

Book Review: *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?*

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James Engel and William Dyrness underscore their passion to see the world recognize the lordship of Jesus Christ and the related call of the church to extend that lordship in its mission activities. However, in an attempt to awaken the church and mission agencies to sweeping changes in the world today, Engel and Dyrness, in *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?*, identify key disconnects in the mission world today. The authors encourage Christians to challenge the assumptions of how things have been done in the past. In order for revival and change to happen, Engel and Dyrness state that it is necessary to diagnose accurately what has gone wrong with the harvest. This is a book for missionaries, future missionaries, mission executives, pastors, and missions committees.

What's Gone Wrong With the Harvest?

By first of all painting a picture of an uninformed past on the part of churches and mission agencies, the authors unravel historically how the church and its mission enterprise have compromised with modernity and with Western forms of political and economic power. The authors call for a return to the biblical belief in a missionary God (Missio Dei) and, at the same time, commonsense recognition of changing world realities.

Because of modernity's glorification of the west and Enlightenment principles, the western church, located in the centers of power, has mistakenly viewed missions as primarily evangelizing "over there". By contrast, the authors make a biblical case for missions to be directed to people everywhere (not just "over there"). Making people followers of Christ and disciples, as opposed to superficial evangelism, is the means. Discipleship is a conversion process that takes place over a lifetime. Moreover, the emphasis of missions is on all creation, including culture and the physical realm.

Back to the Early Church Model

The authors critique the present model for missions. They suggest that the model for missions in the west is the exact opposite of what the early church practiced. Instead of moving from the periphery to the centers of power (as did the early church) to call the centers of power to repentance, the present western model is one that moves from the centers of wealth and world power to those who are impoverished physically and spiritually on the periphery. This phenomenon has made the western missionary enterprise blind to the fundamental realities that lay behind the mission of the early church and the political and economic realities of our own mission structures. Missionaries from the west are often unaware that they are involved in and identified with power centers, thereby producing disastrous consequences to their witness and work. The church and its mission endeavors blend in with the centers of power that are in desperate need of redemption. And as a result, the church often has little credibility in centers of power as those who should love the needy on the periphery. Since the power centers for Christianity have shifted away from the west, this becomes even more problematic.

Engels and Dyrness affirm that missions in a postmodern world will be church-centered, focusing on strengthening and empowering God's people everywhere. The message will once again be holistic and the local church will no longer be viewed as just a vehicle to evangelizing the lost.

Managerial Missiology vs Kingdom Perspective

The authors make the point that the modernist obsession with measurable goals, precision, numbers, predictability, and control has hindered the cause of missions. Engels and Dyrness state succinctly that strategic planning and rational tools are great tools for the mission enterprise as long as one does not become an "autonomous problem solver" apart from a Word-centered empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Engels and Dyrness propose a dependence on God's Spirit for new opportunities. They insist that the goal of Christ's Great Commission is not simply to provide a "lifeboat for lost souls", but the creation of "communities of common people doing uncommon deeds".