

THIRD MILLENNIUM MISSIOLOGY AND THE USE OF EGYPTIAN GOLD

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At the very beginning of a course on church planting and development in Trinity Bible College in Kursk, Russia, I sensed a pervasive suspicion on the part of the students, especially the 22 pastors who made up about half of the class. I soon discovered the reason. Experience had taught them to anticipate more and more material on social structures, demographics, opinion surveys, program development and the like. When they understood that the primary focus of the course would be on biblical theology—and especially as they re-discovered the newness and relevance of the biblical text—their attitude changed completely. In session after session notebooks were readied, Bibles were opened, discussions came alive, and new auditors appeared.

In retrospect, it is easy to see what has happened at Kursk and similar schools since the doors of Russia opened to Western—especially American—missions. Studies in practical theology, Christian education, counseling and missions have become increasingly occupied with social science materials. In some cases those materials have not been well integrated with Scripture. In some cases they have even preempted the proper place of Scripture.

Problems connected with the utilization of profane learning in spiritual endeavor is not new, but for a variety of reasons these problems take on a new urgency as missions enter a new millennium. Accordingly, it would seem appropriate to investigate pertinent precursors, precedents and principles in Scripture and church and mission history in order to chart a proper course.

I. SOME BIBLICAL BACKGROUND: EGYPT, CANAAN AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

A number of pertinent Bible passages point to the relationship between Israel and Egypt, especially as that relationship has to do with the Exodus and its aftermath. Liberation theologians, for example, appear to give more attention to Israel's emancipation from Egypt than to almost any other single event in the OT. At the same time, it is doubtful that any of us give sufficient attention to the subsequent struggle to "get Egypt out of Israel," to use the phraseology of preachers. And yet this latter undertaking proved to be far more difficult than getting Israel out of Egypt. In fact, it constitutes a major theme of the OT—to use Walter Kaiser's term, one of those "nodal points" that we do well to ponder.

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Accordingly, the ubiquitous and ambivalent relationship between Israel and Egypt might well serve as a starting point for this particular study. Throughout the OT and right into the NT, God's Chosen People alternately found Egypt to be a refuge and a prison. Their relationship with the Egyptians proved to be both a bane and a blessing. A few familiar illustrations taken from successive timeframes will have to suffice.

1. In Genesis we learn how, after his arrival in Canaan, Abraham built an altar and worshiped Jehovah. But in Egypt he vacillated, resorted to subterfuge in order to protect Sarah, and was justly rebuked by none other than the Pharaoh himself!

Back in Canaan, at Sarah's suggestion, Abraham proposed to "help" Jehovah fulfill his promise by impregnating her Egyptian maid, Hagar. From that union sprang the Ishmaelites. Tension between Sarah and Hagar and their respective families was further exacerbated when Esau "despised" his heritage, married Ishmael's daughter Mahalath, and fathered the Edomites.

The Genesis record closes with Jacob and Joseph and the rest of Jacob's sons in Egypt as beneficiaries of Egyptian kindness and largesse. But they were destined to become victims of Egyptian cruelty and barbarism. Numerically they had been blessed. Seventy souls had gone down to Egypt, and when they came out they were as "numerous as the stars" (Deut 10:22). But spiritually they had become impoverished.

2. The book of Exodus details Egyptian barbarism and, then, the Passover and Israel's miraculous deliverance. But the text goes on to demonstrate Israel's continued fascination with Egypt as expressed in her lack of appreciation for divine guidance and provision; her preference for Egyptian food; her readiness to convert Egyptian gold into a calf resembling a prominent Egyptian idol; her faulty assessment of the chances for overcoming the Canaanites; and much, much more.

3. According to the account in 1 Kings, no sooner had Solomon ascended David's throne than he formed an alliance with Pharaoh and cemented it by marrying his daughter and bringing her to the city of David (1 Kgs 2:1). Solomon's wisdom surpassed "all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kgs 4:30) but he was not wise enough to withstand Egypt's evil influence. In spite of repeated warnings Solomon's flirtation with Egypt soon became apparent in the prominence he accorded the city of Gezer, Pharaoh's dowry to his daughter (1 Kgs 9:16-17); in the magnificent house he made for his Egyptian bride (1 Kgs 7:8); and in the fact that he allowed his love for her and other foreign women to lead him to a lesser devotion to the Lord and even to idolatry (1 Kgs 11:1-4).

In this way Solomon set the stage for the downfall of Israel. After Solomon's spiritual defection and the division of the monarchy, Jeroboam in the north institutionalized apostasy by taking cues from Aaron's use of Egyptian gold and from the idolatry of surrounding nations, especially Egypt. He built shrines, set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan, and appointed priests indiscriminately (1 Kgs 12:26-33; 13:33). Subsequently, King Hoshea, consorting with So the king of Egypt, offended Shalmaneser and thus invited the downfall of Israel (2 Kgs 17:1-18:13). Even King Hezekiah evidently leaned upon Egypt until Isaiah reminded him that it was not Egypt but the God who

had delivered the fathers from Egypt who alone would deliver Judah (2 Kgs 18:21, 19:21–28).

4. Coming to the Prophets, according to Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Jews of their time had to be warned not to lean on that “broken reed,” Egypt (Isa 36:6). After failing to heed that and other warnings, Jeremiah prophesied destruction and captivity. But he added that, though Jehovah would eventually deliver a faithful remnant from Babylon, those Jews who sought refuge in Egypt would be severely judged and judged in that land (Jer 42:9–22).

5. Subsequently and during the so-called “silent years,” it first appeared that Israelites who disobeyed and sought refuge in Egypt had chosen the better course. Aramaic Jewish papyri found at Aswan indicate that the Jewish colony in Egypt flourished and that they even built a large temple before the time of Cambyses in the late sixth century BC. But Jeremiah was right. Eventually, the kindly Pharaoh Hophra was strangled to death, the temple was destroyed, and Jewish colonists came upon evil days.

Nevertheless, the God who makes even the wrath of man to praise him caused Ptolemy II to bring 72 Jewish elders from Palestine to Egypt in the third century BC in order to translate the Pentateuch into Greek. And, as is common knowledge, the resultant Septuagint translation was destined to play a crucial role in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles.¹

6. As the NT opens, the last independent Edomite King, Herod, concocted a diabolical plot to kill the baby Jesus. Ironically, the Holy Family was instructed to seek refuge in, of all places, Egypt (Matt 2:13–19). Moving on in the NT, we discover various similarly intriguing references. According to the Acts record, people from Egypt were among those who head the gospel in their own tongue on the day of Pentecost and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was a prominent part of Stephen’s apology (Acts 2:10; 7:8–42). The writer of Hebrews uses the Egyptian captivity to warn of the dangers of falling away, hardness of heart, and the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12–19); and he warns believing Jews (and all believers) that the treasures and pleasures of Egypt are to be resisted (Heb 11:22–27). Finally, the apostle John predicts that two witnesses will be martyred in the streets of a great city of the future—a city identified as both Jerusalem and, mystically, as “Sodom” and “Egypt” (Rev 11:3–10).²

Certainly, Egypt and its ubiquitous relationship with the people of God is a theme that was not lost to the NT writers and should never be lost to us as followers of the Lord. Accordingly, the institution of the Lord’s Supper on Passover of the Passion Week—and every celebration of it since that time—recalls for God’s people the fact that they have been redeemed from sin and “rescued from Egypt” by the body and blood of the Lamb of God.

¹ Actually, various manuscripts edited about that time combine to form the basis of our modern texts. But, especially from a missionary point of view, the Septuagint Greek Old Testament dating to c. 275–250 BC ranks as the most important. It was widely distributed, was the Bible of the early Christians, and became the Bible of the Dispersion.

² This prophecy entails a strange irony, namely, that among those who behold the martyrdom of the two witnesses will be representatives of the world’s peoples, tribes, tongues and nations (the rubrics used to categorize the redeemed host in that oft-quoted missionary passage in Rev 5:9).

While well known to Bible scholars, the foregoing biblical and historical references (and many others that could be adduced) deserve careful study by all of us and especially by Christian practitioners. The critical placement, recurrent attention (approximately 750 references in the Bible) and attendant phraseology of these references conspire to underscore both the theological and practical significance of the relationship between Egyptian religion and culture on the one hand, and the fortunes of the people of God on the other. Egypt is at once a friend and an enemy, a storehouse and a rubbish heap, a refuge and a snare for God's people. It is no wonder, then, that that very relationship came to occupy a prominent place in the thinking of one of the greatest of the Church Fathers at a critical time in the history of the church.

II. A RELEVANT EPISODE IN CHURCH HISTORY: SAINT AUGUSTINE AND "EGYPTIAN GOLD"

In the fourth century of the Christian Era a scholar destined to become one of the foremost fathers and theologians of the Christian church, Saint Augustine, came face to face with a most critical issue. Others among the Fathers faced it also, but it was the perspicuous Augustine who addressed it most forthrightly and instructively.

As is well known, many of the Fathers had been educated in rhetoric—the *summum bonum* of the education of the time. The mastery of rhetoric at that time entailed both the acquisition of philosophical and other knowledge, and also the ability to communicate that knowledge clearly, appropriately, and persuasively. For that reason, the great universities of the time—whether in Athens or Rome or Alexandria or Augustine's Carthage—were famous as centers of education in rhetoric.

Early on Augustine himself was profoundly influenced by the philosophy and oratorical skills of Cicero; later by the Manicheism that found its way from Persia through Egypt to North Africa; and, ultimately, by a pervasive Neo-Platonism. But it was his early training in rhetoric that equipped him for his task as *rhetor* of Carthage and, subsequently, of Rome and then Milan. As his *Confessions* makes clear, *rhetor* Augustine took great pride in his classical learning while entertaining a decided disgust for Scripture. Concerning this he later wrote,

And how I was chief in the rhetoric school, whereat I joyed proudly, and I swelled with arrogancy, though (Lord, Thou knowest) far quieter and altogether removed from the subvertings of those "Subverters" . . . among whom I lived, with a shameless shame that I was not even as they.³ . . . I resolved then to turn my mind to the holy Scriptures, that I might see what they were. But behold, I see a thing not understood by the proud. . . . For not as I now speak, did I then feel as I turned to those Scriptures; but they seemed to me to be unworthy to be compared to the stateliness of Tully. . . .⁴

³ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (trans. Edward B. Pusey; NY: Collier, 1961) 38.

⁴ *Ibid.* 40.

Augustine's attitude and perspective underwent profound change when, struck by the eloquence of Ambrose in his Milan pulpit, he was converted and baptized on Easter, 387. His conversion was thoroughgoing. As a consequence, after being ordained as Bishop of Hippo in 396, Augustine undertook a monumental task. Aware of the fact that the various perversions of orthodox doctrine tended to reflect one or another strain of a pagan philosophical heritage, he set out on a twofold task: (1) to define Christian doctrine in such a way as to preserve its exclusive character and weed out pagan accretions; and (2) to effect a rapprochement between revelational truth and those aspects of pagan intellectual achievement not inherently antagonistic to that revelation. Accordingly, in the first three books of *De doctrina christiana* he concerned himself with the discovery of biblical truth (*modus inveniendi* in rhetorical terms), and in the fourth book with ways of expressing and communicating that truth to others (*modus proferendi*).⁵

While Augustine's work reflects his tendency to allegorize Scripture, he nevertheless succeeded in providing his readers with what has come to be a classic statement of both the problem before us and also its resolution. Near the conclusion of Book II he takes his readers back to the Exodus story. He notes that Jehovah himself had ordered the Children of Israel to take vases and ornaments of gold and silver out of Egypt in order to put them to use as they proceeded toward the Promised Land. Could not the same hold true in respect to some aspects of pagan philosophy in general and, in particular, Augustine's own acumen in rhetoric? Is it not possible to employ "Egyptian gold" in Christian service? Augustine answers these questions in the affirmative. He concludes that, *wherever truth is found, it is the Lord's*. Gold from Egypt is still gold. It is usable. It can be a real asset in Kingdom service. However, Augustine adds three cautions. The first is most explicit: *Egyptian gold must be tested in the light of Scripture in order to determine whether or not it is real gold*. The second is both explicit and implicit: *The truths of Scripture are far more meaningful and significant than any knowledge obtainable from Egypt*. The third is less obvious but, it seems to me, also implicit in the text: *Quantitatively as well as qualitatively, more real, Kingdom-building truth is to be found in Scripture than in all the books of Egypt*.

What shall we make of Augustine's solution to the problem of Egyptian gold? On the one hand, there can be little doubt that his rhetorical and philosophical learning contributed much to the way in which he championed biblical truth both within and without the Christian church. His role in the all-important Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) is an obvious case in point. Refusing to sacrifice revealed truth on the altar of pagan philosophy, Augustine nevertheless utilized knowledge and skills accruing to his pre-conversion training to refute Gnostic Christologies and sectarian gospels, and also in a successful effort to maintain Christian orthodoxy.

⁵ Cf. James J. Murphy, "Augustine and the Debate About a Christian Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 46 (December 1960) 408.

On further reflection, however, the problem may be more complicated than Augustine made it out to be, especially in our day. Speaking out of a background in German theology and on the faculty of a leading German university, for example, Eta Linnemann comes to a quite different conclusion. She holds that biblical Christianity and profane philosophy are inherently incompatible, the latter being erected wholly on the bases of scholasticism, naturalism and humanism. Consequently, she does not think that our emulation of Augustine and the church fathers in this regard is entirely positive. Referring specifically to Augustine's gold from Egypt analogy, she writes:

I regard as unfortunate Augustine's statement in *De doctrina christiana* that Christians can use the phantom of pagan sciences like the Israelites used the Egyptians' goods. It needs to be noted in passing that these same Egyptian riches were probably the material out of which the golden calf was made at Sinai. Unfortunately, in Christianly golden calves were made out of the riches of pagan philosophy.⁶

At the very least, Linnemann's statement should serve as a reminder that problems accruing to the use of secular learning in Kingdom service are not easily resolved. In fact, at one point Linnemann herself adds to the complexity of the problem when she says that much of the scientific work of recent centuries (which she also grounds in humanistic philosophy) is actually helpful—by virtue of the patience, faithfulness, mercy and grace of God himself.⁷

Whatever disagreement there might be at this point, looking at the great controversies in which the church has been engaged through the centuries, Augustine, Linnemann and all Bible-believers can agree on one thing. Namely, that it was not human knowledge, lucid argumentation or lofty eloquence that carried the day at Chalcedon and the other early councils, and it will not be human knowledge that will ultimately triumph in our day or any other day. In the final analysis, and in accordance with Augustine's dicta, what has carried the day in the past, and what will triumph in the future, is the truth of the revealed Word of God.

III. SECULAR LEARNING AND THE MISSIOLOGY OF THE "GREAT CENTURY IN CHRISTIAN MISSIONS"

Overviews such as those above are hazardous by virtue of their brevity. The one we will undertake now may appear to be even more so. But, if basically factual and true, it may well be instructive.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century two types of inquiry undertaken in the universities of Europe were destined to have a most significant impact upon missiology as well a theology. One type had to do with the application of comparative religions and social sciences (primarily ethnology and sociology) to mission theory and practice as evidenced in the missiology

⁶ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (trans. Robert W. Yarbrough; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 55.

⁷ *Ibid.* 42–43.

of Ludwig Nommensen, Gustav Warneck, Warneck's son Johannes, and Bruno Gutmann, among others. The other type had to do with historical criticism and the application of Enlightenment principles to the understanding and use of the biblical text.⁸

The impact of the social sciences and historical criticism on the church and its schools is common knowledge. Their impact on missions less so. Nevertheless it would be difficult to overestimate that impact before and after the turn of the century, and right down to the present moment. Theologically, new understandings of the nature of Scripture and world religions exploded upon the church worldwide, especially in places where modern education flourished. In my adopted land of Japan where philosophical and theological ideas tended to move directly from Germany as well as America, for example, great debates concerning the relative authority of the Bible and Japanese religion were precipitated. Some Japanese church scholars went so far as to identify the Jehovah of the OT with Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi-no-Kami of the Shinto pantheon. The faith of a number of samurai-class Christian leaders was shaken. Some quit the ministry and some even departed from the faith.⁹ This at a time when harbingers of genuine revival had been very much in evidence.

Whereas theology in general and the theology of mission in particular tended to suffer a setback in the late 19th century, mission strategy in general tended to profit from secular learning. Gustav Warneck's borrowings from the social sciences were such that he subsequently became known as the "father of the *science* of missions." Informed by the social sciences, the missiological ideas of Gustav Warneck, his son Johannes and Ludwig Nommensen were employed to advantage, particularly in the work of the Rhenish Missionary Society among the Bataks in Sumatra. At the same time, it must be admitted that even in the area of mission strategy the record was not altogether positive. Sufficient concern was not always given to Scripture and to Augustinian principles concerning the use of "Egyptian gold." In Sumatra, for instance, native leaders were sometimes accorded positions of leadership in national churches quite apart from due consideration of biblical qualifications—and with predictable results. And a new century had barely dawned when Bruno Gutmann and his ethnology-based missiology came under serious criticism in East Africa.¹⁰

⁸ A more complete treatment would require consideration of the impact of unitarianism, universalism and the social gospel, especially in the United States.

⁹ A recent book (Yasuo Furuya, ed. and trans., *A History of Japanese Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997]) chronicles the influence of Western philosophies as well as theologies upon Christian leadership and churches in Japan from the early days of the Protestant movement to the present. This work makes it clear that it was the "New Theology" or the time (i.e. "a liberal and rational tendency within theology introduced from Europe and America") that occasioned such upheaval in Japan over one hundred years ago (cf. 21).

¹⁰ Gutmann held that man is not to be understood as an individual but as a member of an organic whole. For him, the aim of mission was not the regeneration of individuals but the perfection of society which perfection is already present in the created order.

IV. TWENTIETH-CENTURY MISSIOLOGICAL IMPORTATIONS FROM EGYPT

All theologians and church leaders are well acquainted with the Liberal-Fundamentalist debates that occurred during the early part of the twentieth century. But in this case also the impact of secular disciplines and thinking on missions and missiology is less well known.

Subsequent to its formation a few years after the famous Edinburgh Conference of 1910, proposals propounded at various gatherings of the International Missionary Council sometimes entailed disavowal of such basic doctrines as the deity of Christ, the finality of Christian revelation and the necessity of conversion. Proponents of a more pluralistic approach to missiology such as Rufus Jones, William Ernest Hocking and Julius Richter were opposed by the likes of John R. Mott and William Paton. But it was their radical position that came to be reflected in an influential assessment of the first one hundred years of Protestant missions from North America. Concerning that assessment Arthur Glasser writes,

When . . . Hocking and Jones sponsored the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry (1932), they did so independently of the mission boards and conjured up a radicalism which could discuss Christianity without mentioning Christ and which was unable to define the concept *church* even in terms of Christian fellowship.¹¹

Less serious at the time (but a harbinger of the future nevertheless) was the impact of secular disciplines on conservative missionaries and missiologists themselves. Shortly after World War I, for example, the Anglican Roland Allen published works in which he advocated "indigenous church" principles based on the ministry of the apostle Paul (and the insights of predecessors such as Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson and John Nevius). Allen's works gradually became very popular among evangelicals and Pentecostals, most of whom overlooked both his Anglican ecclesiology and, more importantly, his rather uncritical dependence upon the principles of modern education. But they should not have overlooked it. The same or similar dependence had characterized the work of many Student Volunteers of the late nineteenth century, and had become most pervasive by the time Allen did his writing. So much so that the late Donald McGavran once told me that, when he went to India in the early 1920s, he as well as most of his colleagues thought of education as the primary door to the church!

However, it was after World War II that "Egyptian gold" became common currency in missions—both conciliar and conservative. During these last fifty years there has been a spurt and then a gradual decline of conciliar Protestant missions on the one hand, and a significant surge in evangelical and Pentecostal churches and missions on the other. But among both conciliar and conservatives the ideas and approaches of secular disciplines have been accorded a wide berth, though in differing ways and with different results.

During the last half century, conciliar missiologists have made repeated attempts to recover biblical authority and redefine mission in ways consonant

¹¹ Arthur F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 86.

with the mindset and methodologies of Western modernity and postmodernity. The results have been decidedly mixed. In 1968 in Uppsala, for example, conciliars more or less agreed to “let the world set the agenda.” Predictably, the “world’s agenda” drowned out Donald McGavran’s appeal to remember the two billion who had not yet had an opportunity to hear the gospel. Then, after the adoption of the Third (“Reform”) Mandate of the Theological Education Fund (1970–77), they conceived of one “contextualized” theology after another. Liberation Theology, Third Eye Theology, Waterbuffalo Theology, the Theology of Ontology and Time—these and still other theologies were deemed to have special relevance to the varied cultural contexts of their proponents. This despite the fact that, whether developed with an eye to the farmer in an Asian rice paddy or a villager in central Africa, most of those new theologies yield clear evidence of having been conceived, birthed and nurtured within the matrices of Western universities and theological schools where biblical revelation had been emasculated by historical criticism.

All the while, evangelical and Pentecostal missiologists have prided themselves on their adherence to the plenary authority of Scripture and the cardinal doctrines of the church. Ostensibly at least, they placed their confidence in the revealed Word of God rather than in the social sciences. Nevertheless, in a profound sense and in unique ways, those very sciences were allowed to “set the agenda” for conservatives as well as for conciliars. This process gained significant momentum in the 1940s and 1950s when the missiological relevance of the social sciences and the potential of rapidly developing technologies became particularly appealing. Gradually but inexorably over the years appreciation gave way to fascination. More and more attention came to be devoted to the discovery and use of social science findings, theories and methodologies. Statistical analysis, dynamic equivalence, transformation grammar, functionalism, bonding, programmed learning, the “motivational pyramid,” cognitive dissonance, decision scales, “yes-yes-yes” and other sales techniques, fuzzy and bounded sets, marketing—all of this and more came to be common grist for missiological mills. And all the while, continuing advances in technological know-how made data gathering techniques, informational networking, satellite telecasting and the like immediately available for Kingdom service.¹²

¹² The author has made an effort to discover the extent of social science influence on missiology over the period of about two decades from the later 1960s to the late 1980s (cf. *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Mission* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988] 139–140). In part the study provided the basis for the writing of a book on directions open to missions in the years remaining in the twentieth century. It consisted of a modified content analysis of representative mission publications during that period.

One aspect of the study entailed an analysis of 444 book reviews that appeared in *Missiology* between 1973 and 1986. (*Missiology* is the official publication of the American Society of Missiology, an organization founded in the early 1970s and composed of Roman Catholics, Conciliar Protestants and Conservative Evangelicals/Pentecostals.) This analysis revealed that the number of books focusing primarily on social science materials was 79 (17.8 percent of the total). The number focusing on theological concerns (i.e. theology *and* mission, and theology *of* mission) was only slightly more—89 (20 percent). The *Missiology* book review study was augmented by a modified content analysis of over two decades (from 1966 to 1988) of major articles in the *International Review*

To illustrate, as this is being written, an entirely new project designed to break down resistance and mass market Christianity is being launched in Japan. Basing their strategy on the kind of imaging techniques used in the commercial world, knowledgeable, dedicated researchers propose to overcome Japanese resistance and achieve results rivaling those achieved by Francis Xavier over four hundred years ago! More than a dependence upon scientific methodology is involved here. Also involved is an almost unbounded confidence in the value and potential of secular science put to Kingdom use.

It is no mystery why conservative theorists and practitioners alike have dedicated themselves to the mastery and utilization of "Egyptian gold." They have done so with the best of intentions and out of a profound concern for world evangelization. They have done so because, the issue of biblical authority being largely settled (in their view, at least), it has been thought that biblical answers to missiological questions can be either readily assumed or easily adduced. What remains is to make full use of any and all resources available in order to carry out the God-given task of discipling the nations.

Though unintended, the results were predictable. In this process we who are theologically conservative have become overly enamored with the glitter of "Egyptian gold." All too often we have disregarded questions having to do with the purity of that "gold" as well as related questions having to do with the extent of our reliance on it. Warnings that we have developed a form of "de-theologized missiology" have gone unheeded in many conservative circles.¹³

The foregoing helps to explain the reaction of my Russian students referred to at the beginning of this article. A generation ago the Church Growth School was greatly indebted to the findings of sociologists and social anthropologists especially. But, at the same time, its early proponents were profoundly aware

of Missions and the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. The former is more ecumenically oriented; the latter is a joint publication of the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies and the International Foreign Missions Association. Only 14 (1.5 percent) of 949 articles in the *IRM* focused on the contributions of the social sciences whereas over four times as many (38 or 6.3 percent) of 604 articles in the *EMQ* had that as a primary focus. On the other hand, 45 (10.6 percent) of the 604 articles in the *EMQ* focused on theological concerns while almost three times that number (145 or 15.3 percent) of the 949 *IRM* articles had that focus.

To better appreciate the significance of this statistical data it would be necessary to set them in the context of all the categories involved. Also a more extensive content analysis would have to be made in order to ascertain more accurately the impact of secular studies and disciplines on the writers and writings of the books and journals that were under study. On the basis of the study in question all that one could confidently conclude is that, quantitatively at least, missiological inquiries of recent times reveal that almost as much attention has been given to profane studies and disciplines as has been devoted to strictly theological ones. Also, more attention has been given to theological subjects in the ecumenically oriented *IRM* than in the evangelical-oriented *EMQ*. My own reading of this is that higher critical studies have so impacted conciliar missiological scholarship that theological understandings of mission are fluid and changing. They are, therefore, in need of constant review and revision. At the same time, theological discussions in the *EMQ* have tended to be less frequent and more superficial. This likely grows out of the fact that conservatives have more or less assumed theological orthodoxy on the one hand, and have seldom subjected secular-based innovations to serious biblical evaluation on the other.

¹³ Cf. Edward Rommen, "The De-Theologizing of Missiology," *Trinity World Forum* 19/1 (Fall 1993) 1-4.

of the need for integrating those findings with a biblical theology of mission. Various attempts were made by Alan Tippett and others of the Church Growth School to fill this lacuna. Over years, McGavran himself became increasingly impatient with any kind of mission that denigrated Scripture and “Great Commission mission.” In more recent times, however, church growth studies and strategies have become almost totally preoccupied with what classical rhetoricians thought of as the “audience,” now seen as the “market.” What those Russian students were rightly suspicious of was an approach to church growth that is overly “user-friendly.” What they came to appreciate was an approach that gave priority to “God-directedness.”

V. LOOKING TO A NEW MILLENNIUM IN MISSIONS

It appears that, for over a century, Protestant missiologists of the various theological persuasions have labored almost too diligently under “Egyptian taskmasters.” Many if not most of us have become almost too acculturated to an “Egyptian mindset” and overly given to the accumulation and utilization of “Egyptian gold.” I confess to being implicated in the process. Now I would sound an alarm—now as we prepare for a new millennium with its potential for entering the “Promised Land” of an evangelized world.

How, then, should we proceed?

Changing direction will be most difficult for conciliars and liberals. As we have seen, already before the close of the “Great Century” in Protestant missions, the Bible had been so subjected to the ravages of the Enlightenment that they often found themselves bereft of authority for both the Christian message and the Christian mission. Because they did not go far enough, noteworthy attempts to regain biblical authority in the twentieth century have been only partially successful. Attempts to bridge the gap that separated Christ from Scripture and both Christ and Scripture from sinful man have not carried the day. Very recent approaches will prove similarly deficient. It will not be enough to get “back to the Bible—almost.”¹⁴ Without a completely authoritative Bible, conciliars and liberals will increasingly find themselves in the company of non-Christian religionists who nevertheless claim a relationship with the One God called by whatever name.

But here we address ourselves primarily to conservative evangelicals and Pentecostals. How, then, should we proceed?

We would do well to listen to some of our colleagues who have recently addressed themselves to this question.

Listen to the cautions of a missiologist whose expertise in anthropology is well known—Paul Hiebert. Speaking to fellow missiologists, Hiebert takes note of the positive contributions of the social sciences to missiology but then cautions and counsels as follows:

. . . we face a real danger. In recent years in evangelical missions, we have been so fascinated by the power of the social sciences that we are in danger of leaving our biblical foundations, and, in the process, of losing the heart and soul of

¹⁴ Cf. Roger Olson, “Back to the Bible—almost,” *Christianity Today* (May 20, 1996) 31–34.

mission. We need to return to the Scriptures to lay the foundations for a theology of missions for the next century.¹⁵

Listen to the advice of a theologian who in the past was committed to the construction of new theologies but who now courteously but courageously exposes contemporary infatuations with the golden calves of modernity and post-modernity—Thomas C. Oden. In a monograph pertinently entitled “On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age,” he proposes that we prepare for the new millennium by undertaking three tasks.

First, he counsels us to study the biblical text itself in preference to its modern interpreters.

Second, he urges that we commit ourselves to contributing no new theology.

Third, he challenges us to reacquaint ourselves with the Christian consensus of the *first* millennium.¹⁶

Listen now to a former student of Bultmann, Gogarten, Fuchs and Ebeling who subsequently became honorary professor of New Testament at Philipps University, Marburg—Eta Linnemann. Converted to Christ and called of the Lord to teach in the Bible college in Malang, Indonesia, Linnemann now says that historical criticism is based on the underlying scientific principle *ut si Deus non daretur* (“as if there were no God”). She says that this has meant that “statements in Scripture regarding place, time, sequence of events, and persons are accepted only insofar as they fit in with established assumptions and theories. Scientific principle has come to have the status of an idol.”¹⁷ Concerning future Christian endeavors, Linnemann is persuaded that two principles stand out as being fundamental to those endeavors. First, the sciences should be recognized as basically anti-Christian even though they yield helpful information at times. Second, the Word of God should be recognized as sufficient for the work of God and as requiring no supplementation from sociology, psychology, educational theory or human experience!¹⁸

Finally, listen to the exhortation of another NT scholar whose commitment to both sacred Scripture and Christian mission is well known to us all—Donald A. Carson. He responds to the current state of affairs and to the challenge of the future in a way that leaves little doubt as to his take on both the urgency of the problem before us and the nature of its resolution. He writes,

... the Bible as a whole document tells a story, and, properly used, that story can serve as a meta-narrative that shapes our grasp of the entire Christian faith. In my view it is increasingly important to spell this out to Christians and to non-Christians alike—to Christians, to ground them in Scripture, and to non-Christians, as part of our proclamation of the gospel. The ignorance of basic Scripture is so disturbing in our day that Christian preaching that does not seek to remedy the lack is simply irresponsible.¹⁹

¹⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, “The Social Sciences and Missions: Applying the Message,” in Edward Rommen and Gary Corwin, eds., *Missiology and the Social Sciences*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 4 (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1996) 203.

¹⁶ Thomas C. Oden, “On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age,” in Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 189–204.

¹⁷ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible* 84.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 156–157.

¹⁹ Donald A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 84.

Then, with mission and evangelism specifically in view, Carson goes on to say,

Evangelism might wisely become, increasingly, a subset of biblical theology. . . . As I use the expression, biblical theology refers to the theology of the biblical corpora as God progressively discloses himself, climaxing in the coming of his Son Jesus Christ, and consummating in the new heaven and the new earth. In other words, sequence, history, the passage of time—these are foundational to biblical theology.²⁰

Readers will note that the two scholars who themselves have been caught up in higher criticism and new theologizing, Oden and Linnemann, are the most radical not only in defending Scripture but in urging its proper use. Indeed, though in ways that are but slightly less restrained, that is precisely what Hiebert and Carson are also proposing. David Wells sums it up succinctly when he writes, “Two decades ago the debate was over the nature of Scripture, today it should be over its function.”²¹

In significant ways, then, the future of mission depends upon what conservatives make, not only of the authority, but also of the function of Scripture. Christian mission must be undergirded with biblical authority but it must be guided by biblical theology. The most hopeful future for missions and missiology depends on the “re-missionizing of theology” on the one hand, and the “re-theologizing of missiology” on the other. To accomplish this, a largely new kind of dialogue and synergism will be required. Theologians will need to fight off the infection of an Aristotelianism imported from Egypt centuries ago; devote less time and effort to the erection of theological systems; and, together with missiologists, give more attention to the kind of biblical theology that will arrest the minds and change the hearts of people of various religions and cultures.²² Missiologists will have to struggle against a pragmatism that is overly devoted to ingenious ways of employing Egyptian gold and puts too much stock on the often ephemeral results of alchemized strategies; and they will have to labor alongside theologians in an effort to understand correctly and handle rightly Holy Spirit-inspired Scripture. Together, all alike will need to ponder again and again the contemporary relevance of Paul’s admonition to first-century citizens of both Caesar’s Rome and Christ’s Kingdom: “Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2 NEB).

²⁰ Ibid. 502.

²¹ David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 212.

²² Cf. Hiebert, “Social Sciences and Mission” 203, n. 8 and Thomas Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1985).