CONCLUSION:
ONGOING IMPERATIVE FOR WORLD MISSION

By D. A. Carson

Granted the interests and character of our honoree John Woodbridge, granted the focus of the essays in this *Festschrift*, and granted the title assigned me—"The Ongoing Imperative for World Mission"—I should relieve your suspense and tell you right away that I'm for world mission. I hope that doesn't come as too big a surprise.[1]

Yet what shall I do with this title? To show something of the sweep of possible discussions the title might call forth, I shall begin by outlining some of the roads I might have traveled in this address, but chose to resist resolutely, before pursuing another way.

The Roads Not Traveled

I shall offer an apostolic number of such roads. Granted "the ongoing imperative for world mission," we might have usefully surveyed:

(1) *An array of "Great Commission" texts*.[2] We might have begun with Matthew 28:16–20. Here we observe that the controlling verb is "make disciples," not "make decisions" or "entertain the sheep." The three supporting participles, all carrying some imperatival force from the context, require us to go, baptize, and teach the disciples everything Jesus has commanded—which sounds as if there might be some further propositional and imperatival content, and not just the biblical storyline. The form of the Great Commission in Luke 24:46–49 is cast as fulfillment and prediction—fulfillment, in that Jesus Christ's passion and

[1] As this paper was presented at a banquet honoring Dr John D. Woodbridge, and not as one of the technical papers of the conference, I have decided to preserve the slightly chatty nature of the presentation, and to keep footnotes to a minimum.

[2] Most recently, see the competent survey by Robert L. Plummer, "The Great Commission in the New Testament," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9.4 (2005): 4–11.

resurrection were predicted in Scripture, and prediction, for in consequence of Jesus' death and resurrection, "repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."[3] The disciples are witnesses of these things, and Jesus further promises "to send what my Father has promised"—doubtless a reference to the Holy Spirit—so that these believers will be "clothed with power from on high." Similar themes are developed in Acts 1, with the geographical extension of the ministry of the witnesses spelled out rather more clearly: "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). John's form of the Great Commission (John 20:19–23) is prefaced by Jesus' appearance to the disciples in a closed and locked room and His greeting "Peace be with you." Doubtless this is meant to be more than a casual *Shalom*; it is meant to be evocative of a huge theological structure. For John's Gospel has made clear that the person who does not obey the Son stands under the abiding wrath of God (John 3:36), while in His death and resurrection the Son fulfills His role as the ultimate sin-bearing "Lamb of God" (1:29, 34). The peace that Jesus promised His followers just a few days earlier, on the night He was betrayed—"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (14:27)—is anchored in His own death and resurrection. And now, risen from the grave, Jesus tells the ten disciples gathered in the room, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (20:21). Some have bled the dramatic parallelism in this commission for more than it can carry,[4] yet the power of this standard of sacrifice and service will never be matched by even the most heroic missionary. And once again, the commission is tied to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins.

Of course, the theme of the Great Commission extends beyond these specific texts. For instance, we cannot forget the instructions of the Spirit to commission Paul and Barnabas for the work of the first missionary journey; nor can we forget the apostle's self-understanding—he is an ambassador of the Great King, conveying His message, "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). But although such texts clamor for attention, for our purposes they must remain a road not traveled.

(2) *The biblical theology of "Great Commission" texts*. Very often Christians have studied the Great Commission texts in isolation from the books or corpora in which they are embedded, and thus unwittingly denuded them of some of their power. To take but one example—before reading Matthew 28, we are expected to read Matthew 1–27. The very first verse announces the ancestry of Jesus through David back to Abraham. Abraham figures elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew 3, John the Baptist tells us that God is able to "raise up children for Abraham" out of the stones themselves. Apparently genetics does not control the locus of the people of God, despite the covenant with Israel. A

[3] Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, TODAY'S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. TNIV®. Copyright© 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

[4] See the careful treatment by Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

little later, Jesus Himself tells us that "many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 8:11). We are not far from anticipating the theology of the apostle Paul, who says that the real children of Abraham are those who share Abraham's faith (e.g., Rom 4). The genealogy of Jesus, in Matthew 1, draws attention, among other things, to the non-Hebrews, including Ruth, a Moabitess who, according to the law, should have been excluded from Israel. The name of Jesus is carefully parsed for us—it is nothing other than the Greek form of Joshua, which means "Yahweh saves"—and so Jesus comes to save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). Coming as it does in the opening lines of the book, this explanation provides a grid for the rest of this first Gospel. This is the book which shows us how Jesus comes to save His people from their sins—by His teaching, by the inauguration of the kingdom, by His death and resurrection, by His consummating return. Small wonder there is a trainee mission (Matt 10) to prepare His disciples for the work of outreach they will have to undertake, in both Jewish and Gentile contexts (and thus cross-culturally), after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The eschatological discourse reminds us that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14). Much more could be said, but you get the idea—the Great Commission is not simply tacked on at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Rather, it brings to a climax one of the themes that drives through the entire book. Similar things could be said, with various emphases, of every book and corpus in the New Testament, anchoring our Great Commission texts to the very structure of the new covenant. And of course, precisely because such themes have been marvelously probed in recent years by, on the one hand, Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien,[5] and, on the other, by Eckhard Schnabel,[6] little needs to be said about them here.

(3) *The still larger biblical storyline*. Rather myopically, I have limited myself so far to New Testament texts. Yet the New Testament documents nestle within an entire canonical framework. The first responsibility of sentient creatures, not least of God's image-bearers, is to recognize their creatureliness, with all that creatureliness entails. Failure to do so is the beginning of idolatry, and therefore of condemnation and death. The most spectacular evidence of God's grace is His pursuit of rebels. Despite the amount of space devoted to God's choice of Israel and to all of the history that flows from this choice, Paul is entirely right to point out that the history of Israel is itself nestled within the still larger history of humanity's creation and fall. That is why we need a New Adam Christology, as much as, say, a high priestly Christology; and that is why we must recognize that the promise to Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed is not done away by the Mosaic covenant. It would be enriching to tease out the countless Old Testament anticipations of the cultural

[5] *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (NSBT 11; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

[6] *Early Christian Mission*. Vol. 1: *Jesus and the Twelve*. Vol. 2: *Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

and racial open-endedness of the people of God in the last times—texts such as Isaiah 19:23–25: "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. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.'" But these massive biblical structures of thought and expectation I must reluctantly set aside—though I will briefly return to this specific passage a little later.

(4) *Responses to objections: alternative exegeses*. Despite the apparently straightforward nature of the Great Commission texts, some have argued that the commission applied only to the apostles, or only to the first generation of believers, so it has no ongoing mandate today. Certainly the apostles enjoyed some unique functions. Nevertheless, if the Great Commission itself tells the apostles to teach *their* disciples to obey *everything* that Jesus commanded them, presumably the command inherent in the Great Commission should not be excluded. Matthew's version of the Great Commission does not read, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, except for this commandment to make disciples. Keep their grubby hands off that one, since it belongs only to you, my dear apostles. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The ludicrousness of this reading merely has to be spelled out; the laughter will handle the rest. Moreover, Paul can instruct a Timothy to find reliable men who will be able to teach others (2 Tim 2:2) He certainly does not mean, ". . . teach others everything except the gospel, of course, since that job was given to apostles only." The believers in Revelation 12 overcome the devil himself by three means—and one of them, as we shall see, is the word of their testimony. But enough—there is little value in exploring that particular objection further.

(5) *Responses to objections: the job's already done*. This objection is grounded in a peculiar reading of a handful of texts. Jesus had predicted that the gospel would be preached to all nations. Paul, writing to the Colossians, happily asserts that the gospel "has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven" (Col 1:23; a handful of texts express similar thoughts: e.g., Rom 10:17–18; 1 Tim 3:16). Lest we succumb too quickly to pedantry, it is worth recalling that elsewhere Paul asserts, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known" (Rom 15:20), and as a result plans to head to Spain (15:24). The sweeping claim that the gospel has already been preached in all nations and to every creature, then, must be qualified by Paul's own assessment. More importantly, the claim must be read in the light of the Bible's handling of salvation-historical developments. For two millennia, the focus of much of God's redemptive work was among the Israelites; now, Paul is saying, in fulfillment of God's ancient purposes, the gospel has gone to all the nations, to every creature. That is precisely the point Paul makes, among others, when he addresses the

Athenian intelligentsia (Acts 17:30). But once again, we cannot pause to focus on this question.

(6) *Responses to objections: postmodern predilections*. I have no intention of taking cheap shots at postmodernism, partly because I'm still trying to figure out what it is. If it is tied to our finiteness, and thus to the insistence that we cannot escape the narrowness of our vision, then it is hard to deny its cogency. Surely it is true to say that there are two kinds of perspectivalist—those who admit it and those who do not. Of beings that can be said to know, only an omniscient God is free from perspectivalism.

Nevertheless, the harder voices of postmodernism raise two objections to the Great Commission. The *first* is nicely articulated by Brian McLaren. In the light of the cultural move from modernism to postmodernism, he argues, we should stop thinking so antithetically and join hands with co-religionists such as Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, refusing to proselytize each other's members as we stand, shoulder-to-shoulder, against the far greater dangers of injustice, social evils, and secularism.[7] Indeed, in his most recent book, McLaren says that what he calls "the secret message of Jesus," stripped of events in Jesus' life such as the cross, is potentially of great benefit to all the world's religions: "This reappraisal of Jesus' message may be the only project capable of saving a number of religions, including Christianity, from a number of threats, from being co-opted by consumerism or nationalism to the rise of violent fundamentalism in their own ranks."[8] I confess I am finding it difficult to decide whether McLaren more seriously misunderstands and misrepresents Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, or Christ.[9]

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[7] E.g., see Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 83: "The church must present the Christian faith not as one religious army at war against all other religious armies but as one of many religious armies fighting against evil, falsehood, destruction, darkness, and injustice."

[8] Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything* (Nashville, Tenn.: W Publishing Group, 2006), 7–8.

[9] McLaren believes that "it's significant to note that all Muslims regard Jesus as a great prophet, that many Hindus are willing to consider Jesus as a legitimate manifestation of the divine, that many Buddhists see Jesus as one of humanity's most enlightened people, and that Jesus himself was a Jew" (ibid., 7). This is formally correct, and profoundly misleading. (a) Although "Muslims regard Jesus as a great prophet," none of them sees Him as the greatest prophet. That is strictly reserved for Muhammad. Moreover, they think that Trinitarianism is ridiculous at best and blasphemous at worst, deny that Jesus rose from the dead, and, for the most part, deny that He died on the cross. (b) True, "Hindus are willing to consider Jesus as a legitimate manifestation of the divine," but this willingness extends equally to seeing all religious leaders as a manifestation of the divine. Indeed, some Hindus think of *all* human beings as manifestations of the divine. This has nothing to do with the uniqueness of the incarnation. Moreover, the structure and assumptions of Hinduism mean that Hindu perception of where the human dilemma lies is radically different from that found in biblically faithful Christianity, so it is not surprising that the "answer" lies in cycles of improvement as one gains the karma to make each reincarnation a little more favorable—not in a sin-bearing substitute. (c) Yes, "many Buddhists see Jesus as one of humanity's most enlightened people," but the "Jesus" they thus evaluate is a carefully winnowed Jesus far removed from the historical reality. No religion is more offended by the uniqueness of Jesus' claims or by His insistence—not to say the insistence of His followers—that salvation is found in no other name than His, than is Buddhism. (d) Of course "Jesus himself was a Jew." Moreover, all of His earliest followers were Jews. Yet virtually all of the conflicts Jesus endured during the days of His flesh were with Jews. At the end of the day, Jews and Christians have a fundamentally different reading of *Tanakh* (what we call the "Old Testament"). As undiplomatic as it is to say so in a culture of kosher pluralism, passages like Matthew 23 and John 8 and the letter to the Galatians—and there are many others—will not go away. If McLaren understands these things, then he is misrepresenting these religions; if he does not, then he is making pronounce-

The *second* hard voice ties postmodernism to anti-colonialism, anti-cultural-hegemony, and the like, and is either suspicious of all proselytization in principle (and evangelism is viewed as merely one species of proselytization), or stands against any proselytization undertaken by people from countries with a colonial heritage. Certainly we are on the cusp of massive transformations of perspective.[10] We have expected the majority of world Christian leaders to be white and Western, to be (relative to most of the world) affluent and capable. But there are now far more believers in the Two-Thirds world than in the West. I have preached in churches of 30,000 people in Asia; a big church in France draws 150 people. The West still produces more well-trained theologians than any other part of the world, but this owes much to economic factors, and I suspect it will change in the years ahead. It is only a matter of time until the leaders of Christians in the Two-Thirds world become better known around the world. Witness, for example, the courageous and influential stance of the Anglican Archbishop of Nigeria, Peter Akinola, on the debate over homosexuality within the world Anglican communion. Many churches in São Paulo, Brazil, have something to teach us about energetic racial integration. When we in the West go somewhere as missionaries, even if we ourselves come from humble backgrounds, we are perceived as coming from the affluent world; our ministry is naturally read as "reaching down." When someone from a Two-Thirds world country becomes a missionary to a country of similar socio-economic level, that missionary is naturally read as a peer. When that same missionary serves in a more affluent country, he or she is naturally read as "reaching up." As a result, expectations change, social dynamics change, modes of influence change. Moreover, for better and for worse, Christian missionaries bring some of their culture with them. In recent decades, there have been more efforts by Western missionaries than in the past to disentangle the gospel from the export of American and other Western cultures, but the challenge is considerable. Now, however, with missionaries coming from many different countries, we are finding pockets of churches served by, say, Korean missionaries that have absorbed not only the gospel but also substantial dollops of Korean culture. It is all very fascinating, sometimes confusing, invariably complicated. It's a grand thing that Jesus is building His Church—often by means of His people, sometimes despite us. What is undeniable, however, is that massive changes lie just ahead.

But none of these developments argues against the ongoing imperative for world evangelism. They merely suggest that in the future, we will be less inclined to think of missionaries going from "us" to "them," and more inclined to think of missionaries going from everywhere to everywhere. Korea (to mention but one prominent mission-sending country) sends out a formidable number of missionaries (at the moment, between twelve and fifteen thousand). In addition, Korea sends "tent-makers" into other Asian countries that would otherwise be

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ments where his misunderstandings are troubling. Either way, his argument is manipulative and, ironically, as offensive to deeply committed and knowledgeable Muslims as to deeply committed and knowledgeable Christians.

[10] Several paragraphs here and under subheading #8 in this address are taken from my earlier essay, "The *SBJT*-Forum: Being Missions-Minded," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9.4 (2005): 86–89.

completely "closed." Many African churches send missionaries cross-culturally to other tribes and to other African countries—and, increasingly, to Western countries, primarily to serve those who have emigrated from African countries to the West. Worldwide statistics are complicated and not always easy to come by, and one is not always sure how accurate they are—but in any case, this development is not in dispute, and one must rejoice over it, even if some of the reasons for getting to this point (e.g., the decline of the West) are disappointing. Jesus has told us He will build His Church. He has not told us that such building will necessarily take place in our hometown or school district. It helps to get things into perspective if we take time to read up on worldwide developments in order to gain a worldwide appreciation for what God is doing. Two or three decades ago, missiologists and other Christian leaders were endlessly debating the precise nature and limits of "contextualization," which was understood to go beyond the well-known indigenous principle by demanding not only that churches in any area be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, but also that their theology be shaped, in measure, by the local cultural context. Nowadays, however, debates over contextualization sound faintly old-fashioned. In the era of global, instantaneous, digital communication, pressures are rising to think through what "globalization" might mean, for good and ill, in the theological arena.[11]

In any case, I cannot take time to run down these related rabbit warrens, as interesting as they are.

(7) *Fundamental skepticism about God, Christ, and the Bible*. In many theological seminaries and universities, not to say in the broader culture, prominent thinkers dismiss what the Bible says about itself, about God, about Christ, and therefore inevitably about the gospel. Transparently, where the gospel is disbelieved, no one will feel the weight of the mandate to proclaim that gospel. Because many of these skeptical voices are influential throughout our culture, some of their strong distaste for anything that smacks of "evangelism" or "world mission" sloshes over into the church itself. That makes no sense, of course, but it is what happens. The skepticism of some parts of our world about the truth of the gospel becomes, among believers, not exactly skepticism, but a sort of waning confidence.

Clearly this is not the place to confront these skeptical voices head-on. But I cannot resist one small observation. From the perspective of Christians whose confidence in the gospel is unwavering, the siren voices of unbelief, far from chilling their fervor for evangelism, constitute a fresh call to evangelize. After all, these siren voices of unbelief need conversion, repentance, faith. Not a little of twentieth-century Western Christian thought has been directed toward meeting exactly that need—whether in biblical scholars like F. F. Bruce, who paved the way for many successors, or in apologists like E. J. Carnell and Francis Schaeffer, who taught us to be orthodox while addressing men and women deeply embedded in contemporary culture, or in popular speakers such as Ravi

[11] See Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, ed., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006).

Zacharias, who continues to challenge the shoddy thinking that infects so many minds with pernicious idolatry. The improving quality of Christian books during the past three-quarters of a century—despite the sad sluice of rubbish—is cause for a great deal of quiet thanks to God. But this aspect of the ongoing mandate of world evangelism I must set aside.

(8) *Nuanced judgments as to what "world mission" includes.* It is perennially important to work hard at the proper relation between ministry of the Word and other ministries, including social concern. Exclusive focus on the former is in danger of fostering a docetic view of the Christian life; exclusive focus on the latter is in danger of abandoning the actual proclamation of the good news. Although there are some important principles to work out, the actual balance of time allotment must depend in part on the local situation. When people are crying on a devastated beach after a tsunami, it is not the best time to distribute Bibles, absent fresh water, food, and shelter. Yet an ostensibly Christian organization which, decade after decade, distributes tons of blankets and food, founds orphanages, and combats HIV, without ever offering Bible studies or explaining what doing this in Jesus' name *means*, and what the gospel is about and how important it is for time and eternity, is indistinguishable from UNICEF or *Médecins sans Frontières*, and is no more Christian than they. Around the world, organizations are wrestling with these and related issues. Always there should be two overlapping circles to the discussion: first, what the Bible actually says about these matters, so far as we can discern it aright; and second, how it applies in any particular context. As a rule, we are most impressed by Christian witness that is full of the Bible, full of Jesus, full of the gospel, full of excellent teaching, full of sacrificial service, full of ministering to the whole person, and, where possible, the community itself, in the conscious outworking of the transforming gospel. For obvious reasons, this can vary enormously around the world. To discuss these matters at length here would take us into an expanding debate.

In fact, this debate has in recent years become far more complex than it had been, owing to renewed interest in the study of culture. Such study shows that, while we may wrestle over what it means to penetrate the culture, or to transform the culture, or to contribute to the time when the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into the city of God (Rev 21:26), we cannot afford to forget that we ourselves are part of the culture. We may constitute a sub-culture with a distinguishable profile from the larger surrounding culture, but we cannot avoid the fact that, for better and for worse, we ourselves belong to that larger culture. The notion of doing good to the city and seeking its prosperity is irrefragably tied to the fact that we are part of the city (Jer 29:7). But from all this important discussion, we will reluctantly turn aside.

(9) *Strategies to fulfill the ongoing imperative for world mission.* In a remarkably penetrating paper, still unpublished (as far as I know), Tim Keller reads Acts very carefully[12] to learn some of the strategies of the early church as the first generation of believers sought to evangelize the Roman world. Apart from

[12] Tim Keller, "Reaching the 21st Century World for Christ," unpublished paper prepared for The Gathering, San Antonio, TX, September 2005.

observing the much-noted fact that the apostle Paul planted churches in urban centers, from which the gospel spread out into the surrounding regions,[13] Keller draws attention to the centrality of the gospel, rightly conceived; to the transformation of human life under the gospel (e.g., freeing the slave girl in Acts 16); to the power of communal life and the integrity of corporate worship. These and other themes in Acts contribute to the drama of the Church's rapid expansion. All of them are worth exploring, and I hope Keller's paper will achieve wide circulation. But I shall not take that road here.

(10) *Statistics*. With my background in chemistry and mathematics, I am probably more impressed by numbers than I ought to be. Moreover, because Trinity Evangelical Divinity School stands at the hub of a worldwide network of Christian leaders, it is fairly easy to tap into a great deal of interesting data.[14] Christians interested in the worldwide church eagerly note that in the late 1970s Cambodia could boast of only 2,000 Christians; today the number is about 150,000. As recently as 1989, there were only four known Christians in Mongolia; today, there are about 20,000, meeting in over 100 churches and 500 house churches. The first church in Nepal began in 1959 with twenty-nine members. Today there are more than half a million believers meeting in 5,000 congregations. The number of Christians, broadly defined, in Asia as a whole, has grown from 22 million in 1990 to over 300 million today, of whom 140 million are evangelicals. In South America, there are more than 8,000 Iberomissionaries to other parts of that continent. The megalopolises of the world are becoming more and more cosmopolitan. London, for instance, boasts 440 spoken languages, and 51 percent of the churchgoers in that city are non-English-speaking. Europe is by far the "darkest" continent, as measured by the percentage of the population without evangelical faith—certainly under 3 percent (by contrast, the percentage in Latin America is 14.5 percent). Vienna has more registered prostitutes than evangelicals; Belgium has more Muslims than Protestants. Other statistics are no less disturbing. Brazil alone has 12 million children living on the streets. It is estimated that more than eight million children in Latin America are victims of pornography and sexual trafficking.

These and many other statistics tell their own stories. Transparently, they have a bearing on how we think about missions. But once again, I shall shunt such information to one side.

(11) *Pragmatic tips, "how to"-style instructions*. These are not always bad. Some time ago, J. Herbert Kane, who taught missions for many years here at Trinity, wrote a book titled *Life and Work on the Mission Field*.[15] The work is rather dated now, of course, but in its time it was wonderfully helpful at the level of practical advice and insight. Many books of a more specialized nature, but

[13] On the church of the first century being an urban movement, see, not least, Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

[14] Many of the following figures were reported at the most recent summit of the World Evangelical Alliance (2005).

[15] (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980).

belonging to the same species, have been published since then. It would be a useful exercise to scan and summarize such work. But once again, I forbear.

(12) *The training needed to sustain and nurture world mission*. Once again, this is a huge topic, and what place better than Trinity to explore it? Our doctoral programs in education and in intercultural studies are constantly exploring such matters, and our resident missiologists doubtless know far more about such matters than I do.[16] So I have additional reason to avoid this topic.

Having listed a dozen roads not traveled, I turn at last to where I want to spend the remaining space of this essay.

The Way of Fundamentals

I wish to highlight three fundamental biblical truths as they relate to the ongoing mandate for Christian missions.

(1) *The sheer desperate lostness of human beings*. We dare not overlook how implacably opposed our culture is to viewing human beings in this way. I still manage to engage in university missions from time to time. By and large, university students display an awesome ignorance of matters biblical and theological. They have never heard of Abraham or Isaiah, do not know the Bible has two Testaments, and are considered gifted if they can remember three of the Ten Commandments. If, then, I set out to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to them, or say something about the incarnation, or insist on the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus, a lot of the terrain is new to them—and there are very few objections. Initially, at least, their response is mild curiosity more than anything else: "Oh, is that what Christians believe? Very interesting." But the one topic almost guaranteed to ignite their ire is sin. Even for many Christians, the catena of biblical quotations collected by the apostle Paul sounds a bit over the top:

> "There is no one righteous, not even one;
> there is no one who understands;
> there is no one who seeks God.
> All have turned away,
> they have together become worthless;
> there is no one who does good,
> not even one."
> "Their throats are open graves;
> their tongues practice deceit."
> "The poison of vipers is on their lips."
> "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."
> "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
> ruin and misery mark their ways,

[16] See also the brief but thoughtful essay by Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Need for Theological Education in Missions: Lessons Learned from the Church's Greatest Missionary," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9.4 (2005): 50–61.

and the way of peace they do not know."
"There is no fear of God before their eyes."[17]

What we must perceive is that the unfolding of the Bible's entire plotline is bound up with human sin, and God's utterly righteous wrath against it. Paul argues at length that human beings did not have to await the arrival of the Mosaic legislation before becoming guilty. The proof of our guilt, from the fall on, is our death: "death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses" (Rom 5:14). Our guilt is tied to the fundamental idolatry. The deep significance of Genesis 3 is not the outcome of choosing one fruit over another, but the outcome of defying God, of de-godding God. The temptation put to Eve was this: "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). The expression "to know good and evil" commonly means more than simply "to discern the difference between good and evil," but something like "to establish the difference between good and evil." That was exclusively God's role. During the creation, God alone pronounced that what He made was good: "he saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31). Thus, if He forbids the fruit of a certain tree, it can only be because the prohibition is good. To defy it is not mere transgression; it is to make human beings the ultimate arbiters of good and evil, as God Himself recognizes (Gen 3:22). This is the beginning of all idolatry.

The first responsibility of sentient, moral creatures, as we have already stated, is to recognize their creatureliness. It is not enough to recognize, in some abstract fashion, that God is the Creator. Rather, we must recognize that we are His creatures—made by Him and for Him, obligated to Him not only in our origin but in our ongoing existence, utterly dependent on Him, joyfully thankful to Him. The only alternative is the most appalling idolatry. Thus the rebellion of Genesis 3 touches off the drama that unfolds throughout the rest of the Bible—our fundamental alienation is alienation from God. The most heinous thing about sin is that we have offended God. That is why David, after the affair with Bathsheba, confesses to God, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Ps 51:4). At one level, of course, this is not true. David sinned against Bathsheba, he certainly sinned against Bathsheba's husband, he corrupted the military high command, he sinned against his family, he sinned against the nation, he even sinned against the baby in Bathsheba's womb. In fact, it is difficult to think of anyone against whom David had *not* sinned. Whence, then, this anguished cry, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight"? But at a deeper level, of course, that is exactly right—what makes sin heinous, what makes it grotesquely offensive, is that it is first and foremost sin against God. If you cheat on your income tax, the party most offended is God; if you puff yourself up with pride, or slander a neighbor, or become profane, the person most offended is God.

What is it in Scripture that is repeatedly said to be most offensive to God, to anger God? What is it that characteristically brings down the wrath of God—in

[17] Rom 3:10–18, citing Pss 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Eccles 7:20; Pss 5:9; 14:3; 10:7; Isa 59:7–8; Ps 36:1.

many hundreds of passages? It is not rape, or murder, or lying, or theft, even though some passages, in Isaiah and Amos for instance, display God's wrath because of social injustice. No, the thing that is characteristically portrayed as bringing down the wrath of God is idolatry. The human stance that prompts God to send the devastation of the flood, or send His covenant people into exile, is repeated and determined idolatry.

Does not Paul say as much? In his letter to the Romans, he devotes two and a half chapters to demonstrating how all humankind, Jews and Gentiles alike, are wrapped up in sin. His exposition ends with the catena of Old Testament quotations I have already cited, and it begins with the somber words, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom 1:18). One of the most striking elements of the wrath of God in the Scriptures is the intensely personal element in it. God's wrath is not characteristically presented as the impersonal outworking of a kind of tit-for-tat moral structure—do bad stuff, and bad stuff happens to you, and God feels sorry about that. Rather, God's anger is personal and real because God Himself is the One who has been offended; our sin attempts to de-god God. The efforts of some recent writers to re-cast the massive biblical evidence in this regard, perhaps most notoriously Steve Chalke,[18] reflect at best an abysmal inattentiveness to what Scripture actually says. The tragedy, of course, is that if we cannot see clearly the nature of the problem, we will not see clearly the nature of the solution. If we refuse to see what the Bible says about the wrath of God, we will certainly fail to see what the cross achieves. If we turn away embarrassed from what the Bible teaches of God's wrath, we will never glimpse the glory of what the Bible says about God's love, supremely manifested in Christ Jesus, especially in His cross and resurrection. We will stumble back to the distortions of 1920s liberalism, so memorably mocked by H. Richard Niebuhr in his 1937 book, *The Kingdom of God in America*: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

The consequences of our rebellion against God are beyond calculation. They include not only death, what Paul calls "the last enemy," but the degradation of the entire cosmos. That is why "all things" must be reconciled to God (Col 1), for "all things" are alienated from Him. Temporal judgments are not the mechanical result of evil's automatic return, but the sanction of God. Read Jeremiah and Ezekiel to be reminded how carefully God Himself wants His people to know that if Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem and raze the temple, it is not because their gods or their armies are superior, but because God Himself, out of outraged justice and holiness, has decreed the judgment. God "gives us over" to the outcome of our undisciplined self-focus and self-love In other words, even the outworking of what we perceive to be historical cause

[18] In particular his book *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003). Chalke uses the plentiful biblical affirmation of the love of God to dissolve the equally plentiful biblical depictions of the wrath of God. It is worth reading the book carefully. See also the accurate and penetrating review by Mike Gilbart-Smith on the http://9marks.org website.

and effect is nothing other than the entailment of God's wrath "being revealed from heaven" (Rom 1).

But there is more. Jesus Christ demands that we think in terms of heaven and hell. Sheep and goats do not end up at the same destination (Matt 25:46). If the judgments of the Old Testament Scriptures seem horrific, they are considerably less than the barrage of pictures that Jesus Himself deploys to describe hell (see also Rev 14:14–20). No thoughtful reader of the Bible can ever forget that "people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb 9:27). That is precisely why Jesus urges his followers to store up treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19–21).

By and large, our culture does not begin to recognize the abject seriousness of the human condition, the mounting guilt of human rebellion, the sheer, desperate lostness that characterizes unforgiven human beings. Even death itself has to be sanitized, marginalized, domesticated—and never, ever, speak of judgment to come.

> Go, bury death in limousines; dispel
> Inevitable death in transient mirth,
> Acquire toys and earthly wealth from birth;
> Pursue position, luxuries, and tell
> Your mortal colleagues of your virtues; sell
> Your future for the present; measure worth
> In prominence, and seek the highest berth;
> Send flowers, and do not think of death and hell.
> Appalling folly, attitude perverse—
> Before the one great certainty, to play
> The ostrich and ignore hard facts, or worse,
> Transform the corpse by euphemism's play.
> Still more: as surely as a mortal dies,
> His certain death portends the great assize.[19]

And what shall we do with bold and terrifying biblical language, like the following? "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (Rev 21:8).

> There are no friends in hell: the residents
> With zeal display self-love's destructive art
> In narcissistic rage. The better part,
> The milk of human kindness, no defense
> Against a graceless world, robbed of pretence,
> Decays and burns away. To have a heart
> Whose every beat demands that God depart—
> This is both final curse and gross offense.

[19] The four sonnets in this address are drawn from D. A. Carson, *Holy Sonnets of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), one of them slightly adapted.

Say not that metaphor's inadequate,
A fearful mask that hides a lake less grim:
Relentless, pain-streaked language seeks to cut
A swath to bleak despair, devoid of him.
This second death's a wretched, endless thing,
Eternal winter with no hope of spring.

The first fundamental in the ongoing mandate for Christian missions, then, is the sheer, desperate lostness of human beings.

(2) *The sheer glory of God.* We need to recapture how often the glory of God is bound up with God's love for His otherwise damned image-bearers. The same Bible that underscores God's holy wrath repeatedly insists that God is slow to anger, plenteous in mercy. He entreats rebels to return to Him; He continues to provide sun and rain to the just and the unjust. The tension is palpable in passage after passage, perhaps nowhere more so than in Exodus 32–34: "You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. . . . The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" (33:5; 34:6–7). Hosea the prophet dares apply to God the image of a betrayed husband—God is the Almighty cuckold, still wooing the cheap hussy that is His bride.

And all of this dramatic insistence on the love and mercy of God is nestled within a still larger theme. God acts in love and holiness to display His glory, to bring glory to Himself. The glory of God is woven into the fabric of the Bible's storyline. Here I can draw attention to only a few of the strands.

Begin with Isaiah. In connection with one of the so-called "Servant Songs," the Servant cries,

> And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:5–6).

In other words, God is determined to bring maximum glory to His Servant, and He determines that He will achieve this by extending His salvation beyond Israel to the ends of the earth. Small wonder Isaiah elsewhere declares, as we have seen, that on the ultimate day of the Lord,

> there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria [two nations proverbial for their paganism, guilt, and oppression of the Israelites]. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance" (Isa 19:23–25).

The New Testament Scriptures articulate the same reality in slightly different ways, but with no less stress on the glory of God. Thus the form of the Great Commission in Acts 1:8 impels the believers to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth." Ephesians 2 insists that "by the blood of Christ" (2:13) Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled and have been constituted one new humanity. God's purpose is "to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (2:16). Jews and Gentiles alike are "members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone" (2:19–20). Moreover, in the preceding chapter Paul makes it clear that God has brought all of this about through His loving predestination, "to the praise of his glorious grace" (1:6), which He has freely given us in Christ, in the One He loves. Everything that flows from Christ, including God's intention "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (1:10 NIV), the promulgation of "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (1:13), and the gift of the Holy Spirit as the promised seal (1:13)—all, all is "to the praise of his glory" (1:14). Thus the glory of God is irrefragably tied to the extension of the gospel to the end of the age.

Earlier I mentioned Exodus 32–34, with its tension-filled amalgam of righteous wrath and tender mercy. These chapters depict the dreadful debauchery of the golden calf episode—Moses is receiving the law on the mountain while the people have returned to idolatry on the plains below. When Moses returns, he smashes the tablets of the law. Horrific judgment ensues. Moses feels desperately abandoned, for even his brother Aaron has been implicated in the moral disaster. As Moses seeks the face of God in the tense and theologically rich prayers that follow, he cries at one point, "Now show me your glory" (Exod 33:18). He knows full well that the only thing sufficient to stabilize him in this wretched apostasy is a renewed and deepened vision of God Himself, of the glory of God. But God replies, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But . . . you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exod 33:19–20).

What follows is the stuff of drama. Moses is hidden in a cleft of a rock. The Lord passes by, and Moses is then permitted to peek out and witness something of the trailing edge of the afterglow of the glory of God (Exodus 34). But while

the Lord is actually passing by, while Moses is still hidden in the rocks and unable to peek out, the Lord himself intones, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in *love and faithfulness* . . ." (34:6)—words that could equally well be rendered, "abounding in *grace and truth*."

Christians have long recognized that the events of these three chapters, Exodus 32–34, are picked up and developed in the last five verses of John's Prologue (John 1:14–18). There are many points of contact between the two passages. In Exodus, Moses has been up on the mountain to receive the law, including the detailed prescriptions regarding the building of the tabernacle; John tells us that the Word became flesh, and (lit.) "tabernacled" among us (1:14). The supreme meeting-place between God and His community of redeemed sinners was no longer a tent, but the tent of the Word's humanity. In Exodus, God intones that He abounds in love and faithfulness, in grace and truth; John tells us that Jesus, the Word made flesh, is full of grace and truth. Indeed, John himself points out that "the law was given through Moses" (1:17), the very theme of Exodus 32–34. Yet the giving of the law was accompanied by debauchery and idolatry. The display of "grace and truth" was in God's word to Moses; and now, the supreme display of "grace and truth" is in the ultimate Word, the Word made flesh: "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Exodus reminds us that no one can look on God and live; John concurs, for he writes, "No one has ever seen God" (1:18). But he instantly adds that, nevertheless, "God the One and Only [the reference is to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh], who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (1:18). Small wonder that a little later in this Gospel, Jesus can say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9).

In short, the parallels between Exodus 32–34 and John 1:14–18 are many. But there is one more that bears directly on our theme. In Exodus, as we have seen, Moses cries out to God, "Now show me your glory"—and God promises to display His goodness. In John's Prologue, the apostle boldly declares of the Word made flesh, "We have seen his glory"—and then in the rest of his Gospel he unpacks the theme of glory. In what way have the disciples seen the glory? After the first sign, the turning of the water into wine in Cana of Galilee, the evangelist declares that Jesus "thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (2:11). The theme develops along similar lines until chapter 12. There, suddenly, we discover that Jesus will be "glorified" by being lifted up on the cross in hideous death (John 12:20–33).

> "Show me your glory!"
> "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you."

And nowhere is there a more moving demonstration of the glory of God in the goodness of God than in the Gospel of John. For here in this God-glorifying death, Christ "will draw all people to [him]self" (12:32). The glory of God in Christ Jesus is the foundation of Christian missions.

Or consider the great vision of Revelation 4–5. Revelation 4 is to Revelation 5 what a setting is to a drama. In other words, Revelation 4 sets the stage with colorful apocalyptic imagery that sets forth the brilliant transcendence and sovereignty of God, who is praised as the Creator: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev 4:11). Even the highest orders of angels voice their utter dependence on Him. And then the drama unfolds. In the right hand of Him who sits on the throne is a scroll, sealed with seven seals. In the imagery of the time, the scroll contains all of God's purposes for judgment and blessing for the entire universe, and these purposes will come into effect only if someone is found who can break the seals. But who in all the universe could possibly approach such a God and serve as His agent in the bringing to pass of all of God's purposes? In fact, no one is found who is worthy, and John the seer weeps. He weeps, not because he is a nosey parker who is frustrated by his inability to peer into the future, but because, in the symbolism of the time, this means that God's purposes will *not* be brought to pass. Life and history have alike become directionless, purposeless, meaningless. But as John weeps, the interpreting elder approaches him and declares, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals" (5:5).

So John looks, and he sees—a Lamb. This does not mean that two animals are parked side by side, a lion and a lamb. Rather, because apocalyptic literature delights to deploy mixed metaphors, the Lion is the Lamb. Indeed, the Lamb itself is simultaneously a sacrifice (it has been slaughtered) and a conqueror—it has seven horns, i.e., a perfection of kingly authority. He comes from the very throne of God—He alone is worthy to open the seals, and thus to serve as God's agent to bring about God's purposes in redemption and judgment. The way He brings about these great ends is made clear in the paean of praise that now erupts in His honor: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (5:10). The scene ends with the entire universe joining in praise to "him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (5:13), who are jointly worshipped throughout the rest of the book.

Thus the sheer glory of God is tightly bound not only to God as Creator, but even more spectacularly to God's redemptive purposes, His missiological purposes, effected by His Son, the vision's Lion-Lamb. The same tie between the gospel and the glory of God is often portrayed in the New Testament, usually in less apocalyptic terminology. For instance, when Paul depicts his ministry and the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, he tells the Corinthians, "All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people *may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God*" (2 Cor 4:15).

The sheer God-centeredness of the Bible reaches its climax in the closing vision. Revelation 21–22 brings together many strands of biblical thought and

exposition into spectacular consummation. The new Jerusalem, obviously symbol-laden, is huge—a cube, about 1,400 miles on edge. But there is only one cube in the Old Testament, viz., the Holy of Holies, into which only the High Priest could enter, and that but once a year on the Day of Atonement, carrying the blood of bull and goat to atone for his own sins and for the sins of the people. But now all of God's redeemed people are living within the cube—the entire new Jerusalem *is* the Holy of Holies, and all of God's people enjoy the bliss of His unshielded presence. No wonder the seer declares, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (21:22).

> I saw no temple in the city: there
> The Lord Almighty and the Lamb, his Son,
> Together constitute the temple: Sun
> And moon had disappeared in deep despair,
> Forever obsolete beside the glare
> Of Deity's unshaded glory. None
> Remembers night; for night and darkness shun
> Such light, consigned to self-love's filthy lair.
> The nations bring their splendor, as the sole
> Response appropriate to holiness
> Transfixing. Nothing, no one in the whole
> Fair city harbors shame or wickedness.
> The city's sons with vibrant joys abound;
> For in the book of life their names are found.

The second fundamental in the ongoing mandate for Christian missions, then, is the sheer glory of God.

(3) *The sheer power of the gospel of Christ crucified*. We tend to overlook how often the gospel of Christ crucified is described as "power." Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, he declares, "because it is the *power* of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). Writing to the Corinthians, Paul insists that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is *the power of God*" (1 Cor 1:18). He takes painstaking care not to corrupt the gospel with cheap tricks like manipulative rhetoric, what he dismissively sets aside as "words of human wisdom"—"lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its *power*" (1:17). The "incomparably great power" that is working in those who believe is tied to the exercise of God's mighty strength when He raised Jesus from the dead (Eph 1:19–20).

There is superb irony in all this, of course. When Jesus was executed in the first century, the cross had no positive religious overtones. The Romans had three methods of capital punishment, and crucifixion was the most painful and the most shameful. Yet here were the Christians, their leader executed as a damned malefactor, talking about Him with gleeful irony as if He were reigning from the cross.

So central was the cross in Paul's estimation that he could write, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him

crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's *power*, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's *power*" (1 Cor 2:2–5). But this stance, of course, is not exclusively Paul's. Martin Hengel and others have shown that in the first century, the four canonical books we refer to as "Gospels" did not use the word "gospel" as if it were a literary genre. In the first century, no one spoke of "the Gospel of Matthew" or "the Gospel of Mark" or the like. Rather, each of the four relevant books was "*the* gospel *according to* Matthew," "*the* gospel *according to* Mark," and so forth. In other words, there was only one gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of the kingdom, with multiple witnesses. This one gospel included the good news of Jesus' coming, ministry, teaching, and miracles, but it necessarily culminated in His death and resurrection to redeem lost sinners to God. Otherwise it was not "the gospel." That is why the recent book by Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, is so misguided. McLaren thinks he can accurately unpack the teaching of Jesus *apart* from consideration of the cross and resurrection. But that is precisely what the four canonical "Gospels" will not allow us to do.[20] Indeed, some wag has said that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John might almost be considered four passion narratives with extended introductions. That is why the second- and third-century heretical so-called "gospels"—*The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Peter*, *The Gospel of Judas*, and others—are not really "gospels" at all—these late, pseudonymous documents leave out the cross and resurrection of Jesus. *Thomas* is merely a collection of 114 sayings, with two snippets of narrative. This is certainly not the one gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Thomas. At the end of the day, it is not by Thomas, and it does not bear witness to the gospel. It is a late document forged in gnosticism, perhaps of Syrian provenance. It is embarrassingly far removed from the emphasis in the New Testament on the gospel of the crucified Redeemer.

Apocalyptic imagery comes to our aid once more. In Revelation 12, the ancient serpent, Satan himself, makes war on the offspring of the "woman," on the people of God—in short, on Christians. He is filled with fury, we are told, because he knows he is doomed and his time is short. How, then, do Christians overcome him? First, they overcome him on the ground of "the blood of the Lamb" (12:11). This takes us back inexorably to the great vision of Revelation 4–5, to the gospel, to the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Second, they overcome him "by the word of their testimony" (12:11). This does not mean they give their testimonies a lot; rather, it means they bear testimony to Jesus and to what He has done. So there it is again—the ongoing mandate for Christian missions, this bearing of public testimony to the triumph of Christ on the cross, is irreducibly tied to the conquest of Satan, and to our own security. Here is where real power lies—in the ignominy and odious shame of the cross. This is

[20] Contrast the careful reading of Mark's Gospel by Peter Bolt, who shows how the entire narrative moves toward the cross and resurrection and richly anticipates these events: *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark's Gospel*, NSBT 18 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

so stunningly important to Christians that "they do not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (12:11).

Christians know, above all people, that by nature we were all objects of God's wrath (Eph 2:3). But we have been reconciled to God by Christ Jesus, and we urge others to be reconciled to Him too (2 Cor 5:11–21), for in the cross, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Thus we see ourselves, like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, somewhere between the City of Destruction, which by God's grace we have abandoned, and the Celestial City, toward which we press, urging people all around us to join us on our pilgrimage. We have tasted so much; there is so much more to come. The power of God in the cross of Christ has begun its transforming work, but we long for the consummation of all things, the dawning of the new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness. We long for consummated resurrection existence, when the sheer God-centeredness of everything will be our incalculable delight. At that point we will experience worship as we ought to experience it, and God will be all in all. Until then, precisely because we have tasted something of the power of the cross, we implore men and women from every tribe and language and people and nation, "Be reconciled to God."

O let us see your glorious face, perceive
Shekinah brilliance shining in the gloom
Behind the veil, transcend the sacred room
And pierce the Paradise of bliss. We leave
Our worship hungry yet: can we achieve
The beatific sight? Dare we presume
To beg for more, outpace the trailing plume
Of glory, and pure rays of light receive?
    It's not that we feel cheated by the grace
    You freely give: each glimpse of your divine
    Perfection crushes us—yet gives a taste
    For holiness transcendent, pure, refined.
Our worship's still a poor discordant thing;
But one day we shall see, and we shall sing.