

FORWARDS

Forward

Since World War II the world has seen an unprecedented migration of people around the world. Outsiders look at the prospects these immigrants have in their new lands, but the immigrants are caught in the unforeseen cultural dislocation such movements create. The hopes of many of them are shattered as they collide with a new culture, and they realize painfully that they will not be able to preserve their cultures in the new lands. Their children grow up in the new culture and want to identify with it, but are pulled back by their kin folk and churches. The result is often shattered dreams and broken relationships.

Social scientists have studied immigration, and its effects on parents and children, but their theories are often abstract and impersonal. Young Hertig takes us into the lives of the people themselves. She helps us hear the stories of parents who want desperately to nurture their children, and of children trying to build their lives in a new world which is foreign to their parents. She highlights the areas of conflict between parents and children, old and young church leaders, and the Korean community and its neighbors in America. It is of vital importance for all those living and ministering in immigrant communities to hear these stories, because they show us the lives of real people.

Hertig goes beyond analysis and gives us biblical and social principles to help immigrants make healthy transitions into their new worlds. She points out the importance of dialogue to build relationships between parents and children, older and younger leaders, immigrants and their neighbors. This must begin with listening deeply to understand the others. It calls for vulnerability and the willingness to give up control to negotiate solutions in which both parties win. It invites the church to be a community of healing that not only helps immigrants and their

children meet God, but also a place where the immigrant community as a body can build true fellowship, acculturate successfully in a strange environment, and be an effective witness for God in their new country.

Paul G. Hiebert

Introduction

Mission outreach has always disturbed the peace of the church. This was true of the early church as it encountered and finally incorporated Gentile converts into Christian fellowship (Acts 13, 15). It was true when missionaries evangelized the tribes of Europe and Inner Asia. It is true today as western churches encounter nonwestern cultures and religions on a global scale.

So long as the church turns in on itself, its task remains relatively easy--building a community of worship and faith. It can turn its attention to developing the social organization that holds the church together--on defining and allocating roles, economic resources, power and legitimacy. It can give itself to defining the orthodox beliefs and practices of the community. Once these social and cultural systems are operational, they normally need only minor adjustments to keep the church functioning over time.

Mission to the outside world challenges this comfortable order. It raises profound questions of cultural and historical differences. Who are these strangers we now encounter? What is the nature of these 'others' and of 'otherness' itself? How can we communicate the gospel to them faithfully and accurately without exporting our own cultural beliefs? What is the gospel in their context? And what, in retrospect, is the gospel in our context? These are critical questions that we are forced to ask when we enter into mission.

The questions multiply when we have converts in these new cultures. How we help give birth to living churches in these societies, and how should we relate to them after they are born? These 'others' are now 'us,' but they are so different from us, not only in their languages, customs, and beliefs, but also in their interpretations of the Bible and their theological reflections. Should they adopt our theological teachings? If so, how do we keep theology from being forever

foreign in their lives? If not, how do we avoid theological confusion and the fragmentation of the church into a thousand islands of beliefs in a sea of relativism?

Charles Van Engen addresses these central missiological issues in this volume. He examines the question of doing theologies in specific contexts, such as in the city, and shows us the benefits and the concerns we face when we encourage all believers to theologize in their own settings--when we take seriously the priesthood of all believers. He traces the current debates emerging out of issues raised by religious pluralism and wrestles with how we can proclaim the uniqueness of Christ without being arrogant and triumphalistic. He looks at the impact modernity and post-modernity are having on the mission movement in the west, and calls for a renewal of our own commitment as followers of Jesus Christ in the harsh cultural environments of our day. He explores the changing nature of the roles of missionaries and ministers in young churches, and he raises the difficult questions related to the unity of the church in the midst of its global proliferation, diversity and fragmentation. Of exceptional value is the way Van Engen traces the history of recent discussions on each of these issues and the wealth of bibliographic sources he gives us for further study. Equally important are new answers he offers to these questions--answers that help us move beyond the impasses that characterize so much of our current thinking. In this, he has contributed greatly to the cause of Christian mission in our day.

missionary movement. Not all will agree with all of Van Engen's suggestions, nor does he expect them to. What he challenges us to do is to face these questions honestly, to hear what others have to say about them, and to submit our understandings to the authority of Scripture.

Van Engen does much more, however, than review the debates on the key issues raised by

the modern mission movement and suggest new, biblical solutions. More significantly, he provides us with a meta-theology--a theology of how we should do theology--that helps us deal with all such problems that emerge in our mission outreach to a lost and broken world. It is this model that provides the underlying coherence of the book. Van Engen begins with an unquestioned faith in the Bible as fully inspired, divine revelation--the authority by which we must test all theological truth. But how are we to interpret Scripture in our day given our own cultural and historical contexts and biases? Whose interpretation should we follow? Here Van Engen turns to his second metatheological principle, namely, that the church should be the hermeneutical community that reads the Scriptures together and discerns what God's Spirit is saying to it through the Scriptures. Too often we have made theologizing the task of a few. Consequently, ordinary Christians are not taught to think biblically about what it means to be Christian in their own daily settings. Moreover, our theologies are often divorced from real life. The author calls us to let the Bible address and transform each of us as individuals, and the church as a whole in our contexts by doing theology-on-the-way. The result is a living, relevant theology rooted in Scripture and resulting in mission and transformation.

What keeps the church from becoming an ingrown community cut off from the world around it? Van Engen's third hermeneutical principle is that the church must study Scripture as a community that is always in mission. Mission is at the very heart of the Gospel and the life of the Church. Mission is not one of the many tasks the church is called upon to do. It is of the very essence of the church itself. In doing mission the church must know the sociocultural and historical contexts of the world in which it lives and ministers to communicate the Gospel meaningfully, and to be God's prophetic agent calling for the conversion and transformation of

people, societies and cultures.

If we apply this metatheological model to our mission outreach today, we are forced to redefine the concept of mission itself. Van Engen does not back away from facing this core issue. His greatest contribution in this volume may be to challenge us to rethink our understandings of our calling, and to bring us back to the biblical basis of the meaning and methods of doing mission-on-the-way.

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