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Foreword

One of the hallmarks of modernity is the fragmentation of life into different spheres: public and private; economic, social, political, and religious; rich and poor. This fragmentation is reflected in the university, with its many disciplines and narrow specializations. With this fragmentation has come the loss of any sense of the dramatic story underlying all history.

There are attempts to recapture this story. If we ask Marxists what is going on, most lay out a story of oppression by the bourgeoisie and a revolution that will restore righteousness on earth for all. Many scientists outline a story of evolution and the triumph of reason. But these attempts are rapidly losing their credibility, and most of us are left to live in a world of highly specialized knowledge and no integrating cosmic story.

The same is true for many Christians. Reginald Bibby documents what many of us know from experience. Most Christians have a smorgasbord theology—based on the study of specific biblical passages in sermons, Sunday School classes, and Bible studies—which answers certain questions and focuses on individuals and their needs. Most Christians talk about personal salvation and what God has done for them in their lives. They have a theology of worship and fellowship, of health and prosperity, and of care for the needy. But they have little in their thinking for a world full of diverse peoples, of an earth caught up in the evils of sin, of a history from before Creation to eternity, or of the reason for their existence in such a world.

In seminaries, too, this fragmentation and specialization has taken its toll. Great care is given to the detailed study of one biblical passage or another, of one biblical hero or another, and of what the Gospel means to us in our lives today. We have a doctrine of God, of sin and personal salvation, and of divine healing and provision. We have a fragmented story—of Jesus, Ruth, David, Mary, and Peter. No longer do we see ourselves as part of a movement far greater than ourselves and a universal history that gives meaning to our lives because it shows us our place in a cosmic story.

In this masterpiece of reflection based on many years of global ministry, teaching, and reflection, Arthur Glasser draws together the many strands of Scripture and gives us again a great vision of the unity of all history. He examines the themes of King and Kingdom as these run through Scripture. He shows that all of Scripture points to the fact that God is a missionary God, that the church is to be a missionary community, and that God's people are to be missionary people. He shows us that mission is at the center of God's great plan, not only of redemption, but also of Creation. He reminds us that this mission is God's mission, that it is much bigger than the little worlds in which we minister, and that it includes not only the salvation of individuals and the redemption of the church but also the reestablishment of God's Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and justice in a new heaven and a new earth. If we as God's people truly meet God, we cannot not be a missionary people, and the church cannot exist apart from mission. Our ministries take on meaning not because they are deeds of witness and service, important as these are, but because they are part of the great mission of God.

Glasser provides a coherent view of the Kingdom running through all of Scripture. In doing so, he brings together Old Testament and New Testament, Jew and Gentile, theology and mission. He shows how God's people, Israel, are important in God's mission plan, but that the Kingdom includes all people.

For those of us who had the privilege of studying under and working with Arthur Glasser, this volume is most welcome. Arthur Glasser's teachings and writings have been life transforming for many of us. For the greater church and for missions this book is very timely. In missions and in the larger church, we live in a time of fragmentation—of substituting theologically founded mission with aimless activism. We need to pause and take stock of where we are going. We need to recapture the vision of mission that runs through Scripture, and use that as the basis for the motivation and methods we use in mission outreach.

If the church recovers a vision of mission as seen in the Bible, it will be revived. If in Christian missions we recover that vision, we will be freed from the tyranny of activism and human-centeredness and recover the long-range perspective and coherence that we now lack. We will joyfully participate in God's mission because we have met a missionary God, and because he has sent us into the world to proclaim salvation, righteousness, justice, and peace.

The danger is that we will do with this work what we do best as moderns. We will classify it, label it, and send it to the right department in church or seminary for action. We will be satisfied that the job will get done if it is assigned to the right people. And then we can get on with the important things in our everyday lives. But church history is a warning. When a church loses its missionary vision, God raises up a new church to carry on the task. Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Constantinople, Rome, Scotland, Germany, England, and North America have been centers of mission outreach. But when they lost that vision they became peripheral to God's great mission. Today God is raising up young churches around the world who see mission as their central reason for existence on earth because in worship they have met a missionary God and heard his call to proclaim his Kingdom to a

lost and needy world. The question is whether the Western churches will be part of that movement, or another side branch in the history of the Kingdom. But Glasser's call goes deeper—to each one of us as God's sign and witness to that Kingdom. In that sense this is a dangerous book, for when we know the truth and hear God's call, we must respond—either with obedience or indifference.

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