

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 19

Volume 19 • Number 4 • October 1995

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

What has Boston to do with Bosnia?

Peter Kuzmic

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Installation address at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, September 9th, 1994

President Coolley, highly esteemed faculty colleagues, distinguished guests, dear students and friends;

I consider it a great honour to be installed today as professor of World Missions and European studies. By establishing this chair, Gordon-Conwell affirms its commitment to the vision of its founders for world evangelization.

This chair is distinguished not because of its occupant but because it carries the excellent and well deserving names of Eva B. and Paul E. Toms. By their long, faithful and outstanding pastoral and global ministry they epitomize the best of the church's holy calling to be God's shining light amidst the darkness of our present age. It is not without significance for this chair that Dr. Toms and I first met in Bucharest, Romania, only a few months after that 'Korea of Europe'—as I like to call that country of great suffering and genuine revival—was liberated from the chains of communist totalitarianism. The event was the first free congress of the Romanian Evangelical Alliance, at which I had the privilege to speak, and at which Dr. Toms represented the National Association of Evangelicals. The place was the famous 'Sala Palatului' which the ruthless dictator Ceausescu built for himself. Only a year earlier he alone was allowed to speak from a podium which now served as a pulpit for our victorious proclamation that 'Jesus Christ is Lord!'

I could be tempted to use this occasion to elaborate what happened there and elsewhere in my part of the world as we witnessed the 'acceleration of history' (Havel), the death of a very promising secular utopia and the collapse of the most powerful enemy the Christian church has ever encountered—Marxist communism. [p. 325](#) But on this topic and the missiological challenges of both post-communist Eastern Europe and post-Christian Western Europe I have already spoken from this place. And, apart from that, let us leave a few things for the classroom.

I also wish to express my deep admiration of and gratitude to professor emeritus of World Mission and Evangelism, Dr. J. Christy Wilson Jr, a citizen of the world, a prayer warrior and a practising protestant saint. It was, again, more than coincidental that Christy and I met twenty-two years ago in Christian ministry in (of all places!) Teheran, Iran. Since that first encounter, Christy has been my constant encourager and a true example of professorial and missionary servanthood.

It was a German missions director who pioneered the scientific study of missions. Dr. Karl Graul in his qualifying lecture at the University of Erlangen in 1864 made a strong plea for missiology to be included in the 'universitas litterarum'. 'This discipline,' he said 'must gradually come to the point where she holds her head up high; she has a right to ask for a place in the house of the most royal of all sciences, namely theology.'

This was the first missiological knock on the doors of theological faculties. They opened very slowly and it was a long and embattled journey before the study of missions was included in theological curriculums of most reputable seminaries and divinity schools both in Europe and in the United States. The first official appointment to the chair of missionary science was made in Germany in 1897. No wonder its occupant, Gustav Warneck, professor extraordinary of *Missionslehre* at the University of Halle entitled

his inaugural lecture 'Mission's Right to Citizenship in the Organism of Theological Science'.

A leading Dutch missiologist in surveying the status of missiological education in America some twenty years ago, expressed a concern about the declining number of university chairs of missions. His warning should be heeded: 'If missiology should ever disappear from the American seminary, it would mark a great loss and would result in the strong growth of provincialism and parochialism among both faculty and students.' (16)

I want to thank the leadership and the faculty of Gordon-Conwell for assuring Dr. Bekker and me—we are, after all, the department of foreign affairs in this institution, you know!—that missiology in this world class seminary is not treated as a dispensable addendum to our strong classical theological curriculum and for recognizing that all authentic theology rooted in and faithful to God's redemptive self-disclosure is implicitly missiological. I am deeply convinced that we are all called to be missionaries, that is to live on the very frontiers of God's redemptive involvement in our world. This is not a statement about location but about intention and our continuous and unreserved availability to serve the Lord of the harvest in whatever capacity and place he chooses to use us.

At the same time, I see my calling to this position linked to a deep concern about what I perceive to be [p.326](#) a precipitous process of de-theologizing of missions, both in theory and practice. This is becoming especially evident in some market-driven anthropocentric North American missionary enterprises. In so much of modern-day missionary and evangelistic activity we are tempted to lose sight of the foundational nature and normative function of biblical revelation; of the fact that the Bible gives us not only the mandate but also the message and the model of how to incarnate the Good News of God's forgiving and healing love in our broken world. We are on dangerous ground when technique takes precedence over theology, and when human strategy and corporate planning replace the trust in the Word and reliance on the wisdom, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. I add my voice to those who are calling for a theologically grounded missiology and for a missiologically focused theology. It is a holy union and therefore: 'Whatever God has joined together let no man put asunder!'

Last month I was in Bosnia, the place of my first missionary calling, a land in which I lived for a couple of years some three decades ago. I have been to Bosnia five times in the last twelve months, involved in the ministry of reconciliation and in alleviating human suffering in my homeland Croatia and in Bosnia, where over 200,000 people have been killed and 3 million have become homeless refugees.

As a result of my frequent intercontinental travels I have been nominated by a faculty colleague for a 'jet-lag specialist of the year award'. I have a confession to make: I still suffer from jet-lag. My wife Vlasta thinks that this biological time-clock disorder has a providential significance in need of theological interpretation for the benefit of our family. By not healing me from jet-lag—according to her, I must say, somewhat dubious exegetical method—the Lord is saying that he has not predestined me for a travelling ministry. But how do you teach and practise world missions and European studies without international travel? This dilemma has helped me to produce a new definition of jet-lag. I believe it is holistic and contextually appropriate and so I have decided to share it at this occasion.

Jet-lag is when your body is in Sarajevo, Bosnia, your stomach is in Boston, Massachusetts and your brain is in a holding-pattern somewhere in-between.

Committed to the missionary aspect of globalization, we are challenged today by a modernized recasting of Tertullian's question:

WHAT HAS BOSTON TO DO WITH BOSNIA?

One could make the paraphrase even more explicit by asking: ‘What has academia to do with missions, what connection is there between the seminary and the world?’

What has Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to do with places, cultures and people so different and so far away? Why should we in the serenity of this ‘holy hill’, enjoying the beauty of our campus; in the peacefulness of our library and in our ultra-modern technologically well-equipped interactive classrooms—why should we concern ourselves with the human tragedies of Bosnia, Somalia and Bangladesh? Why p. 327 should the holocaust taking place in Rwanda touch our lives when it is obvious that the sovereign Lord has placed us so as to be secure from those dangers and other winds of adversity? Should we worry about restoring democracy to Haiti, ask questions about human rights in China or be concerned with the plight of Cuban emigrants?

Why should we burden ourselves with the burdens of the world and allow ourselves to be disturbed by statistics of war, disease and poverty? Why should the turmoils of the world disrupt the tranquillity of our hearts and surrounding?

May I suggest that there is only one compelling reason—for *God so loved the world ...* Our loving Father God has a missionary heart and that is why he sent his Son into the world. Jesus was the missionary par excellence. He himself has given us the holy mandate, the Great Commission: *go into all the world ... as the Father has sent me so I send you ... and you will be my witnesses ... in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world.*

We at Gordon-Conwell are strong believers in and serious students of the **word** of God. We specialize in the holy **text**. But we are also deeply committed to God’s purposes for the **world**. Our overarching hermeneutic is a constant search and journey, a busy two-way street between the **text** and **context**, a building of bridges between God’s holy **word** and his alienated sinful **world**.

We are unfaithful to the Word if we ignore the world.

The church betrays the mission of Jesus at the point of not recognizing the danger of what has been termed, ‘collective self-centeredness,’ when it becomes—as David Bosch used to say—the place that ‘collects and conserves people for heaven’, functioning as a ‘waiting room for the hereafter’ (Bosch, 1984, XXIV).

The church is God’s pilgrim community in the world, ‘proclaiming the praises of him who called you ...’ (cf. [1. Pet. 2:9–10](#)). By its very nature the church is missionary and can never be an end in itself. As Karl Barth put it in his *Church Dogmatics* ‘Its mission is not additional to its being.’ (CD, IV/1,725). Biblical orthodoxy does not allow what many contemporary Christians practise, namely to view and treat missions as an optional appendix to the church.

And so, Boston has as much to do with Bosnia as the church’s obedience to the Great Commission has to do with the world lost apart from Christ. This is stated in art. 6 of the Mission of our seminary: ‘To develop in students a vision for God’s redemptive work throughout the world and to formulate strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism and discipleship’.

We here in Boston have a message for Bosnia, a word for the world. And, believe me, Bosnia has a message for us. George Bernard Shaw perceptively wrote: ‘The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that is the essence of inhumanity.’ A reader’s response to a recent **Time** magazine coverage of the horrendous events in Central Africa makes the same point: ‘Death in Rwanda, in harrowing proportions, p. 328 came not only from massacres and cholera but also from apathy’ (Aug.22).

We need to hear both—the cross-cultural Macedonian cry of the world: ‘Come over and help us!’ and the universal commands of the Master who said: ‘Go into all the world!’

God’s glory cannot be extended among the nations and his purposes with humanity cannot be carried out without and apart from our obedience to the Great Commission. I believe in the primacy of evangelism within the overall mission of the church in the world. ‘The church that fails to evangelize is both biblically unfaithful and strategically shortsighted’ (Snyder, 101).

Bosnia has, however, taught me that evangelism without genuine concern for the suffering and hungry has more to do with religious propaganda than with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. It has taught me that servants of Christ cannot be credible unless they are willing to become vulnerable; that the Good News of our Lord cannot be preached in antiseptic conditions and that those who need it most have not only ears and souls but also eyes and minds, bodies and stomachs. Their receptivity to the Word is greatly conditioned by their painful context and the ability of both the message and the messenger to touch them at the point of their greatest need.

The staggering physical and spiritual needs of our world should not cause us to despair. We need the faith of a Martin Luther who amidst great adversity exclaimed: ‘Spiritus Sanctus non est Scepticus!’

The needs of the world are opportunities for the kingdom of God. We believe in Christ who by his death and resurrection has already defeated the powers of evil. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the executive director of the mission of Jesus operative in our world. We here in our Boston academia need to respond to the battlefields of the Bosnias of our world by developing a ‘spirituality of engagement and not of withdrawal’ (Costas, 172).

Let me conclude by briefly revisiting an event and experience which twenty years ago changed the direction of my life and ultimately brought me to this place today.

Some 4,000 Christian leaders from more than 150 nations of the world gathered in July 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, for one of the most important events in recent Christian history, a great Congress on World Evangelization.

These days as we watch the controversies surrounding the Population Conference in Cairo, and hopefully discern its relative significance for the future of the human race, I was reminded of a digital world population clock, activated at the opening ceremony. From the moment of invocation until the last Amen it ticked relentlessly to register that during the ten-day Congress the net population increase of the world reached 1,852,837 persons. It also documented that since the 1966 Berlin Congress on World Evangelization, in which Dr. Toms participated, the world population increased by 590,193,076 people.

A young delegate from Eastern Europe, the twenty-eight year-old principal of a new Theological [p. 329](#) College in a communist country, stared in amazement at these figures while making sure that he copied them precisely into his notebook before leaving for home. And then he felt on his shoulders the hand of an African Anglican bishop whose heart was burning for world evangelization. He had never before met a bishop who was on fire for God. And the bishop whispered: ‘Just imagine, young man, Jesus died for each one of them.’

This is the reason I stand here today. This is the reason why you are here. While standing at the threshold of the third millennium after the birth of the Saviour, let us prepare well so that we may take his *whole gospel to the whole world*.

Dr Peter Kuzmic is President of Evandeoski Teoloski Fakultet, Osijek, Croatia and Professor of World Missions and European Studies, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, USA [p. 330](#)