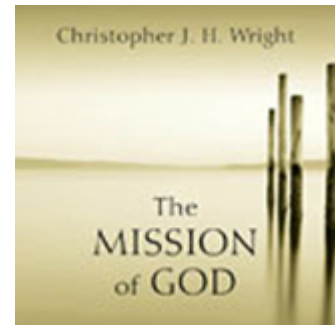


Mission and the Old Testament

Issue 17 Editor: Tim Davy

What is the relationship between ancient Hebrew texts and the mission of the church in the 21st century?

Missionaries have always drawn upon the Old Testament for comfort, inspiration and encouragement. Sadly, this grasp of the vitality and relevance of the Old Testament to mission has not always been a feature of mission thinking. In recent years, however, there have been an increasing number of books and articles on the subject.



This issue of Encounters launches what we hope will be a significant and ongoing contribution both to the study of the Old Testament and to the study and practice of mission. The Mission and Old Testament project is a new venture based at Redcliffe College that seeks to encourage thinking, writing and discussion on the relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures and the theory and practice of mission. In my editorial I give an outline to the project and invite you to contribute. Whether you are a student or scholar, mission agency or practitioner, we would welcome your input. We have much to learn from each other.

One of the most significant writers on mission and the Old Testament in recent years is Rev Dr Chris Wright. It seems appropriate, therefore, that we launch our project with a celebration of Dr Wright's latest book, which is a monumental treatment of the subject of mission and the Bible. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* has been touted as the most important book on mission since David Bosch's *Transforming Mission*. With this in mind, I interview Dr Wright about his book and explore with him some of the issues it raises both for academics and practitioners.

So who do you ask to review a book that spans both mission and the Bible: a missiologist or a biblical scholar? Why choose?! We are indebted to Prof Gordon McConville, Professor of Old Testament at the University of Gloucestershire and Dr Kang San Tan, Head of Mission Studies at Redcliffe College, for their penetrating engagements with the book.

Reflecting the eclectic possibilities of the Mission and the Old Testament project, the remaining articles look at the relationship between mission and the Old Testament from a variety of perspectives. Both theory and practice are embraced - an ethos at the heart of the Mission and Old Testament project.

In *A Kiss from Heaven*, an Old Testament scholar working in Central Asia discusses how Abraham might be a model for mission and society. This is an intensely practical issue given the context he is writing in.

In *Preaching the Old Testament in the Majority World*, Stuart Reid reflects on his experiences of preaching the Old Testament cross-culturally, particularly in poorer settings. Stuart offers much helpful advice to preachers and reveals a number of cross-cultural issues and surprises connected with the Old Testament.

As well as rigorous scholarship, the Mission and Old Testament project is also committed to the vitality and transformational nature of the Scriptures for all peoples, including those working in cross-cultural contexts. For the final article we have gathered first-hand stories from around the globe on how the Old Testament has shaped the experiences of

missionaries, and vice versa. It is a superb reminder that missionaries have always been at home in the Old Testament. We scholars have some catching up to do!

Even this month's Country Profile, which focuses on Lithuania, continues Old Testament and Mission theme. Our Lithuanian writer uses a wonderfully imaginative narrative to explore how the creation account in Genesis would be read in a pagan context, and how Christians might use this as a starting point to genuine discussions about Christianity.

We have two book reviews this month. The first looks at the *Africa Bible Commentary*, an exciting and important collaboration of African scholars. The second review considers the chapters on Old Testament in a Spanish language book on Bible and Mission. It is precisely because most of us will not be able to read this book that we include the review here. We have also made this review available in Spanish.

So, enjoy issue 17 of Encounters. I hope you too capture the excitement of this new venture.

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(Tim Davy, 380 words)
 - **[Article 1](#): Mission: What the Bible is All About: An Interview with Chris Wright.**
(Tim Davy, 2388 words)
 - **[Article 2](#): Chris Wright's *The Mission of God*: An Old Testament Scholar's Perspective.**
(Prof J. Gordon McConville, 1300 words)
 - **[Article 3](#): Chris Wright's *The Mission of God*: A Missiologist's Perspective.**
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- **[Book Review 1](#): Bases Bíblicas de la Misión: Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. Review in Spanish.**
(Edited by C. René Padilla; Nueva Creación & Eerdmans)
- **[Book Review 1](#): Bases Bíblicas de la Misión: Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. Review in English.**
(Edited by C. René Padilla; Nueva Creación & Eerdmans)

Go to the Encounters website at www.redcliffe.org/encounters to read what others are thinking on the Discussion Board. Use the Voice your comments form to add to the debate.

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The Mission and Old Testament Project

Welcome, Explanation and Invitation



Author: Tim Davy, Editor of Encounters, Visiting Lecturer and Director of the Mission and Old Testament Project, Redcliffe College.

The Mission and Old Testament Project is a new venture based at Redcliffe College that seeks to encourage thinking, writing and discussion on the relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures and the theory and practice of mission.

Traditionally, thinking on mission has tended not to embrace the role and vitality of the Old Testament. In recent years, however, there have been an increasing number of books and articles on the subject. But where do biblical scholars, missiologists and mission practitioners go from here?

At the heart of the Mission and Old Testament project are the convictions that:

1. The Old Testament matters.
2. Mission matters.
3. They matter to each other.

So the Mission and Old Testament project is an ongoing space for exploring the relationship between mission and the OT. The ambitious aim is to be a bridge in two ways. Firstly, we aim to encourage the sharing of ideas between two scholarly fields (namely OT studies and missiology). Secondly, we seek to bring together both academics and practitioners who may not otherwise 'meet'. We have much to learn from each other.

Perhaps you would like to join in on the project's ongoing discussions? Below is a list of possible papers and discussion points which range from the purely academic to the reflective and practical. We are also considering a conference, perhaps some time in 2008, that will provide a forum to discuss some of the ideas coming out of the project.

1. How has mission been addressed in Old Testament scholarship?
2. How has the Old Testament been used in mission scholarship?
3. A study of mission/the nations in a particular passage or book of the Old Testament.
4. The Old Testament and Christian witness to Islam, Judaism, etc.
5. Mission and hermeneutics.
6. The Old Testament, the environment, ethics and mission.
7. Mission in Old Testament narratives.
8. Using Old Testament genres in mission.
9. The Old Testament in the life of the cross-cultural worker.
10. Teaching the Old Testament in different cultures: reflections, ideas and advice.
11. Readings of OT texts from around the world.

As such the project is open ended and is more of an invitation than a set programme. So, biblical scholars, missiologists, mission agencies and missionaries 'on the ground', it's over to you...

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Mission: What the Bible is All About

An interview with Chris Wright



Chris Wright is International Director of Langham Partnership International, and author of *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Interviewer: Tim Davy, Editor, Encounters.

Firstly, tell us a bit about your background. Would you describe yourself as an Old Testament scholar or a missiologist?

I was brought up in a Christian home; my parents had been missionaries in Brazil for 20 years before I was born (I am the youngest of four). So I was taught the Bible well within a missionary ethos - so perhaps it's not surprising that I have a passion for both. But I think if I had to choose, I would be considered as an OT Scholar, rather than a missiologist, since I have never done formal missiological degrees, and there are many other branches of missiology than just the biblical dimension that I focus on (e.g. historical study of mission, systematic theological issues, cultural and social anthropology, linguistics, mission strategy, ethical and pastoral dimensions of 'member-care', etc. etc.).

Your particular passion seems to be fusing the Old Testament, ethics and mission. Has this always been the case? How has your experience teaching in cross-cultural contexts affected your reading of the Bible?

The interest in OT Ethics happened because, in 1970, the then Principal of Belfast Bible College (and later of Redcliffe College), Victor Reid, asked me to teach an evening course on 'Christian Ethics'. I thought I should start with the OT, but could find no books on the subject. I wrote to my undergraduate supervisor in Cambridge, John Sturdy, to ask if OT Ethics would be a good topic to do PhD research in (which I wanted to do), and he wrote back to say, 'Probably; nobody has written anything on it in English for 50 years'. So I did my doctorate in the field of the economic ethics of the OT, which led to *God's People in God's Land* (Paternoster), and then *Living as the People of God* (IVP - and eventually the revised form of that; *OT Ethics for the People of God*). So I got labelled a bit as one of those rare people who seem to know something about what the OT has to say on social ethics. In the wake of Lausanne 1 in 1974, this was flavour of the month for some years as British evangelicals recovered their social conscience and engagement.

I taught at All Nations Christian College for a year before going to India in 1983. This missiological context forced me to ask more questions of the OT text: 'What happens when you read these texts from the angle of their relevance to Christian mission?' And the answers began to amaze and fascinate me. Then teaching the Bible in a different cultural context was very enriching and challenging also.

So the two sides of my interest have grown together and reinforce one another.

It seems from your previous writings that you have been gearing up to this book for some time. How significant has this project been for you? Do you feel you've now said what you wanted to say on the subject or are there more areas you want to explore?

Certainly, *The Mission of God* has been the fulfilment of a lot of my life, teaching and thinking for many years now. So in that sense it 'delivers my soul'. It has been a huge amount of work and very significant as something I felt I really had to say. I started out thinking I would just write a book on an OT theology of mission, to fill the gap left by Bosch's book, *Transforming Mission*. But the more I worked on it, the more stuff I discovered in my

research, and the more it seemed necessary to make it a 'whole Bible' approach - even if heavily weighted towards the OT.

I think I have said in the book all I want to (or indeed can!) say for the moment. But I have no doubt at all that there will be other areas to explore and new thoughts to think.

The exciting thing is to discover that other scholars are getting into this field also. There is a whole track each year now at the Society of Biblical Literature thinking about missiological hermeneutics of Scripture. That is bound to throw up new avenues of investigation and discovery. There will be plenty of room for intensive study of specific parts of the canon, and individual books, from a missional hermeneutical perspective, and that too will be very exciting to observe and take part in. I think there is a fresh realisation that the old phrase of John Stott, 'Our God is a missionary God' extends to the scriptures that we affirm come from him.

In contrast to many scholarly works, your writing is very passionate as well as academically rigorous. Is this combination something you have sought to cultivate or is it just your natural style?

I don't try to cultivate it. I find myself excited and moved by what I am reading, thinking, and trying to communicate, and I suppose that comes across. I write, as I lecture and preach, with a fairly high level of personal engagement and energy. I don't know any other way to do it!

What kind of readership were you thinking of when you wrote *The Mission of God*?

I had in mind the kind of people who tell me that they found Living as the People of God helpful - i.e. not just students and pastors, but ordinary Christian folk with a reasonable level of Christian maturity and ability to cope with a bit of a challenge - but without too much technical, theological or critical training. At the same time, I did also have in mind seminary students. I was aware that my work on OT ethics had been increasingly used as a textbook in college courses (especially in the USA), so I had in mind to produce a book that could be used in the same way. So I suppose the kind of person I had in mind was my mental picture of a first year student at All Nations Christian College - generations of whom I taught for many years!

I have to say also that I was very grateful to Dan Reid and the editorial team at IVP, USA, who helped me a lot in making sure the book was well structured and, even though rather large, easy to follow in terms of the flow of its overall argument. And they engaged some excellent readers for the initial manuscript, who came back with nearly 20 pages of dense critique, questions, suggestions and other comments, which I found very useful indeed, and helped the book enormously. At the same time, they let me write and say exactly what I wanted to, with very little actual change to my wording. Any author needs to be grateful for good editing help from a quality publisher.

Most people who've trained for mission have probably taken a course called something like, 'The Biblical Basis of Mission'. The first thing you do in chapter 1 is raise an objection to this title. Why is this?

I don't so much object to it, as suggest that it is not adequate. Of course we need to understand the biblical foundation for mission (as for anything else). But I wanted to get away from the perception of the Bible as merely adjectival to what we do in our human efforts, and see rather that the Bible is itself a witness to the mission of God, and that we must start from there.

You suggest that mission is ‘what the Bible is all about’. How radical a thought is this in the field of Old Testament studies? Why?

I expect it probably is radical. In the guild of OT Scholarship, as in most biblical studies, the tendency for a long time has been towards more and more fragmentation. Furthermore, if one approaches the text of the Bible from a non-confessional stance, then it is simply a collection of ancient books arising from one particular religious culture. There is no inherent unity. So the concept of the Bible being 'all about' anything is uncomfortable in that mindset.

My hope, however, is that for evangelicals with their higher view of the coherence and unity of the Scripture, that it is possible to help them see this missional perspective as a way of understanding the Bible in relation to 'the whole counsel of God' - i.e. God's mission and purpose in creation, redemption, sovereignty and judgment.

The study of mission and the Old Testament has developed considerably in recent years. What do you attribute this trend to? Where do you hope the field will be in twenty years' time, and how do you hope *The Mission of God* will have contributed to this?

It is growing for sure, and that is very encouraging. Perhaps it is because more people who are fine scholars are engaged in teaching - for shorter or longer periods - in cross-cultural contexts ('mission fields' in older language!), in Africa, Asia, etc. So they are having to wrestle with the text in mission contexts (as I did), and discovering new ways of handling it. Over the next few decades, I would hope to see more books devoted to a missional reading of specific biblical books, and many fresh insights gained from that process. I hope *Mission of God* will have helped to 'provide credible space' for such work, in providing some degree of hermeneutical validation for approaching the Bible in this way.

So, what can OT scholars learn from missiologists, and vice versa?

OT Scholars can learn to see that the issues we read of in the text (Israel's encounter with other nations and cultures) are common issues in contemporary mission, and so missiological perspectives can illumine the OT issues.

Missiologists need to learn that mission did not begin on the Mount of Ascension, and that the Great Commission has its roots deep in the OT Scriptures. That, above all, I hope, is what my book demonstrates.

And what can OT scholars and missiologists learn from mission practitioners (agencies and individuals), and vice versa?

That all theology must have a mission relevance, and that all mission practice must be theologically reflected and warranted.

You mentioned David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* earlier. Your book has been compared in stature to Bosch's. What are the similarities and differences between the two?

As I mentioned earlier, the lack of real engagement with the OT in *Transforming Mission* was the stimulus that originally led me to want to write the book I eventually did. I think Bosch's book includes some very fine chapters on the NT, and I learned a lot from it. It certainly gave us more than we had at that time. But his book is much more a history of mission thinking

and practice, with its different paradigms through the ages - whereas mine is a biblical theology. Both kinds of reflection are vital parts of missiology as a discipline.

Some people might be surprised that you spend so much time reflecting on the Old Testament's role in a proper understanding of mission. Why do you do this?

Partly because it is the larger part of the Bible! Also because the OT was the Bible of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, so their whole concept and practice of mission came from 'The Scriptures'. It is tragic, to me, that the modern church has so neglected the OT, or distorted it into rather weird modern systems of interpretation, that ordinary believers just ignore it, or treat it only as a quarry for 'End-Times' prophecies and the like. I really wanted to bring the OT to life in relation to the core foundations of our Christian world view, and show how every key element in its teaching is part of what we believe and how we live in relation to being the people of God in God's world for God's purposes.

Do you think the increased awareness in the Church of such 'global' issues as wide-scale poverty and the environment lends itself to a renewed interest in the Old Testament?

Yes, very much so. Part of the reason why Christians have been slow in responding adequately to these things is the widespread ignorance of the OT.

How has working on *The Mission of God* helped you to reflect on current trends in global Christianity?

The growth of the church outside the west is of course a major factor in all mission thinking. It is part of my 'awareness', but I don't think it materially affected my specific biblical reflections - other than to welcome that the fact that world Christianity, with its multi-national, poly-centric, multi-directional dimensions, seems far closer to NT Christianity than the Christendom we inherited.

Why is it so important that those involved in cross-cultural ministry are steeped in the missional message of the Bible? Also, how have your reflections on the Old Testament shaped your own work?

What else can prepare them for mission service, or give them adequate mental and spiritual resources for the challenges they face?

My OT studies have only enriched my general teaching around the world, and I suppose given me the motivation and resources to speak about various missional and ethical issues in ways that people often seem to find refreshing or somewhat unusual (because they have either ignored the OT, or handled it in purely allegorical ways).

Finally, could you tell us a bit about your role with Langham Partnership?

The Langham Partnership International serves the world wide church, specifically in those parts of the world known as the majority world, where Christians do not have access to resources. The programmes of LPI originated in the vision and ministries of John Stott, and are concerned that the staggering numerical growth of the church overseas should also be growth with depth - particularly through raising the standards of biblical preaching, evangelical theological education, and Christian literature. There are six national supporting movements and three international programmes (Langham Scholars, Langham Literature

and Langham Preaching), each of which has its own full time director and some support staff. My own role as International Director includes co-ordinating this team, doing some teaching and preaching around the world, networking with theological institutions in the majority world, and giving overall leadership and management to the growing movement. Further details are on the website, www.langhampartnership.org.

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Chris Wright's *The Mission of God* An Old Testament Scholar's Perspective



Author: Prof. Gordon McConville, Professor of Old Testament Studies, University of Gloucestershire.

This is a remarkable book, the latest and fullest fruit of Chris Wright's extensive work on understanding the Old Testament in the light of the church's obligation to mission. It takes mission to be the unifying theme of biblical theology, and most remarkably does so by taking the Old Testament as its primary text. This is by no means to the exclusion of the New Testament; on the contrary the two Testaments are interwoven in this story in such a way as to demonstrate their combined testimony to the 'mission of God', which is nothing less than to bring restoration to the creation. Yet the emphasis on the Old Testament is striking, because much Christian biblical theology operates with a dualistic approach to the Bible, in which the destiny of the Old Testament is simply to be superseded by the New; and also with a dualistic approach to salvation and spirituality, in which the national, political, military, social and economic aspects of the Old Testament story of Israel are puzzling and embarrassing. Wright's approach is a far cry from such dualisms. Rather, he grasps the challenge of the Old Testament, as absolutely necessary to an understanding of God's work in the world. In this way it is not so much a biblical theology of mission, as a biblical theology per se, in which mission is presented as the unifying factor.

The essential planks in the argument are these. The Bible is the united testimony to God's purpose to redeem the whole world. In a postmodern world of 'narratives' that seek to explain human existence, it is *the* narrative, or the metanarrative, that unlocks the meaning of human life and destiny. It does so by telling a story that spans the first 'good' creation, the corruption of the created order through human sin, the plan of redemption by means of the election of Israel and its 'missional' life, and the culmination of this mission of Israel in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The emphasis on the Old Testament is thus no mere function of the author's special knowledge of that area, but belongs profoundly to his understanding of the biblical message.

At the centre of it is the particularity of Israel. Particularity is sometimes conceived as problematical for a universally relevant theology. How can the experience of a single people long ago bear witness to the divine purpose in the modern world, especially when it is attended by manifestations in law and history that are alien and sometimes repugnant to modern people? Wright embraces particularity as a strength. The purpose of Israel's election is precisely to bring blessing ultimately to all nations. This theme is traced from the creation through the promise to and covenant with Abraham, and the covenants made with Moses and David, to the New Covenant. The comprehensiveness of Wright's use of the Bible is a crucial feature of the argument. In the elucidation of God's universal purpose, Deuteronomy figures prominently alongside Isaiah, no doubt surprisingly to readers who may be used to finding Deuteronomy pitted against the great prophetic book, and on the side of a narrow nationalism. But here Deuteronomy is rightly understood to portray the life and destiny of Israel as being played out under the eyes of the nations and as a witness to them (Deut. 4:6-8 is a key text, as is Deut. 27-34).

To understand why Deuteronomy can be a 'missional' book, it is necessary to consider how 'mission' is being conceived here. The term 'missional' itself is a clue, being in Wright's view a necessary addition to the vocabulary that includes 'missiology' and 'missionary', with certain connotations he finds unhelpful to his argument. Since the divine 'mission' is congruent with the ultimate restoration of all things, it is played out in all the affairs of nations in all times. Israel's conflicted history with other nations, as well as the Bible's own origins in polemic, is part of this mission. For the call of Israel entails its own cultural transformation, a vision for such transformation of its neighbours, and a reality of cultural confrontation. For

this reason its story is preoccupied with warnings about idolatry. The missional dynamic is also 'monotheizing' (p. 95). To worship other gods is the same as rejecting and corrupting the divine purpose for creation and, for Israel, abdicating its special responsibility of witness. Much of the Old Testament testifies to this cultural conflict. The creation accounts challenge those of Canaan and Babylon with their politico-religious systems. And the exodus from Egypt is the paramount model of redemption, pitting the kingdom of Yahweh against that of Pharaoh, and delivering from slavery into freedom.

This recognition that the 'mission' of God is revealed in cultural conflict not only explains the nature of many of the biblical writings, but also provides a model for contemporary appropriation. For modern mission is rightly seen to be inevitably involved with hermeneutics. In this connection Wright finds Newbigin's notion of 'two-way communication' instructive: the Gospel may be understood in new ways when brought into new contexts (pp. 46-47). Mission must meet the challenges of a postmodern world, but in fact such challenges belong intrinsically to its nature.

The product of Wright's readiness to embrace the particularity of Israel in his view of mission is a holistic Gospel. The exodus model shows that political freedom is part of God's purpose for humanity; similarly, the Jubilee (Leviticus 25) illustrates an economic aspect. Such facets of social existence are inseparable from the spiritual life, and the twin dangers of over-spiritualizing and over-politicizing the Gospel are well addressed (pp. 275-88). Mission ultimately embraces all dimensions of human life, including praise (p. 132), pastoral and ethical concerns (pp. 182-86), and environmental issues (pp. 397-420). And this vision informs evangelism, since 'the fundamental theology behind [the Jubilee] also lies behind our practice of evangelism' (p. 300). In these ways, the particularity of Israel is put to the cause of a universal proclamation. In God's purpose, Israel not only witnesses to the nations, but the nations are finally brought under covenant obedience along with Israel. Ultimately too, the divine mission overcomes death, for a biblical concept of salvation is distinguished from all others by its promise of the defeat of death itself (p. 440).

The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative is very strong in many ways. Chris Wright brings to it his wide knowledge of issues in Old Testament as well as New Testament interpretation, and his long experience of mission. Discussions are nuanced and well-informed, and the desire to allow the biblical message to address the modern church and world is evident everywhere (not least in his extended illustration of the devastating evil of HIV/AIDS, pp. 433-37). It is a powerful answer to detractors of the Old Testament as part of the two-testament witness to Christ. For some readers, the force of the felt otherness of the Old Testament will not be entirely allayed. Have the most difficult parts of the Old Testament been sufficiently addressed here? There is very little on Joshua, and though Deuteronomy is prominent there is scant if any attention to its call for the 'devotion to destruction' of the Canaanite nations (Deut. 7:1-5). The author has certainly addressed such problems elsewhere, and does so in the context of his analysis of cultural critique and transformation. Yet one might look for more help on this here. And other parts of the Old Testament are relatively difficult to win for the universal cause, notably Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. Are there in reality two Old Testaments, one rather inward-looking, and the other the one that is presented here? I think Wright's case can be made against the full OT canvas, but readers may have to look to other parts of his extensive writings for more help on these questions.

Buy *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* from [St Andrew's Bookshop](http://www.standrewsbookshop.co.uk).

Author: Christopher J.H. Wright
Publisher: Inter-Varsity Press
ISBN: 1844741524

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Chris Wright's *The Mission of God* A Missiologist's Perspective



Author: Dr Kang San Tan, Head of Mission Studies, Redcliffe College.

This review seeks to highlight *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative's* contribution to missiology and our understanding of Christian mission. In 1999, at the WEA Iguassu Consultation, I first heard *Chris Wright* express his critique that *David Bosch*, in *Transforming Mission* (1991), devoted rather limited space to the study of Old Testament texts for mission theology. In his new book, Wright devotes about two-thirds of his discussion to Old Testament texts. The above observation points to the book's distinctive contribution in developing a Christian understanding of mission, not only from the New Testament, but beginning with the Old Testament. Wright is International Director of Langham Partnership International and former Principal of All Nations Christian College.

The Mission of God is organised along three major focal points of the worldview of Israel (God, people and earth). After discussing the concept of a missional hermeneutic, Wright develops, in part 2, the assertion that the living God wills to be known to the world through Israel and through the church. In part 3, he moves on to the study of "The People of Mission" by examining biblical themes such as election, redemption, covenant and ethics. Wright concludes with a discussion on "The Arena of Mission" by considering the themes of earth, and the nations in relation to mission.

Wright begins by asking the question of whether a missional reading of scripture can be applied to the whole of the scriptures. What happens when Christians read the Bible as a grand narrative of God's mission? Instead of proof-texting and basing the whole of Christian mission on a few selected New Testament passages, Wright offers a missional reading of the whole Bible. This particular (*missional*) way of reading the scriptures is based on the assumption that "*the whole bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation*" (p.51). Rather than developing a biblical basis of mission, Wright offers a missional apologetic for the Bible; that behind the church's mission is a God with a mission as revealed in the whole of the biblical narrative. Wright's missional hermeneutic seeks to include global Christian voices, "the multiplicity of perspectives and contexts from which and within which people read the biblical texts" (p.39). Beyond contextual and postmodern readings of scripture, Wright argues that the Bible offers a particular story of God's action through Israel with a universal claim among the nations. Missionaries reading this book will benefit from a more coherent and biblical framework for mission. As a result, readers are invited to discover mission in almost every book in the bible. In my view, this modelling of reading the bible missiologically is the most important contribution of Wright's *The Mission of God*.

Secondly, Wright demonstrates an approach to mission reflection through a careful exegesis of scripture. Contextual theologies, cultural studies and sociological insights need to be developed through serious grappling with the scriptures, rather than distorting texts. Although it was not the expressed purpose of the book, *The Mission of God* contributes towards the closing of the existing gap between missiology and biblical studies. Instead of separating theology and biblical studies from *mission contexts*, Wright approaches the texts of scripture through a mission paradigm. In some circles, theological and biblical studies have been considered academic and scientific, while missiology still finds itself under suspect by scholars of other academic disciplines. Part of the distrust may come from missiologists using biblical proof-texts to justify their mission theories and strategies. To some extent, Wright demonstrates in action, more than words, that mission readings and careful exegesis of scripture are both needed for critical missiology.

Some Old Testament scholars question the existence of a mission impetus in the Old Testament, delineating the contrast between centripetal and centrifugal missions. Wright's approach on the particularity of Israel's calling as God's people, in the light of the New Testament understanding of Jesus as the promised Messiah, cuts across radical discontinuity in understanding mission between the two Testaments. Instead, Israel's self-understanding in the Old Testament provides a springboard for the church's mission in the New Testament. Therefore, while recognising the lack of active missionary outreach on the part of Israel in the Old Testament, Wright could argue that Israel "definitely had a sense of mission, not in the sense of *going* somewhere but of *being* something" (p.504).

A third contribution from Wright's studies is the re-definition of mission to include social and political dimensions. In relation to the Exodus story, Wright argues that it shows many dimensions of transformation in God's redemptive programme: political, social, economic, rather than just spiritual. Israel's election, redemption and covenant resulted in an ethical distinctiveness in Israel's witness among the nations. In addition, there is an ecological dimension to God's mission, for "holistic mission, then, is not truly holistic if it included only human beings..." (p.416). In the section dealing with humanity in rebellion, sin is comprehensive, affecting the physical, social, spiritual, and rational dimensions. Therefore, the gospel must be comprehensive in addressing the varied dimensions of sin. While these concepts of holistic mission are not new, Wright's approach in establishing a coherent biblical framework on mission is a major resource for future discussion on the scope and meaning of mission. Our understanding of mission can no longer be limited to evangelism, or social action, but must be an outflow of these theological convictions of a living God who has acted in redeeming the whole creation to himself.

Finally, a biblical-theology approach to interpreting the mission of God yields a strong emphasis on the ethical demands of being the people of God. The growth of Christianity must be accompanied by a worldview transformation that is rooted in Jesus, the seed of Abraham (pp.219-220). In countries where Christianity has grown at a rapid rate, this ethical dimension of mission, integrated in Christian identity, is vital. Far too often, church growth enthusiasts focus on evangelism and church membership rather than the worldview and social transformations of newly formed Christian communities. Possibly, this recovery of missional ethics (not just righteous living as a matter of being pleasing to God but as a matter of counter cultural witness) is what is sorely missing and needed in Christian communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Wright's missional hermeneutic focused primarily on the Christian scriptures. An aspect that is beyond the scope of this book is what is the nature of culture for mission thinking? Coming from Asia, I would like to see missional readings of scripture which integrate these biblical insights into the realities of Asian cultures, particularly utilizing non-Western cultures as positive resources and 'scaffolding' (to use Wright's term) for constructing contextual missiology. Nevertheless, in Wright's defence, this volume is explicitly a biblical study and it may not be fair to expect a thorough going integration with other disciplines such as cultural and social studies. Therefore, Wright's model in focusing on biblical studies can be the very base for contextualising the biblical message to each local situation. However, missiology, by its very nature must go beyond a scriptural basis towards engagement and where appropriate, integration with culture and non-Christian systems of thoughts and philosophies.

Methods in missiology are still unfolding, with some arguing towards a more radical approach. The missional reading of scripture is not just a matter of applying to non-Western contexts what we think we have discovered from biblical traditions. Rather, mission reflections need to be more explicit in our methods of intentionally incorporating culture as a source for theology.

For example, Wright's extensive discussion on idolatry offers key biblical perspectives on the subject. The book, with its orientation to biblical studies, further offers some applications to

Western ideas of idols, but did not really deal with concepts of idol worship in Buddhism or Hinduism which are prevalent in Asia. Mission reflection arising from Asia needs to ask a different set of questions, possibly taking a different route by engaging with various understandings of idols in non-Christian belief systems (for example, the variety of Buddhist perspectives on idols). In such critical correlations and engagements, missiologists develop a distinct Christian perspective on such belief systems. However, critical engagements with non-Christian perspectives must return to works such as Christopher Wright's tome of biblical insights, lest new insights fail to stand the test of individual books of the Bible or fit within the grand narrative of scripture argued in this excellent book.

To conclude, this remarkable book, which covers a vast terrain of biblical materials, meticulously researched, written in an accessible yet comprehensive manner, will be a major text for both students of mission and mission practitioners on the field, as well as for pastors in multicultural settings. Beyond missional readings, the book invites readers towards a doxological participation in the mission of God as the very heartbeat and centre of all reality. In the author's concluding words, "This is the grand narrative that is unlocked when we turn the hermeneutical key of reading all the Scriptures in the light of the mission of God" (p.534).

Buy The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative from [St Andrew's Bookshop](#).

Author: Christopher J.H. Wright
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A Kiss of Heaven: Abraham, Global Blessing, and Civil Society.

Author: Name withheld, working in Central Asia.

For followers of Jesus preparing for a life of cross-cultural blessing, Abraham is no stranger. The blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3) is foundational theology in mission training. Unfortunately, missiological analysis of the life of Abraham often does not go beyond this initial call. It is a regrettable oversight, for in a remarkable way Abraham's life demonstrates key aspects of the way a Christian is to bring blessing to the nations.

Looking at Abraham's life from another missiological angle involves engaging with Samuel Huntington's ideas regarding his infamous *Clash of Civilisations*. Whether or not one agrees with Huntington's analysis of the current global situation, one thing is certain: there is extreme religion loose in the world and it is endangering the planet. How do Jesus followers - called to bless the nations - bring healing and reconciliation, spiritual and social blessing, to a fractured world?

The life of Abraham provides an important part of the answer. The Abraham cycle is wonderful narrative theology, rich like the pattern of a tightly woven Afghan carpet. Its intricate design is full of poignant elements vital for the life and mission of serious Jesus followers. I would like to reflect on four socio-missiological and theological aspects of the life of Abraham. This is no speculative exercise: Walter Brueggemann says that real theology involves life and death implications. The pattern revealed in Abraham should grip the hearts of all longing to find constructive solutions to the current global crisis... and to the ubiquitous brokenness present in humanity.

Journey

Journey is fundamental to the life of Abraham. His journey is a pattern for us... a pattern of faith (Heb. 11:8-12). This worldview-creating journey indicates that existential divine encounter, cross-cultural encounter, danger, and sacrifice, are the stuff of a robust and normative faith. Let us look at these four aspects.

Existential divine encounter is woven throughout the Abraham story. Enlightenment-infected Christianity, bred insipid through an over-indulgence of rationalism and the systematic breeding out of regular, sometimes quiet and sometimes electrifying spiritual experiences of the presence of God, does not have a category for Abraham's experiences. But for those longing to experience an authentic biblical pattern of meaning, Abraham is a model. He experiences God directly on eight different occasions (Gen. 12:1, 6-7; 15:1, 12; 17:1; 18:1; 21:21; 22:1-2) over a period of one hundred years (cf. 12:4; 25:7). This includes dreams, visions, theophanies, and other types of communication. The pattern for us is that there is no pattern in the way God reveals himself. The encounters deny formulation. They simply happen as we seek God, as we step out of the door and into the infinite variety of experiences that characterise the Kingdom journey. Without a foundational existential encounter with God, there is nothing of enduring, eternal value to offer the world caught in the convulsions of the current global crisis. But with real divine experience energising and guiding there is a depth of healing, a significant touch of blessing, a level of freedom and liberation, that is otherwise unknown. And this salvation, this kiss of heaven, does not simply benefit individuals, but benefits societies as well.

Secondly, in Abraham's paradigmatic journey he encounters many nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues (cf. Rev. 7:9). Abraham encounters Canaanites (Gen. 12:6), Egyptians (12:10-20), Amorites (14:13), various West Semitic kings (14:1-18), Philistines (20:1-18; 26:1; 21:32-34), and Hittites (23:1-20). Other nations issue from Abraham and his relatives such as

Moabites, Ammonites (19:36-38), and the Arab nation of Ishmael (21:18). In the powerful crescendo of salvation history Paul, the paradigmatic embodiment of journey and mission in the New Testament, picks up Abraham's journey. Abraham's gritty life of faith indicates that failure is a normal part of journey. This failure creates *curse* for other cultures and civilizations rather than blessing. But the humility embodied by Abraham, coupled with the commitment to make correction, yields blessing in most cases for people in other cultures.

Thirdly, the journey is often fraught with danger (Heb. 11:17, 25, 29, 31, 33-38). Issues of injustice and oppression require a response (Gen. 14:15-16), and issues of human frailty cause serious problems for all involved (12:10-20; 20:2-16). Abraham experiences the full range of these dangers... and so do we.

Finally, the journey with God requires sacrifice. There is a general human tendency to want to settle. For most people a lifestyle of moving brings hardship. From what we know of Abraham's cultural context, it was abnormal to leave the father's household. More than this, the incident with Isaac on Mount Moriah must have tested Abraham to the limits (Gen. 22:1-15). Sacrifice remains a characteristic of Kingdom journey (Luke 9:23). We move now to the second socio-missiological and theological aspect of Abraham's life.

Blessing

The Hebrew word for blessing, *beraka*, is a rich word used to communicate all the good that God bestows upon humanity. It includes salvation blessing, reconciliation with God and humans, practical material blessing, and supernatural signs demonstrating the power and love of the Kingdom of God. Aspects of God's blessing are only experienced by those living in submission to the rule of God. Other aspects of God's blessing are unconditionally granted to humanity simply because God is good. One foundational aspect of God's blessing is that it is normally dispensed by means of God's people. Abraham's life models this for us. In Brueggemann's words Abraham is a "prototype for all disciples."

There are five instances of Abraham channelling blessing cross-culturally. Each of the stories is gritty. They include failure and cowardice as well as courage and inspiration. They are authentic human dramas.

First we see Abraham involved in a land dispute displaying peace-making skills and selfless generosity toward his nephew Lot, the father of the Ammonites and the Moabites (13:7-9). This provides inspiration for Christians in mission to position themselves in socially influential vocations which aid in arbitration and reconciliation.

Secondly, we find Abraham involved in armed conflict in order to free his nephew Lot and a number of West Semitic kingdoms from the injustice and oppression of Kedorlaomer of Elam and his allies (14:15-16). The fundamental point here is that Abraham took up a decisive position against forces of injustice and oppression. Liberation theology notwithstanding, Jesus followers will look for ways to be a prophetic and normally non-violent voice for those suffering injustice. Vocations in a variety of types of relief and development work demonstrate this.

The third example of cross-cultural blessing was Abraham demonstrating his peace-making skills once again bringing reconciliation between his community and that of Abimelech the Philistine (21:22-32). In today's clash of civilisations, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out that it is not secular leaders who will bring peace to various religious communities. Religious leaders are best positioned to broker peace. They are the ones possessing credibility with the religious majority of the world. Jesus followers must understand that in today's milieu of religious extremism, they are uniquely positioned to arbitrate peace. Realising this, the UN has recruited world religious leaders, including Christians, to participate in the Alliance of Civilizations. This alliance aims to address the widening religio-cultural gulf separating

peoples. Christians filled with the Spirit of reconciliation are well positioned to be bridges for peace which lead to the Prince of Peace. Jesus followers specialising in international relations would be well positioned to aid in this way.

The fourth example is Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16-33). Abraham as the pre-eminent Old Testament symbol of cross-cultural blessing reveals what is most valuable in the eyes of God and thus shows that God chose the right person to be the 'father of the nations.' Sodom and Gomorrah were far removed from Abraham culturally, religiously, and morally. Yet Abraham's persistent intercession on their behalf reveals the true heart of the Christian in mission... love, compassion, and grace. Abraham errs in understanding God's plan for these two tragically fated cities (19:24). But he errs on the side of mercy, not of judgment (cf. Matt. 23:23; James 2:12-13).

The last example to analyse involves Abraham and the Hittites at Hebron (23:1-20). Abraham insists on purchasing land from the Hittites that God had already promised him (13:15)! For Abraham, preserving good relationships with the *other* was of primary importance. Later Mosaic laws stress that there would be a diversity of people living in the land of Israel who must receive the same justice and love experienced by the Israelite community (Lev. 23:22; Num. 15:15-16, 29; 35:15; Deut. 1:16; 10:18-19). In a trip I took to violently unsettled Hebron, I heard an ironically different story from a small group of religious extremists. They stated that the tens of thousands of resident Arabs would be driven out by any means. A tragically small number of Jews, Muslims, and Christians, like Rabbis for Human Rights, the Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement, and Christian Peacemaker Teams, have courageously embraced the way of Abraham and risk their lives in non-violent ways to bring justice and peace. Israel and Palestine call out to Christians to bring the blessing of salvation, spiritual transformation, reconciliation, and authentic Kingdom community that are found so powerfully and mercifully in Jesus. But while Israel/Palestine is filled with Christian pilgrims, Christians in mission are strangely absent in places like Hebron. Abraham shows us the way. In the next socio-missiological issue the particularism of Abraham's community and their pluralistic context is made clear.

Particularism and Pluralism

Since the beginnings of Christianity the relationship between biblical particularism and its pluralistic social context have been variously understood. Niebuhr's classic *Christ and Culture* provides an analysis of the ways followers of Jesus have understood this critical relationship. Abraham provides a model of horizontal social inclusiveness and vertical divine exclusiveness similar to Niebuhr's *duality* model. The greatest commandments support this inclusive/exclusive dialectic. Abraham enjoyed healthy relationships with diverse cultures and religions including Egyptians, Philistines and various West Semitic kingdoms. This did not mean the absence of serious problems. But it did mean that when relationships faltered, Abraham mediated reconciliation. He modelled inclusiveness toward the *other*, while maintaining a deep devotion to God. Another way of saying this is that Abraham loved God with his whole being as well as loving his neighbours. Abraham founded and remained in a distinct community, with boundaries flexible enough to allow others to join, while remaining on good terms with other distinct communities. Moreover, Abraham defended those communities, including Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's love of the *other* was unconditional. This brings to mind Jesus' habit of unconditionally blessing any with needs. He healed the sick and cast out demons without regard to faith commitment (Matt. 4:23-24). The ten lepers narrative is paradigmatic for Jesus' behaviour toward the *other*. Excepting a lone Samaritan, the lepers displayed an astonishing ingratitude toward him (Luke 17:12-19).

In short, we learn from Abraham that passionate devotion to God does not mean excluding those who do not embrace him. Indeed, the opposite is true. Whilst our purpose is to see people from all nations worship before the Lamb, we respect the freedom that God gives all

to reject him. God demands an account from all humanity, like Sodom and Gomorrah, but that is God's job and not ours. Like Abraham, our job in mission is to bless the nations. Let us now turn to the next socio-missiological implication of Abraham's life.

Socio-political implications

In *The Desire of the Nations*, Oliver O'Donovan challenges us to reflect deeply on the political aspects of theology. He maintains that evangelical theology must be political. Understanding the socio-political implications of Abraham's life is critical for all Christians, but especially for those engaged in blessing the followers of Islam. This is because traditional Islam understands religion in a concrete political way. In order for Christians to bridge Islam and Christianity's worldview gap they need a more nuanced understanding of the biblical political worldview. Abraham's life offers a political model which has much continuity with Jesus and the New Testament. Five socio-political observations can be pointed out concerning Abraham.

First, Abraham is unconcerned with establishing a kingdom. He establishes a community, but leaves the political structure loose and informal, along the lines of clan or tribal organisation. It appears to be a sort of eldership rule, informal and relational. Although he relates to other kings as an equal (Gen. 23:6), he neither sets up himself nor his progeny in a monarchical structure. He seems to be content to let God be king of the community. Abraham seems secure in the authority he naturally possesses.

Secondly, there is a lone situation in which Abraham subverted a certain type of political reality involving aggression and injustice. This concerned the antagonism of King Kedorlaomer and his allies, including the kidnapping of Lot and his community, and the confiscation of his property (14:4, 14-16). A modern analogy might be the opposition of many Christians, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to Hitler's Nazi regime. But this type of activity in the life of Abraham was unusual. The typical way Abraham relates politically to other communities leads us to the third observation.

Abraham shows no inclination to assert rule over neighbouring communities. In most of his relationships with other political powers, he is supportive and collegial. He neither relates to other societies from a position of power nor plots to overthrow their authority structures. He does not relate to these political entities from within, but benevolently from without. His relationships are characterised by blessing... and reconciliation when relationships suffer. Moreover, Abraham subverts what Niebuhr describes as the universal tendency toward 'tribalism.' Called 'distinctiveness theory' in the social sciences, Huntington holds that it generates the current clash of civilisations. Tribalism is when social groups view themselves as possessors of superior status among the world's diverse cultures. This hubris has dangerous implications when other groups are deemed less than human and undeserving of respect. Abraham displays a complete absence of this type of nationalistic attitude. He neither demonizes nor excludes the Egyptians, Hittites, Philistines, or Amorites. Abraham eschews the ethic of *real politik* that normally characterises relations between nations.

Fourthly, Abraham respects the freedom of his neighbours to make their own religious and cultural choices. There is no evidence that Abraham sought to coerce his neighbours into accepting his faith or belief system. This is a divinely rooted ethic. The God of the Bible grants all freedom of choice. Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares illustrate this. Christians in mission follow this pattern, avoiding extremist religious behaviour that denies others the freedom to differ.

Finally, Abraham lives with the tension of dual authority (cf. Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-2). God secures Abraham's ultimate allegiance. But Abraham respects the authority which his neighbours possess. He pays for Sarah's burial plot at Hebron even though God previously promised that the land was his.

Conclusion

Reflecting on Abraham as a model for mission, we see a man significantly encountering God. He journeys with God in community. His purpose is to bless various peoples. He affirms their liberty of choice, but does not denigrate them when they do not choose God. In fact, he intercedes for blessing on their behalf. Abraham does not give us the total picture of mission. In our day, we add to that the power and message of the cross, the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, and the gifts and richness of the community of Jesus. But Abraham's life provides an essential picture of mission, a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, a kiss of heaven.

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Preaching the Old Testament in the Majority World

Author: Stuart Reid, Itinerant preacher based near High Wycombe, UK.

Easier travel has allowed many of us ordinary Christian workers and pastors to preach all over the world. Although based in the UK all of my life, I have been greatly blessed with the opportunity to spend time in a variety of cross-cultural contexts, particularly in Peru, Ghana and India.

The people I minister to are usually very poor, frequently uneducated but often very intelligent. They are usually intrigued by the presence of a foreigner but there also seems to be a genuine quest for spiritual truth. Generally their world view does not rule out the supernatural realm both of the divine or demons.

How does one preach from the Old Testament?

"If you ask" Alec Motyer says "How does one preach from the Old Testament?" The answer is "How does one preach from the New Testament?" There is no special mystique or approach to preaching that has to descend on preachers when the Lord leads them to minister from the old rather than from the new" [1]. All Christians, whether in the hill tribes of India, the plains of Africa or the burgeoning cities of the majority love to hear preaching that tells them of God's story. Imagine the Bible as a two act play with many scenes. Without Act One (the Old Testament) you can't possibly understand Act Two (the New Testament); without Act Two we would not know where Act One was going! It is like going to a foreign language class and missing all the early lectures on grammar, syntax and vocabulary – you would find the later lessons very difficult. The Old Testament is essential for understanding the New Testament and the overall big story of the Bible.

Every tribe and people has a story but they may have never heard the master story, the true meta narrative. This is not a domineering story written by the "winners" but a story which is sensitive to suffering and written with a view to bringing healing and joy to the nations. So the Old Testament heralds the first few scenes of God's great drama where he is the author and the chief actor. But this is real history, not a cosmic myth or fairy story as God's people move in to slavery, out of it and in to it again. The first testament people finish back in the land of Israel but still, according to N.T. Wright, in spiritual exile awaiting a true deliverer. Essentially the Old Testament is not a story of conquerors but of underdogs, the powerless and the poor – but they are nevertheless God's family on earth. As C.J.H. Wright puts it, "God so loved the world that he chose Israel" [2].

Telling the big story

We have to tell the Big Story to get us out of our little stories; just as Abraham was taken out of his and put into God's story. God takes ordinary, displaced people like Ruth and places her story between the great national themes of Judges and Samuel. This little soap opera highlights how God takes and uses ordinary people. The little sweeper Dalit lady in India needs to be told she has true significance. And the heroes and heroines of the Old Testament invariably are taken from the most mundane of places. Each person created in the image of God, though this image is badly defaced, is immensely valuable. But you have to show them that in Christ they are now in something big. As in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings on the journey to Mordor, Sam the little hobbit asks Frodo "What sort of tale have we fallen into?" The Bible tells our tale. From chapter one of Genesis we are impacted by the size of the story and its teller, our great creator God. From the outset, in the market place of other religions we have to preach "the scandal of particularity"; that God chooses a particular people, Israel, to bear his message to the nations. It also becomes their story as they

respond to his self-revelation and plan of salvation. The Bible is to be preached as a great story, not just a quarry for blessed thoughts and promises! Even the non-narrative parts, the law, psalms and wisdom literature presuppose this particular story line. And the story told must be allowed to shape the community. We must teach that God works his purposes out, not from the outside but from the inside, guiding and teaching his people by his Spirit and of course finally by becoming a character in the story. We must avoid the fantastic abuse of 'spiritualising' the text.

The Bible is all history where, unlike secular history, God is seen to be central. He makes covenants/treaties/deals with people – all people understand that! These covenants give unity to the Bible and God is always faithful to his word, even when his people are not.

Preaching and poverty

Within the context of global poverty, it is important to get across the message that God does have a 'bias to the poor'. The new churches have to be taught that we are not just offering tickets for heaven but making disciples of Jesus. Even the poor Christians have to be taught to be generous. In fact their generosity often shames us affluent western Christians. We have to teach them to see the world through God's eyes, as his prophets did, who protested passionately at the injustices and suffering of the weak and poor at the hands of the strong. We overseas 'helpers' must always accompany the preaching and teaching of the gospel with deeds of compassion. This is not just handing out money but by setting up small businesses, orphanages and self help projects. James 1:27 picks up on many of the cries of the Old Testament prophets and is an essential ingredient of the true gospel.

It is great to be able to show the believer born into the lowest castes they can now trace their roots back 4,000 years to Abraham and beyond. Our emphasis should be not that they invite God into their little story but that they step into God's big story. Just as Abraham didn't invite God to come and live with him in his cosy mansion in Ur but arose and followed God's call. As we teach the biblical picture we seek to immerse each believer in this big story, thereby enabling them to encounter God and learn about his passion for his glory and the gospel in this world.

Preaching characters and genres

There is a great temptation to preach the Old Testament characters as exemplary moral models, extracting principles of godly living from their lives. Indeed when looking for, say, models of workplace excellence, people like Boaz, Nehemiah and Daniel stand out and it is essential to show that the motor rickshaw driver, the market stallholder and the sweatshop sewing machinist can make their place of work into a real place of ministry and service for the Lord. But most of the people God highlights in scripture are unsuitable and flawed. Their chief function seems to be to show God's grace in choosing, using and persisting with them. It is this honest portrayal of Old Testament characters as failures and sinners that helps people today find hope in God's gracious dealings with them. As you preach through 1 and 2 Kings, for example, look at it from the perspective of the Babylonian exile. The people must have asked, "How did we survive those hundred years of mess?" The answer is of course the gracious presence of the Lord. What the Old Testament preaches is that God cares for his people then and now – "warts and all". The clear note of God's faithfulness to his word sounds out right through the first testament and its fulfilment in the New Testament reinforces our confidence in his word. "For all the promises of God find their yes in Him" (2 Cor. 1:20a).

The people I preach to in the majority world have less difficulty than many Westerners in believing that scripture is God's word. However, it is not always easy to get them to understand the different genres of scripture. I remember how difficult it was in South

America to overcome the literalism of dispensationalism that missionaries and North American broadcasters had sown very successfully in to the new churches! Andrew Walls has reminded us that one of the greatest achievements of the missionary movement of the last centuries was to take the Word of God to lands where it was unknown. But the task of contextualisation is always before. As Philip Greenslade puts it, "We will acknowledge that these ancient texts were not addressed to us in the first place but to another people in another time and place, but that in the continuity of faith we can take these texts as written for us (Romans 4 vs 32; 1 Corinthians 10)" [3].

Psalms and songs

One thing all believers love to do throughout the world is sing. How stirring it is to hear full throated singing, whether it is in Peru, India, Ghana or wherever. And the cosmic drama in the Bible comes to us like a musical – there are songs everywhere. Bollywood films have it right when periodically the whole company burst into song. That's why the psalms are central to the Old Testament – they cover the whole of the pilgrim life. When you preach through the psalms to the poor you invariably hit the right note. Kathleen Norris wisely says that "the psalms reflect our world but they do not allow us to become voyeurs" [4]. As Philip Yancey says "They help me reconcile what I believe about life with what I actually encounter in life" [5].

The Psalms are so practical, real and vivid. I have carried a bag of chaff around India and Africa to demonstrate the qualities of chaff as depicted in Psalm 1, as opposed to the qualities of a living tree. Like Jesus' stories and parables, they 'work' in all cultures.

Simple believers like the honesty of the Psalms of lament, which show that the God-centred life is not a carefree stroll in the park. They are allowed to unburden all their negative emotions on God rather than pouring them on other people. There are a lot of angry people in the church and these Psalms provide a safety valve to let out noxious gases and breathe in the truth. They say God understands them and still cares for them. He wants an honest people who will face real, daily suffering with Him. "Covenant minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover up and pretence which sanctions social control" [6].

But the Psalms also call us to celebrate who God is and what he has done as our sublime creator, provider and deliverer. Many of these struggling Christians demonstrate most clearly that an authentic church is a thankful church that constantly sings, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever" (Psalm 107). This is the appropriate response to the preaching of the good news. It celebrates a covenantal relationship – a marriage of God and humans conceived in heaven and made on earth.

Community

People in the western world are soaked in individualism; the tribe, the clan and increasingly even the extended family is not seen as a vital part of life. But especially in Africa, the community is essential – they are all part of a people, a tribe, a family. And so they see far clearer the social and corporate nature of God's people. They see the need to march together like Israel if they are to survive. The Amalekites pick off stragglers in every generation! Great people movements in the 20th and now 21st Centuries are causing many to leave their villages and their homelands. It provides a great opportunity for us to reach those people who have cut their roots, whether in Mumbai, Bangkok or High Wycombe. Many of these migrants are believers who take the gospel into unevangelised places. For instance, seven percent of the 8 million contracted Philippino overseas workers are evangelical Christians. I digress!

The Old Testament and the spirit world

Most majority world Christians have a very clear view of a world inhabitant by spirits (angels and demons). The commands of Deuteronomy 18 etc., against occult practices which were common among the neighbours of Israel were paramount to ensure their survival. They knew that behind the gods to whom the other nations sacrificed were demons (Deut. 32:16-17; Psalm 106:37-38). Christians in many non western nations are still brought up in families where spirits are revered and worshipped. The prohibitions against occult involvement are essential in any teaching of discipleship throughout the world. Several pastors have said to me "Don't expect to set up churches here if you can't deal with demons!" These pastors routinely discern and cast out demons from people coming from other religions and pagan tribes. In these areas visiting western pastors can learn much from the local Christian workers in the whole area of demons and deliverance.

Conclusions

We have to teach the Old and the New Testaments in such a way as to show the unity of God's story. The Bible tells the story of one God and one family. Even the New Testament is about the family of Abraham, for Christians are children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ. There is only one Israel, one chosen people. In the New Testament believers are the circumcision (Philippians 3:13). We teach and preach to get these new believers to indwell this great story of the God of mission, so that they can look out from within the world of the Bible and on to the world in which they live. We have to introduce them to this strange wonderful world of the Bible. To use David Wells' words, "to take meaning we come to give up the narrative of our own life with its parables of self-constructed meaning in order to find the truth that God has given in His own narrative" [7].

It is hard following the Lord in any culture, surrounded by opposition which can be much more than just verbal abuse. And so there is always the tendency to draw back and compromise. We have to so thrill our listeners with the glory of working with and for God that being built up they will say with Nehemiah "Should such a man like me run away...?" and "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down" (Neh. 6:11, 3). There is no greater joy than knowing and serving the Living God of Israel.

Notes

[1] A. Motyer, Preaching the Word, Christian Focus, 1999, p.99.

[2] C.J.H. Wright, Deuteronomy, Hendrickson, 1996, p.57.

[3] P. Greenslade, A Passion for God's Story, Paternoster, 2002, p.29.

[4] K. Norris, The Cloister Walk, Lion, 1999, p.119.

[5] P. Yancey, 'How I learned to stop hating and started loving the Psalms' in Christianity Today, 6th October 1989.

[6] W. Brueggemann, The Psalms in the Life of Faith, Fortress, 1995, p.102 (Quoted in P. Greenslade, Psalms Songs for All Seasons, CWR, 2003).

[7] D. Wells, No Place for Truth, Eerdmans, 1993, p.279.

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Author: Julio, Third year degree student, Redcliffe College.

How significant is the Old Testament to missionaries who are immersed in their 'mission situation'? What role does it play in the nitty-gritty of life and ministry? We asked a number of current and former Redcliffe students about their experiences of the Old Testament in the context of their own mission circumstances. Although a relatively small sample, they represent a rich diversity of ages, cultural backgrounds and ministry roles. Many regions are represented either in the background of the students or in the contexts in which they have worked or are working. These include: Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, India, South East Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia.

We were encouraged by the results of the survey. It seems that missionaries can draw much from the Old Testament, particularly valuing its honesty, vitality and variety. May we all be inspired to dig deeper as a result.

What role does the Old Testament play in your day-to-day life?

Louis: I frequently use the Old Testament in my daily devotions. It has been a source of reassurance to know that the same God that created the whole universe out of chaos, is the same God that will sustain and rescue us from our daily chaos.

Anne: Many times when faced with impossible situations I have read or remembered stories such as David and Goliath or Daniel in the lions' den. I have prayed for strength from God to persevere and overcome these situations and he has answered positively.

Other verses such as Numbers 6:24-26 (the priestly blessing) or Hosea 11:9 ("For I am God and not man: the holy one among you, I will not come in wrath") have helped me to understand God's heart and to be able to share this with others.

I remember one time I was feeling 'got at' from every angle. There was a thunder storm raging outside and the rain was lashing against the wall of the church where we were doing a seminar. I was facing the possibility of getting stuck in the mud on the way back, but God gave me the verse from Isaiah 25:4 "You have been a refuge for the poor... a shelter from the storm... when the breath of the terrible ones is like a storm driving against a wall."

Magda: I enjoy reading the Bible in a year. Last year I studied the book of Genesis in depth at a Bible study fellowship. Moses is a good example of the relevance of the Old Testament to the ups and downs of missionary life. God sent a fearful and hesitant Moses into a confrontation with the powerful forces of Pharaoh for the salvation of his people Israel. So how much more is he able to help, guide, protect and encourage us in the ups and the downs.

I also found that the Psalms are a good place to learn about prayer. They are a collection of prayers for the world, the nations and show us God's concern for their salvation.

Margaret: I really enjoy and appreciate most of the Old Testament, I read it regularly. God used a number of Old Testament passages in the past to challenge me about mission and

'full time' Christian work (Isaiah 61:1-3; Jeremiah 33:3; Genesis 12:1 and others). Once during my nursing training I was in danger of losing sight of my 'missionary call'; the stories of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-19) and Jonah brought to my attention the need for obedience.

I read Old Testament passages alongside the New Testament ones day by day in my devotions. Some books being more difficult to understand (mainly the prophets) may get neglected at times! But there are some real gems: I really like Ezra and Nehemiah. Many verses even from the most difficult books can be very encouraging. I can truly say that I love the Old Testament.

Zoe: I am working through the Bible so ideally I like to read a chapter from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. I appreciate the honesty of the stories in the Old Testament, particularly in the wisdom literature. The Old Testament is not scared to look our real life experiences in the face and ask questions/get angry/be real. It reassures me in difficult times that I should not smooth over my feelings and experiences with "pie in the sky" theology.

Manoj: I read a few chapters of the Old Testament almost everyday, trying to cover it as many times as possible to familiarize myself with it. Earlier I also had the habit of reading a few Psalms and one chapter from Proverbs daily but now I only do that occasionally.

Lucy: I like to read and study the Old Testament but don't do this as much as I'd like to! I have enjoyed good sermons and commentaries through some of the reputedly heavier books – particularly Chris Wright on Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers. I nearly always enjoy sermons from Job – to tackle that book someone has to be real!

Psalms and Job are particular favourites – I have a tape of 2 sermons from the end of Job that I have taken with me all over the place and I have often lent to them to others.

Since you have been in ministry, have there been passages or books of the Old Testament that have particularly struck you?

Louis: The detailed structure of the priestly tradition in Exodus and Leviticus suggests to me the sense of God's love for beauty and order.

Anne: Yes, for instance Jacob's story (Genesis 25-50) with the struggles he had with God and the challenge to continue with him against all odds. Also the fact that at the end of Genesis the family was still together; God was working in their lives, reconciling them through Joseph's forgiving attitude.

Magda: From the beginning God's way has always been to choose the younger over the older, the weak over the strong, the lowly shepherd over the tall, handsome and the rugged, the prostitute over the Pharisee, the poor over the wealthy. The story of Joseph has also been important to me, as has the lesson in God's faithfulness to the Israelites in spite of their unbelief and his faithfulness to us will remain the same. He is the same God!

Margaret: While I was still at Redcliffe the then principal, Miss Naish, gave us a talk on the nitty-gritty and difficulties of life on the mission field. One thing she warned us about was the possibility of getting depressed (even the most cheerful and optimistic temperaments are not exempt) perhaps following illness, disappointment or after some kind of calamity. She told us that this kind of depression is common and could play unexpected havoc with our spiritual lives - taking away our desire to pray and read the Bible. She said that if or when we might be in that situation, we should not worry and we should not force ourselves to read any deep theological text (e.g. Paul's letters). Instead we should go to the Old Testament and read some of the exciting stories of famous people in difficult circumstances who persevered and won - Joseph in Egypt, David, Ruth, Esther, Daniel and others. In my experience such readings worked wonders.

Zoe: When I have felt alone and discouraged with lack of "progress" I feel spurred on by stories like Elijah with the 450 prophets of Baal, or some of the Psalms of David. The way God is patient with Israel throughout the Old Testament helped me to persevere and remember that it is God's work.

Lucy: Old Testament books that have helped me: Ruth (God's providence); Nehemiah; Esther (for such a time as this); Job (my hand on my mouth); Psalms 73; 139; Song of Songs; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Daniel; Habakkuk 3:17,18.

How has the Old Testament featured in your place of ministry?

Louis: Perhaps the situation during the time of the pre-exilic prophets like Amos and their denunciation of social evils has similarities to the social-political situation where I work.

Anne: In my case I tend to live as a 'nomad', picturing myself as a 'wandering Aramean' (Deut. 26:5) trying not to put down roots, because this would change my whole approach to ministry; I would want to 'possess' the country in which I live instead of being a guest there with all the cultural implications.

Some of the people among whom I work are nomadic as well, herding cattle, sheep and goats like the patriarchs did. Their lives are closer to the Old Testament, so their understanding of the stories in it is in some ways more realistic than my own.

Magda: When I share the gospel with people from other faiths, I often start with stories such as Creation, Adam and Eve, the prophets and lead up to the coming of Jesus. For some, these stories are also common to them. Some are oral people who like story-telling and the OT is full of it.

Margaret: I worked in Thailand where the majority of people is Buddhist. To many, sin meant killing animals, smoking, drinking alcohol, deceit and killing people. We had the chance to share from the Old Testament the stories of creation and original sin, and the story of Israel.

We could explain the Gospel but in a society that knows nothing about Creation and the Fall our explanations often fell on apparently deaf ears. So it was necessary also to understand

the Old Testament and about the history of the Jews. This kind of teaching was mostly done in small house groups. Even though my main responsibility was as a leprosy nurse in village clinics, I also had a role in the Church Planting team.

Zoe: In international student Bible studies we would always start the series at Psalm 139, then go through Gen. 1-3 before taking them to Jesus in the New Testament. Even students from former communist countries seemed to really engage with the idea of God presented in psalm 139; it was always a great starting point for them.

Manoj: I have been working among the poor and marginalized people groups and my convictions have been reinforced reading and studying Old Testament passages dealing with God's love for the poor, his passion for justice and fairness, and his anger against oppression and exploitation.

Isaiah 58 has been a very special chapter defining what the Lord has called me to do and keeps me going when I am wanting to give up. It also reassures me that I have been given the privilege to be involved in what is so dear to the heart of God.

Lucy: A local believer has said that we should not just give people the NT, but should give them both NT and OT together. I have often given verses from Psalms (and other books) to encourage a local believer. I think that many parts of the world are still very similar to the OT situation (politically, socially and culturally) – it helps me to understand the culture I work in and the culture helps me to understand the OT!

How do the people you minister engage with the OT books?

Louis: In Malawi the Old Testament is perhaps more accepted though sometimes wrongly applied. It seems to be nearer to the African traditions than the New Testament and it has sometimes been used to support African practices like polygamy. Despite the fact it has sometimes been used to support the beliefs of schismatic groups, it has been of inspiration to many Christians.

Anne: When the church elders were to be elected, the pastor of our church preached a very good word using examples from the Old Testament such as that of Moses and his election of the elders of the tribes of Israel following the advice of his father in law, Jethro in Exodus 18.

Magda: I find that many Christians ignore the teaching of the Old Testament, maybe because it is not so easy to understand - there are so many names and prophecies can be difficult to understand. However we cannot understand the New Testament without understanding the Old Testament.

Margaret: The Bible has been translated into Thai for more than 100 years. When I arrived in 1960 a new translation was in the making; I think the New Testament was already in use but it took a few more years to complete the Old Testament. So instead of waiting for the whole Old Testament to be completed in one book, the Bible Society published each book as it was finished. This meant the Old Testament could be sold very cheaply as small illustrated

booklets. Genesis, Psalms, and Proverbs were very popular even among non-Christians. Christians and young Churches found them very helpful.

Zoe: Whilst working with international students the OT was mainly used to set the scene and explain the problem that Jesus came to solve.

Manoj: The people we work with do not seem to engage with the Old Testament very much but we are encouraging them to read it and become familiar with it. The Old Testament inspires some people but not all understand and identify with what is taught. It is preached only by some in the team. Most prefer to limit themselves to the NT.

How have your experiences affected the way you read the OT?

Anne: My experiences of missionary life date back to childhood. When we experienced near accidents on journeys to and from school or when God opened opportunities for us as a family or others, my mother would see them as signs of the love of God.

Zoe: From our evangelistic Bible studies I have learnt that you cannot just take the New Testament without the Old, that they are parts of one story. The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. Both parts of Scriptures are rich in stories of grace and of the need for judgment. There is nothing totally new in the New Testament.

Manoj: I do struggle with portions of the Old Testament which depict God as violent and merciless to some of the people groups, a God who advocates war and annihilation of entire cities with the women and children but on the whole the Old Testament has made a significant contribution in my spiritual journey.

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Pagan Religion and Genesis 1

Obstacles and opportunities in Lithuania



Author: Rita R.

Lithuania was the last country in Europe to receive the Gospel. Although it is predominantly Catholic, it is also home to the largest pagan temple in the continent.

Lithuanians believe that the whole world is one and therefore humanity and nature should live in harmony by helping each another like a sister and a brother. Pagan teaching on the concept of the world is based on the oak tree. The tree represents all levels of life: the roots denote the underground, the past; water is the spring of new beginning. The middle of the tree represents toiling people as buzzing bees and the top of the tree is the future life and the light of heaven. Death is the continuation of the next life.

Religion is rooted in the personal experience of the Lithuanian way of life and world view. The devotee chooses a god, who will be worshiped by him until the last days of his life. People have spiritual experiences, but they are individual and difficult to describe. People seek inner peace and harmony within their families, communities, ancestors and nature.

The principle of pagan faith is to maintain harmony with all the living and the dead. Lithuanians believed that death is a transformation from one body to another. Purity is the most valuable asset in the world; holiness is the realm of unity and reconciliation.

Gods and ritual

The main goddesses in pagan religion are Zemyna and Laima. Laima is the beloved Divine Mother who protects human lives. Zemyna is the admired Mother Earth who protects animal and plant life. Dievas (God), Velnias (Satan) and Perkunas (Thunder God) are the main three Gods. Dievas is the sky God who lives at the top of the mountains. His duty is to protect agrarian work. Perkunas is the God of the weather and embodied justice. Velnias is responsible for the world of the dead. Lithuanians believe that there are no good or bad gods as each of them can harm and protect at the same time.

Ritual plays an important role in a devotee's life as it represents his life style and spiritual well being. Rituals are held outdoors. Devotees wash their faces and hands as they gather. The elders make offerings of food, flowers, and drink to the fire. Songs and prayers lead devotees to spiritual experiences and connection with the gods. Such a devotional life makes people believe that honesty and faithfulness to the gods is an assurance of wealth and prosperity.

Pagans and the Bible

Pagans in Lithuania face difficulties in understanding the Bible. Usually they read it in an overly literal way, not appreciating the need to understand the context in which it was written. They also harbour bitterness towards Christians that stems from the 13th century. At that time the Crusades reached Lithuania and people were forced to be baptised and reject their gods. The leader of pagan Lithuania, Gediminas, proclaimed that every nation had a right to its own distinctive perception of the world and its own way of worship.

Pagans and Genesis 1

The beginning of the Bible is very important to study as it talks about God and his creation and how we as humans are involved in it. What is our role and what do we do with God's

world? What is our mission in this world? Questions like these can also be found in the pagan worldview of creation. Balts are interested and passionate about creation because it is the root of their beliefs and the place where the gods come from and humans obtain harmony.

The aim of pagan faith is to live in harmony with God and gods, with the ancestors, nature and people. The Baltic faith unites all the faithful – living and dead.

The following section is an imaginary Bible study at which two Christians (Simonas and Darius) and two followers of the pagan 'Romuva' religion (Jurate and Lina) discuss Genesis 1. I hope it illustrates some of the obstacles and opportunities such a text presents when being presented to adherents to pagan religion. Their Bible study takes place in a forest, surrounded by beautiful valleys and hills.

Jurate. I'm not sure what Christians understand by the term 'God'. I believe in the goddess Zemyna. She takes care of my life and I am happy that the Creator God has given me the opportunity to worship what he has created. When they converted to Christianity, people were forced to ignore the goddess of the holy earth and were made to honour the virgin Mary, who was the mother not of the gods, but of one God. We understand that the return of the ancient goddess is unavoidable; it is demanded by nature and this is what people want. We are the children of one Mother – people, animals, trees – and that Mother lives here, near us. All that is alive is a sign of the earth's kindness. I think this whole passage talks about creation and how everything is bound together: sun to darkness, water to land, earth to plants, and so on.

Simonas. We Christians believe that there is only one God. I think God was from the beginning and this means that everything began with God. God acts alone. This is his creation. The earth was empty and with no surface; in other words it was chaos. It is something like what animals experience during a total eclipse – you must try to imagine complete darkness and no life at all [1]. Everything was created according to his will.

Lina. I agree with Jurate that it is so great to sense the goodness of the Creator's gifts to us. We are free to feel them and thank them. I read in another account of creation that the god of Babylon, Marduk, killed Tiamat who gave birth to the gods and her corpse was formed into the world. Man was made to free the gods [2]. These people lived at a time when the Christian God began to be worshipped. I believe that the world was created by God the Creator and he is the Master of Fate, the Lord of the world who ruled Heaven and Earth, while his children assisted him.

Darius. But surely the story about Marduk and Tiamut is just a myth and nothing else? I know that you believe in many gods and that you worship trees and ancestors. And this is your choice. But please take a look at what the Bible says. You misunderstand God's creation. He is the only God and there is no way there can be other gods (Lev. 20:7).

Lina and Jurate are confused. They take their Bibles and begin to read Genesis 1.

Simonas. It's interesting to me that verses 3-5 talk about light and darkness. I know in your religion you worship the sun and the moon. But Genesis makes it clear that heaven is a part of creation - it is not God or even the dwelling place of gods [3]. You should notice that the Hebrew avoids using the exact words 'sun' and 'moon' as they are not to be mistaken for deities [4].

Jurate. I think that God is too far from us and therefore we can choose to worship his divine creation as it is connected with him.

Lina. Also, I do not see very much from the lifestyle of Christians to show that they care for creation as much as we do. It doesn't exactly prove love for their Creator. Are you saying that what the Christian God created is for his glory? Well, I can say that we live in harmony (darna) with nature and each other. Darna is the most important of nature's and mankind's ideals, and is attained and maintained with constant work and toil. It depends on the efforts and concerns of man and his gods. You guys fight with one another and even with other religions just to prove that your God is the right one to believe in. Harmony is the most important thing within all creation, people and nature.

Jurate. I would like to say that nature worshippers' morals show complete respect for nature, life and man. The simplest and universal moral principle is to invite man to do to other men or living beings, that which he would want to be done to him.

Darius. I do agree with your statement about doing good to others and I think this is one of society's norms these days. Even the Bible talk about it in Matthew 7:12. But I do not agree that we should worship nature. God created the world not to be worshipped but to bring glory to Him. God created harmony within his creation; look around you - isn't it beautiful!! All that you have is made by his hands. No other god could do such things. 2 Kings 17:12 speaks about worshipping other gods and it means that people turned from God. This brought emptiness into their lives and through the worship of idols they lost their true connection with God.

Simonas. God doesn't say in Scripture that people will worship nature. What he says is that all he has created is for humans to rule over (v.26). God blessed the animals (1:22), he blessed man and woman and made them in his image (1:26). Blessing is God's fulfilment. God is also the provider of food (1:29-30).

Lina. What would you say about verse 26? This is obviously talking about other gods included in the heavenly court. Why would he say 'Let us make man in our image'? The idea of one god, rightly affirming the world's unity, however, has often prompted the emergence of slave ideologies and dictatorial powers, forcing their subjects to become submissive like sheep. We must learn to be "persons-to-themselves", truly self reliant.

Jurate. God created people and creation at the same time. We belong to one another. We cannot be better than animals or trees. We all have divine powers. Our Lithuanian word for a man is Zmogus, which shows a direct connection to the earth which we call 'zeme'. Zemyna is mother of the earth and zmona – wife. Man is a child of the earth. Because of this the most important symbol for a man is a tree – medis, whose beginning is the earth. A man has heavenly elements and this shows man's connection with the world. This relationship links man with everything that surrounds him. Man differs from his surroundings not because he is smarter, but because of his obligations to others. If a tree or an animal grows only to satisfy man's needs, and is suitable only for lumber and meat – the Bible preaches such a utilitarian outlook – in a case like that the family of man has no future.

Darius. Humanity is given a special task. People weren't created as monsters. God gave them authority over creation for a purpose. Man is responsible for the well-being and prosperity of those over whom he rules (1 Kings 4:24). I like how one commentator has put it:

The succession of generations of the human race, however, is different from that of the animals. Implicit in being created in the image of God is the capacity for language; the succession of human generations is a succession of names (Gen. 5 and 10), and in the succession of names lies the beginning of history. History grows out of the blessing conferred on the human family. [5]

Jurate. What do you mean being made in the image of God? Doesn't that say we can be like gods?

Darius. We have spiritual, moral and rational qualities. That is what makes us in the 'image of God'. It is our capacity to relate to God. Another thing is our dominion over the rest of the world, but not over God. What distinguishes us from every other creature, and links us to God, is our capacity for self-awareness and for reflective self-consciousness. God is the supremely 'self-aware' one: to be in his image is to be aware of ourselves as his creatures [6]. But we cannot be like God.

Lina. You mentioned spirituality. Holiness gives vital power and spiritual strength. This is about your submissiveness to God. Holiness occurs in people and nature. This is where you receive your spiritual strength from. Baltic traditions preserved the ancient concept of holiness which differs considerably from the Christian concept. The whole concept of the human and his faith in a god or gods is based on knowledge. Faith and religion are understood to be man's harmony with sanctity and holiness, and also his relationship with God and the gods. It was perceived that the world and existence are manifestations of mysterious powers and holy life. The concept of the Christian God is not able to embrace the world's diversity. If it had been able to, why would there have been brutal wars against other religions and spiritual traditions?

Simonas. I think we could discuss about God and his creation for weeks. But time is running out and I think we should finish our discussion. It was interesting and challenging to hear your understanding of Genesis 1.

Lina. Why do you want to worship another nation's God? We have our own God and gods?

Conclusion

Baltic religion doesn't leave any doubts about the spirituality and faithfulness of Lithuanian people. They are zealous followers of their gods through the rituals they participate in, and their personal spiritual experiences speak about the concepts of harmony and holiness. These are just some of the issues anyone encountering pagans will need to address. Using the Old Testament is just one way of doing this; but it can be a useful way in to genuine conversation.

Notes:

1. C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, Fortress Press, pp.7-8.
2. The Lion Handbook to the Bible, Lion Publishing, p.130.
3. C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, p.16.
4. D. Atkinson, The Message of Genesis 1-11, Inter-Varsity Press, p.16.
5. C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, p.11.
6. D. Atkinson, The Message of Genesis 1-11, p.37.

About the Author:

Rita R. is a Lithuanian student in her third year of an applied theology degree at Redcliffe College.

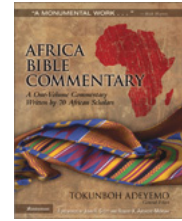
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Africa Bible Commentary

Edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo



Review by Derek Foster, Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Theology, Redcliffe College.

Samuel While reviewing the *Africa Bible Commentary* two lasting memories come to mind. The first was of my being stymied by the question, 'Where did your ancestor come from?'. Not something that my missions training had prepared me for! I was stuck for a response. My western mind had no way of relating to what was a basic element of the worldview of the culture that I was working amongst. This incident has remained with me as I have attempted to alert students training for cross-cultural mission to the necessity of developing strategies for hearing Scripture speak in contexts different from their own. It is so enriching that we here at Redcliffe College have in-put from students who come from non-western backgrounds to guide us in this task. Perhaps this can help you to understand how thrilling it is for me to have to hand a commentary written by those whose roots are so different from mine. Yusufu Turaki's article 'The Role of the Ancestors' (p.480) would have given me a good handle for framing a response to my questioner. And herein lies a particular strength of this commentary – it has a range of perceptive, supporting articles that develop themes raised by the commentators' insights on the text.

I think that there is a further point to be made and that brings me to the second of my lasting memories. I was sitting on the floor in a pastor's home in a remote Indonesian village and saw on a little shelf the only three books in the house: a hymn book, a Bible and a copy of the Indonesian translation of the New Bible Commentary. At one level it was encouraging to know that there was some kind of resource for the pastor in his sermon preparation and his personal study of Scripture. On another level I was aware, even as a callow young missionary, that good as the NBC was, it was an Indonesian presentation of western words set in western worldviews. So here's a further explanation of my excited response to reading through the *Africa Bible Commentary*. At last, here's accessible evangelical scholarship crafted by Africans for Africa. [One waits of course to see a similar single volume commentary that will speak to issues and worldviews in other regions.]

Setting my personal responses aside there are some further points to make about this commentary. It is necessary to understand that there are commentaries emerging in the global south that are written from non-evangelical and even theologically pluralistic points of view. The ABC is to be recommended not only for its conservative scholarship but also for its thoroughness. Given the confines of a one volume commentary it signals its awareness of difficulties as well as offering practical insights into contemporary issues – this last not something that the NBC ever really attempted. I would cite the attention given to the story of King David's assault on Bathsheba (p.392) and its reading as a study of male domination and violence. It echoes responses to this passage that I have heard both in Indonesia and in the Philippines. One welcomes the fact that such issues are not being left to the attention of liberal scholarship and its inadequate responses and solutions to institutional evils.

Throughout the ABC the writers are aware that they are writing in the context of African traditional religions and time is taken to clarify distinctions between the local understanding of something like 'sacrifice' and biblical teaching – after all resemblances can be deceptive (p.1502f). Readers are helped to develop a critical insight into their own communities and how Scripture speaks within them, transforming them. Kwame Bediako explains this aim in his preface to the ABC:

We should not focus on extracting principles from the Bible and applying these to culture. Scripture is not a book existing independently of us. Scripture is the living testimony to what God has done and continues to do, and we are part of that testimony The application of Scripture to our cultures is a gradual process of coming together, of life touching life. Our particular culture encounters the activity of God in building up a community of his people throughout history, a community that now includes us and our particular traditions, history and culture. We will gradually come to share in a family likeness that is not measured by ethnic particularity but by nothing less than Christ himself (Eph. 4:13) [p.4].

I use this commentary as a class text recognising that although it 'does not delve into critical and exegetical details' (a rather modest disclaimer, p.x), it is nevertheless a signpost on one cultural journey for God's people, offering steps that we all need to follow into our reading of the Bible.

As a closing thought, I return to that pastor's house. He was able to get hold of his well-used commentary through the generous commitment of believers from both home and overseas. I wonder if some who read this review might be a part of ensuring that copies of this commentary reach the shelves of those who would not otherwise be able to afford it.

Buy *Africa Bible Commentary* from [St Andrew's Bookshop](#).

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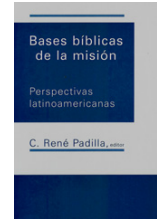
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Bases Bíblicas de la Misión: Perspectivas Latinoamericanas

Edited by C. René Padilla

Review by Julio R., a third-year student at Redcliffe College.



"Existe muy poca reflexión misionológica" escribe René Padilla, el renombrado teólogo Latinoamericano y editor de este libro. "Y en lo que atañe al estudio de la base bíblica de la misión, existe un gran vacío".

"Bases Bíblicas de la Misión" es uno de los primeros libros de su género en la literatura evangélica. Fue escrito por teólogos con extensivos ministerios en el continente.

Existen dos características distintivas que se pueden encontrar a lo largo de la obra: el rol autoritativo que los autores le dan a la Escrituras, así como el énfasis que también le dan a la necesidad de hacer el mensaje bíblico relevante al contexto Latinoamericano de pobreza y opresión. El libro será sin duda alguna de extremado valor para cualquiera interesado en desarrollar un ministerio entre los pobres y marginados, así como también para cualquier interesado en explorar el rol de la Iglesia como agentes del Reino de Dios en un mundo carente de amor y justicia.

El libro está dividido en cuatro secciones. La primera es un artículo escrito por Sydney Rooy en el cual el autor hace un recuento histórico de la búsqueda de la Iglesia por encontrar las bases bíblicas de la misión a través de los tiempos. La segunda sección contiene una serie de cinco artículos que exploran las bases bíblicas de la misión en el Antiguo Testamento, detallaremos estos artículos más adelante. Los ensayos incluidos en la tercera sección cubren la literatura apocalíptica y otros escritos del Nuevo Testamento. En la sección final algunos temas específicos como la misión en contextos de pobreza o sufrimiento son desarrollados.

Dado el tema general de este número de Encounters nos dedicaremos únicamente a los artículos relacionados al Antiguo Testamento.

Las Bases Bíblicas de la Misión en el Antiguo Testamento

La Misión de Israel a las Naciones por Edesio Sánchez.

Este artículo cubre los libros del Pentateuco y los Profetas Menores y explora la naturaleza de la misión de Israel en el mundo del Antiguo Testamento: Israel como "Testimonio a las Naciones" en contraste con la visión tradicional de la misión como "testigos para el mundo". En su estudio de la historia de los inicios de Israel como nación, Sánchez desarrolla una serie de principios misionológicos:

- El proyecto Universal de Dios: hacer de cada individuo un ser-humano.
- La particularidad y singularidad del carácter de Dios.
- Israel como nación peregrina: la necesidad humana de dejar las seguridades humanas y disfrutar de la liberación de Dios.
- El reino de Dios es el reino del vulnerable y marginalizado.

- El llamado misionero de Israel: de ser de bendición a las naciones.
- La familia como unidad primaria y fundamental de la misión.

Sanchez concluye que existen dos aspectos que son vitales para el llamado misionero: la necesidad de ser verdaderamente fieles a Dios y a su palabra y la necesidad de abrir espacios de esperanza para todos los seres humanos, especialmente al pobre, marginado y vulnerable. Fidelidad completa a Dios es el único contexto en el cual se encuentra la práctica genuina de justicia social.

Misión en el libro de los Salmos por Esteban Voth.

Voth encuentra entre las líricas de este libro poético una propuesta misionológica: una constante relación entre el pueblo de Dios y el resto de las naciones, ésta es expresada en la realidad del salmista y la realidad de las naciones. Las canciones del libro de los Salmos son en si mismas alternativas teológicas a las situaciones particulares del salmista. La soberanía universal de Dios, el rol profético del pueblo de Dios, la relación entre el amor y la justicia de Dios para con el pobre y la misión de hoy en día, son algunos de los principios misionológicos que pueden ser derivados del libro de los Salmos.

A pesar de que no podemos basar nuestra misionología en los escritos de los poetas hebreos, concluye Voth, su análisis de la condición humana, el sufrimiento y el dolor humano nos proveen de elementos que nos ayudaran a tener un entendimiento de la misión mas integral y relevante. En la Latinoamérica de hoy en donde la misión esta reflejada en términos de estadísticas de convertidos, requerimos de proponer un concepto de misión en el cual cada individuo tiene un valor particular y singular para Dios, un concepto de misión radical que define el proceso histórico en términos de justicia y vida.

La Vocación Profética: un acercamiento misionológico por Mariano Avila.

De acuerdo a Ávila, con el pasar de los tiempos Israel sobre-enfatizó su elección al punto de olvidar la naturaleza de su llamado. Dios sin embargo mantuvo viva su palabra y su intención de incluir a todas las naciones en su *shalom*.

El autor explora las tres características de la vocación de los profetas: su interpretación del pasado, su crítica del presente y el anunciamento de las bendiciones y el juicio venideros.

El tiempo durante el tiempo de Salomón nos brinda un ejemplo en el que la abundancia de la riqueza material es solo disfrutada por unos pocos mientras que la miseria y opresión es sufrida por muchos. La ley se torna impotente a contener el avance de la bancarrota social del reino. En este escenario Dios levanta a sus profetas quienes violentamente avisan de la inminente llegada del juicio de Dios, la cual brindaría consecuencias catastróficas para Israel.

Muchos elementos de la vocación profética del Antiguo Testamento, afirma Ávila, pueden determinar nuestra misión hoy en día: la necesidad de adquirir una memoria histórica que mire al pasado desde una perspectiva bíblica, la necesidad de promover una cosmovisión bíblica, la necesidad de soñar con un futuro así como también la necesidad de poner fundaciones de esperanza, la necesidad de articular una escatología realista (y no escapista), y finalmente la necesidad de valorar las relaciones internacionales desde una perspectiva bíblica.

La misión en Isaías por Mervin Breneman.

De acuerdo a Mervin Breneman, el libro de Isaías – más que cualquier otro libro del Antiguo Testamento – presenta claramente el mensaje de redención: la obra redentora del Mesías, la necesidad humana del arrepentimiento y la invitación de Dios a acercarnos más a El. Sin embargo Isaías también nos presenta, afirma Breneman, con una visión integral de la misión que envuelve todos los aspectos de la existencia humana. Muchos temas son desarrollados aquí: los oráculos a las naciones y el interés de Dios por el mundo, el mensaje de arrepentimiento para Israel, y los mensajes de amor y paz de Dios en medio de los mensajes de enjuiciamiento. En Isaías, concluye el autor, el Siervo es un misionero que es enviado al pueblo de Dios y a las naciones, pero esa misión es cumplida con sufrimiento para la redención de nuestros pecados. Asimismo nosotros somos llamados a ir a hacer discípulos.

La Misión en Jeremías por Norberto Saracco.

"La Misión y el misionero" así como también "el misionero y su mensaje" son las dos primeras relaciones que Saracco explora en su estudio de Jeremías. Dios en su soberanía interviene en la vida de un hombre para hacerlo Su mensajero y pone Su palabra en su boca. Los otros dos temas aquí también explorados son: La Misión de Jeremías en contraste con las falsas esperanzas de su tiempo y la verdadera esperanza como una actitud misionera. En la Latinoamérica de hoy, la misión involucra brindar esperanza a los millones de personas que no conocen a Jesús así como también a la iglesia que continuamente lucha con la tensión de dejarse ser "seducida" por Dios o ceder a la seducción de una falsa y fácil religiosidad.

Este libro es uno de los muchos títulos auspiciados por la "Fundación Kairos" y la "Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana", organizaciones comprometidas a la búsqueda del dialogo integral entre los textos bíblicos y los temas reales del mundo de hoy, en particular el Latinoamericano. El libro "Bases Bíblicas de la Misión" merece ser leído ampliamente.

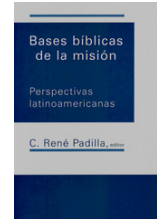
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Bases Bíblicas de la Misión: Perspectivas Latinoamericanas



Edited by C. René Padilla

Review by Julio R., a third-year student at Redcliffe College.

"There has been very little reflection on the subject of missiology in Latin America" says Rene Padilla, the renowned Latin American theologian and editor of this book. "And in regard to the study of the biblical basis of mission" he continues, "there is a great gap".

This book - whose title could be translated as "The Biblical basis of Mission: Latin American Perspectives" - is thus one of the first of its kind in Latin American evangelical literature. It is written by theologians with extensive ministries in the continent.

Two distinctive characteristics can be found throughout the whole book: the authoritative role that the authors give to the Scriptures, and their emphasis on making the biblical message relevant to the Latin American context of poverty and oppression. The book will undoubtedly be of extreme value to anyone who is ministering among the poor and the marginalised and also anyone interested in exploring the role of the Church as agents of God's kingdom in a world that is in great need of love and justice.

The book is divided into four sections: the first section is an article written by Sidney Rooy that recounts the Church's search for the biblical basis of its mission throughout its history. The second section is a series of five articles that looks at the biblical basis of Mission in the Old Testament. These are described in more detailed below. The essays of the third section cover apocalyptic and other New Testament literature. In the final section specific themes such as mission in a context of corruption and suffering are developed.

Given the overall theme of this issue's Encounters, I will focus on the articles relating to the Old Testament, rather than looking at the whole book.

The Biblical Basis of Mission in the Old Testament

The Mission of Israel to the Nations by Edesio Sanchez.

This article covers the books of the Pentateuch and the Minor Prophets and explores the nature of Israel's mission in the world of the Old Testament: Israel as a "Testimony to the Nations" in contrast to the traditional view of mission as "witnesses to the world". Sanchez develops several missionary principles when looking at the initial history of Israel:

- The Universal Project of God: to make of each individual a human-being.
- The uniqueness and singularity of God's character.
- Israel as pilgrim nation: the human need to leave their comfort zone and enjoy God's liberation.
- God's kingdom is the kingdom of the vulnerable and the marginalised.
- Israel's missionary call: to be a blessing to all nations.
- The family as the first fundamental missionary unit.

Sanchez concludes that two things are vital to our missionary call: the need to be truly faithful to God and his word and the need to open spaces of hope to all human beings, especially the poor, the marginalised and the vulnerable. Complete faithfulness to God is the only context in which a genuine practice of social justice is found.

Mission in the book of Psalms by Esteban Voth.

Voth finds a missiological proposal among the lyrics of this poetic book: a constant relation between the people of God and all the nations, this is expressed in the reality of the psalmist and the reality of the nations. The songs in the book of Psalms are themselves theological alternatives to the psalmists' particular situations. The universal sovereignty of God, the prophetic role of God's people, the relationship between God's love and justice for the poor and our mission today; these are some of the missiological principles that can be derived from the book of Psalms.

Although we cannot base our missiology on the writings of the Hebrew poets, concludes Voth, their analysis of the human condition, suffering and human pain provide us with elements that will help us to have a more holistic and relevant understanding of mission. In today's Latin America, where mission is reflected in terms of statistical converts, we are required to propose a concept of mission in which each individual is of a particular and singular value to God, a radical concept of mission that defines the historical process in terms of justice and life.

The Prophetic Vocation: A Missiological Approach by Mariano Avila.

According to Avila, with the passing of the years Israel over-emphasised its election to the point of forgetting the nature of its call. God however kept alive his word and his intention to include all the nations in his *shalom*.

The author explores the three characteristics of the vocation of the prophets: their interpretation of the past, their criticism of the present, and their announcement of future blessing or judgement. The kingdom in the time of Solomon provides us today with a relevant example in which the abundance of material wealth is only enjoyed by the few whereas misery and oppression are suffered by the many. The law became impotent to hold back the advancement of the social bankruptcy of the kingdom. In that scenario, God raised up his prophets who violently warned of the imminence of God's judgement which would bring catastrophic consequences to Israel.

Many elements of the prophetic vocation of the Old Testament, claims Avila, can determine our mission today: the need to acquire a memory that looks at the past from a biblical perspective, the need to promote a biblical worldview, the need to dream of a more hopeful future, the need to articulate a realistic (and not escapist) eschatology, and lastly the need to value international relations from a biblical perspective.

Mission in Isaiah by Mervin Breneman.

According to Mervin Breneman Isaiah - more than any other book of the Old Testament - presents clearly the redemption message: the atonement of the Messiah, the human need for repentance and God's invitation to come closer to him. However, Isaiah also presents us, says Breneman, with a holistic view of mission that involves all aspects of human existence. Several themes are developed here: the oracles to the nations and God's interest for the world, the message of repentance for Israel, and God's messages of blessing and peace among the messages of judgement. In Isaiah, concludes the author, the Servant is a

missionary that is sent to the people of God and to the nations, but whose mission is fulfilled with suffering for the redemption of our sins. We are equally commanded to go and to make disciples.

Mission in Jeremiah by Norberto Saracco.

'Mission and the missionary' as well as 'the missionary and his message' are the first two relationships that Saracco explores in his study of Jeremiah. God in his sovereignty intervenes in the life of a man to make him his messenger and put his word in his mouth. The other two themes explored are 'Jeremiah's mission in contrast to the false hopes of the time' and 'true hope as a missionary attitude'. In today's Latin America, mission involves both bringing hope to the millions of people who do not know Jesus yet and to the church that constantly wrestles with the tension of being seduced by God and being seduced by an easy and false religiosity.

This book is just one example of the many important Latin American titles published under the auspices of the "Fundación Kairos" and the "Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana". They are committed to engaging holistically both with the biblical texts and the real issues of today's world, particularly in a Latin American context. *Bases Bíblicas de la Misión* undoubtedly deserves a wide readership.

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