasonable conclusion would seem to be to extend the usual meaning of The Renaissance to include the Reformation of the 16th century, with an emphasis on the Gutenberg printing revolution in the 1450s and the many children of that printing revolution in the following century. Within 50 years a thousand printers emerged, and by Luther's day in the early 1500s three million printed documents had been produced, three quarters of them religious.

Thus, what started out as a renaissance involving only a few became a reformation more profoundly affecting the entire area of European society than any previous event. Interestingly, the term “Reformation” is not entirely accurate. It implies a reformation or an improvement of theological and moral patterns, when in fact it is much more helpfully understood as a final breakdown of an essentially temporary and

superficial extension of Mediterranean culture and theology—an extension into the Germanic basin. It is basically an example of the breakaway of a mission-field church. It is one more case of the earthen vessel of the missionary culture finally yielding to the new earthen vessel of a new missionized cultural sphere. The Reformation was by no means primarily a theological squabble over the doctrine of the justification by faith. “A cultural reformulation” would be a better phrase.

For example, John Wycliffe, two centuries before the Reformation, is called the “morning star of the Reformation.” His vernacular English translation of the Bible is said to epitomize the thrust of the Reformation and to emphasize the “issue” of the suppression of the Bible and especially the Bible in the vernacular of the various language groups of Europe. In reality, for Wycliffe and later John Hus, it was not so much the case that the Bible could not be put in languages other than Latin but whether or not the Bible was more authoritative than the Pope.

Even that was not at bottom the real problem, but the fact that once you elevate the authority of the Bible, the basis is there to liberate outlying countries from the cultural and political domination of the Pope and his Latin church.

Luther gained great indignation against all things Roman simply because of a routine visit to Rome on behalf of his order. Even had that not happened the breakdown of the “uniformitarian” principle (on which the papacy stood) would have undoubtedly happened in any case. In that case we would merely have not heard of Luther. His trip to the “stinking city of Rome” and its multitudinous tourist traps for naive Christian visitors changed him from a Christian German to a German Christian. Next, money-raising by Rome, promising contributors things after death further troubled him.

His posting (not dramatically “nailed”) on a bulletin board of items for a perfectly routine discussion (of his so-called “95 theses”) certainly highlighted the theological features of the Reformation. But those same things he also wrote about to the current Pope with no great difference of opinion. That Pope was one of the best. He favored the “Elector Frederick” (the “senator” from Luther’s region) as the best candidate to become the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Until that issue of the choice of a new Emperor was decided, the Pope, even if disagreeing with Luther, was not eager to offend Frederick by working against Luther. In 25 years it was settled but the friendly Pope was no longer in power.

Far from being an issue over the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, Luther’s was the 14th entire Bible rendered into German. In Italy, Spain, France, and Germany hundreds of small groups were studying the Bible and believing in justification by faith. Only when it became clear that the Bible in the vernacular could be used for divisive political purposes was it necessary for both Protestants and Catholics to restrict the reading of the Bible to scholars. Both camps burned Bibles in unofficial translations.

A proper reading of the Book of Acts could have allowed for a peaceful diversity of “Insider Movements” within the various cultures over which the Latin church had extended its reach. Why, for example, should Mediterranean respect for celibacy be extended into Germanic territory?

Had the Reformation been mainly a matter of doctrinal reformation, the Lutheran “revolt” would not have spread automatically to all of the territories beyond which the Roman empire had not thoroughly “romanized” the cultural substratum—as had been the case, for example, in France, Spain and Italy.

There would seem to be two exceptions to the rule that the Reformation succeeded where the Romans had not succeeded. In both Poland and Ireland, we see outlying groups who deliberately stayed “Roman” in order to distinguish themselves from peoples that had gone Protestant, and who were geographically between themselves and Rome.

Of course, the Roman domination of much of Europe for centuries created a tension leading to half-hearted loyalty to the Reformation—and considerable hesitation and confusion. To this day villages in Germany side one way or another, or post the percentage breakdown of Catholic or Lutheran at the edge of the town as you drive in. However, for at least a century such differences led to innumerable armed conflicts such as endure in Northern Ireland, which goes back to the Celtic/Anglo-Saxon tension long before the Reformation.

This perspective I am giving you is missiological. It would seem to aid enormously in modern attempts to decipher the complexity of the complexion of global Christianity. The same word, Reformation, is often mentioned when a radical change of earthen vessels takes place both at home and in the so-called mission lands.

But it is uncommon to hear of the significant parallels between 1) the transmission of Biblical faith from Jewish to Greek and Latin worlds, 2) the transmission of Biblical faith from either Greek or Latin to several other worlds farther north, and 3) the transmission of Biblical faith from Western Christianity to forms of the faith that prefer not to adopt Western culture along with the treasure that always comes in earthen vessels.

There are other parallels. Islam can be seen as the transmission of Biblical faith from a Roman to a Semitic earthen vessel. Islam is, unfortunately, blighted by the simple fact, as we have seen already, that the form of faith from which Muslims drew their cues was itself a highly defective Christianity. One insightful scholar for this reason has said that Islam is victim of (flawed) Christianity. Furthermore, the Bible in its entirety was not available in Arabic.

Other parallels thus can be seen all over the mission world, that is, cases where the Bible becomes available and a considerable number of people prefer to interpret it for themselves instead of accepting the missionary’s culturally laden interpretation.

Even in American history we can perceive what H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Social Sources of Denominationalism* famously points out, that denominations are basically more often different cultural streams than they are theological disagreements.

The beginning of global missions is to be seen in the later years of this period, due to the ability to circumnavigate the globe. It is for Protestants a matter of acute embarrassment that the beginning of global missions is almost entirely a Catholic event. Ample coverage of this significant beginning is contained in the reading assignments for this lesson.

## **Some Thoughts on the Significance of the Post-Exilic Period**

(2008) (Foundations Reader, 97-99)

From the time of David and Solomon, the Hebrews tended to associate their ethnic existence—their “peoplehood”—with the existence of lineages of kings. But after the definitive deportation of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon self-rule was never again to be a very long-lasting reality. In the absence of Kings the Jews began to focus on scripture which described and confirmed their roots, their covenant with the Living God. Furthermore, large bodies of Jews were to be found not only in Babylon (and Persia) but more and more in Grecian Egypt. The “Babylonian Talmud” is much more extensive than the Palestinian Talmud. And it is in Alexandria of Egypt that the great bridge translation of Hebrew scripture, the Septuagint was initiated.

Amazingly, even though the Jews did not have a king of their own during the four hundred years prior to Christ, except in the Hasmonean period, which rapidly went awry, the unifying backbone of their faith—considerably stiffened by its foundation in the coherent, historical account in the Bible—enabled them to wangle their way with their overlords whether Persian, Greek, or Roman, to the extent that they governed themselves and provided fairly obedient subjects to their overlords.

There was a great amount of shuffling back and forth between external domination from the North and South, that is between Syrian and Egyptian control over Judea (e.g., Selucid vs. Ptolemaic). However, such details are almost irrelevant in the face of the simple fact that for three centuries before Christ both Egypt under the Ptolemies and Syria under the Selucids were Greek-speaking, highly Hellenistic governments.

Thus, from the time of Alexander’s campaign of conquest over Judea (331 BC) until the rise of Muhammad a thousand years later, Judea was exposed to virtually unending Greek and Latin influence.

Between the declining power of the Selucids and the rising power of Rome, the Maccabean revolt (against increasing assimilation to outside influences) provided the Jews with rulers of their own (the Hasmoneans), but this was not to last very long, even though, beginning with Aristobulus I they employed the word King. They reunited as a single political entity the whole of the earlier North and South Kingdoms, and temporarily even more, but they were unable to please both the extremely faithful and the secularized (Hellenized) elements —any more than has modern Israel.

When these native rulers fell to quarreling among themselves the Romans moved in and first propped up the Hasmonean dynasty as a subservient state, under John Hyrcanus II, and then sided twenty years later with Herod, a despised Idumean (Edomite), who, as a convert, tried very hard to be accepted, going so far as to build the magnificent “Herod’s Temple,” as well as many other imposing civil structures. Note how little regard the Jews had for converts!

In any case, the “patching over” of the Hebrew faith into the Greek language and culture had the double effect of releasing the influence of that faith into an enormous communication basin, and at the same time enabling that expanded faith to perpetuate itself through its new language and culture down through many centuries into modern times. There is no other example of a religion preserving a language and culture from ancient times so successfully. (According to Lamin Sanneh, the Yale professor,

Christianity has more successfully preserved native cultures by honoring their languages—in Bible translation—than has any other religion.)

Thus, not only was this faith borne along by the Septuagint, that is by documents, but it carried with it a healthy respect for other ancient documents. Virtually all of the literature we have today from Roman and Greek times comes to us through the lengthy succession of monastic learning communities which prized the written word so highly. Only four manuscripts exist from the Roman period which were not copied by monastics.

But, as noted, this universalized religion is not only the explanation for our relatively spectacular knowledge of Greece and Rome, it explains the existence of a body of literature and knowledge about events far back in history which has no parallel in any other sector of the planet. That is, the vast bulk of ancient literature which has been preserved, the vast majority of all the knowledge which historians mull over as they sift information about these ancient times and places, comes from books which would not exist today had it not been for the monastic libraries and their durability throughout many turbulent centuries. Turbulence has always characterized the entire planet in general, but in this one portion of the globe the ancient literatures were uniquely prevented from man's own self-destructive tendencies by a specific scholarly and religious tradition.

Back to the main point: the political instability and the inability of the Jews to form a coherent, long-lasting political state served again as a vital pressure toward their leaning on their faith and their scriptures rather than on a visible, earthly kingdom. If their faith was intended to be given away to other peoples and other languages, then a political power representing that faith officially would have been a drawback. The Jewish "fundamentalists" of Jesus day, despite their earnestness and godliness and even their missionary efforts ("traversing land and sea to make a single proselyte"), did not eventuate in any great insight into how they might "free" the Gospel from their particular cultural tradition. Had they had a political state they could call their own it would have been even harder to give their faith away.

As it was, their social unity was damaged extensively by the existence of various attempts to absolutize the faith culturally and by attempts to make it a civil power. Jewish messianism was, according to Jesus, focused on power in this world rather than upon a Kingdom which was not of this world. Most Jews did not see how they could be "saved" without being politically rescued. This is probably what Jesus was talking about when He said, "Seek to save yourself and you will lose your life."

But the very geography which God gave them as a springboard to the world made them into a doormat between the continents of Africa and Asia when they sought cultural and political durability. The see-saw of powers ruling over that tiny land bridge doomed all but wishful thinking about the achievement of a worldly power.

The many verses Russell quotes show how easily it was for the Jews to interpret God's purposes in earthly, political terms. They explain how readily the crowds shouted Hosanna ("save now"), thinking that Jesus should proceed directly to the Roman barracks and throw Roman soldiers into the sea. It shows how readily modern readers misunderstand the nature of the triumph on that "day of triumphal entry." It explains how readily activist Christians today confuse the physical for the spiritual, the social for the evangelistic, the ethnocentric for the cross-cultural.

God did have a plan for all the nations of the world, but it was not for a Jewish state to become a world ruler (requiring either an Alexander or a Hitler to force unity on

all peoples). Then, what was it? Jewish messianism to this day, with its mirror image in strands of evangelicalism today, is a grave and great distraction from a globalized faith.

Let's note the simple fact that even in Jesus' day the "locus" of Judaic faith was no longer in their promised land. That land served them well. Though it was a bridge to the nations, when they considered it a fort of defense it became a doormat. Meanwhile both in Babylon and in Egypt there were far more godly Jews than in Palestine. By Jesus' day, it had become almost meaningless what did or did not happen in the Temple in Jerusalem. As Jesus said, "The time will come when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the father" (John 4:21).

While the Old Testament treats over 1,000 years, the first half of the New Testament focuses primarily on three years, and the rest of it treats a handful of additional years. We will be much distracted if we suppose that the details of the pushing and shoving of nations is the essence of the story. The Old Testament shows us how God looks at history. We can look at the Intertestamental period with the same perspective. We are not given Biblical treatment of either this period or any other in the next 2,000 years, except for the reality check of the pages of the New Testament for those brief years.

Virtually all literature in world history has been lost. The most detailed and reliable ancient information is in the Bible, and most of the rest is the result of the Christian tradition that has been the most successful in preserving information about the story of man. At this very moment, it is the great libraries of the Christian countries which outshine all other libraries past and present.

But one of the main points is the fact that the Christian tradition began in a liberation from political and cultural wrappings. Judaism and Islam continue to suffer in canonized culture. Christians base their faith on a Bible which is both Semitic and Greek—and Roman. The faith is not to be entangled or confused with any of those cultures, and indeed around the world today it is brilliantly contextualized with no loss of full dynamic. Our task is to retrace the durability of that faith as it survived the tumult of the Intertestamental period, and to notice carefully how easily that transmission both went right and went wrong.

In successive lessons we will see right in the New Testament passages the tug of war between Semitic and Hellenistic clothing. This is not meant for us to choose between the two, although we will find that we are much more likely to be influenced by Hellenic thought than Semitic thought. We are to understand our faith to be reflected in both but to be tied to neither. This is easy to say but fascinatingly and even puzzlingly difficult to fathom. Almost all of the differing strands of the Christian faith, including Islam, are to a great extent basically variations on the axis between no immersion in Hellenic culture, e.g., continuing Judaism or differing forms of Marcionism, which rejects all that is in Jewish clothing.

The entire chapter of Romans 14 is Paul's attempt to bond those who continue with a great deal of Jewish culture and those who are coming from a Hellenic background. He did not think that it was necessary for either of them to condemn the other. In most of his letters he is expounding the Hellenic way of Christian faith. In Romans 14 he is pleading with Hellenic believers to accept those who prefer Jewish cultural norms. In neither case is the faith itself to be confused with the cultural carrier

vehicle without which it cannot survive. Like a crustacean, it must have a shell, but the life is not in the shell.

## **The First Four Hundred Years** (2008) (Foundations Reader, 153-58).

We have for convenience divided the whole of history into 400-year periods rather than focusing on what happened in every century. I am not very interested in getting people to remember unrelated details. I think the ability to remember something is almost useless unless what you remember is tied into some concept. So I would like now to talk about concepts that relate to the first 400-year period, 0 to 400 AD.

### **Historiographic Difficulties**

First of all—and almost preliminary to any discussion of what happened so far back in history—is the question that could be called historiographic. It is a question of how you know what you know.

One of the most eminent professors in the world in the field of history, Lynn White, Jr., made the statement that if it were not for the Carolingian Renaissance we would know no more about the ancient Roman Empire than we know about the ancient Maya, which is not very much. There are only four documents available at this time in history that come directly to us from the era of the Roman Empire. Everything else we know results from the literary output of converted savages in the forests of Europe and the Bible study centers they established. In each center they treated the Bible with great care. These were the first Bible schools where they studied not only the Bible, but secular literature as well. They copied and recopied especially the Bible, but also a lot of the ancient Roman literature. Except for those four manuscripts, the ancient Greek or Roman literature we have today was preserved due to that intervening “Bible school” activity after the fall of the Roman Empire. And this rescue of the literature came just in time before the Vikings swept in and burned most of it to ashes again.

In other words, we are looking back over many centuries—many mountain ranges, leaving valleys of darkness in order to get back to Latin Rome. It is really amazing that we know anything at all about events that far back.

There is a second dimension of difficulty, however, that is not just a physical problem. It has to do with blankets of prejudice. Everything we do has that complication. For instance, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon is a very detailed and lengthy set of volumes which scrounges its information from many other documents, most of which are still available. But it is a highly selective, biased and colored account. His whole purpose is to prove that the Christian faith wrecked the Roman Empire. And the fact that he has a hard time proving this is at least one positive thing, but the record he gives is a distortion due to his prejudice. There is not a single unprejudiced document in history (except for the Bible itself that attacks its own people over and over again).

For example, the Roman Catholic tradition with determination and thoroughness has tended to revise and twist the entire Christian history in order to make its own church lineage look like one single beautiful, continuous phenomenon. This means that a Roman Catholic document talking about the Celtic church should be treated with a healthy dose of distrust. Neither can an English document be trusted when it talks about the Celtic



church: the English church was even more irritated about the Celtic Church than were the Romans.

We constantly run into vast prejudices. The art of the interpretation of history is to a great extent catching on to the prejudices, and then, by allowing for them, figuring out what must have been true.

Let me give you one example. Those of you who have heard of Pelagius immediately think of him as a heretic. During Pelagius' period of time, Augustine of Hippo was the orthodox theologian who argued with Pelagius, telling him and everybody that Pelagius' theology was heretical. To this day church historians usually consider his theology to be a notable heresy. They base their comments to a great extent on Augustine's judgment. The church historian Latourette did his research on Pelagius and made the statement that Pelagius probably didn't believe exactly what his antagonists said he believed. It is almost always true in an argument if only the documents written by one side are available. The persons criticized may not have said all the things their opponents ascribe to them. So Latourette made the rather astounding statement that Pelagius was probably not Pelagian! He was, at the most, a "Semi-Pelagian."

The question that an anthropologist might raise over this situation is why these two theologians were arguing in the first place. Since hardly anything written by Pelagius himself is in existence today, we cannot simply read the text of his argument and decide for ourselves; all we have is what his accusers said about him. Why was there an argument? That is the most important preliminary question.

It is not very hard to find out that Pelagius came from the wrong side of the tracks. He was not even a citizen of Rome. He came from the Cornwall area—the lower south end of Britain in the Celtic belt where the Roman legions were still in charge. Apparently, some of the people there were highly educated but were not first-class Romans. When Pelagius went down to Rome, he already knew Greek, Hebrew and Latin, whereas Augustine, a first-class Roman citizen, knew only Latin and could not read either Greek or Hebrew.

Picture Pelagius walking into Rome, much about him betraying his background from the sticks—he may even have had the wrong color of hair, blonde instead of Mediterranean black—but, nevertheless, with such sophisticated academic credentials (better than Augustine's). You can well imagine that this would provoke an argument, no matter what Pelagius believed.

After visiting Rome and (Roman) North Africa, Pelagius went on his way to the Middle East. We next hear about him when he got into Jerome's sphere, and Jerome called him a "Celtic pig"—not a very scholarly evaluation. He not only called Pelagius a pig, but actually said, "that stupid pig like all the other Celts"—a comment which gives us insight into the "broad research" Jerome had done.

Then Pelagius disappears from the pages of history except for other occasional references to him in the documents from the period of the Carolingian Renaissance which were faithfully and mechanically copied. These are still available to us, and when we read about Pelagius, we tend to say, "Oh, what a terrible heretic this guy was."

Thus, when you go back and try to find out what happened, you encounter not only mechanical problems in just getting the data, but also cultural factors—enormous prejudices, which may cause even more misunderstanding.

One other example is the Venerable Bede, who was one of the very few historians during the first millennium, and one of the most trustworthy. He wrote a very detailed account of the English-speaking church. Even he had to deal with political correctness. Bede lived in a post-Celtic era after the Synod of Whitby when the English church had supposedly adopted the Roman (Catholic) tradition. Although an Anglo-Saxon, he was educated in a Celtic area, but was politically unable to write anything that was pro-Celtic. Thus, all the way through his rather thick and very interesting book, *An Ecclesiastical History of the English-Speaking People*, Bede is constantly taking pains to point out that Celtic scholars were wrong about the Easter date, the “tonsure” (the haircut that monks wore), and other equally “important” things.

However, leaking into the narrative, either subconsciously or very likely consciously, is a steady campaign. If you read the whole book and stop to think about what is really being said, you get a different point of view. Bede is quite pro-Celtic. Before the Synod of Whitby, most of the Celts in Britain were followers of Pelagius; indeed, many continued to revere him for four hundred more years. In his book, Bede presents these Celtic Christian leaders as humble, godly people. In his detailed story of the exchange at the Synod of Whitby, the Roman church leaders come across as insufferable snobs, even though they are the ones who happen to have the correct theology. In other words, Bede bows to the political necessity of following Rome, but we can tell where his sympathies really lie if we read the entire book carefully, being aware of the racial tensions of the time.

So here is a piece of literature that is superficially prejudiced in order to get published, but is more accurate and sympathetic in its between-the-lines message. These are just examples of how historiography must discover and grapple with prejudice. One more point under historiography: what is it then that we do know? Most of what we know about the phenomenon of Christianity in the first 400 years after Christ comes from only one or two documents. It either comes from the New Testament itself, which is a blazing beacon of truth and light in the early part of this 400-year period, or it comes from one other set of documents, the work of Eusebius, the official chronicler of the Roman Empire.

Most historians are embarrassed to admit that they have to trust Eusebius. When Christianity became officially tolerated, he was asked by the government to pull together a lot of the documents that had survived from the catacombs and the earlier period. So, Eusebius put together a massive multi-volume set of writings. He quoted from hundreds of documents which are no longer available to us. The problem with Eusebius is probably not that he is misquoting the authors of those documents, because, compared to the original documents that we do have, his quotations are fairly accurate. But, he quoted what he wanted to quote and left out what he did not want to quote. Inevitably, hundreds and hundreds of documents are completely lost sight of except for quotations that come from Eusebius.

Thus, almost always when we are reading the Early Church Fathers—Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and others—we are reading what Eusebius pulled together. Direct knowledge of this period is very scarce. And it is absolutely amazing how much we actually do know about Rome, the Roman Empire, or the Early Church, considering the problems of historiography and the heroic work of the monasteries.

### **Between the Beginning and the End**

We do know the beginning and the end of the period. The beginning is in the New Testament, and the events at the end were written down when Constantine and others allowed Christianity to flourish in the last hundred years of the 400-year period—from AD 300 to 400. Thus, we know a lot about the church in the fourth century. But we do not know anything, except indirectly, about the period between the New Testament and the fourth century.

However, if you know the beginning and the end of a story, it does not take too much imagination to figure out what happened in between. Let me give you three examples.

First of all, we know that at the beginning of this period the gospel was in a stable; at the end of the period it was ensconced in the Lateran Palace of Rome. The very palace of the emperors was taken over by the Christian church when Constantine, due to his wife's deriving from the eastern part of the empire, finally yielded to her wishes and moved the headquarters of the empire from Rome to what was thereafter to be called Constantinople. That move left behind this palace which was then turned over to the most reliable people in town, who by that time happened to be Christians.

In contrast to the West, Christianity had a sizable slice of the population in the eastern part of the empire. Perhaps as much as 30 percent of Greece was then Christian, for example. By then it was simply impossible to ignore this movement. It is utterly ridiculous to assume that, just because Constantine became a Christian, that gave the Christians an unfair advantage. Whether or not Constantine was converted, Rome would have had to tolerate Christianity anyway because by AD 300 there were so many Christians throughout the empire.

The second example of being able to conjecture because we know about the beginning and the ending is that we know the gospel went from Galilee of the Gentiles to the Goths during this period. The arguments that took place in the fourth century were so virulent and the heretics driven out so systematically that those heretics became reluctant missionaries in the Gothic areas. As a result, most of the Gothic peoples became at least nominally Christian by the end of the 400 years ("Gothic" in this case refers to all the different tribes of Middle Europe of that period). That is an end product that we know about. The mechanism whereby they were converted is not very clear, but we know that they were Christians of a sort by the end of the period. In some cases, the Goths accepted Arians exiled as heretics because they welcomed the heretics as enemies of Rome!

Thirdly, we know that the gospel went from Galatia to the Celtic peoples. We don't know that it went literally from Galatia to Galicia (in northeast Spain), but we can at least conjecture. There was probably a connection, likely by family, by traders stretching from Galatia of Asia Minor all the way to Ireland— across the northern part of Greece through former Yugoslavia, up to the Celtic peoples in what is still called the "Celtic belt" which stretched across Southern Europe. There was likely some kind of fairly constant communication between the Celtic tribes, by ship from Asia Minor going west through the Mediterranean and Gibraltar, then into northern Spain, into what is called Galicia (another Celtic name) in the Northwest tip of Spain, into Brittany (another Celtic name) in France, and into South Wales and Cornwall or Wales and Ireland.

For Paul the Apostle to have gone to the Galatians, who were Celtic peoples, or at least to have visited among them and to have implanted the gospel into that Celtic belt

gives us the possibility of imagining that it was the means whereby the gospel got so early into Ireland. Otherwise we have no explanation.

I'm not saying that the Galatians of the New Testament were Celts. They could have been. They lived in the Celtic belt, in an area named after the Celts, who landed there in 284 BC. The Greek word for Galatians, *galatoi*, is phonetically parallel to the word celt, the three consonants—g/k, l, t—are the evidence.

We also know that the gospel that landed in Ireland was not Western but Eastern. It was not Roman in the Latin tradition of Christianity; it bears strong evidence of Greek and Egyptian Christian background. This, of course, is another tell-tale evidence as to why Celtic Christianity must have come from the eastern end of the empire.

### **The Spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire**

As mentioned before, Constantine's conversion was not the main reason why the Roman Empire became tolerant to Christianity. Constantine did not proclaim Christianity as the official religion of Rome until over a half century after his conversion.

It is interesting that even after it became official, there was a case of a short reversal. In the fourth century the emperor Julian tried to get the people of the empire to go back to their pagan tradition. That is why he is known as "Julian the Apostate." He grew up a Christian, but apparently didn't like the politicization of the Christian religion. Also, he had a sort of deep inherent concern for the past, and perhaps Christianity was still not sufficiently indigenized.

So he tried to reinstate the pagan tradition. He ordered the priests in the pagan temples to try to keep up with the Christian preachers. The Christian tradition emphasized helping the widows and the orphans and being kind to the slaves, often even liberating them. He ordered the pagan priests to do the same and to preach to their followers that they should do similar good works. But Julian's intended pagan reform didn't work. It lasted just about three years, and then collapsed when Julian lost his life in a military battle and the next emperor was a Christian.

The interesting thing about Christianity in this period, however, is that, as it began to move out of its Palestinian background, it did not carry a Palestinian trait or culture with it. In Paul's hands it was no longer simply a Jewish tradition. To this day across the world Christianity has no homeland; there is no holy place like Mecca to which we turn nor any particular Christian culture, if we are careful not to canonize a particular tradition. It is the most nearly non-cultural religion in the world. Islam, wherever it goes, has people facing toward Mecca. They believe that the Koran cannot be adequately translated, or at least they do not like it to be translated. Christianity is characterized as a world religion. In some respects, it is the only world religion—the only multicultural religion—by the fact that it is not held down by a particular ethnic origin. This is why it was able to conquer the Roman Empire and in doing so became a potentially unifying faith among a wide diversity of peoples. It did not represent a particular language or cultural background.

Of course, there were many other reasons why the Christian religion was able to race around the empire. Very crucial was the communication system made possible by the hundreds of thousands of miles of roads paved with stones, which enabled messages to go from the far reaches of the empire to Rome itself in the matter of a few days. Secondly, the Pax Romana produced a (forced) military peace which stretched across a

large section of the world. Because of this peace and the comparative ease of travel, Christianity could even cross the English Channel to Britain, thereby introducing another phrase, the Pax Britannica, or the Peace of Britain. Centuries later it was possible for the British to rule the seas of the world without fear of pirates because they followed the example of Julius Caesar who had effectively destroyed the ability of pirates to harass ships on the Mediterranean Sea. Except for storms, travel by sea became as safe as on the roads of the empire, making it possible for the faith which had no ethnic origin to expand with linguistic and geographical freedom.

Another characteristic of this early period is the fact that there was no organized missionary work. When Paul was headed for Spain, he was part of a missionary team. But inevitably he went to the synagogues. When he wrote that “all Asia has heard the gospel,” he did not mean that he had preached to all the people in Asia Minor, as we now call it, much less what we call Asia today. In those days Asia merely meant a small “county” at the western end of what we now call Asia Minor. Nobody in the Roman era would have referred to Asia Minor, much less to China, as part of Asia. By saying that all Asia had heard the gospel Paul undoubtedly meant that he had been to every synagogue in Asia, a small eastern section of Turkey, because that was his approach. He focused on the synagogues because he was trying to find the God-fearers, those Gentiles who had been drawn to the Jewish faith but had not become Jewish proselytes. He was also trying to win godly Jews over to an evangelical faith in Christ.

Only at Lystra and at Athens do we find him preaching to pagan Greeks, and he did not do so well in those cases because his specialty was working with people who had already become friendly to the Jewish tradition. Of course, he knew about all the various kinds of people: the Jews, the Greeks, the Barbarians and the Scythians. And he was willing to become a Jew to the Jews, a Greek to the Greeks, and, I suppose, a Scythian to the Scythians, although we don’t know of any work he did among the Scythians. He just named them as part of his anthropological list.

Although Paul, a Jew who had grown up in a Gentile setting, was not really evangelizing cross-culturally, he was nevertheless doing missionary work because he was planting a church where there was no church in those particular cultural traditions—that is, there was no indigenous type of Christianity there. Later on, Cappadocian prisoners who had come to Christ within the empire witnessed to the Goths to the north, as did the exiled Arian bishops kicked out by the more orthodox leaders. To the east of the empire the so-called “Nestorian” bishops were also forced to leave and carried the gospel further east beyond the boundaries of the empire. Barbarians to the north and the west invaded the empire and captured Christian girls who spoke of their faith and sometimes won their pagan husbands.

For centuries, however, there had been colonies of Jews spread all over the Roman world. In a certain sense they made up what might be called a “missionary compound.” A synagogue in northern England, for example, was not a missionary outpost in the usual sense. But those who came to that synagogue revered their Bible, which was mostly the same as the one we have in the Old Testament today. And they learned in this Bible that God wanted all the nations to hear the gospel. Although that synagogue did not have missionary purposes like we would expect from a mission compound, nevertheless, it did have a missionary function because the God-fearers (Gentile believers) were drawn into that synagogue, and hundreds of others like it

scattered all over the Roman Empire. For all we know, in Britain the synagogues preceded the witness to Christ and in that sense actually had a very valuable function.

As a matter of fact, it is very likely that, looking back at their origins, Christians have failed to realize the mighty contribution of these thousands of Jewish synagogues. There may have been one million of the God-fearers associated with the ten million Jews in the empire. And ten million Jews is about 10% of the Roman citizenry. These synagogues for centuries radiated the light of God and paved the way for a faith that would eliminate almost entirely the Jewish cultural vehicle which they unconsciously embodied.

It should be difficult to ignore the missionary significance of this fact. In all of subsequent history Jews have been upright, industrious, family-loving, God-fearing people. That they could have consciously or unconsciously attracted a million Gentiles to their Bible (and maybe 100, 000 Gentiles to convert completely over to their culture—called proselytes) is something Christian historians have tended to overlook. We may have tended to write off the vast Jewish diaspora as a purely legalistic and non-functional faith, meanwhile thinking, superficially, that the Gentile version of that faith—later to be called Christianity— was pure.

We know that the first 400-year period ended with a blaze of glory by the year 400 (what I have named The Classical Renaissance) simply because the world's most powerful empire up to that point in history had been taken over by the faith of our Lord. But before Paul ever set to work, the Jewish diaspora was in place. Peter said that “in every city Moses is preached” (Acts 15:21). What this means is that the presence of believing Jews throughout the Roman Empire was a de facto missionary movement to which we see an amazing parallel in the diaspora of Western Christian culture today. Today, then, the Biblical faith is also to be found “everywhere,” but mainly in the garments of a particular (Western) cultural tradition. Only to the extent that it can put on other clothes will it ever become a truly universal faith.

In the era of the Roman Empire the Biblical faith in the enculturated form of the Jewish diaspora was found “everywhere” within that empire, and to a much less significant extent beyond its boundaries. We hear of Jewish synagogues in India and Korea, for example.

Today, however, the Biblical faith is to be found “everywhere” to a great extent in an enculturated form called Christianity. And, like the Jewish diaspora, it is unevenly leavened by true faith. There are masses of purely wooden “followers” of this faith crowding the ranks of Christians just as there were the equivalent within the Jewish diaspora, which Paul at times downgraded harshly as a legalistic deadness. In other cases he insisted that faith was still to be found in that diaspora—that “not all Israel is Israel” (Rom 9:6).

We would have to say the same about the modern expansion of Christianity around the globe. It is a mixed movement, not just a pure faith. Millions of “Christians” East and West are mere nominal followers. The true faith is found only partially but, nevertheless, vitally.

Thus, both Judaism or Christianity are enculturated vehicles of true faith—fairly specific cultural vehicles. The mission task is apparently then not to extend either of these vehicles but to extend the Biblical faith, preaching Christ, not Christianity, preaching the Bible, not all the twists and turns of our enormous theological tradition. And we return to

our earlier conclusion: only to the extent that our faith can put on other clothes can it ever become a truly universal faith.

[But this is happening before our eyes. Africans have taken the ball and run with it—in the enormous AIC movement. The same thing has happened in the phenomenal Chinese house church movement, and in the “Churchless Christianity” movement to faith in Jesus Christ in millions of Hindu homes 20 years later.]

## The Second Four Hundred Years (AD 400–800)

(2008) (Foundations Reader, 173-78).

### Overview of the Period

Now we come to the “Barbarian invasions.” Shortly after the year 400 there was chaos—the beginning of the first of the two Dark Ages. The two Dark Ages are the hundred or so years after the years 400 and 800. The first was just after 400, when the so-called Barbarians—the Germanic tribes—swept into Rome and Southern England. The second Dark Ages occurred just after 800 when a new and different type of barbarians, the Vikings, swooped down from Scandinavia upon the by-now Christianized earlier kind of Barbarians. Between those two Dark Ages, however, there was the marvelous Carolingian Renaissance, named for Charlemagne. Once again, at the end of the second 400-year period, there was a blaze of glory far brighter in many ways than the parallel blaze of glory at the end of the first 400 years. Thus, although there were two Dark Ages, there were also two Light Ages. There was an age of Light between 300 and 400, and another Light Age, renaissance, between 700 and 800, beginning a little before 700.

At least one historian has noted that what was “dark” for the Roman world was actually the dawning of a great light for the Barbarian world. No matter how you look at it, the time between 700 and 800 was a period of consolidation and scholarship, Bible transmission and Bible study, etc.

It is possible to observe that in the four-hundred-year period between 1200 and 1600 a third Dark Age occurred. This was not due to a military invasion so much as to the widespread devastation of the Bubonic plague in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The plague, which might be called a bacteriological invasion, was far more destructive than either of the two earlier invasions.

Now, with this rough canvas before us, let’s go back and pick up some of the traces of the Celtic tradition. The Celtic tradition in this period is usually passed over in our history books, partly because it does not have any modern advocates. We are dealing once more with the phenomenon of prejudice.

### The Celtic Movement in AD 400–800

In 410 and after, everything was cut to ribbons by the Germanic tribal peoples, who took over Rome itself. The result was such chaos that the people in Rome began to lose the ability to speak Latin. During the fifth century the only outpost of peace and quiet was in Ireland. Even England was under tremendous stress because with the fall of Rome and the withdrawal of the Roman legions from Britain, other Barbarians—the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes—had invaded England from across the channel. Simultaneously, the Celts (by and large still semi-pagan) of Ireland and Scotland also invaded from the west and north. But St. Patrick and other Christians who had been captured in Britain brought the Gospel to them early in this period. And they responded almost *en masse*.

Eventually it was from Ireland that the Gospel came *en force*, bringing scholarship, the Bible, and documents. At this point there was no Celtic church as such, just monastic centers, which were both scholarly and missionary out posts. To them, the transmission of the Bible and transmission of the faith were one and the same. These Celtic monks knew not only Latin but Greek and Hebrew. Thus, the people of the city of Rome, now dominated by Gothic invaders, asked for teachers from Ireland to come to teach them how to speak Latin again.

What an amazing twist! It is as if the Chinese were to invade the United States, and after a hundred years everyone was speaking half Chinese and half English and didn’t know which was which; so U.S. government officials had to go to Nairobi to bring some Oxford-accented Africans to come and teach English in the United States. That is exactly parallel to the situation in Rome. Because of the chaos of the invasions, the aqueducts no longer brought fresh water to the city. Indeed, the whole city was practically a malarial swamp. They forgot skills they had known, and



for a long time the situation was getting worse and worse. This is the “fall of Rome”—the city of Rome, not the seat of the Roman empire, which long before had been shifted to Constantinople.

But the Irish “church” (that is, the Celtic Christian movement) was a different kind of a structure. Nevertheless, it was a “church” of a sort which retained and extended the faith wherever it went. The Celtic *peregrini*, or “wandering monks” of which Latourette writes, went all over England and Europe, spreading the Gospel.

However, as you read the usual church history texts, it is hard to find even hints about Celtic Christianity. Until recently the only decent book on the subject was a book called *The Celtic Churches: A History 200–1200* by John T. McNeill. Only in the last few decades has research on the Celtic church begun to be significant. It is a big reversal of the study of Western civilization to uncover the vitality and the power of this Celtic movement.

### **Vitality and Early Roots of the Celtic Church**

Until almost the eighth century the Celtic Christians in general were beyond the Mediterranean sphere, like Pelagius, whom Augustine of Hippo and others in the early fourth century considered a heretic outsider. Thus, some might ask if the theology of these Celtic Christians was orthodox. They were certainly more Orthodox than Catholic, since their faith originally came from the East. Also, their theology was sound. The basic book for them was the Bible, revered above all others. They were a bit bizarre, like all of our cultural traditions.

The forbears of Celtic monks, only a few decades earlier, were head-hunting savages, and only the transforming power of the Gospel can account for the radical change in the lives of those people. But like every other tradition after its first encounter with Christ, it took the Celts a long time to root the remaining evil out of their society. Thus, when we look at the Celtic churches and monastic centers in the 400-to-800-year period we must take into account the background of these people and try to understand how far they had come from where they were before the Gospel got to them.

There are evidences of the early existence of Christianity in southern Britain when Constantine became the emperor of Rome and made it legal to be a Christian. That is what happened in 312 in the edict of Milan when Constantine declared that there would be no more persecution of Christians. Christianity was already deeply entrenched, though still greatly persecuted in the east. But Western scholars have not in general realized just how many Christians there already were in Britain by the year 200.

When Constantine took over and sensed just how widespread Christianity was, he convened a council in 314 in a little place in southern France called Arles. Three bishops—Celtic Christians—are recorded to have come to this council from southern England. Evidently, Christianity was already flourishing in Britain because the Celtic church there already had at least three bishops!

Later in that same century Pelagius came to Rome. He was a highly educated and sophisticated Celt even though he came from the wrong side of the tracks. But culturally, he was quite different from the Christians in Rome and North Africa. Even more difficult for them was the fact that his theological stance was not considered proper, being much closer to that of the eastern end of the empire than it was to that of Augustine of Hippo and the church of Rome in the West. Whatever is true about his theology, we know that the followers of Augustine of Hippo had monumental arguments with Pelagius. In fact, all we know about him is what some of his opponents said of his thinking.

Here was a highly sophisticated scholar coming out of southern England, way out in the western sticks in Cornwall. His scholarship and Biblical knowledge show that even in the fourth century there was a relatively advanced kind of Christianity in England in a situation which to day might be called a mission field.

It is perfectly possible, and many scholars admit this, that Patrick was not the first missionary to Ireland when he went there in 432. Some historians believe that there was a lot of Christianity in Ireland before Patrick ever went there. Not all scholars are even sure that there was a man named Patrick. But there are some documents attributed to him that are breathtakingly beautiful, high-minded and spiritual. Obviously someone wrote them.

However, the Venerable Bede, the historian in the second period of Light, 700 to 800, does not say anything at all about Patrick. In Bede's most complete narrative of the story of Christianity in the British Isles there is no reference whatsoever to Patrick, not even negative. That is very confusing and mysterious.

It is very hard to find out the truth about the Celtic Christian situation. But one thing we can perceive comes from the effect they had on the pagans they evangelized. We do know that the Celtic Christian monks certainly had a lot of Christian vitality.

### **Celtic and Roman Traditions Clash**

Around the year 500, Columba, the second son of an Irish chieftain and a member of a Celtic order, started the first missionary training center in history. At that time Scotland was totally pagan, so Columba discretely set up his community on the island of Iona, just a few miles off the coast of Scotland. Later on, a similar missionary training center was established on the other side of Scotland just below the point where it joins England. It was also on an island, at least when the tide was up, but otherwise a peninsula. This second outpost was called Lindisfarne. Both of these training centers began sending missionaries not only into Scotland, but also into England, which was now mainly occupied by the pagan Angles, Saxons and Jutes. They also began sending missionaries across the English channel. Columban, not as well known as Columba, went to the continent in the late 500s. He traveled all over Europe, as far down as northern Italy. There the various other kinds of Christians—mainly those who had followed Augustine of Hippo and called their theology Catholic—were as mad at him as the Jews were at John the Baptist. To try to bring some resolution to the argument, Columban ended up writing scholarly epistles to the Pope.

There were many Celtic missionaries, and they established monastic missionary centers in so many places both in the British Isles and on the continent that finally the Pope (of what is now called the Roman Catholic church) decided that his “catholic” brand of Christianity ought to gain control over that area. So in 596 he sent Augustine of Canterbury to England (not to be confused with Augustine of Hippo, whose disciples 200 years before had argued theology with Pelagius).

This later Augustine timidly settled in Canterbury, a small peninsula jutting out into the English channel in the south of England and as close to the continent as it was possible to be and still be in England. There he converted the king and queen of the area and established the Roman Christian tradition.

To this day there are two archbishops in the English church—the Archbishop of York representing the Celtic tradition and the Archbishop of Canterbury representing the Roman tradition. The fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury is considered in a popular sense the top leader of the Anglican church shows that eventually the scales tipped very slightly in favor of the Roman tradition. But, the fact that, technically, the Archbishop of York is equal to the Archbishop of Canterbury (the latter is “first among equals”) shows that in actuality the Celtic tradition held very strong.

York is in northern England, where the Celtic tradition held on the longest, and Canterbury is in southern England where Augustine first landed. To this day in the English church the Archbishop of York by his vestments represents the Eastern form of Christianity and the Archbishop of Canterbury, with vestments derived from the Latin Roman secular magistrates,

represents the Western form of Christianity. Is it any wonder that Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism eventually split?

The Celtic tradition, as we have seen, originally derived mainly from the eastern part of the Roman Empire, revealing this fact by their slightly different theology, their tonsure (haircut of the monks) and their method of calculating the date on which Easter was celebrated. (The Celts celebrated it on the first day of spring according to the solstice, whether or not that was on a Sunday. In this custom they again followed what had been the pattern of the church in the east.)

Thus, in 597 Augustine of Canterbury was sent as a missionary to England by Pope Gregory, the first pope of any significance and one of the most revered of all popes since. Since the very title “pope” was invented later, Gregory was simply known in his era as the bishop of Rome. He was a very dynamic and godly man, a product of the Benedictine monastic tradition. (Most of the best early popes came from the monastic tradition, which has continued to be true for most of Roman Catholic history.)

This second Augustine, the missionary, was not in any sense as capable as Gregory the Great. And he did not have the same sense of missionary calling as was true of the Celtic missionaries who wandered all over England and the continent. Augustine had not been trained as a missionary. He really did not want to go to England and try to evangelize the pagan Angles and Saxons. He was afraid of them. He went only out of obedience to Gregory. That became the beginning of Western or Roman Christianity in England, long after—note—Celtic Christianity had been well established.

Why did the Angles and Saxons respond to the Roman missionaries more than to the Celtic ones from the north? They responded best when a missionary lived among them. It is also true that when they had invaded England after the withdrawal of the Roman legions, the people they fought with to take over the land were all Celts, whom they pushed over into the western seaboard of present-day Cornwall and Wales. Taking over the religion of a conquered people is not something that conquerors do. Also, Celtic Christianity stressed humility and a simple life style. By contrast, Roman Christianity loved ceremony and pomp. It also had the status of the immensely prestigious, although now quite defunct, Roman Empire in the West (still alive in the East).

So, at this time Christianity in England was mainly Celtic except in the south east near Canterbury in Kent. Celtic missionaries from the West and North had already penetrated deep into middle England, setting up and reestablishing monastic houses wherever they went. But coming mainly from the two missionary training centers, both in the north, they had not yet really established themselves strongly in the south. Augustine landed at the right place.

The clash begun two hundred years earlier with Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius came to a head with Augustine of Canterbury and Aidan and other Celtic abbots from Lindisfarne, Iona and the many monasteries they had founded. Augustine’s assignment was not just winning Angles and Saxons, but turning heretical Christians (Celts, followers of Pelagius) into Catholic Christians. He was successful to a certain extent, especially in winning the king and queen in the area of Kent to Roman Christianity.

Also, when the king of Northumbria, King Oswy, was converted by Celtic missionaries to their brand of the faith, he looked around for a suitable Christian bride and chose the daughter of the king in Kent. It wasn’t long before the couple recognized how awkward it was for him to be Celtic and for her to be Roman in her faith, especially as it related to when to fast or feast for Lent and Easter. So in 664 King Oswy called a council to be held at the Celtic monastery of Whitby in the north-central part of England. Bede gives a detailed account of the council, albeit from the Roman Catholic viewpoint, but showing between the lines the respect and appreciation he has for the genuine humility and faith of the Celtic monks who came to the Synod of Whitby.

This Synod is considered by Roman Catholic historians, and to some extent by Protestants as well, to be the great watershed of the conflict between the Celtic and (as both Protestants and Catholics might say) “true Christianity.”

As we have already pointed out, the Celtic church at this time was probably truer to the faith of the early apostles than was the Roman church. The final outcome of the Synod of Whitby supposedly hinged on which brand of Christianity was more true. Rome's followers claimed as their founder the Apostle Peter who, they said, was given the "keys of the kingdom" by Christ himself. The Celts followed the Apostle John, probably because of their longstanding connection with the Christianity of the Middle Ages and love for the Celtic missionaries from Lindisfarne.

Today, if in a book on church history you come to a section that talks about the conversion of the English and Augustine of Canterbury is praised, you know that you are reading a Roman Catholic perspective, even if it is a Protestant textbook. Such a book has a distinct Roman Catholic bias obvious from the fact that the great missionary work of Celtic Christianity is rarely mentioned, if at all. And yet, except for the very minor work done by Augustine in Kent, missions in England at this period did not come from the south but from the north, not from Rome but from Iona and Lindisfarne.

Although Ireland and Wales did not have such well-known missionary training centers like Iona and Lindisfarne, Celtic Christians from there also reached out to the admittedly pagan Anglo-Saxons in central and even southern England. Indeed, the Celtic *peregrini* (which means "wanderers" and refers exclusively to the Celtic missionaries) evangelized and set up monastic houses not only on the continent and in eastern Europe, but also in Italy, Iceland, and on the Faroe and other islands to the northwest of Ireland. There are even some evidences that Irish missionaries may have arrived in Greenland or in some of the northern areas of the United States.<sup>1</sup> All told, Celtic Christianity and its missionary movement in particular was very virile. Ireland can be said to be the only nation in the first thousand years of Christian history that was a truly "missionary" nation.

### **Implications for Today's Missions**

What are the missionary lessons we can learn from the invasion of the pagan Anglo-Saxons into England in this second 400-year cycle after Christ? We know that the Anglo-Saxons who invaded and conquered Britain (a Celtic name) were completely pagan, whereas those they conquered, the Celtic peoples, were to some extent Christian. It is usually very hard for the conquerors to take the faith of the people they have conquered. Therefore, we have to admit that it was a good thing that the Romans arrived with a different form of Christianity—they were culturally more acceptable to the Anglo-Saxons. It was useful because then the Anglo-Saxons could become Christians without saying that they were now becoming Celts.

Likewise, it is a good thing today for another denomination to arrive if the Christians who are already in a given place represent a different ethnic or cultural tradition from the people they are trying to win. To give a modern-day example, it would be much easier for Southern Baptists to win the Turkana people of Kenya than for Presbyterians to try to win them. The Presbyterians of Kenya are mainly Kikuyus, who for many generations have been enemies of and have despised the Turkana. Therefore, in evangelizing the Turkana, it is better for some other denomination to take on that task than for the Turkana not to become Christians at all. Unfortunately, the Southern Baptists do not happen to be involved in reaching the Turkana.

For the same reason some of the Brahmins and middle caste peoples of India need to become Christians without having to imply that by so doing they have become untouchables. This parallel seems to be very close to what happened so long ago in England. There is also another parallel. In contrast to the general lack of missionary passion in the Roman tradition back then, where did Celtic Christianity get theirs? Every Celtic monastery had a scriptorium where they constantly copied the Bible. Evidently, as they copied and lovingly illustrated these scriptures, they also read them and understood the Bible, even the Great Commission.

There is no other reason that can account for the fact that the Celtic Christians were such avid missionaries. This is why the Roman church feared that without a Roman missionary

presence in England the Celtic tradition would win over the Anglo-Saxons and thus expand the non-Roman Celtic base that was already there. Believing that Celtic Christianity was heretical, inevitably, Pope Gregory must also have reflected that if the church of Rome did not send their Roman brand of faith there, Anglo-Saxons would become Celticized. You can see the parallel to some Presbyterians worrying that a more recent church tradition, for example, the Assemblies of God, might move into a vacant portion of an area which had long been considered Presbyterian mission territory. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was sometimes a case of a mission trying to move in with what it considered to be a superior theology rather than missionaries simply going where there was no faith at all.

Earlier a statement was made that it is difficult for conquerors to accept the religion of the people they have conquered. There are a few cases when this happened. The Romans conquered the Greeks, but eventually took over a lot of the Greek culture. It was certainly true that the Vikings took over the Christianity of the people they conquered. But where this has occurred historically, the conquerors were usually crude savages coming out of the forest into a more sophisticated situation. And it is not too hard to conjecture that they were overawed by what Christianity had produced rather than by the kind of faith that the Christians possessed.

Let me point out another missiological technique. Almost always the differences between cultural traditions come out in the form of arguments over trivialities. The surface differences between the Celtic Christians and the Roman Christians at Whitby were over the Easter date, the way they cut their hair, and the type of monastic order they had. They were also aware of many more other little cultural differences between them. Culturally antagonists, they irritated each other (today we call it culture shock) and argued over the surface issues. Practically all the theological arguments in history resolve down to trivialities which hide much more significant and deep-seated prejudices as well as ethnic differences.

In this situation, Pope Gregory the Great made a move of unbelievable wisdom and major missiological in sight. He chose as the Roman church representative to the Celts in England a certain monk, Theodore of Tarsus, who came from that city in the eastern part of the empire. Tarsus had to be very significant for Celtic Christians whose Christianity harked from the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Before he went to England, however, he was kept in Rome long enough so that his Eastern tradition haircut could grow out to be combed like the Roman tonsure.

It was a very strategic move to send Theodore into that situation because he came from the East, which the Celts trusted. Coming from his background, he could now tell the Christian Celts, "Look, I used to cut my hair just like you do. I used to celebrate Easter according to the solstice of the sun, just like you." But now, here he is, a respected senior, coming from the right place but wearing Roman garments. The Roman strategists rightly calculated that Theodore was the kind of person who would be acceptable to the Celtic people, mollify them and perhaps even win them to the Roman faith. And he did, to a considerable extent. This was in the 7<sup>th</sup> century just after the Synod of Whitby in 667. When he came to England he could talk sympathetically with both traditions and, amazingly, was able to accommodate Roman ideas of ecclesiastical structure to the dispersed independence of the Celtic monastic centers. In this structural process, the young Wilfred, the proud and often heralded Roman hero of Whitby, had his immense diocese whittled down into pieces by the elderly Theodore.

A possible reason for Roman scholars not often recognizing Theodore's strategic contribution is his suspect Eastern background. In fact, after he had been invested with authority by Rome, Rome apparently felt it had to send another man named Hadrian along with him to England just to make sure he did not stray from the Roman tradition.

But let's not fail to apply the missiological lesson here. In the mission field we are trying to win people who, like everyone everywhere, have certain predispositions and prejudices. We need to use wisdom as to whom to send as a missionary to the group we are trying to reach. This was the strategy of the Romans in getting Theodore. And all through the history of the church

anybody with any common sense has been willing to try and figure out which cultural terms would make the most sense, be the most acceptable in their situation.

So, if you are working in a former British colony like Ghana, it would not make sense to get people from France to witness there. But if you are in Niger or Gabone, it is better not to get the missionaries from the Anglo-Saxon background, but send someone who can represent the French tradition—people in Francophone Africa do not particularly like the British or the Americans. We have to use the simple wisdom of the ages when we try to win people to Christ. Their predispositions must be taken into account.

#### Endnote

1. I want to comment just a bit more about the possibility of Irish missionaries coming to the U.S. hundreds of years before Columbus “discovered” America. Twenty years ago people laughed at the idea that not only Celtic voyagers but also Canaanites had visited our shores way back in history. But archeologists have found Canaanite and Phoenician inscriptions in Massachusetts. And there are early but very rare signs of Celtic influence as well. Such evidence really disrupts all of our previous ideas, but the fact is that this Celtic church went far and wide. Although in Latourette you’ll find a very significant Celtic Christian movement discussed, much more data has come to light since he wrote his books. Today, scholars studying the situation tend to be from France, Scandina via and Germany with a few from England (mainly women) and recently a few from the U.S.. Among the Anglo-Saxon English there is still a real bias against the Irish and anything pertaining to them historically.

## **The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission**

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*In an address given to the All-Asia Mission Consultation in Seoul, Korea, in August 1973 (the founding of the Asia Missions Association), Ralph Winter describes the forms that God's two "redemptive structures" take in every human society, and have taken throughout history. His thesis has two major implications: (1) We must accept both structures, represented in the Christian church today by the local church and the mission society, as legitimate and necessary, and as part of "God's People, the Church"; and (2) non-Western churches must form and utilize mission societies if they are to exercise their missionary responsibility.*

It is the thesis of this article that whether Christianity takes on Western or Asian form, there will still be two basic kinds of structures that will make up the movement. Most of the emphasis will be placed on pointing out the existence of these two structures as they have continuously appeared across the centuries. This will serve to define, illustrate and compare their nature and importance. The writer will also endeavor to explain why he believes our efforts today in any part of the world will be most effective only if both of these two structures are fully and properly involved and supportive of each other.

### **Redemptive Structures in New Testament Times**

First of all, let us recognize the structure so fondly called "the New Testament Church" as basically a Christian synagogue.<sup>1</sup> Paul's missionary work consisted primarily of going to synagogues scattered across the Roman Empire, beginning in Asia Minor, and making clear to the Jewish and Gentile believers in those synagogues that the Messiah had come in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; that in Christ a final authority even greater than Moses existed; and that this made more understandable than ever the welcoming of the Gentiles without forcing upon them any literal cultural adaptation to the ritual provisions of the Mosaic Law. An outward novelty of Paul's work was the development eventually of wholly new synagogues that were not only Christian but Greek.

Very few Christians, casually reading the New Testament (and with only the New Testament available to them), would surmise the degree to which there had been Jewish evangelists who went before Paul all over the Roman Empire—a movement that began 100 years before Christ. Some of these were the people whom Jesus himself described as "traversing land and sea to make a single proselyte." Saul followed their path; Paul built on their efforts and went beyond them with the new gospel he preached, which allowed the Greeks to remain Greeks and not be circumcised and culturally assimilated into the Jewish way of life. Paul had a vast foundation on which to build: Peter declared "Moses is preached in every city (of the Roman Empire)" (Acts 15:21).

Yet not only did Paul apparently go to every existing synagogue of Asia,<sup>2</sup> after which he declared, "...all Asia has heard the gospel," but, when occasion demanded, he established brand new synagogue-type fellowships of believers as the basic unit of his missionary activity. The first structure in the New Testament scene is thus what is often called the New Testament Church. It was essentially built along Jewish synagogue lines,<sup>3</sup> embracing the community of the faithful in any given place. The defining characteristic

of this structure is that it included old and young, male and female. Note, too, that Paul was willing to build such fellowships out of former Jews as well as non-Jewish Greeks.

There is a second, quite different structure in the New Testament context. While we know very little about the structure of the evangelistic outreach within which pre-Pauline Jewish proselytizers worked, we do know, as already mentioned, that they operated all over the Roman Empire. It would be surprising if Paul didn't follow somewhat the same procedures. And we know a great deal more about the way Paul operated. He was, true enough, sent out by the church in Antioch. But once away from Antioch he seemed very much on his own. The little team he formed was economically self-sufficient when occasion demanded. It was also dependent, from time-to-time, not alone upon the Antioch church, but upon other churches that had risen as a result of evangelistic labors. Paul's team may certainly be considered a structure. While its design and form is not made concrete for us on the basis of remaining documents, neither, of course, is the structure of a New Testament congregation defined concretely for us in the pages of the New Testament. In both cases, the absence of any such definition implies the pre-existence of a commonly understood pattern of relationship, whether in the case of the congregational structure or the missionary band structure which Paul employed earlier as Saul the Pharisee, and later, at the time the Antioch congregation in Acts 13:2 released Paul and Barnabas for missionary work.

Thus, on the one hand, the structure we call the New Testament church is a prototype of all subsequent Christian fellowships where old and young, male and female are gathered together as normal biological families in aggregate. On the other hand, Paul's missionary band can be considered a prototype of all subsequent missionary endeavors organized out of committed, experienced workers who affiliated themselves as a second decision beyond membership in the first structure.

Note well the additional commitment. Note also that the structure that resulted was something definitely more than the extended outreach of the Antioch church. No matter what we think the structure was, we know that it was not simply the Antioch church operating at a distance from its home base. It was something else, something different. We will consider the missionary band the second of the two redemptive structures in New Testament times.

In conclusion, it is very important to note that neither of these two structures was, as it were, "let down from heaven" in a special way. It may be shocking at first to think that God made use of either a Jewish synagogue pattern or a Jewish evangelistic pattern. But this must not be more surprising than the fact that God employed the use of the pagan Greek language, the Holy Spirit guiding the biblical writers to lay hold of such terms as *kurios* (originally a pagan term), and pound them into shape to carry the Christian revelation. The New Testament refers to a synagogue dedicated to Satan, but this did not mean that Christians, to avoid such a pattern, could not fellowship together in the synagogue pattern. These considerations prepare us for what comes next in the history of the expansion of the gospel, because we see other patterns chosen by Christians at a later date whose origins are just as clearly "borrowed patterns" as were those in the New Testament period.

In fact, the profound missiological implication of all this is that the New Testament is trying to show us *how to borrow effective patterns*; it is trying to free all future missionaries from the need to follow the precise forms of the Jewish synagogue



and Jewish missionary band, and yet to allow them to choose comparable indigenous structures in the countless new situations across history and around the world—structures which will correspond faithfully to the function of patterns Paul employed, if not their form! It is no wonder that a considerable body of literature in the field of missiology today underlies the fact that world Christianity has generally employed the various existing languages and cultures of the world-human community—more so than any other religion—and in so doing, has cast into a shadow all efforts to canonize as universal any kind of mechanically formal extension of the New Testament church—which is “the people of God” however those individuals are organized. As Kraft has said earlier, we seek dynamic equivalence, not formal replication.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Early Development of Christian Structures within Roman Culture**

We have seen how the Christian movement built itself upon two different kinds of structures that had pre-existed in the Jewish cultural tradition. It is now our task to see if the functional equivalents of these same two structures were to appear in later Christian cultural traditions as the gospel invaded that larger world.

Of course, the original synagogue pattern persisted as a Christian structure for some time. Rivalry between Christians and Jews, however, tended to defeat this as a Christian pattern, and in some cases to force it out of existence, especially where it was possible for Jewish congregations of the dispersion to arouse public persecution of the apparently deviant Christian synagogues. Unlike the Jews, Christians had no official license for their alternative to the Roman Imperial cult.<sup>5</sup> Thus, whereas each synagogue was considerably independent of the others, the Christian pattern was soon assimilated to the Roman context, and bishops became invested with authority over more than one congregation with a territorial jurisdiction not altogether different from the pattern of Roman civil government. This tendency is well confirmed by the time the official recognition of Christianity had its full impact: the very Latin word for Roman magisterial territories was appropriated—the diocese—within which parishes are to be found on the local level.

In any case, while the more “congregational” pattern of the independent synagogue became pervasively replaced by a “connectional” Roman pattern the new Christian parish church still preserved the basic constituency of the synagogue, namely, the combination of old and young, male and female—that is, a biologically perpetuating organism.

Meanwhile, the monastic tradition in various early forms developed as a second structure. This new, widely proliferating structure undoubtedly had no connection at all with the missionary band in which Paul was involved. Indeed, it more substantially drew from Roman military structure than from any other single source. Pachomius, a former military man, gained 3,000 followers and attracted the attention of people like Basil of Caesarea, and then through Basil, John Cassian, who labored in southern Gaul at a later date.<sup>6</sup> These men thus carried forward a disciplined structure, borrowed primarily from the military, which allowed nominal Christians to make a second-level choice—an additional specific commitment.

Perhaps it would be well to pause here for a moment. Any reference to the monasteries gives Protestants culture shock. The Protestant Reformation fought desperately against certain degraded conditions at the very end of the 1000-year Medieval

period. We have no desire to deny the fact that conditions in monasteries were not always ideal; what the average Protestant knows about monasteries may be correct for certain situations; but the popular Protestant stereotype surely cannot describe correctly all that happened during the 1000 years! During those centuries there were many different eras and epochs and a wide variety of monastic movements, radically different from each other, as we shall see in a minute; and any generalization about so vast a phenomenon is bound to be simply an unreliable and no doubt prejudiced caricature.

Let me give just one example of how far wrong our Protestant stereotypes can be. We often hear that the monks “fled the world.” Compare that idea with this description by a Baptist missionary scholar:

The Benedictine rule and the many derived from it probably helped to give dignity to labor, including manual labor in the fields. This was in striking contrast with the aristocratic conviction of the servile status of manual work which prevailed in much of ancient society and which was also the attitude of the warriors and nonmonastic ecclesiastics who constituted the upper middle classes of the Middle Ages... To the monasteries... was obviously due much clearing of land and improvement in methods of agriculture. In the midst of barbarism, the monasteries were centers of orderly and settled life and monks were assigned the duty of road-building and road repair. Until the rise of the towns in the eleventh century, they were pioneers in industry and commerce. The shops of the monasteries preserved the industries of Roman times.... The earliest use of marl in improving the soil is attributed to them. The great French monastic orders led in the agricultural colonization of Western Europe. Especially did the Cistercians make their houses centers of agriculture and contribute to improvements in that occupation. With their lay brothers and their hired laborers, they became great landed proprietors. In Hungary and on the German frontier the Cistercians were particularly important in reducing the soil to cultivation and in furthering colonization. In Poland, too, the German monasteries set advanced standards in agriculture and introduced artisans and craftsmen.<sup>7</sup>

For all of us who are interested in missions, the shattering of the “monks fled the world” stereotype is even more dramatically and decisively reinforced by the magnificent record of the Irish *peregrini*, who were Celtic monks who did more to reach out to convert Anglo-Saxons than did Augustine’s later mission from the South, and who contributed more to the evangelization of Western Europe, even Central Europe, than any other force.

From its very inception this second kind of structure was highly significant to the growth and development of the Christian movement. Even though Protestants have an inbuilt prejudice against it for various reasons, as we have seen, there is no denying the fact that apart from this structure it would be hard even to imagine the vital continuity of the Christian tradition across the centuries. Protestants are equally dismayed by the other structure—the parish and diocesan structure. It is, in fact, the relative weakness and nominality of the diocesan structure that makes the monastic structure so significant. Men like Jerome and Augustine, for example, are thought of by Protestants not as monks but as great scholars; and people like John Calvin lean very heavily upon writings produced by such monks. But Protestants do not usually give any credit to the specific structure within which Jerome and Augustine and many other monastic scholars worked, a structure without which Protestant labors would have had very little to build on, not even a Bible.

We must now follow these threads into the next period, where we will see the formal emergence of the major monastic structures. It is sufficient at this point merely to note that there are already by the fourth century two very different kinds of structures—

the diocese and the monastery—both of them significant in the transmission and expansion of Christianity. They are each patterns borrowed from the cultural context of their time, just as were the earlier Christian synagogue and missionary band.

It is even more important for our purpose here to note that while these two structures are formally different from—and historically unrelated to—the two in New Testament times, they are nevertheless functionally the same. In order to speak conveniently about the continuing similarities in function, let us now call the synagogue and diocese modalities, and the missionary band and monastery sodalities. Elsewhere I have developed these terms in detail, but briefly, a modality is a structured fellowship in which there is no distinction of sex or age, while a sodality is a structured fellowship in which membership involves an adult second decision beyond modality membership, and is limited by either age or sex or marital status. In this use of these terms, both the denomination and the local congregation are modalities, while a mission agency or a local men’s club are sodalities.<sup>8</sup> A secular parallel would be that of a town (modality) compared to a private business (a sodality)—perhaps a chain of stores found in many towns. The sodalities are subject to the authority of the more general structures, usually. They are “regulated” but not “administered” by the modalities. A complete state socialism exists where there are no regulated, decentralized private initiatives. Some denominational traditions, like the Roman and the Anglican, allow for such initiatives. Many Protestant denominations, taking their cue from Luther’s rejection of the sodalities of his time, try to govern everything from a denominational office. Some local congregations cannot understand the value or the need for mission structures. Paul was “sent off” not “sent out” by the Antioch congregation. He may have reported back to it but did not take orders from it. His mission band (sodality) had all the autonomy and authority of a “traveling congregation.”

In the early period beyond the pages of the Bible, however, there was little relation between modality and sodality, while in Paul’s time his missionary band specifically nourished the congregations—a most significant symbiosis. We shall now see how the medieval period essentially recovered the healthy New Testament relationship between modality and sodality.

### **The Medieval Synthesis of Modality and Sodality**

We can say that the Medieval period began when the Roman Empire in the West started to break down. To some extent the diocesan pattern, following as it did the Roman civil-governmental pattern, tended to break down at the same time. The monastic (or sodality) pattern turned out to be much more durable, and as a result gained greater importance in the early Medieval period than it might have otherwise. The survival of the modality (diocesan Christianity) was further compromised by the fact that the invaders of this early Medieval period generally belonged to a different brand of Christian belief—they were Arians. As a result, in many places there were both “Arian” and “Catholic” Christian churches on opposite corners of Methodist and Presbyterian churches across the street from each other.

Again, however, it is not our purpose to downplay the significance of the parish or diocesan form of Christianity, but simply to point out that during this early period of the Medieval epoch the specialized house called the monastery, or its equivalent, became ever so much more important in the perpetuation of the Christian movement than was the

organized system of parishes, which we often call the church as if there were no other structure making up the church.

Perhaps the most outstanding illustration in the early Medieval period of the importance of the relationship between modality and sodality is the collaboration between Gregory the Great and a man later called Augustine of Canterbury. While Gregory, as the bishop of the diocese of Rome, was the head of a modality, both he and Augustine were the products of monastic houses—a fact which reflects the dominance even then of the sodality pattern of Christian structure. In any case, Gregory called upon his friend Augustine to undertake a major mission to England in order to try to plant a diocesan structure there, where Celtic Christianity had been deeply wounded by the invasion of Saxon warriors from the continent.

As strong as Gregory was in his own diocese, he simply had no structure to call upon to reach out in this intended mission other than the sodality, which at this point in history took the form of a Benedictine monastery. This is why he ended up asking Augustine and a group of other members of the same monastery to undertake this rather dangerous journey and important mission on his behalf. The purpose of the mission, curiously, was not to extend the Benedictine form of monasticism. The remnant of the Celtic “church” in England was itself a network of sodalities since there were no parish systems in the Celtic area. No, Augustine went to England to establish diocesan Christianity, though he himself was not a diocesan priest. Interestingly enough, the Benedictine “Rule” (way of life) was so attractive that gradually virtually all of the Celtic houses adopted the Benedictine Rule, or *Regula* (in Latin).

This is quite characteristic. During a lengthy period of time, perhaps a thousand years, the building and rebuilding of the modalities was mainly the work of the sodalities. That is to say the monasteries were uniformly the source and the real focal point of new energy and vitality which flowed into the diocesan side of the Christian movement. We think of the momentous Cluny reform, then the Cistercians, then the Friars, and finally the Jesuits—all of them strictly sodalities, but sodalities which contributed massively to the building and the rebuilding of the *Corpus Cristianum*, the network of dioceses, which Protestants often identify as “the” Christian movement.

At many points there was rivalry between these two structures, between bishop and abbot, diocese and monastery, modality and sodality, but the great achievement of the Medieval period is the ultimate synthesis, delicately achieved, whereby Catholic orders were able to function along with Catholic parishes and dioceses without the two structures conflicting with each other to the point of a setback to the movement. The harmony between the modality and the sodality achieved by the Roman Church is perhaps the most significant characteristic of this phase of the world Christian movement and continues to be Rome’s greatest organizational advantage to this day.

Note, however, that is not our intention to claim that any one organization, whether modality or sodality, was continuously the champion of vitality and vigor throughout the thousands of years of the Medieval epoch. As a matter of fact, there really is no very impressive organizational continuity in the Christian movement, either in the form of modality or sodality. (The list of bishops at Rome is at many points a most shaky construct and unfortunately does not even provide a focus for the entire Christian movement.) On the other hand, it is clear that the sodality, as it was recreated again and again by different leaders, was almost always the structural prime mover, the source of

inspiration and renewal which overflowed into the papacy and created the reform movements which blessed diocesan Christianity from time to time. The most significant instance of this is the accession to the papal throne of Hildebrand (Gregory VII), who brought the ideals, commitment and discipline of the monastic movement right into the Vatican itself. In this sense are not then the papacy, the College of Cardinals, the diocese, and the parish structure of the Roman Church in some respects a secondary element, a derivation from the monastic tradition rather than vice versa? In any case it seems appropriate that the priests of the monastic tradition are called regular priests, while priests. The former are voluntarily bound by a *regula*, while the latter as a group were other than, outside of (“cut off”) or somehow less than, the second-decision communities bound by a demanding way of life, a *regula*. Whenever a house or project or parish run by the regular clergy is brought under the domination of the secular clergy, this is a form of the “secularization” of that entity. In the lengthy “Investiture Controversy,” the regular clergy finally gained clear authority for at least semi-autonomous operation, and the secularization of the orders was averted.

The same structural danger of secularization exists today whenever the special concerns of an elite mission sodality fall under the complete domination (e.g., administration not just regulation) of an ecclesiastical government, since the Christian modalities (congregations) inevitably represent the much broader and, no doubt, mainly inward concerns of a large body of all kinds of Christians, who, as “first-decision” members, are generally less select. Their democratic majority tends to move away from the high-discipline of the mission structures, and denominational mission budgets tend to get smaller across the decades as the church membership “broadens.”

We cannot leave the Medieval period without referring to the many unofficial and often persecuted movements which also mark the era. In all of this, the Bible itself seems always the ultimate prime mover, as we see in the case of Peter Waldo. His work stands as a powerful demonstration of the simple power of a vernacular translation of the Bible where the people were unable to appreciate either Jerome’s classical translation or the celebration of the Mass in Latin. A large number of groups referred to as “Anabaptists” are to be found in many parts of Europe. One of the chief characteristics of these renewal movements is that they did not attempt to elicit merely celibate participation, although this was one of their traits on occasion, but often simply developed whole “new communities” of believers and their families, attempting by biological and cultural transmission to preserve a high and enlightened form of Christianity. These groups usually faced such strong opposition and grave limitations that it would be very unfair to judge their virility by their progress. It is important to note, however, that the average Mennonite or Salvation Army community, where whole families are members, typified the desire for a “pure” church, or what is often called a “believers” church, and constitutes a most significant experiment in Christian structure. Such a structure stands, in a certain sense, midway between a modality and a sodality, since it has the constituency of the modality (involving full families) and yet, in its earlier years, may have the vitality and selectivity of a sodality. We will return to this phenomenon in the next section.

We have space here only to point out that in terms of the durability and quality of the Christian faith, the 1000-year Medieval period is virtually impossible to account for apart from the role of the sodalities. What happened in the city of Rome is merely the tip

of the iceberg at best, and represents a rather superficial and political level. It is quite a contrast to the foundational well-springs of Biblical study and radical obedience represented by the various sodalities of this momentous millennium, which almost always arose somewhere else, and were often opposed by the Roman hierarchy.

### **The Protestant Recovery of the Sodality**

The Protestant movement started out by attempting to do without any kind of sodality structure. Martin Luther had been discontented with the apparent polarization between the vitality he eventually discovered in his own order and the very nominal parish life of his time. Being dissatisfied with this contrast, he abandoned the sodality (in which, nevertheless, he was introduced to the Bible, to the Pauline epistles and to teaching on “justification by faith,”) and took advantage of the political forces of his time to launch a full-scale renewal movement on the general level of church life. At first, he even tried to do without the characteristically Roman diocesan structure, but eventually the Lutheran movement produced a Lutheran diocesan structure which to a considerable extent represented the re-adoption of the Roman diocesan tradition. But the Lutheran movement did not in a comparable sense readopt the sodalities, the Catholic orders, that had been so prominent in the Roman tradition.

*This omission, in my evaluation, represents the greatest error of the Reformation and the greatest weakness of the resulting Protestant tradition.* Had it not been for the so-called Pietist movement, the Protestants would have been totally devoid of any organized renewing structures within their tradition. The Pietist tradition, in every new emergence of its force, was very definitely a sodality, inasmuch as it was a case of adults meeting together and committing themselves to new beginnings and higher goals as Christians without conflicting with the stated meetings of the existing church. This phenomenon of sodality nourishing modality is prominent in the case of the early work of John Wesley. He absolutely prohibited any abandonment of the parish churches. A contemporary example is the widely influential so-called *East African Revival*, which has now involved a million people but has very carefully avoided any clash with the functioning of local churches. The churches that have not fought against this movement have been greatly blessed by it.

However, the Pietist movement, along with the Anabaptist new communities, eventually dropped back to the level of biological growth; it reverted to the ordinary pattern of congregational life. It reverted from the level of the sodality to the level of the modality, and in most cases, rather soon became ineffective either as a mission structure or as a renewing force.

What interests us most is the fact that in failing to exploit the power of the sodality, the Protestants had no mechanism for missions for almost three hundred years, until William Carey’s famous book, *An Enquiry*, proposed “the use of means for the conversion of the heathen.” His key word means refers specifically to the need for a sodality, for the organized but non-ecclesiastical initiative of the warmhearted. Thus, the resulting Baptist Missionary Society is one of the most significant organizational developments in the Protestant tradition. Although not the earliest such society, reinforced as it was by the later stages of the powerful “Evangelical Awakening” and by the printing of Carey’s book, it set off a rush to the use of this kind of “means” for the conversion of the heathen, and we find in the next few years a number of societies

forming along similar lines—12 societies in 32 years.<sup>9</sup> Once this method of operation was clearly understood by the Protestants, 300 years of latent energies burst forth in what became, in Latourette's phrase, "The Great Century." By helping to tap the immense spiritual energies of the Reformation, Carey's book has probably contributed more to global mission than any other book in history other than the Bible itself!

The 19th Century is thus the first century in which Protestants were actively engaged in missions. For reasons which we have not space here to explain, it was also the century of the lowest ebb of Catholic mission energy. Amazingly, in this one century Protestants, building on the unprecedented world expansion of the West, caught up with 18 centuries of earlier mission efforts. There is simply no question that what was done in this century moved the Protestant stream from a self-contained, impotent European backwater into a world force in Christianity. Looking back from where we stand today, of course, it is hard to believe how recently the Protestant movement has become prominent.

Organizationally, however, the vehicle that allowed the Protestant movement to become vital was the structural development of the sodality, which harvested the vital "voluntarism" latent in Protestantism, and surfaced in new mission agencies of all kinds, both at home and overseas. Wave after wave of evangelical initiatives transformed the entire map of Christianity, especially in the United States, but also in England, in Scandinavia and on the Continent. By 1840, the phenomenon of mission sodalities was so prominent in the United States that the phrase the "Evangelical Empire" and other equivalent phrases were used to refer to it, and now began a trickle of ecclesiastical opposition to this bright new emergence of the second structure. This brings us to our next point.

### **The Contemporary Misunderstanding of the Mission Sodality**

Almost all mission efforts in the 19th Century, whether sponsored by interdenominational or denominational boards, were substantially the work of initiatives independent of the related ecclesiastical structures. Toward the latter half of the 19th Century, there seemed increasingly to be two separate structural traditions.

On the one hand, there were men like Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, who were the strategic thinkers at the helm of older societies—the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in England and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), respectively. These men championed the semi-autonomous mission sodality, and they voiced an attitude which was not at first contradicted by any significant part of the leaders of the ecclesiastical structures. On the other hand, there was the centralizing perspective of denominational leaders, principally the Presbyterians, which gained ground almost without reversal throughout the latter two-thirds of the 19th Century, so that by the early part of the 20th Century the once-independent structures which had been merely related to the denominations gradually became dominated by the churches, that is administered, not merely regulated. Partially as a result, toward the end of the 19th Century, there was a new burst of totally separate mission sodalities called the Faith Missions, with Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission (CIM) taking the lead. It is not widely recognized that this pattern was mainly a recrudescence of the pattern established earlier in the century, prior to the trend toward denominational boards.

All of these changes took place very gradually. Attitudes at any point are hard to pin down, but it does seem clear that Protestants were always a bit unsure about the

legitimacy of the sodality. The Anabaptist tradition consistently emphasized the concept of a pure community of believers and thus was uninterested in a voluntarism involving only part of the believing community. The same is true of Alexander Campbell's "Restoration" tradition and the Plymouth Brethren. The more recent sprinkling of independent "Charismatic Centers," with all their exuberance locally, tend to send out their own missionaries, and have not learned the lesson of the Pentecostal groups before them who employ mission agencies with great effect.

U.S. denominations, lacking tax support as on the Continent, have been generally a more selective and vital fellowship than the European state churches, and, at least in their youthful exuberance, have felt quite capable as denominations of providing all of the necessary initiative for overseas mission. It is for this latter reason that many new denominations of the U.S. have tended to act as though centralized church control of mission efforts is the only proper pattern.

As a result, by the Second World War, a very nearly complete transmutation had taken place in the case of almost all mission efforts related to denominational structures. That is, almost all older denominational boards, though once semi-autonomous or very nearly independent, had by this time become part of unified budget provisions. At the same time, and partially as a result, a whole host of new independent mission structures burst forth again, especially after the Second World War. As in the case of the earlier emergence of the Faith Missions, these tended to pay little attention to denominational leaders and their aspirations for church-centered mission. The Anglican church with its CMS, USPG, etc., displays the Medieval synthesis, and so, almost unconsciously, does the American CBA with its associated CBFMS (now CBI), CBHMS (now MTTA) structures. Thus, to this day, among Protestants, there continues to be deep confusion about the legitimacy and proper relationship of the two structures that have manifested themselves throughout the history of the Christian movement.

To make matters worse, Protestant blindness about the need for mission sodalities has had a very tragic influence on mission fields. Protestant missions, being modality-minded, have tended to assume that merely modalities, e.g., churches, need to be established. In most cases where mission work is being pursued by essentially semi-autonomous mission sodalities, it is the planting of modalities, not sodalities, that is the only goal. Mission agencies (even those completely independent from denominations back home) have tended in their mission work to set up churches and not to plant, in addition, mission sodalities in the so-called mission lands.<sup>10</sup> The marvelous "Third World Mission" movement has sprung up from these mission field churches, but with embarrassingly little encouragement from the Western mission societies, as sad and surprising as that may seem.

It is astonishing that most Protestant missionaries, working with (mission) structures that did not exist in the Protestant tradition for hundreds of years, and without whose existence there would have been no mission initiative, have nevertheless been blind to the significance of the very structure within which they have worked. In this blindness they have merely planted churches and have not effectively concerned themselves to make sure that the kind of mission structure within which they operate also be set up on the field. Many of the mission agencies founded after World War II, out of extreme deference to existing church movements already established in foreign lands, have not even tried to set up churches, and have worked for many years merely as



auxiliary agencies in various service capacities helping the churches that were already there.

The question we must ask is how long it will be before the younger churches of the so called mission territories of the non-Western world come to that epochal conclusion (to which the Protestant movement in Europe only tardily came), namely, that there need to be sodality structures, such as William Carey's "use of means," in order for church people to reach out in vital initiatives in mission, especially cross-cultural mission. There are already some hopeful signs that this tragic delay will not continue. We see, for example, the outstanding work of the Melanesian Brotherhood in the Solomon Islands.

### Conclusion

This article has been in no sense an attempt to decry or to criticize the organized church. It has assumed both the necessity and the importance of the parish structure, the diocesan structure, the denominational structure, the ecclesiastical structure. The modality structure in the view of this article is a significant and absolutely essential structure. All that is attempted here is to explore some of the historical patterns which make clear that God, through His Holy Spirit, has clearly and consistently used a structure other than (and sometimes instead of) the modality structure. It is our attempt here to help church leaders and others to understand the legitimacy of both structures, and the necessity for both structures not only to exist but to work together harmoniously for the fulfillment of the Great Commission and for the fulfillment of all that God desires for our time.

### End Notes

1. One can hardly conceive of more providentially supplied means for the Christian mission to reach the Gentile community. Wherever the community of Christ went, it found at hand the tools needed to reach the nations: a people living under covenant promise and a responsible election, and the Scriptures, God's revelation to all men. The open synagogue was the place where all these things converged. In the synagogue, the Christians were offered an inviting door of access to every Jewish community. It was in the synagogue that the first Gentile converts declared their faith in Jesus. Richard F. DeRidder, *The Dispersion of the People of God* (Netherlands: J.H. Kok, N.V. Kampen, 1971), p. 87.
2. In Paul's day Asia meant what we today call Asia Minor, or present-day Turkey. In those days no one dreamed how far the term would later be extended.
3. That Christians in Jerusalem organized themselves for worship on the synagogue pattern is evident from the appointment of elders and the adoption of the service of prayer. The provision of a daily dole for widows and the needy reflected the current synagogue practice (Acts 2:42, 6:1). It is possible that the epistle of James reflected the prevailing Jerusalem situation: in James 2:2 reference is made to a wealthy man coming "into your assembly." The term translated "assembly" is literally "synagogue," not the more usual word "church." Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper and Row Co., 1969), pp. 126-27.
4. "Dynamic Equivalence Churches," *Missiology: An International Review*, 1, no. 1 (1973), p. 39ff.
5. Christians, it said, resorted to formation of "burial clubs," which were legal, as one vehicle of fellowship and worship.
6. Latourette, Kenneth Scott, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), pp. 181, 221-34.
7. Latourette, Kenneth Scott, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 2, *The Thousand Years of Uncertainty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), pp. 379-80.
8. Winter, Ralph D., "The Warp and the Woof of the Christian Movement," in his and R. Pierce Beaver's, *The Warp and Woof: Organizing for Christian Mission* (South Pasadena, CA.: William Carey Library, 1970), pp. 52-62.

9. The London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Netherlands Missionary Society (NMS ) in 1795, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799, the CFBS in 1804, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) in 1810, the American Baptist Missionary Board (ABMB) in 1814, the Glasgow Missionary Society (GMS) in 1815, the Danish Missionary Society (DMS) in 1821, the FEM in 1822, and the Berlin Mission (BM) in 1824.

10. Winter, Ralph D., "The Planting of Younger Missions," in *Church/Mission Tensions Today*, ed. by C. Peter Wagner (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

## **Collapse of Colonialism, The Rise of Globalization**

(2008) (Foundations Course, Lecture 15).

Our topic leans heavily on the book, *The Twenty-Five Unbelievable Years*. There is certainly no value in my just repeating what is in those chapters. Rather, I would like to build up a larger context for that phenomenon—the phenomenon of the retreat of the West.

The West, of course, is a rather silly word, for what is west of what on the globe? Everything is west of something. We are talking about Western culture. It doesn't matter where you are in the world, there is what is called Western culture. Western culture is predominantly a Christianized phenomenon. It doesn't mean that Westerners are Christians, except in culture. It does mean that a Westerner is a person whose ethical judgments and philosophical, cosmological, worldview thinking, and so forth, have been predominantly the result, whether he knows it or not, of the Hellenistic tradition, which is non-Christian, the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the Western European Christian experience.

Eastern Christians are also Western in the larger sense of Western culture. In other words, Russians are part of the Western cultural tradition. When the Russians cross over into China, they are Westerners, even if they are living in Siberia or going into China. China is non-Western, because China in thinking and culture, at least prior to Mao Tse-tung, was for the most part unaffected by the West. Communism, however, is a Western phenomenon. Westernization has taken place not only through missionary penetration of the provinces of China, but because every single card-carrying communist is a Westernizer. His materialism derives from Christianity.

Christianity is the most materialistic of all known world religions. In fact, it has to be, because as some great theologian said, "God was the first materialist." He created the atoms, those shining, brilliant, unfathomable beauties that go together with the subatomic particles; and all this unbelievable complexity that is beyond our comprehension in its ultimate reality—God created all this!

All of this is based on God's wisdom, and it is the Christian who understands and is awed. The Christian does not worship it, but respects it and sees the glory of God in the handiwork which He has displayed for us: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

Thus, the created world we have in common with communism. Many other things we have in common with communism. The ravages of communism across the world, as an atheistic, anti-religious system, are to a great extent just bizarre perversions of a Christian inheritance. The Bible itself is anti-religious! Read chapter 1 of Isaiah. Read chapter 23 of Matthew. Christianity is not even really a religion, according to some theologians, and when it becomes a religion, it may no longer be a faith.

Now, that is an overstatement. I do believe there are many religious people who are also profoundly Christian. But it is Christianity alone—Evangelicalism in particular—which allows for the acceptance of people who do not go through fancy rituals, and who are not beholden to any observable patterns. Even Evangelicals eventually fall into patterns, so that if you walk into the most highly unstructured Evangelical service, the people there can tell exactly what is coming next. So don't let

people in non-liturgical traditions claim that they are non-liturgical in the ultimate sense. But despite habit structures being what they are, the fact of the matter is that Christianity in a certain sense really isn't a religion. It is a faith, it is a life. It is, in this sense, the only candidate for a world faith. All other religions are religions. Even Christianity becomes a religion all too easily.

But Christianity is the only world religion in another sense. When people speak of world religions, they often only mean long-lasting religious systems. Any long-lasting religious system with lots of followers in any place is sometimes called a world religion. That's nonsense! To be a world religion you have to have, in some sense, an affinity with all the cultures of the world. There is no other good candidate for that description except Christianity and its extensive cultural diversity. Christianity is the religion (if you wish to call it that) which has been most willing to take upon itself the cultural clothes of every tradition.

Islam, by comparison, although in some ways a heretical variety of Christianity, is much more of a religion, in that it requires the Arabic language in its holy book. It requires facing towards Mecca when you pray. It requires many things to be the same wherever it goes. It is what the communists in Indonesia once called an imperialistic religion. The communists, before they fell from power in Indonesia some years ago, claimed that the Indonesians were dupes to accept a foreign religion. But they were unable to pin that criticism on the Christians. The Christians had churches that were built in Indonesian architectural styles; their Bible was in Indonesian languages; their hymns and music partook, at least to some extent, of the Indonesian cultural tradition. In that sense, Christianity was nowhere near as foreign an invasion as Islam. And, by the way, Christianity got to Indonesia before Islam did! That is a very interesting thing. Islam is a relatively recent in Indonesia.

The Bahai religion is much too small a movement to be called a world religion, but it does to some extent follow Christianity in a multi-cultural approach. Their problem is their scriptures. Bahai people will tell you about their ineffable, ethereal scriptures, but they cannot be translated! I think that it is true: they are un-translatable! For when you translate them, no modern person with any sensitivity would go along with their bizarre and rather crude character. They have the same problem at that point as Islam. However, Muslims refuse to translate their scripture for the additional reason that they envision a global single language.

The point is that somehow there are many children of the Westernization process: communism is one of the children. It reflects faithfully many of the ethical concerns of Christianity. The ethical system which the communist society espouses, but which it does not have the power to live up to, is for the most part Christian. Their emphasis on the equality of all people was borrowed directly from Christianity. Their cell structure, their emphasis on confession, all this was borrowed directly from Christianity. Their sense of history comes directly from Christianity. Communism is a bizarre, heretical, and virulent evil, but to a great extent it has been a part of Western Christianized civilization. The process of Westernization produced an immense fertility of mind and industry, of political and demographic power. There is no example in human history, in the annals of mankind in any part of the world, of any other human movement gaining momentum so rapidly, building up population and wealth and power so rapidly, as you see in Western Europe. And that is precisely where the Bible was unleashed.

That power spilled over in many ugly ways, tragic ways, and also beneficial ways, all across the world. What earlier parallel is there of a vast muscular spill-over of population into another part of the world, as the modern colonial movement? What about the Crusades? The colonial movement was, in fact similar in some ways to the Crusades. It was far less holy, far less Christian in most ways. But for most of its early history, under the Portuguese, Spanish, and French—before the Bible-pounding Protestants got into the act—colonization was definitely a Christian Crusade. All ships carried priests: missionaries with the intent to convert people to Christ as King.

When the Protestants got into the act, their first large-scale presence on the open seas was the pirates. That's right, the pirates were Protestants, and you can imagine how easily this fitted into the Catholic stereotype of Protestantism. Father Baegert, a missionary priest, in his book, *Observations in Lower California*, pointed out that Protestants actually ruled the Caribbean, meaning that pirates ruled the Caribbean, and why didn't they evangelize? Some of these pirates actually did have chapels in their outposts, in their hideaways. Some were religious men. With all their cut-throat piracy, they may have thought they were doing God's will.

However, in general, when Protestants got into the act, colonization no longer had a Christian dimension to it. For example, the Dutch were allowed into the ports of Japan even after Japan totally sealed itself off from all other ships. The reason was that no one would have ever suspected the Dutch Protestants of bringing Christian missionaries. That is not quite true, however. The Dutch actually did bring chaplains with them to Taiwan. At one time there even was a fairly promising movement there. They also eventually did bring chaplains into Indonesia, the so-called Dutch East Indies. But, as I say, Protestants in general were less religious by far than other colonizing powers.

Notice that all this immense muscular outburst, whether you call it a crusade or not, to a great extent was a result of the explosion of a community produced by the limited tincture of Christian faith in Europe. When I read books written by secular scholars about the rise of Western civilization I just have to shake myself to realize that these authors are systematically omitting all of the Christian dimensions. I would read in Latourette about the Evangelical Awakening and its impact on the English parliament and everything else; and then I read a secular book with no reference of any kind to anything of that sort! It is just as if you're reading about two different worlds.

In fact, there was a great deal of vitality, of Christian devotion, of high-mindedness, of social reform, political reform in Western civilization and colonialism. The ending of slavery is one of the most obvious results of Christianity. Slavery was not something invented by Christians. In fact, to this date in history, there have been far more white people enslaved by white people, than black people enslaved by white people. Who are the Slavs? They are the quarry from which human slaves were gained for centuries and centuries, for over a millennium, the greatest source of human slaves sold into Africa. Slavery, therefore, was not caused by Christianity; slavery was there before Christianity ever arrived.

Christianity was what eventually percolated into the higher circles and, through John Wesley and the Evangelical Awakening, into the lives of Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect. Clapham was a district of London where these Evangelicals lived. They were called a sect, although they were really only a subordinate party in Parliament. They were the ones who led the anti-slavery movement. The impact of Christianity on the rise

of Western civilization, virtually unknown and undetectable in secular books, also accounted for the vitality and the military power of the West. It is a strange thing that the very muscle wielded by the Crusaders in cutting off people's heads was muscle produced by Christianity.

Christianity makes people healthy. It turns "the hearts of the fathers to the children." There is a lower infant mortality instantly when a population becomes Christian. There are all kinds of good things that happen: orphanages and hospitals, insane asylums. All kinds of problems are ameliorated because of Christianity. All that produces power, even for those who do not acknowledge it, and eventually spills over across all the world.

But the impact can either be called colonialism (with an adverse twang to the word), or it can be called a blessing. I don't know of any clear-thinking member of a former colonial country who will not be able to tell you how ambivalent their people are about the former colonial presence. Many people in India today, if they had their choice, would ask the British back. Of course, they would probably have to think twice! There would be lots of people who would be opposed to it. And there would probably be a lot of violence.

It is incredible that any one country would rule another country. Allan Moorehead wrote a book on the South Pacific called *The Fatal Impact*, and describes it as literally fatal to thousands of people, as slave ships and European diseases captured or killed off those people. It was fatal in other ways, since their cultures were largely destroyed. The point is that, at some point in history, the vast, massive and, for most observers, utterly irreversible movement out across the world all of a sudden began to crumble and retreat—after four hundred years of massive, muscular, irreversible outreach, controlling every square foot of the world!

So we have this amazing and unexpected collapse of colonial power. I will not say that I don't think that there is the slightest intrinsic virtue or superiority in Western man. I really do think that there is a great deal of superiority in Western culture insofar as it has been affected by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I will give not one millimeter of credit to any other source! It is Christ. Western nations can say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I!"

But I was sitting in a hotel room years ago talking to a Christian leader, John Gatu, from East Africa. He and I in a few minutes were to debate, before cameras, his widely criticized proposal for a moratorium on all mission work. He came up to my room in the hotel. It was his initiative to talk to me, hoping somehow that we could avoid unnecessary conflict in our discussions. I'm sure after the debate he was completely satisfied with what I said, because I agreed that in his situation in Kenya a withdrawal of missionaries from authority was quite reasonable.

But there I was, talking to a man whose own people a few months earlier were involved in the Mau Mau uprising. If I were John Gatu, I would be very embarrassed at the thought that my people, the Kikuyu, were involved in the orgies and unbelievable atrocities of those satanically-driven people. What I tried to tell him—yet what I couldn't easily convey—is that I was just as aware as he was of the orgies of brutality and bestiality among the tribal people of my own past.

Consider the Irish. They were originally headhunters. In their little boats they would go up the Irish Sea and suddenly besiege a little village thirty miles away and kill

every man, woman and child. They would pile all the heads into their boats and return, almost sinking, hollow out those skulls, process them and drink out of those skulls. Irishmen were drinking out of skulls as late as the sixteenth century!

Who are we kidding? Satan is the god of this world. All peoples come from a background of satanically controlled cultures. There is no intrinsic merit in Western society apart from the direct and indirect impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Science itself is a result of the cosmology which is uniquely found in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

You cannot be a scientist if you do not believe in the orderliness of nature. You cannot be a scientist if you are merely a Hellenistic philosopher. Plato believed in a pantheon of quarreling gods, whose quarrels decided whether it rained or didn't rain. You couldn't possibly have been a scientific observer of weather if you were a Plato. There is nothing about the Hellenistic tradition that would ever have allowed science to develop. The so-called Greek science, about which many books are written, is in a totally different category from Western science. The roots of the latter are the godly reflections of Christian people upon the orderliness and beauty of a creation which God designed.

However, there came a time when God obviously said "time's up" for Western political power. The crumbling of that vast world-wide empire is the story of the "Retreat of the West." However, the retreat of the West is actually only the retreat of political and military power. It is not a retreat of the cultural or economic power, or the retreat of the religious influence of the West.

Many people assumed, and maybe many hoped, that with the withdrawal of the troops and the colonial offices of the Western powers, they would have taken with them all other influences. But, as you'll see in the chapters of my book, in many cases the cultural impact of the West actually escalated in the absence of the often stuffy, censorious, and condescending colonial rulers.

The other important thing in this whole story is that in most cases the gospel of Jesus Christ actually was given freer reign with the Retreat of the West. It was not the gospel that retreated! *The Twenty-Five Unbelievable Years* book is simply the story of the unbelievable fact that the church of Jesus Christ emerged from this twenty-five-year period of Western retreat more powerful, stronger, more rooted, more indigenous than ever before!

At this point our dual topic, from colonialism to globalization, can be seen not as two different eras but as a very long and gradual transition in which both are present at all times. The end of the "25 Unbelievable Years" is described in that book as the end of only certain externalities, the outward clothing. The inner dynamic of the impact of the West did not decline at all, and is now the major driving force in the entire globe.

Globalization also is not new, except in its extent and rapidity. For thousands of years, goods from one part of the world have been traded for goods from other parts. All that has happened is, seemingly, that the process has been astoundingly speeded up. Interdependence has increased to the point that some are suggesting that the main reason China will not literally conquer the USA is due to the industrial and commercial interdependence of the two countries. Frankly, that may be the opposite. When the Gothic tribal peoples had learned the art of war by mustering in and out of the Roman legions, it simply made them both willing as well as able to overrun the Western Roman capital of the city of Rome itself. The Empire never again regained it.

A recent book proclaims that the world is now “flat.” That is, there is a level playing field and small businesses in one place must contend with huge industries thousands of miles away. (On that score it is just as much a smaller world as a flat world). The book gives an example of workers in Egypt losing their jobs. The work they used to do is now suddenly taken away from them by more efficient processes in China. Lantern makers of Cairo used to work months in advance to pile up stock for the moment when the Islamic year made carrying around hand lanterns the thing to do. Now those millions of lanterns are made in China and shipped to Egypt at a lower cost.

The thousands of Egyptians left without work are not less willing or less able to work. They simply cannot compete with Chinese efficiency. They have been made poor through no fault of their own but because of sweeping improvements in global communication and manufacturing. Neither is it due to people in China trying to harm them. The Chinese workers are simply trying to make things that the world will buy, so they then can buy things other countries of the world make. Another example is that after the 9/11 travesty in New York, the first two million miniature American flags sold in the USA were made in China!

For centuries, but more gradually, what is called technological unemployment has been taking place as hand looms gave way to textile mills, and subsistence farming gave way to mechanized farming. Today the transitions are blindingly swift and millions upon millions of people in the so-called Two-thirds World are suddenly without work. At the same time smaller numbers do in fact have jobs as part of the global economy due to distant outsourcing—jobs that never existed before where they live. Advanced globalization has obviously injected a new ingredient into the necessary strategy of Christian missions. That will have to await another lesson.



## **Beyond Christianity**

(2008). (Foundations Course, Lecture 17)

The title of this lesson was not designed to be provocative. At no point are we talking about “individual Christianity.” All the movements we will talk about involve whole families and even communities, and perhaps countries. A biblical faith is not adequately or durably represented in anyone’s “individual Christianity.”

But “Churchless Christianity” is the title given to a serious book by Herbert Hofer, a senior Missouri-Synod Lutheran theologian who was a professor in a mission field seminary for some years. The book is a report of a scientific statistical sampling of the population of the largest city in Southern India, Chennai, formerly Madras. It is a very concrete witness to the kind of thing we refer to when we speak of “beyond Christianity.”

Dr. Hofer’s intention in his book is to describe the surprising existence of a considerable amount of true faith in Jesus Christ which exists outside of the somewhat Westernized church movement in India. That’s where he gets the idea of “churchless,” which we can understand simply to be a movement which is outside of the formal Christian church movement in India. It is not without some kind of fellowship groups.

His sampling techniques were employed within that huge 13 million or so population of greater Chennai. He found that about three quarters of the population held a higher view of Christ than the average European. The other 25 percent appeared to be serious believers in Jesus Christ. The worship and Bible study of the latter did not show up in the church buildings of that area but was confined largely to homes of extended families. This 25-percent category he called Churchless Christianity. Amazingly, this sphere in greater Chennai is two or three times as large as the formally Christian population.

However, it might have been better to have described this phenomenon Christianity-less churches, rather than Churchless Christianity, because while it is outside of the formal Christian movement it nevertheless manifests itself usually in the form of what we call “House churches.” It simply does not wish to be associated with Western Christianity, and particularly with the mainly Dalit (untouchable) level of society. That is, the millions of people involved in this de- scribed phenomenon have faith in Christ but not in a Christianity tied both to the very lowest classes and to Western degradation (that is, nuclear rather than extended families, high divorce rates, pornography, alcoholic debauchery, huge criminal populations, etc.). This is why you could equally say that it is a movement of Christianity-less house churches.

These same percentages are not true in other parts of India. In tribal North East India, where the population figures are far smaller, the Christian population is as high as 75% or even 95%. However, the same kind of a phenomenon, that is, faith and practice unrelated to Western-styled church life, could arise anywhere in India or in the entire globe.

As we explore this global phenomenon it will be a bit of a review of some things we have already said in earlier lessons, but we will look more systematically at this particular type of thing in three periods—the New Testament period, the Reformation period, and the current world period.

### **The New Testament Period**

We have already noted in a previous lesson the extensive changes over the centuries of the outward, “earthen vessel” in which the true riches of faith are contained. We mentioned various stages throughout the Old Testament and New Testament and into the period of the Roman Empire when Constantine introduced one of the biggest changes of the “earthen vessel.” We described most of the earlier changes as diachronic, that is, within the same cultural tradition, but changes over time. However, we described the New Testament picture as being a much more radical type of “lateral” change, where the earthen vessel of one culture changes over to a very different culture, and continues to exist simultaneously with the very different cultural vehicle of the source culture.

These lateral shifts are the most disconcerting because almost always those whose faith is carried in the earlier vessel fail to recognize the validity of the faith contained in a contemporary, but different cultural vessel. That is, some of the Jews who believed in Christ could not conceive of Greeks being faithful followers of Christ without switching over to Jewish foods, clothing, language, etc. So also the Greeks who followed Christ could not conceive of that same faith being truly represented within the Jewish culture, which they thought to be out of date, never adequate, or dead wrong.

Later, Roman Catholics of Mediterranean culture couldn’t conceive how the faith could be contained in a vessel of Germanic culture. Let’s look at that much studied period.

### **The Reformation Period**

Predictably, those who held the true Biblical faith in the Germanic culture vessel felt that the Mediterranean vessel was invalid and was now to be superseded, and those that held the faith in the Mediterranean vessel thought the Germanic vessel was invalid. This is again parallel to the assumptions of some of the Greek believers that the Jewish vessel was an invalid vehicle of the faith, and vice versa.

Meanwhile, during the Reformation period there were actually many different versions of the faith. There were still lingering traces of the Zoroastrian survivals of Manichaeism in the form of the Cathari believers in southern France, although the Catholics tried their best to exterminate them completely.

There were peasants in Germany who read the Bible and believed in ways that didn’t correspond to either Catholic or Lutheran traditions. A simultaneous phenomenon called the Anabaptist movement was so strong as to be termed, often, the third force of the reformation. Roman Catholic and Anabaptist traditions are continuing to this day with a considerable social split, not just between Catholic and Protestant, but between Protestant and Anabaptist traditions.

The most powerful source of belief in both a faith and a particular earthen vessel is that of the Roman Catholic tradition. That stream, more than any other tradition, is the one which successfully extended its language. Latin survived for many centuries and performed the valuable function of a trade language and a scholarly language somewhat the way English is today. Unity through one language was a beautiful vision and the existence of a common written language in much of Europe has been a tremendous benefit. At the same time, this so called “beautiful vision,” which could be called “uniformitarian concept,” broke down permanently with the Reformation.

Curiously, the Eastern Orthodox Church much earlier gave up the idea of everyone within their tradition speaking Greek. Thus it exists as a number of Orthodox traditions, each with its own language. In a certain sense, this was a reformation before the Reformation.

But from the Roman Catholic point of view, what I call the “breakdown of the uniformitarian hypothesis” was a great tragedy. Their fears have been confirmed by what Kenneth Scott Latourette has famously called the “fissiparous tendency” following the Reformation. That tendency, blamed of course on the Protestants, has produced dozens of different versions of the faith, each within its own earthen vessel. That is a horror for those Catholics who have continued to hold to the ideal of a single universal church with a single language and single cultural tradition. They did not smile to both predict and then witness that ideal breaking up into a thousand pieces.

On the other hand, Catholic missionaries have been much more flexible. No single generalization about Catholic mission strategy could possibly be valid. Note two extremes. In Peru in 1540 the Jesuits decided it was necessary to whip the Incas to make them go to church and to Confession. Sixty years later, in 1600 AD, Jesuits working in China were soon capable of shifting gears radically in almost the opposite direction. In Peru they didn’t speak the language of the native. In China, they did. In Peru, they didn’t wear native clothing. In China, they did. In Peru, they didn’t respect the Inca scholars. In China, they respected the Chinese scholars.

In fact, their “accommodation” to the culture was so complete that reports trickled back to the Vatican that they were syncretizing the Christian religion. After 70 years of shipboard communications back and forth, the Vatican precipitated a decision of the Emperor of China expelling all Christian missionaries of what- ever kind. The sad story of this huge setback is what is called the Chinese Rites Controversy. The decision of the Vatican was against adopting a Chinese vehicle for the faith, even though the brilliant Jesuits, at this point in history, felt that they could see very clearly the value and the feasibility of the Gospel messengers dressing like the Mandarins and mastering their classical Chinese literature.

### **The Current World Situation**

Across the centuries, the Pope’s decision against Jesuit accommodation, which triggered the Emperor’s rejection of all missionaries, has been amply restudied. Views still vary, but there is a much more friendly attitude today toward cultural change than that of the Pope in the early 17th century. Of course, it is certainly possible to go too far. Before we leave China, it may be well to note a major movement involving hundreds of thousands of believers in the Bible called the Taiping Movement (also called the Taiping Rebellion). It took over the largest city in China at the time (Nanking) and ruled it very fairly and justly for over a decade. The leaders published parts of the Old Testament. They tried to live by the Bible, but they didn’t get everything exactly correct. The leader of the movement called himself “God’s Chinese Son” or, that is, the “other son of God” besides Jesus. Some of the missionaries favored the movement thinking that it would eventually turn out all right. Others opposed it as being too far out.

In any event, the Manchu leaders recouped their main city with the help of British, American and French gun- boats who together pursued the slaughter of thousands

of followers of the Taiping movement. This is all remotely parallel to the peasant movements of Reformation times whose people were also slaughtered and suppressed.

Today, we find movements that are very similar to the Taiping movement in many parts of the world. In Africa, there are hundreds of denominations that, as in China, have someone who is considered a divine person leading them. Obviously, missionaries are wary of such syncretism. There are probably twice as many movements that are equally different from standard Christianity of the west but which don't have a divine person in their midst. In Africa, all of these so called non-standard versions of Christianity are referred to as African Independent Churches or African Initiated Churches. They are often referred to as the AIC's for short. Their adherents number over 50 million in 20,000 "denominations."

Not only is there a spectrum of different opinions on the part of missionaries toward these groups, as is understandable, but also the groups themselves are a spectrum even more varied in size and in complexion. One of the larger of these groups is called the Kimbangu group, originating in what was once the Belgian Congo, today Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Belgian government, which favored the Catholic church, clapped Simon Kimbangu in jail, who languished 38 years before dying in prison. When he went into prison, his followers were very few. At the time he was carried out to be buried, the Belgian Congo very suddenly became an independent country called Zaire and his jailers speculated that if he had survived long enough to be freed in the Independence movement, he might have been able to recoup some of his followers.

He apparently didn't need to do that because by the time he died and the Congo became independent it turned out that his followers had grown to over one million and are now in the millions. This particular kind of Christianity is, as could be expected, disdained by many missionaries, but tolerated and perhaps respected by others. It is now a member of the World Council of Churches. Donald McGavran's perspective on these African AIC churches was to simply ask, Did they revere the Bible? He used to say, provocatively, "it doesn't matter what they believe if they are assiduously studying the Bible. Give them time, they'll turn out OK."

In any event, in Africa, where there are less than 400 church traditions established by Western missionaries, the number of believers that don't track with Western Christianity of any sort are practically equal in number and may be growing faster. You might say that our faith is now "out of control."

We've seen the same thing already, as we began this lesson, in the case of India. It may be that in China there is something very parallel as well. Very crudely you can say there are three kinds of Christians in China: the Catholics, the state recognized Protestants, and the so-called house churches of China. The latter, as with the AIC's in Africa, represent a wide spectrum of groups, and notice that they are by far the largest in number. The Catholics are far fewer than the recognized Protestant church sphere of maybe fifteen million, while the so-called house church movement has been estimated to be anywhere from 60 to 80 million.

In other words, most of the believers in Jesus Christ in Africa, India and China aren't exactly "Christians," and whether they are called churchless Christianity, or Christianity-less churches, they are a very strong and stalwart category. No matter how we look at this phenomenon we have to recognize that most of the Christianity which

continues in much of Western culture is falling behind despite the fact that it might be more doctrinally correct.

On the other hand, speaking candidly, it must be admitted that of the two billion people in the world who do in fact consider themselves “Christians” a fairly large proportion are not at all clear about what they believe and are far less interested in the Bible than those in the non-traditional new spheres, those in the Christianity-less spheres. This phenomenon, to use Archbishop Temple’s famous phrase, “is the new fact of our time.”

## **Churchless Christianity**

(2008) (Foundations Reader, 283-86).

I would like to address what I see to be the largest new factor in 21st-century missions. In past history there have been other “major factors” in mission strategy. Unfortunately, in most of those cases, we did not see them clearly until it was already too late to maximize our strategies in their light. I will give some examples from the past so that we can be more alert to new factors in the present.

### **Earlier New Factors**

1. *The William Carey factor.* Almost single-handedly William Carey broke down all kinds of silly theologies which seemed to oppose the thought of sending missionaries. He went and did it. Protestantism finally became aware of the Great Commission. But Protestants had been blind to missions for over two hundred years. Their coveted Reformed theology did not help them.

2. *The Hudson Taylor factor.* Taylor almost single handedly broke down the idea that we cannot penetrate inland, and with confidence seek to evangelize whole countries. Seventy years after Carey’s Enquiry was published token missions, touching only coastlands, was all Protestants could conceive. I don’t believe we need to learn that lesson again, praise God!

3. *The Archbishop William Temple factor.* He is the one who tore back the curtain so that all could see the existence and vitality of the non-Western church movements. He spoke of a global church as “the great new fact of our time.” Most mission supporters back home simply could not believe that a new force had been born in the mission lands. I don’t believe we need to learn that lesson again, praise God!

4. *The Townsend/McGavran factor.* Townsend focused our attention upon geographically distributed tribal societies. McGavran pointed out sociologically isolated people groups. These men tore back the curtain on the existence of thousands of new places to go to and new peoples to be reached, who formerly were by-passed. Together these two men took cultural identity seriously. For many years missions talked about reaching a whole country once a church movement existed within any one of the ethnic spheres of that country. Some missions prided themselves on having missionaries in every “country” being blind to the divergent peoples within those countries. I hope we don’t need to learn that lesson again.

5. *The non-Western mission factor.* David Yonggi Cho in Korea, perhaps more than any other person, helped to tear back the curtain on the vital existence of mission agencies being born in the former mission lands. For many people this was an entirely new phenomenon. We still have much to learn from this sturdy emerging reality. In my opinion, the general failure of Western missions, historically, to plant mission societies,

not merely churches, is the largest and most serious strategic error Western missionaries ever committed.

6. *The “Churchless Christianity” factor.* This factor is the thesis of this article. This, to me, is the largest new factor in 21st-century missions. Very few understand it. It is not yet taken seriously. To some it may come as a huge, disturbing surprise. To others it may constitute the final evidence of the power of the Bible over all other strategies of mission. In any case, it radically changes our understanding of the kingdom of God and the work of God on earth in regard to the role of what we call Christianity.

### **The Big New Factor Today**

Churchless Christianity is the title of a book compiled by a Bible-believing Missouri-Synod Lutheran missionary and theology professor. Thus, when I speak of “Churchless Christianity,” I am referring to that book. The book contains the results of a scientific survey of the largest city in Southern India, formerly called Madras, and today known as Chennai. It gives the evidence that masses of Hindus have a high regard for Jesus Christ, and about 25% of that city of millions of people have given up their idols and are daily Bible-reading followers of Christ. The surprise is that the majority of these followers of Christ study the Bible and worship at the home level, continue to associate within the Hindu social sphere, and do not routinely associate with the somewhat “Western” Christian churches. That is why the book is entitled *Churchless Christianity*.

In my perspective it would be more accurate to speak of “Christianity-less churches.” Why? Because we are talking about fervent Bible-believers who at least meet in “house churches,” even if they do not normally meet in existing “Christian churches.” This fact is itself very reminiscent of the New Testament worshipping households, such as that of Cornelius, Lydia, and Crispus.

Moreover, this is not a tiny, isolated phenomenon. We are talking about millions of believers who neither call themselves Christians, nor are called Christians by their Hindu neighbors.

This subject which I have labeled the “Churchless Christianity Factor” is, however, little recognized. I myself have long been unaware of it. It is so little understood that we may need to describe it more fully before commenting on it from a viewpoint of mission strategy—that is, what we can or cannot do about it.

### **What It Is**

Note well that a cautious, Bible-believing Missouri-Synod Lutheran seminary professor brought this factor into limited prominence when he made a professional survey of that great South India city of Madras (Chennai) in the 1980s. His survey revealed millions of fervent, daily Bible-reading followers of Jesus Christ who continued to identify with Hindu and Muslim families, but who lived largely in total isolation from the formal Christian movement in India. While this was surprising, disturbing, and perplexing, and he even wrote a book about it, it did not attract much attention for ten to twenty years. You can imagine reactions such as “Then, are the traditional Christian movements in India wrong?” “Do all Hindus and Muslims have to go this route”? The published book describing this careful survey, entitled *Churchless Christianity*, has a somewhat misleading title, as I have pointed out.

### **Is This an India-Only Phenomenon?**

In regard to missions in other parts of the world, this one survey of one large city in India raises insistently the more general question, “Can believers in Jesus Christ in other countries continue as part of a cultural tradition which is distinctly different from the Western Christian tradition?” Many of us might believe this could happen in theory and yet recoil emotionally at its appearance and existence in real life.

In other words, it raises an even more significant question for mission strategy. Is this seemingly “breakaway” movement happening only in South India, or are there parallels in Africa and Asia in general? How would we find out? What book might we consult?

Here the answer is swift in coming. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* reports 52 million Bible believers in Africa and 14 to 24 million believers in India who are outside of the formal Christian movement. Furthermore, we also know that there are from 50 to 70 million Chinese followers of Christ who are clearly outside of the 15 million Chinese believers within the formal Christian church movement in China today.

These are not small numbers! How do they compare to the number of Christians in these various countries? Or, more accurately, how do these numbers compare to the number of sincere, Bible-believers who are formally Christians in the same countries? (Many within the Christian sphere are quite nominal.)

In actuality, the astounding and perhaps alarming fact is that there may now exist in the non-Western world as many (or even more) truly devout believers in the Bible and Jesus Christ outside of formal, Western-related Christianity as there are truly devout believers within it.

Curiously, mission leaders have talked about “contextualization” or “indigenization” for many years, under the assumption that we could develop, as it were, new “clothing” for the Western church to make it more acceptable to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. But, amazingly, it has not until recently dawned on us that God may have a different strategy altogether. He has been with us as we planted identifiable Christianity, but He now seems, in addition, to be bringing forth large movements entirely from within these huge non-Western cultural traditions.

Alert mission observers have already seen some evidence of these new movements. But they may have ignored them as “breakaway heresies” rather than understood them largely as sincere responses to the Bible.

### **How Important Is This New Factor?**

We can compare it to the previous major factors that have been accepted and understood by mission strategists:

1. Carey’s rediscovery of the Great Commission.
2. Taylor’s push to complete the Commission geographically.
3. Temple’s discovery of a truly global church.
4. Townsend and McGavran’s emphasis on the Biblical nations not the political nations, the era of the unreached peoples.
5. The discovery of mission agencies appearing on the “mission field,” that is, Two-Third’s World Missions.



The sixth factor, however—the sudden awareness of the Gospel bursting the bonds and boundaries of Western Christianity—is very little understood.

Number six is a phenomenon that would seem to be parallel to the Biblical shift from Jewish to Greek clothing, and also parallel to the shift from Latin to German clothing (which is usually called the Reformation). At this late date in history it would appear that there have been at least three “reformations”: Jewish to Mediterranean, Mediterranean to European, and European to non-Western.

### **What Is Our Response?**

What will be, and what should be, the mission response to this major new factor? Shall we call it “unofficial Christianity” and just live with it? Shall we drop the term Christianity altogether and start counting not Christians but Bible believers?

We need to pause and think clearly. Christianity is not a Biblical term. Even the word Christian which is in the Bible only three times is apparently a “sneer” word employed by outsiders and not a word the New Testament believers called themselves. That is, New Testament believers were in some cases, called Christians by others, but apparently no one in the New Testament ever called himself a Christian. When Agrippa asked Paul if he were trying to make him into a Christian, Paul did not make any use of the word.

My personal perspective is that we recognize again that our mission is simply the Biblical faith. We preach Christ, not Christianity. In this regard I see a parallel to the New Testament Biblical faith escaping the Jewish cultural tradition and being born from within the Greek culture. I see this phenomenon in the book of Acts not as a unique event but as a major example of a process that must happen over and over again as missionaries cross into new cultures.

We see in the New Testament the consternation of Jewish followers of Christ viewing the Greek followers of Christ as somehow inferior. And the Greek believers apparently also looked down on Jewish believers—or Paul would not have defended them in Romans 14.

Not only do we see the Greek believers scoffing at the Jewish wrappings. We see earnest Jewish followers of Christ, the “Judaizers,” insistently seeking to make the Greek followers more Jewish. Do we today sometimes think like the Judaizers? Do we seek to make Muslim and Hindu followers of Christ more “Christian,” by urging them to call themselves Christian, or by following certain Western Christian customs?

### **Is This Radical Contextualization?**

What we are talking about goes beyond ordinary “contextualization.” Some have called it “radical contextualization.” What we call this phenomenon is not the point. It is really not a new phenomenon. Christianity itself is the result of *radical contextualization*.

When the Gospel moved beyond the Jewish cradle in which it was born, it not only took on Greek clothing, but carried within it the same Biblical demands of heart faith. When later it was taken up by Latin-speaking people it outwardly changed again, so much that eventually the Greek church and the Latin church movements went separate ways. Still later, as Biblical faith penetrated the Teutonic forests of middle Europe, it divested itself of a good deal of the Latin tradition and now reappeared as a German,

Lutheran, tradition. About the same time it broke away as an English phenomenon. These new traditions were much more than a change of language.

The Biblical faith became at an early point a Celtic phenomenon, and there was antagonism for a long time between Roman and Celtic forms of faith. A bit later than the Celtic but before the Lutheran we see the Biblical faith emerge within the Arabic tradition in the form of Islam, which is only partially Biblical.

Many ancient observers felt that Islam was simply an Arabic form of Christianity. But the Christianity to which Muhammed was exposed was very weak and defective. It possessed only parts of the Bible, and in particular it had a defective understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Muhammed was apparently able to evaluate the defective trinity of the Christians he knew and rejected it just as we today reject such a misunderstanding.

Meanwhile, Christianity for many centuries was tied in with local governments which could not allow social diversity, and so Christians of one sort even tried to exterminate Christians of another sort, and certainly opposed the followers of Islam. Instead of sharing the Bible and studying it together they simply tried to remove the cultural diversity through persecution and even genocide. In general, Christians have actually been more intolerant than Muslims.

Today America faces a rapidly growing movement which has a partially Biblical faith, called Mormonism. Mormons believe the whole Bible, but like Islam, they have their own special prophet and additional book, not the Qur'an but the Book of Mormon.

Early on, American Christians killed many Mormons, tried to convert them, and drove them out of the eastern part of the country. But they have continued to grow into a large movement today. Many of them, as in all streams of Christianity, are purely cultural in adherence. Many of them are very sincere and godly people. And, they have retained a concept of the Christian family which in many ways is superior to general American family perspectives.

Now, the practical question that arises no matter what kind of a person we are dealing with—whether Presbyterian, Mormon, or Muslim—is, do they hunger and seek after righteousness? Do they in their hearts seek to know God and do His will? If they are Catholic, Muslim, Lutheran, Hindu or Baptist, do we feel they must leave their own people and join ours and call themselves by our name, whether Presbyterian, Anglican, Evangelical, or just Christian?

In other words, is it our mission to insist on a change of name and a change of clothing? Isn't the Bible, isn't Jesus, God's Son, more important to them than what they call themselves or how they worship? In this regard, are we afraid that our supporters and donors are forcing us to report on how many "Christians" or "Baptists" we have created, or how many church buildings we have brought into being that look like our own church buildings?

### **What Can We Do?**

We can go humbly to these groups and try to help them understand the Bible more clearly without assuming they will accept our form of Christianity when they read the Bible.

Furthermore, we can rejoice that there are millions outside the formal Christian tradition who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness and who have in their hands the Bible. Isn't that better than to add more millions who may call themselves Christians

but who do not pay much attention to the Bible and who can hardly be described as “hungering and thirsting after righteousness?”

## **The Role of Western Missions in the 21st Century**

(2008) (Foundations Reader, 299- 302).

**1** *The long-standing and indeed illustrious campaign to take Western Christianity to the world's minority groups is slowing down because fewer and fewer such groups remain untouched.*

One of the miracles of the 20th century—which forever changes the focus of missions for the 21st—is the fact that the Western missions have been so successful in transforming dark mission fields into bright mission sending forces.

It is true that we must give credit to the AD2000 Movement and others in the last ten years for highlighting the fact that there are still dark pockets needing the light of the Gospel. But, nevertheless, precisely because of the efforts of Western missions and, more recently, the active missionary outreach from many Third World countries, the fact is we are running out of “traditional pioneer mission fields.” There aren't many left. Are we going to be without a job? Yes, in the traditional sense, more and more.

Because pioneer missions have planted well-established churches in so many parts of the world, the 21st century looks radically different from that the 19th or 20th when Western Protestant missions began their work in earnest. Pioneer missions of the kind we have undertaken in the past are useful and essential in far fewer places around the world compared to the situation in the days of William Carey.

Thus, on the world level we now have the miracle of what is very nearly a single Christian family. For example, English is becoming more and more the *lingua franca* of international Evangelicalism. This relatively unified global cultural tradition of Christianity is a good and joyous thing, but it is probably not final.

It is actually wrong to think that reaching the final unreached people with Western cultural Christianity will be the fulfillment of the Great Commission. It is a marvelous beginning, it is not a mistake; nevertheless, it is not the whole picture.

**2** *Both Western and non-Western missions are now assisting more and more Christians in other parts of the world to build their churches and schools and to reach out to their own people, rather than tangling with heretofore non-Christian peoples.*

This continuing post-pioneer part of the picture is a blessed reality. But it is a very different process from the continuing activity of pioneer mission to the small remaining unreached groups in the world. Ironically, the very success of missions in producing vital overseas churches has meant, for one thing, that donors are becoming less and less interested in supporting mission work. Missionaries have sought to “work themselves out of a job,” and they have succeeded in many places beyond their dreams. But their dreams have turned into nightmares as their faithful supporters have lost interest in their work. Donors have by now long been complaining that the Great Commission must not be redefined to read, “Go ye into all the world and meddle in the national churches.” Many mission supporters have turned to assist the continuing growth and impact of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, since this organization is known to be working where there is not yet a church that can stand on its own two feet.

**3** *Meanwhile, as missions have often had great success among oppressed and minority groups, the Gospel of Christ and the Bible has also gone beyond the physical extension of the Western institutional church structure. It has entered into the large “Resistant blocs” of non-Christians producing seemingly syncretistic forms of “semi-Christian” faith. Millions of Africans and Asians are in this second category.*

The so-called “Resistant blocs” of Chinese, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists resist the Western cultural style of our faith while being very acceptive of Christ. So, while the Gospel has created a substantial movement of “Christianity” within most of the small groups, it has only extracted a token few individuals out from within these large groups. At the same time, some people within these large blocs are accepting the Gospel and the Bible in strange and unexpected ways. We may wish to ignore them, but we cannot deny that they exist.

**4** *It becomes suddenly clear that history may be repeating itself and that the experiences of the New Testament and early church throw remarkable light on the present.*

It is necessary to speak of a “global stalling” of the Westernized form of the Gospel.

We rejoice that millions have turned from their own culture and embraced the culture of Westernized Christianity, at least in part. They have the freedom in Christ to do so. This is just like the 100,000 Gentiles in Paul’s day who turned from their own people and embraced the Jewish vehicle of faith, becoming circumcised “proselytes.” These people were mostly genuine believers, but had shifted culturally in a way Paul considered a legitimate option but an illegitimate requirement non-essential to faith. This is the kind of “proselytism” that has evolved around the world among minority peoples but which is mostly feared and fought by those in the majority cultures.

But in Paul’s day, there were many more people—maybe ten times more—who were not proselytes, but “God-fearers.” These were people like Cornelius, who were attracted to the Word of God in the synagogues, but who had not made the shift over to the Jewish cultural tradition.

Paul’s mission strategy made both Jews and Proselytes—who had settled on the Jewish cultural tradition—furious. What did he do? He acknowledged the reality (despite the remaining weaknesses) of a new, unplanned, “Greek” version of the Biblical faith. This new version was based on Jesus Christ and the basic principles of the Jewish Bible, rather than literally upon all the Jewish customs described in the Bible.

Paul’s efforts helped to generate a vast movement which soon encompassed most of the million “Godfearers” and eventually became at home in the Greek, Latin and Syrian Christian traditions. Naturally, as soon as these major Mediterranean traditions cast an influence beyond their home cultures, hundreds of different varieties of semi-Biblical faith resulted.

For example, the Greek tradition of faith influenced the Slavs and the Celts, while the Latin influenced both Celtic and Teutonic cultures, and the Syrian tradition influenced the Arabic culture. Germanic Lutheranism, Slavic Orthodoxy and Semitic Islam resulted, employing different languages, literatures and cultures, the most significant common denominator being the Bible. All of these, to some significant extent, were “people of the book,” the Bible of the early church. All of them, in addition, were

influenced by the New Testament and generated their own additional semi-scriptures as well.

Greek Orthodoxy naturally considered the Greek scriptures most authoritative. Latin Catholicism enshrined its Latin translation, and the Lutherans, to be different, chose the Hebrew. However, because the Arabic translation of the Bible did not come soon enough, the Islamic tradition emerged with far less direct access to “the Book.” There were many arguments about what form of the faith was the one, right form.

When Islam engulfed Egypt, two different Biblical traditions were at that time at each other’s throats. All of these various cultural traditions tended to consider their own cultural derivation of the faith correct, and any lingering presence of the followers of a “foreign” faith was resented, rejected or marginalized.

Actually, none of these cultural traditions of faith were perfect, even though most of them were barely salvific.

**5** *Thus, it seems possible that the 21st century will see further unification around a generalized form of Western Christianity but at the same time see the looming up of radically different forms of our faith which may be barely recognizable and may be alienated or even antagonistic.*

We need only to reexamine our own past to see how drastically unity was shattered by the various deviations in Western history. The Quakers were considered a radical departure—and they were. Evangelicalism itself was, but so were Christian Science, Seventh-Day Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Pentecostals—all with varying degrees of similarity to the Reformation traditions and with varying degrees of relationship to the Bible. All these became—and perhaps still are for many—shocking departures from “the faith once delivered.”

However, figures like Billy Graham have succeeded in gaining a hearing to some extent from within almost all of these divergent traditions, just as Brahmins in India have been attracted to Graham’s message and his Bible without affiliating themselves with the formal movement of Christianity.

The phrase “churchless Christianity” has thus been employed to describe some phenomena in South India. It is possible that a more accurate phrase might be to speak of “Christianity-less churches,” since we see people still regarded as “Hindus” involved in home meetings much like the “*ecclesia*” of the New Testament but we do not see any close affiliation of these believers with the cultural tradition of Christianity. This raises the question whether we are to preach Christ and not Christianity.

A recent secular editorial in India recounted the gruesome tortures early missionaries of Portuguese Christian tradition inflicted on the people of Goa wherever departures from faith were suspected. We can protest that that was “Catholic” Christianity. But our own Protestant “Christian” cultural tradition includes similar events, such as when John Calvin consented to the death by fire of Michael Servetus as well as thirty-some women accused of witchcraft, whose departures from the faith seemed threatening to the unity of the Gospel. How can we not therefore try to understand the disinclination of high caste Hindus today to see their cultural unity threatened by invading missionary forces which may find it difficult to conceive of a Hindu cultural tradition that validly understands the Gospel.

**6** *The willingness and the ability to “give away our faith” is the great challenge of the 21st century. Can we accept the fact that Christianity by that name will never conquer the world even though our Bible and our Savior may become a spiritual reality within even the major so-called “resistant” blocs? This is, of course, a complex and delicate area of thought as well as a human phenomenon, which now includes perhaps more sincere people in the non-Western world than does the formal extension of Western Christianity into Africa and Asia.*

We have always thought that one of the blessings of the achievement of a worldwide Church movement is the possibility that this miraculous global fellowship would enable those of us in the West to reexamine our faith, our theology, our very study of the Bible. What neither the Western church nor its converts in the Third World are fully prepared for is the radical de-Westernization of the Gospel. But the 21st century may be the time when this will happen without our power to stop it.

Paul’s ministry begs for a parallel today. Our impact on the non-Western world has been primarily on the relatively few who for various reasons want something of our Western cultural tradition. We suddenly realize that both Western and non-Western missions are promoting our Westernized forms of religion. Some of the non-Western missions are just as much involved in this as are the Western missions. This is understandable and it is not evil, unless we believe and preach that the Gospel can only exist in its Western vessel.

Paul said circumcision did not need to carry over. For many in his day this was as outrageous as for anyone today to say that baptism by this or that method is not essential. If the parallel is at all valid that our missionary movement is similar to the Jewish diaspora and its “Gospel,” then we are not likely to see the missions, whether Western or not, capable in general of doing so radical a thing as Paul did.

**7** *It is possible that some of the non-Western peoples are more interested in the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—as they see His glory in the face of Jesus Christ—than they are interested in our procedures for gaining salvation. It may be that we ought to more deliberately “Declare His glory among the nations” than we are to sell our formulas for getting people into heaven, even though we ourselves may find it difficult to distinguish between these two related things.*

Jesus demonstrated the character of God in His preaching and healing ministry, and, on that basis, asked people to repent and believe. And he talked to people who had a great head start in understanding His Father in heaven. Today we are trying to build on a far thinner foundation. Once people know God through our science, medicine, through scriptures like Proverbs, and, even better, by knowing the Christ of the Gospels, then our missionary efforts to the major blocs will be more effective. There will still be those, however, who simply want to become Westernized, learn English and so forth.

Can Western and non-Western missions in the 21st century change enough to encourage and nourish some of these highly indigenous movements? Our overseas church constituencies may be as opposed to such an approach as the Jewish believers were opposed to Paul’s approach. Thus, our task in the 21st century is not so much to promote a Westernized Christianity as to defend the name of God, to represent Him more faithfully, to point out the role of Satan and be on God’s side in striving to destroy the works of Satan. We are, as Paul put it, “to open peoples’ eyes, turning them from

darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.” However, the outward results of this process may both surprise us and also not be immediately recognizable to our supporters.

In summary, the difference between the activity of Western and non-Western missions is not very great. They are both highly Western compared to the new indigenous movements which derive their faith more directly from the Bible than from Christianity. We have long gloated over the fact that Christianity is now geographically global. Our faith and our Bible, just as in the past, quickly goes beyond any particular codification of it.

Third World missions may be able to leave their own inherited Christianities and choose to follow the growth of Biblical faith and worship where this flows beyond the bounds of traditional Christianity. It is possible that some of these non-Western missions will be more able to do this than the traditional missions in the West. The culture of the West is itself changing so rapidly that traditional denominations are all on the decline while newer and unusual movements are those which are growing. The West today needs the help of the Third World churches and missions, especially if they are willing to follow faith and not form.



## Who is a True Christian?

*This was Ralph Winter's last "writing," dictated to his assistant a few weeks before his death on May 20, 2009.*

Evangelicals have a hard time figuring out who is and who is not a true Christian, in the sense of a born-again member of God's Kingdom. We are especially troubled about those who don't call themselves Christians. We tend to reject the faith of Gentiles in the Bible who had a relationship with God, such as Abimelech. On the other hand, we turn a blind eye to a billion Christians who may have no spiritual credentials at all. And even church fathers like Justin Martyr and Tertullian, who disagreed with each other on practically everything, and whose views would not pass muster with our present day doctrine of substitutionary atonement, are viewed as true Christians by most Evangelicals today.

Down through history our criterion for what a Christian is has tended to be intellectual. As late as 1524, long after the Constantinian period, a scholarly Lutheran professor began to doubt whether the body and blood of Christ appeared in the eucharist. She was executed. A few years later a man turned up in Geneva with a slightly different interpretation of the trinity and Calvin executed him. As Christianity invaded the Dutch, two versions of Calvinism were popular. One version was totally unacceptable to the other side and street riots led to people on the other side having their arms and legs torn off.

Eventually the Evangelical Awakening appeared with its emphasis that experience, not knowledge, is what is necessary to be converted: being born again, the filling of the Spirit, and other experiences. However, Evangelicalism has experienced a relapse, and we are back to emphasizing creeds, which seem less demanding. Across the United States we have innumerable creeds.

Thus to sum up, it seems to make little difference to most Evangelicals what a Christian needs to be and to do if they call themselves a Christian. But if they don't call themselves Christians, such as Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists, all of our powerful criteria are brought to bear and we tend to throw them out, no matter how seriously they seek God.

It seems to me, however, that no form of Evangelicalism nor any other definition can be adequate as a criterion of acceptability to God. We need to realize God does not intend for us to decide who is a spiritual Christian [OR: who is in his Kingdom] and who is not. That means the spiritual status of a lot of people is in doubt, and that's the way it should be. Embarrassingly, a huge amount of God's will is being performed every day by people who do not call themselves "Christian." Jesus' expectations that the will of God would be enacted in this life is actually happening before our eyes. This also means that Kingdom mission is in many cases a joint operation with "Christians" and non-"Christians" whose status with God is ambiguous or unfinished.