

The Elephant in the Room:

Towards a Paradigm Shift in Missiological Education

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About the Author

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Abstract:

In this paper, I identify the critical need within Western academia to move from an ethnocentric understanding of theology to a global theological framework. Western missiological and theological education is often restricted to solely Western hermeneutics, methodologies, and worldview. While the rich diversity of the global Church is sprinkled throughout traditional Western education, the real vibrancy of global missiology, theology, and ecclesiology has yet to fully impact Western academia. In reflecting on this lack of diversity and inclusivity, I identify two paradigm shifts that need to take place before Western academia can engage in a true global dialogue. I argue that by re-determining who has a voice in academia and by listening to global theology in transformative ways, the West can begin to engage meaningfully and humbly as an equal partner in global academic discourse.

As I sat in the small Bible School classroom in Adelaide, Australia, I couldn't help but notice the Papua New Guinean pastor sitting behind me. The topic of the day was church planting and along with a handful of other Australian pastors and leaders, I was spending the afternoon learning about the challenges and potential strategies for planting churches. Our lecturer for the day was a highly experienced church planter by Western standards, having started several churches during his decades in ministry. However, as I listened to him speak, my thoughts turned again to the Melanesian pastor behind me. Would he be asked to share? Would we hear his story? For the Christian leader seated behind me was not merely a member of the course but a visiting minister on a practicum exchange from the largest church in our denomination. Moreover, the irony was not lost on me that he was an experienced church planter who had helped plant not one or two churches but over forty churches during his lifetime. As the minutes of the class dwindled down, I started to realize the obvious; our visitor would not be asked to speak. It was in fact a one-sided practicum; one in which pastors were sent to the West, to learn from the West, but not the other way around.

While there may be exceptions to this scenario, an unfortunate and uncomfortable truth resides within this narrative. I join the increasing number of scholars and institutions, who are on a journey of revisiting and reimagining Western missiological and theological education. In this paper, I outline several ways in which Western theological institutions can increasingly listen to and learn from the collective experience and wisdom of the global Church. In the first section, I draw our attention to the core of the issue; the critical need within Western academia to move from an ethnocentric understanding of religious education to an inclusive and holistic global theological framework. In the following sections

I identify two steps that need to take place before this goal can be reached: 1) Re-determining who has a voice in religious education and 2) Listening to global theology in transformative ways.

Moving from a Western Theology to a Global Theology

Recently, in a casual conversation with my friend's teenage daughter, the young girl confidently explained to me that she was the best softball player on her team. She went on to explain objectively that she wasn't joking; she was literally the best player. Although all the other players tried very hard, she just had natural talent and thus was the most valuable competitor. Although we may smile at this unbridled confidence often seen in our youth, this belief in many ways mirrors the sense of superiority so often reflected in our Western theology. We simply, even if

unwittingly, believe that we are the best. Non-western scholars may try to exegete the Scriptures, apply biblical hermeneutics, and contribute to missiological and theological conversation, but really, we are the best. Our ability to interpret Scripture is superior, as are the methods we use to do so. Our theological conclusions are more accurate, more in-line with Christian tradition, more theologically orthodox, more hermeneutically reliable, freer of cultural bias, and just downright correct. Although this ethnocentric belief is more often implied than stated, until recent decades it has been the presiding assumption in our Western-centric academies. The primary problem with this mindset isn't only its myopia; it is its discontinuity from patterns of biblical faithfulness. Wilbert R. Shenk highlights the problem when he states: "the global domination of Western theology remains largely unaddressed. Theological education in the non-Western world is still captive to the Western tradition and curriculum."¹ Nevertheless, while Western theology and curriculum has dominated recent decades of theological conversation, the geographical and theological shifts within the global church demand a radical change.

Although the West still boasts an abundance of educational resources, theological scholars, and prestigious institutions, much of the cutting edge theology-on-the-ground is taking place among the fruitful churches of the global South and East. The tremendous numerical growth of the Church in Latin America, Asia, and Africa has birthed a vibrant theological discussion that is contextual, engaged with current issues of injustice, poverty, and materialism, and is biblically grounded. More than simply offering a marginal hearing of these voices, a new theological paradigm needs to be created in which Western theologies are understood to be a voice, rather than *the* voice of theological thought.

In order to fully make this shift, there are several preliminary changes that need to take place on both an individual and institutional level. First, the limitations and inadequacy of relying upon one contextual theological perspective need to be acknowledged. From its inception, Christianity has addressed the specific concerns of its adherents within their socio-cultural, political, and historical context. Whether we consider the prophet Elijah sharing the love of God with the Sidonian widow at Zarephath or the 1st century Early Church leaders addressing the polytheistic concerns of new believers, God's truth is shared within a cultural context, to a specific people, within a particular time period. While God's truth is universal, theology is by its very definition, humanity's perception and understanding of God and religious truth. Thus, while adhering faithfully to the gospel of Christ, there naturally exists within the global Church "differences in religious experience, in ways of thinking and arguing about theology, in views as to the tasks of the Church, in individual and communal life-styles."² While the extent of this theological diversity has not been fully evident largely due to centuries of geographical isolation, the contemporary

1 Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission," 98.

2 Bosch, "An Emerging Paradigm for Mission", 496.

Church faces an increasingly complex reality within its theological discourse.³ No longer can one theological voice assume that its perspective is universal; instead the validity of other theological perspectives must be brought to bear on our vision of the future of Western theological education.

In discussing this major transition, David J. Bosch acknowledges the need for Western scholars to make this shift and the potential challenges that theologians will face in making it. He explains:

It is, therefore, presumptuous for persons of one culture and tradition to dictate the “normal” signs of conversion for another culture and context. To accept this, not only intellectually but also existentially and practically, may be a traumatic experience for Christians from the west. It makes our own views and convictions vulnerable. It de-absolutizes them. And even if we have assured ourselves and others a thousand times that it does not matter, that all along we have been working and hoping for a genuine contextualization of the gospel in the younger churches, we cannot rid ourselves of the nagging fear that, perhaps, they may have missed the real essence of the gospel.⁴

While this “nagging fear” reveals the ethnocentric nature of the West’s theological assumptions, it also emphasizes the necessary realignment of the West as it considers the Church and its mission. The Church does not direct God but God the Church. Likewise, theological truth is not bound to one specific people group, region, or time period. Instead, theological truth is bound to God. It is therefore infeasible for one nation, people group, or individual to hold the exclusive rights as interpreter of God’s truth. This reality does not undermine the universal nature of God’s truth but instead considers the biases and cultural context of those who interpret it. As Kevin J. Vanhoozer notes: “theology in an era of world Christianity is still hermeneutical, but hermeneutics now means not ‘rules for interpretation’ but ‘reading from one’s lived experience’ ... Today, it is hermeneutically incorrect to claim that one’s interpretations are immune to cultural conditions and hence applicable to all times and places.”⁵ Thus, as we consider the realm of theology, biblical exegesis and hermeneutics cannot be, and should not be, the property of one global region or a limited group of scholars.

Second, it is crucial to understand that the study of God is a collective global activity. As we consider historical accounts such as the establishment of the Moravian *Unitas Fratrum* in 18th century Herrnhut and the development of Pastor Xi Shengmo’s ministry to opium addicts in 19th century China, it is evident that developing theology has been a characteristic of Christian communities throughout Church history. However, in contrast to this rich and diverse theological heritage in

3 Bosch, “An Emerging Paradigm for Mission,” 496.

4 Ibid., 496.

5 Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule them All,” 95.

our age, Western theology is often pushed to the forefront of theological discussion. In writing of this current overemphasis on Western theology, Shenk argues that contrary to popular belief, theology developed in the West is often the least helpful to Majority World churches. He points out that “it is more promising to cede to the Asian, African, and Latin American churches the freedom to seek out natural links between their experiences and those historical periods when the church confronted similar issues.”⁶ Shenk explains, “great cultural and historical distance separates the early church and the modern Western church, whereas contemporary Asian, African, and Latin American Christians have considerable affinity with those of the first and second centuries.”⁷ The author notes that the religious and cultural pluralism familiar to Majority World Christians allows them to relate to the socio-cultural context of the early church.⁸ As such, lessons drawn from early church realities may be more applicable to Majority World churches than the realities of the West. However, as the author concludes, “this limitation has not inhibited Western theology from assuming that it is uniquely qualified to determine the theological canons by which contemporary African, Asian, and Latin American churches ought to live.”⁹ As the author so aptly states, Western theology does not, and cannot, answer all the urgent questions of the global Church. Instead, Western theology brings insight as it contributes to the entire body of theological thought. It is in the collective study of God and Scripture throughout history that the global Church can learn, grow, and flourish.

Finally, in moving towards a global theological framework, Western scholars must embrace the role of being co-learners rather than theological teachers. Solomon Aryeetey, a Ghanaian medical doctor and co-founder of Pioneers-Africa, addresses this issue head on in his timely article “Sebi tafratse (with all due respects): A Word to the West from the Rest.” He writes:

Enough is enough! This is the 800 lb. gorilla in the room every time groups of Christians in the Majority World sit around the table with their Western counterparts to talk about partnership. It is time to call a spade a spade, and not a big spoon! A dear friend of mine stated it this way: ‘As a representative of the non-Western segment of the Body of Christ, I refuse to be a second-class citizen in my own Father’s house!’¹⁰

Aryeetey’s poignant words ring true, and present a challenge to the Western Church. In order to become co-laborers and co-learners in Christ, Western and Majority World churches need to develop mutual partnerships, partnerships in which both of their academic and missional pursuits are given equal standing and voice. This move does not mean, however, that “third world theology should now

6 Shenk, “Recasting Theology of Mission,” 100.

7 Ibid., 100.

8 Ibid., 100.

9 Shenk, “Recasting Theology of Mission,” 100.

10 Aryeetey, “*Sebi tafratse*,” 171.

become the norm for the entire world ... Neither does it mean that third world Christianity does not also face dangers on all sides and that it is not as susceptible to distortion as first world Christianity was and still is.”¹¹ But it does imply that our own Western theologies have limitations and “that third world Christians do not need anyone’s authorization before they theologize.”¹²

As co-learners, the Western church can glean wisdom from fellow believers around the world. David D. Ruiz, in conjunction with Majority World leaders at the 2004 Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization, addresses both the current changes in Majority World churches and the lessons that can be learned from these growing missional movements. He writes:

The growth of the Majority World Church and its vitality have transformed it into a new missionary force. For example, The Nigeria Evangelical Mission Association (NEMA), founded in 1982, is formed by 90 missionary agencies and denominations and has more than 3800 missionaries in 38 countries. Indian Mission Association is connecting almost 200 national agencies and COMIBAM in Latin America is connecting 26 different countries in a mission movement. These agencies and churches today have some contributions to offer to the contemporary mission of the church.¹³

Ruiz continues, noting that various characteristics of Majority World mission such as the direct relationship between the missionary and their sending church and the reemphasis on long-term mission, are valuable practices that contribute to global mission theory and praxis.¹⁴ In his discussion, Ruiz also acknowledges the areas of growth facing the Majority World mission movement. He notes the shared challenges of raising financial support, the over-popularity of high harvest mission fields, and “the tendency to send missionaries where the same language is spoken.”¹⁵ It is in this acknowledgement of both the limitations and contributions of the Majority World mission movement that Western Christians can take their rightful positions as co-laborers in Christ. It is also in this mutual position of humility and respect that balanced and insightful global theological discussions can develop.

This movement towards a global theology requires decisive action as well as a conceptual paradigm shift. Although many steps can be noted as potentially contributing to this shift, in the following sections I highlight two crucial steps needed to reach this goal. First is the re-determination of who has a voice in academia. Second is the need to listen to Majority World theologians in transformative ways.

11 Bosch, “An Emerging Paradigm for Mission,” 501.

12 Ibid., 501.

13 Ruiz, “The Two Thirds World Church,” 9.

14 Ibid., 9.

15 Ruiz, “The Two Thirds World Church,” 9.

Re-Determining Who Has a Voice

The first move towards this change is re-determining who can and should speak. I will never forget the uncomfortable feeling of inadequacy as I stood in front of the Institute of Evangelism Students at Bethel Centre in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, teaching the course *Revival for Today*. As a recent seminary graduate, I was assigned the task of instructing the first year evangelism students on the signs and wonders, healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles of the gospel narratives. My class was filled with pastors and church leaders from around the nation who were actively involved in church planting, healing ministries, prison ministries, and local evangelism. As the days and weeks passed, it quickly became apparent to me that while I was very familiar with the intellectual concepts presented in the gospels, I had limited knowledge as to how God used the miraculous in his Church today. While I could readily supply the missional motifs, socio-cultural background, and structure of the text, it was my students who had experience living out the biblical realities in their contemporary context. Similarly, as we consider developing a more global theological outlook in the West, we must consider the full diversity of wisdom and knowledge that is present in our world. In the West, we have long valued theory over praxis, science over experience, and literature over oral history. But, as the center of Christianity continues its geographical shift to the Global South and East, the assumed superiority of this approach, and the cultural values and assumptions behind it, must be reassessed. The rules of our theological discussions must be revised to allow for the diversity of thought and methodological approach reflected in the growing global Church.

During the past few centuries, theological clout has been pre-determined exclusively by Western educational standards and ideals. Academic degrees earned, institutions attended, texts published, and academic societies joined all determine who can speak, to whom, and where. As long as one plays by these rules, she or he can have a voice in academia. This academic structure has been created for the West by the West and then exported as a definitive model to the Majority World. Per Frostin comments on how this reality has played out within his context:

In discussing Third World Theologies with Scandinavian colleagues, I have frequently encountered arguments of the following character: It is interesting that Third World Christians create new types of theology, but I can dialogue with them only on the condition that they state their critique of Western theology in a manner understood by me as scientific. In other words, the prerequisite of a dialogue is that the other party accepts “our” rules, since only these rules are genuinely scientific. This prerequisite for dialogue is ... the hegemony postulate.¹⁶

16 Frostin, “The Hermeneutics of the Poor,” 131.

Expanding on Frostin's thoughts, Tite Tiénou explains, "the West's self-perception that it is the center of scholarship is a corollary of the hegemony postulate. Here the assumption is that the West represents the center of scholarship and the rest (usually Africa, Asia, and Latin America) fits in the margins. The assumption is seen in the reflex of dismissing third world scholarship without real or adequate basis."¹⁷ At its core, this dismissal of Majority World scholarship and the demand for conformity in theological method is based upon the assumption that Western scholarship is superior to that of the Majority World. As Shenk states "the Western intellectual framework assume[s] the primacy of Western culture."¹⁸ Is this true? Is Western scholarship and culture really superior? A growing number of scholars are adamantly proclaiming: "No!"

While historically Western nations are not alone in their claims of mental superiority, such beliefs have always proven to be shortsighted, ethnocentric, and ignorantly pronounced. Addressing this unspoken assumption of Western intellectual superiority, Aryeetey points out the inherent inaccuracy of such a claim. He explains:

At the heart of Western culture is a tendency to presume that there is little that can originate from a culture outside of the West that could be described as better than what the West offers. "*Sebi tafratse*" [with all due respect], this is baloney! It is insulting to the creativity, ingenuity, and sovereignty of the God who so delicately made the other cultures for his glory. Unwittingly, Christians in the West have believed this lie that makes them feel a sense of entitlement to a biblically untenable position of first-class citizens in the Kingdom of God. The result is that they then expect all other cultures to automatically assume the subservient and inferior role of second-class citizens. This is heresy.¹⁹

As the author so accurately relates, non-Western Christians are not second-class citizens in the Church, and I would add neither are they second-class citizens in academia. Therefore, if Western theoretical constructs are not inherently superior, then it can be inferred that neither is Western scholarship or methodology. If this is true, the question quickly becomes: "why ... Christian theologians from other parts of the world must play by Western Christianity's rules in order to do theology."²⁰ Similarly, if Western theological models, degrees, and methodologies are not inherently superior, "how [then] do we do theology 'after the West'?"²¹

17 Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," 47.

18 Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission," 100.

19 Aryeetey, "*Sebi tafratse*," 171.

20 Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule them All," 88.

21 Ibid., 91.

In noting this transition away from Western biblical methods, Vanhoozer explains “the very notion of method may itself be too Western a category to embrace for some.” He notes that “it may be that theology in an era of world Christianity inhabits a situation ‘after method,’ that is, a situation in which no one method dominates.”²² The author continues:

Non-Western theologies question the form, content, and categories that have become default setting of academic theology. In this respect, non-Western thinkers have become surprising bedfellows with certain Western postmoderns. Both groups ... agree on the need for a genealogical analysis of Western intellectual systems to unmask their apparent universality and on the need to listen to others. And both groups agree that the West’s discourse on God and salvation is ultimately only a “local” theology.²³

This act of separating theology from methodology is an important step towards facilitating a global theological discourse. Thus, in moving forward, the boundaries of who speaks in theological circles must also be expanded to include a wider expression of theology.

This transition is by no means new to Christianity. Throughout Church history theologians have routinely adopted new methods to study and convey theology. As Christianity has spread across the world, the avenues through which believers have expressed their faith have been as diverse as their linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. The authors of Scripture reflect this diversity in their expression of theological thought through a wide spectrum of genres: poetry, song, the law, narratives, proverbs, theological discourse, letters, and prophetic writings. Acknowledging the various ways in which communities understand and articulate truth, Bosch highlights the growing understanding among Western scholars of these diverse theological constructs:

Now, at long last, we are beginning to rediscover what is sometimes referred to as the Hebrew way of experiencing reality as contrasted with the Greek way. This has led to an appreciation of ‘narrative theology’ and ‘oral theology’ as legitimate complements to conceptual theology. Walter Hollenweger argues that the Bible uses narrative theology predominantly; here the medium of communication is ‘not definition, but description, not thesis, but dance, not doctrine, but hymn, not the learned book, but history and parable, not the formulation of concepts, but the celebration of banquets’ (Hollenweger 1979:80-81; [Bosch] translation). He is aware of the limits of narrative (or ‘analogical’) theology; it is imprecise and ambiguous, so it needs to be supplemented (not replaced!) by ‘catalogical’ or conceptual theology. It is not enough to enunciate the correct doctrine, nor

22 Ibid., 91.

23 Ibid., 89.

to be logically consistent. There should be room for intuition and imagination. Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am,' has to be supplemented with 'I experience' and 'I participate, therefore I am.'²⁴

While noting the validity of "narrative," "oral," and "conceptual" theologies, Bosch rightly emphasizes the complementary nature of each expression of theological thought. As Bosch indicates, the inclusion of a variety of theological models does not eliminate the necessity of any one method but instead each model contributes to the wider spectrum of theological understanding.

In recent decades scholars have increasingly embraced the complementary nature of theological methodologies. Texts such as Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones's, *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (1997), and W. Jay Moon's, *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture* (2009), highlight the contribution of narrative theology within theological research. Similarly, oral theology - theology expressed through song, drama, proverbs, poetry, sermons, and story - is also gaining its place within global theological education. In *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, Philip Jenkins recounts numerous examples of oral theology in churches around the world. In the author's comments on contemporary African churches, Jenkins writes:

Modern African churches have made great use of music, both imported and autonomous; and at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, believers across the continent have deployed local musical traditions to the service of praise and worship. So central, in fact, is music to African cultures that institutions of all kinds are commonly riven between the official head and the music leader, whether the musician is a church worship leader or a school choirmaster: music matters.²⁵

As the churches in the South and East continue to grow in their global influence, the richness of their oral and narrative traditions will become more accessible to Western scholars. While not replacing the West's own theological heritage, these fresh modes of theological expression have the potential to add a layer of depth and wisdom to the global Church's understanding of God and his kingdom.

I witnessed first-hand the impact of one of these rediscovered methodologies, narrative theology, while attending a church service in Port Moresby. Papua New Guinea is a nation united by its love of stories. When locals spend time hanging out with their friends, the common expression used is "We are going to tell stories together." Knowing Papua New Guineans love of narrative, I was surprised while living in the capital how rarely narrative was incorporated in Sunday sermons.

24 Bosch, "An Emerging Paradigm for Mission," 499.

25 Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 32.

Preachers, perhaps mirroring their missionary counterparts, often overlooked the narratives of Scripture and instead focused on systematically exploring biblical motifs. However, this Sunday morning was different. We were all sitting together in the open-air auditorium of Bethel Centre, and the preacher before us was weaving a spellbinding tale. The young evangelist was telling the story of a large, Papuan black snake that had crawled into the upper rafters of his family home. Between describing his attempts to keep his mother from walking into the room and the snake's adventures in the ceiling, the preacher had the entire audience riveted between fearful apprehension and uncontrollable laughter. The preacher then moved with conviction, highlighting the parallel between the snake and the presence of sin in our lives. The entire auditorium of 2,000 people fell silent. The obvious comparison hit us all like a brick. No logical explanation of the negative consequences of human sin could have impacted us in the same way that the speaker's powerful narrative had. While Western academia often dismisses the adequacy of narrative as a vehicle of theological ideas, the power of story cannot be denied. In 1st century Israel, Jesus chose to teach hundreds of his followers spiritual truths through story. Generations of Christian scholars have followed suit expressing significant theological treaties in famous works such as St. Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*, Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, Teresa of Ávila's *The Interior Castle*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Paul Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. What we witnessed during that Sunday service in Port Moresby exemplified the validity and continued potency of this ancient tradition of narrative theology.

Listening to Global Theology in Transformative Ways

The second step towards facilitating a global theology is listening to and learning from non-Western theologians. During a recent academic conference, I witnessed some of the challenges that this paradigm shift poses for both parties. It was the final afternoon session of the conference, and the last academic papers were being read to the tired but congenial audience. After reading my own paper, one of my non-Western colleagues presented his current research in which he examined contextualization models within his own indigenous community. As the scholar opened up the conversation to the audience, hands flew up around the room, and the strong resistance of the academic crowd became quickly apparent. While such a passionate response is not at all unwelcome or unfamiliar in the iron-sharpening-iron discussions of academia, it was the scene that followed that caught my attention. As the questions came to a close, the next presenter stood up to present his parallel research; this time the scholar was from the West. Per the theme of the afternoon, the speaker also presented his research on the same people

group. His specific topic was a historic analysis of the indigenous church and their continued governance by outside Western bodies. After the paper was read, the same audience responded with overwhelming support for the scholar. One of the previously dissenting audience members even adamantly expressed the injustice of the situation stating that “members of [this non-Western community] really needed to be allowed to govern themselves and speak for themselves.” I sat there in stunned silence. The obvious disparity between the two responses was simply too clear to ignore. Only a few minutes before the same audience member had forcefully dismissed the perspective of a member of that exact community. After the session ended, I approached my non-Western colleague who had originally presented and asked him if he often received this hostile of a reception. He smiled knowingly and explained that this response had become a common occurrence within his academic career.

There is something wrong with this scenario. Something is askew when Western scholars can only welcome non-Western perspectives when they are filtered, packaged, and interpreted by our Western peers. True dialogue, while the more challenging path, needs to provide an equal platform for each voice. By engaging in open theological dialogue with the full body of Christ, each party is apt to hear points of view with which they agree and disagree, and positions that align with and oppose their own. Nevertheless, this vibrant intersection is healthy and vital for the growth of the global Church. Moving ahead in global dialogue can be challenging as “habits formed over years, and even centuries, cannot change overnight.”²⁶ However, one significant step forward in this journey is listening with openness and respect to our brothers and sisters around the world.

When considering theology from the global South and East, there are several common themes that emerge. One of these themes, the importance of embracing the organic relationship between theology and missiology, is of unique significance. In analyzing the historic development of Western theology, Shenk explains the current separation between theology and missiology that exists in the West. He writes:

From as early as the fourth century Western theology has pursued an inward-focused, intellectual, and pastoral agenda rather than an outward-looking evangelistic and missional agenda ... As Western theology moved into the university and was professionalized, it became increasingly detached from ecclesial reality and cultural context. In the twentieth century it was left to missionary statesmen and a few theologians sympathetic to mission to develop the theology of mission; the academy—in both its dominant seminary and university forms—largely ignored it.²⁷

26 Tiénou, “Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity,” 50.

27 Bosch, “An Emerging Paradigm for Mission,” 490.

Emphasizing this same historical predicament, Bosch explains, “When, approximately a century ago, missiology was admitted as a subject into the field of theology, this was done not because it was intrinsically necessary to have a separate theological subject called “Missiology,” but because western theology had forgotten its very *raison d’être*.”²⁸ Quoting Martin Kähler, Bosch continues that “the early Christian mission was ‘the mother of theology’ and even today theology, truly defined, should regard itself as a ‘companion of the Christian mission, not a luxury of the world-dominating Church.’”²⁹ While the separate study of theology and missiology has its benefits, the separation of the Church from its mission does not. Bosch rightly states that Western theology, in losing its connection to the mission of God, has forgotten its very reason for existence. As Shenk rightly notes: “It is time to listen to voices from the non-Western world that can help construct a theology capable of empowering the global church for participation in the *missio Dei*.”³⁰

While the West’s “missionless theology and churchmanship”³¹ was originally exported overseas, many churches in the Majority World have since reestablished the holistic connection between the Church and the mission of God. In C. René Padilla’s article “The Fullness of Mission,” the Latin American scholar calls attention the need for a universally action-based Christian faith. He explains:

The Christian mission is concerned with the development of the whole person and of all people. It includes, therefore, the shaping of a new lifestyle ... The need is for models of mission fully adapted to a situation characterized by a yawning chasm between rich and poor. The models of mission built on the affluence of the West condone this situation of injustice and condemn the indigenous churches to permanent dependence. In the long run, therefore, they are inimical to mission. The challenge both to Christians in the West and to Christians in the underdeveloped world is to create models of mission centered in a prophetic lifestyle, models that will point to Jesus Christ as the Lord over the totality of life, to the universality of the church, and to the interdependence of human beings in the world.³²

This practical outworking of one’s Christian faith against the real systemic injustices of the world recalls the marriage of ‘word’ and ‘deed’ in the pre-Christendom church. While not entirely absent from the Western Church, the organic connection between right belief and right action can be found at the forefront of Majority World mission theology. Noting this trend, Vanhoozer writes: “Increasingly, theologians in Africa, Latin America, and Asia are more interested in orthopraxis than orthodoxy. Theology must be relevant, and it must make a difference; it must

28 Bosch, “An Emerging Paradigm for Mission,” 490.

29 Bosch, “An Emerging Paradigm for Mission,” 490; Kähler, *Erfahrungen der Leibhaftigkeit*, 189.

30 Shenk, *Write the Vision*, 98.

31 Bosch, “An Emerging Paradigm for Mission,” 490.

32 Padilla, “The Fullness of Mission,” 10-11.

address people's concerns, and it must transform the structures of everyday life."³³ As Bosch confirms, this revolt "against [the] intellectualization of theology ... [has] made an 'epistemological leap' from a hermeneutic of abstract reflection on the truth to a hermeneutic of praxis. One *does* theology, one does not simply *write* it."³⁴ This embodied faith reunites the body of Christ with its original mission to love God and love its neighbors (Matt 22:37-39).

The importance of adopting a missional theology was highlighted anew when I attended the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 2010 in Cape Town, South Africa. While at the conference, I was one of 4,000 Christian leaders from over 198 countries attending the global conference. After one of the afternoon sessions, I struck up a conversation with two Latin American church leaders attending the conference. Standing in the busy hallway we exchanged pleasantries in Spanish, and I asked them about their impression of the congress so far. In answer to my question, the two women hesitated slightly and then proceeded to tell me what they had just observed. Directly after one of the sessions focused on "Wealth, Power, and Poverty," they had walked outside of the convention building with the bustling conference crowd to the waiting buses. Scattered amidst the coaches were several women and men begging for money. The women explained with surprise and shock, "we had just left the session focused on compassion for the poor, and as we stood there, individual after individual passed the poor without offering assistance. It was as if no one even saw the poor."

As we continued our conversation, their observation struck me: "It was as if no one even saw the poor." In a few minutes, these women had pinpointed a major flaw in Western theology: the pervasive dualism that has long separated word and deed; the dualism that enables us to discuss compassion for the poor, without being compassionate; that enables us to theorize about evangelism, without evangelizing. And, in theological education, the dualism that allows us to focus on intellectual theory without ever participating in the mission of God. However, unless we engage in theological conversations like this one in Cape Town, our theological blind spots will continue to be our blind spots. It is only in listening and learning from our brothers and sisters in Christ that we can experience the full insights of the global body of Christ.

Conclusion

When I think back to the Bible School classroom in Adelaide, Australia, I am saddened and embarrassed by the paternalistic attitude extended towards the visiting Papua New Guinean pastor. This sense of superiority and privilege that so seamlessly permeates our Western mindset is damaging to the entire body of

33 Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule them All," 96.

34 Bosch, "An Emerging Paradigm for Mission," 499.

Christ and also detrimental to the Western Church. Like a table with two legs, the absence of a global theological discussion can only result in a lop-sided theology. While hiring non-Western faculty members and including diverse perspectives in academic texts is a step in the right direction, it doesn't address the systemic problem: the intellectual hierarchy that pervades Western academia. It doesn't challenge the "assumption...that the West represents the center of scholarship and the rest (usually Africa, Asia, and Latin America) fits in the margins."³⁵ In researching for this paper, it was sobering to note the early publication dates of the articles and texts that first raised this issue. Over thirty years have passed since prominent Western and non-Western scholars initially called for a comprehensive theological paradigm shift. Even more eye opening is the present lack of Western seminaries promoting non-Western theologies at an institutional level. In searching for best practices in Western seminaries, I eventually had to concede that currently there are none.

As a professor of religion at a Christian undergraduate institution in the United States, I look forward to the day when my theology students are as familiar with the thoughts of Orlando Costas and Kosuke Koyama as they are with those of Karl Barth and John Calvin. While the rich diversity of the global Church can be seen sprinkled throughout traditional theological education, the real vibrancy of global missiology, theology, and ecclesiology has yet to fully impact Western academia. Therefore, as we consider the future, indeed the very nature and mission of theological education in North America, there is one urgent need that rises above all others: the need to let the global Church speak! - to speak into our understanding of God, Scripture, and the Church -to speak into not just what we teach our students, but how, why, and to what end we teach them as well - to speak into our theologies, methodologies, and traditions.

35 Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," 47.

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