

Scripture, Culture, and Missions

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Many scholars today are discussing the need to contextualize the presentation of the gospel and the way that we do ministry. Jesus gave believers his Great Commission and sent the church on mission (Matt 28:19-20; John 20:21). Contextualization considers the culture into which the gospel is proclaimed and tries to remove unnecessary stumbling blocks to communicating the good news of salvation. The subject of contextualization, however, gives rise to many questions concerning why and how the church engages in mission. For instance, what role does Scripture play in contextualization? What forms and strategies should believers use as they are engaged in mission? Should they contextualize at all? If so, how far is too far? How far is far enough? How should Christians understand culture? Who should contextualize? What principles or values should be used in contextualization? How can one ensure that the gospel enters the culture and does not become diluted by the culture?

This issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* (*SWJT*) focuses on the relationship between Scripture, culture, and missions. Most of the essays enclosed in this volume were delivered at the *Sola Scriptura* or *Sola Cultura?* conference held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on April 14-15, 2011. The contributors to this issue will answer many such questions like those asked in the previous paragraph. First, since Scripture should be the driving force behind any theological or missiological enterprise we undertake, I have contributed an article titled, "A Biblical Theology of Missions and Contextualization." The address provides some theological and methodological principles to help believers as they engage in evangelism, missions, and contextualization. I have the privilege of serving at Southwestern as Professor of New Testament and Managing Editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. Second, in an essay called, "Global Choices for Twenty-First Century Christians," Malcolm Yarnell discusses, from a global perspective, our theological choices in fulfilling the Lord's commission during the twenty-first century. Yarnell is Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Center for Theological Research at Southwestern Seminary. He was also my predecessor, having faithfully served as the managing editor of *SWJT*. Many thanks, Dr. Yarnell, for your outstanding service and a job well done! Third, in an article entitled, "Proclaiming the Changeless Truth in These Changing Times," Norman Geisler speaks to the problem that the evangelical church faces today of proclaiming a premodern message in postmodern times. Three crucial areas are addressed: absolutism, exclusivism, and supernaturalism. A well known philosopher and apologist, Geisler serves at Veritas Evangelical

Seminary as Chancellor and Distinguished Professor of Apologetics and Theology, occupying the Norman L. Geisler Chair of Christian Apologetics. Fourth, Paige Patterson examines in an address titled, "Encountering Culture in Light of the Book of Daniel," how four Hebrew children in the book of Daniel responded to a culture change that they had no idea was coming. He ascertains what we can learn about how we as followers of Christ should respond to the cultural circumstances in which we find ourselves. Patterson is President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, serves as Professor of Theology, and also holds the L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism ("Chair of Fire"). Fifth, in his article "*Scriptura* or *Cultura*: Is There a *Sola* in There?" Keith Eitel describes the tensions between text and culture, explains how the role of culture has come to have sway in the current conversation, and proposes a set of biblical principles to take the lead in the contextualization dance between text and context. Eitel serves Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as Professor of Missions, Director of the World Missions Center, and Dean of the Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Missions. Sixth, in a preliminary analysis, David Hesselgrave asks, "Did Cape Town 2010 Correct the 'Edinburgh Error'?" For many years it seemed to Hesselgrave that the fateful "error" at the famous World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, was its failure to deal with vital matters of the Christian faith—with theological and doctrinal issues crucial to the future of Christian mission. Hesselgrave, a prominent missiologist, wrote an earlier article entitled, "Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error?" In the present article, however, he asks whether missions conferences (particularly the one held at Cape Town) held 100 years after Edinburgh have corrected the errors of the earlier conference. Seventh, John Morris anticipates the following essay and provides "An Introduction to McGavran's Thoughts on the Church and Denominations." Morris serves as Assistant Professor of Missions at Southwestern and secured the rights to publish the next article, a little known piece written by Donald McGavran in 1985. Eighth, in his essay, "The Church, the Denominations, and the Body," the late Donald McGavran, arguably the greatest missiologist of the twentieth century, addresses and analyzes the tremendous drive for denominations to unite, and thus, structurally speaking, make one church. McGavran served as Dean Emeritus of the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Finally, John Massey contributes a thought provoking theological review of Church Planting Movements (CPMs) methodology in "Wrinkling Time in the Missionary Task." Massey is Associate Professor of Missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously served as a career missionary from 2001-2011 with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. This journal issue also contains several regular and extended book reviews.

We pray that these articles equip and assist you as you engage in evangelism, missions, and contextualization. If you like what you read in this issue and would like to have one of our faculty members speak in your church or lead your congregation in a study of any sort, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are more than happy to serve you. Further, if God has called you into his service please consider allowing us the privilege of preparing you at Southwestern for a lifetime of ministry. God bless you!