

Book Reviews

Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition,
by Michael W. Stroope (Downers Grove, IL: IVP
Academic, 2017, pp. 477)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This is a challenging book that questions the continuance of mission work as we have known, practiced, and discussed for the past two centuries. Radical changes swirl around the mission enterprise and this book calls for a radical response, not a knee-jerk response that is situationally based, but a fresh understanding of mission, how it developed historically, and why a new perspective is needed. This review will be extensive, consonant with the importance of the book.

The first chapter, the Introduction, is on “The Enigma of Mission.” This statement is a wake-up call for the rest of the book:

The oldest and most common use of mission is as a political or diplomatic term. The national and political interests of one country or territory are represented to another country or territory through its diplomatic mission. (2)

Stroope goes on to summarize seven meanings for the term “mission.”

M1: Mission as general, common task or representation or personal assignment. (Elizabeth has made it her mission to make sure all the children in the area are able to attend school.)

M2: Mission as specified aim or goal of a corporate entity. (The mission of our company is to provide products of superior quality and value that improve the lives of consumers all over the world.)

M3: Mission as specific and personal life purpose or calling. (My mission in life is to raise three children and provide hospitality for those who enter my home.)

M4: Mission as evangelism and church planting. (Mission means proclamation of the gospel to those who have never heard.)

M5: Mission as the ministry of the church in all its forms. (The ministries of the church contribute to the accomplishment of its overall mission.)

M6: Mission as structures or entities related to the expansion of Christianity. (Mission San Juan Capistrano was established in 1776 by Spanish Catholics of the Franciscan Order.)

M7: Mission as the activity of God in the world, often with little to no reference to the church. (God’s mission is much larger and often different from the work of the church.) (10–11).

Stroope also discusses the attempts to make singular and plural uses of the term carry distinctive meanings, but suggests that these have failed, and have only added to the confusion of meaning.

A core statement for the book is that

Mission, birthed and developed in the modern age, is itself inadequate language for the church in the current age. Rather than rehabilitating or redeeming mission, we have to move beyond its rhetoric, its practice, and its view of the world. The task is one of *transcending* mission. (26; italics in original)

This rather extreme suggestion is supported in many convincing ways. One is to point out how little “mission” has been used in biblical and Christian history:

Mission has to be read into the biblical and historical narratives anachronistically in order to create continuity between mission past and mission present. The more demanding task today calls for us to do more than justify, revise, promote, and bolster mission. Rather, the pioneering task is to acknowledge the habits of language and thought that developed around mission beginning in the sixteenth century and to foster new rhetorical expressions for the church’s encounter with the world. (27–28)

A potential misreading of the book is to focus on the terminology of mission; Stroope is constantly pointing much deeper than merely terminology:

The overall intent of this study is an appraisal of the long and enigmatic course of mission rhetoric. My concern is not merely to dismiss mission language, nor to damage the church’s witness and service to the world. Nor do I believe it is possible or even wise to abandon mission language altogether. Rather, the aim is to identify the source and severity of the mission problem and offer language that I feel more appropriately expresses the church’s being and activity for the time in which we live. (29)

Section One of the book is four chapters on “Justifying Mission.” Stroope suggests that two types or groups of people defend mission language: partisans and apologists.

Partisans are activists for mission... They proclaim *mission* and *missionary* as biblical without qualifying statements or accompanying evidence. Their argument is usually based on an uncritical, and at times naïve, reading of these terms into Scripture. Partisans leave the impression that Jesus and Paul speak of *mission* and *missionary* and thus both words are in the Bible to be literally seen and understood. (35–36).

Apologists... recognize the obvious absence of mission in Scripture and seek to establish justification for the term. (37)

Chapter two is on “Reading Scripture as Mission.” There is an interesting discussion on the Old Testament and mission, pointing out that some see no mission for OT Israel, others read mission into everything in the OT, and some make a theological category for mission even though there is no cross-cultural sending in the OT. Stroope concludes that in OT study, “Mission, as a rhetorical device,

In the end, the Crusades and their era are a different reality from modern mission, but the roots of modern mission lie in the Crusades—particularly the terminology of the Crusades carried over into the missionary movement.

improperly controls interpretation and communicates more than the Old Testament text intends” (81).

The situation with the New Testament is not much better. Two statements from Stroope make this point:

Characterizations of the early church as a *missionary church* with a *missionary spirit* are problematic for several reasons. First, with such characterizations, the assumption is that these communities were more than churches: they were *missionary churches*. (102, italics in original)

Lauding the early church through missionary language may present an inspiring picture of early believers, but it does not aid us in understanding the dynamics of the faith and witness in their context and at their time. The language of *mission* and *missionary* prejudices our reading of the text so that a clear understanding of motives and intentions is impeded by a retrospective burnishing of Christian history. (103)

Chapter three is “Presenting Mission as History.” Here Stroope shows that reading the expansion of the early church as missionary work and mission expansion is reading into the historical record:

Modern interpreters, in spite of the absence of mission among these early individuals and historians, feel compelled to insert such conceptual language into the historical record. The imprecise vocabulary of mission and its anachronistic rendering of history are the products of something other than a plain reading. Rather, mission is either generalized to express any kind of common purpose or task, or it is historicized in order to promote modern mission endeavors. (142)

This same trend appears in the next chapter, which is in a new section of the book. This second section is comprised of four chapters headed “Innovating Mission.” Of most interest here is the relationship of mission terminology to the Crusades. First, note the core fact that “Much like the preceding centuries in Christian history, the language of *mission* was simply nonexistent before and during the Crusades” (220). Modern interpretations, however, are not bound by this:

And yet, modern interpreters of the medieval era and the Crusades find reason to liberally insert *mission* and *missionary* into the narrative of the Crusades. Once again, because of the elasticity of mission language, interpreters find reason to appropriate modern terminology to explain medieval activities and to identify their actors. However, in the appropriation, they ascribe nineteenth-century assumptions and aims to eleventh-century events and individuals. (221)

Some interpret the Crusades as a missionary project. Others suggest that mission was something done by individuals who focused on evangelism while other Crusaders had other

motives. In the end, the Crusades and their era are a different reality from modern mission, but the roots of modern mission lie in the Crusades—particularly the terminology of the Crusades carried over into the missionary movement.

Finally, in the sixteenth century, the term mission is introduced into church history: “Mission, in its modern meaning and use, made its appearance in the sixteenth century. Ignatius de Loyola (1491–1556) took existing language and repurposed it” (238).

From Ignatius’s introduction of mission into the speech of the Society [of Jesus], a major shift began that eventually reformed the way the church talked about and framed its encounter with the world. In Ignatius’s innovation, the era of mission began and the modern missionary movement has its roots. The genesis of this shift was a gathering of friends in a chapel and their common vow. (239)

Section Three on “Revising Mission” has only two chapters. The first (“Protestant Reception”) looks at the development of “mission” among Protestants.

Oblique references to mission in Zinzendorf’s writings and the Moravians’ early foundational documents became full-blown expressions of mission and missionary in the second generation of Moravians. (314)

The second chapter is on “missionary problems” and starts with a focus on “the modern missionary movement.” That phrase is traced to the last decade of the nineteenth century when Baptists were celebrating their mission centennial and coined the phrase. This now-standard phrase is brought under close scrutiny.

As a whole, *the modern mission movement* functions as rhetorical device—slogan or motto—of a tradition. More than a historical period or ideological category, the modern mission movement identifies means and intent as Christians relate to the world. The modern mission movement functions like any other identity, motto, or slogan, as “an instrument of continuity and of change, of tradition and of revolution,” [Richard McKeon, *Rhetoric: Essays in Invention and Discovery*, 1987, p. 2] and thus it is a reminder of the recent past and a call for a response. In this way, the modern mission movement structures reality, and maintains and advances specific perceptions and values for individuals and the church. While significance can be found in each of the three words (modern, mission, movement), taken together they offer a distinct concept that frames identity and cause. (318–319)

Mission, as expressed at Edinburgh [1910], held vestiges of Urban’s summons [to the Crusades] and Ignatius’s vow. Its notion of conquest, occupation, and triumph were from previous eras, dressed in modern garb but motivated by similar aims. Mission was the link between the two eras, and through this

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language Christendom assumptions of one era are conveyed to the other. In this manner, Ignatius’s rhetorical innovation found full expression and reached its logical conclusion at the Edinburgh Mission Conference. (338)

Stroope goes on to evaluate mission “partisans,” who, like those who were at Edinburgh 1910, promote triumphalist slogans and seek more and more mission funds and action, and mission “revisionists,” like the Laymen’s Inquiry whose 1932 study of *Re-thinking Missions* began what has become “a perpetual revising of mission” (343). Yet even the revisionists maintain mission language, however radical their suggested changes might be. But the remarkable changes in the world in recent generations suggest that it is time for new paradigms (and terminology) to emerge:

What Ignatius innovated and Protestants made into a modern tradition is ebbing in its usefulness and vitality—but more importantly, contemporary Christians have begun to recognize the conceptual dissonance with mission language and its tradition. A number of factors should signal that rather than redoubling efforts to defend mission, or to promote the latest revision of mission, or to anticipate what mission should be in light of the newest trend or the next conference, it is time to recover ancient language that will enable a more vibrant and appropriate encounter between the church and world. (347–8)

Stroope outlines and briefly discusses seven current realities that point towards a new paradigm. First, Christendom is waning. Second, the colonial legacy of mission is not easy to overcome. Third, culturally and religiously plural societies kill the geographical assumptions involved in mission. Fourth, as modernity declines, so will mission. Fifth, multiple Christianities challenge the basic concept of mission. Sixth, the terminology of the modern mission movement is already dying out. Finally, the desire for empathy and mutual exchange with non-Christians creates space for language other than mission (348–352). So Stroope summarizes that

When we defend and promote mission, we may find that we are championing the wrong cause... we may find ourselves hindering the right cause... The necessity of transcending the rhetoric of the modern missionary movement is critical, given its past associations and its present implications... Transcending mission is more than a shift in rhetoric; it is witness to our continual conversion to the gospel story. (353)

So, if we transcend mission and adopt new terminology and attitudes, just what will that look like? Stroope has a few suggestions to start us again on the right path.

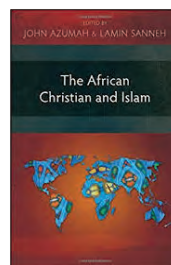
As language enters vocabulary, integrates with thought, and becomes the content of communication, it changes the way

one sees God, it shapes identity, and it determines actions. *Kingdom* language prompts those who follow Christ to live as *pilgrims* who give *witness* to the coming reign of God. They are not called *missionaries*, and their life purpose is not named as *mission*... Kingdom language frees the modern believer from ordinary expectations and expands the range of possibilities. Kingdom language is the better choice of language, because it is rooted in revelation, includes all types of believers, prioritizes formation of life, expands possibilities, underscores the place of the church, liberates from Christendom assumptions, and points to the Spirit’s work. (376; bold italic emphasis added)

Kingdom, pilgrimage and witness are key terms Stroope wants to make central in our vocabulary, replacing mission, missionary, and even missiology. Other terms like service and humility immediately come to mind. As the long development to our current phrase of “modern missionary movement” has been traced, it seems likely that there will be a long period of fermentation before any new construct becomes the accepted terminology for a new era. Evangelical “mission” societies have quite systematically and rather thoroughly removed “mission” from their names; it seems it is also time to remove mission from our terminology and, the much more difficult process, from our thought and life. The exciting prospect of representing Christ and his kingdom in the post-mission era should revitalize and redirect our witness as pilgrims among the peoples of the world. To this end, Stroope is not critiquing the past era so much as issuing a clarion call for new initiatives for the glory of God. May many embrace his perspective and begin the reboot.

The African Christian and Islam, by John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh eds. (Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs, 2013, pp. 484)

—Reviewed by Gene Daniels



Africa has a long, rich history of Christian-Muslim interaction, stretching back to when king Negus of Aksum (modern Ethiopia) famously received some of Muhammad’s followers who were fleeing persecution. Not only that, but for the past century or so, the continent of Africa has been the primary fault line of Christian-Muslim interaction in the world. Yet when was the last time you read about African Christian approaches to Muslims?

While leaders of world mission were strategizing in Europe, a great revival was being started by an indigenous African leader who is barely a footnote for most of us.

For some of us it has simply been for lack of access. I, for one, have wanted to learn more about African Christian thought on Islam for some time, but the difficulty of locating sources always stood in the way. That is why I leapt for joy when I found out about a relatively new book, *The African Christian and Islam*. The volume is the proceedings from the conference of the same name which occurred in Accra, Ghana, in July of 2010. This marvelous book was edited by two of my favorite African missiologists, John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh.

Both of these men are from a Muslim background and are first-rate scholars. Therefore, I was not surprised that some of the keenest insights come from chapters contributed by the editors themselves. For example, in a chapter on the history of God's work in Africa, Sanneh draws a fascinating line between events in Africa and Europe:

In 1910 when Harris [William Wade Harris, the West African prophet] started his mission, there was a famous meeting of mission and church leaders . . . generally referred to as Edinburgh 1910. No one at that conference gave Christianity a chance in Africa, certainly not at the hands of Africans themselves. The mood was one of paternalistic distrust at Edinburgh . . . (19).

Thus, while those we remember as the leaders of world mission were planning and strategizing in Europe, a great revival or movement to Christ was being started by an indigenous African leader who is barely a footnote for most of us. Could it be the West has always overlooked and underestimated the work of God in and through African indigenous agency?

Azumah weighs in on a chapter on Christian-Muslim encounter in Africa. When he writes about the post-9/11 mission environment, he explains how Africa has been barraged with Western apologists who promote a confrontational approach towards Islam and are "literally sowing seeds of fear and suspicion in African Christians towards Muslims" (59). He goes on to say that while Africans can learn about Islam from the West, it has to be a two-way street. In particular, the West can learn from the African Church about dealing with Muslims in "terms and realities of shared experience in society" (60).

This idea of shared community was touched on by several of the contributing authors. It was not so much by explicit statements as it was a palatable tone throughout the volume. In various ways, they reminded the reader that African Christians often live as members of the same society with Muslims. For the most part, they write of them as friends, neighbors, even family members—not as objects of evangelistic efforts. This perspective is a valuable

corrective to us in the West, whether we are encountering Muslim diaspora in our hometowns, or moving into theirs. Either way, we need to see ourselves as members of a shared society. And this is certainly one of those areas where we in the individualistic West should sit at Christian Africa's feet.

Another theme which surfaced several times was a reminder that Africa and Christianity have a long history. Even beyond the familiar Bible stories of Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt with the Christ child, and Simon of Cyrene (Libya) carrying the cross (Lk 23:26), there are deep roots to the Church in African soil. For instance, John Onaiyekan, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, reminds us of the lasting impact of ancient African theologians such as Cyprian (modern Tunisia) and Augustine (modern Algeria), and the many desert saints (in Egypt) who were the forerunners of the later monastic movements in Europe. Perhaps we might better connect with the insights in the volume if we would reread some of the Patristic fathers through the lens of their African-ness?

Not all the African figures we should learn from are shrouded in the ancient past. Elom Dovlo, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ghana, explores the ministry of the man Andrew Walls credits with the first sustained missionary engagement with African Islam in modern times, that is Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Among other things, this chapter explores key attitudes which shaped his ministry to Muslims.

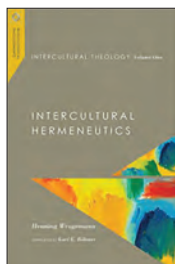
For example, he examines how Crowther relied on the "use of the Bible in conversations with Muslims because he believed that the average Christian knew his Bible better than the average Muslim knew the Qur'an" (92), thus modeling an effective mission strategy. Dovlo also points out that the Bishop's methods, which were steeped in the concept of mutual respect, "grew out of a culture of tolerance and cooperation" which was part of traditional Yorba religious culture (93).

Why should this book be must reading, at the top of your pile? Africa is home to the world's fastest growing Christian and Muslim populations. Yet it seems that we in the West are often so enamored with our own ideas that we neglect the ideas generated in this massive evangelistic encounter between these two great missionary faiths. Thankfully John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh have given us a wonderful window into what God is doing in and through his church on that continent. Now it is up to us to avail ourselves of the opportunity.

A very high view of Scripture can get in the way of appreciating what others consider meaningful. We often spend too much time exegeting the biblical text and not enough time exegeting the local context.

Intercultural Theology, Vol. 1: *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, Missiological Engagement Series, by Henning Wrogemann, translated by Karl E. Böhmer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2016, pp. 431 + xxii)

—Reviewed by Larry W. Caldwell



I was excited when I first heard about Henning Wrogemann's *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, the first volume of his three-volume set addressing the important topic of *Intercultural Theology* (originally published in German in 2012). While I had never heard of this German missiologist prior to this publication, my scholarly interest for the past thirty years or so has been in the areas of both intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics. Thus, I was thrilled when I first opened the book—what new insights would I glean from Wrogemann? Unfortunately, I was soon disappointed, not because Wrogemann fails to deal with the topics at hand. He approaches the subject matter from new and interesting perspectives, but he essentially plows no new ground in this book.

As a result, this review is somewhat bittersweet. The good news is that Wrogemann's work takes issues like "intercultural theology" and "intercultural hermeneutics" beyond the confines of missiology and injects them into the academic mainstream for scholars of the Bible and theology. As a pedigreed German missiologist—he holds the chair of mission studies, comparative religion, and ecumenics at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel in Germany, and the chair of the German Society of Missiology—his writings will be given much attention. In this regard it is a good work and will be read by many of our colleagues in the greater academy. As a result, we should all be grateful to Wrogemann (and InterVarsity Press!), since it is a rare thing indeed when a missiologist is taken seriously by Bible scholars and theologians.

While I will not take the space here to thoroughly address the contents and major themes of Wrogemann's work, I do commend the excellent job Terry Muck has done in this regard in his recent review.¹ Instead, in what follows, I will address first, some strengths of the book for frontier missiology and frontier missions, and second, what I see as "incomplete understandings" in Wrogemann's approach to both intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics. I will also footnote some complimentary sources for those who want to pursue Wrogemann's call for intercultural hermeneutics.

Strengths for Frontier Missiology and Frontier Missions

First, and foremost, Wrogemann rightly reminds us that all theologies, and thus all hermeneutics, are local; they are shaped by the local people themselves. Throughout Part 2 of the book ("Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Concept of Culture") He draws upon theories of cultural semiotics and discourse theory to this zenith:

This leads us to redefine what an intercultural hermeneutics is: from a cultural-semiotic perspective, it is the attempt to decode other, foreign cultures using the medium of their own conceptions and terminology, i.e., to identify that meaning, those referential connections, and that relevance that things have for people from the culture in question. This attempt must, however, be augmented by the discourse-theoretical perspective, since it is necessary critically to analyze the pan-cultural desire to portray certain cultural configurations as self-evident. I consider such a new intercultural hermeneutics to surpass older approaches to hermeneutics, which tended to be oriented more toward understanding texts or more toward appreciating what others consider to be meaningful, etc. (154–155)

The first part of Wrogemann's quote—"using the medium of their own conceptions and terminology"—is an important reminder for those of us who work with least reached peoples. We must seek for local hermeneutical methods that work for the local people and, correspondingly, help the local people use their own hermeneutics as they approach the biblical text and as they develop their own local theologies (more on this below). A typical Western approach to either hermeneutics or theology most likely will not work in their local context. The second part of his quote—"surpass older approaches to hermeneutics, which tended to be oriented more toward understanding texts"—points directly to a weakness in the methodology of many who work among the least reached. How so? The very high view of Scripture that many missionaries have can sometimes get in the way of "appreciating what others consider to be meaningful." We oftentimes spend too much time exegeting the biblical text and too little time exegeting the local context. As we better learn the local people's "medium of their own conceptions and terminology" the better we will be able to trust both the Holy Spirit, and the local community of believers, to work out what the Bible is saying to them.²

Second, Wrogemann redefines "intercultural theology" as a new technical term that uses a rediscovered, older technical term, namely "mission studies." In fact, he prefers the combined term "intercultural theology/mission studies" since

it emphasizes the interculturality of theology. From a global perspective, theology is pursued everywhere. This means that the subject is just as concerned with contributing to an

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adequate understanding of theological traditions from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, for example, as it is with reflecting on this exchange itself and on how it is determined by its own context. (23)

So why is this important for those who do frontier missiology? Precisely because, once again, Wrogemann emphasizes not only theology but also the local culture (with the word “studies”) because, as he says:

it concerns the expansion of Christian religious configurations, on the one hand, and the plans, efforts, and forms of expansion within the local context (in both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, on the other). (24)

As a result, as frontier missiologists do theology among a least reached people group the emphasis should not just be on the developing of a local theology, but also on understanding the local theological traditions that will give great insights into the best way that theology should be done in the specific local context. All too often, we fail to take adequate time to truly know and understand the local culture in our well-intentioned desire to make disciples and plant local fellowship groups of Jesus followers. Wrogemann, in a sense, is giving us permission to take the time necessary to truly have “an adequate understanding of theological traditions.”

Third, we need each other. Wrogemann reminds us that each people group's theology, interpretations, and expressions of faith are valid. A main theme of the book is what he calls “intercultural ecumenism”:

not just . . . a narrow conception of ecumenism limited by a Eurocentric perspective or by the perspective of denominational studies. It is concerned with all of the many forms of expression of the Christian faith instead of merely concentrating on doctrinal and written theology. It aims at a comprehension that is as holistic as it is critical . . . (26)

Wrogemann's understanding of intercultural ecumenism gives frontier missiologists the freedom to experiment with theologies, interpretations, and expressions of faith that will work among a particular least reached group. Though he does not refer to recent questions facing frontier missiology—like debates over insider movements, the use of “Allah” and familial terms in translation—Wrogemann's theories support the legitimacy of local faith communities to explore, albeit holistically and critically, those elements of their local culture that make their theology, interpretations, and expressions of faith valid for their own people. Those Western theologians and missiologists of a more restrictive viewpoint on such controversial issues might do well to pay attention to what Wrogemann is saying in this regard.

Finally, this book is a reminder that we can learn much from professional “armchair” missiologists like Wrogemann. Though he has never had significant cross-cultural “front line” service, he makes up for this lack through incorporating a plethora of majority world examples in his writing as he attempts to explain intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics in their worldwide contexts. Chapter 5 on Islam in Africa, and chapter 6 on Hinduism and Christianity in India, will be especially helpful for anyone working among the least reached in those contexts.

An Incomplete Understanding of Intercultural Theology

While there are many strengths in this volume, there are regrettably some weaknesses as well. The bad news, or at least the sad news, is that Wrogemann—though “one of the leading missiologists and scholars of religion in Europe,” and one who “has written the most comprehensive textbook on the subject of Christianity and culture today” (from the dust jacket)—pays scant attention to non-European missiologists and ignores their comprehensive textbooks on this same subject. In fact, in one brief footnote, he dismisses the works of Nida, Kraft, Hiebert, Hesslegrave, Rommen and Sannah as promoters of “translation models” that “are especially popular in the United States” and which “will not be pursued any further in this book.” (328, fn. 43) And why not? Wrogemann's reaction against including North American missiologists is strange given that the overall purpose of the book is to be a “comprehensive textbook” on intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics. In fairness, he does devote several pages to TEDS's missiologist Tite Tiénou's “prescription theology” in chapter 13 on “The Contextual Theologies of African Evangelical Theologians” (208–214). But this is the extent of any substantial North American (albeit African) contribution. This failure may be excused since Wrogemann, by his own admission (xxi), is writing primarily for the European context (particularly German) and thus the preponderance of sources from European and, especially, German scholars.

This omission, though perhaps understandable, is unfortunate. Wrogemann correctly defines intercultural theology as “the analysis and description of contextual expressions of Christianity” (24) and skillfully develops this definition—from his German/European bias—throughout the remainder of the book. Sadly, he fails to recognize and interact with North American missiologists who have been promoting such an analysis since at least 1979 with the publication of Charles H. Kraft's *Christianity in Context*³ (his detailed development of ethnotheology is reflected in the book's

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very subtitle: *A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*). Neither does he regard Paul G. Hiebert's *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*,⁴ published in 1985, which devotes entire chapters to "Critical Contextualization" (chapter 7) and "The Fourth Self" (chapter 8, dealing with the need for local "self-theologizing").⁵ As a result, though Wrogemann constructively adds to the discussion of intercultural theology, he does not "introduce the concepts of culture and context" (as, once again, the dust jacket proclaims). These concepts have already been introduced by an earlier generation of missiologists, and to neglect them in an otherwise comprehensive study of this nature is disappointing.

An Incomplete Understanding of Intercultural Hermeneutics

And what about intercultural hermeneutics? As is true for intercultural theology, so too with intercultural hermeneutics: Wrogemann does not shed much new light on the subject but merely adds his bit to a thirty-year-old discussion—at least among North American missiologists. Wrogemann generally shapes intercultural hermeneutics within the overall framework of his understandings of intercultural theology. More specifically, when he combines cultural semiotics and discourse theory and applies it to intercultural hermeneutics (see the quote above from 154–155), Wrogemann is merely stating in a different way what Robert J. Schreiter was arguing for way back in 1985 (also using semiotic theory!) in his *Constructing Local Theologies*.⁶ Wrogemann would have done well to build on this earlier work of Schreiter.

Furthermore, as early as 1979, Kraft was talking about "ethnotheological hermeneutics."⁷ For Kraft

[a]ny model of hermeneutics that ignores the influence of the interpreter's culture on that person's attempts to understand the Scriptures is seriously deficient. Many who seek to employ [foreign hermeneutical methods like the grammatico-historical] are severely hampered by a failure to grasp the full significance of the culture-boundedness of themselves and of their methodology.⁸

As a PhD student of Kraft in the 1980s, I believed that his ideas of ethnotheology—as good as they were—actually did not go far enough, or deep enough, into a local culture. It was my observation that, while good ethnotheologies were arising in the non-Western world, the basic hermeneutical methods undergirding those ethnotheologies were still Western, since they were based predominately on the historical-critical and/or grammatical-historical approaches to hermeneutics. Subsequently, I helped develop the concept

of "ethnohermeneutics,"⁹ arguing that both Western missionaries and local non-Western theologians needed to look for and use interpretation methodologies *already present in that specific culture*. It was this kind of attempt to interpret the Bible in their culture that provides the foundation from which they subsequently can develop their own unique ethnotheology.¹⁰ I argued for exegeting the biblical text in culturally appropriate ways while also exegeting the culture and how the culture understands such texts.¹¹

Recently we are hearing many new voices that argue for culturally appropriate hermeneutical methods, and these appeals are not just from the Western world. This is intercultural hermeneutics on an ecumenically grand scale, something that is promoted by Wrogemann, but not always followed through on.¹²

Concluding Thoughts

Though these above "incomplete understandings" are noteworthy, the fact remains that Henning Wrogemann's *Intercultural Theology*, Vol. 1: *Intercultural Hermeneutics* is a significant contribution to missiology. Although I think that the book is too cumbersome (read: too complicated and too German) for use as a textbook for a class on contextualization; nevertheless, it merits our attention, if for no other reason than for the attention it will receive by our colleagues in the academy.

As mentioned at the outset, Wrogemann's work was originally published in German in 2012. It is the first volume in a projected three volume set by Wrogemann, and part of the larger "Missiological Engagements Series" edited by Scott Sunquist, Amos Yong and John Franke. Let us hope that the forthcoming two volumes, as well as the entire Engagements series, will take more seriously the contributions of North American missiologists, especially those scholars whose work has influenced frontier missiologists and theologians who work among the least reached peoples.

Endnotes

¹ Terry C. Muck, "Intercultural Hermeneutics. Vol. 1 of *Intercultural Theology*," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 41 no. 3 (2017): 194–202. Available online at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2396939317698779>.

² For help in how to do this with local peoples, you can refer to my *Doing Bible Interpretation. Making the Bible Come Alive for Yourself and Your People* (Sioux Falls, SD: Lazy Oaks, 2016).

³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture. A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

“**H**induism is actually a comprehensive way of life within which the gospel may be translated, rather than a religion that people need to reject in order to confess Christ.” (Shultz)

⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985).

⁵ Many others were involved in helping to develop “contextual expressions of Christianity.” See, for example: Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1963, 1970, 1988); Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985); David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization. Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989); and Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992, 2002).

⁶ Schreiter addresses such aspects especially in his chapters on “What Is Local Theology?” (chapter 1); “Mapping a Local Theology” (chapter 2); “The Study of Culture” (chapter 3); “Theology and Its Context” (chapter 4); and “Popular Religion and Official Religion” (chapter 6).

⁷ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 129–146.

⁸ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 143.

⁹ Larry W. Caldwell, “Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 1 no. 2 (1987): 314–333.

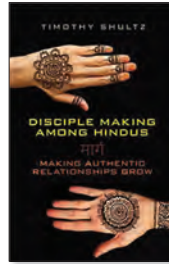
¹⁰ Larry W. Caldwell, “Cross-Cultural Bible Interpretation: A View from the Field,” *Phronesis* 3 no. 1 (1996):15.

¹¹ See Larry W. Caldwell, “Interpreting the Bible With the Poor,” in *Social Engagement: The Challenge of the Social in Missiological Education* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits, 2013): 165–190.

¹² See, for example, R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconstructions. An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003); Hans de Wit, et al, eds., *Through the Eyes of Another. Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004); D. N. Premnath, ed., *Border Crossings. Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007); Nāsili Vaka’uta, *Reading Ezra 9–10 Tu’a-Wise. Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) and his use of “contextual hermeneutics.” The following have been published since the 2012 German publication of Wrogemann’s book; however, they are important to mention for the purposes of this review: Shawn B. Redford, *Missiological Hermeneutics. Biblical Interpretation for the Global Church*. American Missiological Society Monograph Series 11 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012); Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elaine M. Wainwright, eds., *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*. Semeia Series 75 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); and, from a nonreligious perspective, Ming Xie, ed., *The Agon of Interpretations. Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). This last work, edited by Ming Xie, is perhaps the most international collection of works by scholars on the subject of intercultural hermeneutics to date.

Disciple Making among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow, by Timothy Shultz (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016, pp. 154)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This book is short, direct, and written in simple English, yet it carries a challenge that few will digest in just one reading. It calls for a total change of paradigm in evangelism and discipleship when engaging Hindus with the message of Jesus. The content is anything but complex, yet its application will be revolutionary.

The author shares from his own deep engagement with Hindus. As he says in his introduction, “everything I have written here I continue to experience as a journey of discovery that stretches me” (xiv). He rarely cites another author, but writes with deep emotional involvement, on failures and pain, as he reflects on his own experiences. This gives the book an authenticity that is often lacking in more theoretical writing.

The first chapter, “Learning Curve,” lays out an abundance of background information that must be understood for effective communication with Hindus. Of course, an understanding of Hinduism is vital, and in introducing a very helpful discussion Shultz suggests that “Hinduism is actually a comprehensive way of life within which the gospel may be translated, rather than a religion that people need to reject in order to confess Christ” (7). The rich concept of dharma is briefly introduced as a key concept, but along with his perceptive exhortation,

As Christ’s disciples we must be extremely careful not to be too prescriptive in how we come alongside Hindu people as they assess how the gospel changes their dharma—as it most certainly will do. (13)

The Hindu family comes into focus as part of this introductory learning curve. The iconic status and central function of family (as opposed to the family’s place in Western individualism) are helpfully discussed. This leads into a discussion of caste, again very helpfully done with a focus on practical concerns and modern realities. A final introductory topic is about Indian Christianity. Shultz points out that

The Indian church has come to believe that Hindu civilization and global Christianity are ultimately incompatible, and in many ways Christian experience in India, particularly since Independence, seems to prove that assumption. (20)

It takes time to figure out why Hindus are not interested in our “good news” . . . when one begins to adjust to this, there is inevitable distancing from Christians who insist on traditional patterns.

But Schultz’s perspective is all about presenting an alternative paradigm to this belief.

The second chapter on “Obstacles and Approaches” looks at four obstacles and three approaches before closing with a case study. Before starting on the obstacles, there is an important discussion of the challenges of Hindu ministry. The vast differences from traditional Christian ministry mean that people will “face a disorienting learning curve” (23). It takes time to figure out why Hindus are not interested in our “good news,” and that when one begins to understand and adjust to this, there is an inevitable distancing from other Christians who expect and insist on traditional patterns.

The first obstacle is that of foreign religion. Hindus are so deeply convinced that Christianity is not for them that they can be quite shocked to learn that Jesus is indeed for all people. Hindu identity is a closely related second obstacle. This goes back to the understanding of “Hinduism” as a “comprehensive way of life.” A Hindu “converting to Christianity” must change that comprehensive way of life, thus reinforcing in his or her mind that Christianity is a foreign religion. But Hindu identity can and must be affirmed in Christ; as Schultz says,

Until Christians understand how to apply the message of Galatians to a Hindu context and stop thrusting Hindus into an identity crisis, millions of Hindus will continue to resist any call to faith in Christ. (31)

Indian Christian identity is the third obstacle, which relates to the caste system and the low caste roots of most Indian Christians. On the fourth obstacle, spiritual blindness, Schultz is bold on the point that Satan is the only enemy, and a number of his common wiles among Hindus are helpfully explained.

The first approach (still following the content of Chapter Two) is contextualization and is more focused on theory. The second approach is contextual skills and is intensely practical: properly learning Hindu names and food culture; practicing the courtesies of Hindu cultures; understanding family structures and Hindu worship, deities, festivals, and philosophy; and, lastly, learning language. This is an excellent practical section to guide people starting out in befriending Hindus. The third approach is “building a witness,” again, very practical and of great importance. Schultz stresses that “an effective witness is something that must be built over time” (40). Quick verbal proclamation is “woefully inappropriate” (40) because of the cultural gap and massive misunderstandings that Hindus have about Jesus

as part of the foreign religion of Christianity. But the core paradigm shift for Hindu ministry is clearly stated:

The paradigm-breaking truth is that Hindus themselves actually build a positive response to the gospel that is centered on practice rather than knowledge (41).

This becomes a key to the rest of the book and is central to the very moving case study that closes the second chapter.

The following four chapters spell out the approach to Hindus that Schultz developed over his decades of interaction with Hindus. The first and central point (Chapter Three) is relationships: a true, vital and natural relationship with a Hindu must be the foundation for sharing the good news of Christ. The focus on natural relationships suggests that this approach is not for full-time gospel workers as much as it is for dedicated Christians in normal jobs and for tent-makers. There is much excellent practical advice in this section, including how relationships develop and (in many cases) do not develop. Schultz suggests that “Relationships in Hindu culture are covenantal in nature” (57), and this is a very helpful perspective. There is no reason to be reticent about Christ, although there is much reason to avoid “evangelism.” The reason natural relationships can lead to fruitful sharing of Christ is because

Open and sincere spirituality without any trace of coercion is a very desirable perception—one that we as believers actually want the Hindu family to have of us, because many Hindus respect people of faith who are genuinely conscious of God. (61)

Chapter Four begins by addressing verbal gospel witness that is based on genuine relationships to Hindus but moves the reader into a discussion of how both Hindus and their believing friends can have genuine experiential encounters with Christ. Schultz considers “the apologetics of Jesus” to be experiential rather than rationalistic, citing and explaining John 14 (in the first section, “The Apologetics of Jesus,” 64). Schultz refers back to his discussion on dharma, and introduces the new concepts of *anubhav* and *bhakti* (experience and devotion) as keys to how Hindus will recognize Christ as good news. When Hindus encounter Christ in prayer and worship, by seeing answers to prayer, and experiencing his peace, the barriers related to foreign religion will begin to break down. This is rich and rewarding reading, needing re-readings and deep meditation to internalize this ministry paradigm.

The fifth chapter goes on to talk about clarifying these experiences. Hindus who experience blessing in the name of Jesus are ready to hear good news about who Jesus is. Schultz suggests three scripture passages for presenting Jesus to Hindus: Matthew 27–28, for the story of his death and

Shultz is not trying to sugar coat reality: “You will have moments in your life when you are certain nothing is right.” But this is not to discourage but to forewarn.

resurrection; Romans 8:31–34 on his current status as Lord; and Philippians 2:5–11 that ties the story and current reality together. There are too many practical and insightful points in this exposition to even allow for a summary here. The end goal is full surrender to Christ as Lord, although this often is the result of a considerable process, as Shultz points out:

Hindus sometimes seem to surrender to Jesus in a series of stages. The stages have to do with a growing trust or faith in Jesus as their exclusive Lord. They begin by praying to Jesus among their original deities. Then they will pray to Jesus as their chief deity. At the next stage Jesus becomes their *Ishta Devata*, their chosen and exclusive Lord, and finally they acknowledge him as the supreme Lord of everybody in the world. (91)

Chapter Six is on “Intentional Discipleship” and considers a number of important perspectives on both the meaning of discipleship and particularities related to Hindu discipleship to Jesus. The central concept here is that the Christian does not understand Hindu realities and can only learn them from the person he or she is relating to.

... the disciple who initiates ministry is a cultural outsider, and they actually need help from the people they are trying to introduce to the gospel to be able to communicate effectively. (97)

Christians are in a collaborative ministry with Hindus from the very beginning as they share areas of need and growth and help each other explain the gospel and grow in Christ. Thus Hindus actually help their mentor evangelize and disciple them! (97)

In this scenario the Hindus help their mentor interpret the biblical teaching and apply it to their lives wisely and practically, and the mentor lets them do so, because they trust the work of the Holy Spirit and humbly accept that the Hindus are fully capable of understanding how to live out biblical teaching in their own lives. (97)

The centrality of family is again in focus here, and discipleship means learning how to follow Jesus within a Hindu family.

If discipleship to Jesus means that the Hindu believer must break covenant with his or her family, Hindus will continue to view Christianity—and by extension, Christ himself—as a real threat to the Hindu community. Sadly, this reality is all too common, and it is the exact opposite of good news for the world. (100)

In light of this family reality, Shultz spends some time on those Bible passages that seem to suggest that a break from family will (or should) often happen when someone follows Christ. The crucial issue of marriage is also addressed before turning to three broad points on discipleship in Hindu contexts. The first is that one cannot really teach Hindus, but rather should fill the role of a coach, recognizing that all decisions and actions are for Hindus to work out within

their family context. A second point is that discipleship is a meaningful part of *bhakti* (devotion) and *seva* (service). Finally, the principle of translation, conveying biblical meaning into another cultural context, is discussed along with notes about syncretism. All of this is then related to the meaning of church, baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

A brief closing chapter comes back to the challenge of the cultural difference between Hindu and Christian worlds. Shultz suggests that the Christian engaged deeply with Hindus will often end up with a compartmentalized life, relating to both communities separately in a complex manner. But perhaps some should leave the Christian world to integrate their life within the Hindu world; and others may at some point move in the opposite direction. Shultz is not trying to sugar coat reality; he rather suggests that “You will have moments—or extended periods—in your life when you are certain that nothing is right” (124). But this is not to discourage, but to forewarn. Clearly it is a great, transformative privilege to engage Hindus in the way Shultz outlines.

An appendix takes this very practical approach to ministry and makes it even more practical: how to first meet Hindus, how to develop relationships, how to evaluate what is happening as relationships with Hindus develop. This is repetitive with some of the earlier content, but reinforces the broad paradigm that has been presented while providing action steps that any disciple of Jesus can begin to implement. A glossary of Indian terms is also included.

This is a landmark book in the history of Christian engagement with Hindus. The daunting challenge of representing Jesus among Hindus is not made easy, but it is made conceivable and the way to move forward is made clear. This book needs wide circulation among concerned Christians who live among Hindus, and networks of such Christians need to develop for mutual learning and encouragement. Nothing this reviewer has read over the past thirty years provides as much hope for the future as this simple volume. Where, now, we might ask, are those who will take up the challenge of living this kind of life among Hindus? **IJFM**