



Mission Round Table

The OMF Journal for Reflective Practitioners



**From every Tribe and Language
and People and Nation**

One People Uniting in God's Mission

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Editorial

Walter McConnell

From the beginning, when God created humankind to serve as his regents by exercising dominion over the rest of creation, until the very end when the Lamb, by his blood, ransomed people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” so that they could be a kingdom and priests who reign on the earth (Rev 5:9–10), the Bible consistently recognizes the oneness that people share despite their differences. Though distinctions are made between Jews and Gentiles, sinners and saints, the Bible shows greater interest in what unites people—whether under the old or new covenant—than what makes them different. We have seen this reality in the previous two issues of *Mission Round Table* that presented eight of the papers read at the OMF Mission Research Consultation at the end of May 2023. With three more consultation papers in this issue, we complete those studies and prepare the way for the next issue.

We begin with David Eastwood’s devotional on Isaiah 19 that shows how God has the power to change hated enemies into friends, and that he has already woven this into his design. Amazingly, a prophecy that begins by announcing judgment against Egypt ends with this nation and another ancient enemy of Israel—Assyria—uniting with Israel to worship Yahweh and bring a blessing upon the earth. As we live in an age when this unity seems as unlikely as in the prophet’s day, we too need to hear that “in that day” Yahweh will bring these peoples together and proclaim: “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance” (Isa 19:25). And as we trust that that day will come, we need to join our global brothers and sisters in united praise.

In the second article, I attempt to draw upon anthropology and biblical theology to show just how difficult it is

to articulate a biblical theology of race and ethnicity. This is partially because these concepts that are so important in the modern world were either unknown in ancient times or understood in a completely different way. As is hinted in the title, the best we can do is to produce a *tentative* biblical theology of race that is built upon the terms the Bible uses for humankind as a whole and the way different peoples relate to one another, particularly those who are *in Christ*. The paper also encourages us to “look to Jesus” when we face the winds and waves of scholarship that overwhelm us and when our personal relationships with others do not match the biblical ideal.

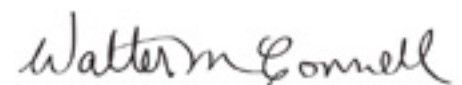
Our third article is written by an Old Testament scholar with years of experience working with the church in East Asia. In it, he responds to questions raised by Asian Christians who want to adopt a theology of mission that they can use in their local context. While his initial reflection surfaced Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12 as basic Old Testament texts used to support mission in the sense of “a post-Fall activity ... in which God intends to work through his chosen and faithful human agents to bring salvation blessing to an unredeemed humanity,” he found himself “wondering if God’s mission—and humanity’s role in God’s mission—is limited to redemption.” By focusing on the pre-Fall text of Genesis 2, the author broadens the discussion as he asks “Where is the mission? What is the mission? and Who does the mission?” and shows that, in addition to promoting blessing and redemption, mission is accomplished when humans rightly fulfil their priestly function of extending God’s dominion and rule in the world.

Shifting our focus from a text at the beginning of Scripture to the end, Jay Mātenga’s article spotlights the nations, tribes, people, and languages spoken of in Revelation to show God’s intent

“That They Will All Be One.” Although diversity and uniqueness will always characterize different groups of humans, in Christ we are citizens of the same kingdom and should, therefore, work together to overcome the sin that seeks to destroy relationships. Mātenga rightly explains that the tribes, nations, peoples, and languages should not merely be seen as the *scope* of our mission activities, but they should be included as full *participants* in all missions activities. In Christ, those who were *they* are now *us*. We should therefore work together under the One who has dominion over all so that the world will know that he has made us one just as he makes all things new.

The final article is a taster of what is to come in the next issue of *Mission Round Table* that takes the global church and mission as its theme. Ma Tianji introduces us to an important early twentieth-century Chinese Christian missionary—Gao Jincheng. A student of medicine under the tutelage of CIM missionaries in Kaifeng and an early worker at the Borden Memorial Hospital in Lanzhou, Gao subsequently set off for the Northwest of China, trusting the Lord to provide for his needs as he sought to help people there by opening a hospital, planting a church, and more. As the article shows, Gao’s life is somewhat clouded by mystery and, to clarify some of the issues involved, Ma is writing a second paper that will appear in the next issue.

May the God who has called us together to be his people and share his dominion in creation and the new creation use these papers to help you think about your place in his mission and your relationship with others who join us in that mission.



Editor, *Mission Round Table*

Though it distinguishes between Jews and Gentiles, sinners and saints, the Bible shows greater interest in what unites people—whether under the old or new covenant—than what makes them different.

Isaiah 19

When God Changes a Hated Enemy into “His People”

David Eastwood



David Eastwood has served for thirty-two years in Taiwan with OMF International. During that time, his ministry has included Bible teaching, preaching, and church planting, and, for the last nine years, he has served as the Field Director. David initially trained at All Nations Christian College in the UK but has since completed further studies with Singapore Bible College and Spurgeon's College in the UK. He is studying for a Doctorate in Practical Theology with the Cambridge Theological Federation, investigating the experiences of the Taiwanese working class as they become part of a local church.

¹ *A prophecy against Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear.*

² *“I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—brother will fight against brother, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.*

³ *The Egyptians will lose heart, and I will bring their plans to nothing; they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead, the mediums and the spiritists.*

⁴ *I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them,” declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.*

⁵ *The waters of the river will dry up, and the riverbed will be parched and dry.*

⁶ *The canals will stink; the streams of Egypt will dwindle and dry up.*

The reeds and rushes will wither,

⁷ *also the plants along the Nile, at the mouth of the river. Every sown field along the Nile will become parched, will blow away and be no more.*

⁸ *The fishermen will groan and lament, all who cast hooks into the Nile; those who throw nets on the water will pine away.*

⁹ *Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope.*

¹⁰ *The workers in cloth will be dejected, and all the wage earners will be sick at heart.*

¹¹ *The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give senseless advice. How can you say to Pharaoh, “I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings”?*

¹² *Where are your wise men now? Let them show you and make known what the LORD Almighty has planned against Egypt.*

¹³ *The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deceived; the cornerstones of her peoples have led Egypt astray.*

¹⁴ *The LORD has poured into them a spirit of dizziness; they make Egypt stagger in all that she does, as a drunkard staggers around in his vomit.*

¹⁵ *There is nothing Egypt can do—head or tail, palm branch or reed.*

¹⁶ *In that day the Egyptians will become weaklings. They will shudder with fear at the uplifted hand that the LORD Almighty raises against them.*

¹⁷ *And the land of Judah will bring terror to the Egyptians;*

everyone to whom Judah is mentioned will be terrified,

because of what the LORD Almighty is planning against them.

¹⁸ *In that day five cities in Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD Almighty. One of them will be called the City of the Sun.*

¹⁹ *In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the LORD at its border. ²⁰ It will be a sign and witness to the LORD Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the LORD because of their oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them. ²¹ So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the LORD and keep them. ²² The LORD will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the LORD, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them.*

²³ *In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together.*

²⁴ *In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth.*

²⁵ *The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.” (Isaiah 19:1–23 NIV 2011)*

Because we are so used to our Bibles, it doesn't strike us as unusual that there should be a prophet in Israel standing up and talking about other nations. For us, Isaiah son of Amoz, nephew to king Amaziah, is one of the most profound theologians of the Hebrew Bible, quoted extensively in the New Testament. But at the time, Judah was such a tiny nation, long past its glory days of Solomon's Israel. To the north, the growing superpower of Assyria and to the south, the still militarily powerful historic empire of Egypt were both exercising political and military power and were ultimately likely to end up at war with each other. And in between them was this tiny little nation. How would this be seen by the generals in Assyria who believed their rise in power was due to the blessing of their gods? What would be the response of the Pharaoh in Egypt, a self-proclaimed god, to hear that this prophet of a God of a tiny and insignificant nation was speaking words of judgement about them?

But from the perspective of the people of Judah, this is familiar territory for them and us. We are used to the idea of the prophets of Yahweh speaking words of judgement against the nations surrounding Israel. Theologically, they were an affirmation that God had not abandoned the covenant, that Israel was still his people, and that he would judge those who harmed them. We expect, with our knowledge of the Old Testament, that there would be a list of condemnations of the various neighbouring countries and then finally, the sting in the tail would be that the prophet would turn his focus to Judah and show that they are no different and also deserving of God's judgement. Starting in chapter 10, Isaiah talked about God's judgement on Assyria, then spoke a prophecy against Babylon in chapter 13, a prophecy against Moab in chapter 15, an oracle against Damascus in chapter 17, and a prophecy against Cush in chapter 18. In every case, the pattern is the same: condemnation and judgement. And so, as chapter 19 begins with an oracle concerning Egypt, Isaiah's listeners would be expecting the same thing. A chance to indulge in some, frankly, satisfying racist criticism of a nation that has historically been the enemy of Israel, and stands in the Bible as the nation representing oppression, slavery, and opposition to God. They probably know that the end goal is going to be condemnation of Judah, but at least they can enjoy what

Isaiah is going to say about Egypt and everybody shout a loud "Amen!" at the condemnation they know is coming.

And so, it starts as we would expect. God is coming to Egypt in a cloud of judgement: the idols trembling in his presence (vv 1-3). Already in Exodus, God had displayed his superiority over the gods of Egypt in the plagues (Exodus 7-10), and now, 700 years or so later, Isaiah's words are confirming the superiority of the true God to the idols that have been set up to represent these false gods. These things that humans have substituted as a source of their faith other than the true Creator. For Egypt, that especially included the Nile river, the source of their sustenance and their economy—food, transport, and agriculture—and which they worshipped as a god. The people who trust in these idols will finally realise the futility of trusting in them and though their hearts will melt with fear (v 1), it will be too late because the Lord has come in judgement.

The verses that follow describe how God will bring that judgement, how he will systematically dismantle a nation that was one of the greatest powers and civilisations on earth for over 2000 years, an incredible length of time! There will be internal conflict and civil war (v 2). They will lose confidence in their religion (v 3). They will become enslaved to the very nations they ruled over (v 4).¹ The Nile—the source of their economy and power—will be dried up, the crops it watered will wither and die (v 5). The



Isaiah by Michelangelo (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.

industries based around the Nile will collapse (vv 9-10). The fishing industry will end. Workers in the industries that relied on the Nile for both resources such as flax and as a transport hub for export of fine linen and grain to the world will lose hope, be sick at heart, and pine away.² The country, once proud and rich, will be a mess of stinking canals and parched, dusty fields. Can you imagine the same judgement today? What would it look like if the huge tower blocks at the heart of our cities—New York, London, Singapore—became abandoned piles of concrete and broken glass? Once gleaming BMW and Mercedes cars, abandoned and rusting by the roadside next to burnt out shopping malls empty of goods, fit only as shelters for the homeless poor and packs of wild dogs. Yet, none of our proud civilizations have been around for anywhere near as long as the Egyptians of Isaiah's day.

The leaders of Egyptian society will be shown to be useless (vv 12-15). Their divinations will prove hopeless and they will be like a drunkard staggering around in his vomit and suffer under cruel oppression. With their society in disarray, economy destroyed, and leadership ineffective, they will be able to do nothing to avert the judgement of God. In fact, they will not even see it coming, because their diviners and mediums will receive no answer from their idols. This is the fate of Egypt: a nation living in opposition to the Creator God in every aspect of their society. And even as we have read their judgement, we realise this is not just the story of Egypt; this is the story of humanity.³ This is the story of a people who trust in and value their idols above all else. Idols of religion, family, career, economics, and entertainment. Idols that will tremble at the coming of the Lord of hosts. In a sense, we are brought back to consider the unity of humanity, because for all our rich cultural and linguistic differences, Egypt here could be any of us or all of us. Fallen humanity is unified in our trusting in idols of our own making. Leaders who cannot see what is really happening in the world are ignoring the One who deserves our worship and obedience. So, if Egypt represents all of us who trust in economics, politics, humanism, and the man-made religions of the world, its end represents the end of all of us (v 15). There is nothing we can do.

Up to this point, Isaiah's listeners in Jerusalem are probably enjoying

this.⁴ But then Isaiah says something staggering in verses 16–24. He starts with the words “In that day,” words that are repeated six times in this passage. This is code for the final day of God’s judgement and reckoning when God will act in power to change everything. And as the story of Egypt’s fate unfolds, “In that day” we are seeing a revelation of a story of humanity that would have been shocking and incomprehensible to Isaiah’s audience as it was absolutely not what they were expecting.

In verse 16, those who opposed God are humbled. This is a judgement that brings terror and makes Egypt aware of the people of God as a sign of the judgement to come. According to verse 18, the language of Canaan will be spoken in five cities of Egypt. People in those Egyptian cities will swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. Though some have proposed that this refers to the existence of Jewish diasporic communities in Egypt, the conclusion to this passage suggests that more is intended here.⁵ Possibly, it hints that God’s people will be unified by language: a partial reversal of Babel’s division. But imagine how shocking and, frankly, how unlikely this idea of Egypt swearing allegiance to the God of Israel sounded to Isaiah’s audience. And, as verse 19 says, instead of the worship of fraudulent gods, there will be at the heart and at its borders of this pagan land altars to God and pillars to commemorate his works.⁶ This is the very thing that was found in Israel of Isaiah’s day.

The land of Egypt—representing slavery and bondage and the foolishness of human idolatry—will become like the promised land of God. By now Isaiah’s audience is no longer shouting “Amen!” or laughing at the absurdity of it all. Rather, they are quite possibly getting a bit angry. Not only is Isaiah cutting away the pleasure of indulging in racial hatred and superiority, but now he is threatening the very thing that they cling to for that feeling of superiority. The promised land, the temple of God, the symbols of who they are as a people with their unique covenant with Yahweh. And from their perspective, it only gets worse. How can Egypt become God’s people? “They will cry to the LORD and he will send them a saviour,” is the answer (v 20). This is the very picture of Israel in Egypt. The enemy, the

God is saying that “I will have my people, and they will not be ethnically defined.”

ones who were supposed to be judged, are offered the same opportunity for salvation as Israel. The oppressors are offered their own Moses—a saviour, a deliver.

And they will know God and will sacrifice to God. And then, if it is not clear enough that this is speaking of a covenant relationship, the prophet writes: “And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them” (v 22). This would really have gotten the attention of Isaiah’s listeners, because they would have known when this very thing happened to Israel. It happened in Numbers 21, when the people grumbled to Moses and God that they had been brought out of Egypt to suffer in the wilderness. And God responded by sending a whole load of snakes—a symbol of the land of Egypt, as it was one of their main gods that was worn on the head of Pharaoh. And when the people repented, God told Moses to set up a serpent of bronze on a pole.

We are familiar with the story and know that the symbolism is even more significant for us as Christians because Jesus Christ, the incarnate son of God, identified himself with the bronze serpent

in John 3. So, even though there is nothing that Egypt (or the world) can do about the judgement to come (v 15), the Lord takes the initiative to strike and to heal. And the pattern of striking and healing will also be seen in Isaiah 53, where God punishes his own servant, striking him with punishment, and by his wounds we are healed. This reminds us of how he has saved us and this is the language being used here in Isaiah 19.

When verse 23 speaks of a highway running from Egypt to Assyria, Isaiah introduces the other major superpower of his day and intimates that this is the nation most likely to end up going to war with Egypt. But in ancient times, road building required peace. We know, for example, of the Roman roads and the *Pax Romana*, a 200-year period of peace and prosperity in the Roman empire that made it possible for the gospel to spread so quickly in the 200 years following Jesus’ death. This road Isaiah mentions going from Egypt to Assyria represents a promise of peace over that whole area. But it’s not only a road for peace, but a road used for pilgrimage. This is a story, not of these two nations and their hatred for each other, but of all nations and all racial and

national hatred. Here, the prophet announces how the dream of peace in the Middle East will be achieved: through the desire of the people of the world to worship the true and living God. In that day, there will be true and lasting peace. But how will it happen? Through the worship of God. Isaiah likes to use the metaphor of a road to represent the end to alienation and separation (11:16, 33:8, 35:8, 40:3, 49:11, 62:10).⁷ And we see the metaphor develop through Isaiah from there being a road representing peace and unity of people in the worship of God, to the preparation of a road that will welcome the coming of God’s Messiah, to a highway over which the nations will flow into Zion as they come to worship God (62:10).⁸

So, as verse 24 states, “in that day Israel will be the third.” Remember who the people of Israel are. Remember why they hated Egypt and most of the other nations



The Bronze Serpent (Num. 21:4–9) by Gustave Doré (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.

around them. Remember too, why they felt superior to those nations. Israel had, at this point, a history of a thousand or more years (depending on when you date the Exodus) of oppression, attempts at cultural and physical genocide, but also the special relationship with God through the covenant, a relationship that gave Israel their total sense of superiority to the nations around them. They were the people of God, the covenant people, the redeemed people. And so, when Isaiah says: “Israel will be the third along with Egypt and Assyria a blessing on the earth,” this is the language of the Abrahamic covenant, not just applied to the Gentile nations, but being fulfilled through them. And God says, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.” These are words that sound like those the Mosaic covenant applied to Israel. Chris Wright describes this as “one of the most breathtaking pronouncements of any prophet, and certainly one of the missiologically most significant texts in

oppressed, enslavers or enslaved, rich or poor, colonialists or colonised. A world unified by idolatry and rejection of the true Creator God is offered a much more blessed, eternal, and meaningful unity together before the feet of the Redeemer. It truly is amazing to see this in Isaiah. The offer of a release from all bondage to sin is offered on equal terms to all humans regardless of any human-made distinction. The equality of all humans—confirmed in both the act of creation and the calamity of the fall—finds its final expression when God restores all the broken relationships caused by sin through the reconciliation achieved in Christ. This equality, though, does not minimise the rich diversity in which God has allowed us to express our humanity. When all power and authority is acknowledged to be in the hands of God, then differences between humans no longer become a foundation for creating hierarchies of importance that need to be defended, supported, and justified by grasping power and oppressing others.

ultimately, it is in the act of submission to and worship of the Creator God that a redeemed humanity will cast aside all racism, nationalism, and class prejudice and stand with unity before the throne. But we don’t have to wait until that day to worship. How can we allow our worship of our Saviour shape our attitudes to others, especially others who are not like us? How should we proclaim the gospel of salvation in a way that makes the world aware that they can do nothing, except humbly accept the love and grace that is offered to them? **MRT**

The equality of all humans—confirmed in both the act of creation and the calamity of the fall—finds its final expression when God restores all the broken relationships caused by sin through the reconciliation achieved in Christ.

the Old Testament.”⁹ Wherever Isaiah delivered this message—but especially if it was in the temple in Jerusalem—I can’t begin to imagine what the response was. They would have heard it as an insult to Israel. But God is saying that “I will have my people and they will not be ethnically defined.” God’s people will be from multiple ethnicities, and it is through this people that God will bless all nations. Because God took the initiative, changed the story in a startling way by striking his Son who represented all mankind, he made it possible that anyone who looks to him will be healed, by his wounds.

So just as there is unity in judgement—a world of people unified by condemnation of sin, irrespective of whether they are Buddhists, Muslims, secular atheists, or nominal Christians, irrespective of whether they are Asian, African, or European, irrespective of whether they or their ancestors were oppressors or

The phrase, “In that day,” takes us, as New Testament Christians, to Revelation 21:24–26 where the kings of the earth will bring into the new Jerusalem the glory and honour of the nations. All that is good about humanity will be celebrated and offered to God when people from every tongue, tribe, and nation will be gathered before the throne to worship God. Have you ever wondered how John knew they were from every nation, tribe, people, and language? I suppose it could be a knowledge imparted supernaturally, but perhaps even their resurrection bodies and those white robes still showed the different skin colours, facial features, and perhaps even cultural fashions. That is just speculation, but what we have seen from this passage in Isaiah is a bold proclamation of the universal Lordship of Yahweh in the face of superpower domination, impending war, and racial hatred. It has been a reminder to us that the clear, biblical message is that,

¹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 366–67.

² Oswalt, *Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, 369–70.

³ Bultema describes Egypt as “the symbol of world power in general and of the house of bondage from which God’s people must be delivered in particular”. Later in Scripture, Babylon will take on this significance. Harry Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Cornelius Lambregtse (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 194.

⁴ That is, all except for the political leaders in Jerusalem who were attempting to forge an alliance with Egypt in order to resist the yoke of Assyria. Motyer sees a key purpose of 19:1–15 to be to dissuade the leaders of Judah from relying on a nation doomed to God’s judgement. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 163.

⁵ See Oswalt, *Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, 376.

Commentators have interpreted this in very different ways. Calvin suggested the text meant five out of every six cities would turn to God, but others have looked for a later historical explanation based on references to Jewish colonies in Egypt after the exile (cf. Jer 44:1). I am not sure the precise number is as significant as the shocking idea to Isaiah’s listeners that this would happen at all.

⁶ A Jewish temple is known to have existed at Elephantine in 410 BC that was possibly built after the fall of Jerusalem. John Merlin Powis Smith, “The Jewish Temple at Elephantine,” *The Biblical World* 31, no. 6 (1908): 448–59, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3141839> (accessed 19 December 2023). Another Jewish temple was built in Leontopolis around 170 BC. Josephus claimed that though it was built to draw the loyalty of Jews away from Jerusalem, “There had been also a certain ancient prediction made by [a prophet] whose name was Isaiah, about six hundred years before, that this temple should be built by a man that was a Jew in Egypt.” Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, xii:10.3. This temple was destroyed by the Romans in 73 AD. Both of these temples were built by Jews, not Egyptians, and it is possible that the prophecy of Isaiah of the conversion of Egyptians to worship Yahweh was so distasteful to the Jews that they deliberately misinterpreted it to justify their disobedience of the Law of Moses that insisted that the temple altar should be in the promised land. See Powis Smith, “The Jewish Temple at Elephantine, 458. Cf. Deut 12:5–19).

⁷ Oswalt, *Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, 380.

⁸ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 588.

⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006), 236.

Toward a Tentative Biblical Theology of Race and Ethnicity

Walter McConnell



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In writing this paper, I feel a bit like the Apostle Peter who, while trying to row across the lake at night, faced both the impossible wind and the terrifying sight of what he and his fellow disciples took to be a phantom walking toward them across the surface of the water. And though Jesus was there and could enable him to walk on the stormy waves, Peter found it difficult to keep his eyes on the Lord as his context was frightfully distracting. This urges me to start with a prayer that Jesus would help me focus on him as I interact with two complex issues that don't integrate anywhere near as smoothly as we might like them to. You see, it's one thing to say that you want to produce a biblical theology of race and ethnicity and quite another thing to do it.

How do you protect yourself from being swallowed up by the waves tossed up by the fierce winds of scholarship that make it difficult to even define what you mean by the terms "biblical theology," "race," and "ethnicity"? And how can you do a biblical theology on a theme that had probably not entered the minds of the authors of Scripture and left, at best, a minor impression? And how does one who has not been professionally trained in anthropology and sociology adequately portray how terms like "race" and "ethnicity" are understood by scholars today? I would like to say one does this by keeping his eyes on Jesus, but as Peter has ably modeled, this too can be more easily said than done. This is particularly so as I need to explain my definitions of the terms I will deal with so that, even if others understand them differently, the path I intend to tread through the waves should be clear. My hope is that by turning to the wind and waves of definition I do not lose track of the One who gives faith to those who look to him, and unites them as his people, as that is our supreme need as we address this important and difficult subject.

The winds of biblical theology

I begin by turning my face towards the winds of biblical theology. Though we might like to say that biblical theology is simply the study and presentation of what is revealed in the Bible,¹ a definition this broad does not help distinguish how the discipline differs from textual studies, exegesis, literary and historical enquiry, or other forms of theology. Neither does it get us around the thorny reality that, as Phyllis Tribble perceptively noted: "Biblical theologians, though coming from a circumscribed community, have never agreed on the definition, method, organization, subject matter, point of view, or purpose of their enterprise."² As a result, Old Testament theologians describe and use a great number of approaches. In influential works on the subject, Walter Kaiser lists four main types of Old Testament theology, Brevard Childs lists seven models for biblical theology, and Gerhard Hasel summarizes ten different approaches used by modern Old Testament theologians (which he maintains are not mutually exclusive and overlap to some extent).³ Ralph Smith has synthesized Hasel's summary to delineate six different approaches he believes should be used in combination in order to deal with all of the theological data found in the Old Testament.⁴ More recently, Klink and Lockett have described five approaches to biblical theology while Kim and Trimm highlight seven.⁵ It should be appreciated that there is wide acknowledgement that no one approach is sufficient so that modern practitioners use multiple methodologies to develop their Old Testament theology. Even so, the fact that scholars who self-identify as biblical theologians describe their craft in disparate ways, may lead one to question whether biblical theology is even possible. Is the best one can hope for an assortment of "biblical theologies" that reflect the understandings of various groups and individuals throughout biblical history or ancient and modern interpreters?

We should perhaps begin by saying that biblical theology is best understood in contrast with other types of theology.⁶ It is, as Barr states: (1) “something that is done by biblical scholars,” (2) “something new, in the sense that it is searching for something that is not already known,” and (3) something “seen as possessing an *ecumenical* potential” in that all Christian traditions claim that the Bible is the prime source for their beliefs and practice.⁷ Ironically, the fact that Christians (not to mention Jews) do not all agree on what the Bible teaches on many issues shows us just how important biblical theology really is and the need for us all to search for “something new”, as Barr’s second point stresses, so that we can discover its real meaning.⁸ For, as Barr adds, “Perhaps the various traditional theologies fell into conflict because on the one hand they failed to absorb all the range of biblical material, or on the other hand allowed non-biblical sources, ideas and methods to influence their argumentation? If so, then might not a really biblical theology lead to results that would transcend these differences?”⁹ If Barr is correct, a *truly* biblical theology would draw those who proclaim allegiance to the Bible together as they recognize the true meaning and purpose of God’s holy word. If it were only so easy.

As I see it, the bottom line for doing biblical theology is related to our starting point in asking theological questions. Let me illustrate my point. In doing this, I am not saying that one kind of theology or one direction of questioning is better or worse than another. Each has its own place, and each can be effectively used for understanding the works of God and the needs of the world.¹⁰ A systematic theologian asks questions that are pertinent for his own age, in all of its cultural, historical, ecclesiastical, and philosophical particularity. Systematicians begin with current issues and use the Bible (and other resources) to devise answers that they find satisfactory (or, at least, plausible). Historical theologians pursue their craft in a slightly different direction, by asking questions about the development (or stagnation or disappearance) of particular doctrines through the course of history. The answers they find may explain why Christians (or sub-groups thereof) believe certain things today or they may focus on the understandings of certain groups at some point in history. Both pursuits have their place.

Biblical theologians begin with the biblical text itself, attempting to identify concepts—theological themes—that were of interest to the writers of the Bible and their first readers. Goldingay would thus limit his questioning to: “What understanding of God and the world and life emerges from these two Testaments?”¹¹ This means that biblical theologians must discern—mainly through inductive and descriptive means—what the Bible was written to say to people in the ancient world and construct a bridge that communicates and applies this message to our world today. As biblical writers could have different interests or perspectives on certain concepts or be writing to people who needed specific teaching, biblical theology notes the progress of redemptive history and how theological concepts developed over the time during which the Bible was produced.¹² Biblical theologians thus seek to discover what themes are important to a particular biblical writer and discern why this may be so. Biblical theology is thus fundamentally a diachronic investigation into the text of Scripture to see what themes it is interested in and to see how those themes develop. And biblical theologians, like all exegetes, need to remember that since the concerns of the biblical writers may have been completely different from ours, we must be careful not to read our ideas into the text or define the words they use any way we want to. The importance of this will be seen below.

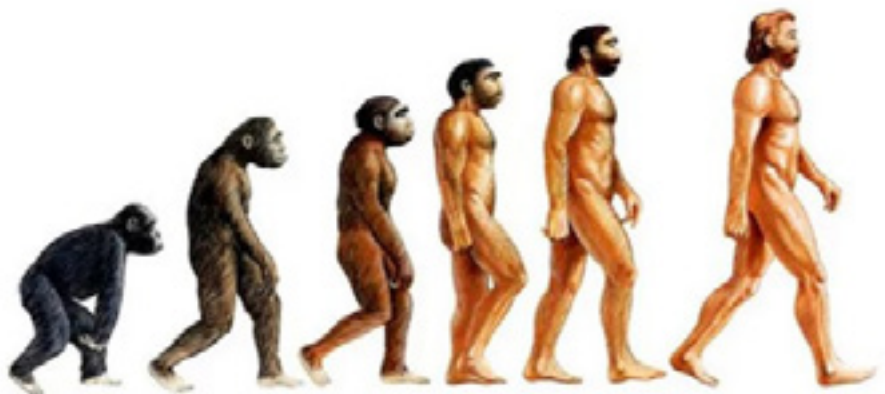
The waves of “race” and “ethnicity”

Having cut through the winds of biblical theology (well, at least making a little headway), we need to confront the definitional waves that make “race” and “ethnicity” so difficult to meet head-on. To do this, we need to turn to the discipline of anthropology.¹³ Though the

word “anthropology” comes from Greek roots—*anthrōpos* and *logia*—that mean “the study of humankind,” this discipline was unknown in the ancient world. And while some locate its foundations in the Italian Renaissance,¹⁴ most scholars see it developing during the age of discovery as Europeans came into contact with others who they perceived to be different from themselves. Simply put, “The field of anthropology emerged in Western society in an attempt to understand non-Western peoples.”¹⁵ At its roots, it is therefore inherently Eurocentric. The origins of the discipline greatly impacted its development and findings as nineteenth-century Darwinian concepts held sway. Looking for development in the species, anthropologists described peoples and their cultures in terms of *unilinear evolution* as being somewhere along the spectrum of primitive to modern. Europeans, who invented the method, unsurprisingly located themselves at the apex of human development—*civilized*—with other cultures ranging somewhere between *savage*, *barbarian*, and *civilized*.

This is clearly seen in the standard illustrations that accompany the social Darwinian concept of “the ascent of man.” In these pictures, the “modern man” is tall, white, fair-haired, and clearly advanced—out in front. The more primitive people are shorter, darker, and progressively ape-like. This structuring of people and cultures from a Eurocentric and Darwinistic perspective strongly influenced the development of what we would today call ethnocentric or racist attitudes and actions towards others. And since it was described as such in the books, white superiority was accepted as true (at least by some).

Thankfully, the “primitive” (and embarrassing) notions of early anthropology did not last—at least not in the books. As the twentieth century



Stages in human evolution, illustration by David Gifford / Science Photo Library



Die fünf Menschenrassen [The Five Races of Man], G. Ellka (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons

progressed, the discipline developed and many older ideas were replaced. Even so, many anthropologists—known as *primordialists* or *essentialists*—continue to ask questions about the biological characteristics of people, their essential qualities. They thus focused on things like skin color, hair color and texture, eye color, facial features, etc., to discern common features that transcended continents or can be minutely localized. Improving on their academic forebears, they added investigations into blood characteristics, genetics, and more. Even so, their fundamental approach identified some human characteristics as fixed from birth and independent from historical processes so that groups can be identified and categorized according to their inherent similarities.

One of the main models used by this method groups people geographically, thus producing the common idea that there are three races—“Europeans”, “Africans”, and “Asians” (otherwise designated “Caucasoids”, “Negroids”, and “Mongoloids”)—that developed in separate geographic regions.¹⁶ While this theory first developed around 200 years ago, subsequent scholars noted the existence of sub-categories across these “races” and the significant overlap that exists between these groups. By reevaluating the evidence, scholars expanded on these three groups, identifying up to around 200 different racial groups. Others, by examining genetic data, have concluded that “Although there are clear observable correlations between variation in the

human genome and how individuals identify by race, the study of human genetics challenges the traditional concept of different races of humans as biologically separate and distinct.”¹⁷ Is there, as is popularly stated, “only one race: the human race” or three, five, 200, or more? That professional scholars who are asking this question can come up with such different answers indicates a great divergence in either their philosophical or methodological approaches or both. Either way, it begs the question regarding just how useful this way of dividing up humanity really is. The dangers are heightened when it results in people being pigeonholed due to their race or physical appearance. In the end, the primordialist path is one that many modern anthropologists refuse to travel.

Leaving biological and physical questions behind, cultural anthropologists regularly focus on the social worlds in which people live. Due to the direction of their questioning, the groups they describe often bear little if any resemblance to the way biological anthropologists describe the same people. Rather than thinking of “race” as a biological or genetic distinction that unites or separates people, they understand it to be a cultural construct, an ideological way of categorizing people, and thus center their study on people in their cultural settings. The approach will be familiar to many missionaries who have learned and used “participant observation”. By embedding oneself within a target group, a researcher can “observe” their actions through “participating” in their lives and cultures. Observation leads to “ethnographies” that describe a group’s social settings, economic conditions, religious affiliation, political organization, etc.

As research moved from the study of “tribal” populations to more heterogeneous, urban cultures, a change from speaking of “race” to speaking of “ethnicity” became conspicuous in some of the literature. While the term “ethnicity” was rarely used before the 1960s,¹⁸ its popularity rose in the context of “collective identity”—the feeling of “we-ness” shared by a group that may engage in “collective agency” in order to gain group recognition or pursue a goal.¹⁹ Collective identity seeks to answer the question, “Who are we?” But this can only be answered in the light of the questions, “Who am I?” and “Who do I belong to? Who am I part of?”²⁰

Whereas biological distinctions were thought to be long-lasting if not unchangeable, collective identity is understood to be relatively short-lived and transient, undergoing continual metamorphoses. In part, this is because individuals may *identify* with multiple groups at one and the same time, but *emphasize* a particular group due to prevailing circumstances. Thus, someone could rightly say, “I am an American” or “I am a Chinese American” or “I am Chinese” and be speaking the truth. The differences in the responses may well be due to one’s setting and those with whom one identifies or not. Thus, “I’m *not* Chinese, I’m *Vietnamese*” corrects a wrong inference. Similarly, “I’m a *born-again* Christian” distinguishes the speaker from all non-Christians and those thought to be “liberal” or “folk” Christians or members of what the speaker understands to be a cult. Or two people can be friends at work but enemies once they leave the office because one is Catholic and the other is Protestant and they live in Northern Ireland. This *constructivist* approach to human groups stresses the “we-they” dualism that is used to describe “our group” as distinct from “their group”, relationships that continually change. From this perspective,

The core of ethnicity is the consciousness and feeling of individuals that they are members of a ‘We’-group, and their behavioral actions in light of this feeling. Ethnicity is a socially grown collective identity, which assumes a common history and origin as well as shared traditions, and claims to define a culture as different from (all) others.²¹

Even so, one can slip into and out of groups, almost at will.

Like different kinds of theologians, primordialist and constructivist anthropologists ask very different questions as they search for different kinds of answers. And while some may advise that we “consider these theories as not competing but, instead, as potentially complementary,”²² the kind of questions asked naturally produces different answers and results in diverse understandings of race and ethnicity. The ensuing difficulties lead to the claim that “the vast majority of anthropologists have rejected the concept of ‘race’ as a useful scientific concept.”²³ This doesn’t mean that they don’t use the words “race” or “ethnicity”; they do. And it’s not just that people define the terms differently. The bottom line is

that speaking about “race” is inadequate because “people use that word in very different ways but assume that they are talking about the same thing,”²⁴ when they are not. No wonder we are so often at loggerheads when it comes to discussing such potentially divisive ideas concerning race and ethnicity. It is almost like using the term “biblical theology.” Unless you define what you mean when you use the term and (humbly) request that others define what they mean, it is likely that misunderstandings will result.

A biblical vocabulary for humankind

Turning up one’s collar to the wild wind or trying to find refuge from the angry waves is difficult. But when it comes to attempting to do a biblical theology of race and ethnicity, one is battered by both at the same time. In addition to the basic problem of definition is the reality that, strictly speaking, “race” and “ethnicity” are not biblical terms.²⁵ How does one develop a biblical theology of concepts that are not explicitly present in the Bible as they hadn’t been conceived when it was written? This is another place where one needs to look intently to the Lord for help. And help is there, because even though the specific words “race” and “ethnicity” cannot be found in Scripture, a number of cognate ideas are. It is at this point that we need to consider a number of biblical words that relate to humankind, people, nations, tribes, clans, and language groups. Anyone who studies these in detail will discover that they are frequently used in parallel constructs or clustered together.

The basic biblical terms that can be related to race and ethnicity are as follows:

- humankind, mankind, man (אָדָם *ādām*; ἄνθρωπος *anthrōpos*)
- nation, people (עַם *am*; גּוֹי *gōy*; אֲמֵלֶת *l’ōm* [only in poetry]; אֲמָתָה *ummā*; γένος *genos*; ἔθνος *ethnos*)
- language, tongue (שָׂפָתַי *sāpāt*; לָשׁוֹן *lāšōn*; γλῶσσα *glōssa*; διάλεκτος *dialektos*)
- tribe (מַטֵּה *mateh*; φυλή *phulē*)
- family, clan, household, kindred (בַּיִת *bayit*; מִשְׁפָּחָה *mišpāhā*; מוֹלַדֵּת *mōledet*; οἶκος *oikos*; γένος *genos*; πατρία *patria*)

While each of Hebrew and Greek words has its own semantic range of meanings, there are significant areas of overlap between the meanings of many of these terms. The accompanying diagram shows that various Hebrew terms can be translated as “nation” or “people”.²⁶ Similarly, “language, tongue” and “tribe” can be used as synonyms for some of these terms.

The Semantic Relationships Among the OT Designations for “Nation”



Since these words can be used to refer to groups of people who share something in common with their own kind and distinguish them from others, they perform a similar function to the words “race” and “ethnicity” though the modern connotations of these words would have been unknown to the ancient users. They are, therefore, our entry point into discerning what the Bible teaches about relationships between peoples, and for this reason they will prove to be the best way to engage a biblical theology of the subject. So, since the Bible wasn’t written to speak directly into modern understandings of “race” and “ethnicity”, we will consider what it says about humankind as a whole and the relationship between groups of people in order to inform our understanding of how God would have us relate to others.

Though our study could address each of the terms listed above, we will limit ourselves to the study of “humankind”, “nation, people”, “sojourner”,

and “house”, as these provide the foundational biblical teaching on humanity and human relationships.

Humankind (אָדָם *ādām*; ἄνθρωπος *anthrōpos*)²⁷

The basic Hebrew word for humankind is *ādām*, which occurs more than 550 times in the Old Testament.²⁸ For the most part, *ādām* is a collective noun (and therefore never occurs in the plural)

that can be translated “man” (in the generic sense), “mankind,” “human,” and “humankind.” It also is used for the name of the man “Adam”. The Greek term *anthrōpos* distinguishes humans from animals, angels, and God but adds little to the concept as developed in the Old Testament.

In many ways, the first use of *ādām* in the Bible sets the stage for our theological understanding of what it means to be human. When God says, “Let us make *ādām* in our image, after our likeness” and then “God created *ādām* in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:26–27), it is clear that this initial creation of humans includes every human who would follow. From the beginning, there was no differentiation between races, nationalities, or any other human groupings. As Maass says, “The use of the word *ādām* in the OT presents one of the strongest evidences for ancient Israelite universalism. In most passages using *ādām*, including the earliest texts, it is clear that this word is not intended to refer particularly to Israelites, but to all men.”²⁹ The only point of differentiation was that *ādām* was created as male and female.³⁰ All humans—men and women, as *ādām*—are created as God’s-image-on-earth to relate to him and to the rest of creation. All humans possess equal rights and responsibilities to rule over creation as his representatives, his regents.³¹

But as the story continues, all people—both individually and corporately—are shown to fall into sin. The man,

Strictly speaking, “race” and “ethnicity” are not biblical terms. How does one develop a biblical theology of concepts that are not explicitly present in the Bible as they hadn’t been conceived when it was written?

Adam, and his wife, Eve, are the first to succumb, but not the last.³² Genesis 6:5 reports that sin was so pervasive just before the flood that “The LORD saw that the wickedness of *’ādām* was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” God was so grieved by this universal rebellion that he chose to cleanse the earth through the flood and reset creation so that it could begin again. But even though God set things right, the “children of man” (*’b’ne hā’ādām*, Gen 11:5)³³ continued to go their own way so that God had to intervene, dispersing them across the earth and confusing their languages (*šāpāt*, Gen 11:9).

The stories in the early chapters of Genesis describe a reoccurring pattern of sin, judgement, and signs of God’s grace. Though sometimes understood differently, the “Table of Nations” recorded in Genesis 10, which provides a genealogy of Noah’s three sons, should similarly be seen as a sign of grace. It is a promise that the people God has made will spread out into the world to receive his blessings. The problem is that the passage has often been used to identify black Africans as a cursed race for being descendants of Ham. There is, however, nothing in the text that would rightly lead to this conclusion.³⁴ And though some of the descendants of Ham were African—specifically Cush (Nubia and northern Sudan), Mizraim (Egypt), and Put (Libya)—the Canaanites, Babylonians, and Assyrians were also included among his descendants. It is therefore important to note that it was only Canaan (who was not an African), not all the sons of Ham, who received the curse (Gen 9:25–27).

The Table of Nations notably connects all the descendants of Noah as one people. Each section highlights the descendants of one of his sons, and ends with a refrain that mentions their lands (*’eres*), languages (*lāšôn*), clans (*mišp’hōt*), and nations (*gōyīm*) (Gen 10:2–5, 6–20, 21–31; cf. 32). These are terms that will be repeatedly used in the Bible to unite people as one.³⁵ Most of these terms are found in God’s promise to bless the nations through Abraham and his descendants.

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country (*’eres*) and your kindred (*mōledet*) and your father’s house (*bayit ’ēbikā*) to the land (*’eres*) that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation (*gōy*), and I will

bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth (*mišp’hōt hā’ādāmā*) shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:1–3)

Though the term *’ādām* never appears in the Abraham accounts, this key passage resounds with other words bearing significant theological weight on our subject—country/land (*’eres*), kindred (*mōledet*), house (*bayit*), nation (*gōy*), and family/clan (*mišp’hā*). But before looking at some of the other words, we should notice Yahweh’s promise to bless *all the nations* through Abraham.³⁶ God’s creational intention was to bless humankind (*’ādām*) so that they could “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). This original blessing was passed on to Noah and his descendants after the flood in almost identical terms.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.” (Gen 9:1–2)

These promises are subsequently given to Abraham (Gen 22:17–18), his wife

Sarah (Gen 17:16), his descendants (Ishmael—Gen 17:20; Isaac—Gen 25:11; 26:2–5, 12–13, 24; Jacob—Gen 27:27–29; 28:1–4, 13–15; 32:26–29; 35:9–12; Joseph—Gen 48:15–20; 49:22–26), and through them to the world (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; 30:27; 39:5; 47:7, 10).³⁷ God’s creational focus on the whole of humankind never ends, even when he is specifically identifying his “chosen people”.

Though God promises blessing to all people, Old Testament universalism should never be thought of in such terms that “everyone will be saved.” Neither Testament supports this idea. The New Testament does it in terms that explicitly use *anthrōpos*. Thus, Paul distinguishes between the “our outer man” (*exō hēmōn anthrōpos*)—our physical and moral selves (2 Cor 4:16)—and our “inner man” (*ton esō anthrōpon*)—our spiritual and immortal selves (Eph 3:16). He further differentiates between “the old man” (*ton palaion anthrōpon*)—our sinful, unconverted self (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9) and the new man (*ton kainon anthrōpon*)—our renewed self that has been regenerated by Jesus Christ (Eph 2:15; 4:24). And though all humans, from a creational perspective, are equal under God and consist of both the outer and inner man, only those who have been renewed through Jesus Christ become part of his family, the spiritual offspring of Abraham, the ones who receive and pass on the promise of God’s blessing.



Dopo il Diluvio: l'uscita degli Animali dall'Arca (After the Flood: the exit of Animals from the Ark) by Filippo Palizzi (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons. Oil on Canvas, 104.5 x 150.5 cm.

A final significance is that the one God, in Jesus Christ, became human (*anthrōpos*). In this way, Jesus identified with us, set us an example, and made it possible for us to be made right with God. His identity was so completely human that people who saw him recognized him as a man—the man born blind (John 9:11), the Jewish leaders who recognized that “No one ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46), the centurion who witnessed the crucifixion (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). That the Gospel writers used this term in a context where Jesus being a man is thought to be incompatible with his being God (John 5:18; 10:33) is all the more remarkable. Yet they never downplayed his humanity. Jesus included himself in Old Testament teaching regarding humankind—“The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27) and “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4). His standard way of referring to himself was “Son of Man” (*huios tou anthrōpou*), a phrase that closely identified him with humankind in general but also signified that he fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (cf. Dan 7:13).



The Lord of the Sabbath by Gustave Doré, engraved by Adolphe: François Pannemaker.

Nation/People (ἄμ; ἡλ *gōy*; γένος *genos*; ἔθνος *ethnos*; λαός *laos*)³⁸

A key part of God’s promise to Abraham was that he would become a great nation. The word *gōy*, and its more common plural form *gōyim*, generally refers to “people” in a group sense, and

God’s creational focus on the whole of humankind never ends, even when he is specifically identifying his “chosen people”.

Another aspect of Jesus’ identity as a human is purely theological and made through a contrast between “the first man Adam” (*ho prōtos anthrōpos Adam*—note the echo of the Hebrew for humankind in the name) who became a “living being,” as he was “from the earth, a man of dust,” and passed those traits on to us and “the last Adam” (*ho eschatos Adam*), “the second man” (*ho deuterios anthrōpos*) who “became a life-giving spirit,” is “from heaven,” and is the source of our heavenly existence (1 Cor 15:45–49). Similarly, the *kenosis* passage of Philippians 2:5–8 elevates Jesus to be our example by explaining how he gave up his position as God, made himself as nothing by being born as a man (*anthrōpōn*), and as a man (*anthrōpos*), humbled himself even further by dying on a cross. Paul made a further statement that “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men (*anthrōpōn*), the man (*anthrōpōs*) Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). It is only by believing on *this man* that any human out of all humankind can be saved.

(though biblical use is not consistent) it is often used for people who are related politically (perhaps, but not necessarily, under a king), come from the same geographical territory, and/or are related by blood. A *gōy* may also share a common language and worship the same deity. The word *am*, also means “people”, and probably connotes a closer, potentially blood relationship with others (though as we will see below, this is not always the case). As *am* sometimes denotes “relatives” (2 Kgs 4:13; Ezek 18:18), it can be used for a segment of a larger group. Both terms are broad in meaning and can be relatively ambiguous. Old Testament authors can thus use *gōy* and *am* as synonyms (cf. Exod 33:13; Deut 4:6; Ps 18:44; 105:13)³⁹ or to distinguish between Israel as God’s people (*am*) and the nations (*gōyim*) who are outside the covenant.

In accordance with God’s promise, Abraham’s descendants are identified as a *gōy* since they inhabit a land and exhibit

a political structure, be it patriarchal, under a judge/chieftain,⁴⁰ or monarch. But Israel was not to be a nation like the other nations. They were to be *God’s* nation. As Israel gathered at Mount Sinai, just before Yahweh gave them the Ten Commandments, he spoke to them through Moses and said: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (*wegōy qādōš*)” (Deut 19:5–6).⁴¹ By listening to Yahweh’s voice and obeying his covenant, Israel would be a holy, that is, a *set apart* nation, distinct from those around them. This would do two things for them. First, it would protect them from the surrounding nations that acted corruptly before Yahweh by worshiping other gods. Second, it would allow them to model what a *gōy* should really be like, and in this way act to bring blessing to the other nations in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.

As *gōy* and *am* signify limited-sized groups of people, they in some sense correspond to our reference to an ethnic group or nation of people. Their use in the Bible, however, helps us see that God treats the peoples or the nations as part of one humanity to whom he has promised his blessings at creation and through Abraham. This is nowhere better seen than in Isaiah 19:24–25 where the prophet proclaims:

²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”

Here, Israel and their almost perpetual enemies Egypt and Assyria are joined together by Yahweh as a blessed triarchy, within which Egypt is specifically referred to as “my people” (*ammī*). That the nations are counted as God’s people is frequently seen in the Psalms.

¹ Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy! ² For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth. ³ He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. ⁴ He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah ⁵ God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a

trumpet. ⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! ⁸ God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne. ⁹ The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted! (Psalm 47:1–9 ESV)

While one might initially think that the command in v 1 for “all peoples” (*cāl hā‘ammām*) to clap their hands and shout in praise concerns Israel alone, that interpretation should be quickly abandoned. Twice the psalm declares that Yahweh is the king over all the earth (*‘al cāl hā‘eres*, vv 2, 7) and it further announces that he “reigns over the nations” (*‘al gōyīm*, v 8). Since he is the ruler of all, all people bow before him. Indeed, when we read that “the princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham” (v 9), it is clear that the first group is distinct from the second. The “princes of the peoples” (*n’dībē ‘ammām*) must be from the Gentile nations that join righteous Israel in their worship of Abraham’s God. The blessing that God promised to come to the world through Abraham has come to them. And while we should rejoice that ethnicity is irrelevant when God the king rules over the peoples of all the earth, we should also note that the categories pertaining to the peoples are not reduced to one. The individual nations continue to be recognized in their particularities as people who praise Yahweh along with Israel.

In the New Testament, *laos*, *ethnos*, and *genos* are all used in reference to groups of people. As with *‘am* and *gōy*, *laos* and *ethnos* are sometimes used to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles. At other times, they are synonymous. Perhaps the most significant New Testament use of *genos*, from our perspective, is when Paul addresses the Areopagus and describes the Christian God as one who does not need be served with human hands and quotes Greek poets in order to emphasize that even they knew that “In him we live and move and have our being” because “we are indeed his offspring (*genos*)” (Acts 17:28). Paul the Jew recognized that he and the Athenians were one family under God, even if they didn’t recognize him as such. This fact, however, did not negate Paul’s identity as a Jew or theirs as Greeks. The identity humans share under God does not negate their



Der Auszug der Israeliten aus Ägypten (Departure of the Israelites) by David Roberts. Oil on canvas, 119 × 212 cm, image by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0.

national or ethnic identity any more than it does their being male or female, slave or free. Unity and diversity are held in common though not in tension.

Like *‘am*, the term *laos* can be used in the New Testament to refer to the Jews as distinct from the Gentiles, the *ethnē*. Even so, there are signs that *laos* can be used for all mankind. This comes to light in Luke’s birth narratives where the angel proclaims that “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people (*panti tō laō*)” (Luke 2:10). Reflecting on this passage, Marshall concludes that even though “The ‘people’ means Israel rather than the gentiles,” in the context of Luke-Acts, “it is just possible that a wider reference is beginning to creep in, since the message echoes Hellenistic announcements affecting the whole world.”⁴² And though Bock insists that *laos* in Luke 2:10 “is not a statement about both Jews and Gentiles,” but about Jews only, he acknowledges that in Simeon’s prophecy recorded in Luke 2:31–32 *laos* points to both Jews and Gentiles.⁴³ So, whether or not we should see a universal proclamation of the coming of the Messiah from the first announcement of his birth, it is clearly in view from the time he was presented at the temple. It is also present in Jesus’ final command to “make disciples of all nations” (*panta ta ethnē*) where both Jews and Gentiles are in view, so that his disciples would see both groups in their distinctiveness and oneness in needing to be discipled.⁴⁴ Rising from this, our acceptance of other people in the world and in Christ should emerge

from this biblical understanding of the *ethnē* as one people made up of many.

Sojourner (גֵר *gēr*)⁴⁵

That the “other” can be united with “us” can be further seen in biblical treatment of *gēr*, the Hebrew word derived from a verb for “to sojourn” that refers to a “sojourner”, “stranger”, or “foreigner”. But a *gēr* is not just any old foreigner. Usually, he is one who has settled down in the land and become part of it. Thus, after living in Canaan for many years, when Abraham was seeking a grave site for his wife Sarah, he said to the Hittites, “I am a sojourner (*gēr*) and foreigner among you” (Gen 23:4). Similarly, when Elimelech left Bethlehem during the famine, he “went to sojourn (*lāgūr*) in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons” (Ruth 1:1). In both cases, these families, after leaving their home countries, became what we might today call “permanent residents” in what had been a foreign land. Some, like Israel in Egypt, could build a diasporic community in their new home. In the case of Elimelech and Naomi, their sons were allowed to marry into the population of their new homeland.

Israel’s experience as sojourners in Egypt was to give them empathetic hearts towards sojourners who came to live in their land (Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19). Indeed, there is good reason to think that a *gēr* could become a recognized member of the people of God.⁴⁶ In Exodus

12, when Israel is given instructions for celebrating the Passover, they are told:

⁴³ And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but every slave (*‘ebed*) that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ No foreigner (*tōšāb*) or hired servant (*śākīr*) may eat of it. ⁴⁶ It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸ If a stranger (*gēr*) shall sojourn (*yāgūr*) with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land (*ke ‘ezrah hā ‘āres*). But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. ⁴⁹ There shall be one law for the native (*‘ezrah*) and for the stranger (*gēr*) who sojourns (*hagār*) among you.” (Exod 12:43–49)

In addition to the Israelites, this passage mentions four different categories of people who are said to have come out of Egypt: circumcised “servants” or “slaves” (*‘ebed*), “foreigners” (*tōšāb*), “hired servants” (*śākīr*), and “sojourners” or “strangers” (*gēr*). In all likelihood, these categories give us a breakdown of who was included in the “mixed multitude” (*‘ereb rab*) mentioned in Exodus 12:38. A crucial distinction is made between the *gēr* and *‘ebed* and the *tōšāb* and *śākīr*.⁴⁷ The *‘ebed* spoken of here is one who has been bought with money, and, in accordance with the covenant God established with Abraham, had been circumcised (Exod 12:44; cf. Gen 17:12–14). A *gēr* is an outsider who aligns himself with the community by living with them and worshipping Yahweh as demarcated by the sign of circumcision. These two groups of people can share in the Passover. The *tōšāb* and *śākīr* cannot. The first is someone who, though living with the community, has not integrated with it religiously through circumcision. A *śākīr* is simply a hired hand who apparently is more interested in his daily wage than in the Lord. This distinction opens up an important theological truth. By allowing the “sojourner” and circumcised “slave” to partake of the Passover, the nation of Israel recognizes them to be full members of God’s covenant community. As Hays says:

The presence of other ‘peoples’ or ‘nationalities’ at this juncture of the

story has strong implications as to the nature of ‘true Israel’. It also suggests a partial fulfilment of Yahweh’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: ‘and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed’ (NRSV). Finally, Exodus 12:43–49 indicates that participation in the celebration of Yahweh’s great redemptive act was not based on birth or ethnicity but rather on relationship to Yahweh and his covenant.⁴⁸

This integration of sojourners and circumcised slaves into national Israel is an indication that Abraham really is the “father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4–5) and opens the door for others who are not physical descendants of Abraham to be counted, along with Israel, as members of God’s family. Interestingly, the Bible occasionally spotlights individuals who are joined to the nation, some of whom proved somewhat controversial while others were accepted with open arms. It is worth considering several examples.

1. Though we often think that Israel unflinchingly refrained from marrying outside their own people, the Bible shows that this was not true. Though they did not mother any of the children of promise, Abraham’s wives Hagar and Keturah were not from his people. When Isaac sent Jacob away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from his mother’s brother Laban, he obediently left, and soon met and married both Rachel and Leah. The rivalry between the sisters over having children, resulted in Jacob taking two other wives—Bilhah and Zilpah. As they were servants of Rachel and Leah, it is likely that they were not related to Abraham’s kin, and thus, from the very beginning, “foreigners” were an indelible part of Israel. And though we don’t know the background of the wives of all of Jacob’s sons, Judah married a Canaanite woman named Shua who bore him three sons (Gen 38:2–4). Judah’s eldest son, Er, married Tamar (whose ancestry is uncertain but may well have been Canaanite)⁴⁹ but was “put to death” by the Lord due to his wickedness. After Judah’s second born died for refusing to raise up offspring for his brother, Tamar gave birth to twin sons—Perez and Zerah—through Judah. Jacob’s son Simeon is said to have had six sons, and at least the last of whom—Shaul—is said to be “the son of a Canaanite woman” (Gen 46:10).⁵⁰ Jacob’s second

to youngest son—Joseph—married an Egyptian woman who bore him two sons—Ephraim and Manasseh, who became tribes in their own right. From an early age, the descendants of Abraham included people with bloodlines that could be traced to nations such as Aram, Canaan, and Egypt. It should not be surprising to find others who married foreigners.

2. Though little detail is given, it seems clear that Moses had two wives. Exactly when he had them (i.e., which order they came in) or if he was married to them at the same time is unknown. His only wife to be named in the Bible is Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest (Exod 2:16, 21), who bore his son Gershom.⁵¹ In addition to Zipporah, Moses had a Cushite wife (Num 12:1). Her Cushite roots are emphasized by being repeated twice. Though some have tried to explain the text differently,⁵² the fact that Cush was the land to the south of Egypt and was inhabited by black Africans and the people of Egypt and Cush had a long history of interaction, it is likely that Moses was married to a black African woman.⁵³ Whether she produced any heirs is never stated.

3. When the Israelites were about to enter the land, they were commanded to destroy all Canaanites. During the first battle, the whole population of Jericho was destroyed except for Rahab and her family. The text records that she “has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho” (Josh 6:25). Rahab’s salvation clearly came as a result of her faith that Yahweh would give Jericho and the land into Israel’s hands (Josh 2:9–20). And though the book of Joshua says nothing about her marrying anyone from Israel, the genealogy of Jesus records that she and Salmon were the parents of Boaz (Matt 1:5).⁵⁴

4. We earlier mentioned that Elimelech and Naomi went to sojourn in Moab, where their sons took Moabite wives. After the death of her husband and sons, Naomi returned to Bethlehem because she heard that the LORD had visited his people by giving them bread. Though Ruth was encouraged to return to her people and gods, she protested, insisting that “where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my

people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). By joining her mother-in-law in Bethlehem, Ruth exchanged being in the position as a sojourner with her. However, after she married Boaz, the people of the town blessed Boaz by saying, “May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman” (Ruth 4:11–12).⁵⁵ Ruth, the *gēr*, became an integral member of the people of Israel, equal to the original matriarchs.

Household (תַּיִת *bayit*; οἶκος *oikos*)⁵⁶

As with many other words, the semantic range of *bayit* is quite broad, though the basic meaning is “house,” usually distinct from but can include a “tent” (*šhel*). By extension, *bayit* can be used for “temple,” “sanctuary,” “shrine” (i.e., “house of God”), one’s personal property (that is, the things kept in one’s house), one’s family (the people who dwell in one’s house), and a dynasty (the house and lineage of a king).

More important for our consideration is its use for the whole tribal or national order, such as the “house of Ephraim,” “house of Jacob,” and even “house of

Israel.” Viewed through New Testament eyes, the concept can apply to the whole community of God’s people. Thus, the author of Hebrews compares Moses, who “was faithful in all God’s house [i.e., the people of Israel] as a servant,” to Christ, who “is faithful over God’s house [i.e., all the people of faith] as a son” (Heb 3:5–6).⁵⁷ Significantly, in the same sense that the Old Testament viewed all of Israel as the people of God, the New Testament identifies all believers in Christ as the one people of God. Paul thus considers believing Gentiles to be “fellow citizens with the saints” and counted as members “of God’s household (*oikēioi*),” who are “built together into a dwelling (*katoikētērion*—notice the *oikos* root) of God in the

Biblically, it is more important that we unite ourselves with the whole people of God through faith than segregate ourselves according to “pure” bloodlines or political, geographical, linguistic, cultural, or other groupings. Over and over, the biblical message for Israel—as a people—is that those who fail to keep God’s laws will be “cut off”. In some cases, this meant that they would be executed for their sins. At the very least, it meant that they would no longer be considered part of the people of God. Membership in God’s family is based on faith, not blood. This requires that our views on race and ethnicity be radically relativized in the context of faith that fashions our identity as the one people of God.

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Spirit” (Eph 2:19–22 NASB). No room remains for treating any member of God’s household differently from another. Racial, social, and economic backgrounds are irrelevant since we are citizens of the same kingdom, members of the same household (i.e., family), and united as the dwelling place of God’s Spirit. And this is all described in plural, not singular, terms that even more clearly united us.

Conclusion

As I come to the end of this study, I need to ask whether I have made any progress through the billows and storm. I would hope to think so. And yet, as is intimated in the title of this essay, what I have produced is, at best, a *tentative* biblical theology of race and ethnicity. The major reason for this is, as we have seen, that the word of God is not as interested in addressing issues of race and ethnicity as we might like it to be. Though Scripture acknowledges that differences exist between tribe and tongue and people and nation, between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, it is more concerned that humanity—*ādām*, to use the term that has united us since creation—should experience God’s blessings that were built into the fabric of the universe. Its focus on blessing moves the narrative from the negative impact of sin that causes our relationship with God, one another, and the whole of creation to be turned upside down to showing how God has intervened so that those who come to him in faith can be truly blessed as spiritual descendants of Abraham and fellow-heirs of Jesus Christ. As we catch hold of what this means for us, the categories that can be used to divide us are set aside and we can only work “toward” a theology of race and ethnicity as we pursue the clearer



Ruth og Naomi (Ruth and Naomi) by Laurits Tuxen (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.

While there may be many pragmatic reasons to plant churches according to the “homogenous unit principle” or something similar, biblical theology demands that all marks of division be cast down so that those who are in Christ by faith are recognized to be, and recognize themselves to be, the one people of God. Not part of the people of God, but the people of God that includes many diverse groups.

and higher emphasizes the Bible places on blessing and reconciliation and unity.⁵⁸

According to Paul, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11). The emphasis on unity and reconciliation is further developed in Ephesians where Paul tells his Gentile friends that although they had been separated from the people of God, they had now been brought near “by the blood of Christ” who broke down the wall of division so that we could become one people who are fellow citizens with each other and all indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:11–22). If the Old Testament and New Testament people of God are united with others who share the same faith and the same Spirit, it is imperative that Christians today accept everyone who shares their faith as brothers and sisters—no matter their race, ethnicity, social standing, or gender. Hays rightly says:

The New Testament proclaims that in Christ believers form a new humanity. The old barrier of hostility and division between ethnic groups has been demolished by the Cross, and now all peoples of all groups are to be one in Christ. Our primary identity as humans is to be based on our union with Christ, and no longer based on traditional human sociological connections. Christians of other races are not just equal to us; they are joined to us. We are both part of the same body, united by the presence of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us both. We are also fellow heirs, brothers and sisters of the same family. While there may be practical and sociological reasons for creating and maintaining Churches that are ethnic specific (Black Churches, Hispanic Churches, White Churches, Korean Churches, etc.), this division into ethnically

based worshipping communities is contrary to the imperatives of Paul.⁵⁹

And what is true for the American context that Hays writes into, is equally true in the rest of the world. While there may be many pragmatic reasons to plant churches according to the “homogenous unit principle” or something similar, biblical theology demands that all marks of division be cast down so that those who are *in Christ by faith* are recognized to be, and recognize themselves to be, the one people of God. Not part of the people of God, but *the people of God* that includes many diverse groups.⁶⁰

The biblical message is that God created all people in his image and that, in Christ, whatever differences developed over time for whatever reasons are demolished. As much as anything else we have seen, the picture painted on the last pages of Scripture showing all the nations worshipping God should move us to receive them as they receive us and as God has received us all—in Christ. As I have written elsewhere:

The scenes described in Revelation 4, 5, and 7 reveal a riot of sights and sounds as God’s worshippers joyfully encircle the heavenly throne to proclaim his eternal praise. The angels, living creatures, twenty-four elders, and the redeemed who come from every tribe and nation and people and tongue worship the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb by their words and actions.... Each group worships God in unique ways that enhance everyone’s experience. And when one group exhausts itself with praise, another steps up to worship God in a totally different way. Significantly, ... cultural and linguistic distinctions can be readily discerned. If this is how worship is done in heaven, should we be overly concerned about variations in style or language

on earth? Could we not combine a few when we come to meet God? Should we not learn from the worship of others and join them so that we can multiply their praise and ours? When we pray that God’s “will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” should we not consider how our worship on earth can be done like it is in heaven?⁶¹

As we focus our attention on the biblical theological truths that humans are one in creation, one in Christ, and one throughout eternity, we should do all we can to put distinctions between race and ethnicity behind us and live in harmonious relationships with everyone who shares our common faith. But however good this may sound in theory, we face winds and waves thrown up by our cultures and personal circumstances that may cause us to fear that we might not make it through. Like Peter who caved in to the pressure brought on by the “circumcision party” and refused to eat with Gentile believers (Gal 2:11–14), we may lose our resolve to accept others in Christ and prove that we are nothing more than hypocrites who delude ourselves. In times like these, we especially need to look to Jesus because he is the only one who can help us keep our heads above the water. When we struggle to accept a coworker who looks different from us or speaks languages that we don’t know or who comes from a different social or educational background, we need to look to Jesus who makes us one. When we find ourselves bewildered that the people we have come to serve do not exhibit the kind of cultural attributes we expect or display the kind of Christian ethics we think they should, we need to seek Jesus who unites us through the same Spirit.

The differences we experience do not negate the fact that since these people are made in God’s image they are one with us. Nor does the unity we share negate the differences we experience. But since God has promised to bless the nations through Abraham and his descendants, we need to see that we are sent to be his means of blessing them and that they are his means of blessing us. Being “in Christ” means that we are bound together as brothers and sisters. And just as brothers and sisters can so easily misunderstand each other, become jealous of each other, or fall into petty fights, we need to look to Jesus because all the theories and postulates we might devise about race and ethnicity can be

easily ripped to shreds when we come into contact with real people who we feel are in some way different from us. At such a time, we need to look to Jesus and reach for his hand to help us and the others around us climb into the safety of the boat where we will join those who are our family members through faith and where race, ethnicity, and social backgrounds become irrelevant. **MRT**

Questions for reflection

1. How can a better grasp of biblical theology inform your understanding of God's view of race and ethnicity and help you to put it into practice? How would the kind of questions biblical theologians, systematic theologians, and historical theologians ask impact the way they describe racial and ethnic issues?
2. Was the approach to anthropology you learned more influenced by essentialist/primordialist or constructivist ideas? What difference would these make in the way you understand different ethnic groups? Do you feel you need to adjust your anthropological thinking about ethnicity? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
3. What have you learned from the terms the Bible uses for people and nations that will influence your thinking about those you would have considered "other"? How will this new understanding impact the way you treat others? What difference do you think this will make in your ministry?

S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 11–29; Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 28–114.

⁴ Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 87–91.

⁵ Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Brittany Kim and Charlie Trimm, *Understanding Old Testament Theology: Mapping the Terrain of Recent Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020).

⁶ James Barr gives "doctrinal theology and philosophical theology" as potential contrasts. He could, no doubt, add more. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 1.

⁷ Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 2–3.

⁸ We have no time to survey the associated issue of the extent of the canon and how that impacts biblical theology or the storms that topic can raise.

⁹ Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 3.

¹⁰ We need to keep in mind that it is not possible to make an absolute distinction between biblical, historical, and systematic theology, in part because they are all used by the same people. Carson's statement is worth repeating. "To relate the nature and functions of systematic theology and biblical theology respectively proves distractingly difficult because various scholarly camps operate with highly divergent definitions of both disciplines, and therefore also entertain assumptions and adopt methods that cannot be reconciled with those of other scholarly camps." D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester and Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 89.

¹¹ John Goldingay, *Biblical Theology: The God of the Christian Scriptures* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 13.

¹² Some biblical theologians are quick to point out that biblical authors could articulate different theologies. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

¹³ This was well noted by Hays. "Developing precise definitions and distinctions of ethnic groups in the Ancient Near East or even within the Hellenistic world can be an even more difficult task, one that falls more properly within the realm of cultural anthropology or sociology than that of biblical theology." J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race, New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Leicester: Apollos and Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 28.

¹⁴ John Howland Rowe, "The Renaissance Foundations of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 1 (1965): 1–20.

¹⁵ Raymond Scupin, "Race and Ethnicity: Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives," in *Race and Ethnicity: The United States and the World*, 2nd ed., ed. Raymond Scupin (Boston: Pearson, 2011), 4.

¹⁶ Scott MacEachern, "The Concept of Race in Contemporary Anthropology," in *Race and Ethnicity: The United States and the World*, 2nd ed., ed. Raymond Scupin (Boston: Pearson, 2011), 37.

¹⁷ The American Society of Human Genetics, "ASHG Denounces Attempts to Link Genetics and Racial Supremacy," *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 103, no. 5 (1 November 2018): 636, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6218810/pdf/main.pdf> (accessed 20 December 2023).

¹⁸ Christoph Antweiler, "Ethnicity from an Anthropological Perspective," in *Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualizations across Disciplines*,

Regions, and Periods (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015), 25.

¹⁹ For an introduction to the subject, see David A. Snow and Catherine Corrigan-Brown, "Collective Identity," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., ed. James D. Wright. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 174–80.

²⁰ Though developed along other lines and for different reasons, this identification of one's self in community with others is reflected by Charles Taylor when he says, "One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it." Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35. Building upon this idea as it impacted her self-identity as a Korean-American growing up in northern Minnesota, Michelle Lee-Barnewall says that "A critical aspect of our identity is formed in community, in relationship with others." And as she strikingly demonstrates, our relationships within community do not always result in a positive self-image. Michelle Lee-Barnewall, *A Longing to Belong: Reflections on Faith, Identity, and Race* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2023), 18.

²¹ Antweiler, "Ethnicity from an Anthropological Perspective," 27.

²² Snow and Corrigan-Brown, "Collective Identity," 177.

²³ Scupin, "Race and Ethnicity," 6.

²⁴ MacEachern, "The Concept of Race in Contemporary Anthropology," 34. MacEachern later gives clear reasons why "race" is such a difficult topic to discuss. "Anthropologists working within the different subfields of our discipline have different conceptions of race and the meaning of racial identifications, and like nonanthropologists they sometimes use the term without specifying exactly what they mean." MacEachern, "The Concept of Race in Contemporary Anthropology," 35. If anthropologists can't understand what someone means by "race", what chance do the rest of us have?

²⁵ George Yancey notes that "the concept of race did not exist at the time when the Bible was written." He adds that "If you went back into biblical times and talked about individuals as whites, blacks, or Hispanics, you would likely receive a confused look. God knew the concept of race would eventually develop, but it made no sense to discuss it in the Bible since it was an unknown concept at that time." George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2022), 130.

²⁶ Graphic from D. I. Block, "Nations," ISBE 3:493.

²⁷ See Claus Westermann, "אָדָם *ādām* person," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT)*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:31–42; Fritz Maass, "אָדָם *ādām*," *TDOT* 1:75–87. Joachim Jeremias, "ἀνθρώπος, ἄνθρωπος," *TDNT* 1:364–67. Though it is not a common use of the word, אָדָם *bāsār* can be used as a synonym of *ādām* and thus unite all humanity, particularly in a negative way. See N. P. Bratsiotis, "אָדָם *bāsār*," *TDOT* 2:326–28.

²⁸ *TLOT* says 554x, *TDOT* says 562x.

²⁹ Maass, "אָדָם *ādām*," 83–84.

³⁰ Contra Phyllis Trible's claim that God first created a sexually undifferentiated "earth creature," upon whom he later performed a surgical operation in order to make two. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress and London: SCM, 1978), 72–73. It is better to say that God's initial design was to create one *ādām* to be "male and female."

³¹ The interpretive, theological, and practical issues surrounding the concept of "the image of God" are legion. For an introduction to the concept, see Walter McConnell, "In His Image - A Christian's

¹ Thus, broadening Sailhamer's statement that "Old Testament theology is the study and presentation of what is revealed in the Old Testament." John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 17.

² Phyllis Trible, "Five Loaves and Two Fishes: Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 451. See the similar statement made about Old Testament theology by Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 72.

³ Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 9–10; Brevard

Place in Creation,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 20 (April 2006): 114–27. For more information, see James Barr, “The Image of God in the Book of Genesis—A Study of Terminology,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51, no. 1 (Autumn 1968): 11–26; David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (1968): 53–103; Edward M. Curtis, “Image of God (OT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:389–91; Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series 26 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988); J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

³² In addition to recognizing them as a historical couple, the New Testament typologically views Adam and Eve as “everyman” and “everywoman” whose sin impacted all who followed them, so that everyone who was marred by their sin that leads to death have need of the “second Adam” who could bring them life (Rom 5:14–15; 1 Cor 15:22).

³³ Hamilton says that the use of *benê hā’ādām* “reduces these pretentious human beings to their real size. They are but mere earthlings.” Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 354.

³⁴ See Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 51–56.

³⁵ See, for instance, Zechariah 8:20–23 that prophecies of peoples (*‘amîm*) from many cities (*‘ārîm*) and nations (*gōyîm*) coming to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. Revelation similarly speaks of people coming from every tribe (*phulê*) and tongue (*glōssa*) and people (*laos*) and nation (*ethnos*) to worship the Lord (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 14:6).

³⁶ Bauckham states the important truth that “Blessing is a rich biblical notion that has been rather neglected in Christian theology. Blessing in the Bible refers to God’s characteristically generous and abundant giving of all good to his creatures and his continual renewal of the abundance of created life. Blessing is God’s provision for human flourishing. But it is also relational: to be blessed by God is not only to know God’s good gifts but to know God himself in his generous giving. Because it is relational the movement of blessing is a movement that goes out from God and returns to him. God’s blessing of people overflows in their blessing of others and those who experience blessing from God in turn bless God, which means that they give all that creatures really can give to God: thanksgiving and praise.” Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 34.

The theme of promise or blessing is so important in the Pentateuch that David Clines identifies it as the main theme of the corpus, adding that it includes the three elements of posterity, divine-human relationship, and land. David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, JSOT Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 29–43. Note that these promises or blessings are not intended for Abraham’s descendants only, but for all people.

³⁸ A. R. Hulst, “עַם / ‘am / gōy people,” *TLOT* 2:896–919; Ronald E. Clements and G. Johannes Botterweck, “גוֹי / gōy,” *TDOT* 2:426–33.

³⁹ *Gōy* is also found in parallel with *mamlahā* (kingdom), *mišpehā* (family), and *l’ōm* (people).

⁴⁰ Note that the New Jewish Publication Society version of the Hebrew Bible regularly refers to the “judges” as “chieftains.” This is more in character with their role in society than what we usually think of as judges. In the book, only Deborah is said to make judgements for the people in a way that might resemble a modern judge (Jud 4:4–5).

⁴¹ Israel can also be referred to as an *‘am qādōš* (Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21, etc.). The distinction between *‘am qādōš* and *gōy qādōš* is not clear and any attempt to differentiate between them would likely be

fruitless.

⁴² I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 109.

⁴³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 215–16.

⁴⁴ R. T. France notes that while *ethnē* is regularly used in Matthew for Gentiles, in several passages it clearly includes the Jews among the nations (Matt 24:9, 14; 25:32) as it does here. Though “all the nations” is popularly said to support mission to individual “people groups”, Jesus’ command, in context, unites all groups into the one without dissolving their distinctions. It thus parallels the way Galatians 3:28–29 and Ephesians 2:11–22 treat groups that were historically considered dissimilar to be united in Christ and thus one people.

⁴⁵ R. Martin-Achard, “גוֹר / gūr to sojourn,” *TLOT* 1:307–10; D. Kellermann, “גוֹר / gūr,” *TDOT* 2:439–49.

⁴⁶ Thus, Kellermann says that “under the sign of religious integration the concept develops more and more toward the proselyte, the non-Israelite who becomes an adherent of the Yahweh faith.” Kellerman, “גוֹר / gūr,” 443.

⁴⁷ The word *tōsāb* is rarely found in the Hebrew Bible. In some settings, it is fairly equivalent to *gēr*, though the current setting distinguishes between them in that one is recognized as being part of the community by undergoing circumcision and the other is not because he remains uncircumcised.

⁴⁸ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 69–70.

⁴⁹ Wenham and Waltke surmise that she may have been a Canaanite, possibly due to her name which means “palm tree”. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1994), 366. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 510.

⁵⁰ The word “son of” is singular in Hebrew, so grammatically it should refer to the last son only, though it may refer to all of them. As the text never explicitly says so, we would expect that this Canaanite woman was his wife or concubine. If not, he had an illicit relationship with her.

⁵¹ It may be significant that Gershom means “sojourner there”, as Moses was sojourning in Midian at the time (Exod 2:22). As we have seen, sojourners attach themselves to the locals economically and matrimonially.

⁵² For different interpretations of the passage, see Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 136. Budd personally accepts that Moses married a woman from Cush.

⁵³ For a deeper investigation into this relationship, see Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 70–81. See also his arguments that Phinehas the priest may have had a Cushite mother as his name means “the Cushite” or “the Negro”. Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 81–85.

⁵⁴ This does, of course, presume that the Rahab mentioned in Matthew 1:5 is the same as the prostitute spoken of in Joshua. See R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 74. Note that, at Jericho, Rahab and her family are incorporated into Israel due to her faith while Achan and his family become *herem*—devoted to destruction—because he disobeyed God’s clear instruction by taking the things that had been proclaimed *herem*. Those with no blood tie are counted with Israel due to faith and those with blood ties are cut off for their lack of faith.

⁵⁵ Note that Tamar, who bore two sons to Judah, is included in this blessing that includes Rachel and Leah, the original wives of Jacob, which shows that she was also a fully accepted member of Israel. Note also that Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba—“the wife of Uriah”—were included in Jesus’ genealogy (Matt 1:3–7). Though it is not known whether Bathsheba was originally from Israel or not, her first husband, Uriah, was a Hittite

who was an honored member of David’s army. It may be significant that these four women in Jesus’ genealogy, along with his mother Mary, had what can be called unusual relationships with the fathers of their first sons. As the first four were indisputably in the line of the Messiah, Matthew may have intended that anyone who had qualms about the possibility that Mary could bear the Messiah would see the connection. Though not mentioned in Matthew 1:7, the fact that the wife of Solomon’s son Rehoboam was an Ammonite further waters down the blood of the Messiah (1 Kings 14:21, 31).

⁵⁶ Harry A. Hoffner, “בַּיִת / bayit house,” *TLOT*, 1:232–36; O. Michel, “οἶκος,” *TDNT* 5:119–59.

⁵⁷ For an extended argument, see Michel, “οἶκος,” 125–28.

⁵⁸ The use of “toward” in the title is a nod toward the series of books written by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. who used the term to acknowledge that his was not the final word on the subject being addressed.

⁵⁹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 204–205. Millard Erickson rightly discerns that the biblical teaching that removes racial distinction between people should be extended to many other groups. “After examining the origin, purpose, and destiny of all humanity, the characteristics of race, gender, economic status, age, the unborn fetal state, and marital status become incidental to one’s basic humanity. God has regard for all persons. Since God takes that view, it is incumbent upon the believer to adopt a similar view and to practice a godly reverence for all humanity. This is especially true for those who may be subject to discrimination.” Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 494.

⁶⁰ This theological truth does not require every congregation to be multicultural. As Jarvis Williams wisely says: “The people of God consist of members from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. But this does not mean that every church will be multiethnic.” He then adds that “A church should strive to reflect the ethnic makeup of its majority culture and of the demographic in the community in which the church exists. The diversity of a church depends in part on the success of that church’s engagement with its community and its members’ engagement with their neighbors where they live. Christians of color should not go into White churches or White communities that have an all-White leadership and membership and try to compel them to be what they can never be: non-White and multiethnic with diverse people of color. In fact, if Christians of color ignore this advice and proceed in this impossible and fruitless task, they will waste time and energy and will become frustrated and maybe even burned out and bitter. Similarly, Christians in monoethnic communities of color should not try to make multiethnic churches out of monoethnic churches of color if the leadership and ethnic demographic are not conducive to this desire. This too will lead White Christians and Christians of color to frustration, burnout, and bitterness. White churches in monoethnic White communities will always be White churches if those communities are predominantly White. Monoethnic churches of color in monoethnic communities of color will always be monoethnic churches of color if those communities are filled with people of color. And that’s okay! Gospel faithfulness is the goal, not multiethnicity or diversity.” Jarvis J. Williams, *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical theology of the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 180–81. What is true in the American context is equally true in other contexts.

⁶¹ Walter McConnell, *How Majestic is Your Name: An Introduction to Biblical Worship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 259.

Reflections on Genesis 2 as a Theology of Missions

JA

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Introduction

Before I begin, a confession needs to be made. I am not a missiologist, much less a trained theologian. I am a biblical scholar, primarily of the Old Testament. For this reason, let me apologise—from the outset—if my exegesis of the Bible and the implications I attempt to draw appear somewhat simplistic or fail to sufficiently interact with mission theology. Admittedly, I hope that readers—who may be more familiar with these fields—might provide me with helpful suggestions to follow up. Similarly, if there are any criticisms or doubts, I welcome those as well.

Despite my limitations, I am not completely new to missions. My wife and I are field practitioners in East Asia, where we live and serve cross-culturally, assisting others to establish theological education in their context. In fact, this paper was originally prompted by indigenous mission agency leaders who asked me to formulate a simple “theology of missions” that they, in turn, could present to local churches.

After reviewing several seminal works on the topic, it seemed to me that two texts are often provided as the basis for mission in the Old Testament. First, there is the Covenant in Genesis 12 where the Lord promises that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” through Abraham and his descendants.¹ Inevitably, this sets up an expectation that mission—at least in the Old Testament—was the privileged responsibility of Israel, a single ethnic group, in contrast to “the nations”, who are everyone else. Even in the New Testament, in Acts and many of the Epistles, we can see how this distinction—along racial and ethnic lines—continued to be a source

of tension in the racially and ethnically mixed churches of early Christianity.

A second text that also features prominently is Genesis 3:15, where God announces that the “seed of the woman” will eventually crush the evil one. Usually this is understood Christologically, so that—following the righteous lineage in Genesis—the term “seed” eventually points to Jesus in the New Testament. Moreover, because it occurs in the context of the Fall in Chapter 3—which takes place much earlier than humanity is divided by language and ethnic differences in Chapter 10—it is taken to reflect the universal mission of God (*missio Dei*) in salvific terms. That is, the mission of God is understood to be a rescue operation, with the goal being human redemption because all of humanity is fallen.

Taken together, “mission” is understood as a post-Fall activity, one in which God intends to work through his chosen and faithful human agents to bring salvation blessing to an unredeemed humanity. I don’t think many of us would disagree with this statement, at least in principle. However, in preparing a theology of missions for my local colleagues, I found myself wondering if God’s mission—and humanity’s role in God’s mission—is limited to redemption. Or, better yet, is mission only a post-Fall activity? To answer this, I turned to Genesis 2. What I found there, I will present under three headings: Where is the mission? What is the mission? Who does the mission?

Where is the mission?

Genesis 2:15 provides an interesting detail that is not often explained. The verse is translated similarly



The Garden of Eden by Thomas Cole (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons. Oil on canvas, 97.8 x 134 cm.

in most versions. Here, I will provide the popular ESV.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work *it* and keep *it*.”

Key to understanding the location of human activity is in identifying the “*it*” that humanity is supposed to “work and keep.”

Unlike English, the Hebrew language distinguishes between nouns as having either masculine or feminine gender. In the present case, the object of human activity is indicated by feminine pronominal suffixes on each of the verbs,² which normally refer to a preceding noun that is also feminine. To this extent, there is no support for suggesting that humanity is to be active with the masculine nouns—the garden or its vegetation—despite their widespread acceptance.³

So *what* are humans supposed to “work and keep”? A solution is provided earlier in the chapter with the feminine nouns “land” (אֶרֶץ *eres*) and “ground” (אֲדָמָה *adama*).⁴ In the context of this pericope,⁵ the word “land” occurs six times and refers to various topographical regions.⁶ Alternatively, the word “ground” occurs four times where in verse 5, importantly, it is also associated with human “work” (עָבַד *bd*)—the same human activity referred to in verse 15.⁷ In any case, regardless to which of these terms the later “*it*” may refer, both land and ground identify locations *other than* the garden of Eden.

From the descriptions given in 2:5–6, the land and ground are barren and desolate. Of course, this does not mean that they were not “good” in the sense that chapter 1 designates them, only that they were *unproductive*. That is, they were not producing any vegetation. Two explanations are given for their unfruitfulness: The first is that, due to a lack of rain, the land was an arid desert; and second, due to the ebb and flow of an uncontrollable water table the ground was a boggy marshland.⁸ In either circumstance—dry or wet—the region outside the garden was completely unproductive.⁹

However, it would be wrong to conclude that the land and ground were—in *themselves*—incapable of becoming productive. As Genesis 2:5–6 make



On the banks of the Euphrates, G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIGmatpc-16145].

clear, the problem of their infertility lies not with the soil, but with the absence of activity by God and humans.¹⁰

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground.

By implication then, the land and ground were potentially *very* fertile and capable of producing abundant vegetation, if only God would “cause it to rain” and humanity were present to “work the ground.”

In view of this situation, it is significant that the first activity of God in the following verses is to create humanity and a garden. On the one hand, the abundance of the garden in 2:9 demonstrates the ground’s latent potential once God acts upon it. Nevertheless, the continued absence of rain and the removal of humanity from the barren ground seem only to further thwart its potential productivity. That is, until it becomes clear that the purpose of humanity’s presence in the garden is actually to facilitate their activity outside of it.¹¹

In stark contrast to the wasteland outside, inside the garden of Eden was a place of luscious abundance. The description places special emphasis upon the fruit of the trees, apparently interested only in their comestible qualities.¹² To this extent, it is reasonable to imagine that, from the

point of view of the narrative thus far, the garden was a divine blessing to humanity, providing for their sustenance. Such a place of nourishment would certainly be needed if they were to be active in the wasteland, outside the garden.

In addition to the blessing of its abundance, the garden’s location could also be taken as of significant benefit to humanity’s work. According to verses 10–14, the garden of Eden is identified with being positioned at the headwaters of four rivers. Taken together, the rivers and the lands with which they are associated, can be roughly understood to represent the “four corners” of the world in the ancient mind.¹³ To this extent, the location of the garden of Eden was in a central position and its human occupants would enjoy convenient and unobstructed access to all the major regions of the world outside.

In conclusion then, the location where human activity is to take place is *outside the garden*—in the “earth” and “land”—which is currently an unproductive wasteland awaiting the activity of God and humanity to make it fulfil its latent potential. The garden is not the locus of human activity. Rather, its nourishing abundance and its central location are to facilitate human activity even as its identity, being sacred space, is to provide a model for their task in the world outside.

What is the mission?

If the unproductive world outside the garden of Eden is to be the locus of activity, what is humanity supposed

to do there? Helpfully, Genesis 2:15 also provides a brief summary. Humanity is expected to “work” (עבד *ʿbd*) and to “keep” (שמר *šmr*) it.

The first of these verbs, “work” is frequently attested throughout the Old Testament and its meaning is very context dependent.¹⁴ It is commonly used to refer to agricultural as well as religious activity. When the former is intended, “ground”, “earth”, or “soil” will usually appear as the direct object. An example of this occurs in Genesis 2:5 where human “work” almost certainly refers to rural labour, presumably the intensive work of building and maintaining artificial irrigation works common in the Near East.¹⁵ Agrarian activity could also be inferred in Genesis 2:15, in light of our discussion already.

So, does this indicate that all humanity are to be farmers? I think not, at least not entirely. Its coordinated appearance with the second verb “to keep” (שמר *šmr*) suggests that “work” in this instance was to be understood also in relation to *sacred service* and not merely agricultural labour. Evidence for this can be found in the book of Numbers (3:7; 8:26; 18:5–16), where these two terms also appear juxtaposed. In these occurrences, the *hendiadys* created by this construction is used to describe the duties unique to Levitical priests. For Genesis 2:15 to describe human activity with the terms “work and keep”, was akin to portraying humanity as priests and their task in the world outside of the garden as sacred service. Thus, even if agricultural activity may be implied by the use of these verbs in 2:15, it is not to be understood only as “production” but of priestly duty.

Within the context of the ancient Near East, the primary duty of priests was not to serve as religious experts or perform sacrificial rituals. These were only a means to an end. As John Walton helpfully outlines, the purpose of ancient priests was to uphold creation and preserve divine order.¹⁶ Many different kinds of service could be associated with this role, not least through all manner of agricultural activities related to building, maintaining, and expanding the sacred gardens commissioned by ancient kings.¹⁷ Along these lines, if the supreme rulership (“rest” שבת *šbt*)¹⁸ of God over all creation in Genesis 2:1–3 can be taken to serve as the immediate context of this passage, then 2:15 suggests that the LORD God has tasked humanity—

as his priests—to undertake the duty of extending his garden—this sacred space of divine order—expanding it into the world and making it productive under his rule and dominion.

Who does the mission?

The sacred duty facing humanity was huge. Humanity—specifically the man (2:7–15)—could not fulfil this task alone. To this end, the LORD God proceeds to create woman for the man. The Hebrew phrase עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*ʿezer kənegdô*) is used to describe her in 2:18 and 20 and is translated fairly consistently between the English versions:

NIV: “a helper suitable for him”
ESV: “a helper fit for him”
NRSV: “a helper as his partner”
NASB: “a helper corresponding to him.”

However, recent scholarship has demonstrated this translation to be wholly inadequate and potentially misleading, especially as we attempt to understand the role dynamics of the woman to the man.

It is generally agreed that the term “helper” (עֵזֶר *ʿezer*) does not confer upon the woman an inferior status in relation to the man. In fact, quite the opposite could be argued. Many occurrences of this verb refer to God as “rescuer” and humanity in the weaker position of needing rescue. To this extent, proponents of women as man’s “helper” have unwittingly tipped the balance of power *toward* women who should otherwise be understood as having a superior position *over* man.

Recognising this problem, R. David Freedman—and more recently Walter Kaiser—have demonstrated on historical-linguistic grounds that the Hebrew term עֵזֶר (*ʿezer*) actually represents the mergence of two older Hebrew/Canaanite roots with similar pronunciation into a single written form.¹⁹ This combination of terms gives rise to a conflation of meanings wherein one root, עָזַר (*ʿzr*) means “to help”, “to rescue”, and “to save” and is easy to identify because it is paralleled with other expressions of saving and deliverance,²⁰ while another root גָּ-ז-ר, with an almost identical initial guttural sound, means “strength” and “power”. Importantly, the latter option occurs in contexts that do not connote status difference; it describes an attribute.²¹ To this extent, Freedman

and Kaiser each conclude that in 2:18 and 20 the term cannot be understood as “helper” without inferring that the woman is *over* man. Rather, the term should be understood to describe the woman as a “power” or “strength” of equal status, not least because it accords with the account in Genesis 1, where man and woman are equally created in “the image of God,” but also it is juxtaposed with a second word כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*kənegdô*), to which we now turn.

Hebrew scholars label the term כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*kənegdô*) a *hapax legomenon* (or just *hapax*) as it appears only once in Scripture. Etymology can provide some help, so that the meanings “that which is opposite” or “that which corresponds to” can be inferred from the related root נָגַד (*neged*). For some, this etymology appears to lend support to the idea of “complementarity”—wherein the woman differs from man in terms of her role—“complements” his function and activity in creation. However, the appearance of כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*kənegdô*) in later Mishnaic Hebrew provides an important clarification to the idea of “complementarity”. Rather than imply role differences, the term כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*kəneged*) in Mishnaic Hebrew refers to “equality” in status and authority, as evident in the famous phrase “The study of the Torah is *equal* (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ) to all the other commandments.”²²

Along these lines, כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*kənegdô*) in 2:18 and 20 would be better understood as emphasising the woman’s equality in relation to man, especially as it relates to power, strength, and authority. Moreover, it provides a clearer understanding of why the creation of animals was not sufficient. Only the woman—another human being—could be considered a power equal to man. The task of priestly humanity—to extend the garden and transform the outside world—would need a co-equal team to undertake it.

Summary and Conclusions

In summary then, I have outlined a way in which we may understand mission as a pre-Fall directive that can include later themes of human redemption and blessing, but is not limited to them. “Mission” in this sense is to be understood more broadly, not so much as a “de-sacralisation” but the opposite—to see human activity that fulfils its priestly function

Regardless of race—or perhaps through it, as Genesis 10 suggests—all believers are active in an unproductive world. Moreover, no particular race has privileged access or superior knowledge of the garden template that we are to extend into the world.

of extending the dominion and rule of God in the world as mission.

In my view, Genesis 2 implies that God’s mission existed from the beginning of creation. As such, it can now be argued that God’s mission and the purpose of God’s creation of humanity was not interrupted or augmented by the Fall. Instead, it is possible to understand that humanity’s later expulsion from the Garden in 3:23–24 may well be a way to accelerate this mission, in much the same way that David Eastwood suggested from Genesis 10 that God used the dispersal of humanity after the Babel event to fulfil his earlier stated will for humankind.²³

If I may, I would like to suggest the following implications flow out of today’s reading of Genesis 2 in light of the 2023 Mission Research Consultation’s theme of “Race, Ethnicity, and Mission.”

Regardless of race—or perhaps through it, as Genesis 10 suggests—all believers are active in an unproductive world. Moreover, no particular race has privileged access or superior knowledge of the garden template that we are to extend into the world. Indeed, in light of Genesis 3, the Garden of Eden no longer exists in our midst, and humanity is limited to their own part of the unproductive world, with only a memory of God’s sacred space to work from. Finally, the model of humanity—as it is presented in this chapter—is one of power/strength equality. With the exception of Creator vs creation, human hierarchies find no evidence in this chapter, not least those based on gender. **MRT**

Questions for reflection

1. Where is mission: How might humanity’s mission to the vast unproductive region outside God’s garden be understood today?

2. What is mission: In light of humanity’s sacred mission to transform the world into the likeness of God’s garden, is mission limited to evangelism and church planting? If not, then what is “missionary activity”?

3. Who does mission: How does the understanding of women in Genesis 2 empower female missionaries in the sacred task of humanity?

¹ See Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 194–221.

² Note the appearance of the *Mappiq* in both forms, removing the possibility of reading a masculine suffix. Umberto Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 1: From Adam to Noah*) suggests that in “several texts” the *Mappiq* is absent, suggesting that both verbs represent infinitive long forms. However, he presents no evidence for this, whereas the BHQ presents no alternative readings other than the present reading with a *Mappiq*.

³ Note the Chinese Union Version (和合本) has “耕种和看守那园子” (“to work and keep the garden”). More recently, Barry Bandstra (*Genesis 1–11: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*) has made a similar assertion, regrettably without explanation. It is interesting that the LXX (ancient Greek) translation of the Hebrew here uses the masculine form *αὐτὸν* (*auton*) when a feminine form exists. This suggests that the early translators understood this verse to probably refer to the “garden”. For “vegetation”, see the explanatory notes of the NET. It should be noted that the proper noun “Eden” is also an unlikely candidate. In Genesis 2:15, Eden serves as the *nomen rectum* and, so, cannot be referred to by the later sufformatives.

⁴ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987).

⁵ Genesis 2:5–17.

⁶ Prior to God establishing the garden, the “land” referred to geographical regions that were either desolate—where bushes and plants were absent (2:5 [x2], 6)—or the geographical regions to which the rivers of Eden flowed (2:11 [x2], 13).

⁷ In addition to the object of human activity, the “ground” (אֲרֶץ) in this pericope also refers to the material from which humanity was formed (2:7) as well as the locus of the watering “mist” (2:6), and, later, the “trees” that would make up the garden (2:9).

⁸ David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IL: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

⁹ It should be noted that the use of contrasting descriptions, in this case *desert* and *swamp*, are a

familiar Hebrew poetic device called *hendyads* that is used to indicate comprehensiveness. In this case, the “earth” and “land” were to be understood as completely unproductive, in contrast to the luscious garden of Eden.

¹⁰ Note the chiasmic structure in 2:5–6, which centres on the absence of activity by the LORD God and humanity.

¹¹ Note the syntactical relationship in Genesis 2:15 between the *wayyiqtol* and *qatal* verb forms to indicate result and purpose. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §36.2.3d.

¹² The phrase “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (נֶחְמָד לְרֵאָה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל) is probably a poetic device, similar to a *hendyads*, which taken together could best be understood along the lines of food that is “delectable”, that is, both attractive and delicious.

¹³ Two of these rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, are known to us by the same names and continue to flow today through the regions of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. To this extent, these rivers may be generally understood to represent the regions northwest and northeast of the garden. Although the rivers named here as the Pishon and Gihon have not been identified, the regions Havilah and Cush, with which they are respectively associated, probably represent regions to the southeast and (far) southwest of the garden. A number of ancient works depict similar scenes. Note the colourful mural of Zimri-Lim discovered at ancient Mari depicting his investiture, illustrated with streams flowing out of jars into four different directions. Amélie Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East C. 3000–330 BC*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 96.

¹⁴ For a helpful discussion of the term’s semantic range in relation to this passage, please see: John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 104–115.

¹⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 155; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 59.

¹⁶ Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 106–109.

¹⁷ There exist a number of accounts that record the building and remodelling of sacred gardens by kings following their enthronement and victories.

¹⁸ On this point of “rest” (שָׁבַת *shbt*), see: John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009).

¹⁹ R. David Freedman, “Woman, A Power Equal to Man,” *BAR* 9 (1983): 56–58; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Correcting Caricatures: The Biblical Teaching on Women,” in *Correcting Caricatures: Revisiting the Biblical Ideal for Men and Women in Ministry*, ed. Tim Krueger, William D. Spencer, and Megan Gruelich (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality, 2012): 6–13.

²⁰ See, for instance, Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7; Ps 70:5.

²¹ As an attribute of God, see Deut 33:29; Pss 20:2; 89:19; 121:1, 8; 146:5; Hos 13:9. As attribute of others, see Isa 30:5; Ezek 12:14; Dan 11:34.

²² Babylonian Talmud: *Shabbat* 127a.

²³ See David Eastwood, “Genesis 11:1–9 The Tower of Babel—Scattered Humanity,” *Mission Round Table* 18, no. 2 (July–September 2023), 4–5.

That They Will All Be One: The Transformative Potential of *Ethnos*, *Phylē*, *Laos*, and *Glōssa* for Global Missions Today

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Preface

In keeping with Māori customary protocol, I am obligated to locate myself, to establish from where I stand and under whose authority (that is, my family's) I speak, as Māori. Since I identify most strongly with my father's world, though I was brought up in my mother's, what follows is my *turangawaewae* (standing place) in time and space...

Kō Takitimu te waka (my tribal canoe is the Takitimu). *Kō Te Waka o Kupe me Tuhirangi ngā maunga* (the mountains I belong to are known as the canoes of high chief Kupe and Tuhirangi, the sea serpent that Kupe chased along the Pacific in his discovery of Aotearoa New Zealand).

Kō Ruamahanga te awa (my river is the Ruamahanga—it was in this river that I was baptised as a new believer in Christ in 1984). *Kō Ngāti Kahungumu ki Wairarapa, kō Ngāti Porou, kō Kai Tahu ōku iwi* (I have direct genealogical connections to these three tribes that span the East Coast of both the main islands of Aotearoa New Zealand). *Kō Ngāti Rākauwhakairi tōku hapū* (my primary clan or family group name means to lift or hang in adornment). *Kō Kohunui tōku marae* (my clan's customary meeting place is called Kohunui—a physical piece of land on the outskirts of the village of Pirinoa, shared by our family groups, with buildings for meeting/sleeping, cooking/eating, and keeping tools and supplies).

Kō Jay Mātenga tōku ingoa (my name is Jay Mātenga), *kō Aperahama Kuhukuhu Tui Mātenga tōku tupuna* (descendent of Abraham Kuhukuhu Tui Mātenga). *Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa* (and so, three times respectful greetings to you all).

On my mother's side, my English heritage can be traced back to the first settlers in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a Woiwurrung Aboriginal great, great grandmother (according to family oral history) from my maternal grandmother's Australian line.

Introduction

We know well the song. The Great Creator sang the six verses of Let There Be, climaxing on the bridge where humans were crafted after the image of the Divine Persons. Humans were made compatible kinds, two unique entities with the ability and commission to reproduce after their kinds and spread throughout the created order—every pairing combination creating a distinctive other, all designated to nurture, guard, and grow creation. Then the tune takes a darker tone. A malevolent one enters the narrative, convincing the humans to disobey their Divine orders and unlock the ability to determine what is good and what is not. Immediately, they determined their nakedness was not good and, shortly thereafter, they came to understand the dire consequences of their disobedience. Cast out from the holy paradise they were created for, the next verse in the song tells of their first offspring killing his younger brother—because he determined it was good to do so. Like a wolf at the door, Sin revealed its hand, and Cain was banished from his land.

Descendants thereafter reproduced as ordained and, as they grew in number, they gathered into distinctive groups. Each determining their own vision of “the good life”—until God lamented ever creating them. Humanity was rebooted by a flood, then the clans that formed and joined in unholy collaboration after the reset were scattered by a supernatural confusion of languages. Yet even before the separation, each clan from the sons of Noah is identified by their *mishpacha*, *lashon*, *eres*, and *goy*—their kin, language, geography, and political organising structure. For Japheth, with the shorter lineage, the order is land, tongue, family, and nation. That Ham and Shem were to clash in the holy land as descendants of Canaan and Abraham could explain why they share the same order of tribe, language, people, and nation, whereas Japheth, potentially the father of the

northern peoples (including Europeans) according to this song, remained distant from the biblical focal point in geography and language.

And with the Genesis 10 list of seventy progenitors, we have what is known as the “Table of Nations” as the lyricist wanted us to hear it. Seventy being numerically significant only insofar as it is indicative of a large number of descendants.¹ This symbolises the taproot of all the peoples of the earth. Verifiable by hard science or not, this list, which provides the *whakapapa* (lineage) of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has but one aim: to establish common origins. Tribal peoples the world over know this and value the importance of ancestral connections. For Māori, we are adrift without our *whakapapa*. It is a metaphysical umbilical cord from time immemorial connecting us to our reality in this world, to our people, linking us with a history, providing us with significance and purpose, and holding us to account for the days we spend on this side of eternity. *Whakapapa* reminds us that our forebears walk with us—in our imaginations and our genetics, but also as living witnesses on the other side of the veil between this life and the next—and we do well to honour them with lives well lived on this earth.

When Māori from different parts of our nation first come together in formal

Missions studies has made much of the narrative that God is seeking to create a kingdom of people from all nations, but, until relatively recently, what such a kingdom might look like went largely unexamined.

settings, we spend a great deal of time in conversation according to customary protocols. This introductory phase is called a *pōwhiri*. In my understanding of this word, it means to weave (*whiri*) the darkness (*pō*) or our ignorance of one another, hosts and visitors, with the intention that we will eventually come to a place of mutual enlightenment, trust, and full inclusion in the host’s hospitality. A critical part of weaving relationships for Māori is to share our lineage back as far as we can, to see if we can find a common ancestor. Once found, it provides the basis for an enduring relationship. We discover that we are relatives. Long-term accords can be created. After all, as Jesus keenly observed, a “household divided against itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25 NIV).

In this paper, I encourage us to invest in weaving the darkness, enlightening our ignorance of one another. Only then will we understand what Jesus prayed for in John 17 when he asked *Matua e te Rangi* (our Parent² in the highest place) “that they will all be one, just as you

and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me” (John 17:21 NIV). We are, from the beginning of the song, of one origin, and it is to this integrated singularity³ as the beloved people of God that we have returned through our allegiance to Christ. But it is not a homogeneous, integrated singularity. In-Christ, we do not cease to be distinct. Rather, as in John’s apocalyptic visions, we remain identifiable by our language, nation, tribe, and people. It is in the very tensions of this interplay of identities that we forge a new creation. The kingdom of God. Shalom. Harmony. Peace. But not as the world might imagine peace, and certainly not as the world tries to attain peace. It is not the absence of tensions because of our differences. Our integrated singularity as a holy people in-Christ is the result of the Holy Spirit tuning the tensions caused by our differences, shaping us into the full measure or maturity in-Christ (cf. Eph 4:13), transforming us individually and corporately into the people of God. Therein, the glory of God is displayed in all its fulness for the world to see, so that they may believe and know... and join our choir in the new song of creation.

1. A people from all nations

Missions studies has made much of the narrative that God is seeking to create a kingdom of people from all nations, but, until relatively recently, what such a kingdom might look like went largely unexamined. “But of course, it should look just as civilised as our culture,” says the colonial missionary. While that might sound untenable now, an overt aim of the so-called “modern” missionary movement was a conflation of “‘civilisation’ and the ‘spread of the gospel.’”⁴ This culturally totalising assumption has only been challenged as the Protestant Church outside of the European diaspora started to mature and become more visible post-World War II. Granted, brave prophets from Majority World churches mark the pages of missions history prior,⁵ but the globalisation and technological advancement of the latter half of the twentieth century have enabled the true influence of what is now accepted



The Creation by James Tissot (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons. Gouache on board, 20.7 × 24.6 cm.

as World Christianity⁶ to be felt by Protestants of European descent.

As post-colonial globalisation has done for the world, so it has had an effect on the global church and her missions. It has exposed the powers that be to an undeniable diversity, a plurality of perspectives on reality, all vying for validation within a world system that is (currently) dominated by Western capitalist industrialisation. What Scripture reports very broadly as tribes, languages, states, peoples, families, Gentiles, Barbarians, the ends of the earth, all nations, they, them, others, we now see in minute detail by scientific ethno-linguistic taxonomies. But, as the saying goes, it could be that we are “not seeing the forest for the trees.”

After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, “Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9–10 NLT)

This is a grand eschatological vision often used by missions motivators to rally churches to the cause of cross-cultural ministry. It is viewed as an objective. God wants people from every nation and tribe and people and language worshipping around the throne as members of Christ’s body, the church. We have now mapped every nation and tribe and people and language, and, having identified them, we can specifically target how to reach them with the gospel in our responsibility to bring about this grand vision. But is it? Is this a target to be achieved or is it a prophecy that God will fulfil? You might imagine that they are synonymous—God will fulfil the prophecy through a church mobilised. But they are qualitatively two different things. A target to achieve by force of our canny will is anthropocentric, a prophecy awaiting fulfilment through obedience to God is theocentric—and we do well to ensure our missions are thoroughly centred on God’s mission rather than our clever strategies. The sovereignty of God is all.

Revelation 7:9 is but one of seven different ways that John uses a group of four categories to describe all the people of the earth: five instances include *ethnos* (nations), *phylē* (tribe), *laos* (people),



San Giovanni evangelista a Patmos [John the Apostle on Patmos] by Jacopo Vignali (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.

and *glōssa* (language), but each time in a different order (out of a possibility of twenty-four different sequences). Two additional sets substitute tribe (kinship group, often signifying the people of God) for kings and multitudes respectively. Here, they are in the order they appear in Revelation (the underlines highlight the substitute for tribes):

1. ... you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Revelation 5:9 NLT)
2. ... a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9 NLT)
3. ... I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.” (Revelation 10:11 NLT)
4. ... for three and a half days, all peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will stare at their bodies. No one will be allowed to bury them. (Revelation 11:9 NLT)
5. ... the beast was allowed to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And he was given authority to rule over every tribe and people and language and nation. (Revelation 13:7 NLT)
6. ... angel flying through the sky, carrying the eternal Good News to proclaim to the people who belong to

this world (i.e., the earth/land)—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. (Revelation 14:6 NLT)

7. ... the angel said to me, “The waters where the prostitute is ruling represent masses of people of every nation and language.” (Revelation 17:15 NLT)

Scholars agree that John uses these sets of four very intentionally; it is not authorial randomness (as my usage is!). There is something John intends the readers to understand about his reference to the people of the world and the people of our God, and it has deep missiological implications. In his book, *The Climax of Prophecy*, Richard Bauckham notices this and rearranges the order to better draw out significance from the sets for the saving of the nations. He leaves out Revelation 10:11, arguing that it represents John’s commission to speak a message to the entire human world, which is reinforced by the other references; and because Bauckham views them as hermeneutical keys, he adds Revelation 1:7,⁷ 15:4,⁸ and 21:3⁹ to group the passages into these three sets of three (quoting from NLT):

Christ’s Sacrifice

Revelation 1:7 “all the nations of the world will mourn for him”

Revelation 5:9 “tribe and language and people and nation”

Revelation 13:7 “tribe and people and language and nation”

Worship

Revelation 7:9 “nation and tribe and people and language”

Revelation 14:6 “nation, tribe, language, and people”

Revelation 15:4 “All nations will come and worship”

Cities (Babylon surrendering to the New Jerusalem)

Revelation 11:9 “all peoples, tribes, languages, and nations”

Revelation 17:15 “masses of people of every nation and language”

Revelation 21:3 “God’s home is now among his people!”

In sum, Baukham argues that

The pattern therefore indicates that (1) the Lamb by his sacrifice will win the allegiance of the nations which are now impressed by the bogus sacrifice of the beast; (2) the nations which now worship the beast will be won, through the witness of the martyrs, to the worship of God; (3) the nations which now serve Babylon will become, through the witness of the martyrs, God's peoples with whom he will be present in the New Jerusalem.

Thus it becomes clear that, although the fourfold phrase is not itself used to describe the nations as converted and included in the kingdom of God, it is always used with this transfer of the nations from the beast's rule to God's in view. This is also implicit in the relationship of the phrase to the key verse Daniel 7:14.¹⁰

Baukham, however, believes that the pattern defends a universalist fulfilment of Old Testament aspirations, in that the nations will be saved due to the witness of, rather than solely as part of, the church. Thus, viewing the church (the suffering ones) as more of a utility in God's hands, rather than the totality of the population in eternity. Therefore, while his patterning is helpful, his concluding thesis is unacceptable to Evangelicals. It dismisses salvation by faith in Christ alone (requiring allegiance and regeneration), by separating those who are saved to eternity into two camps: those who have suffered for their faith in Christ this side of eternity and the nations who eventually submit (under duress?) to Christ's rule and "get there" in the end. His view deals well with connecting John's revelation to Old Testament prophecy but seems to neglect the New Testament twist on the fulfilment of those prophecies in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling followers of Christ as essential to the formation of new creation. In an Evangelical reading, Scripture is quite clear that only in-Christ (through faith) are we being transformed into and will be transformed for new creation. The great transfer from Babylon (this world/darkness) to New Jerusalem (new creation/light) happens as God's people increase in number due to the attractive faithful witness of the suffering church, rather than a final moment of defeat and surrender of the nations.

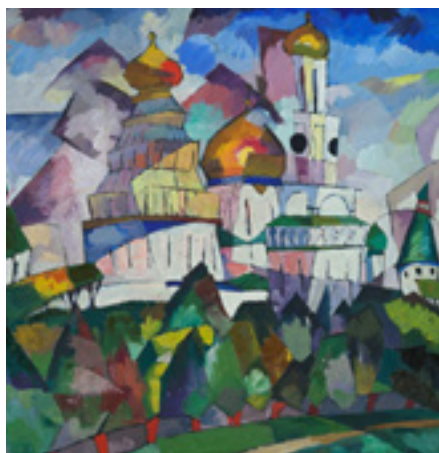
But from this point forward, we shift from thinking of every tribe, language, people, and nation as the scope of our missions activities, to every tribe, language, people, and nation becoming participants in our missions activities.

That corrective established, Baukham helpfully provides insight regarding numerical symbolism before he closes his chapter on the conversion of the nations. Throughout his work, he draws numerical symbolism from the Old Testament, especially the prophets and apocalyptic literature, into his interpretation of John's revelation. In particular, the "symbolism of the sevenfold use of the fourfold phrase... this number 28 (7 for completeness x 4 for the world) indicates that the phrase refers to all the nations of the whole world."¹¹

While the ordering of the fourfold phrase differs for John's narrative purposes, the main point is struck: the purposes of God are for the totality of human inhabitants of the earth throughout space and time and without exception. Whether viewed as nations, states, tribes, language groups, ethnicities, cultures, families, affinities, in-groups or out-groups, everyone is included, and no one should be excluded from the opportunity to respond to the good news that "the God of Israel reigns" (Isaiah 52:7 NLT) in Christ, whether they accept God's purposes or not—a decision that will determine their access to new creation.

2. New creation from all nations

To this point in the paper, any Evangelical with exposure to cross-cultural missions might wonder why



Churches. New Jerusalem by Aristarkh Lentulov (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.

I am bothering to put so much effort into confirming what we have long known—the gospel is for all peoples. This has been a core motivator since the modern missionary movement began in the late 1700s. As we moved into the late twentieth century, Townsend,¹² McGavran,¹³ Winter,¹⁴ Barrett,¹⁵ Johnstone,¹⁶ *et al.*, drew our attention to ever more narrowly defined differences in people groups around the world. Since then, we have been better able to identify groups of people for whom the gospel is not yet readily accessible, promoting this as an urgent need in order to draw resources to see them "reached"—people from (or out of)¹⁷ every tribe, language, people, and nation becoming God's people. From Genesis 10 to Daniel 7 to Revelation and numerous references in between, it is clear that we are to "Publish his glorious deeds among the nations, tell[ing] everyone about the amazing things he does" (Psalm 96:3 NLT). "We" are to tell "them."

But from this point forward, we shift from thinking of every tribe, language, people, and nation as the *scope* of our missions activities, to every tribe, language, people, and nation becoming *participants* in our missions activities. It is one thing to view the language of all the nations in Scripture as "them," like trees of all kinds (cf. Ezek 47:12), it is quite another to realise they are now "us," the forest of Lebanon that is the people of God (cf. Ps 104:16). This shift strikes deep into our core missiological assumptions, and it is imperative for our understanding of God's mission that we comprehend the implications. Unless we fully embrace the New Testament vision for a culturally diverse people of God as a witness to the nations, we will blindly stumble along with our ethnocentric plans—well-meaning though they be—and miss God's strategy for bringing people out of the pluralities that make up Babylon into the diverse integrated singularity that is New Jerusalem, an entire world of peoples into a multi-racial new creation.

The foundational ethic of the new reality we enter in-Christ is love, as

Scripture defines God's love. Perhaps the best snapshots we have of this ethic can be found in Galatians 5:22–23 and 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. I believe these two passages link together due to Paul's example of the (singular) fruit of the Spirit prioritising love in the Greek, so the fruit of the Spirit passage is better rendered with a colon following love.¹⁸ In other words, "the fruit of the Spirit is love: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23 NIV, punctuation mine). In addition, Paul frequently provides contrasting sets of virtues, comparing those of the world (under law) and those of the kingdom (under grace in-Christ).¹⁹ Galatians 5:22–23 is set in contrast to this dark list...

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; *hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy*; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19–21. Italics mine.)

Punctuation in English translations of Scripture are at the interpretative discretion of the translator, since it does not exist as such in the original Hebrew or Greek, but, in this case, the semicolons help us to separate out a cluster of "works of the flesh" (KJV) that are particularly damaging to the community of faith.

All sin is relationally destructive—that is how the Bible views the purpose of Sin as a malevolent force—but the italicised attributes listed can be particularly vile in this regard. A word for the church in our times: there is no place for such behaviour in God's shalom reality.

One would think that, bestowed with such a precious gift as God's love coursing through our being as a result of our faith in Christ, Christian communities would be spaces of blessed union, a utopia of understanding, lacking any hint of strife. They clearly are not. There is the hypothesised ideal, and then there is the lived reality. We do not have to participate in Christian groups long before we experience factions, self-interest, control, abuses, ideological differences, polarising extremes, racism, manipulation, exploitation, self-righteousness, judgementalism... division. Such divisions are bad enough within a homogeneous community; such

as the Jewish churches to whom James wrote, let alone multi-cultural communities that are increasingly the experience of our missions groups and cosmopolitan churches. People coming together from all tribes, nations, peoples, and languages only amplifies tensions between followers of Christ—but they also maximise the potential for maturity in-Christ.

Dismissing division with the argument that we are living in a "now/not-yet" kingdom reality while we wait for Jesus' second coming and our resurrection to sort it all out or pretending that there is some sort of spiritualised "hidden unity" that transcends our squabbles that will be revealed when Jesus returns, sells the gospel short. It corrupts the surest and most certain witness for which we are sent into the world: our communal existence in-Christ as an integrated singularity (cf. John 17:18–26). In our communal life together, we carry the responsibility to activate God's love in our relationships and manifest it in the world. It does not happen automatically. As Richard Longenecker notes in his Galatians commentary,

combined with the givenness of these virtues by God (the love list of Gal. 5:22–23) is the believer's active involvement in expressing them in his or her own lifestyle—or as Paul puts it pointedly a couple verses later: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (v25).²⁰

In step with the Spirit, we must aspire to, and work towards, harmony on this side of eternity as our primary missions strategy, our part in God's plan to lead people out of Babylon into New Jerusalem "until the full number of Gentiles [every tribe, language, people, and nation] comes to Christ" (Romans 11:25b NLT). But it is not a harmony made of forced homogeneity, where some illusory "Christian worldview" exists as the conforming and validating standard.

As the church has spread throughout all the earth and grown such that the majority of Christians now dwell outside



Jesus Washing the Feet of his Disciples by Albert Edelfelt. Oil on cardboard, grisaille, 58 x 47 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

of the boundaries of Eurocentric Christianity, the emancipation of indigenous theologies, assisted by the emergence of what is now studied as World Christianity, has now burst that illusion.²¹ The Eurocentric theological consensus²² is no longer the grand arbiter of what is or is not acceptable in Christian faith and practice. Rather, biblically faithful, localised theologies, in conversation with the global church (including the church throughout history) lead us forward as God's people from every language, tribe, people, and nation into new creation. Each representative is distinct, all integrated, together singular.

Harmony is a significant aspiration for Indigenous²³ peoples, of which I am one. As we read Scripture, we see harmony throughout. Shalom is too easily translated "peace", but it is arguably better interpreted as harmony. If the kingdom of God is the fulfilment of the prophetic promise of a shalom socio-spiritual reality, as I believe it is, then peace, shalom, harmony, unity, rest, etc., become synonymous. When Jesus offered his disciples the gift of peace (εἰρήνη *eirēnē*, John 14:27), he was offering more than the cessation of hostility or a state of tranquillity and ease, while those are ultimately part of it. It is clear from the following passages in John that Jesus was offering inclusion in a loving, integrated singularity that is recognised in Scripture by many metaphors, like a kingdom, a city, a body, a family, a sheepfold, a

bride, or—as Jesus explains immediately following his offer of peace—like a vine. We commonly refer to these metaphors as examples of unity in Christ, local expressions of which we know as “churches” or “fellowships,” including those groups that gather in missionary service. In the climax of John 17:18–26, which I call “The Great Commitment,” Jesus prays that we will all become part of the One in-Christ, who is in God, who is in Christ, who is in us... so that the world will believe (that is, find credible), and know (that is, experience) that Jesus was lovingly sent to bring about new creation.

How, then, are we to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3)? First, we need to move away from thinking of unity as agreement or even agreeing to disagree. Unity is not forced conformity; we know this; but it is also not just a live and let live avoidance. Next, we need to accept that unity comes from being willing to submit our perceived rights, privileges, and power in loving service to others. To yield, to give way, and to give away. As living sacrifices. Not passively, but with a deep curiosity to understand where those who are getting under our skin are coming from—and, God willing, to allow such encounters to mature us, little bit by little bit, into the fulness of Christ. To be transformed by the renewing of our mind in such communal co-existence, as we see in Romans 12:1–2.

To borrow Paul’s terminology in Philippians 2, where Jesus—knowing who he was—chose to lay it aside. This sacrificial love in action—our being living sacrifices—is a kenotic exchange. And it only works when it is reciprocated. We are to be mutual servants of one another within our communities of faith, extended out into our societies. And, furthermore, the greater the diversity in our midst, the greater the maturity we develop. James tells us (James 1:2–4) that we should consider it joy when others within the faith cause us trouble, because if we sit in the tensions of difference (holding to the faith), persevering, we will mature. James, writing to Jewish believers, was not referring to external pressures as trials, testings, troubles, or temptations, but tensions *within* the fellowship. This is clear from the rest of the letter in which he calls out relationally destructive behaviour among them. Before he does so though, he establishes a vision of a beneficial future if only we persevere in the faith—in the belief that

in-Christ harmony is possible. If we do this over time, it will produce maturity. If this is a positive vision of benefit within a monocultural group of believers, imagine the blessed maturity developed if we process tensions well in a multi-cultural group—the expectation of such an outcome should fill us with overwhelming joy!

If we are to manifest new creation from all nations, we simply must shift our posture from defence to deference. To have the same attitude as Christ (cf. Phil 2:5), to stop guarding our preferences, power, and privilege, but instead to yield and serve. This is what it means to be in-Christ. A better rendering of the Greek in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (TBFE) is “if anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation! Old things have gone, and look – everything has become new!”²⁴ In this translation, Tom Wright adds “there is a” for English readers but the Greek simply associates being in Christ with new creation. It is not so much that we are created anew as individuals, but that we enter a new reality as individuals who are being transformed by the Spirit within the context(s) of Christ’s new covenant community/ies. Maturity, or metamorphosis (transformation), happens inter-relationally, co-creating new creation reality.

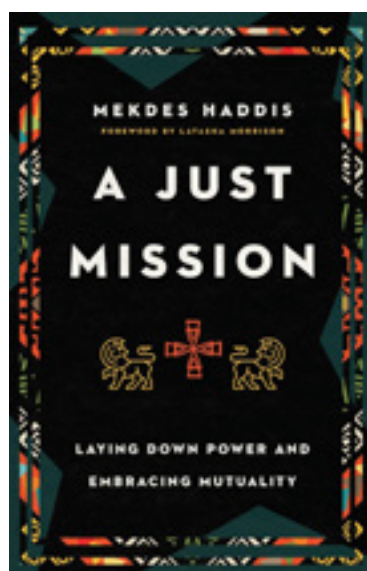
Reading with Indigenous eyes, Romans 12:1–2 makes this quite clear. If they are anything like me, collectivist-oriented readers of Scripture will be sensitive to communal implications throughout the Epistles, and this is one of those texts where a decolonising of our theology can help us see what Paul means with greater clarity. An Industrial (see endnote 23) reading places the individual believer’s

posture before God as the living sacrifice, with the assumption that transformation emerges from the private devotion of said believer. But this could not be more disjointed from the rest of Romans 12 where Paul speaks of the need to, in love, make way for each other’s unique giftedness. Rather, the living sacrifice to which Paul refers is the “kenotic” self-giving of ourselves to one another in covenantal community as the body of Christ. *This* is acceptable worship, in honour of all that God has done for us. Then, it is through our interactions within the fellowship of male, female, eunuch, Jew, Greek, Barbarian, slave, free, rich, poor, husbands, wives, young, old, etc., that we are transformed/matured by our learning from one another and making space for each other to flourish as God has gifted each of us, empowered by the Spirit who is love. Cross-cultural missions groups and multi-cultural fellowships are beacons of grace in this regard. This is non-conformance with the customs of this world, which loves to distinguish, divide, separate “their kind” from “our kind,” suppress, and dominate.

In these mutually submissive relationships, we are *all* transformed. This perpetual inter-relational state of Holy Spirit-empowered reconciled mutuality is where we come to know and do the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God, which (according to my anchor Scripture of John 17:18–26) is the pursuit of a loving integrated singularity—harmonious relationships. But the thing we must realise is that nowhere in the natural (and, I suggest, supernatural) realms can harmony be produced without resonant tension. Shalom unity is tension held in balance—tuned if you will. We need to normalise tension, instead of trying to dissolve it, resolve it, ignore it, or avoid it. Consider it cause for great joy, for it is in the tensions that we are transformed... if we process them well.

3. Co-creation with all nations

Ethiopian missiologist Mekdes Haddis published a book titled *A Just Mission*.²⁵ In it, she tackles the dark side of missions as a colonial enterprise, dominated by the West, that suppresses the ability for “the rest” to fully engage in God’s mission. Her positionality is as a black, migrant woman in the context of a racially divided United States of America, calling out the injustice of white supremacy in the global missions enterprise. The white American missions commentator and author Brad



Vaughan (who formerly appropriated the Asian-influenced pseudonym, “Jackson Wu”) called Haddis’ book “the most dangerous mission book in a generation” and embraced comments that labelled Haddis’ concerns as a “rant.”²⁶ Journalist Christy Hemphill joined Haddis’ defence on Twitter and then released an article titled, “‘A Just Mission’ Is Only Dangerous When You Don’t Know How to Listen.”²⁷

Material written by Indigenous believers pushing back against Industrial hegemony is often polemical but rarely a rant. It may be perceived so because the text is written from the perspective of pain. Add to Haddis recent decolonising missions critiques from people such as Randy Woodley (Native North American),²⁸ Harvey Kwiyani (Malawian),²⁹ or even the anthology of Indigenous critiques of short-term missions compiled by Inslee and Burns,³⁰ and you will find a similar tone of frustration if not anger. Namibian Reinhold Titus, Chief Strategy and Inclusion Officer in Operation Mobilisation (OM), conducted research among senior missions leaders from

Expressions of frustration and experiences of injustice can be emotive, but they have good reason to be, and it should not be so easily dismissed. The work of scholars such as Willie James Jennings³² or Jehu Hanciles,³³ who write with a more restrained academic note, seem to garner less pushback. But they may also make less of an impact because they do not strike as close to home for those who hold dominant positions in missions institutions. Like Majority World authors before them, such as John Mbiti or Lamin Sanneh (to name pitifully few), these more abstract works are easier to ringfence in the realm of the academy or ignore altogether. However, when someone points out the injustices of a system within which you are privileged, it becomes threatening and personal. The reaction can be visceral. It can seem as if the critics are undermining your very identity, presenting an existential crisis. They certainly present a threat to the established “business proposition” of the missions arms of the “Christian-industrial complex”³⁴ that relies on donors believing the best about

forms cognitive and affective structures able to seduce people into its habitation and its meaning making.”³⁹ Yet, it is undeniable that a pale skin colour provides easier access to the privileges of such a system—this is my lived experience as a fair skinned Māori. As Jennings goes on to elaborate, we need to create better spaces for broader belonging, and that means greater equitability. The problem is, “when you are accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.”⁴⁰

Race is but one signifier of the differences between tribes, languages, people, and nations. It is imposed upon us by scientific enquiry. François Bernier (1625–1688) is believed to have developed the first comprehensive classification of humans into distinct races,⁴¹ and researchers of human groups have reclassified us in myriad ways ever since—including missions demographers.⁴² We do well, however, to remember how relatively recent skin-colour classification became a defining factor. Historian Thomas Gossett notes that

Our struggle is not an issue of white supremacy; it is an issue of any dominant-group supremacy.

Africa for an MA thesis at Redcliffe College. Reinhold’s respondents testified to the struggles they experienced in missions prior to and since taking on leadership responsibilities. Their experience of systemic injustice in missions mirrors the concerns of Haddis, Woodley, Kwiyani, *et al.* In his interviews, all respondents noted barriers to inclusion (read: active participation at a decision-making level) due to the Western origins, administrative systems, and (often unspoken) expectations of those in control of their organisations. Among the quotes Reinhold includes are these:

the systems that were established, and also even the structures at times, and the processes were so culturally loaded in a Western mindset and worldview that it just makes it almost impossible for others to work through the same processes and systems in order to be part of the organisation... I think by nature of being founded by Western agency, there was already a set of lenses as to... who would be leading who... the ground is tilted.³¹

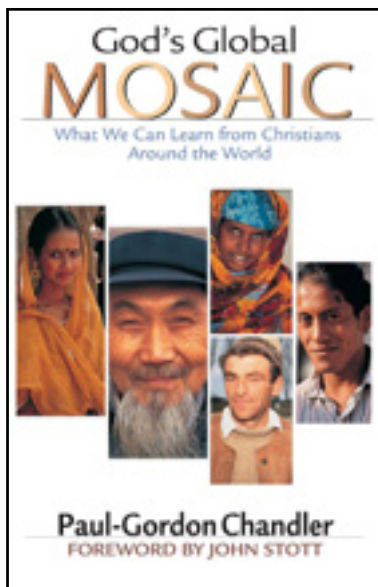
missionary service, especially from the “West to the rest.”

As the saying goes, “When America sneezes, the world catches a cold.”³⁵ And so it seems with what has come to be known as the “culture wars” and race relations as an aspect of that. The ferment originating in the USA is now influencing global conversations and global missions more than any time prior to 2020.³⁶ Sadly, emotionally-charged terminologies are now being applied to the conversation that I do not believe will help us to navigate our way forward as an integrated singularity for the benefit of God’s mission. Terms like “whiteness”³⁷ amplify skin colour as a differentiating factor, even though proponents like Willie Jennings claim that the appropriation of a colour is “not simply... a marker of the European but as the rarely spoken but always understood organizing conceptual frame.”³⁸ More recently, he clarified that “‘whiteness’ does not refer to people of European descent but to a way of being in the world and seeing the world that

before the eighteenth century physical differences among peoples were so rarely referred to as a matter of great importance that something of a case can be made for the proposition that race consciousness is largely a modern phenomenon. What is certain is that the tendency to seize upon physical differences as the badge of innate mental and temperamental differences is not limited to modern times. The racism of ancient history, even though it had no science of biology or anthropology behind it, was real, however ever difficult it may be for us to judge the extent of its power.”⁴³

If it is not one thing, it is another. Prejudice emerges in myriad ways. It is core to the Sin-effect at work in human beings, our capacity to judge what is good and punish that which we determine to be not good. This is why we need Jesus,

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles [read: from every tribe, people, language, and nation] into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us (Eph 2:14 NLT).



Our struggle is not an issue of white supremacy; it is an issue of any dominant-group supremacy—Ephesians 6:12 playing out in our midst. It is about supernatural power. Anything that would seek to divide, to undermine, to tear down relationships is doing the work of the enemy to destroy the shalom of God. And, to the core of my being, I do not believe authors such as Haddis, Woodley, Kwiya, and Titus are seeking to tear apart anything. Critiques of missions from Majority World commentators that I know personally are deeply concerned for bringing about a corrective to strengthen unity, not destroy it. Harmony demands such tension. Too much force of influence (or dominant control) and you oppress, too much resistance is rebellion (which, if successful, too easily becomes the oppressor), but, if held in balanced tension, you have potential for new creation. This is the way of all healthy relationships.

Perhaps the best analogy to apply is that of two distinct parents creating a unique third person. Māori call this *whakapapa*, from which we derive our concept of lineage or genealogy. But the principle is much broader. It is the co-creation of something new from the unique blend of two or more pre-existent entities. Māori scholar Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal explains *whakapapa* as a scientific method this way:

Whakapapa is an analytical tool traditionally employed by Māori to understand... the nature of phenomena, the origin of phenomena, the connections and relationships to phenomena, describing trends in phenomena, locating phenomena, extrapolating and predicting future phenomena...

Whakapapa is a way of organising information into a coherent form.⁴⁴

It is about mapping relationships and determining how to multiply them for positive effect. As Royal goes on to say, “Whakapapa... is concerned with growth rather than deconstruction.”⁴⁵ More than co-existence, an Indigenous concern is for promoting mutual vitality. Always. From a Māori perspective, the impulse of the universe is always generative. Life creating life. After the sixth verse of creation, the Great Creator may have rested but the song continues, and we have both inherited and participate in creation ongoing. Even better, in-Christ we are generating new creation, together:

Contrary to the aberrant theologies that argue for the preservation of the distinctives of every tribe, language, people, and nation, which provide the source for cultural supremacies such as apartheid,⁴⁶ the arc of Scripture leads us to a new type of being, generated from the combination of our distinctives. At the turn of the century, missions leader Paul-Gordon Chandler observed that

the richness of living among Christians of other nationalities, within their respective cultures, cannot be overvalued. These opportunities of learning from other cultural expressions of the Christian faith are unique and beautiful windows on God and the displaying of his character.⁴⁷

But they also allow God to bring each one of us into greater alignment with that character “so that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ” (Eph 4:13 NLT). That we are transformed by our relationships is being proven by the science of interpersonal neurobiology. Dan Siegel, Professor of Psychiatry, has found that “human connections shape neural connections, and each contributes to the mind [our personhood]...”⁴⁸ Add a cross-cultural aspect to those relationships, and the transformation runs even deeper, as intercultural specialist Joseph Shaules observes:

Foreign experiences make possible a process of deep cultural learning, one that can make us aware of the cultural configuration of our unconscious mind, and make us more effective interculturally. This learning process can be experienced in negative ways—such as culture shock or cross-

cultural misunderstanding—but it also can stimulate personal growth and provoke deep-seated changes in our perception, worldview, and identity.⁴⁹

Could dwelling with one another in the tensions of our difference be the antidote to prejudice, especially as it emerges in the form of racism? Social scientist Gordon Allport believed so and his thesis is being consistently proven.⁵⁰ Rutger Bregman summarises:

After years of research, he'd [Allport] found a miracle cure. Or at least he thought he had. What was it? Contact. Nothing more, nothing less. The American scholar suspected that prejudice, hatred and racism stem from a lack of contact. We generalise wildly about strangers because we don't know them.⁵¹

While he did not include a “God-factor” in the equation, Allport confirmed that the more time we spend with people who are different from us, the less we are likely to treat them as “other” and exclude them or, worse, dehumanise and persecute them. Time spent with others breeds understanding, empathy—it weaves the darkness of ignorance into enlightenment. Moreover, as we now know from neuroscience, it transforms each participant in the process. Add the Holy Spirit into this mix, and the benefits of this transformative process within the new covenant in-Christ take on biblical proportions... “the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image” (2 Cor 3:18b). As we dwell together in-Christ—every tribe, language, people, and nation—we are, quite literally, co-creating new creation. The old is past, the new has come.

Conclusion

The case is made for a fresh eschatological vision of the purposes of God. A vision of a people for God from every people, nation, tribe, and language—diverse, unique, yet contributing every facet of their uniqueness to the loving integrated singularity that is the New Jerusalem that has come out of heaven in Jesus Christ to make God's dwelling place forever with humanity. Our petty rivalries deny our true citizenship. Our defence of privilege prohibits us from stepping into greater blessing. Our allegiance to the moralities of political preference and culturally-

derived doctrines traumatise relationships and offend the transcendent ethic of God-in-Christ that is biblically defined and Jesus-exemplified as loving-kindness. Residual Sin continues its impulse to destroy relationships, but such behaviour is beneath us, unbecoming of new creation.

One day Jesus will return. The enemy will be vanquished. Death and Sin will be no more. New creation will be established in glorious fulness, and we will be eternally free to love more intimately and grow more magnificently than we can ask or imagine (cf. Eph 3:20). In the meantime, we remain on this side of eternity, commissioned as suffering witnesses to the glorious plan of God for every language, tribe, nation, and people. Suffering, struggling against the ruling principles, authoritative assumptions, and natural powers of this world, to be sure, but also in the tensions of our own differences—all of which are affected by “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12b). We will overcome them “by the blood of the lamb” (Rev 12:11 NIV)—which metaphorically and spiritually ties us together as one family made up of many families—and the word of our testimony: that “dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations” (Ps 22:28 NIV). And because the world sees evidence of it in our loving, integrated singularity, our covenantal communion in-Christ, a peace that the world cannot give, that world will believe and know that the Son was sent to “make all things new” (Rev 21:5 KJV). And the song of creation continues.

Sing a new song to the LORD,
for he has done wonderful deeds.
His right hand has won
a mighty victory;
his holy arm has shown
his saving power!
The LORD has announced his victory
and has revealed his righteousness
to every nation!
He has remembered his promise
to love and be faithful to Israel.
The ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

Shout to the LORD, all the earth;
break out in praise and sing for joy!
Sing your praise to the
LORD with the harp,
with the harp and melodious song,
with trumpets and the sound
of the ram’s horn.

Make a joyful symphony
before the LORD, the King!
Let the sea and everything
in it shout his praise!
Let the earth and all
living things join in.
Let the rivers clap their hands in glee!
Let the hills sing out their songs of joy
before the LORD,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with justice,
and the nations with fairness.
(Psalm 98 NLT) **MRT**

Questions for reflection

1. This paper begins by introducing some Maori practices, including introductory conversations intended to bring about “mutual enlightenment, trust, and full inclusion in the host’s hospitality.” How do introductions within your home culture serve to bring people into relationship? What form do they take? How effective are they? How do introductions within your host culture serve to bring people into relationship? What form do they take? How effective are they?
2. What will happen to our practice of mission if we “shift from thinking of every tribe, language, people, and nation as the *scope* of our missions activities” to thinking of them “becoming participants in our missions activities”? How does this impact our theology and practice of mission?
3. How can missionaries today address the relationships between people with power and those without to balance the tension so that unity and vitality can develop? How can developing a deep knowledge of people who are different from us help us grow personally, culturally, and Christianly?

This submission has not been published previously as a whole, either in print or electronically, nor is it before any other journal or publisher for consideration. Some aspects may appear in articles from previous presentations self-published at jaymatenga.com as they relate to developing ideas around mutuality of belonging as a missions motif.

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 335. Kindle ed.

² *Matua in te reo Māori* (Māori language) is non-gendered. It can refer to either father or mother. This helps us to avoid limiting our understanding of Jesus’ *Abba* according to modern patriarchal tropes.

³ I use “integrated singularity” to disrupt assumptions we all have concerning our understanding of “unity”, which more often than not infers absence of conflict or some level of conformity with a group’s consensus. The Greek word John uses for Jesus’ prayer (John 17) is εἷς (heis), the numeral one—something that cannot be divided: singular. This is all the more perplexing because Jesus is speaking of more than one, so it is an “integrated singularity” of many participants. I am conscious of contemporary scientific use of singularity as a concept, but that ought to strengthen the point. Artificial Intelligence reaches a singularity when its myriad data sources are fully integrated into a singular entity. A black hole is known as a singularity because it absorbs all matter that comes within its gravity. The many become integrated into one. In John 17, the implication is that the many disciples become singular in-Christ, under the will of God.

⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 296. Or, even worse, a conflation of “the ‘three C’s’ of Christianity, commerce and civilisation.” Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 305.

⁵ Consider, for example, Bishop Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah of the Diocese of Dornakal in south-eastern India, one of only nineteen representatives from the Majority World at the 1200-strong World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910. When asked to speak at a side-meeting, Azariah pushed back against supposed colonial superiority, lamenting a “great lack of frank intercourse and friendliness” toward Majority World believers, accusing the missionaries that “too often you promise us thrones in heaven, but will not offer us chairs in your drawing rooms.” Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 124.

⁶ “World Christianity’ is the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel. In these societies Christianity was received and expressed through the cultures, customs, and traditions of the people affected. World Christianity is not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European Enlightenment frame.” Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 22.

⁷ “Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him—even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen!” (Rev 1:7 NLT)

⁸ “All nations will come and worship before you for your righteous deeds have been revealed.” (Rev 15:4 NLT)

⁹ “God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.” (Rev 21:3 NLT)

¹⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 336.

¹¹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 336.

¹² See, for example, William Cameron Townsend, *A Thousand Trails: Personal Journal of William Cameron Townsend 1917–1919 Founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators* (Grand Rapids: CREDO, 1985).

¹³ See, for example, Donald Anderson McGavran, *Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions*

(Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

¹⁴ Influence best found in Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2009).

¹⁵ Best known for, David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, A.D. 1900–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁶ In addition to various editions of *Operation World*, Johnstone is more recently known for, Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011).

¹⁷ Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:1–2; and Zechariah 8:20, among many other references, speak of people from the nations that are “not Israel” coming to worship the Lord. In Ephesians 2:15, Paul, collapsing these peoples as Jews did under the rubric of “Gentiles,” shows that God’s intention was always to graft people from every nation into the Abrahamic blessing, via acceptance of the new covenant sealed with Jesus’ blood. It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue further for an “open exclusivist” view of salvation, in contrast to Bauckham’s universalism, but the narrative arc of Scripture that accepts the supernatural elements of the New Testament whereby the Holy Spirit (only internally available to those allegiant to Christ) is a necessary agent for resurrection to eternal life, is hard to dismiss—impossible for an Evangelical. As is made clear in 1 Corinthians 15:23, resurrection is for those “who belong to Christ” (NLT) but everyone is invited to belong if they will.

¹⁸ In his commentary on Galatians, Richard Longenecker notes: “if there is an emphasis in this list of nine items, it is probably to be seen in the first item, ἀγάπη (“love”), for that is where in a Greek structure one would expect to find anything being stressed.” Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Kindle Loc. 13393–13395. This view is supported by Leon Morris who, in addition, notes that “we are called to live in love, in love for God, in love for one another, and in love for all.” Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), Kindle Loc. 1529 of 8495, *The Way of Love*.

¹⁹ As if you needed further evidence against a universalist consummation of this age, here Paul is very clear that those without the regenerative power of the Spirit, which produces God’s love in the believer, will simply not be included as part of new creation.

²⁰ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 259, or Kindle Loc. 13362 of 18868.

²¹ I deal with this theme in greater detail in “The Blessing of Diversity: Benefits of the Emancipation of Indigenous Theologies in Light of the Emergence of World Christianity,” *Anvil: Journal of Theology and Mission* 39, no. 1 (2023): 6–17, <https://churchmissionsociety.org/anvil/the-blessing-of-diversity-jay-matenga-anvil-vol-39-issue-1/> (accessed 4 October 2023).

²² While there is a wide variety of theological expression in the theologies of the European diaspora, there is a generally cohesive commitment to what is considered to be normative Evangelical theology. I have coined “Eurocentric theological consensus” to capture that normative theological rubric. I don’t specify Evangelical because the norms arise from systematic and reformed theologies that may better reflect an ecumenical commitment, but are nonetheless Eurocentric. The term was influenced by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), as well as the four successive volumes where he deals with the development of theological

consensuses over time.

²³ I hold to the United Nations’ definition of indigenous, with a lower case i, but I capitalise it when distinguishing between Indigenous and Industrial as two distinct, global, epistemic ecosystems intersecting and overlapping on a spectrum, similar to the Collectivist and Individualist value sets continuum developed by industrial psychology researchers like Geert Hofstede. I capitalise Indigenous when referring to people who have a dominant collectivist orientation (Majority World, Global South, Developing World, people of colour, etc), and upper-case Industrial refers to those more inclined to be Individualist (Western, Modern, First World, white, etc). This is a simplified explanation, but, properly understood, these terms helpfully enable reference to large groups of people according to shared innate values, wherever they live, more than some arbitrary geographic or economic identity. For example, “Global South” makes no sense to us who live “down under,” and Majority World typically includes Latin America which I would classify as Eurocentrically Industrial, but closer to the Indigenous end of the spectrum than, say, England or Germany.

²⁴ John Goldingay and Tom Wright, *The Bible for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2018), 2 Corinthians 5:17.

²⁵ Mekdes Haddis, *A Just Mission: Laying Down Power and Embracing Mutuality* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2022).

²⁶ Brad Vaughan, then writing under the pseudonym Jackson Wu, since pulled his 31 January 2023 review of Haddis’ book and replaced it with something of an apology which can be found here: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2023/01/31/this-is-the-most-dangerous-mission-book-in-a-generation-seriously/> (accessed 20 April 2023). Vaughan’s critique drew much attention on Twitter, where it was also revealed that he was a white American writing under the guise of an Asian, which was further deemed to be disingenuous. As a result of the Twitter furore, Vaughan conceded to revert to his real name and IVP are committed to altering the author name on at least some of his titles.

²⁷ Christy Hemphill, “‘A Just Mission’ is only Dangerous when you don’t know how to Listen,” *Faithfully Magazine*, <https://faithfullymagazine.com/a-just-mission-dangerous-listen/> (accessed 20 April 2023).

²⁸ Particularly, Randy S. Woodley, *Mission and the Cultural Other* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022).

²⁹ See, for example, Harvey Kwiayami, “Mission After George Floyd: On White Supremacy, Colonialism, and World Christianity,” *ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission* 36, no. 3 (2022): 6–13.

³⁰ Forrest Insee and Angel Burns, *Re-Imagining Short Term Missions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022).

³¹ Reinhold Titus, “Fostering Globally Inclusive Mission Organisations: Exploring Inclusivity in Western Founded Global Mission Organisations Through the Experiences of Senior African Leaders Serving in Them,” (MA thesis, Redcliffe College, 2021), 35–36.

³² See, for example, Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); and Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

³³ Particularly, Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

³⁴ Scott A. Bessenecker, *Overturning Tables: Freeing Missions from The Christian-Industrial Complex* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014).

³⁵ Usually referring to economics, this saying is traced back to Prussian/Austrian diplomat

Klemens Wenzel Furst von Metternich who applied it to France during the Napoleonic era. See, Wolfram Siemans, *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

³⁶ The 26 May 2020 death of George Floyd in the USA was a significant marker in the spill-over of racial unrest from the USA to other parts of the world. US civil rights movements had previously inspired similar movements in other nations, but the Black Lives Matter movement has co-opted imaginations afresh and the issues of prejudice that might previously have pushed back against colonialism are now arising afresh as a struggle against “white” supremacies.

³⁷ The term “whiteness” can be traced back to sociologist W. E. B. Dubois’s 1910 essay, “The Souls of White Folks,” https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du_Bois_White_Folk.pdf (accessed 5 April 2023).

³⁸ Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 25.

³⁹ Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 9.

⁴⁰ There is no agreed provenance for this quote; it seems to have evolved online in the mid-late 2000s.

⁴¹ Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴² This is not to diminish the importance of people-group research or demography. Used correctly, the insights that specialists in these areas provide missions are invaluable.

⁴³ Gossett, *Race*, Kindle Loc. 190–194, Chapter 1, paragraph 2.

⁴⁴ Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, “Te Ao Marama: A Research Paradigm,” in *Te Oru Rangahau: Māori Research & Development Conference* (Palmerston North, NZ: Massey University, 1998), 80.

⁴⁵ Royal, “Te Ao Marama.”

⁴⁶ The Afrikaner “Great Trek,” following the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833, was a result of a deviant theological belief that giving black people equal standing with white “Christians” (more a cultural than theological designation) was “contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and religion.” Alec Ryrie, “The Gospel of Apartheid,” paper presented to Gresham College on 27 April 2017, https://www.gresham.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04-27_AlecRyrie_TheGospelOfApartheid.docx (accessed 8 April 2023). As modern history has shown, such a view has devastating effects and must be denounced as thoroughly incompatible with Scripture, even as similar ones are starting to appear again among right-wing neo-reformed Christians in the USA and elsewhere.

⁴⁷ Paul-Gordon Chandler, *God’s Global Mosaic: What We Can Learn from Christians Around the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 126.

⁴⁸ Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2012), 3.

⁴⁹ Joseph Shaules, *The Intercultural Mind: Connecting Culture, Cognition, and Global Living* (Boston: Intercultural, 2015), 17.

⁵⁰ Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp have continued Allport’s studies, confirming that intergroup contact reduces prejudice. See, for example, Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, “A Meta-analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2006): 751–83. Also, Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, “How does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-analytic Tests of Three Mediators,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 38, no. 6 (2008): 922–34.

⁵¹ Rutger Bregman, *Humankind: A Hopeful History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), Kindle Loc. 4856 of 7600.

Pioneer CIM Medical Missionary or Communist Martyr? The Unusual Story of an Influential Chinese Christian

Dr. Gao Jincheng (高金城)

Ma Tianji



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1. Introduction

Gao Jincheng (高金城), also known as Kao Gin-cheng¹ and Gao Guting,² was, according to numerous CIM reports, a pioneer of medical mission work in early twentieth-century China, including the region of what is now Gansu Province. Although not much detailed information is available about his life, we can reconstruct some important aspects of his life and missionary work. His uniqueness can be expressed in many ways. (1) His missionary activities, spanning several decades, creatively and responsibly, combined medical care for people with the spread of the gospel. (2) Interest in Gao arises from his high social influence, which contributed to the rescue of missionaries in some instances. (3) Gao's life story has been related from the perspective of the Communist Party of China (CPC), even though the accuracy of this version is far from certain. Obviously, his life has been stylized over time in certain narratives, the degree of authenticity of which needs to be verified. This is linked to some biographical inconsistencies that need to be clarified. A look at the existing literature in the media and research can reveal the essential portrait of Gao and the controversial dimension of his story.

2. Sources and previous research

In order to construct a reliable historical account of Gao, independent sources are imperative. Both Christian and secular sources, especially those from the latter, including the Communist Party of China (CPC), must be taken into consideration. Among the most significant Christian sources detailing Gao's life and service as a medical evangelist are reports in the China Inland Mission (CIM) periodical *China's Millions* from the 1920s and 1930s.³ These include, notably, Frank Houghton's memorial volume for George King, a friend and close associate of Gao, as well as documentation by CIM missionaries Mildred Cable and

Francesca L. French, derived from long-term personal interactions with Dr. Kao, his family, and friends.⁴

On the secular side, it is noteworthy that a memorial museum honoring the (Communist) "Martyr Gao Jincheng" was established in Zhangye in 2010.⁵ A brochure from the museum, reaching over a hundred pages, contains not only a life account of Gao from the CPC's perspective but also various testimonies from friends and family members about him.⁶

Scholars Lauren Pfister and Liu Jihua conducted an in-depth investigation into Gao's life in collaboration with Lanzhou University, focusing on Chinese Christians and communities in Northwest China during the first four decades of the twentieth century.⁷ Their findings are documented in an essay included in the volume *Shaping Christianity in Greater China: Indigenous Christians in Focus* and clarify some controversial dimensions of Gao's life, particularly his still unresolved disappearance in 1938, an event that from the Communist perspective has led to him being declared a heroic martyr. A notable merit of their study is the acquisition of additional information from Gao's living descendants through email correspondence, which adds to existing public documentation. For instance, Gao's religious activities and devotional habits were detailed by his youngest son, Gao Shijie (高士傑), providing a vivid picture of Gao's spiritual life.⁸

This present work builds upon the essay by Pfister and Liu, but incorporates additional, more recent sources. Overall, the focus of this work centers more on Gao's development regarding his Christian faith and his missionary ministry in connection with CIM. A second article will analyze some controversial aspects of Gao's life to elucidate the problematic facets of narrative constructions from both Christian and Communist interpreters.



CIM Hospital at Kaifeng, photographed by G. W. Guinness. From Geraldine Taylor, *Guinness of Honan* (London: CIM, 1930), 208.

It is intended to show that a one-dimensional heroization tends to distort Gao's life story, not only losing sight of the complex historical context in which he lived, but also obscuring the breadth of his work and how it has inspired others.

3. Life journey and ministry

3.1. Childhood and first encounters with the Christian faith

Gao Jincheng was likely born around 1888⁹ in a village near Kaifeng in Henan province, in impoverished circumstances. Few biographical details are known about his childhood.¹⁰ According to Cable and French, he had his first encounter with the Christian faith at the age of seven when he saw a Western missionary preaching on the street.

His first introduction to the Westerner, and to the Faith which he fearlessly preaches, was at a village fair, when,

at the close of a solemn discourse, the hearers were requested to close their eyes, while prayer was offered on their behalf. With characteristic quick wittedness, little Kin Cheng (for such is his first name) while appearing to cover his face with his hands, in reality converted his fingers into spy-glasses, the better to enable him to detect any suspicious act on the part of the strange man, who was, doubtless, using this means to take some nefarious advantage over his audience!¹¹

From a young age, Gao had to contribute to his family's livelihood, so he initially worked as a laborer in an evangelical church. According to Christian sources, Gao, at the age of 16, met the CIM missionary couple, Edward G. and Jane E. Bevis (畢斐然 and 馬素芬), who offered him a job as a household servant.¹² The couple quickly recognized Gao's talent and diligence and sent him to a school established by the CIM to receive a basic education.

According to Wong, an extraordinary encounter left a deep impression on Gao. In May 1905, a series of guests visited the Bevis's home, one of whom had a long pigtail. It was none other than Hudson Taylor, the founder of the CIM.¹³ Even after a long time, Gao remembered this personal encounter well, stating that he was deeply moved by Taylor's general demeanor and gentleness. Shortly afterward, under Bevis's guidance, Gao entrusted his life to Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. These events laid the foundation for his future work, in which he constantly sought God's help and guidance.

3.2. Medical education and the beginning of his missionary work

In Gao's hometown of Kaifeng, hundreds of patients had been treated by the medical missionaries in 1904. The reputation of the missionary medical clinic spread rapidly to the surrounding villages. The high demand led Dr. G. Whitfield Guinness (金純仁) to consider purchasing a plot of land and building a new hospital using funds collected in England.¹⁴ During this period of rebuilding, Dr. Guinness's colleague, Dr. Sidney H. Carr (柯維則), who was busy with his own work, was looking for a new medical student to serve as an assistant. He chose Gao, who had apparently made a good impression on him with his diligence and talent. The medical training would last twelve years, including a seven-year study program with numerous medical examinations and a five-year period of hospital assistance. With great determination, young Gao left his home to follow Dr. Carr in his medical work. The valuable experiences gained during his training



Front row from left: Gao, Dr. Guinness, Dr. Carr, with other students. From Taylor, *Guinness of Honan*, 229.



From left: Dr. Guinness with the three first student assistants; Gao is leftmost. From Taylor, *Guinness of Honan*, 200.

opened new perspectives for Gao and provided him with the opportunity to acquire medical knowledge and skills that he could later apply in his missionary service.¹⁵

The official reopening of the Kaifeng Gospel Hospital took place in January 1906. At that time, the staff consisted only of Dr. Carr, Dr. Guinness, and several medical students, including Gao. In the first year alone, several thousand patients were treated and approximately 300 surgeries performed. Before the completion of the seven-year program, Gao successfully passed all the required medical examinations through diligent and conscientious study, and, in 1911, he joined the hospital as an assistant physician. Gao's growth in medical knowledge and academic success went hand in hand with his spiritual growth. He passionately studied the Bible and was deeply moved by the gospel, which he desired to share with others in love and humility.¹⁶

3.3. The friendship with George King and the call to a new ministry in Lanzhou

As early as the summer of 1911, Gao Jincheng met Dr. George E. King (金品三), a Scottish medical missionary of roughly the same age who had been born in China to missionary parents. Gao and King quickly formed a lifelong friendship. The two shared similar visions and ideals: they valued medicine, had a strong missionary calling, and enjoyed engaging in evangelism. When King eventually transferred to the Wilson Memorial Hospital in Pingyang, Shanxi, in March 1912, Gao accompanied him.¹⁷

In 1915, George King founded the Borden Memorial Hospital in Lanzhou, Gansu. He asked his friend Gao to join the new medical team, as there was an urgent need for medical personnel, especially a Chinese doctor. Gao had already passed all his clinical medicine examinations, officially becoming a recognized physician with unlimited career prospects. Initially, Gao hesitated in his decision, though as Houghton describes it, he subsequently saw King's invitation as a Macedonian call (*cf.* Acts 16:9–10).

God gave him [King] another gift of incalculable worth—a trained Chinese colleague, and one whose qualities as doctor and evangelist

he had already proved, namely, the Dr. Kao who had accompanied him to Pingyang three years before ... and had since been giving valuable assistance there. Kao was once more on the staff at Kaifeng, and King laid the claims of Kansu before him. Was he to settle down to medical work—yes, and Christian work—in his native province of Honan, to accept, perhaps, some official appointment, or to sacrifice the opportunities which he had won by sheer merit and face the hardships of life in far-off Kansu? It was a call to definite missionary work, and one evening, after King had spoken to him, another Voice, more tender and more insistent, spoke so clearly that only one response was possible if he craved for God's best.¹⁸

At the end of 1915, he set off with his wife and their two daughters for his new position in the remote area. Together with King and Dr. Robert C. Parry (巴本全), Gao was involved in the training of medical students and led them to nearby and distant locations for evangelistic purposes.¹⁹ In one of the major cities in the region, Liangzhou (now Wuwei City)—the furthest mission station in northwest China under CIM—Gao frequently assisted W. M. Belcher (卜存仁) and his wife in their evangelistic work.²⁰ Over time, Gao traversed the Hexi Corridor, visiting cities and villages on the border of China. It is reported that Gao and King extended their itinerant medical evangelistic works into areas around Lanzhou, contacting many members of ethnic groups in that vast region. King was particularly fascinated by the diverse Muslim communities in



George King. From Frank Houghton, *George King: Medical Evangelist* (London: CIM, 1930), fontispiece.

the region, while Gao found engaging with Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhists uniquely challenging and intriguing.²¹

3.4. Evangelistic work and church planting in Ganzhou

In 1919, when the first students completed their medical education at the Borden Medical School and were to be sent to various locations for medical missionary work, Gao took the initiative and requested to be sent to Ganzhou (now Zhangye, Gansu) to advance the medical and evangelistic work there.²² Gao collaborated with a small group of Chinese Christians to establish the economic and institutional foundation for a new church. Leveraging his medical skills to assist those in need, he quickly coordinated efforts with others to acquire land. Over the next few years, they successfully built a distinct church community, while Gao emerged as a widely recognized and highly trusted Christian leader, community pastor, and practicing doctor. Reporting on his work in Ganzhou, Houghton said: "There was Dr. Kao, King's first colleague at Lanchow, laying deep the foundation of an indigenous church at Kanchow and beyond."²³ Gao was similarly praised in a 1925 report by King: "There to the northwest runs the great old road to Turkestan, and Persia, and Europe, along which the gospel is spreading now like a prairie fire, from the living Church in Kanchow."²⁴

The beginning of missionary work in Ganzhou was a particularly challenging time for Gao. Initially, he had to live in a cheap inn where he treated patients and preached the gospel. While his excellent medical skills soon earned him a good reputation, his sermons often encountered resistance and even persecution.²⁵ Despite the initial difficulties and all the disappointments, Gao remained persistent in his work. In the first year, only a few people came to faith, but over time, the number of believers grew to thirty. Worship services were held in the house he rented. In 1921, Mrs. Geraldine Taylor arrived in Ganzhou, met Gao, and witnessed the growth of the church. In her book *The Call of China's Great Northwest; or, Kansu and Beyond*, she expressed her enthusiasm for the ministry in Ganzhou:

Perhaps the most encouraging of these developments has been that of independent Chinese missionary effort. It is a new thing in Kansu to have the Gospel carried far afield by Chinese

Christians, unpaid and unsent save by the Spirit of GOD. Dr. Kao was the first, and it is a joy to record that the work at Kanchow grows and deepens. In August 1921 the first baptisms took place, when a little church was formed with seventeen members, two of whom were women. Now there are more than eighty inquirers, and it is all that Dr. Kao can do to shepherd the flock and make time for prayer, without which he realises there is no spiritual power. He speaks in a recent letter of rising at night to pray, and of longing above everything else that GOD would make him and keep him a man of prayer. Meanwhile the light is spreading and there are no fewer than thirteen places around Kanchow in which the Christians are at work.²⁶

In June 1923, three CIM missionaries, Mildred Cable (盖羣英), Eva F. French (馮貴珠), and Francesca L. French (馮貴石), who had previously served in Shanxi province, intended to move to northwest China to begin a new missionary work.²⁷ When they passed through Ganzhou in March 1924, they saw the chapel and the church bookstore on a main street in the city center, where evangelistic sermons were held daily at noon and attended by about 150 people.²⁸ While they were deeply impressed by the missionary work going on, they also saw the great need among believers for biblical instruction. In collaboration with Gao, they conducted a short-term Bible school for several months to equip the young Christians.²⁹

Within five years, Gao was able to establish a comprehensive evangelistic center in Ganzhou, including a chapel, medical clinic, and Bible school. The elaborate construction project was carried out with significant time invested by many believers. Bibles in Chinese, Arabic, Tibetan, and Mongolian were available in the chapel for people to take and read. By the end of 1924, 98 people had been baptized and the chapel was filled during worship services.³⁰

3.5. Gao's commitment to justice and his work under the "Christian General" Feng Yuxiang

Gao, along with Cable and the French sisters, often traveled to Suzhou to preach the gospel. At that time, the fortress commander of Suzhou, Wu Tongren (吳桐仁), collaborated with



Feng Yuxiang (center) with two officers, photographed by Captain H. Holmes. From Marshall Broomhall, *Marshal Feng: A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ* (London: CIM, 1924), frontispiece.

other officials to exploit and oppress the residents. Their cruel actions on the streets and in prisons, where people were injured or even killed, caused widespread horror. Courageously, Gao—who enjoyed a good reputation among the population and was acquainted with some influential individuals—advocated on behalf of the oppressed and the poor and providing at the hospital. In his role as pastor, he also cared for the wounded and sick in prisons. When Gao publicly exposed the atrocities committed by Wu and other officials, he incurred their wrath. They soon fabricated the accusation that Gao had raided the prison and released the prisoners.³¹ He was arrested and handed over to the governor of Gansu, Liu Yufen, with the intention of having him sentenced to death for treason.³²

It was only when the "Christian General", Feng Yuxiang (馮玉祥; 1882–1948),³³ a well-known warlord, led his troops into Gansu Province that Gao was declared innocent and released with the help of both Christians and the general population. However, imprisonment had severely affected his health. After Gao regained his freedom, General Feng appointed him to support the work of the Red Cross.³⁴ During the nationalist Northern Expedition, Gao accompanied the "Christian General" as his army marched further north. When Feng became the military governor of Zhengzhou at the beginning of 1928, Gao was appointed director of the military hospital in the city. Though he faithfully fulfilled his responsibilities at the hospital, his heart longed to return

to Gansu and continue his medical missionary work.³⁵

3.6. Gao's last years

Little information is available that recount Gao's activities in his later years. A few articles published in *China's Millions* report on how he utilized his recognized social status and numerous relationships to aid and support missionaries. From 1928 to 1930, the northern and northwestern regions of China were struck by a severe famine. In the spring of 1930, CIM General Director D. E. Hoste (何斯德) handed over relief funds and supplies worth over 50 million dollars to G. Findlay Andrew (安獻令), who was to distribute them to support the people in Gansu. However, the route from Xian to Lanzhou was extremely unsafe due to frequent bandit attacks and robberies. So it was that Gao accompanied and aided Andrew, ensuring the safe transportation of money and supplies to Lanzhou in Gansu.³⁶

Gao used his esteemed status and personal connections to rescue missionaries from emergency situations. On 8 August 1930, 3,000 Hui (Muslim) soldiers invaded Anding (now Dingxi County), ransacking the area. Irene Reynolds (任梅清) and Ruth L. Nowack (羅福生), who worked at the CIM mission station there, were in great danger. Fortunately, Gao quickly intervened, procured a safe pass for them, and brought them back to Lanzhou.³⁷ On 28 October of the same year, a nurse from the Borden Memorial Hospital, Emily Gomersal (孔寶書), accompanied Mrs. Helen M. Hayward (海文德) to Beijing and took care of her illness during the journey. Near Baotou, Inner Mongolia, they were robbed by bandits. Gao Jincheng led a company of government troops to rescue them and brought them safely to Beijing.³⁸

The Communist Party of China retains a particular interest in Gao because, from the perspective of their official historical narrative, he died a martyr's death. This version of his biography, which mainly focuses on Gao's last years, describes how he provided medical care to many injured soldiers of the CPC and contributed to rescue operations of the Red Army.³⁹ According to this account, Gao was arrested due to his sympathy towards the CPC and secretly murdered by Hang Qigong, a commander of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang),

in 1938.⁴⁰ These claims, however, cannot be independently verified. Based on the available records, it is likely that Gao had to leave the military hospital in 1929, as he seemingly had the freedom to come and go to assist missionaries in need. It is possible that Gao at this time continued to serve as a medical missionary to travel and evangelize the Hexi Corridor region and all places in Gansu province.⁴¹ Though the year of his death is uncertain, it can be provisionally dated to 1938.

Interim conclusion

Undoubtedly, Gao Jincheng is one of the most remarkable missionary figures who worked in China in the first half of the twentieth century. Christian sources attest to how his missionary work creatively combined medical care for people with the spread of the gospel among various ethnic groups in northwest China. Interest in Gao beyond Christian publications reflects his high social influence. Interest is also raised due to the striking gaps in his life story, particularly as they concern his last years and death. While the CPC version of the story Gao's death is known, the veracity of this version is far from certain. For this reason, a second article on Gao is envisioned to address some controversial issues surfaced in recent research and illuminate the problematic side of the narrative idealization found in both Christian and Communist records. **MRT**

¹ This article uses the pinyin form of his name throughout. However, it should be noted that in older sources he is frequently known as Kao Gincheng, for instance in Frank Houghton, *George King: Medical Evangelist* (London: China Inland Mission, 1930), 41. His Chinese surname can be literally translated "tall" and his given name means "golden city".

² According to the main sources and the statement of his youngest son, it can be assumed that Guting (固亭) is his style-name (zi 字). For a detailed account, see the main source: Lauren Pfister and Jihua Liu, "An Indigenous CIM Medical Missionary and National Hero: Unveiling complexities in the Story of Dr. Kao Gin-Cheng," in *Shaping Christianity in Greater China: Indigenous Christians in Focus*, ed. Paul Woods, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum, 2017), 134. The ancient Chinese considered that a person could only use their "ming" (名) in the presence of royalty or elders, while the "zi" was used to be addressed among peers or younger generations. Therefore, his first name appears in most public documents, while his style name is often used by his relatives and friends.

³ Evangeline French, Mildred Cable, and Francesca French, "The Far North-West: A Circular Letter (From Liangchowfu, Kansu, April 11, 1924)," *China's Millions*, British ed. (August 1924): 126–28; Evangeline French, Mildred Cable, and Francesca

French, "Progress in the Far North West: A Circular Letter (From Kanchow, Kansu, July 8, 1924)," *China's Millions*, British ed. (November 1924): 170–72; "In Kansu" and "Unevangelized Regions" in "Points from the Annual Report Presented at the Annual Meetings Held in the Queen's Hall, London, on the Occasion of the Mission's Diamond Jubilee on May 12th, 1925, 1865–1925," *China's Millions*, British ed. (June 1925): 90; "Editorial Notes," *China's Millions*, British ed. (July 1930): 115; I. Reynolds, "Advance Challenged in Kansu," *China's Millions*, British ed. (November 1930): 183, <https://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:221953>, E. J. Mann, "Forward Work in Kansu," *China's Millions*, British ed. (June 1931): 102–104, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:222171> (accessed 4 January 2024).

⁴ Houghton, *George King*; Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *Dispatches from North-West Kansu* (London: CIM, 1925), <https://archive.org/details/dli.pahar.2270>; Mildred Cable, Francesca French and Evangeline French, *A Desert Journal: Letters from Central Asia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), <https://archive.org/details/dli.pahar.2557>; Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *Through Jade Gate and Central Asia: An Account of Journeys in Kansu, Turkestan, and the Gobi Desert* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947), <https://archive.org/details/dli.pahar.2338> (accessed 4 Jan 2024).

⁵ 朱興忠 著, "感受紅色力量: 高金城烈士紀念館建設紀實" [Sensing the Strength of the Red: A Record of the Establishment of the Hero Gao Jincheng Memorial Museum, *Zhangye Daily* (8 August 2010), 1.

⁶ 陳金榮 姚興宏 主編, 祈連忠魂高金城: 高金城與張掖人民營救紅西路軍將士事蹟 (張掖: 高金城烈士紀念館, 2012) [Chen Jinrong and Yao Xinghong, eds., *Qilian's Faithful Gao Jincheng: An Account of Gao Jincheng and the People of Zhangye Rescuing the Red Army* (Zhangye: The Hero Gao Jincheng Memorial Museum, 2012)], cited in Pfister and Liu, "An Indigenous CIM Medical Missionary and National Hero," 133–34. Pfister and Liu acknowledge that this representation, aligning with an interpretative position oriented towards the CPC, relies on an older article in the journal *People*: 鄭仁泉 全士英 著, "祈連魂—黨的忠誠朋友高金城烈士" 人物 1987年第4期, 90–101. [Renquan Zheng and Shiyang Quan, "The Soul of the Qilian [Mountains]: The Faithful Friend of the Party, Hero Gao Jincheng," *People* 4 (1987): 90–101].

⁷ Pfister and Liu, "An Indigenous CIM Medical Missionary and National Hero." See also, Lauren F. Pfister and Yanrong Chen, "Following the Traces of Christians and Christian Communities in Northwestern China from 1920 to 1936," *Jian Dao* 37 (2012): 101–36; Lauren F. Pfister and Yanrong Chen, "Notes from Local and China Inland Mission Sources about Christians and Christian Communities in Northwestern China (1920–1936)," in Man-kong Wong, Wai-Luen Kwok, and Yee-Cheung Lau, eds., *法流十道: 近代中國基督教區或史研究 [The Religious [Law] Spread Through the Ten Circuits: Studies of Modern Chinese Christianity on the Basis of Regional Perspectives]* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2013), 593–612.

⁸ Pfister and Liu, "An Indigenous CIM Medical Missionary and National Hero," 135–36.

⁹ There is no consensus regarding Dr. Kao's birthdate. The majority of Chinese sources say he was born in 1886, while a Christian source places it in 1888. See "高金城," <http://ren.bytravel.cn/history/gaojincheng.html> (accessed 4 January 2024).

¹⁰ A short account of his early life can be found in the CIM materials and secular sources. Cable and French, *Through Jade Gate*, 43–45; Houghton, *George King*, 25–27; Chen and Yao, *Qilian's Faithful Gao Jincheng*, 1–5.

¹¹ Cable and French, *Through Jade Gate*, 43.

¹² 黃錫培 著, 捨命的愛: 中國內地會宣教士小傳 [Sik Pui Wong, *Sacrificial Love: Portraits of CIM Missionaries*], 2nd ed. (Petaluma, CA: CCM, 2007), 183. An extensive biography of Dr. Gao in Chinese is provided in Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 183–97. The problematic aspects of this source will be discussed in the following sections. In any case, Gao's birth and death dates are stated as unknown, while incorrect characters for his name are used. The account of Dr. Gao's life and work in that source concludes around 1931 and does not engage with any historical materials beyond Christian ones. Details of Dr. Gao's life and works in the online article by Li Yading, who evidently relies on the summary by Wong, are also limited to Christian sources. Yading Li, "Gao Jiancheng," *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*, <https://bdconline.net/en/stories/gao-jiancheng>; 李亞丁 "高金城," 華典, <https://bdconline.net/zh-hans/stories/gao-jincheng> (accessed 11 December 2023). To learn more about the service of Edward Bevis, see Edward G. Bevis, "Seed Sowing at Kai-feng Fu, Honan," *China's Millions*, North American ed. (June 1904): 64–65, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:218703> (accessed 4 January 2024).

¹³ Wong documents this encounter between Gao and Hudson Taylor shortly before the latter's death. Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 184. However, this has not been extensively described in any of the contemporary sources. It is accurate, though, that Hudson Taylor was in Henan shortly before his death and made various visits at that time. Howard Taylor, Katharine P. Shapleigh, and H. G. Barrie, *The Journey's End: The Story of the Last Days and Burial of the Rev. J. Hudson Taylor* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits, 2019).

¹⁴ Houghton, *George King*, 24.

¹⁵ Houghton, *George King*, 25–27. See also, Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 184–85. Christian sources underscore that pursuing a Christian education was not in accordance with his father's wishes. Consequently, the prospect of engaging in Christian education, even preceding the opportunity to study medicine, generated internal conflict within his family.

¹⁶ Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 185.

¹⁷ Houghton, *George King*, 26.

¹⁸ Houghton, *George King*, 40–41. Wong describes Gao's dramatic struggle. "One evening at the hospital, as he was on his knees praying, he heard the still voice of Jesus calling him and quietly rebuking him: 'What have you lacked all these years? Which of the things which I promised you have failed to come to pass? Did I call you in order for you to become a high official or a celebrity? Or to spread the gospel?' At once, he felt a sense of deep self-reproach, and saw that he had forgotten God's mercy and had been ungrateful. Searching his heart, he asked himself, 'If it had not been for God's call and provision, where would he be today? If so many missionaries had not cared for both his body and his soul, where would he have gotten this opportunity to be a doctor?' At this point, he re-affirmed his covenant with Christ willingly to lay down everything to be a faithful servant of the Lord, wherever he should be sent." Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 186.

¹⁹ Houghton, *George King*, 41–44.

²⁰ Geraldine Taylor, *The Call of China's Great North-west; or, Kansu and Beyond* (London: CIM, 1923), 68, 70–72, <https://archive.org/details/dli.pahar.2233> (accessed 15 January 2024).

²¹ Houghton, *George King*, 37, 48; Cable and French, *Through Jade Gate*, 46.

²² Cable and French, *Dispatches from North-West Kansu*, 3–5.

²³ Houghton, *George King*, 57.

²⁴ Houghton, *George King*, 55.

²⁵ Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 188–89; Arthur Moore,

“The City of Kanchow, in Kansu. The Work of the Gospel There,” *China’s Millions*, British ed. (1922): 24–25.

²⁶ Taylor, *The Call of China’s Great North-West*, 198.

²⁷ These three women had dedicated at least two decades of their lives to living and working in a girls’ school in the city of Huozhou, Shaanxi province.

As CIM missionaries, they sought a transition from educational missionaries to itinerant evangelists in the Gansu region, encompassing parts of what is now Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Qinghai. It marked the beginning of their unique career as “The Trio” or “The Three Righteous Women.”

During this distinctive phase, they crossed paths with Dr. Gao and made the decision to join him and his Ganzhou Christian community. This collaboration proved to be an immensely significant and creative missionary endeavor. Cable and French, *Through Jade Gate*; Pfister and Chen, “Following the Traces

of Christians and Christian Communities in Northwestern China from 1920 to 1936,” 101–136, cited by Pfister and Liu, “An Indigenous CIM Medical Missionary and National Hero,” 138.

²⁸ Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 189.

²⁹ James O. Fraser expressed great appreciation in this work. See Eileen Crossman, *Mountain Rain: A New Biography of James O. Fraser*, rev. and ed. M. E. Tewkesbury (Bletchley: Authentic, 2006), 210–11.

³⁰ Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 190.

³¹ Cable and French, *Through Jade Gate*, 152; Chen and Yao, *Qilian’s Faithful Gao Jincheng*, 3.

³² It is recorded that Gao was arrested by members of the police force under Mr. Wu’s supervision and remained in jail from 17 February to 1 June 1926. Cable and French, *Through Jade Gate*, 150.

³³ Feng converted to Christianity in 1914 and began leading his troops with a combination of Christian socialism and military discipline. He became known

for baptizing his soldiers with a water hose. See Marshall Broomhall, *Marshal Feng: A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ?* (London: CIM, 1924).

³⁴ Cable and French, *Through Jade Gate*, 156.

³⁵ Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 193.

³⁶ Reynolds, “Advance Challenged in Kansu,” 182; “Editorial Notes,” *China’s Millions*, British ed. (July 1930): 115, 118.

³⁷ Reynolds, “Advance Challenged in Kansu,” 182–83.

³⁸ W. H. Aldis, “Editorial Notes,” *China’s Millions*, British ed. (1931): 14–15, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:222171> (accessed 4 Jan 2024).

³⁹ Chen and Yao, *Qilian’s Faithful Gao Jincheng*.

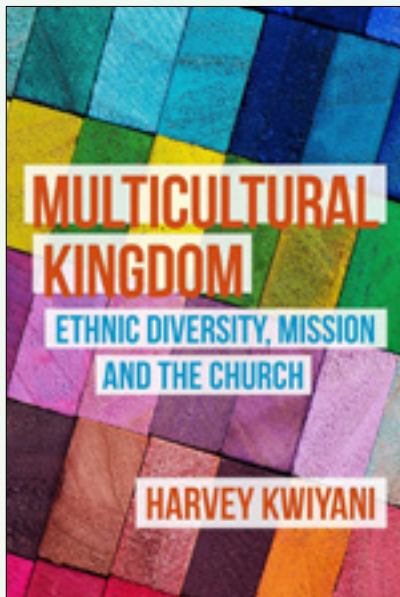
⁴⁰ “高金城 Gao Jincheng.” 百度百科, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/高金城/6316801> (accessed 11 December 2023).

⁴¹ Wong, *Sacrificial Love*, 194.

Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church

By Harvey Kwiyani. London: SCM, 2020. ISBN 978-0-334-05752-9. 256 pp.

Reviewed by Walter McConnell



Kwiyani’s book rightly declares that the church is a Multicultural Kingdom. His understanding is strikingly illustrated by his mother’s comparison of the church to a mosaic. “The beauty comes out of each piece being in its right place and contributing its colours—and all the pieces, in their magnificent colours, are needed for the mosaic to be a mosaic” (3). No matter what color we may be or how we fit into the mosaic, the book will give readers insight into what it

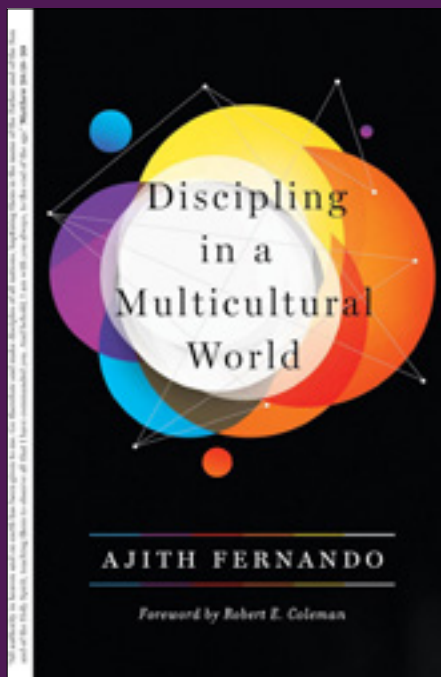
means for the church to be multinational, multiethnic, and multicultural and thus reflect Christ’s vision and reveal both the goal of mission and means by which it is accomplished.

Following an introductory chapter, the book falls into three parts. Two chapters summarize the spread of the gospel through the modern (mainly Protestant) mission movement, how this interfaced with colonialization, and the recent migration of Christians to former colonizing countries, particularly Britain (where Kwiyani, who was originally from Malawi, now lives). Migration has caused places that were once largely monocultural to display great ethnic and cultural diversity. The next part considers the implications of the church’s diversity from cultural, ecclesiastical, and missiological perspectives. A main goal is to show that cultural diversity is a gift from God to be celebrated and taken advantage of. The final chapters focus on what Kwiyani identifies as the need for churches to reflect this diversity in their membership, leadership, and worship practices. Though the ideas discussed can be applied to many settings worldwide, the book is largely written for a British Christian audience.

As this book was written by a concerned Christian to his brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a highly personal account, peppered with numerous stories that illustrate the realities faced by many who live in culturally diverse contexts. There is much to applaud. As our earthly worship should resemble that which is to come, the mosaic Kwiyani envisions is a precursor of the worldwide multitude that Revelation says will worship the

Lamb in the future kingdom. The author’s emphasis on our need to express hospitality, listen to one another, and build cross-cultural relationships demonstrates his concern for the needs of both minority and majority people within a larger culture and highlights things that benefit everyone. While this is nothing startling, it is refreshing to hear it again, read examples of how it is being done, and realize that it can be transferred to other settings.

Though this very readable book has a lot going for it, it is far from perfect. The power of some points is weakened by frequent repetition. How many times do we need to hear about rapid church growth in Africa or that the Western church needs to listen to immigrants? The author, just like the rest of us, at times uses Scripture and church history to support his ideas even when it is not certain that they do. The fact that Antioch was a cosmopolitan city and the church there had a multiethnic leadership does not demand that churches today follow this pattern. Similarly, tracing mission history back no farther than William Carey ignores more than 1700 years of mission by non-Protestants along with the fact that through much of its history the church was stronger and more missionally active in Asia and Africa than in Europe. Readers should also be careful to think through the statistics given. Some are just plain wrong and some are used to support ideas that conflict with others in the book. These cautions aside, most missionaries—particularly those working with diasporic peoples—would benefit from giving this book a thorough reading.



Discipling in a Multicultural World

By Ajith Fernando. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. ISBN 978-1-4335-6285-3. 238 pp.

Reviewed by Nathan Keller

The only imperative in the Greek of the Great Commission is “make disciples.” For this reason, and rightly so, a vast number of books have been written about disciple making; Ajith Fernando’s *Discipling in a Multicultural World* is a unique contribution to this field. It sparkles like a brilliant gem on a bookshelf among many other good books and thus stands out, calling out to be read, ingested, and lived out.

Fernando uses the metaphor of “spiritual parenthood” to describe the process of making disciples. Just as parenthood is filled with joys and sorrows, times of excitement and times of exhaustion, so too is helping others become disciples of Jesus Christ. Fernando summarizes the heart of discipleship: “Disciplers are servants of disciples, doing all we can to help them grow and be fruitful” (258).

This attitude echoes the Apostle Paul, who wrote of his own work of discipleship: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col 1:28–29 ESV).

Many books on discipleship focus on either what it means to be a disciple of Jesus or provide step-by-step methods of how to make disciples of Jesus. This book is different.

In the first half, six chapters introduce the nature and importance of spiritual parenthood. Here, Fernando addresses why it’s needed, objections to it, as well as the importance of the Christian community in helping people grow as disciples. He then addresses the distinction between earthly and heavenly families, the reality of suffering as a Christian, and how the spiritual parent can intentionally perform certain actions to grow a disciple.

In the second half of the book, Fernando takes readers on a unique,

yet comprehensive, exploration of the different ways in which disciples of Jesus change and transform, and thus grow as life-long disciples.

In this half, Fernando writes about what is included in the process of change, how learning God’s truth through various ways leads to change, and how praying for those whom we disciple helps them to change. He then has three insightful chapters on how understanding the biblical teachings regarding guilt/forgiveness, honor/shame, and fear/liberation can lead to a Christian growing as a mature disciple of Jesus Christ. He finishes with a chapter on the importance that experiencing Christ’s healing of wounds can have in a disciple’s life and maturity. These later four chapters are what makes this book truly unique.

Having received his formal theological education in the United States, Fernando writes in the style of a Western pastor-theologian. Yet, as a Sri Lankan man who lives, understands, and ministers in Asia, he deeply understands the challenges of being a disciple of Jesus in a non-Christian environment. As a result, this book is filled with insights and illustrations of what it means to make disciples in the non-Western world. Included are the themes of honoring parents, being part of a collective society, and being surrounded by a culture of animistic worship. These are the cultural and religious realities that are experienced in the ministry fields where many missionaries live and serve.

As the world is becoming more global, and once Christian-majority societies are experiencing drastic change, the discipleship principles in this book are needed in the West as well. Its teaching is thus truly global in scope.

I strongly encourage anyone who would like to be a reflective practitioner of Christian mission to read *Discipling in a Multicultural World* and to put what you learn into practice. May this book be a great aid as you spiritually parent others to be disciples of Jesus.