



the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

SHORTCHANGING THE CHURCH IN THE NAME OF MISSION

Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street, *Selling Out the Church: the Dangers of Church Marketing*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1997, \$22.99.

*Reviewed by Ian Littler
Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia*

Just as Luther posted his theses on the cathedral door, 'so have Kenneson and Street posted their own point-by-point protest on the door of the market-driven church. And they leave little room for doubt—the issue is still the selling of indulgences.' The comment is by Pastor James E. Baucom, Jr., Moderator of the Co-operative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia.

In his Foreword to this book, which provides a critique of the current trend to 'market' the church, Stanley Hauerwas notes that 'few developments are having greater effect on the actual practice of the church than those advocating and writing about church marketing.' We are indebted to Kenneson and Street, he says, for exposing the theological presuppositions behind moves to market the church.

The authors' concern is the ag-

gressive use of marketing principles to advance the 'mission' of the church without regard for the consequences. The writers show convincingly that the form in which the gospel is presented shapes the content of the message.

They contend that the purpose of the church 'is to be a sign, a foretaste and a herald of a new humanity that God is bringing into being.' Church marketing principles articulated by George Barna, Shawchuck, Kotler, Wrenn and Rath, Schaller and others not only do not help, but actively militate against, this purpose.

The writers show that the assumptions behind church marketing principles are fundamentally at odds with the gospel, and with genuine mission and evangelism. The first chapter describes twelve models of the church, all of which are commonplace and inadequate: They are 'Entrepreneurial,' 'Instrumentalist,' 'Relevant,' 'Self-interested,' 'Full-service,' 'Therapeutic,' 'Forgetful,' 'Ephemeral,' 'Engineered,' 'Homogeneous,' 'Pragmatic' and 'Christendom.' Each comes with a brief explanation. Most are easily recognized.

Church marketing wrongly puts the emphasis on attracting people to church. The proper question is, what does it mean to be the church in an age when people no longer have culturally induced reasons for being in the church? The church has for-

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gotten the answer to the question.

Kenneson and Street question the changes advocated by church marketeers and the direction in which they lead. Marketing is not neutral; it alters the content of the message, re-fashions the church in its own image and turns the worship centre into a service centre.

Later chapters deal with the perils of marketing—its creation of new ways of thinking: that other people should be prepared to satisfy our desires. The ‘target’ of church outreach becomes the ‘customer’ or ‘consumer,’ with the church a provider of ‘products.’ Marketing facilitates the ‘exchange.’ But ‘the logic of the Christian faith is not the logic of self-interested exchanges.’

The common practice of ‘shopping around’ for a church assumes that the church exists to meet people’s perceived needs. Marketing concepts depend on this notion and utilize it, but it is wrong. According to Kenneson and Street, ‘if you treat people like customers, they will act like customers.’

The fundamental question is whether the church and its faith should be viewed as just another marketable commodity. ‘Once the church’s fundamental identity has been constructed as a business whose purpose is to serve its constituency by attempting to meet its insatiable and undisciplined desires and needs..., then the church is no longer in the position to be what God has called it to be.’

As a result the church’s mission is now defined in terms of the risk that the customers will take their business elsewhere. ‘It comes as no surprise that one church marketeer has written not only marketing guides for churches, but also a guide for church shoppers.’ One great weakness of the marketing approach is that it is unable to take account of the fact that God has provided something humanity didn’t even know it needed. And it ignores the fact that, while Jesus ‘met some people where they were,’ he also drove many away.

Moreover, marketing oriented churches are data-driven. They survey churches, communities, perceived needs, etc., etc. And because data only become useful as they serve particular

ends, they are really clusters of concealed values. ‘Data gathering isn’t as innocent as it looks.’ The data-driven approach assumes that the church should determine who is and who is not likely to respond to the gospel. The church,

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say the authors, should not be in that business.

The decrease in the perceived importance of theology and the minister as theologian has resulted in a rash of prominent ‘pastor-therapists’ and ‘pastor-managers.’ In the marketing model, the pastor’s task is to manage. Church

marketeers introduce a new form of the church’s cultural bondage, while they encourage us to think we are in control

Readers are urged to beware the measurable. Neither growth nor effectiveness is a reliable indicator of faithfulness. Consumers are trained to believe (wrongly) that they alone are the final arbiters of what they need. For marketeers the real issue is church survival, which they perceive to be entirely in our hands rather than the concern of the God who calls the church into being. Since Christian faith is understood as a consumer good the marketing approach relies on the likelihood of people placing the congregation’s self-interest before its ministry and mission.

This is an important book. It shows the extent to which cultural forces like marketing, introduced into the church, distort the truth of the gospel and impede and cripple the faithfulness of the church. ■

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PUBLICATIONS EXPAND FROM THE “MISSIOLOGY OF WESTERN CULTURE” PROJECT

A major exploration of Gospel and Culture themes within the Western world has taken place in a project entitled “A Missiology of Western Culture.” Led by Wilbert Shenk, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, the project has linked together scholars from a number of Western societies, including many people associated with the GOCN in North America. The purpose of the project has been to provide the churches within Western societies with missiological orientation to the important tasks facing the church at the present time.

While the multi-year project, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, has now come to conclusion, the fruit of its work is coming into publication and promises to supply a rich set of resources for churches that take seriously the changed social and cultural conditions of their life and the gospel’s calling to new forms of missional identity. A series of brief paperback books under the general title “Christian Mission and Modern Culture” is being published by Trinity Press International, edited by Alan Neely, H. Wayne Pipkin, and Wilbert R. Shenk. A brochure describing the eight books already in print and two forthcoming in February 1998 is available from the publisher (at P.O. Box 1321, Harrisburg, PA 17105, 800-877-0012). The publisher is currently offering the ten titles for a combined, discount price of \$65. To these ten at least sixteen more will be added to make this the most extensive, sustained treatment of the missionary challenge posed by Western culture.

Following are the titles of, and brief notes about, the books available thus far in the Series:

A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging, by Judith M. Gundry-Volf and Miroslav Volf. Exegetical and theological perspectives on the encounter with others in light of a “politics of difference” in Western societies, the resurgence of ethnic and cultural conflicts in the non-Western world, and the clash between modern technological and traditional cultures on the global level.

Truth and Authority in Modernity, by Lesslie Newbigin. An analysis of the sources of truth and authority in the modern world and of how science has become a means to power rather than a pathway to wisdom or to a true understanding of the human situation.

The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission, by J. Andrew Kirk. A proposal that the health of the entire Christian community hinges on getting the theological task right by linking theology and mission.

The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality, by Alan J. Roxburgh. An interpretation of the marginalization of the churches as an experience of “liminality” and an outline of leadership characteristics required in today’s missionary congregations.

The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity, by Douglas John Hall. A survey of ecclesiastical responses to the end of Christendom and a proposal for the churches

actively to disestablish themselves in the service of their re-engagement of the society.

Religion and the Variety of Culture: A Study in Origin and Practice, by Lamin Sanneh. A provocative analysis of culture in all of its variety, including the relationship of religion and Christianity to culture.

Write the Vision: The Church Renewed, by Wilbert R. Shenk. A call to renewal of the integrity of the church and its missional character in the West.

Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture, by David J. Bosch. An analysis of the postmodern world, the legacy of the Enlightenment, and Christian faith in a postmodern age.

The Secular Experience of God, by Kenneth Cragg. An exploration of how well equipped today’s religions are to cope with secular dilemmas and on what terms Christian finality can hold in a climate of irreligion, pluralism, and competition from other “authorities” of revelation.

Secularization and Mission: A Theological Essay, by Bert Hoedemaker. A call for serious reflection about what kind of rethinking of mission is necessary if one takes the implications and effects of secularization seriously.



Gospel and Culture Movements in the U.K....

THE FUTURE OF GOSPEL & CULTURE IN THE U.K.

The GOCN's companion movement in the United Kingdom has taken another turn that provides it now with an institutional setting in an aggressive new program of the British and Foreign Bible Society. According to a formal notice in the Autumn '97 issue of their magazine *The Bible in TransMission*, the steps have been taken to ensure momentum into the future of what in its first expression was the Gospel and Our Culture Programme (of the British Council of Churches) and later, after a merger with the C. S. Lewis Society, Gospel & Culture.

Its connection now with *The Open Book* campaign will link it with efforts to make a tangible difference in the lived reality of Christian faith and the life of the church.

The Bible Society signaled its commitments with this notice: "The Board of Trustees for Bible Society agreed at its meeting of 14 June 1997 to take over the work of the Gospel & Culture network as a part of *The Open Book* campaign. The appropriate legal and financial arrangements have now been completed and we hope the new journal *TransMission* will become a forum for the publication and discus-

sion of many Gospel & Culture issues.

"The Rev. Dr. Colin Greene commented, 'it is good to see Lesslie Newbigin's vision has not dimmed, but has in fact been taken up by a number of significant institutions and mission agencies.'

"We hope that through *The Open Book* initiative, we can provide a new focus to this important international movement."

Colin Greene, Head of Theology and Public Policy at Bible Society has had a long association with the Gospel & Culture movement in the U.K. as well as with the GOCN in North America. In his article elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter (page 6) he explores some of the issues and challenges which confront the local church (in Britain, but also elsewhere) in the aftermath of the death of Princess Diana. ■



BRITISH "CHRISTIANS IN PUBLIC LIFE"

Another report from the U.K. comes from the Rev. Dr. David Clark, a Methodist minister and until recently Senior Lecturer at Westhill College of Higher Education in Selly Oak, Birmingham, England. Since 1992 he has coordinated an initiative called Christians in Public Life (CIPL). David is reporting that they have just published many of their reflections over these past few years in a book entitled *Changing World, Unchanging Church? An Agenda for Christians in Public Life* (Mowbray: London, 1997). David is the editor and adds both an introduction to the issues which the brief "position papers" address and a concluding section outlining ways to keep working on these fronts. This growing movement in the U.K. has a lot of affinity with the

movement in the U.S.A. which finds expression in the Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (CMDL), coordinated by Bill Diehl. Both groups have great concern about the way churches are *not* formed around an understanding of the laity's missional calling and role within their work worlds, and about the way that clericalism has become one of the main sources of this malformation.

According to its publishers, the appearance of *Changing World* is precipitated by the fact that "the relationship between Christian faith and contemporary values has recently become a key issue in social and political dialogue. Christians in Public Life has been addressing this relationship since 1992. The essays in this book are all 'position papers' in which individual 'Christians in public life'

have contributed to the debate.

"Amongst many distinguished contributors are Richard Adams, Hilary Armstrong, Alistair Burt, George Carey, Mary Grey, Gerard Hughes, Lesslie Newbigin, Helen Oppenheimer, Michael Taylor, Elizabeth Templeton and Rowan Williams. Together the papers are a unique and powerful commentary on the relationship of the Church with the wide world at the turn of the millennium. They will ring bells with anyone who has ever asked how it is possible to make sense of the challenges of faith, while playing a full part in secular culture. The experiences, insights and not least the passion revealed in these papers speak for themselves, beginning to map out a new way of being Church for a new way of being society." ■

NETWORKINGS

▲ One of the connections of the GOCN has been with Asian American Churches across the USA and Canada who network together their common concerns about how the gospel and their own culture are related, and how they then relate to the other ethnicities among the North American churches. News was sent recently about the **Japanese Canadian Christian Churches Historical Project** (JCCCHP) and some of their recent and forthcoming publications. Already published is *The Ministry to the Hopelessly Hopeless: Japanese Canadian Evacuees and Churches During World War II*, edited by Rev. Dr. Roland M. Kawano. Anticipated to be published in the spring of 1998 are two volumes: *The Rev. Francis Wm. Cassillis-Kennedy: Elder to the Japanese Canadians*, and *A History of Japanese Congregations in the United Church of Canada*. All of these are available from Pastor Stan Yokota, 59 Regency Square, Scarborough, Ontario M1E 1N4 Canada, phone 416-265-3386.

▲ A conference whose purpose it is “to equip disciples of Jesus for the 21st century” has been announced by

Eastern Mennonite Seminary, bearing the theme “**Practicing Truth: Confident Witness in our Pluralistic World.**” The conference is scheduled for March 26-28, 1998, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and it will feature a keynote presentation by Lesslie Newbigin. The conference intends to “explore alternatives to the traditional approaches of American evangelicalism and mainline Protestantism.” GOCN member Linford Stutzman is one of the primary organizers of the conference and he can be contacted by email at <stutzmal@emu.edu> or by phone at 540-432-4260 for further information.

▲ GOCN member John Nyquist has passed on information about a conference called “**Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns**” which will be presented by Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, on May 13-15, 1998. The conference will include presentations by Ravi Zacharias, Roy Clements, Ajith Fernandez, and Don Carson and numerous workshops. For further information, call 800-417-9999.

▲ The **Center for Parish Develop-**

ment has announced its seminars for 1998, including many of special importance for the transformation of churches in light of a missional vision of the church. The dates range from January to August for the various seminars, and vary in length from 2 ½ days to 5 days. For full details about the seminars, contact the Center by phone at 773-752-1596 or by fax at 773-752-5093.

■ The Apologia Report is an online research journal which “provides annotated bibliographic detail from hundreds of magazines, academic journals, online sources, and news publications to identify the most valuable resources to aid Christians as they encounter competing truth claims and seek to wisely respond.” A one-year subscription is \$15 for individuals and \$50 for organizations. Rich Poll, the editor of the Report, encourages GOCN members to request a free sample issue by sending the message “info ar-sample” to <hub@xc.org> or to visit the Report’s web site at <<http://apologia.org>>. For further information contact Rich Poll at Apologia, P.O. Box 552, Crestline, CA 92325, phone/fax 909-338-4873.

FALL CONSULTATION ENGAGES THE MISSIONAL CHURCH MANUSCRIPT

Presentations from Howard Snyder, Bill McConville, and Jim Hudnut-Beumler sparked vigorous dialogue with the co-authors of *Missional Church* and the other 60 people present at the October Consultation of the GOCN. Intensive work in small groups began to give

shape to the emerging priorities for playing out this vision in practical terms for congregations committed to living as sent communities in North America. These and other reflections from small study groups across the country will guide the work to be done in the “Transforming Congregations Towards Mission” Project.

A more complete report and reflection from the consultation conversations is being prepared by Darrell Guder, the leader of the authoring team and the program director for the consultation. His report, including excerpts from the formal responses of Snyder, McConville and Hudnut-Beumler, will be featured in the next issue of this newsletter (March 1998). ■



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NO STORY, NO MEANING

Colin Greene

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Sunday, 31 August 1997 will remain indelibly imprinted upon the corporate memory of the British Isles as one of the saddest days of recent history. The death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi-al-Fayed in a car crash ranked alongside the assassination of President J. F. Kennedy as a day many will never forget. Diana's life and death has been transformed into one of the great contemporary dramas of our era. The media coverage of the events surrounding her death was both intense and, at times, intrusive. What was almost entirely lacking, however, was the ability of political, media and religious commentators to link her own story of personal triumph and tragedy to that other great story of triumph in adversity upon which our culture was founded. Here, Colin Greene explores some of the issues and challenges which confront the local church in the aftermath of this tragedy. [Note from the Editor of TransMission.]

From the beginning to end, the Bible tells a story of personal exploration and development. It is a journey, just like Diana's and countless others, towards maturity and corporate responsibility. It is a story interlaced with all the poignancy, passion and perversity of what it means to be a human being. And yet it is also a story of God's self-declaration and journeying with us, a God who suggested that his own nature and identity would be revealed in what he does amongst us: "I will be who I will be." It is the story of the God whose most deeply personal and vulnerable self-expression is encapsulated in a life which also began in obscurity and ended in apparent tragedy.

Narrative and Promise

Without such a narrative underpinning for our own sense of social and cultural identity, there is nothing to stop our distress degenerating into hopeless sentimentality or endless recrimination and self-examination at times of national grief. Without a promise that has ultimately to do with what Jesus enshrined, the expansion and enrichment of our own lives through the love of God and neighbor, then the activities of paparazzi become just another response to the moral and religious vacuum created by the ideology of the free market.

Appropriate Language

The loss of this biblical perspective in people's consideration of the ultimate meaning and purpose of life has disastrous social and political consequences. David Hay is just one of many commentators who has identified that this loss has, for most people, transformed spirituality into an embarrassing personal secret which "dissipates its potential to change society because it does not feed into public understanding or legislation." Similarly, Robert Bellah notes in his important book *Habits of the Heart* that American public life has lost the Judeo-Christian language of communitarian and corporate responsibility. Consequently, many Western people are not able to find an appropriate language in which to frame their social and moral decisions

and commitments.

Re-Engagement

If the local church is to effectively engage with contemporary society, our starting point must be the need to enable people to re-engage with the Bible, not just as a text, a compendium of doctrine or a glossary of religious experience, but as a narrative which includes *everyone* and is echoed in countless other stories of human suffering and endeavor.

This story claims to be public truth because it is rooted in history and holds together personal spiritual growth and corporate social and political responsibility. And yet the Church is now faced with the challenge of re-engaging culture with this story at a time when, interestingly, a decline in church attendance has been matched by a growing interest in spirituality in general, a phenomenon which was manifested in a variety of ways before and after Diana's funeral. However, unless people's spirituality is rooted in a journey of faith and an exploration of discipleship which underpins reality, the spiritual quest easily degenerates into narcissistic self-absorption or hopeless escapism.

Resources

It is this cultural propensity to seek spiritual fulfillment in ideologies and movements which do not relate to the biblical story which *The Open Book* campaign is addressing. A resource pack for local churches is now available which will equip churches, communities, and other groups to re-engage their localities with the Bible. Already, many churches have begun planning events and programs which will make up the national, corporate attempt to "open the book to the culture and the culture to the book." If you would like details of the resource pack, write to: The Open Book, c/o Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon, SN5 7DG, United Kingdom. ■
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“WHO ARE WE?”

A SERMON FOR NEW MISSION VISION

Lee Wyatt
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Things have changed haven't they? During the last thirty to forty years, America—and the church with it—has been undergoing a fundamental reshaping of life at every level. Forty years ago “Father knew best” but now poor Homer Simpson knows little or nothing about anything that matters. Forty years ago we watched *My Three Sons*. In recent years we watched *My Two Dads*. Then we worried about the sexual overtones of Elvis's hip and pelvis gyrations, now we see Ellen DeGeneres “come out” into an open lesbian relationship in prime time. Then we all felt at home in the safe and predictable world of Andy, Barney, Aunt Bea and the gang of *The Andy Griffith Show*. Now we uneasily empathize with the unpredictable, fuzzy, and more than slightly schizophrenic world of Paul and Jamie Buchman on *Mad About You*.

Yes indeed, things have changed! If you have lived through these years, you might well liken the experience to going from a slow, leisurely canoe trip around a placid lake to plummeting helter-skelter through the rapids on a white-water rafting expedition without a guide. Walter Truett Anderson captures well what many of us feel in our guts in the title of his book *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*. But whether we like it or lament it, we can't ignore it. These changes are so far-reaching that “business as usual” will no longer suffice—either for the nation or the church.

Let's play with that image of white-water rafting for a moment. There are four rules of white-water rafting: 1) rest during the calm spots because there are always more rapids ahead; 2) when a rock looms ahead, lean into it not away from it; 3) whatever else you do, never, ever stop paddling; and 4) let everything else but your life jacket go if you fall into the water. In a time like ours, these are not just rules for white-water rafting, they are also rules for white-water living and for ministry in a “white-water” world. They are essential life skills for people and organizations on the cusp of the 21st century. Let me offer my translation of those rules into biblical idiom for you to consider:

1. “Rest during the calm spots” becomes “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Learn to keep the Sabbath. Sabbath reminds us that God is God and we are creatures. Our work and our ministry are important but not indispensable. God will hold things together while we rest a bit. Sabbath is God's gift to us. Let's make time

for it regularly and keep that time inviolable.

2. “When a rock looms, lean into it” becomes “Take up your cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Though it goes against our natural inclinations, salvation or deliverance always comes by moving into and through our difficulties not by escaping or avoiding them. If we can't find God in the midst of our trouble, we won't find him anywhere else either.

3. “Never, ever stop paddling” becomes “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Joy, prayer, and gratitude are the forms of vigilance required to faithfully navigate “white-water” life. They are three different ways we love God, and by doing them “always,” “without ceasing,” and “in all circumstances” we learn more and more to make our own the answer to the *Heidelberg Catechism's* first question about what is our “only comfort, in life and in death”: “That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.”

4. “Let everything else but your life jacket go” becomes “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Or, as Telly Savalas used to say on his TV show *Kojak*, “Ya gotta' know who loves ya, baby.” And when nothing else is going right we've got to cling fast to Jesus, for he is, indeed, the one who loves us.

So, Sabbath keeping, cross bearing, joy/prayer/gratitude, and clinging to Jesus are our guidelines for “white-water” living. In truth, they always should have been our guidelines. But in America the church appeared so successful and was tied so closely to the vision and values of the so-called American Dream that these guidelines were often forgotten or ignored. We took on the role of chaplain on the Good Ship America rather than that of the missionary people of God whose only “home” (no matter where they reside) is the kingdom of God.

Through this past year the Elders have studied many biblical images of the church, read analyses of the kinds of cultural changes we're experiencing, and prayed, shared, and received the Lord's Supper together in an effort to embrace the strange grace of our present distress and articulate a fresh vision of who and what St. Andrew is called to be. We've tried to state in a brief and compelling way a vision for this church consistent with our call to be a missionary people and sufficient to enable us to ride the rapids of our “white-water” times. We commend it to you.

*We are called as God's own beloved people,
entrusted and equipped by the Spirit
to be and to proclaim
the good news of Jesus Christ.*

*Our mission is
to worship, to live together, and be present in the world
as Christ's body.*

CANADIANS INVITED TO EXPLORE CANADIAN GOCN

A number of Canadian leaders have been invited to gather on January 22-23 in Edmonton to explore the potential for forming a Canadian Gospel and Our Culture Network to give more focused attention to the Canadian context and the needs of the Canadian churches. The gathering will reflect on the history and character of the North American GOCN and similar movements in other Western countries, and will note the distinctive features of the USA and Canadian contexts which make each of them important for the missionary challenges facing churches in the West.

The meeting is being called by Alan Roxburgh and others who have been involved in GOCN activities in the USA and in a pair of one-and-a-half-day seminars held in Toronto and

Vancouver last year. George Hunsberger, Craig Van Gelder, and Judy Bos will be present at the Edmonton meeting to share something of the GOCN movement to date and reflect on ways to enhance mutual support and encouragement between the Canadian and USA parts of the movement.

Roxburgh's call to meeting included some important observations about the need for a more distinct Canadian network to emerge.

"Over the past five years I have been a member of the Coordinating Team that has given overall direction to the Network. We have sought to be genuinely North American in our perspective. We have invited Canadian leaders to our conversation and people like Douglas John Hall and Mary Jo

Leddy have been major presenters at several of our consultations. Throughout this period the Network has been aware that Canada is not the USA in terms of missional issues facing North America. Indeed, in many ways, as the first postmodern nation in the world (Richard Gwynn, 1994), Canada is a leading and crucial player in our understanding of what it means to recover a missional church. With this in mind I believe that this is a time when those of us who are Canadians need to explore the potential for forming a Canadian Gospel and Our Culture Network that will function cooperatively with its USA counterpart. I believe the Canadian context has much to offer the conversation of a missionary ecclesiology in North America." ■



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