

History; Translation; Matthew 28; Culture

Father we acknowledge You as our father and as the Lord of all the earth. We praise You as the creator Lord, the covenant-keeping Lord, and the One who, in Your own surprising ways, remains intent and fully committed to remaking Your world. You are committed to make things right and making things beautiful and wonderful beyond our wildest imaginations. We praise You for the surprising work of the Lord Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, the country tradesman who in obscurity was executed and rose from the dead. That small beginning led to the results that we see today of His followers stretching all around the world. Thank You that as we as the Lord Jesus' disciples seek to follow You, we know that You are with us. We know that you want to use us as salt and light, and You want to shape us and conform us into the one new person, the body of the Lord Jesus, and the temple where Your Holy Spirit dwells. We praise You for Your grace, mercy, and love. Lord, as we live in this world that has its own sorts of surprises, all within Your providential care, we look to You in times of surprising crisis such as is unfolding in America this morning. There are also difficulties in Nigeria that are painful and signs of smoldering animosities. They are also continuing in Israel, Palestine, the Philippines and other places. Oh Lord, we entrust these matters to You and know that You are the Lord. We confess that Jesus Christ is indeed the risen One. As all of Your people follow you today, there are people in positions of particular responsibility with respect to these public events that have wide implications. We pray, Oh Lord, for wisdom, for Your care, and for Your restraining hand to protect and give seemingly small miracles that will not be reported but will be testimonies to Your grace and mercy. Lord, as we meet again, we look to You to guide us, help us, and make this a time that will further prepare us and enable us to serve the cause of the Gospel. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

On the recommended reading list, another item is *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* edited by Steven Hawthorne and Ralph Winter. Some may have taken the Perspectives course that is sponsored by the Center for World Mission and offered around the United States and various places around the world. This is the textbook and reader that was formulated in 1981, written by a number of people. You may be familiar with this book. There is a new third edition that came out in 1999. It is huge, and all sorts of people have contributed articles to it. The categories for the Perspectives course and for this reader are fourfold: the biblical perspective, the historical perspective, the cultural perspective, and the strategic perspective on world mission. There are many names in missions thinking and all sorts of issues that are addressed in here. It would behoove you to examine this book at your convenience. There is a companion study guide that is used if you take the course. This reader is a very important work, and the course remains increasingly influential in many evangelical circles. It is offered in churches and locally in Saint Louis occasionally.

We will move next to topic number six, Christian history as translation. Previously we noted how God is the covenant creator Lord and maker of His world. After the representatives of creation, our first parents, Adam and Eve, rebelled and fell into sin, God graciously committed Himself to redeeming His world. We see as the Bible unfolds that God is committed to dealing with all peoples around the world. He comes in a particular way to affect His worldwide redemption. He comes to Abraham and works in Israel in a particular way especially to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah for the whole world. The Messiah comes, and the cross-cultural and intercultural aspect of the Christian church is at the very heart of what it means to be Christian. The good news is for all peoples, that is part of what makes it good. It is for you and me, no matter what language we speak and what our cultural background is. As we realize that and think in that covenantal way, we realize that Christian history is a history of the translation of the news of Jesus, who He is, and what He has done. It goes from particular languages and cultures to other languages and cultures. That is one way to look at Christian history. Last

time we mentioned that Lamin Sanneh speaks to that, and we looked at a few of his quotations.

Let me give some other quotations today. As the Gospel moved originally out of its Jewish setting almost 2000 years ago and into new Gentile settings, whether African, Greco-Roman, or Assyrian, Sanneh points out that it “is unscrambled from one cultural yoke in order to take firm hold in a different culture.” In this unscrambling process, the Gospel faces the risk of becoming linking in particular concrete ways. We will understand it in our languages, and our various practices will be redeemed for the sake of worship and service. Whatever the cultural expressions of living out the Christian faith among the people of God turn out to be, they will be particular. They will be somehow fitting with that cultural location. Then, as the Gospel comes into a new setting, there needs to be an unscrambling process in order for that fitting to take place anew. What this whole process says is that on the one hand you have a relativizing of cultures. There is no place for any particular culture to snub its nose at another culture. All cultures are, within God’s providence and grace, worthy receptacles and expressions of the people of God. On the other hand, it destigmatizes any cultural host of the Gospel. All settings will be capable of, worthy of, and prepared by God to receive and express afresh the Christian faith. This includes theological understandings, worship styles, and the way you express your love for one another.

One example that I experienced in the last few years in moving to the United States from Japan is the way that Christians greet each other and express their concern for one another. In Japan, including within the Christian community, there is virtue, and Christian virtue in not pushing yourself on someone when you meet them. You hold back, and you are not terribly aggressive in meeting someone. If someone new comes to church, you want to make them feel welcome, but you do not push yourself on them, introduce yourself, and start talking about personal matters. That is not culturally proper. In a Christian way, as it comes to be expressed in Japan, if you do push yourself and you are too aggressive, you exhibit pride and arrogance toward the other person. It would be interpreted that way. Imagine the shock, having grown accustomed to that after a number of years in Japan, of coming to the United States. I have well-intentioned, caring Christian Americans whose loving responsibility and compulsion is to come up to me and very aggressively introduce themselves. Within 20 seconds they want to talk about deep heart issues. My instinctive reaction to that with my Japanese instincts is to wonder who this person is. I might think they have a great deal of self-confidence, coming at me so strongly. But that is not what that person was about at all. Out of Christian love, that person wanted to encourage and know me.

You can see how those different cultural expressions are equally legitimate in their particular settings, but they are really quite different. That is one example that I have experienced recently in how the Christian faith takes shape differently in different settings. Inwardly, it is a shock, because those things can run very deep in what it means to be a Christian.

The point of Sanneh’s book is to argue for these implications of the translation of the Bible, especially in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Africa. In modern times, Africa was so degraded in European people’s minds that he wanted to destigmatize African culture. The focus of his own background and much of the book’s research fits well with the message of saying that all cultures are level before God.

Worship styles are different in cultures, and that may be the single most identifiable area where cultural expressions vary. Dr. Dalbey will come in a few sessions to talk about the regulative principle and worship within multiple cultural settings. We who hold dear to the regulative principle in worshipping God only as He tells us to in Scripture; nevertheless, we want to be sensitive to cultural expressions. Most settings in sub-Saharan Africa are extremely expressive. If you do not move around, dance, and use various instruments, it is just not right. In the city of Saint Louis, you will have people who want

something that is more traditional, more contemporary, or blended. You can almost reduce that totally to cultural preference in terms of what people are used to.

In Japan, there is certain variety, but traditional Japanese sensibilities say that religious worship and contemplation is much more inward and subdued. There is genuine meeting in worship that takes place within something that is set and fixed. When I first went to Japan, I was involved in church planting. Because of my own background and training, when I was responsible for leading worship in our church, I changed it every week. I thought it helped people to stay alert and keep them from getting in a pattern. That was terribly disruptive for people there. For it to be the same week after week was a structure within which people were free to worship. It is not uniform in Japan, as other Japanese can attest to. I came to accept that, in Japan, for it to be quiet, reserved, and the same week after week was freedom to worship for many people.

We will talk about theological differences a little bit later when we get to Christology. Here again, I urge us to remember the universal and the particular. If you see this as a spectrum, it is not so much that you search for a balance. It is that you need much of both. Seeing God as triune is a biblical, universal understanding of who God is. But particular understandings of ways of thought with respect to how theology is split out might, on the one hand, focus on the particular, precise, crystallized, and propositional expression of the integral interrelationships of the persons of the Trinity. That needed to develop in a Greco-Roman environment as it did in association with early ecumenical councils. When you go into certain other settings, it is not necessary. That does not mean that this is wrong for the other setting. They need each other. But particular expressions can be different manifestations of how universal Christianity is understood. That is a general example of how that splits out. Even how you order your theological subjects can be affected by culture. In a Protestant tradition, we start in the Westminster Standards with Scripture. Much of that is because of a need to counter the idea that the church is the ultimate authority. Scripture is the authority, and you can see the historical background for why that is emphasized. You do not necessarily have to order theological subjects that way.

Let us talk about how the Christian faith spreads from one cultural setting to another. Sanneh outlines a couple of different ways this can happen. One way is by diffusion, where it goes as a total package. The assumption in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century mission work was that in people becoming Christians they also needed to become civilized. Missionaries thought that the language people speak, the laws that the people should have, the way families should look, the way that the Sabbath is observed, the way that worship takes place, and what people's demeanor should be all needed to come from one culture to another. The sending culture knew what was right and had the right model.

Counter to that idea is the translation method where the receiving setting sets the pace. There is a fresh entanglement of the Gospel. That is riskier, because you do not know what it will look like. When you look at what translation really implies, that is what will happen. On page 30, Sanneh says, "The Gospel demands a plural frontier for its diffusion, looking with alarm at the notion of a hermetically sealed culture as the exclusive conveyance of God's truth." There is no one particular cultural setting. Paul fought against this in the New Testament. It was the very heart of the Gospel. This is another very important quote from Sanneh, "God is not an interchangeable cultural concept, a pious embodiment of cultural self-regard. But neither is God an abstract force who is encountered outside the limits of cultural self-understanding." Sanneh argues against contemporary notions of religious expression being confined to various cultures. That is not what religion is, and it is not who God is. God is not some puff of smoke coming up out of the train called culture. On the other hand, you cannot just say that God is something way out there. God always comes to us in the concrete. There is universal and particular in those statements that Sanneh makes. We believe in a God who is the God of all peoples and creation. People

who follow Him always follow Him as the universal God. At the same time, we never encounter Him outside our particular cultural settings. That is how He comes to us, and ultimately that is how He came to us in one single Man. Jesus of Nazareth was the God-man, but He was one particular man.

When you look at Christian history, you see urges within the Christian faith to change and grow. Often times that will come through persecution and social upheaval. Sometimes it is an intentional change. There is also the urge to regulate and organize when things feel like they get out of control. We may set up a committee because things change too fast. We feel like we have to define who God is along with all our theological points. Both urges will be there, and there is a tension where we will go back and forth. You can see this throughout history.

Within that ongoing dynamic, the Christian church can take a couple of different postures with respect to how the Christian faith relates to cultural settings. On the one hand, there can be the dynamic of being quarantined, where you try to freeze what the Christian faith looks like. You isolate yourselves from the world, become totally separate, and say what is Christian and what is worldly. On the other hand, there is the other end of the scale where you become so intent on allowing the cultural setting to dictate what happens that there is really nothing distinctive about Christianity. What Sanneh argues for is a constructive biblical posture of prophetic reform. You are involved in the world, care about the world, and serve Christ within your various callings and vocations. As a corporate church, you will speak the language of the contemporary culture, and you will be aware of what people's contemporary needs are. But insofar as you are a Christian living in touch with God and listening to His Word, you will preach where there needs to be change, and you will offer good news of mercy that is distinctive.

Let me give a few more quotations from Sanneh: "Rather than being an abstract code imposed from a predetermined vantage point, reform grows out of the experience of a worshiping community with a profound stake in the world." You care about your community and what happens in the world. You are not simply aloof and fully detached, like a monastery. I do not want to fully criticize the place of monasteries, because they have had their important place in Christian history and continue to do so. "Prophetic action in history is the active participation of believers in the sign and promise of God rather than surrender to the world as the ultimate destiny." We are not just left up to chance in that whatever happens will happen. There is firm hope, because Jesus has risen from the dead. He is coming again, and He is with us. He changes lives and changes settings. He brings good, and there is firm hope and conviction in that. "Christianity entered the multiple world of cross-cultural encounter with an open mind and a firm faith. The risk that it took with the first step it exploited with the second." When Christianity moved across cultural settings, there was an open mind on the one end of change and a firm faith in who Jesus was and is. That was a risk that it took in the encounter with an open mind, but it came with a firm faith in who Jesus was and faith in His Word. That is where you exploit and bring change into new settings. It causes people to say, "Look how these Christians love each other. Look how even though they suffer they continue to pray for their enemies." Sanneh spends a great deal of time talking about the Jewish-Gentile frontier. "The Jewish-Gentile frontier became a paradigm not only of God's universal reality, though that was crucial, but also of the reform impulse, which cleansed syncretism without allowing it to lapse into the predestined utopia of quarantine. There was now not one cultural center but a multiple frontier across which God was the center of gravity." He talks about how God is universal though the reform moves into a particular setting. Now there is a multiple frontier, not just one cultural location. God becomes the center of gravity as He is known, worshiped, and followed as the God of all sorts of peoples and languages.

Let us talk about some current wrestling points in our particular setting with some further quotations from Sanneh. "No one is beyond this error of assuming a built-in advantage for culture, especially when

culture is underpinned by economic and political power.” That says a great deal about the modern missions movement and about those of us who are in the United States and still a part of the modern missions movement. The United States still has economic and political power, and when you go cross-culturally with a U.S. passport, those connections of economic and political power do not automatically evaporate. People see you as an American, and they see you as someone who has money. If you get in trouble, the planes might start coming to protect you. All those sorts of connections will be there. One assumption that people make is that that is because of God’s blessing or that it makes us superior as Christians. The reaction to that can be an overreaction, which is something that has happened in our day. We have so oppressed the world over the last few hundred years that now we think we have nothing to offer, nothing to do, and no contribution to make. If you are Caucasian, you need to not do anything and apologize. That is not terribly constructive either.

Sanneh goes on to say, “Cross-cultural boundaries are accorded an intrinsic status in the proclamation of the Gospel, and Christians who stood at such frontiers acquired a critical comparative perspective on their own cultural identity.” The apostle Paul could not see through to what was wrong with the Judaizing influence if he had not himself experienced God cross-culturally firsthand. He knew Him in different languages. He saw through the mono-cultural chauvinism that was behind what the Judaizers were all about. That is why He was able to come down so hard on those who insisted that people of different cultural settings do things they way they do. He said there is freedom in Christ, and that is the same today. Those of you who have moved cross-culturally know the painful reality of genuinely experiencing different ways of thinking about matters, understanding issues, and knowing how to relate to people. You come to see that your own cultural background and setting is not the only way to approach something, necessarily. It might be about how to discuss something in a committee and make a decision, or it might be about how leadership is really effective in a church or school organization. You could differ regarding what beautiful music or classical literature really is.

The next quotation from Sanneh speaks even more directly to the nature of the Gospel: “When he stressed faith over against works, Paul was intending to enunciate the inclusive principle of God’s right and freedom to choose us without regard to our cultural trophies. Faith, as the absolute gift of a loving, gracious God, is the relativizing leaven in culture. Western psychology and its theological variants have unjustifiably subjectivized the issue, pitting inward assurance against social engagement. In fact, Paul desired above all to safeguard the cultural particularity of Jew as Jew and Gentile as Gentile, though challenging both Jew and Gentile to find in Jesus Christ their true affirmation.” Pitting inward assurance against social engagement is very much a reality within much of evangelical Christianity, and it speaks much to our evangelical instincts. We think that ultimately the Christian faith is about giving me peace and forgiveness. Jesus died for me. That is true, but that is not all that Jesus did, and it is not all that He is about. Sanneh stresses the point that the good news is that we all have sinned and all are saved by faith alone, regardless of our cultural setting. That is right at the heart of what Romans and Paul is about. I agree with what Dr. Sanneh does here. When you look at Christian history as moving as translation from one setting to another, you see God embracing people in Christ, no matter who they are, through faith alone.

Andrew Walls sees the incarnation as perhaps the original prototype of translation. The very Son of God is translated into a particular setting: first-century Palestine. He was, as it were, translated. Walls says in a striking sort of way that Christ is “translated again in terms of every culture where He finds acceptance among its people.” I do not think we need to hear Andrew Walls saying that there is some sort of ontological change going on in Christ. He seems to stress that there is a fresh encounter with and understanding of Jesus as He comes to be understood, heard, and believed in by new peoples. One image I have heard Professor Walls use is that you see Jesus of Nazareth shouldering His way into a new

setting when He is preached afresh in a group of people in a language for the first time. It is not that God is not already there working and dealing with His people. The news of Jesus is that He intervenes and says, "I am your Lord." People have to deal with that afresh. Walls uses language that reflects this dynamic. He says, "Throughout Christian history, two forces are distinguishable in constant tension. One is the indigenizing principle, a homing instinct, which creates in diverse communities a sense that the church belongs there, that it is 'ours.' The other is a 'pilgrim' principle that creates within the Christian community the sense that it is not fully at home in this world, so that it comes into tension with its society from its loyalty to Christ. The one tends to localize the vision of the church, the other to universalize it."

Later we will encounter Kwame Bediako, who talks about how Christians in Ghana come to the point of saying that using their traditional drums in worship is Christian, but it is Ghanaian to do this. Before God and with a clear conscience, they can say that those drums are a part of their Christian way of worshiping. That is a particularization and contextualization of the faith that would be inappropriate for many churches in the United States to use. Not that we would not use those drums, but it is not at home here as much as it would be there. There is tension there between the universal aspect and local aspect of Christianity. You do not just get a little bit of both, but both dynamics will be present as the Christian faith finds expression and continues to develop as cultural settings change. Culture does not stay static.

Perhaps the easiest place to see this is in all of the discussions and difficulties we encounter in churches over worship style. Walls points out that "one result is the rich diversity of Christian life and experience. Another is the new transcendent commonality, shared across diverse communities." We are one faith and one body, yet with diversity. When you look at it from a religious studies and sociological viewpoint, evaluating the Christian church worldwide, there is no more diverse religious faith than Christianity. It is incredibly diverse. As a result, often times the lines of where the Christian church stops and syncretism begins are not always clear. When you get into theological articulation, it can become particularly uncomfortable and tricky. You need to be orthodox yet open to God being God for this set of people over here.

I have come to accept more peacefully for myself how, for many people in this part of the world, the individualized understanding of the Christian faith is contextually appropriate. Individualism is a basic part of human identity in this part of the world. If it is taken to an extreme where that is all that the Christian Gospel is, that is inappropriate, because that is syncretism. For example, listen to the first-person singular pronoun that is used in our hymns and worship songs. The importance of community is there, and that is because God will not allow His people to slip fully into individualism. He fights for us, and His mission is to mature us. By His grace He will not let us fall into full syncretism. Sometimes it happens, but it is by His grace and mercy that it does not happen more often. It strikes me that the individual expression and understanding of the Gospel in this setting is very much particularized. In cross-cultural transmission of the Gospel, if that individualism is taken as the universal expression and understanding of the Gospel, it could be difficult. If it is taken into a setting that is extremely communal, where decisions are made together, then there is a dynamic of unscrambling the Gospel. You have to determine what it should be for those people.

On the one hand, there is the contemporary and politically correct dynamic that we want to avoid of saying that particular cultures must not be criticized, because they are sacred within themselves. Some of the quotations from Sanneh suggest that it is up to the insiders to critique culture. Let us talk about the role an outsider has and what some guidelines are for that. A couple of terms that have come up in the missiological and sociological literature are "imic" and "etic." Imic people are the cultural insiders, and etic people are the outsiders. The proper, helpful understanding of the dynamics of suggesting change

and improvement for cultural settings that takes this into account is that you need both. Sanneh would agree with this. The initiative and “final, long-lasting decisions” will happen here. If you think about the contextualization diagram, the inside cultural dynamic is what is really important. At the same time, there is a vitally important role for the etic person as well. If you do not have the etic person at all, you are left to a setting that is in danger of falling into the particular and into syncretism. Part of what Sanneh does is examine the implications of the translation of the Bible that will emphasize the importance of the imic. As Sanneh examines this in the wake of the modern missions movement in Africa, because Africa was so degraded, he emphasizes the legitimacy and beauty of African cultures as affirmed by the translation of the Bible into African languages. He also affirms the necessary place of the missionaries in bringing the Christian Gospel. The Bible would not have been brought in if there had not been outsiders bringing it in. There would not have been proper perspective on how to live as part of the universal Christian church if there had not been outsiders giving perspective and input. Missionaries need to come in as learners and listeners, but their perspective will be extremely helpful to the new group of people. I would add to that that it is helpful for any church in any setting to recognize itself as inherently international. We do not fully belong to this particular setting. We are yoked together with people of all sorts. We need to seek the input of outsiders no matter who we are. We need their input to help us from slipping into syncretism. This is something that we should all be eager and ready to do. There are a lot of dynamics that we need to keep in mind.

Some have said that we spend a great deal of time singing about and talking about how we think and feel, and that is because the culture has come into the church and affected our proper theology. We should be focused on God and His glory. You could also say that this particular culture has started to overshadow the full dynamic of the universal/particular tension that should be alive and well in our setting. Wherever you are, you will be particular. If we do not have conferences on personal identity and do not stress as the Bible stresses my own relationship with God, it will not connect with people here. But that should not come to overshadow the attention that comes on the glory of God and who He is. If this particular tends to blur out to where the universal fades away, it is an over-contextualization and over-particularization of who we are. We will talk later about culture and how there is an inherent confusion in the way we use that word.

A posture of one who wants to offer criticism into a culture needs to be that as a learner. It needs to be done in a way that people in the other culture perceive, understand, feel, and really listen. You need to have gained the right and earned the respect to speak. When you have this etic/imic sort of relationship, the etic moves into the imic setting, and it adjusts and becomes more like an imic while remaining an etic. As an etic person interacts with and lives within an imic setting, the etic will change, and some of the lines will get blurry. While cultural locations and instincts may remain distinct and different, the unity in Christ takes precedence as well. You almost have different levels of identity that are going on. The unity in Christ to where we are a universal people of God with our particularities still very real is part of this exciting, interesting, and unpredictable dynamic that will occur. Part of being able to hear each other is to know that you belong together in Christ. When you say “we,” it will move away from being this culture or that culture. It will be more universal. The individual cultures are not done away with; it is a fluid dynamic. But identity in Christ will take precedence while recognizing the reality of these continuing cultural differences and particularities.

Let us move on to topic seven, which is Matthew 28:18-20. First let me make some general comments. As originally written, the Great Commission was in Greek but without the punctuation and marks that we have in our Bibles today. It reads, “Jesus came and said to them, ‘To me has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore as you are going make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that

I have commanded you. Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.” Those are Jesus’ words that we use, and they have been such fundamental words in the modern missions enterprise. They are important for what we are to be about as Christian people in speaking the good news to people who need to hear it. In Verkuyl’s *Contemporary Missiology*, he takes a traditional interpretation and understanding of these words. If you want to go preach a three-point sermon on the Great Commission, it could be on Jesus’ authority, Jesus’ continuing mandate, and Jesus’ promise.

Let me move on to some comments by Bosch on these verses from his *Transforming Mission*. He has some interesting and helpful comments for us. He says, “Matthew 28:18-20 has to be interpreted against the background of Matthew’s Gospel as a whole [...] No exegesis of the Great Commission divorced from its moorings in this Gospel can be valid.” It is not as though this stands alone. It comes at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, and Matthew wrote for a particular Christian community. They had probably become a minority Christian community in Syria at the time. He tells these Jewish Christians to demonstrate the validity of Jesus really being the Messiah, and he provides them courage and strength to follow this Jesus as His disciples. That is part of what his Gospel is all about. Bosch goes on, “Matthew is not interested in missionary terminology as such; he sets out to describe the missionary practice of Jesus and the disciples and, by implication, of the community of his own time and of later times [...] A missionary community is one that understands itself as being both different from and committed to its environment; it exists within its context in a way which is both winsome and challenging.” That is the prophetic posture of the Christian community in its own setting instead of a quarantined or syncretistic one. That is what the early Christian communities needed to hear and be encouraged by, whether in Syria, Ephesus, Rome, or Galatia. That is what we need to hear as well on a continual basis. That is what Matthew’s Gospel is all about. It is helpful to remember that those words come at the end of Matthew’s Gospel as a whole. They are not just set out as a missionary treatise for a special missionary conference.

When we get to some of Andrew Walls’ comments, we are challenged to think of the contextual understandings that have arisen with respect to these words. On page 27 of *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, he talks about Christ being the translation in the incarnation. He says, “Christ, God’s translated speech, is retranslated from the Palestinian Jewish original. The words of the Great Commission require that the various nations are to be made disciples of Christ. In other words, national distinctives, the things that mark out each nation, the shared consciousness and shared traditions, and shared mental processes and patterns of relationship, are within the scope of discipleship.” Walls notes at the bottom of this page that “it is the nations, not some people within the nations, who are to be disciplined.” The Word said that all the nations or ethnic groups are to be made disciples. Walls stresses that if you just go with what the words say, you see these corporate entities or groups that are to be disciplined.

Walls talks on page 48 and following about some of the different understandings that Christians have had about these words of Matthew. He first notes that in recent times in the modern missionary movement we have had a highly individualistic understanding of the Great Commission. When you go back to its original setting when the Gospel was written, Jewish Christians would have heard “baptize the nations” and thought about the Gentiles as opposed to themselves. Those were the nations. They thought that is what Jesus meant. When you talk about European nations going to disciple the nations, they thought He meant non-Christian lands. You go make those nations to be Christian countries. That is what the Great Commission meant. In our day, with the firm hold of individualism and individualistic understanding of the Christian faith, we hear in Jesus’ words to make disciples of particular individuals within all the nations. That is what the emphasis is. Here you see Walls subtly suggesting how it is that the particular understandings of the Bible hit us very deeply, depending on what the setting is. He does not say that it is necessarily wrong or criticize it. He just describes it that way. He suggests that when

you hear the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel afresh, it is legitimate to suggest that Jesus had in mind these corporate aspects of who we are as different groups of human beings.

When you think that way, all sorts of things come within the scope of what God's world mission is about. It brings in the scope, for example, how men should view women and how women are viewed within a society. That very much comes within the scope of what God's mission is about. What about the matter of human rights within a society? In the West, individual human rights have become elevated almost to the ridiculous at times. "Whatever I want to do, I will do. Do not dare try to regulate anything about anything to do with me!" But that is not okay, and the Gospel has something to say to it. Walls says that those sorts of things come within the view of what Jesus said discipleship is all about. All areas of academic study are included, such as ethical matters, stem cell research, or abortion. That is part of discipleship in particular settings. Discipling as we use the term in this setting today is where one individual teaches another individual how to have a quiet time and walk with Christ. I do not think that Walls would say that is not what Jesus meant. But I think he would say that if that is all we think discipleship is, we limit what Jesus meant by those words. We are limited by over-particularization of the setting.

That is helpful, stimulating, and challenging from the Scriptures to hear afresh what the Great Commission is all about. I would encourage you to go and reexamine some of the New Testament studies regarding this. I have checked with people who are much more familiar and conversant with the studies of the New Testament, and they have confirmed that they agree with Bosch. I would encourage you to hear it afresh for yourself. It puts in perspective how the Great Commission is a part of the ongoing revelation of Scripture and the overall covenantal redemptive intention of God to redeem the entire world.

I want to move on to topic number eight, which is about culture. Lamin Sanneh says, "Christian life is indelibly marked with the stamp of culture. [...] Paul was a cultural iconoclast in his defiance of the absolutist tendencies in culture, but he was not a cultural cynic, for in his view God's purposes are mediated through particular cultural streams." God always works with us, deals with us, relates to us, and redeems us as parts of cultural people and expressions. We are pieces of the big human puzzle, and it is within cultures as a whole that God is at work. As was indicated earlier, the whole place of indigenous cultures in our world is an increasingly major topic within public discussions. The United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organization has a great deal to do with the recognizing the importance for cultural preservation in the midst of economic development. They have some different emphases on preserving cultures, recognizing the diversity of cultures, and recognizing the equal legitimacy of cultures.

Let me note the importance that is given in political and economic policies, not just to the environment in our day, but also to cultural preservation and recognizing the dignity of cultures. You will know that that is part of the air that we breathe in our public discussions. That is not unrelated to the understandings of cultures and the respect for cultures that we see developing in Christian missions circles as well. The Christian missionary movement operates within the wider developments of history. The types of respect for culture and how to go about cross-cultural communication of the Gospel develop within, as a part of, and intimately connected to the wider understandings of culture that are in our day.

One comment about culture is from Sherwood Lingenfelter, who wrote *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*. He points out that when we talk about culture, we should not simply understand things like traditional customs, music, dress, food, and language. We can tend to assume that

is what we mean when we talk about culture. He also says that there is a whole other slice of people's corporate life that we can understand to be a sociocultural level. The economic, political, and organizational relationships that we have are also a part of culture. We need to keep that in mind. You can distinguish between those two categories, but you must not rip them apart in a way where you talk about culture such that it leaves out the importance of socioeconomic political relationships. Those are realities within groups and help to shape what a culture is all about. That is an important point, and it is part of what was connected with the discussion about the importance of contextualization that began about 30 years ago. I will leave that comment right there, and we will come back to it later.

Shenk talks about three varieties of mission, starting on page 48 of his *Changing Frontiers of Mission*. Some have asked in missions today how far we are into the contextualization understanding in comparison to the indigenization understanding. My thoughts are that for the most part, evangelical missions, especially Euro-North American missions, would fall more within the indigenization posture than contextualization.

Shenk points out that culture as a concept has not always been there. It started in Germany, and within missionary circles over the past 200 years there arose an understanding of a separate entity that could be analyzed and understood, called "culture." In that sense, he talks about the invention of the word "culture." When you go back 200 years, missionaries went out with a pre-critical understanding of culture. There was not an idea or thought of separate cultures. The outsiders were the ones who set the agenda. Of course they knew what Christian culture looked like, and that is what missions was all about. You replicate what life looked like back home, because there was nothing of value in the place you arrived.

Then you enter the next stage, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, called the indigenization level. In this stage you draw on the people and resources there, but you reproduce the original that you have in your own cultural location as a missionary agent. The person who manages and directs what happens is still the outsider. That is because you know what you are talking about, and you have experienced it. These people do not yet know what the end product should be. They start at ground zero, and there is nothing there yet. You know it needs to fit there somehow, so it happens as directed from the outside. There are different cultures, and there will be different cultural expressions of what the faith looks like, but it is the outsider who determines this.

When you move into the 1970s, the overall macro context is of independence movements throughout Africa and Asia. There was a loss of confidence in the West and criticism of the Western missionary movement. Around 1972, the word "contextualization" arose. It is connected with wider socioeconomic matters, but it is meant to say that the Christian faith needs to rise afresh and have a fresh, new expression in new settings as determined by people in those settings. All those who come from the outside with their help are no longer wanted. They have helped for so long and told the insiders what to do for so long. Even though the outsiders could be quite nice, the insiders wanted to do it on their own. That has been the trend, to put it in somewhat of a caricature form. Shenk outlines that for us as the contextualization model. Control of the process resides within the context rather than with an external culture or agent. Culture is a dynamic involving a system of values, and that shapes what happens. The Gospel encounters a culture, calls forth faith, and it develops anew and afresh there. That should include theological development. That is where you have all sorts of some of the new emphases and theological expressions, a few of which we touched on earlier in the course. That is where we are today.

As evangelicals, and in particular ones that by definition take a conservative understanding of what the Christian faith is about, how we deal with these issues is very much at the center of evangelical

missiologial concerns. There is not full agreement within evangelical missiologists, and there is not full agreement within missions practitioners about what that should look like in various settings. One issue that has come up recently is concerned about Christian ministry within Islamic settings. The question is if it is proper to observe the five daily prayers, traditional Islamic dress, go to prayer service on Friday, do it all in Arabic, and call God Allah. Is that the best way for the Christian faith to be contextualized, understood, and embraced by Muslims? That makes some people very nervous, though. You can feel the difficulties in the discussions that arise.

Next time we will talk about some of the writing of Gary Althen. He has published a lot of things to help international students who come to the United States to understand Americans. He has also published some things to help Americans understand international people as well. We will also look at some of Andrew Walls' works. He is a renowned Scottish historian, and he has published a number of articles on world Christianity. He spent his early career in West Africa. A question for you to think about in preparation for next time is what particular traits do American Christians bring to the cross-cultural Christian mission enterprise?