

The Paradigm of “Relational Realism”

Enoch Wan

The recent increased interest in “worldview” study, the on-going discussion on “paradigm-shift” and the trend of the emerging church are factors that require contemporary missiologists to be more conscious of the underlying epistemological and ontological paradigms in their own research and writing. Paul Hiebert’s book, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Trinity Press International, 1999), is a case in point.

“Relational realism” is offered in this brief study as an alternative paradigm to “critical realism” embraced and exemplified by Paul Hiebert.

Several key-terms are defined below for the sake of clarify in our discussion.

Paradigm—a coherent conceptual model for philosophical postulation and scholarly research (Kuhn 1970, Barbour 1974) or “the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises” or “interpretive framework” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:19).

Ontology—the systematic study of issues related to the nature of being and the reality of existence.

Epistemology—the systematic study of issues related to the nature, essence and means of knowledge and truth.

Relationship—the interactive connection between personal being (Beings); whereas “relationality” is the generic quality of being connected.

Since one’s epistemology is based on his ontology, “relational realism” is to be defined on two levels.

Ontologically, “relational realism”

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Ontologically, “relational realism” is to be defined as “the systematic understanding that ‘reality’ is primarily based on the ‘vertical relationship’ between God and the created order and secondarily ‘horizontal relationship’ within the created order.”

within the created order.”

Based on this understanding, “relational realism” informs us that:

—God is the most Real, only in relationship to Him there is the existence of the created order (i.e. the reality and existence of angelic, human and natural orders co-existing and interacting relationally.)

—God is the Absolute and Infinite who transcends time, space and cir-

cumstance; whereas His created order is otherwise until in the “eschaton” when there will still be distinction between the Creator and the created order.

Epistemologically, “relational realism” is to be defined as “the systematic understanding that God is the absolute Truth and the Perfect Knowledge, and only in relationship to HIM is there the possibility of human knowledge and understanding of truth and reality.”

Based on this understanding of “relational realism” it informs us that:

—Human understanding is best comprehended and experienced in relational networks of God and the cre-

ated orders (3 systems in existence: angels, humanity and the natural order co-existing and interacting relationally).

—Apart from relationship with God in terms of His enablement (common grace and general revelation) and enlightenment (special grace and special revelation), knowledge and human understanding is impossible and imperfect. The understanding of “relational

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realism" is presented diagrammatically in Figure 1 on page 3.

Relationship is an essential nature within the Triune God (Father, Son and H.S.) and among humanity (male and female). The reality of God's dealing with the created order is to be understood in terms of multi-level, multi-dimensional and multi-stage reality of relationship.² (See Figure 2 on page 3).

The relevance of "relational realism" is summarized below listing positive and negative aspects.

Negative: As an alternative to "critical realism," the paradigm of "relational realism" can negatively help Christians to:

—avoid the orientations characterized by rationalism, individualism and narcissism, secularism, humanism, etc.;

—prevent Christians from extreme pragmatic and programmatic practice and obsession in managerial and methodological approach to ministry;

—presumptuously exclude God to be "supra-cultural" from human affair and cultural matters that is characteristically "modernist;"

—prevent blindness to the reality of the unseen world of spirits (the "excluded middle") of "modernist;"

—not succumb to pessimistic and relativist epistemology of "post-modernism" and positivistic epistemology of "modernism/critical realism" which recognize only the lower-level of reality (of humanity horizontally); but not the higher level of reality (vertically with God).

Positive: As an alternative to "critical realism," the paradigm of "relational realism" can positively help Christians:

—re-emphasize the Trinity—a unique Christian understanding of God;

—refocus on collectivist elements in doctrines such as: the Trinity, the Church, the Kingdom of God, etc.;

—rediscover the community aspect of Christian life style and spirituality;

—readily be cross-culturally valid and contextually relevant in evangelism and discipleship due to emphasis on relational network that is trans-culturally relevant;

—return to relationally relying on God who gives the increase and accomplishes HIS *missio deo* with sovereignty;

—recognize the reality of the spirit world.

Figure 4 on page 4 compares the epistemology of Paul Hiebert's "critical realism" (1999:37-38 as quoted in the first row below) and Wan's "relational realism"—both assert realism; but in different ways.

Conclusion

In this brief study "relational realism" is presented as an alternative paradigm to "critical realism."

Endnotes

1. See selected articles on "trinitarian paradigm" at: www.globalmissiology.org

* "Understanding "Relationality" from a Trinitarian Perspective"

* Sino-spirituality: A Case Study of Trinitarian Paradigm"

* "Ethnohermeneutics: Its Necessity and Difficulty for all Christians of all Times"

* "The Paradigm and Pressing Issues of Inter-disciplinary Research Methodology"

2. For works dealing with multi-level, multi-dimensional, multi-contextual matters in missiology, see <http://missiology.org/misionchina/misionchina.htm>

* "Critiquing the Method of Traditional Western Theology and Calling for Sino-Theology"

* "Practical Contextualization: A Case Study of Evangelizing Contemporary Chinese"

* "Theological Contributions of Sino-theology to The Global Christian Community"

* "Jesus Christ for the Chinese: A Contextual Reflection."

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Figure 1: Two Levels of “Relational Realism”

TYPE	TOPIC	CHARACTERISTIC	THEME
EPISTEMOLOGY	Relational theologizing: Systematic understanding of God and His Word/work in relational terms and interactive networks	—not rationalistic (i.e. mere propositional) —not existentialist/humanistic —not positivist (modernist/ scientific) —integrationist (not dichotomistic nor dualistic) and interdisciplinary	W I S D O M
ONTOLOGY	Relational Christianity: Christian faith and practice in relational terms and interactive networks	—multi-dimensional —multi-level —multi-contextual —multi-stage	Trinitarian Paradigm ¹

Figure 2 – Multi-level, Multi-dimension and Multi-stage of Relationship

ORDER/ SYSTEM	RELATIONSHIP (MULTI-DIMENSION, MULTI-LEVEL, MULTI-CONTEXT)		BIBLICAL REFERENCE	
Uncreated order —Triune God	essence	Intra-trinitarian relationship of Father, Son & H.S. with perfect unity & harmony	John 17; Phil. 2:1-11	
	nature	Absolute, transcendent, infinite		
C R E A T E D O R D E R	Angel	essence	Created and ruled by God	
		nature		—Not: absolute, perfect, infinite; but superior to humanity & nature —Since the Fall—disharmony
	Human	essence	—Willed to existence by God (“let us...”) —created with God’s breathe & image both male & female (reaffirmed even after the fall and the flood) —Designated by God with authority to rule & subdue, provided with food —Blessed by God to be fruitful & multiply	Gen. 1:26-30, 2:7-9, 5:1-2; 9:1-7 Ps. 8; Heb 2; Eph. 2:11-22
		nature	Strife, conflict, disharmony since the Fall Within the redeemed humanity: Reconciled and mediated by Christ with unity restored and harmony obtained	
Nature	essence	Created and sustained by God Cursed after the fall and in Christ restored. By/for/through Him	Acts 17:26 Eph. 2:1-14; Col. 1:16-18	
	nature	Harmony before the fall Cursed and groaning for redemption “Shalom” ushering in by the messianic rule of Christ		

Figure 3: Relationship between Triune God & Humanity (Christians)

TRIUNE GODrelationship....	HUMANITY	CHRISTIAN
Father	—Created, ruled & sustained by God (Ps. 103:19-22 to Ps. 104)	—“Male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free...all in one in Christ”(Gal. 3:28)	Known Foreordained Called
Son	—“In Him we live, move & have our being” (Act 17:26) —“...by...for...through Him” (Col. 1:15-20)	—“all together...one body...one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 3:1-4:7)	Atoned, mediated Redeemed Reconciled
Holy Spirit	—“...first fruits of the Spirit...those God foreknew...predestined...called...justified...glorified” (Rom. 8:1-30; Gal. 4: 1-7)		Regenerated Indwelled Endowed (gifts)

Figure 4 – Hiebert’s “critical realism” vis-à-vis Wan’s “relational realism”

POSITION	NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE	RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE	THE UMPIRE’S RESPONSE
CRITICAL REALISM	“The external world is real. Our knowledge of it is partial but can be true. Science is a map or model. It is made up of successive paradigms that bring us to closer approximations of reality and absolute truth”	“Each field in science presents a different blue-print of reality. These are complementary to one another. Integration is achieved, not by reducing them all to one model, but by seeing their interrelationship. Each gives us partial insights into reality.”	“I call it the way I see it, but there is a real pitch and an objective standard against which I must judge it. I can be shown to be right or wrong.”
RELATIONAL REALISM	<p>The external world is real but that reality is primarily based on the vertical relationship of God & His created order (Acts 14:14-17, 17:24-31), secondarily based on horizontal relationship within the created order (i.e. spirit world, human world and natural order.)</p> <p>God is the absolute Truth.</p> <p>Science is a road map and may provide human-based paradigm that cannot exclusively claim to be the only way to closer approximations of reality and absolute truth.</p> <p>Scientist, with a modernist orientation, has neither monopoly to truth nor can dogmatically/conclusively/exhaustively make pronouncement on reality.</p>	<p>God is the Truth: His Word (incarnate personhood & inscripturate—revealed & written) is truth, His work (creation, redemption, transformation, etc.) is truthful.</p> <p>Therefore, truth and reality are: multi-dimensional, multi-level, multi-stage and multi-contextual.</p> <p>All human efforts & disciplines (science, theology, philosophy, etc.) without vertical relationship to God (the Absolute Reality) at best are defective ways to approximate truth and reality (for horizontal=being uni-dimensional; single-level=human plain field; uni-contextual=shutting out the spirit world of God & angels (Satan & fallen angels included).</p> <p>Truth & reality are best to be comprehended and experienced in relational networks of God & the created orders (3: angel, humanity and nature).</p>	<p>Man, without God and His revelation (Incarnate and inscripturate Word) and illumination (H.S.), can be blinded to truth & reality.</p> <p>Therefore, he is not the umpire to make the final call of being: real or illusion, truth or untruth, right or wrong, good or bad.</p> <p>No human judgment is final, nor can it be dogmatic /conclusive; without the vertical relationship to God who is the absolute Truth & the most Real.</p>

The Uniqueness of Christ

*Believing and Communicating Jesus as “the One and Only”
To Those Who Believe He May Be One but Not Only*

I opened my copy of *The Centrality of Christ in Contemporary Missions* with hopeful anticipation. Certainly this is an essential topic to explore in the theology of mission and other missiological studies. However, while I enjoyed many of the articles, finding them interesting and with some flashes of good insight, my hopes and expectation were not satisfied.

George Murray’s opening article was fundamentally right—basic biblical and evangelical doctrine—but was disappointing because of what he didn’t say. He needed to move outside the constraints of traditional evangelical thinking, which has been unconsciously shaped by the mindset of modernity with its neat epistemology, and which is sometimes constrained by the fear of censure—fearful of sincere exploration of those “gray areas” of theology which are questioned and challenged in the postmodern, globalized context today.

I grew up learning the views Murray expounded. They are cut and dried, decidedly black and white, but I now find inadequate and trite. They seem to lack honesty and integrity about the ambiguities, mysteries and non-disclosures of Scripture. Yes, there is “exclusiveness” in the Gospel; the uniqueness of Jesus as Savior and Lord is undeniable; the claims of the cross are unequivocal. However, taking Scripture as a whole, and not “proof-texting,” we find hints of wider redemption of the whole of creation.

There are enough imponderable questions and enough mystery for me to be able to answer the probing questions of my agnostic brother-in-law, “I don’t honestly know about the tribesman up the Amazon who died without knowing about Jesus Christ. But I do know salvation is in Christ alone and redemption is through his atoning death and resurrection. I know and therefore obey the divine imperative to make this known in the world.” I also tell him Scripture talks of all things being brought back into unity under

Christ, and that there will be a grand redemption of all creation with a new heaven and earth; but until then creation groans like a woman in labor, awaiting the full redemption of the sons of God. I tell him Jesus is the representative man in whom human personhood is redeemed, and that Scripture says just as in Adam all died, so in Christ will all be made alive. I tell him I am not sure exactly what that means except God incarnate in Jesus Christ is necessary to the equation.

One of the highlights in this compendium on The Centrality of Christ was Harold Netland’s quote from

Regardless of our faith or philosophy, we all share the common ground of our humanity, and wrestle in some way with the conundrum of the human condition. The uniqueness of Christ in his incarnation speaks to this.

John Stott in which Stott defined the uniqueness of Christ—in his incarnation, atonement, resurrection and gift of the Spirit. This would have been a useful framework with which to explore the issue of the centrality and uniqueness of Christ.

In my experience, we evangelicals have tended to be weak with regard to two of these elements—the incarnation and Spirit. We are inclined on one hand to emphasize the salvific value of the death and resurrection of Christ and on the other to pay scant attention to the import of the incarnation and necessity of the indwelling life of the Spirit.

Thanks to the charismatic move-

ment in the last 30-40 years, the lack with regard to the ministry of the Spirit has been redressed to some degree, but is still a neglected dimension in evangelical theology and life. Perhaps more significantly (with regard to the uniqueness of Christ), we fail to make much of the incarnation. This doctrine was not even touched on by Murray, and yet, as Stott has rightly defined it, it is a key element in understanding who Jesus is and what he does; it is a necessary dimension of the uniqueness, and therefore the centrality of Christ in contemporary missions. Regardless of our faith or philosophy, we all (modern or postmodern; Christian, Buddhist or Muslim) share the common ground of our humanity, and wrestle in some way with the conundrum of the human condition. The uniqueness of Christ in his incarnation speaks to this.

Perhaps we (who are still “modern”) are too bound by our post-Enlightenment thinking, and still too influenced by the much older dichotomous understanding of the duality of body and spirit. We are still too gnostic in our theology, to the degree that our evangelical gospel is good news for a

future in a spiritualized “heaven”; but fails to integrate our theology of salvation into earthy life in the here and now. We need the integration of the “fleshly” and “spiritual” which we understand to take place in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

There is a passage in *The Mediation of Christ* in which T. F. Torrance makes honest and profoundly challenging statements on the incarnation which highlight for me the significance and centrality of the incarnation for us:

“In him the Incarnation and Atonement are one and inseparable, for atoning reconciliation falls within the incarnate constitution of his Person as Mediator, and it is on that ground and

from that source that atoning reconciliation embraces all mankind and is freely available to every person."

Torrance goes on to say what the incarnation means for the healing and sanctifying of our human nature, "re-creating our humanity within the holiness and perfection of his own sinless human life, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification."

Later on, he amplifies the "personalising and humanising activity" of Jesus through his incarnation, in light of the fact that the one who became man is also the creating Word of God. Torrance argues that through Christ's incarnation there was "an acute personalising of all God's interaction with us." This unique and profound consequence of the incarnation of Jesus is certainly good news for a modern (post-modern) world, where our scientific, technological and managerial skills have exacerbated the depersonalizing of the human being. For Christ "redeems us from thralldom to depersonalising forces, repersonalising our human being in relation to himself and to other human beings: But what Christ has done, and continues to do, goes far beyond that, for he anchors our persons immutably in his own Person in God, the generating source of all personal being."

But Torrance doesn't stop there; he affirms that Jesus Christ is also "the humanising man" who redresses the corruption of our human nature which has "fallen a prey to dehumanising forces which have entrenched themselves within the very structures of human existence so that it cannot escape from them." Here again, Torrance applies to our condition the unique and central significance of the incarnation: Throughout his human life, Christ was "humanising the human nature which he assumed from our fallen, dehumanised state, converting it from its estrangement from the Creator back to its proper relation to him."

It is this kind of integrative theological thinking we need to explore as we consider the centrality of Christ in missions in our contemporary world. Missiologists at the frontiers between gospel and culture must grapple with a contextual Christology for the post-

modern world which moves beyond the neat systematic categories and black-and-white, definitive theology of the modern era with its dualism and over-spiritualization of salvation.

There are other evangelical theologians doing this. I think particularly of people like N. T Wright, Richard Baukham and Rikk Watts. In a similar way, Eugene Peterson does this in *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*. While subtitled *A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, it is the kind of integrative theology we need—rooted in God's Trinitarian revelation of himself as divine persons in community, calling us into an intimate relation with God (Father, Son and Spirit) in our time, place and relationships.

These are the thoughts I had on reading *The Centrality of Christ*. However, a few days later I came across *Christ the One and Only* in which a theologically and ethnically diverse group of well-qualified authors wrestle with the same fundamental issue in a thorough and imaginative way. This book is essentially (though not formally) structured in two parts, the first six chapters spell out fundamental Christology, the last five chapters engage dialogically with Judaism, Islam and Buddhism.

The opening essay is on the Incarnation—substantiating my point above. Elias Dantas recognizes the implications of this fundamental doctrine. He deals with alternative (heretical) views to our traditional understanding of the person of Christ and how the Church has responded to these in its historic confessions and creeds. However, he goes on to show the implications of the incarnation in the life and ministry of the church: God makes himself "tangible" by disclosing himself in Jesus Christ. This revelation is furthered by "the embodiment of Jesus' message and life in his church" in history. "The incarnation bears witness not only to the fact that God has become part of history in the man Jesus, but also to the fact that this man reveals authentic humanity." Dantas then goes on to explore how we can "make God tangible in our pluralistic world."

The other Christological essays deal with the uniqueness of life and teachings of Christ, of his suffering and

death, his resurrection and his role as the revealer of God. The sixth chapter deals with Trinitarian faith and includes sections on the critical role of Christology for the doctrine of the Trinity, the uniqueness of the Triune God, and presence of the Triune God in the world. The sum effect of these essays is a broad exploration of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in a way which is fully cognizant of the questions the church faces in its life and mission in the world today.

The final chapters look for pathways of understanding with people from three major faith blocs. Ellen Charry helps us understand how Jews view Christianity and why they are disinterested in Jesus as Christ, then looks at Judaism from a Christian perspective in this way facilitating meaningful dialogue. Paul Chung, K. K. Yeo and Sung Wook Chung help us see ways in which we can address the uniqueness of Christ to Buddhist and Confucianist audiences through meaningful points of contact and potential grounds for contextualization. Similarly, Ng Kam Weng examines the common ground of understanding for Muslims and Christians of Jesus as eschatological prophet, but shows that Jesus is "more than a prophet" and that "Christianity envisages a richer sense of revelation than Islam does. For Muslims have only the revelation of Divine will; God the Revealer remains himself unrevealed. He sends his message but is himself withdrawn in transcendence."

The compilation of these essays makes a good case for the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as "the one and only" with theological breadth and apologetic strength. The contributors engage in a sensitive but confident way with three other faiths or religious systems; open to the possibility of common issues and the presence of truth within them, but with the conviction that God "must be known, can only be known, by revelation".

The incarnation is without question a "miracle of revelation" which "brought into human life in space and time the eternal Word of the living triune God."

The gospel is meaningless without the Christ-Jesus, the one and only fully representative man, who is God incar-

nate for all humanity. However, Christology is also contingent on theology of the Trinity, which has been a difficult doctrine to teach and validate to Christian disciples as relevant to faith and conduct; let alone a conundrum to people of other faiths, and in particular Muslims with their resolute and adamant adherence to the singularity of the one true God.

Part of our difficulty lies in the legacy of our particular western epistemology—deeply impregnated with dualism since the days of Plato and (particularly since the Enlightenment) systemically addicted to the concept of the autonomy of the individual. This individualism has dangerously diminished personhood by divorcing the person from his/her contingent relationships with their mutual obligations and benefits.

It is a wonder that the historic doctrines of the dual nature of Christ and the unity of the tri-personal God should have survived such hazards! However, in the last 30-40 years, we have seen a significant number of theologians grapple with Trinitarian theology in fresh and revitalizing ways which are profoundly significant for the life and mission of the church in our postmodern and pluralistic world. Our Christology is informed and enriched by theological thinking which has begun to break free from the limiting confines of dualism and individualism. We are thus enabled to engage in constructive and meaningful ways with people who don't think like us or believe like us.

The self-revealing nature of the one God whose tri-personal existence is the source and ultimate fulfillment of all personhood and community has ultimately revealed himself incarnate in Jesus Christ, "the one and only." This must surely be our fundamental starting point as we encounter and counter those who tell us Jesus can be one, but not the only one.

John D Wilson is a veteran missionary with World Team with 20 years in church planting and Bible translation in Papua (Irian Jaya), Indonesia (1971-1991). He currently serves as Asia Area Training Coordinator. ■

The Changing Face of World Missions

David Hesselgrave Reviews Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen and Douglas McConnell's book *The Changing Face of World Missions—Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Baker, 2005).

Missions, missiology, mission—all are changing. And not alone their face but also their arms and legs, and hands and feet, and—sometimes to an alarming degree—their mind and heart!

No single volume of less than 400 pages could be expected to do a better job of cataloging, characterizing and contemplating these changes than has been done in this book. It is a magnificent work. Written by six different authors, its treatment of twelve major and numerous subsidiary trends is nevertheless consistently ordered, remarkably thorough and well documented. Within understandable limitations that I will mention later, this

tualization. The various authors write concerning trends in which they can be considered expert by virtue of both careful study and personal involvement—identifying, reflecting, evaluating, and making recommendations with respect to each trend.

In addition to being accurate and substantive in content, the book is enhanced by sidebars that offer stipulated definitions of major terms, questions for reflection and discussion, and illustrative case studies. The combined investigations of the authors result in a most helpful reference list that extends to 22 pages. Subject and Scripture indices round out the work.

There was a time when I considered

No single volume of less than 400 pages could be expected to do a better job of cataloging, characterizing and contemplating these changes than has been done in this book.

is missiology at its best. Whether mission specialists in boardrooms and classrooms, missionary practitioners in whatever endeavor, or mission supporters and volunteers in local churches, all alike should study this book and keep it available as a ready reference. It is a most worthy continuation of Stan Guthrie's *Missions in the Third Millennium* and a most appropriate companion to its predecessor in this series, *Introducing World Missions* (by A. Scott Moreau, Gary Corwin and Gary McGee).

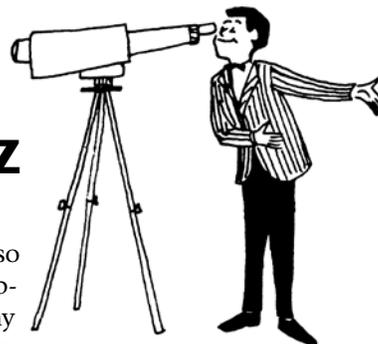
In addition to the three main authors, chapter writers include Mike Barnett, J. Tedd Esler and A. Scott Moreau. Twelve major trends are categorized as being global, missional or strategic in nature—four in each of these three categories. Taken in order, these trends have to do with globalization, demographics, spirituality, epistemology, global Christianity, partnership, technology, and contex-

it incumbent upon writers on trends to define and establish objectively both the number and nature of those selected for special treatment. Of course, I still think that objectivity is important. However, as changes have become increasingly numerous and momentous, the ability to sort them all out determine their relative significance increasingly becomes a matter not just of statistics of one kind or another, but also of broad knowledge and sound judgment. Though you or I might have somewhat different readings of the present world situation and the ways in which Christian missions ought to respond to it, overall it would be exceedingly difficult to improve upon what our colleagues have done here. Objective data is to be found in abundance. But of commensurate importance is the considered judgment of these scholars who have lived, studied, thought and taught Christian

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The two articles that we are offering in this issue may stretch your thinking, and perhaps move you out of your comfort zone. Both Enoch Wan and John Wilson have presented scholarly issues that perhaps we have taken for granted. They are challenging the status quo with a fresh look at other alternatives to Missiological thinking. Not all may agree with the conclusions, but scholars who wrestle with issues always gain our respect in the EMS family. Thanks men for giving us something to chew on. Thanks also to our dear friend Dr. David Hesselgrave for high lighting Dr. Mike Pocock's very helpful book on issues and trends. Having read the book myself, and passing it along to my senior pastor, this volume should set a bench mark for at last the immediate future in missions, and can be a valuable tool also in the local church setting.

As seen
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The Changing Face of World Missions

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missions during precisely those years when change has become the hallmark of world cultures, a global church and Christian missions. Although reported in the third person, the first person experiences of these authors contribute greatly to their awareness of, and response to, what has been happening. What we have here, then, is a clear window to the thinking of six front running younger missiologists poised to replace a builder generation now rapidly retiring from the missionary scene,

Three things remain to be said. First, the authors wisely distinguish between issues and trends (pp. 12-13). This book makes by far its greatest contribution in the areas of change and trends. Readers should not anticipate the thoroughgoing treatment of issues that is given to trends. That would require much more extensive treatments

of alternative understandings of such concepts as indigenization, contextualization, holism, incarnationalism, missional, *missio Dei*, and still others. To undertake that kind of analysis within the scope of a single book of this size would be manifestly impossible.

Second, the authors are also to be commended for not falling into the trap of embracing change for the sake of change. It is quite common today to hear and read grandiose and hyperbolic statements to the effect that missions have no future unless they are willing to take great risks and inaugurate wholesale changes. The scholars who have contributed to this book recognize that certain changes are both justifiable and necessary. At the same time, they evidence a sincere fidelity to that which is unchanging—the person of Christ, the Christian gospel, and the Word of God.

Third, when accompanied by the kind of natural and political trends

not dealt with here, our missions may soon be dealing not only with “sea-change” by with a global tsunami of cataclysmic proportions. Bible prophets and secular pundits seem to agree at this point. (For example, on the basis of demographic data alone, Mark Steyn predicts the extinction of Western European and then American civilizations well within this century (cf. *The New Criterion*, January 2006). I trust, then, that I will not be misunderstood when I urge new generations of evangelical missiologists to remember that the changes we do not make will be more determinative for the future of the church and its missions than the changes we do make.

Nevertheless, changes there must and will be. Many of those changes are laid out for us in *The Changing Face of World Missions*. Read it carefully. Study it thoroughly. Keep it readily available. You will want to refer to it often in the days just ahead. ■



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