

## Twelve Frontiers of Perspective

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In this article, I am going to outline some of the major shifts or changes of perspective, each, in a way, a “frontier,” that has emerged at least in my own thinking since 1976 when I left my professorship at Fuller Theological Seminary. You might call these emerging perspectives *extensions of vision* because they represent additional insights into the factors not previously considered. This list can be looked upon as my own personal experience since 1976 that has profoundly modified and molded my perception of the mission task.

### **Background**

When we first set up the US Center for World Mission, the rationale was derived primarily from a new application of a McGavran perspective. McGavran was a third-generation missionary from India who established as factual the idea that cultural factors are more important than language factors. Here’s a village in India which has only one language but fifty different hermetically-sealed caste groups. In some ways the people in these differing spheres don’t have anything to do with each other and a single church-planting outreach can’t penetrate more than one of these. In a practical sense you can only penetrate one of them with any one form of Christianity.

And so, McGavran said, if you happen to find a person in your congregation who comes from another group, even one person sitting in the back—look on that person as a “bridge of God.” McGavran wrote a book called *The Bridges of God*. The idea is that once you can go with even one person into one of these hermetically-sealed compartments, then you might reach the rest of the group. At that point you can plan to “disciple to the fringes.” The movement that might result he called “a people movement to Christ.” The achievement of that kind of a result I have called “a missiological breakthrough.” This is one of the basic ideas of the so-called Church Growth School of Missiology.

### **Perspective One: Unreached Peoples**

However, after being steeped in that atmosphere for ten years, I began to realize that if his perception is true—that minor cultural differences can separate people and keep them from going to the same congregation, etc.—then this has horrendous implications for the existing mission movement. Many missions have gone around the world to major tribal groups and expected all the other groups with their differences to assimilate to that particular one, melting-pot style. Missions seeking simplicity often find it hard to take cultural differences within a country seriously. They do not want to seek two different forms of Christianity. They may expect that the form that develops in their first major beachhead ought to be good enough for all the other groups. Thus, it was a major insight for McGavran to emphasize the need for “Bridges of God” into other different cultures.

In fact, he sometimes implied, “If you don’t have a bridge, forget it. You can’t get into these groups. Spend your heavy time where you already have a bridge.” “Look for bridges. Don’t leave a bridge unattended,” etc. So what about the other groups? He didn’t have a good answer. At this many took offense because what he said seemed logically to lead them to give up their work if a breakthrough bridge did not already exist.

Statistically speaking, however, I discovered, in time to present the case at the Lausanne Conference in 1974, that a very large proportion of world population is from this perspective sealed off due to the lack of “bridges.” This further information, then, defined a huge frontier, which it took a few years for McGavran himself to accept. It meant that a major remaining frontier existed in the fact of thousands of remaining hermetically-sealed pockets of people around the world that had not yet had any kind of penetration.

From an extreme interpretation of McGavran’s point of view, it wasn’t practical to go to groups without some kind of a bridge into their midst. Nevertheless, I felt that it was at least required of us

to compile these peoples in a list and take them seriously as a cogent definition of one aspect of the unfinished task of missions.

Thus, the US Center for World Mission was founded on the idea that there was a huge number of people in thousands of pockets that had not yet been penetrated, often right alongside some existing church movement. Too often the feeling had been that because we had planted a church, say, in Pakistan, we could assume that this church was good enough for everyone in Pakistan.

It's interesting, though, that when we first started, no one had attempted to count the number of pockets not yet penetrated. The closest thing was Wycliffe's *Ethnologue* which dealt with language groups not cultural factors. Amazingly, I myself had only undertaken to estimate the number of *individuals* that were within such groups. It was not until we published a chart of 16,750 unreached *peoples* that estimates of the *number of unreached peoples* rather than total population became important.

## **Perspective Two: The Great Commission and Abraham**

The second major new insight, or frontier, that we picked up along the way had to do with the Bible. My wife and I began writing a series of columns in *Mission Frontiers* called "Missions in the Bible."<sup>1</sup> We began with the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—and we moved on down through the history of the formation of the canon of the Old Testament, and talked about the presence or the absence of mission vision in each of those periods. You can see that change of perspective and the resulting radically new idea (to us) that the Great Commission was right there in Genesis 12. Now that was a revolutionary thought for me. I had toyed with the thought when I was still at Fuller, but it really came home to me as we began to write this series of articles, month after month.

This new frontier of understanding came to a head just as the first *Perspectives Reader* was going to press. This was in 1981. I was the only one who thought we ought to make sure this idea got into the book, and I was being outvoted by everybody else on the editorial committee. "No way," they said, "no one else sees things this way, and so we can't put it in."

But, by providence, I happened to be asked to be a speaker at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center (that was in 1980), and when I went to that I ran into Walter Kaiser, Jr. (now President Emeritus of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary). I had been looking at one of his books, and between sessions I questioned him about the way he was titling his chapters. He put into every chapter title of his book on the Old Testament the phrase, "The Promise." I said, "Dr. Kaiser, isn't that simply a Jewish misunderstanding of what was actually a *mandate*, a command? It wasn't just a promise; it was more than that. Maybe they reduced it down to a promise." I was very upset about that. He calmly replied, "Well, the reason I used the word *promise* is because Paul did. Paul referred to Genesis 12:1-3 as *the Promise*." I staggered back fumbling for words and said, "Well, yeah, but Paul was only using the term that was common among his hearers. Surely it isn't that he agreed with his listeners that the Abrahamic Covenant was only a promise."

Then he looked right at me and said, "Well, you can call Genesis 12:1-3 the Great Commission if you want." Again I staggered back and I said, "Oh, now wait a minute. I can't go around saying that Genesis 12 is the Great Commission. I don't have the biblical credentials. I'm not a Hebrew professor. I need to be able to quote somebody who is. Do you have that statement in print?" So then, for the third time I staggered back when he answered, "Look, you quote me and I'll get it in print."

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<sup>1</sup> • Missions in the Bible (Overview), *Mission Frontiers*, Dec. 1980. <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missions-in-the-bible11>.

• Missions in the Bible (OT-I), *Mission Frontiers*, April 1980. <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missions-in-the-bible3>.

Missions in the Bible (NT), *Mission Frontiers*, Aug. 1980. <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missions-in-the-bible7>.

• Missions in the Bible (Acts), *Mission Frontiers*, Nov. 1980. <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missions-in-the-bible10>.

So I came back to the editors who were working on the final stages of the 1981 version of the *Perspectives Reader*, and I said to them, “Guess what, Kaiser agrees with me here. We can quote him.” But, that didn’t make much difference—I had nothing to prove this. However, in a few days the mail brought a cassette which was the recording of a chapel talk Kaiser had just given at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where he was the Dean. Sure enough, he did in fact get his stirring statement into print—at least printed magnetically on tape! What he sent on cassette then became Chapter 4 in that first *Reader*.

That was a major insight for us, giving us a whole new perspective on the Bible. And this element in the Perspectives course is one of the biggest jolts which especially seminary students get when they take the Perspectives course. The idea that the Great Commission is the backbone of the whole Bible—not just one of the teachings of the New Testament—is a major shift in perspective, a frontier yet to be crossed for most Christians. I have a feeling this was the same thing Paul was puzzling over for three years in Arabia. We used to joke that we would from then on refuse to talk on the *biblical basis of missions*. We will not accept that topic. But we will be willing to talk on *Missions as the Basis of the Bible*. We think that the difference between missions being just one topic in the Bible, or the *one theme* of the Bible, is a pretty important question. The stories *in the Bible* are great, but the *story of the Bible* is even more important.

Luther’s commentary on Genesis observes that Abraham in his day was to convey a blessing to other peoples, and Luther names off nine peoples so blessed. Gradually we learned that many people had already taught what we are saying about the Great Commission in Genesis 12—notably Kaiser—or we couldn’t have mentioned it!

We have since learned that the “blessing” being spoken of is not so much a blessing as a new relationship, such as the blessing conferred by Isaac on Jacob. Also, the Great Commission was further given to Isaac and to Jacob (Israel). In the latter case (Gen. 28:14-15), we may be looking at the very passage Jesus was paraphrasing as he spoke to the children of Israel in his day, as the Greek wording of Matthew 28:20 is very similar to the wording in the Greek Old Testament (the LXX) which was currently in use in Palestine at that time.

### ***Perspective Three: From the Unfinished Task to the Finishable Task***

The third major change of perspective emerged when we began to realize that it is a relatively small task to reach all these thousands of peoples—in view of how large the global community of Christians is, and how many churches there now are to reach them! That is, it is a *relatively small* job, not a *relatively large* job. Of course, it’s still a somewhat *new* job because many people don’t yet think in these terms, that is, it is a frontier to be crossed.

We still point out that the task is larger than just establishing a Christian outpost in every country. For example, someone may say, “We now have a church in Pakistan; so cross off Pakistan.” We tell them that Pakistan is not the goal—it’s the many *peoples* in Pakistan. In fact, the church in Pakistan has a Hindu background, not a Muslim background, and 98 percent of the Pakistanis are Muslims. By insisting on giving attention to many smaller groups we are still making the job bigger.

But now we also promote the idea that, relatively speaking, it is a finishable job to make at least a “missiological breakthrough” into every people group on the planet. This is the idea behind the phrase, “A church for every people by the year 2000.” And, relatively speaking, this *intermediate goal of initial penetration* is concrete and measurable, and it is a task that is relatively *small*, not hopelessly *large*! *In all mission strategy the breakthrough is the most difficult and crucial task.*

Unfortunately, some organizations have been too eager to drive down the numbers of groups to be reached. We at least continue to insist that an approach which only lists groups which are 10,000 or larger in population is one that inevitably omits some 4000 groups that are smaller. That, however, does not totally negate the overall relative smallness of the task. Incidentally, I recently calculated that there are only fifteen million people within the 4000 groups that are smaller than 10,000 in population.

### ***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, fifty-two 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, fifty to eighty 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 19<sup>th</sup>-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 fifty 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?” That in turn leads us to the fifth shift of perspective.

### **Perspective Five: Reverse Contextualization, the Recontextualization of Our Own Tradition**

We have been talking about radical contextualization for *others* to contend with in *other* lands. However, as I have thought about this, it became to me ominous and suspicious that our own form of Christianity has been unthinkingly assumed to be the most balanced, biblical, and properly contextualized. Is it possible that we need to know how to *decontextualize* our own Christianity before we can ever very successfully *contextualize* the Bible for somebody else?

Let's assume for a moment that our best understanding of the word *contextualization* here at home is not that of seeking indigenous forms to make our faith, our form of Christianity, more acceptable to others, but also means trying to make sure that existing indigenous forms employed by our own people are accurate carrier vehicles for a true, balanced, biblical faith. In that case we need to be doubly sure what biblical faith really is.

In seeking to understand our own form of Christianity, I have been helped a great deal by a serious book published by InterVarsity called *God at War*. It was written by Gregory Boyd, a professor at Bethel Seminary in Minneapolis, who suggests that in the 4th century our Christianity imbibed a terrible syncretism, a very tragic theological misunderstanding, a theological pollution. And, for the next 1600 years our Western, Latinized Christianity has become a carrier vehicle for a form of faith which is not solely biblical, but also pagan in the area of Neoplatonism's passivity toward evil and its absence of a satanic opponent to God's will. This means we are telling people around the world (by our actions, not our words), "Our God can get you to heaven but he can't cure your malaria because he apparently does not know or care or have power in that sphere." Thus, being invisibly and unconsciously saddled with this theology, we can't ourselves as part of our mission do anything trenchant about malaria either, and we should just pray about it, help those who already have it, and let it go at that.

Thus arises the idea of *the decontextualization of our own tradition, or reverse contextualization*, which means being willing to find major philosophic or biblical or theological flaws in our own tradition. It really isn't the same as asking if the as-is Christianity of our stripe will ever fit into the Hindu tradition. It's a different task requiring us to talk about the proper contextualization of the gospel in two directions: into the field culture and, even before that, into our home culture.

### **Perspective Six: The Reclaiming of the Gospel of the Kingdom**

Closely aligned with this last point, or perhaps merely a specific application of it, is a more recent syncretism that has emerged in Western Christianity, especially within the Evangelical tradition. It may today even be the distinctive heresy of the Evangelical as we have become specialists in merely getting people happy and getting them into heaven. We sing a lot more about what God does for us than we are thrilled to do what he is asking of us. The seeds of this heresy were planted even before the Reformation as the Roman church sought ways to support its ecclesiastical endeavors, build temples, etc. The idea was that if you can sell people something (especially if it doesn't cost you anything), this will create income for the church. Thus were developed a whole array of services that were offered to people, principal among them was a ticket to gain entrance into heaven.

The Reformers, being non-Roman, were not so impressed by the financial need to build St. Peters in Rome, and they short-circuited the Roman plan of salvation, which involved payment of funds to build St. Peters. They gave a better answer to the question of how to get to heaven. But they answered the wrong question or at least not the main question. The Bible does not talk so much about how to get people into heaven as about how to get heaven into people. In the process we have made "faith" purely intellectual.

Nevertheless, latter-day Evangelicals have run with their answer and made their "gospel of salvation" a nearly total substitute for the gospel of the Kingdom. Why is this? Nineteenth century Evangelicals were very socially conscious compared to Evangelicals in 20th century. Sub-Saharan Africa is 80 percent Christian, but has been described as having a faith that is, as we have already

noted, a mile wide and one inch deep. Apart from otherworldly assurances, the avowedly Christian structures contribute very little to “Thy will be done on earth” as Jesus asked us to pray. Missionaries are not normally trained nor well-equipped to take on the social, commercial, medical, engineering, and political problems of Africa. Neither are the national pastors. This vast array of problems is not part of our gospel of *Salvation*, even though it is definitely part of the gospel of the *Kingdom*. We leave these problems to the “secular world.” In a word, we think of ourselves as *survivors*, not *soldiers*.

### **Perspective Seven: Beyond Christianity**

We may need to go beyond mere radical contextualization. The biblical faith has gone beyond Judaism. The New Testament has shown us how that can and must be done for the sake of the Gentiles. We have also seen how our biblical faith has been able to go beyond Roman Catholicism. To go beyond Judaism did not invalidate the faith of those believing Jews who remained Jews. To go beyond Roman Catholicism does not invalidate the faith of those believing Catholics who have stayed behind. Is it time to allow for the possibility that some people around the world will choose to go *beyond Christianity* as we know it?

This has already begun to happen. We have already noted the existence of millions of Africans who are eagerly following Christ and the Bible but not identifying with any form of traditional Christianity. The Lutheran-Missouri Synod study already mentioned describes the situation in the one city of Chennai (Madras) alone, where millions of devout followers of Jesus and the Bible have chosen neither to call themselves Christians, nor to identify with the socio-ecclesiastical tradition of Christianity, and who still consider themselves Hindu. That report indicates that there are many more of this kind of devout believers than all the devout believers in that place who do identify with the social tradition of Christianity. What about all those millions in the house churches of China? When the bamboo curtain rises, how certain can we be that they will wish to be identified with formal Christianity—in China or any place else?

The New Testament Judaizers had only one solution: make people of any background into Jews. The Roman Catholics have for the most part had only one solution: make everyone into a Catholic. Have Evangelicals done the same? For the most part, yes.

We have seen our gospel work fairly well—to draw people into Evangelicalism, a Westernized Evangelical movement. But by and large this has happened only if they belonged to a minority or an oppressed group—like tribal peoples or Koreans under the Japanese, people who had more to gain by giving up much of their cultural identity. In all such cases worldwide, people have seen the value of identifying with a foreign import that would befriend them and take their side. But by now we have lapped up most of these minorities and oppressed peoples. The future is correspondingly bleak for the further extension of our faith into the vast blocs of Chinese, Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists *unless we are willing to allow our faith to leave behind the cultural clothing of the Christian movement itself*. Do we preach Christ or Christianity?

Apparently, our real challenge is no longer to extend the boundaries of Christianity, but to acknowledge that biblical, Christian faith has already extensively flowed *beyond Christianity* as a cultural movement just as it has historically flowed beyond Judaism and Roman Catholicism. Our task may well be to allow and encourage Muslims and Hindus and Chinese to follow Christ without identifying themselves with a foreign religion. The Third Reformation is here!

### **Perspective Eight: A Different Type of Recruitment**

It is not strange that most mission agencies have settled on recruiting people who are college or seminary graduates. Most businesses wait until people graduate from college to take them in. Even in that case businesses recruit in engineering schools for engineers or business majors, etc. That is, the secular world is very concerned that the people they take in have the right background.

One obvious reason for this is that it is possible to do so. We have engineering schools and business majors. For mission agencies, however, it is not quite the same. Yes, there are mission majors in Bible colleges and in some Christian colleges. But it is ominously true that in many cases

those students who choose those majors face curious pressures from the bulk of the other students, attitudes not far from “distancing,” even ostracism. In very few of these schools is there an entirely wholesome and healthy attitude toward Christian service, much less missions. The bulk of the students seem to feel in this “Christian” atmosphere that they must defend themselves against pressures for full-time Christian service, and the missions students are very much a distanced minority, no matter how favorable some of the faculty and school officials may be.

By contrast, on the secular campuses—where fifteen out of seventeen Evangelical young people are to be found—there are student Christian fellowships which tend to be much more interested in options for Christian service. But, they still don’t have either the guidance or the right courses available to them.

Due to the simple fact that the source of the bulk of Christian service volunteers has become the secular schools, one of the major trends in the past fifty years has been, inevitably, for the mission agencies not to expect new recruits to have prior Christian training. Thus has arisen the pattern of the agencies requiring “a Year of Bible” for those without a Bible college or Christian college background. This policy has indeed pushed many into further schooling in Christian institutions—where, unfortunately, they have met the negative undertow toward Christian service already mentioned, and often less than ideal cross-culturally oriented course options. Some missions have no pre-candidate requirements at all. I was told that at one large conservative seminary ten percent of the incoming students are interested in missions, but only two percent of the seniors are.

In the past fifty years, then, the mission movement has considerably moved from seeking candidates from Christian schools with a lackluster training in missions, to candidates from secular schools with often a lackluster preparation for Christian service. There is no mission-world parallel to a technological company going to Stanford and wooing graduates into engineering and technology.

However, things are changing. It is now possible to do something radically different. There is now available a hefty educational package which can be studied either before or after going to the field. It is credit and degree bearing. It meticulously integrates 100 textbooks and hundreds of additional articles and chapters from other books into 320 lessons requiring four hours per lesson as well as additional activities. It is designed to be a part-time activity. It does not require physical relocation to any school campus. It is already employed by several fully accredited schools for both BA completion studies or an MA degree. (And those schools have cleared approval with their regional accrediting bodies.) Under the banner of the INSIGHT program it is also available as a first or second year of college. It has been utilized by the Wycliffe field-survey department, since it can be studied during either secular employment before going to the field or during on-field ministry, or a combination of both. *It covers everything taught in seminary as well as the core of a substantial liberal arts degree plus anthropology, linguistics, and missiology.*<sup>2</sup>

The basic implication of all this is simple and arresting: missions can now be vitally in contact with dedicated high school graduates or with a vast untapped group of people who have only two years of college, whether they are still in school or have been out for ten years, and guide them and track them through high-quality, carefully-designed basic training for Christian service as either laymen, pastors, or missionaries. These pre-candidates do not have to burn their bridges behind them at any point prior to completion of this program. And missions can accept them as full members when they have this training behind them.

There is a fascinating additional factor. By waiting until students find their own way through college, mission agencies are all vying for the same reduced number of people. College graduates interested in missions are few and far between. They have not usually had the right training, as we have noted. They are much more likely to be laden with debts.

By comparison, there is an enormous number of people who have only two years of college, and they are even more likely to be excited about missions and less burdened with debts and less sought after by agencies. The report is that forty million Americans have only two years of college. Ten million of these are Evangelicals of which one out of fifty are keen for missions but have been

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on these programs, visit the William Carey International University website at [www.wciu.edu](http://www.wciu.edu)

blocked by the lack of a degree. One out of fifty of ten million is 200,000 people! Presently unsought by missions! Able to take this new curriculum, hold down a full-time job, and emerge without debt!

By focusing on high-schoolers or these two-year people the agencies will not be lowering but raising their standards. Such agencies will as a result end up knowing far more about their new candidates than ever before—if they have tracked them after or during a curriculum like this. They will be seeding their work force with people who for the first time have serious, professional, foundational academic training for cross-cultural mission. This, in turn, is the most hopeful remedy for the pervasive trend today to a tragic amateurization of missions, what with short termers staying on, local churches sending out ordinary members on tourist-mission jaunts, and even fewer regular candidates having the right foundation for cogent career service.

### ***Perspective Nine: A Trojan Horse?***

Briefly, this is the problem we face: fifteen out of seventeen Evangelical young people are never in a Christian school, a Christian college, or even homeschooled. In the Christian schools and colleges secular textbooks are commonly employed by “secularized” Christian teachers. Yet this means that our children from a very young age are exposed to thirty hours of secularized perspective each week, but spend only thirty minutes in Sunday school (and on a totally different subject).

However, only a small number of widely used secular textbooks dominate the public schools and colleges. Why can’t supplementary booklets be written that would comment on precisely these books chapter by chapter, referring to specific page numbers where something important has been left out or is stated with a bias. Such supplementary booklets could then be employed in 1) Christian schools, 2) homeschool contexts, 3) by Christians teaching in public schools, 4) very importantly by Sunday schools, 5) *but most importantly by concerned parents* (who may not be able to count on any of the first four). By working in just the latter two cases we will likely be able more comprehensively to reach the “fifteen out of seventeen” than anything else we could do.

This kind of an effort could become the most strategic attempt yet to stem the tide of secularization in our schools public and private. It is somewhat like the ancient strategy of the Trojan Horse, since such materials are designed to become an integral part of both the major time commitment of virtually all students every- where as well as concerned Evangelical parents.

### ***Perspective Ten: Needed, A Revolution in Pastoral Training***

This revolution deals with three drastic drawbacks pervasively embodied in pastoral training both at home and abroad. These are so serious that it is sad, yet fair, to say that the seminaries and Bible schools of the world are a surprisingly weak and often negative contributor to the growth of Christianity around the world. *Virtually every church movement everywhere which has adopted residential schools of any type for their exclusive source of pastoral candidates has slowed, stopped, or even declined in growth.* At the same time, virtually every church movement everywhere that is rapidly growing selects its pastoral leaders later in life and may not effectively train them, maybe not at all.

The school-supported movement may offer superior theology without growth and vitality. By contrast, those movements which do not depend on residential training of young people for their pastoral leaders are often vital in faith and growth while weak and inherently fragile due to their lack of foundational knowledge.

Is there something wrong with the pastoral training institutions? Yes, even though they may have excellent, well-prepared faculty and entirely valid intentions, usually they have most or all of three deficiencies. They are often wrongly criticized for other things that may not be the heart of the problem: for being “academic” or “out of touch” with grass-roots conditions. It is much more likely that the roots of their inability to contribute dynamically to the growth of the church lies in most of the following three problems of inherent design:

**1. Wrong Students.** The most severe problem is the simple fact that 90 percent of the students in pastoral training are not the seasoned, mature believers defined by the New Testament as

candidates for pastoral leadership. We have adopted the defeating assumption of the lengthy, mediocre pattern of the Roman Catholic tradition, namely that you can breed leaders by a “formation” process if carefully designed.

Both in US seminaries and in some four or five thousand overseas Bible schools, Bible institutes, theological colleges, etc., the vast majority of the students will never be effective pastors. No matter what or how or where they are taught, they simply lack pastoral gifts, and at their age and level of maturity there is no way to predict that they will ever gain the essential gifts and maturity.

On the other hand, those church movements that are growing effectively in the USA or around the world depend primarily on the sifting dynamics of the local church to discover leaders, not the protocols of school admissions offices to select them. They further depend primarily upon the inductive process of local church life to train these leaders, using whatever resources may be accessible to these home-grown leaders in the form of books, radio, or quite often apprenticeship. They do not calculatingly avoid or despise the schools. Their local leaders simply do not have access to the riches the schools possess. Their leaders, in addition to church responsibilities, are usually married men with families and bi-vocational employment.

But, can the schools make their riches available to pastoral leaders on the job? Yes and no. They could theoretically, but they don’t know how and tend to feel it difficult to transcend the culturally-defined niche in which they are found. The global movement called Theological Education by Extension is by now well known. In India it has taken hold effectively in the form of one program encompassing 6000 students called, The Association For Theological Education by Extension (TAFTEE). But this program was not launched by any existing school, and its graduates are not routinely incorporated into existing denominations. The latter’s polite rejection becomes understandable only when you recognize that a large proportion of those studying under TAFTEE are people coming out of midlife, such as doctors, engineers, university graduates. Meanwhile, the existing pastors who control the ordination process are mostly the output of traditional Bible institutes or seminaries, and may actually fear the competition of this impressive non-traditional source of leadership. The typical TAFTEE graduate compared to the typical seminary or institute graduate is not only more mature but has more extensive secular education. This latter factor leads to the second aspect of this problem.

**2. *Wrong Curriculum.*** When Bible institutes first got started in America, judging by the pattern portrayed by Moody Bible Institute founded roughly one hundred years ago, the idea was to offer Bible study to adults whose previous education, even as far back as 1900, had already been edited to a secular viewpoint. The idea of supplementing school curricula with Bible studies was a good one.

Moody Bible Institute opened as a night school for adults who already had some public school and who simply wanted the Bible. Soon, however, it began to be replaced by a daytime Bible school curriculum equally devoid of any other subject, but now for younger students, who had not yet received the other things taught in public school. This constituted a reverse censorship. Younger students exposed to nothing but the Bible, whether in Sunday school or Bible Institute could never learn about the rest of history much less discover the profound impact of the Bible during the many centuries following the close of canon. And, if they later did any serious study in public schools or colleges concerning the “rise of Western civilization” or the history of the United States, those courses skillfully omitted the role of the Christian church except for negative events like the Salem Witch Trial. No contrary view was available in schools teaching just the Bible.

Today, the average missionary to, say, India, is very poorly prepared to answer the questioning of honest intellectuals who have heard that Christianity was a drag on scholarship, science, and enlightenment, and was an intolerant and oppressive force, launching “crusades” against Jews, Muslims, and even other Christians. Why unprepared? Because the missionary’s secularized education has already told him the same thing. To answer with an outline of Romans is not enough.

The answer? Christian efforts to educate their young people, whether in Christian schools or homeschool programs, must be able to reintegrate the secular perspective about everything with a Christian perspective about all those same specific issues. This cannot be done in thirty minutes in

Sunday school after thirty hours in the previous week of secular schooling, and on a totally different subject.

A student that comes home from school with the idea that William Jennings Bryan flunked the Monkey Trial needs to know that he actually won the case, and to learn on Sunday that David slew Goliath will do him no good on that point.

The student who hears that the Salem Witch Trial “shows what happens when religious people get control of the community” (as one textbook has it) needs to know that a restudy of the Salem event was published which showed that precisely the *clergymen* in Salem, who studied both theology and science at Yale, were the ones that insisted on a strict, scientific court trial which ended the hysteria that had been promoted by the *businessmen* in town, and that approach had great effect in shutting down witch killings even in Europe. But for a student to go to church and learn how Samuel chose David will do nothing to erase that Salem slur.

***What would a balanced curriculum contain?*** God has given us two “books” of revelation: the Bible, which is his Book of Scripture, and nature, which is his Book of Creation. He does not want us to slight either one. Yet the sad situation is that, in general, one major human tradition (the scientific community) is studying the second and despising the first, and another human tradition (the church community) is studying the first and ignoring or rejecting the second. Yet, both are essential to a proper understanding of God and his will. The Bible itself affirms the second, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament displays his handiwork (and) there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:1; see also Romans 1).

Thus, we run counter to the Book of Scripture itself if we do not rejoice in and discern the glory of God in his Book of *Creation*. We cannot fully declare the glory of God if we do not embrace science as a vast domain in which we can both see God’s glory and advance his Kingdom.

Some have suggested that there is both an evangelistic mandate and a cultural mandate. I see that as an artificial dichotomy. Being human, we are likely to conceive of the redemption of *homo sapiens* as the primary concern of God. But *homo sapiens* is specifically the most recent divine strategy to promote the reestablishment of the Kingdom of God. Man was created to be responsible for all other created beings. His fall made him part of the problem, no longer merely a chief means of the solution. Adam’s and Eve’s descendants became by no means a trustworthy custodian of life forms. We easily forget that even if there were no humans, or if all humans were already “saved,” in that case the Kingdom of God would not necessarily have come and all things on earth been conformed to the will of God even as it is in heaven. Man was meant to be an ally in the redemption and restoration of Creation, not merely a worker for his own redemption, even though his own redemption is essential for his restoration as a worker in the Kingdom, and as a warrior on God’s side in the destruction of the works of the devil.

Nature, prior to the appearance of *homo sapiens* and long before Adam fell, was shot through and through with terrible slaughter, bloodshed, violence, and suffering, as the result of the fall of Satan. Man was intended to work with God in destroying the source of that evil. This was once God’s good world, but it became severely distorted by the fallen adversary of God long before *homo sapiens* existed. “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

Of course, Jesus could not have been understood if he talked about microbiology. Even John Calvin was unable to talk about it. Both he and Luther even opposed the idea that the earth circled the sun. However, after centuries of gradual advance in the understanding of nature, with God often employing “secular” scientists, we can now see that 90 percent of the complexity of life is too small to see with the naked eye. It would take 200,000 cells to cover the period at the end of this sentence. The responsibility of humans for restoring the reputation of God (who, according to many confused people, is the cause of suffering and sickness) is now much larger than ever before. That responsibility is also more logical and urgent than ever before. The evil working of the adversary is right before our eyes picking off believer after believer, long before natural death.

As was mentioned in Perspective Nine, fifteen of every seventeen Evangelical students are totally untouched by any Christian grade school, high school, or college. At the very moment they study materials that have been secularized—whether American history or sociology or psychology or whatever—that is the time they need additional materials to round out and perhaps correct the picture. They cannot effectively study secular books one year and the Bible another year. This is essentially the insight of Perspective Nine.

**3. *Wrong Packaging.*** It is one thing to value both the Bible and the Book of Creation, and thereby to be able to present the full spectrum of the task of advancing the Kingdom of God through the schooling process. But there is something else. We live in a world which speaks specific languages and channels life in specific cultural patterns. It is a missionary principle to speak the language of the native. In this respect the entire Bible Institute movement falls desperately short. And, although it no longer exists as a strong movement in the USA, it is very much the pattern still overseas.

In Bolivia years ago a young man approached me and explained that after he had completed three years of public schooling, a nearby Bible Institute had “stolen” three years of his life. After attending there three more years he did not emerge with a sixth grade diploma recognizable by the government. Now he was unable even to get a job in a car repair shop.

In a South East Asian country a Bible college faculty member shared with me the tragic fact that after graduating from that Bible college students were unable to enroll in the national university. The school in which he was a faculty member offered units and degree structure that did not conform to the pattern of society.

Once it is understood that we have to present both the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature, we still need to package that education in packages recognizable to the world. It is a desperate mistake to suppose that “a parallel but equal” system is the answer.

The most far-reaching major cultural tradition ever developed in history is the university pattern. If Christianity has won astonishingly wide expansion into the world’s cultures, the university has even more greatly succeeded. The thousands of college graduate missionaries of the famed Student Volunteer Movement often thought that universities were part and parcel of the Kingdom of God, and did not always understand the strategy of what we call church planting. Their universities were often so successful that they attracted a mountain of non-Christians and eventually lost their faith, just as happened with hundreds of colleges about the same time in the USA. That is something surely to be feared and guarded against.

But is the answer to set up a separate system and offer non-standard credits and nondescript degrees which are not recognized in the larger society? Studies demonstrate that if missionaries do not establish university institutions, national believers will. When I left Guatemala in 1966, the first Evangelical university in Latin America in many a year had just been established. About three decades later it had 30,000 students. And there are now dozens of other new universities of Evangelical origin worldwide.

### ***Perspective Eleven: The Religion of Science***

This frontier has been mentioned in passing under the needed revolution in pastor training. It eminently deserves to be considered a frontier in its own right. This frontier is, ironically, the result, in part, of the very intellectual vigor of the Christian faith. It is the science community which is now as global as the Christian faith itself. All effective scientific endeavors are dependent totally not so much on a particular “method” but on *a faith in the existence of order in nature*. This is a uniquely biblical insight. It is the result of the Christian tradition.

It is as though the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture have spawned two global faith-communities, and that to most of the adherents of either faith the “other” is invalid. Millions around the world have been challenged and awed by each of the two books, and have been captured by profound belief in them, and are so confident of the glory they have found that anyone from the

“other” side who questions the glory which they perceive may be automatically assumed to be blind and/or faithless.

This is not to say that a large minority of each of these two faith communities does not partake of the cultural tradition of the other. There are many scientists who are church-goers without as profound a faith as they have in the truth and beauty of their scientific experience. There are many Bible-believing people who are happy with science and technology but who do not regard it as a holy experience comparable to what they experience at church.

More troublesome by far are those zealots on each side who seek to tear down faith on the other side. We think of people like Carl Sagan<sup>3</sup> or Richard Dawkins<sup>4</sup> for whom confidence in the Bible is ridiculous, or some of the zealous believers in the Book of Scripture who actually twist Scripture in their attempt to dethrone science. I refer to a perverse quoting of Psalms 19:3 as saying (speaking of the handiwork of God in creation) that “there is no speech or language where their voice is heard,” rather than “there is no speech or language where their voice is *not* heard.”

The Book of Scripture itself extensively attributes a revelation of God’s glory within what we call General Revelation. Paul, in Romans 1, seems to present the ultimate summary of the power of General Revelation. He goes on to imply in chapter two that there are Gentiles that “do by nature the things the law requires” without ever seeing or hearing from Scripture.

Whether or not we can readily make these statements congruent with our popular formulas for getting to heaven, they are extremely significant in missions in regard to foundations on which to build. Various religious faiths contain ambiguous mixtures of truth and nonsense. We do not do well to ignore anything which is true, no matter where we find it.

In fact, perhaps the most classic of all missionary mistakes is the perspective with which Abraham dealt with Abimelech. Why, Abimelech asked, did Abraham tell a lie and try to deceive him? Because, Abraham said, “I said to myself there is no fear of God in this place.” Instead of expecting to find that the Holy Spirit is in contact with all peoples, and building upon that foundation to the extent he might, Abraham presumed that all virtue was on his side and that Abimelech could not have possessed any spiritual foundation to build upon.

Thus, in crossing this frontier into the realm of science we must not ignore the presence of the Holy in the very world of science. If we can be people whose devotion to the living God is richly nourished by both Books, we can respect the genuine beginnings of belief in the lives of many, if not most, scientists. We can rejoice in the faith they have which will give them reason to hear of another kind of faith.

But it is not as simple as that. zealots on both sides have erected high walls to dichotomize and polarize the two Books. Simple honest inquiry across this frontier is thus as uncommon as it is difficult.

On the other hand, this frontier would seem to be, inherently, the easiest of all frontiers to cross, as well as having the greatest potential in terms of communicating with the modern world. We need ourselves to love God’s Word and God’s Works, and we need to share the manifest glory from both of those Books if we wish to cross this huge frontier.

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Edward Sagan (November 9, 1934- December 20, 1996) was an American astronomer and astro-chemist and a highly successful popularizer of astronomy, astrophysics, and other natural sciences. He is world-famous for writing popular science books and for co-writing and presenting the award-winning 1980 television series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, which has been seen by more than 600 million people in over sixty countries. He also wrote the novel *Contact*, the basis for the 1997 Robert Zemeckis film of the same name. During his lifetime, Sagan published more than 600 scientific papers and popular articles and was author, co-author, or editor of more than 20 books. In his works, he frequently advocated skeptical inquiry, humanism, and the scientific method. (from Wikipedia)

<sup>4</sup> Richard Dawkins is a British ethnologist, evolutionary biologist and a popular science book writer (author of the best-selling, *The God Delusion*). Dawkins is an outspoken anti-religionist, atheist, secular humanist, and sceptic. (from Wikipedia)

## **Perspective Twelve: The Challenge of the Evil One**

This is the most difficult to address of all of the other frontiers. It is actually an application of Perspective (Frontier) Five, the Recontextualization of Our Own Tradition. One reason it is a problem is because it is often easier to critique another culture than our own.

Furthermore, an understanding of this frontier requires going against the strong current in our own culture which puts any thought of an evil one into the category of Santa Claus. Worse still, stressing this frontier requires a reconsideration of our own religious, theological, and historical tradition, dealing as it does with a defect in that tradition. Finally, and most difficult of all, if there really is an intelligent evil one, you would think that any attempt at calling attention to him would be opposed by a skillful, deceptive intelligence not just ignorance. And that is a long story.

The Old Testament itself is characterized by a continual viewing of things from the standpoint of final purpose, the purposes of God. The simplest example of this very noble point of view is where Joseph says to his brothers, “You did not send me to Egypt, God did” (Gen 45:8). In this verse the outcome, the purpose, is highlighted without, of course, denying that the brothers in actuality also sent him into slavery.

A scarier example is the startling contrast between 2 Samuel 24:1-25 and 1 Chronicles 21:1-25. The latter passage, part of the Chronicler’s summing up of things, is a verbatim repetition of the twenty-five-word earlier passage, with the exception of the replacement of a single word. In 2 Samuel *God* is the one who “incites” David to go wrong in counting the people. In the later summary by the Chronicler, *Satan* incites David to do wrong.

What we need to note here is that in the earlier passage, as in the Old Testament in general, things are explained entirely in terms of God’s sovereignty. Both accounts are correct, just as both Joseph’s brothers and God can be said to have done the same thing.

Once we get into the New Testament, we find that the followers of Christ have now gained a heightened appreciation for an evil one whom they now actually name *Satan*, a word that all through the Old Testament simply meant an “adversary.” God himself was a *satan*, or adversary, when he opposed a false prophet. However, Christians of the Manichaean sect went further and adopted the Zoroastrian dualism of two equal Gods, one good and one evil.

It so happens that our present theological tradition is more influenced by Augustine than by any other theologian. Augustine started out Manichaean and eventually reacted so violently against it that he essentially banished references to an evil one. In his writings, as in neo-platonism in general, all things are to be seen in terms of God’s often mysterious *purposes*. For Augustine, facing tragedy and harm and disease is simply a case for us to trust God not only to work things out for good, but to trust that God had some good reason to bring it to pass in the first place.

Much could be said about this, but for me the key point is that if God does everything and we do not employ both of the biblical perspectives about the work of God and Satan we see in the Bible, we will find ourselves unable to fight against the *causes* of evil for, in that case, we would be fighting against God.

Jonathan Edwards found this to be true. He sought to protect the Indians in his charge from smallpox by wanting to test out a vaccine. Pastors in Massachusetts warned him that in doing so he would be “interfering with Divine Providence.” He first tried it on himself and died the truly horrible death of smallpox. The pastors said God killed him.

Curiously and ominously, to this day, Christians are not well-known for fighting the viruses, the bacteria, and the tiny parasites that cause illness. We are only noted for being kind to people who are already sick, helping them get well, defending them against aggressive pathogens.<sup>5</sup> We mount no offense against the pathogens themselves. We are willing to fight back at visible human muggers but not invisible bug muggers! That is, our pre-germ theological tradition does not trace disease back to the work of an evil one. Thus, to my knowledge there is not a single avowedly Christian institution

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<sup>5</sup> Editor’s Note: Unfortunately, however, in 2020, rather than protecting others from the deadly coronavirus, Evangelical Christians have a reputation for refusing to take the precautions necessary to end the pandemic.

on the face of the earth that is working specifically for the eradication of disease pathogens. The medical and pharmaceutical industries draw their support from sick people who want help in getting well, and who are not paying for research at the roots of disease.

Is this a blind spot in the spectrum of God's mandate to us in mission? I think so. If we can properly recontextualize our faith at this time, we will no longer need only to trust that in God's sovereign *purposes* there are good things even when things go wrong. We can both recognize the truth of that and also work against the *causes* of evil and suffering. Indeed, we are in that case, free to understand that God is expecting us to join in that effort. Biblical perspective puts it this way: "The Son of God appeared for this purpose that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). And Jesus said, "As my Father sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). Isn't that clear?

However, as Dr. Gordon Kirk has said, "Satan's greatest achievement is to cover his tracks." If that is true, then it is also true that we are extensively unaware of what the evil one is doing. For example, humans have concluded that cock fights and contrived animal-versus-animal shows are illegitimate and are now illegal. How much less likely should we suppose God to have created the nearly universal, vicious, animal-versus-animal world of nature? Indeed, were carnivorous animals originally herbivorous (as is implied in Genesis 1:28-29)? Did the evil one and his assistants have sufficient knowledge to tinker with the DNA of God's created order and distort nature to become "red in tooth and claw"?

Obviously, the great theologians of the past, such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Calvin, could not have imagined how lions, originally content to lie down with a lamb, could or should one day be restored to that state through the combined efforts of good angels and human endeavors. But, remember, if Satan has covered his tracks well, we would not expect to find many thinking these thoughts. How then are we going to attempt to destroy his works? Is that a mission to be pursued? Does that represent a frontier to be crossed?

### ***But Are These Frontiers?***

Looking back on these twelve shifts of perspective, how many of these things can readily and feasibly be called *frontiers* of missiology? Of some value might be the following definition:

*Mission frontiers*, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go, yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly, and which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, the subject of *mission* frontiers is specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas, ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

But let's examine these issues.

The idea of the Great Commission in the Old Testament is not the usual kind of frontier. But for me it has been. I have often referred to it as the greatest intellectual revolution in my life. The whole Bible is completely different because of that one insight, and it has really made the Bible much more precious and significant to me. Since then I have studied the Bible far more than in all of my life before, and so it's a frontier of thinking for me even if it might not go over well to some as a "frontier." Note that it is one of the commonly mind-blowing elements of our Perspective course.

By contrast, to say that there is a huge number of peoples yet to be reached does sound like a frontier. But, of course, to recognize that all these peoples can be reached fairly readily now may have reduced that frontier to just sort of a need for further encouragement.

However, in number seven, to say that we need to make a major shift, giving up our form of Christianity- so-called in order for the Biblical faith to penetrate Hinduism, *that* is still a frontier. That's the radical de-contextualization frontier, and I don't think we need to pussyfoot about it. That perspective itself is not totally new, and we can safely say that both the frontier of the *unreached* peoples as well as the new frontier of the supposedly *reached* peoples must now be re-

addressed with a truly biblical form of Christian faith that makes sense of them. Here, then, are two major frontiers.

In fact, the latter involves the fact that there are many millions more individuals within the “reached” peoples than are contained in the remaining unreached peoples, which is a relatively small number. I did some calculations on AD2000’s 242 “untargeted” groups. I came up with only 15 million people. Then I looked at all the smaller unreached groups—the 4000 or so groups smaller than 10,000 in population. As mentioned earlier, they only constitute another 1.5 million people. So we’re talking about a total of merely 16.5 million people in all of the untargeted groups in the world! Is that a big number? Not really, for it is only 1/300th of the world’s population! While this is not a huge frontier, it is still a pressing challenge.

Someone might say that just because there are only a few remaining “untargeted” groups does not mean that all other groups are actually reached—that is, already have a true, McGavran type “People movement to Christ.” Aren’t there still some massive larger unreached groups?

That is true since they do run up to 10 or 15 million in some cases, like the Juang in South China. But even so, we have our arms around the intermediate task of the Unreached Peoples. This is a manageable task, and it’s a frontier still, admittedly. It is not less important because we are now also talking about the frontier of radical decontextualization—one of two major dimensions of frontiers.

And there is, of course, the fifth perspective—can we call it a frontier if we are trying to disentangle biblical faith from our own Christian tradition? I certainly think so. I’m not sure how many are involved in trying to do so, or at least with that terminology.

In a sense it does not matter whether we employ the word *frontier* or not. These are perspectives that throw light on our path into the future. The future is itself a frontier, after all.