

**Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*,  
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**[Summary of relevant chapters]**

**Introduction**

The **traditional understanding** of missiology is that it studies the issues arising from the *geographical expansion* of Western Christianity into other cultures. That goes together with the theological concern of taking the gospel to those who need to hear it. The traditional understanding is unsuitable for today.

**A. Changing World Church**

1. There has been an amazing *growth of the Church in the South* over the past century. Two-thirds to three-quarters of Christians live outside the West.
2. This goes together with a steep *decline* in membership in the older churches in the West. Which is accompanied by deep compromise to the secular worldview of Western culture.
3. The explosive *growth of the global Pentecostal church*.

**B. Changing situations in the World (mega-trends)**

1. The *collapse of colonialism* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Missionaries flowed along the paths of colonial rule. Its collapse brought the challenge to rethink the entire approach to mission.
2. *Globalization*: the spread of the modern Western story of economic progress around the world, especially with the use of new information technology.
3. *Urbanization*: people moving to cities. Cities represent powerful centers of cultural, economic and political dominance in the world.
4. The overwhelming *social and economic problems* that affect our world: poverty, hunger, illiteracy, corruption, HIV-AIDS, human trafficking, violence, terrorism, nuclear and environmental crises.
5. Escalating global *population growth*.
6. We are witnessing a *revival (resurgence) in religions* around the world.
7. Significant *cultural shifts in Western culture* establish a new context for mission today: e.g. consumer society, digital revolution and postmodern thinking.

**C. A New Understanding of Mission**

1. Mission is **from** all 6 continents, including Africa & Asia; it is **to** all 6 continents, including Europe & N-America; and it is **in** all six continents.
2. Mission is "our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of the world for the redemption of God's creation" (Chris Wright). The church must understand its mission as *participation* in the mission of the triune God.
3. Mission is *communication* of the gospel. It is for Christians to communicate the good news not only with their words but also with their lives and deeds.
4. Mission is the *whole church* (not just missionaries) taking the *whole gospel* to the *whole person* (not a 'spiritual gospel' for the soul and a 'social gospel' for the body) in the *whole world* (not just to mission fields).

**Part One – Ch. 1. Scripture as record of God's Mission**

In the past we looked for isolated passages that supported our idea of a geographical expansionist understanding of mission. But we should see the thrust of the central message of Scripture: "The

Bible is a narrative record of God's mission in and through his people for the sake of the word". We should be reading the whole of Scripture with mission as its central interest and goal.

### **A. God's mission to restore the whole world**

The Bible gives us the story of the whole world. Central theme is: God's mission to restore the world and its people. Mission is the major key to unlock the story of the Bible.

### **B. God chooses Israel to bring salvation to the whole world**

1. **The election of one people for the sake of all nations.** God chose a particular people (Israel) to gather all humankind into that community. A movement from the one to the many. Why elect one people? First: God wants to bless the many. Second: context of covenant, both privilege and obligation (Amos 3:2).
2. **Genesis 12:1-3: Blessed to be a blessing.** Story starts with Gen. 1-11: God chooses Abraham because he wants to save all humanity and all creation. Not told how God will bring that redemptive blessing.
3. **Exodus 19:3-6: A display people to the nations.** Israel is God's special possession but bound to God in a covenant and they have a special place in God's redemptive purpose: priestly kingdom and holy nation for the sake of the whole earth. They are to be a showcase to the world of how being in a covenant with God changes a people. The Torah (law) directs Israel's life and tells them how they should live as a holy nation in the midst of the nations. But: it was difficult for Israel to keep the universal horizon of their mission clear (cf. Jonah).
4. **The land in the sight of the nations.** Israel is placed in the land at the crossroads of the nations, as a display people visible to the nations. God's mission involves God's people living in God's way in the sight of the nations. In 1Sam. 8 Israel wants a king. God gives them a king. It is this kingdom that now becomes the universal horizon of God's purpose: an everlasting kingdom into which all nations will be brought. But Israel rebels, is led into exile. Seems God's mission has ground to a halt.
5. **The prophets' message: The future fulfillment of God's mission.** Prophets speak of an end-time event when God will rule the whole earth and bring salvation to the nations (Is. 2:2-5; 52:10). But first Israel themselves must be converted (Ezek. 36:22-32). This will be ushered in by a Messiah, a faithful anointed king, a world ruler (Zech. 9:9-13), but also a suffering servant (Is. 53). The mission of God thru Israel is:
  - (1) *universal*: its about the whole earth and all nations;
  - (2) *centripetal*: Israel's role is to be light to the nations;
  - (3) *eschatological*: the final gathering of the nations is happening in the future.

### **C. God sends Jesus to gather and restore Israel to its mission**

1. **The 'already but not yet' period of the kingdom as a time of gathering.** The eschatological period of the ingathering of Israel and the nations begins with the kingdom mission of Jesus (Mk. 1:14-15). The Jews expected the kingdom to come immediately in fullness (old age closes, new age begins). But Jesus is the Messiah and his works are the signs that the power of God to renew creation has indeed broken into history. The forces of the age to come are flowing into history, but the counterforces of the old age remain a reality. In the time of the 'overlap of the ages' the apostolic Church has to share the Good News to the ends of the earth. Gathering is what gives this interim period meaning: The gathering of all peoples into one is the eschatological deed of God.

Three images of gathering:

- (1) All people gather on Mount Zion for an end-time banquet (Is. 25:6-9 & Luke 14:15-24);
- (2) The gathering in of harvest (John 4:35 & Mt 9:37-38).
- (3) A shepherd gathering in lost sheep (Jer. 23:2-3, Ezek. 34:12, 23-31 & John 10:16)

### **2. Jesus is sent to gather Israel for their mission**

Jesus is sent on his mission in the power of the Spirit (Lk 14:18). What was the mission that the Father sent him to accomplish? According to OT prophets the ministry of the Messiah is first to

gather Israel and then to purify and empower Israel for its missional calling (Ezek. 36:24-27).

### 3. Israel gathered and formed to take up their missional calling.

Jesus calls his gathered community to take up their missional identity (Sermon on the Mount: e.g. light & city on hill). Two elements in this mission:

1. to represent a distinctive and attractive life;
2. to take part, by word & deed, in Jesus' gathering mission.

### 4. The elements of Jesus' kingdom mission.

The kingdom mission of Jesus is to gather and restore Israel to its missional vocation. We also need to see how Jesus carried out his mission. Jesus' mission is a pattern and model for our own.

Jesus' mission is centred in the kingdom of God. The (kingdom) words of Jesus were confirmed by deeds. Some of the components of his mission:

- Jesus announced the kingdom with words.
- He demonstrated it with his deeds.
- He (lovingly) attacks evil (individually & socially).
- He formed a kingdom community.
- He taught his disciple community about the kingdom.
- He stands with sinners & outcasts & welcomes them into the kingdom.
- He prayed for the kingdom. He suffers as he withstood the opposing powers.

As the church finds itself in new situations, it must follow Jesus' pattern with imagination & creativity.

### 5. Crucifixion, resurrection and commissioning

The kingdom mission of Jesus climaxes in his **death on the cross** and his **resurrection** from the dead. The law could not form the faithful people into a contrast community because of the power of sin. (Rom. 8:3-4).

The bodily resurrection is the dawning of the new age to come (Col. 1:18, Rev. 1:5, 1Cor. 15:20).

These 2 events constitute the turning point in universal history: the **old age** (sin, death, Satan) is passing away and the life to the **age to come** has arrived. The effect of these events moves beyond Israel, it has **universal** significance. Jesus commissions his disciples to take the good news to all nations.

- **Matthew**: make disciples, baptizing and teaching them (Mt. 28:18-19)
- **Luke**: proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations in the power of the Spirit (Lk 24:45-49)
- **John**: continue what Jesus has been doing (Jn 20:21).

#### D. The Church's mission to the ends of the Earth

The church needs to continue the mission of Israel and of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Book of Acts records earliest mission of the church. For the disciples the resurrection, kingdom, and coming of Spirit mean one thing: Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6).

Jesus' answer is important (Acts 1:7-8):

1. The fullness of the kingdom is **not yet** here. Gathering will continue.
2. Until the end does come, your task is to **witness**.
3. You can only do this if the Spirit comes to **equip** you and give you the life of the kingdom.
4. The witness will go to the **ends of the earth**.

Also OT talks about the ends of the earth (Ps. 72:8, Is. 49:6). Acts tells us that the eschatological promise is being fulfilled. But before that 2 important events must take place:

1. The **ascension** of Christ (Acts 1:9-11): launches the mission of the church. The church announces the sovereign rule of Jesus in the whole world.
2. The outpouring of the **Spirit** (Acts 2:1-13): the exalted Christ pours out on his church the same Spirit who empowered him to carry out his mission.

The mission of the church in Jerusalem is successful. But also: many within Israel refuse to be gathered and so are cut off from the people of God. Yet the time has also come for gentiles who believe the gospel to be grafted on like wild shoots (Rom. 11:17-21).

The first major move outward from Jerusalem is an unplanned expansion of the gospel into Judea, Samaria and certain gentile areas (Acts 6:8 - 12:25). It is especially under **persecution** of the church in Jerusalem that the gospel spread throughout these areas (Acts 8:1,4).

The church in Antioch commissions Paul & Barnabas to take the gospel to Asia Minor (Acts 13:1-3). Paul's missionary pattern is important:

1. He is a **pioneer church planter**, preaching the gospel where it has never been heard and establishing churches. He stays no longer than 2 years in one place and when he leaves, he says: Now you are the mission in this place. Paul revisited the churches and sends letters.

The church needs to be **both centripetal** (attractive to outsiders) and **centrifugal** (go out to the nations), like the example of the church in Antioch.

2. Paul has a **deep concern for the poor** (Gal. 2:9-10). Paul's activity shows his commitment to a ministry of mercy and justice (e.g. 2Cor 8-9) that accompanies his evangelistic efforts.

3. Paul establishes many gentile churches. Church in Antioch was unique: majority was gentile, not Jew. Controversy about the new cultural forms that were developing. Conclusion of Council in Acts 15 is very important for the ongoing mission of the church: it allows for contextual diversity. **God's people have to learn to live amidst the cultures of the world.** These means: embracing the 'treasures' (the good) and opposing the destructive idolatries of all cultures. God's people are now living everywhere and multi-ethnic: they are sent to live in the midst of all the cultures of the world. Since the gospel is **translatable by its very nature**, it can take on many cultural forms.

A missionary encounter also brings **suffering**. The church will challenge the ruling powers by word and behavior. The result is conflict and suffering (Acts 14:22).

### E. God's mission continues beyond Acts

Book of Acts ends in Rome. Why does it end so abruptly? What about the ends of the earth? The story needs to be continued. We are **invited to take part** in that mission. Book of Acts has no ending as long as Jesus' promise to return remains unfulfilled.

The church today is to carry out its mission in a manner that is consistent with what happened before. We take up:

1. Israel's mission to be a light to the world;
2. Jesus' mission to make known the kingdom of God;
3. the early church's mission to bear faithful witness to Jesus.

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### Group discussion

Topic: Abraham as a model of our mission

In the NT Abraham is mentioned as an example to us:

- Paul focuses on the faith that led Abraham to **believe in the promises** of God (Rom 4, Gal. 3:6-29).
- James focuses on the faith that led Abraham to **obey the command of God** (James 2:20-24).

Questions:

1. Look up Romans 4:13-16 and James 2:20-24. What do you learn from these passages?
2. Abraham was called 'to leave and go'. Some of us are called to leave our country and go out for missions. But all of us need to 'leave' (cultural) things behind in order to believe in God. What do we need to leave behind for the gospel?
3. Abraham was called to be a blessing to others. How can we as a church bless others around us? Give examples.

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## Part One – Ch. 2. Theology of Mission & Missional Theology

### A. Theological reflection on Mission. Three distinctions.

#### 1. *The mission of God and the missional nature of the church.*

Mission is not simply a *task* of the church but it defines the very *identity* of the church. One of the problems with the old model of mission: mission societies were doing missions and the church supported it. Mission and church were separated. But: the church must be missionary and mission must be ecclesial (= done by the church).

The mission of the church is rooted in the mission of the tri-une God. The church takes its role in the loving mission of the *Father* to restore the creation as it is accomplished in the kingdom mission of the *Son* and realized to the ends of the earth in the power of the *Spirit*.

The church is *participating* in God's mission, i.e. mission is not only defined in geographical terms.

#### 2. *Missional dimension & missional intention.*

Is everything that the church does mission? Stephen Neil: 'If everything is mission, then nothing is mission'. There is a missionary *dimension* of everything that the church does. But not everything the church does has a missionary *intention*.

A missionary **intention** is: an activity that is aimed at inviting people to believe the gospel and submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Both of the aspects of mission (dimension & intention) are essential.

#### 3. *Mission & missions.*

Newbigin: Whereas **mission** is the total calling of the church to make known the gospel as it participates in God's mission, **missions** (with an 's') are particular initiatives within that total mission of the church.

### B. Missional reflection on Theology.

We are also in need of a missiological agenda for theology because theology is by its nature missionary. African Chr. theology is *a product of mission* as the church tries to address its context of injustice and poverty with the gospel.

*What theological issues are important for the mission of the church today, esp. in the West?*

#### 1. **Salvation.** Four misunderstandings:

- (1). Salvation is only for individual;
- (2). Salvation means: you go to heaven when you die;
- (3). Salvation is mainly future (when we die);
- (4). We are recipients of God's salvation, not channels.

This *leaves out* a number of points we find in NT: Salvation is bound up with the coming of the kingdom of God, the restoration of God's rule over all of creation. God chooses a community (the church) to represent and make known that future; and individuals are called to join this community and take responsibility.

#### 2. **Gospel.** What is the good news? Not simply a message about how an individual can go to heaven. It is the message that in the person of Jesus Christ and in the events of his life, death, resurrection and ascension God has revealed and accomplished his salvation of the whole creation.

#### 3. **Eschatology.** Not only the end-time events surrounding the return of Christ. But: in the announcement of the Jesus, the kingdom of the end is breaking into history now in him and by

the Spirit. We cannot separate Jesus from the kingdom. Salvation is a personal encounter with Christ, yet it carries creation-wide significance. Salvation is not only for the future, but it is also present now.

4. **Christology.** We often focus only on the cross & resurrection. But then the importance of Jesus' life is neglected. And then we miss the importance of the *gathered community* (of disciples) that was central to the mission of Jesus. We may also fail to see Jesus' *deep concern for the poor* and the marginalized.  
Cross & resurrection must be connected with the message of the *kingdom*: All powers that oppose the rule of God meet their defeat in the death of Jesus on the cross. The resurrection is the beginning of the end-time kingdom of God in history.
5. **Pneumatology** (= work of H. Spirit). Work of Spirit often limited to the application of Christ's salvation to individuals. But Spirit is important in area of eschatology & mission.  
(1) In his resurrection Christ begins the *eschatological age of salvation*. He pours out the Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit belongs to the future and gives us a foretaste of the salvation of the end time.  
(2) The Spirit moves from Christ to the whole world and so salvation moves from Christ to the church and on to the world.
6. **Ecclesiology** (= about the church): we are not only receivers of salvation but also channels. If we only talk about the institution and the pastoral role of the church, we will become an *introverted* church. So (1) the communal life of the church is important *to empower its members to be missional* and (2) they are as much the church *throughout the week* (as they work in all sectors of society) as when they gather for worship on Sunday.
7. **Humankind.** We learn from Scripture that human beings are at the deepest level **religious** and human life is fundamentally **communal**. We were created with the power to shape our culture. Human rebellion and sin are not simply a matter of personal choices but involve sinful structures & communal idolatry. The church is to be part of this world and to live under Christ's rule. This will include an encounter with the gods that rule in the various cultures of the world.
8. **Scripture.** The Bible not only tells us the story of God's mission but also takes an active part in shaping us to play our part as a missional people. Scripture wants to form and equip us for our missional calling.

## Part Two – Ch. 3-4. Historical & Emerging Paradigms of Mission

Mission takes different shapes depending on historical and cultural context. Already in NT. *Revelation*: to equip the suffering church. *1 Corinthians*: prepare the church to stand up against the influence of Hellenistic culture. We must learn from mission history: to be corrected and/or enriched.

Different ways of looking at the history of mission.

1. **Traditional view**: understanding the way the gospel has spread geographically and taken root in various cultures. E.g. (1) Spread thru Roman Empire [100-500]; (2) Christianizing of Europe [500-1200]; (3) From Europe to the world [1500-1950]; (4) Focus on unreached peoples [1950- ]
2. **Different view**: looking at expansion of Christianity in the various cultures and how this had deepened and enriched the faith (Walls & Escobar). E.g. (1) Jewish church in mission; (2) Expansion into the Greco-Roman world; (3) Evangelization & making of Europe; (4) Empire & mission *from* Europe; (5) Shift of Christianity to the South.
3. **Paradigm view**: understanding how mission was practiced in a certain historical context (paradigm). E.g. (1) Early church [33-313]; (2) Christendom [313-1800]; (3) Enlightenment [1800-1918]; (4) Ecumenical model [1918- ].

- A. **Early Church paradigm.** Positives: the local church had an attractive power. Christians were different, their life was exemplary: they lived out a gospel of love & charity (caring for poor, orphans, sick). Big contrast with the rampant immorality of Rome. They refused to be conformed to Roman culture but did not withdraw from public life (evangelists, martyrs). They were not perfect, they also failed: more and more accepting of Greek worldview (immortality of the soul, this world not important).
- B. **Christendom paradigm.** Two big changes: (1) Chr. faith was now contextualized in Roman culture (before: Jewish). (2) Conversion of emperor Constantine (4<sup>th</sup> C.): Christianity became religion of the empire. Result: before church was weak, poor and in margin; now it became wealthy, dominant & powerful. Problem: **they lost a missional focus** (prophetic-critical stand towards culture weakened).  
Growth of *monastic orders*. Monks went out for missions, both domestic & foreign (pagan tribes).  
During time of *colonialism*: mission often became religious side of colonial expansion.
- C. **Enlightenment paradigm.** Enlightenment (18<sup>th</sup> C.) was a secular version of Chr. faith. Salvation could be found in human ability (science & technology). Chr. faith by many seen as implausible. **Modern missionary movement** (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> C.): missionary societies provided large financial & human resources toward cross-cultural missions. From Chr. West to non-Chr. other parts of world. They presented a westernized Gospel: (1) Europe was the dominant civilization; (2) Gospel was very much part of Western culture, seemed one package. Also: commercial & economic worldview shaped colonialism during this time. It was all about: Christianity, commerce & civilization (3 C's).  
*Motives for mission* in this period: (1) obedience to Great Commission; (2) love for Christ & for people; (3) millennial expectations (bringing in the harvest of the last era).
- D. (Emerging) **Ecumenical paradigm:**
1. Mission in, to, and from all 6 continents (not only from West to Rest).
  2. Mission in/to the West is also necessary (not only cross-cultural mission from West).
  3. Rethink missional nature of the church (against separation of mission and church).
  4. Focus on contextualization (instead of a Western gospel).
  5. *Missio Dei*, mission is first of all God's work (against trusting in human efforts only).
  6. Liberation theology (against dependence on unjust global economic structures).
  7. Mission in weakness & suffering (as a response to mission from strength).
  8. Mission as partnership (in response to mission as task of Western churches).
  9. Holistic salvation (instead of spiritualized or humanistic salvation).
  10. Unity (instead of so many different denominations).
  11. Theology of religion (Western Christianity is not superior any longer).
  12. Global urban mission (instead of focus on third-world villages).
  13. Pentecostal mission (in addition to Roman Catholic & Protestant mission).

## Part Two – Ch. 5. A Survey of the Global Church

This survey will help to understand the issues that churches in different parts of the world are facing in their mission. Again we say: Christianity is no longer (if it ever was) a Western religion. The Christian church is now present in every part of the world. Does not mean that the missions task of the church is done.

**Statistics:** today over 2.3 billion Christians (1.6 billion Muslims & 1 billion Hindus).

Growth rate Christianity: 1.3% (Muslims: 1.8% & Hindus: 1.3%).

The most important change in the world church today is the global shift to the South & the East. What are some **features** of Southern churches?

- Pentecostal and independent churches grow fast;

- church present among the poorest in the world;
- church persecuted in certain places;
- conservative in theology & ethics;
- vibrant worship;
- focus on supernatural (prophecy, healing).

**A. Sub-Saharan Africa.** Today half billion Christians (60% of population).

Growth of *African Indigenous (Independent) Churches* (AICs) is remarkable.

AICs react against Westernized Christianity & they want Christianity to adopt many aspects of the African religious heritage.

**Features of AICs:** focus on direct revelation (dreams, visions), healing & spiritual power. AICs adopt much of African community structures. Open to polygamy or ambiguous about it. Rites (sacraments) are prominent. African type of worship & much attention to OT (= close to African culture).

**Evaluation** of AICs. Different opinions:

- (1) syncretistic;
- (2) faithful expression of Afr. Christianity;
- (3) both syncretism & faithfulness.

The traditional churches are in danger of not touching the African heart! Contextualization necessary.

African church is **maturing** in many ways: reaching out to the educated; vision for church planting/unreached; well-educated African theologians & contextualized theology is being developed.

**Challenges for African church:**

- (1) What is the Church's mission in the social, political & economic life of the nation?
- (2) Ongoing struggle in relating the gospel to traditional African culture. Western theology not big enough for Africa (Andrew Walls).
- (3) Fast growth means: need for discipleship & theological training. Also need for unity in body of Christ.
- (4) Ongoing evangelization of Africa is needed: many unreached people left.
- (5) Threat of violence because of tribalism and encounter with Islam. What does a faithful missionary encounter with Islam (other religions) look like?

**B. Asia.** Today 360 million Christians, 8% of population. Church growing, but number of Christians very small in many countries. Growth in China has been amazing: 4.5 mill. in 1949, now maybe 100 million. Also enormous growth in South Korea. Growing missionary vision in S-Korea, China, India & Philippines.

**Challenges:**

- (1) Over 85% of population is unevangelized.
- (2) Many Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists in Asia. Some areas: persecution of Christians. Asian theology of religions needed.
- (3) Urban mission (big cities) will be urgent task for Asian church. Holistic mission necessary (slums).

**C. Latin America.**

Two groups: **Roman Catholics** (75% but less than 15% attends church) & **Evangélicos** (today over 90 million, 17% of population).

Evangélicos made up of 3 groups: (i) mainline Protestants (like Anglicans); (ii) evangelicals (e.g. Baptists) & Pentecostals (75% of the Evangélicos).

**Challenges:**

- (1) Need for unity among churches (RC <> Pentecostals & division within Pentecostals);
- 2) Need for well-trained leaders;
- (3) Cultural challenges like drug trade (& corruption);
- (4) Urban mission, as LA is over 75% urban.

**D. The Middle East & North Africa.** Church is 'barely surviving'. This is where Christianity began! For 600 years the church grew there. 7<sup>th</sup> Century: Muslims invaded this area and it became Islamic empire. For Christians this meant: extra tax, marriage & inheritance laws to hinder Christian growth, illegal to convert to Christianity. Church started to decline: conversion to Islam or emigration. Now 18 million Christians among 330 million Muslims.

Churches in this region are vibrant centers of worship & social activity but they are unlikely to grow or even hold their numbers. The church must find ways to survive in the region where Christianity was born.

E. Pacific

F. Eastern Europe

**G. The West.** Church in Europe is 'thin, but alive'.

Church in West is in decline: church attendance low, more and more people don't believe in God and faith is private, little impact on society.

**At the same time:** over 75% of people in Europe claim to be Christian (cf. Christendom paradigm).

Also: USA is different. Christian faith seems more alive there.

**Positive** trends: growth of Evangelical/Pentecostal traditions & renewal in traditional churches. Growth in church from the global South in Western cities.

**Challenges** for the church:

- (1) secular influence on the church (syncretism);
- (2) lack of unity among churches;
- (3) lack of interest in cross-cultural missions;
- (4) faith is seen as private & individual;
- (5) influence of consumer culture on the church.

## Part Three – Ch. 7. Faithful Contextualization

Today the church has been planted in every culture of the world, and the gospel now takes many cultural forms. Question is: what is the relationship between the gospel and culture(s)?

**Urgency of the issue** – the issue arises from the very nature of the gospel itself. The gospel must take a cultural form. It is not a matter whether the gospel is shaped by culture; the only question is whether the contextualization of the gospel is faithful or unfaithful.

**Ethnocentrism & Relativism:** *Ethnocentrism* is where one cultural expression of the gospel (e.g. the Western) is considered normative for all others. *Relativism* is the opposite problem. This is the situation where no cultural expression can be judged good or bad by Scripture or by the Church. There is no standard. E.g. invoking ancestor spirits to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.

**Syncretism & Irrelevance:** *Syncretism* takes place when the gospel is absorbed into idolatrous forms, structures and categories of the culture and is consequently compromised. The other side of

it is *irrelevance*. This happens when the church want to be faithful to the gospel by holding on to older or foreign forms of the gospel.

### **Contextualization today**

- No single expression of the gospel is universally normative.
- Contextualization is a process that is concerned with every part of life, with the mission of the church in the broadest sense.
- Contextualization is an issue for all churches, in the West as well as in other parts of the world.
- Contextualization is an ongoing process, because culture changes and the church will never complete this task.

### **Two models of contextualization**

1. The *translation* model: the unchanging message of the gospel is 'translated' into various cultures. Problem: what is exactly the 'unchanging message of the gospel'?

2. The *anthropological* model: it starts with culture instead of gospel. One looks for areas where God is already revealing himself in the culture (e.g. strong community value in Africa). Missionary discovers the truth about God in the existing culture. Problem: the gospel is good news that needs to be proclaimed.

### **Five points regarding Faithful Contextualization:**

1. The church finds itself at the crossroads between the gospel & culture. Contextualization is the concrete daily task of finding ways to faithfully live out the gospel in the midst of the culture.
2. The first commitment of the church must be to the gospel. The culture must be evaluated from the standpoint of Scripture, not the other way around.
3. This requires that the church understands its cultural context. It is a matter of growing discernment and wisdom.
4. We need some distance to properly evaluate our culture. We need to learn from other churches how they do it. We also learn from other cultural situations and we learn from (church) history.
5. Faithful Contextualization is an ongoing process, the task will never be completed. It is a constant missiological task.