

FORWARD:

Arthur Glasser's Book

Forward

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 a loss of the big story underlying all history.

There are attempts to recapture the big 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. Some scientists outline a story of evolution and the triumph of reason. But these are rapidly losing their credibility, and most are left to live in a world of highly specialized knowledge and no integrating story.

The same is true for many Christians. Reginald Bibby documents what many of us know from experience, most Christians have a smorgasboard theology based on the study of specific biblical passages in sermons, Sunday School classes and Bible studies, which focuses on themselves, their friends and their churches. Most tell us about their personal salvation and what God has done for them in their personal lives. They have a theology of worship and fellowship, of health and prosperity, and of care for the needy. They have no place in their thinking for a world full of diverse peoples, or of a history from before creation to eternity, or of the reason for their existence in such a world.

In seminaries great care is given to the detailed study of one biblical passage and another, on the life of one biblical hero and another, and of what the gospel means to us in the church 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, David, Adam and Peter. No longer do we see ourselves as part of a cause much greater than ourselves, a movement that explains all of

creation and history, and that gives meaning to our lives because it shows us our place in this cosmic story.

In this masterpiece of reflection based on many years of global ministry, teaching and reflection, Arthur Glasser has drawn together the many strands of Scripture and given us again the great vision running through all of 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 the God's people are to be missionary people. That mission is all encompassing. It speaks of personal salvation, but also of corporate redemption and the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness, peace and justice.

Arthur Glasser helps us see the big picture within which our local activities take place. He shows that mission is at the center of God's great plan of creation and redemption. 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 reign of righteousness, peace and justice in a new heavens and a new earth. If we as God's people truly meet God, we can not not be missionary people, and the church cannot exist apart from mission. Our ministries take on meaning not in themselves as 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. Shows how God's people Israel are important in God's mission, 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 many of us, Art Glasser's teachings and writings have been life transforming. They have reminded us of the big story in which we work in missions. Reminding us that what we do is significant because it belongs to that big story. Freed us up from the tyranny of activism and human-centeredness. From the burden that we must make mission work, freeing us to look for God's work and participating in it fully. But calling us to passivity, but to active participation 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 be done, and that we can get on with the other 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 now 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. The question is whether the Western churches will be part of that movement, or another side branch in the history of the Kingdom.