

# Foreword

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Twin changes in global demography propel many of the assumptions that run through this volume: the growth in Christianity in the global South, and its decline in the global North. Moreover, this demographic shift takes place at a time when the speed of travel and communication allows a virtual crossing of geographical boundaries with the click of a mouse and thus creates the perception that parts of the world are desirable destinations for refuge, vacations, employment, or evangelism. Christians and people of other faiths move around the world taking their beliefs and practices with them, creating more religiously plural environments. While analysis of these changes is not the focus of this book, the intellectual debates and practical Christian responses that have emerged through the changes we call secularization, pluralization, and globalization prompt the scholars contributing here to call for change in the theological status quo. It is no accident that Lesslie Newbigin is often referenced in these pages. Having spent much of his life working with Christian communities in a religiously plural India, he returned to Europe and made the incisive observations on Western society and Christian mission for which he remains so well-respected. The current landscape of Christian

churches provides new angles and aspects on the familiar ground of the nature and economy of God, and the proper response of God's creation and God's people, the analysis of which is the work of theologians and missiologists.

The aim of the book is to address essential methodological questions for developing the kind of theology that will fuel Christian mission. It assumes that this is best done by clearing the ground, by starting from first principles, rather than rushing ahead. This is no "how-to" handbook. Jason Sexton and Paul Weston have brought together thoughtful scholars who have engaged thoroughly with the ways in which the disciplines of theology and missiology may inform each other. Categories and terms are scrutinized, clear meanings are provided, genealogies of thought are explored, and new approaches are detailed. The underlying concern of the book is best articulated in Mike Goheen's quotation of Richard Bauckham, that academic theology and biblical studies often propound a "self-generated agenda [that] increasingly excludes the church from its context and implied audience." The antidote to this malaise is a recourse to missiology, defined as the reflection on the gospel in a particular context, not a form of "timeless" theology. Through missiological reflection, the contributors perceive new ways of comprehending the Creator actively loving the creation. They reexamine how we bear witness to Christ, and explore how we live with diversity, both within the church and outside it. Yet this volume provides no unthinking acceptance of missiology. While the contributors assume that contemporary missiologists have uncoupled contemporary missional thought from negative historical assumptions associated with the word "mission" and that they benefit from cross-cultural insights, Kirsteen Kim and Brian Stanley both critically examine the intellectual antecedents of cultural studies in the Western world.

It is pleasing to see that the call for collaboration between systematic theologians and missiologists is not unique. It perhaps represents a recent trend. A recent special edition of *Theology Today* took a similar approach to a related issue. It called for interdisciplinary collaboration

as Western theologians engage with the “World-Christian turn.” Paul Kollman, one of the contributors, argued for missiology “to serve as a master discipline” facilitating enquiry among church historians and systematic theologians. Missiology, he said, “is ecumenical, engages theological subfields . . . embraces the social sciences, and attends to Christian manifestations everywhere.” Concerned that theologians either judge theologies emerging from the global South as “chaotic, syncretistic and superficial,” or enthusiastically “laud the proliferation of theological creativity and inspiring discipleship as social and cultural differences generate new Christianities,” he urged that “historical and theological understanding of the diversity and vitality of the world Christian movement will be well served by deeper attention to contemporary missiology.”<sup>1</sup> Another enthusiastic proponent of the world-Christianity turn in theology declared, “I see enormous theological potential in exploring the polycentric nature of world Christianity,” giving as an example the fact that “it revolutionizes the notion of ‘tradition’ as a source for doing constructive theological work . . . tradition becomes a more fluid, heterogeneous, and politically inflected category for constructive theological work.”<sup>2</sup> Missiologists have examined the adaption and reinterpretation of Christian tradition around the globe. They are used to situations where—to push Jonny Baker’s metaphor—the conceptual maps to hand appear misleading and they require the orientation skills of those they meet to help them comprehend the landscape anew. The present volume includes articles that take their impetus from the Western world and its need for Christian mission, and the insights drawn from a discipline that has engaged with peoples and their theologies worldwide. The West may be perceived as having particular attributes and requirements. It is also—particularly in an era of globalization and mass migration—interconnected with the whole world.

1. Paul Kollman, “Understanding the World-Christian Turn in the History of Christianity and Theology,” *Theology Today* 71 (2014): 174–75.
2. Joy Ann McDougall, “Contemporary Landscapes and New Horizons: The Changing Maps of World Christianity,” *Theology Today* 71 (2014): 162.

## THE END OF THEOLOGY

This book benefits from the face-to-face meeting of its contributors, which enabled them to engage with each other's contributions. The chapters often maintain the conversational style of a small conference while delving deeply into issues that prepare the way for greater collaboration. Their perspectives are fresh and engaging. They cover a wide range of ground that reaches beyond theology into biblical studies, history, and world Christianity. Together, they encourage the reflective practice of mission theology that shapes the Christian life lived as the body of Christ in the world.