"Highly recommended."—Tim Keller

PAUL S. WILLIAMS

EXILES ON MISSION

How Christians Can Thrive in a Post-Christian World

EXILES ON MISSION

How Christians Can Thrive in a Post-Christian World

PAUL S. WILLIAMS

BrazosPress
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

Contents

Acknowledgments ix
Prologue: Longing and Shame xi

Part 1: Enduring Faith: Christians and the Contemporary World

1. The Legacy of Modernity 3
2. Are We in Exile? 24
3. Two Temptations 41
4. Judgment and Mission 53

Part 2: Fostering Hope: From Alien to Ambassador

5. Learning to Lament 67
6. Calling, Citizenship, and Commission 80
7. Establish an Embassy 99
8. Know the Mission 115

Part 3: Ambassadors of Love: Exiles on Mission

9. Learn the Language 137
10. Stories of the West 156
11. Cultural Translation 184
12. Pilgrimage: A Way of Being 213

Bibliography 231

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

Prologue

Longing and Shame

What would it be like for the church to serve the purposes of God in this generation?

I, for one, want to see this. I want to see Christians in the Western world confident of God's presence in our midst and confident in the power of his gospel. I want to see believers experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit working through them in their workplaces and neighborhoods and in the public square. I want to see Christian communities known in our societies as communities of healing, justice, and wisdom. I want us to be known by our love for one another.

This is a book for people who share these desires. It is for those perplexed by the missional challenges of contemporary life and frustrated by the consumerism and disunity of much contemporary Western Christianity. It is for those who feel uncovered and unprotected by their leaders, and are disaffected by the apparent irrelevance of traditional Christian practice and belief. It is for those who long for humble, intelligent, anointed leadership.

These desires are not limited to Christians. There is also an inarticulate heart cry "for the children of God to be revealed" (Rom. 8:19). Despite the incredible sophistication of modern science and technology and the unprecedented wealth enjoyed in the developed world, Westerners are increasingly

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

prone to loneliness, meaninglessness, and despair. Our culture is riven by conflict and disunity both within and between nations. We are experiencing a profound breakdown in trust and confidence. Might the church offer any kind of hope, purpose, and life?

The perspective I offer in response to these desires and questions has been shaped by my own somewhat eclectic journey. My first career after graduating from Oxford University was as a professional economist (in strategy consulting, public-policy development, and real-estate investment banking). After fifteen years working in this way, I made a significant change to move from Oxford to Vancouver and took up a position as part of the theology faculty of Regent College, an international graduate school of Christian studies affiliated with the University of British Columbia. The emphasis of my questions changed from "How do I relate my faith to my work?" to "How does the church engage missionally in contemporary culture?"

Part of my role at Regent involved launching and leading the Marketplace Institute—a think tank aiming to promote a theological vision for life in the marketplace and to equip the church to do the same. This meant that I had both the privilege of teaching young adults who came from all over the world to study theology for a few years and the experience of speaking to Christian leaders throughout North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific.

I've heard from many church leaders who want advice on how to help their congregation better connect faith and life. At the same time, I've met countless Christians working in secular contexts who have a great hunger for faith-work integration and whole-life discipleship but who also hold a deep disappointment and frustration with church life. For many of these believers, there is a shocking gap of irrelevance between Sunday and Monday that for some will end in nonattendance and possibly nonbelief.

These experiences have taken place for me alongside a parallel exposure to the broadly evangelical theological academy, particularly in North America. When I put those conversations "out there" in the church and the marketplace alongside those "in here" among the faculty and "ministerial"

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

graduates of the theological academy, I've been led back frequently to some troubling questions:

- Why aren't the church and the Christian academy solving this critical problem of the faith-life divide, despite its growing urgency for believers and unbelievers alike?
- Is the sacred-secular divide connected to the missional challenges facing the church in the Western world?

Since the 1960s, most of Western Europe and the former European colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas have progressively rejected Christianity not only in terms of the formal influence of the church in public life but also in terms of any perceived positive cultural contribution of Christian faith. With vanishingly few exceptions (and these largely involving the shrinking conservative heartland of the United States), it is now not a cultural advantage to be known as a Christian or to engage in "God talk" in these societies but rather a positive hindrance to communication, likely to be misunderstood and possibly detrimental to one's reputation.

This Western turn *against* Christian faith constitutes a significant change of context and is interwoven with what appears to be a seismic shift in world history that is at least as significant as the sixteenth-century Reformation. Cultural historians use words like "momentous" and "unprecedented" to describe the changes convulsing Western societies since the 1960s. The term "postmodern" signifies not just the *end* of a modern period—characterized by confidence in reason, science, and technological progress to usher in ever-increasing wealth and happiness—but also a rejection of the vestiges of the Christian culture which that modern world inherited from the Middle Ages. Where this decisive turn toward nonreligion, amorphous spirituality, moral relativism, and authoritarian secularism will lead is unclear, which is why we can only describe our current time as "post-."

Just as these huge changes are fundamentally altering the internal character of Western culture, Western political and economic power is losing

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

its dominant role on the world stage. In different ways, the emerging BRIC[1] nations of Brazil, Russia, India, and China are changing the global balance of power and altering Western cultural dominance. Meanwhile, Islamic fundamentalism has emerged as a destabilizing and often violent challenge to the Western cultural narrative.

The church thus faces a double barrier to effective mission.

The first is that almost the entire institutional infrastructure of the church and the assumptions that underlie it are now outmoded. Seminary education, the process of selecting and appointing trainees and church leaders, the form of many church services, and the theological assumptions in much preaching and pastoral care all *inhibit* effective missional engagement with Western culture because they are based on a set of cultural assumptions that no longer hold.

Second, that culture is now not simply increasingly pagan but is pagan with an anti-Christian flavor. Christianity is typically derided as the enemy of free thought and rational science by secular critics like Richard Dawkins but is at the same time blamed for its part in the rise of modern science and the market economy by advocates of the environmental movement.[2] Christians who work for justice in the social arena can easily be critiqued by those who fear a renewed attempt at a Christian theocracy or those who recall the previous entanglement of missions with colonialism. Tainting everything is the ongoing scandal of institutional child sexual abuse.

Essentially, all the church's past sins are coming back to haunt us, even if the criticisms are incoherent and self-contradictory (for example, it's hard to be implicated in the rise of modern science and technology and at the same time be anti-rational). Part of the reason for this is that Western culture is not a unified whole that has now rejected Christianity. Rather, having

1. An acronym coined in 2001 by former Goldman Sachs Chief Economist Jim O'Neill ("Building Better Global Economic BRICs"). I agree with O'Neill that including South Africa makes little conceptual sense, though it may be a politically astute way for these four nations to engage the African continent.

2. Most influential of the latter argument was the 1967 lecture "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" given by Lynn White to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in which he blamed Christian theology for the exploitative nature of the Industrial Revolution.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

rejected the faith that once held it together, Western culture is fragmenting into incoherent and incommensurable discourses, but each fragment has a different grudge against the church. We find ourselves in an incredibly difficult and ambiguous position.

This situation constitutes a strategic crisis for the church in the West. I say this not as a pessimist foreseeing the inevitable decline of Christian faith in the West. The narrative of inevitable decline is a historically inaccurate piece of wishful thinking on the part of secular humanists that we must not internalize. Rather, I want the church to face realities and seek God together for faith to respond in our generation with the same striking countercultural combination of humility, boldness, and expectation of the manifestation of God's presence that characterized early Christianity and other periods of renewal and vitality. If this crisis is to become an opportunity, this is the space we must occupy.

Believers must face two core underlying questions:

- Has the church lost confidence in the gospel?
- Do we believe the gospel is good news for our societies?

We might feel our society doesn't really need the gospel. *Does* the gospel have anything to offer? Have we outgrown Jesus now that we have nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and DNA sequencing? Alternatively, we might see Western culture as a lost cause, so impervious to change and so morally degenerate that the only hope for it is a swift end (but one that comes, we hope, after we've enjoyed a few more years of the twilight of Western civilization in some quiet backwater).

The heart of this book, then, is a response to a paradox: though we *long* for the kingdom, we are often *ashamed* of the gospel.

In many situations, we find Jesus and the Bible embarrassing. Frequently, we feel intimidated by the increasingly commonplace criticisms of and hostility toward Christianity. Unprotected and uncovered by our leaders, we feel ashamed and daunted. We become anxious and doubtful, with the result that many abandon the institutional church as a "sinking

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

ship," retreat within it to form a "holy huddle" and wait for the end, or "man the barricades" and defend what is left of cultural Christianity. None of these responses can provide the kind of hope or direction that God intends.

It is in this context that the church needs to be able to sing "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne" (Rev. 7:10). For such a song to be sung as an authentic expression of the gospel requires that God meet us in the midst of our longing and shame and empower us to sing. This is the challenge of "sing[ing] the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land" (cf. Ps. 137:4). It is the challenge of being exiles on mission.

I am by no means the first to make theological use of the biblical concept of exile in recent times.[3] In my experience though, much more can and needs to be made of it. I will make the case in chapter 2 that "exile" not only captures well our existential moment but is also a dominant model throughout Scripture for a theology of mission that has practical and conceptual power.

As I've heard my colleague at Regent College J. I. Packer say, "True theology leads to doxology." I've written this book to help us worship, in all of life, in the contemporary world—to "sing" in a foreign land, with faith, hope, and love. To sing with *faith* means that our song can't be sung as mere wishful thinking—an attempt to make ourselves feel better. It means that we must sing it with the conviction arising from confidence in the character of God and the truth of his word. To sing with biblical *hope* is, again, not simply a wish about what might be but a sure expectation that God will indeed act in the world, in our culture and time, based on his promises. To sing with biblical hope is a prophetic act—we are declaring reality before it is visible. Finally, to sing of God's salvation with *love* means that our shame and anger must be purged and sanctified so that

3. My thinking has been shaped by a sermon series by Charles Simpson I heard in 1990, a student paper I wrote on Daniel for Eugene Peterson in 1994, and reading Walter Brueggemann's *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* and William Stringfellow's *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*. Later I also gained much from reading Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon's *Resident Aliens*, N. T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*, and various tomes by Alan Hirsch and Mike Frost. I engage with these and other writers in subsequent chapters.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

we are able to love those who mock us and misunderstand us and those who persecute us and seem to be our enemies. To be able to sing like this requires a journey of humility, brokenness, and courage. It is to invite an outpouring of God's Spirit and saving power in our societies. To be able to sing like this is truly to be the church.

This book is divided into three parts. The parts roughly correspond to the biblical virtues of faith, hope, and love. Part 1 explores what it means for God's people to be in exile in the contemporary world. "Exile" challenges and shapes our sense of identity and mission. It forces us to decide what we will believe and who we will listen to. It requires faith. Part 2 is all about the biblical shift of identity that we can experience—a shift from "alien" to "ambassador"—and what this means for a prophetic approach to discipleship, the local church, and our understanding of mission. This shift fosters hope. Finally, part 3 focuses back on contemporary culture, showing how the ambassadorial paradigm of exile provokes and invites innovation in the way we reach out to others and empowers every believer in their own context. We become ambassadors of love.

During the final stages of writing this book, I took on a new role as chief executive of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The research I've done and the concerns I've summarized above have driven me toward a greater engagement with Scripture and desire to see Bible confidence built in the church. So I make no apology for the extensive use of Scripture throughout this book. By conviction and experience I believe that there is great power in Scripture, not simply at the level of the overall message of the Bible, but also in the detail of how that message is conveyed. I pay detailed attention to the biblical motif of exile because I am convinced that in doing so it is possible to find not simply better thinking or fresh vision but also the empowerment and encouragement that come when we know we've been encountered by God's presence and voice.

My hope is that while you read this book and wrestle for yourself with the Scripture, Jesus will come alongside you just as he did for those despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their context and mind-set was one of being aliens in exile in their own land, and their outward circumstances

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

didn't change during their time with Jesus. The Romans (and the corrupt religious authorities) were still in charge at the end of the story, just as they were at the beginning. What transformed their entire outlook was a rereading of Scripture during which their hearts burned within them (cf. Luke 24:32) and after which they suddenly could recognize Jesus where before they could not see him. We too need a transformation not just in our thinking and perspective but also through a fresh encounter with the living God. This is my prayer for you.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

PART ONE

ENDURING FAITH

Christians and the Contemporary World

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

1

The Legacy of Modernity

With all the resources available to the church in the West, and the incredible history of foreign missions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, how did we end up in a situation where the church in the West is so out of touch with its own missional and cultural context that even committed believers find most Sunday services difficult or irrelevant? To answer this, we must understand the kind of responses we have made to the "legacy of modernity." To begin, we need to step back briefly into the era of Christendom that preceded it.

The End of Christendom

Christendom can perhaps best be thought of as a *symbiotic* relationship between church and state.[1] This mutually beneficial relationship grew out of the accession of Constantine as Roman emperor in AD 312. Constantine brought an end to centuries of persecution of Christian believers by Rome and ultimately established Christianity as the official religion of the empire.

1. I have taken this basic idea of Christendom as symbiosis from David Bosch (*Transforming Mission*, 274). It comports well with historian Sir Richard Southern's definition of the medieval period as "the identification of the church with the whole of organized society" (*Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 16).

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

When the western part of the empire fell to the "barbarian" invaders about a century later, Europe fragmented into a diversity of smaller and more isolated kingdoms.

However, seeded across these territories were a network of monasteries and religious communities that preserved the classical culture of the ancient world and spearheaded mission to the tribal peoples living throughout the European continent. The majority of these peoples converted from pagan worldviews in which society, religion, and power were inseparable. As such, conversion tended to occur in groups, not by isolated individuals. When tribal peoples did convert, Christianity became the religion of their entire territory.

Both the Constantinian and tribal legacies of Christian expansion in Europe thus lent themselves to a union of political and religious authority. Over time, this manifested itself in established churches powerfully shaping national politics and law. Society became culturally "Christian" without individuals necessarily having encountered God or believed the gospel. The task of the local church became focused on helping people develop their personal faith and practice in line with the gospel, rather than thinking missionally about the surrounding culture.

These fundamental assumptions of symbiosis persisted beyond the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. It was as natural for established Protestant churches—whether the Anglican in Britain, Reformed in Holland, or Lutheran in Germany and Scandinavia—to think of their nations as "Christian" and *assume* a high level of influence in political, cultural, and social affairs as it was for Catholic churches in Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

Christendom made manifest a new kind of longing. A longing for peace (from persecution and, later, tribal warring) developed into a longing for a unified order expressed most evidently in Charlemagne's temporary successes and the eventual flowering of the medieval synthesis of faith and reason in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the work of Thomas Aquinas and Dante Alighieri. The attempt to achieve this order through political power and force also gave rise to the shame of coercive conversions,

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

the violence of the Crusades, the corruption of Christian ideals by political power and material wealth, and the eventual disunity and division of the church itself.

The Rise of Modernity

In response to a church at war with itself across Europe, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers sought a framework for order and peace that was less contentious than the theologically charged positions used to justify war. Gradually an early form of "secular reason" came to replace theology in national and international politics.

Over time, the European Enlightenment decisively weakened the ties between church and state. But much of the mind-set of Christendom, including the cultural Christianity of the West, persisted into the modern period. It was natural for churches to identify mission as the *geographic* expansion of faith enabled by European colonization. This assumption was not confined to the churches but was also interwoven with political power. A commonplace assumption of nineteenth- and early–twentieth-century mission and political economy alike was the concomitant geographic extension of Christianity, civilization, and commerce.

Modernity was dominated by a longing for peace and order but also by a vision of progress in science, technology, wealth creation, and social equality. Christians were centrally involved in these developments. This is why we can now be accused by environmentalists of supporting unsustainable and exploitative models of economic growth but also rightly be proud of Christian social reformers such as William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury, Elizabeth Fry, and Josephine Butler. Alongside these and other social achievements of Christianity in the modern period must be put the shame of the entanglement of foreign missions with colonialism and imperialism and the church's involvement in the twentieth-century experience of total war. Parts of the church were unable to resist the Nazi regime in Germany, and even the "Christian" allied powers engaged in systematic bombing of civilians and made use of the terrifying destructive power of nuclear energy

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

to defeat Japan. The church in Britain and the United States, as elsewhere, was visibly implicated in these actions.

As well as revealing the compromise of the church, European imperialism and twentieth-century total war also dealt a death blow to the intellectual credibility of modernity, with its confidence in human reason to assure societal progress, peace, and human happiness.

The point of this summary is not to diminish those Christians who stood against these compromises, to say that no good was done, or even to suggest that better choices could easily have been made at crucial turning points. Rather, the point is to understand that churches in the contemporary Western context face *particular* missional challenges. The legacy of Christendom has left a fear of the political use of theological authority. The church's entanglement with the imperialism and total war of modernity has significantly damaged its reputation as a community that can resist harmful ideologies and act on behalf of the weak and marginalized. This shame is magnified by churches' involvement in institutional child sexual abuse.

The legacy of modernity meant, in part, that the fortunes of both Enlightenment modernity *and* Christianity were locked together. A loss of confidence in one meant a loss of faith in the other. The rise of a postmodern consciousness that began in the 1960s was a response to the ideology and power abuses of modernity. Postmodernity celebrates not a unified order but a diverse individualism. It rejects unifying stories and insists on a "value-neutral" liberal secularism. It is deeply suspicious of power and seeks always to give voice to those considered marginalized and alienated.

Mission after Hiroshima

Since the 1960s, Christian thinkers and leaders have responded to these changes, spawning a growing literature and a divergent range of missional practices. Twentieth-century total war was particularly galvanizing to a wide range of Christians. The decisive shift in societal practices took place in the 1960s, but it was evident in the postwar period that Western culture was experiencing a huge loss of faith (in Christianity *and* in the modern project).

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

Three intertwining strands of theological discourse emerged as missional responses in the wake of World War II and flowered particularly in the 1970s and 1980s—the prophetic, the evangelistic, and the pastoral. I want to trace the development of these strands to help us better understand the practical, institutional, and discursive outworkings that we've seen over the last twenty to thirty years. Reviewing the literature and organizational history briefly at this point will help us in several ways. We will see the themes of longing and shame manifest in various ways. While we will notice the fragmentation of the debate and the piecemeal focus of particular traditions, we'll also be able to see the good in each part of those debates. With the benefit of hindsight, we will be able to pull these strands together and thereby paint a clearer picture not only of how God has been at work in the Western churches in the postwar period but also of lessons still to be learned.

Prophetic

More than any other, the prophetic strand was energized by the experience of Christian accommodation to the Nazi regime in the Second World War. Around 85 percent of those who voted Hitler into power were churchgoers, and a similar proportion of the German church capitulated to Nazi pressure to endorse the regime. Awareness of this shame galvanized many leaders in the German confessing church to mount a faithful resistance, and the legacy of the writings that emerged form the substance of this discourse. Karl Barth is the key figure in this strand, particularly through his influence on writers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jacques Ellul, William Stringfellow, and Stanley Hauerwas. The major concern of this strand is the avoidance of compromise and the purity of Christian witness, expressed through concerns for radical discipleship in community, radical critique of the ideology of Western culture, and resistance to any syncretism arising from theological assimilation to Western cultural norms. Classic texts include Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* (1948) and *Life Together* (1954), Ellul's *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1951), Stringfellow's *An Ethic*

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land (1973), and Hauerwas's *Resident Aliens* (1989), coauthored with William Willimon.

Evangelistic

With origins in the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, the evangelistic strand responded to the widespread loss of faith in the wake of World War II by focusing on the "evangelization of the world in this generation."[2] Billy Graham is the key figure in this strand, especially through the Lausanne movement following the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism held in Berlin.[3] From the outset, the Lausanne movement has struggled with a degree of confusion over the nature and meaning of evangelism and the relationship of evangelism to social concern. Around 2,700 evangelical leaders from more than 150 nations met at the 1974 congress in Lausanne.

This internationalism, a great strength of the movement, increasingly brought Western evangelicals into close contact with their counterparts in the developing world. The latter were far less infected by the legacy of the late-nineteenth-century reaction to the liberal social gospel that had led many Western evangelicals to withdraw into a private and personal version of faith and adopt a sacred-secular dichotomy. Accordingly, they were prominent in challenging Western theological dualism on these matters.

The classic texts of this strand are the series of covenants and declarations issuing from successive Lausanne gatherings. There is a clear progression of ideas away from sacred-secular dualism and toward a more holistic understanding of the gospel as we move from the *Wheaton Declaration* (1966) to the *Lausanne Covenant* (1974, authored by John Stott) and then to the *Thailand Statement* (1980), to the 1982 Grand Rapids *Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility*

2. The rallying cry of the Student Volunteer Movement, itself begun in the late nineteenth century by Dwight Moody.

3. The church-growth movement, inspired by Donald McGavran, is also part of this strand. It too was formed out of a wrestling with the priority of evangelism over social concern. Over time, and partly under the influence of C. Peter Wagner, it became distorted into a technique-obsessed focus on pragmatic strategies to build large churches, often with little remaining focus on mission or conversion.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

(CRESR, jointly sponsored by the Lausanne movement and the World Evangelical Fellowship), and finally to the *Wheaton Statement* (1983).[4] The consensus emerging from this protracted dialogue is that the gospel requires both public *proclamation*, in words, and public *demonstration*, in social concern and transformation.

Pastoral

The third and final strand of postwar theological discourse I identify as "pastoral."[5] Its primary concern is for the application of biblical teaching in the lives of ordinary believers. As such, it is not surprising that this strand is less obviously responding to World War II but is much more concerned to safeguard and pass on biblical truths to a new generation.[6] This group's predominant influence has been from Dutch Reformed leaders like Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. More generally, this strand has followed the emphasis in Reformed thought on relating theology to all of life. Its main themes are, first, the vast scope of the gospel and the claims of Christ's lordship over the entire creation and, second, the necessity for human beings to operate within some kind of worldview that seeks to bring meaning and coherence to life. The classic texts in this strand are James Sire's study of competing worldviews, *The Universe Next Door* (1976), and Al Wolters's explication of the Christian worldview, *Creation Regained* (1985). This strand has provided Christians with a significant resource for

4. A detailed and insightful summary of this progression can be found in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 403–8.

5. It might be noticeable by now that I am taking my descriptors for these broad categories of Christian response to the end of Christendom from the list of appointed gifts given by Christ to the church as recorded in Eph. 4:11–12. Technically, the fourth charism in the list is the "pastor-teacher." While I absolutely hold that this phrase is intended to signify one gift, and not two, such that teaching is the primary means by which the pastoral ministry of a shepherd of God's sheep is to be discharged, "pastor" makes for a more elegant descriptor.

6. The juxtaposition in this sentence bears brief reflection. On the one hand, there is clearly something right about the idea of faithfully handing on the apostolic teaching as relevant in any era. On the other hand, an experience like the capitulation of many German Christians to the Nazi regime demonstrates that how we read Scripture is very much influenced by our cultural context and that we need the help of other believers to break out of our own cultural horizons in ways that allow the text to confront us.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

understanding competing belief systems, combatting the sacred-secular divide, and gaining a biblical narrative framework for public theology.

I present these three strands as such in order to highlight the positive contribution that each has made to the global church. As they emerged in the wake of the Second World War and flowered in the 1970s and 1980s, each began at once, though in small measure, to influence and cross-fertilize one another. This process was accelerated by the introduction of a powerful catalyst in the form of British missionary and theologian Lesslie Newbigin (1909–98).

Newbigin's influence in this entire postwar missional movement has been *apostolic*. His ministry and writing powerfully articulate central elements from each of the three strands I've identified and combine them into a coherent strategy for the pursuit of God's mission in the contemporary Western world. Converted while studying economics at Cambridge University, Newbigin became bishop of the Church of South India and was active in the ecumenical dialogue associated with the World Council of Churches. On returning to Britain in 1974, he saw Western culture through missionary eyes—not so much as a secular society without gods but as a pagan society with false gods. He bemoaned the failure of the church in the West to achieve an effective missionary encounter at home, even while it was focusing on missions everywhere else. Newbigin's combination of theological orthodoxy and generous ecumenism has enabled his thinking to engage believers across an incredibly wide range of Christian traditions, including mainline Protestants; independent evangelical, charismatic, and Reformed groups; Anglicans; and Catholics. His most influential works include *The Open Secret* (1978), *The Other Side of 1984* (1983), *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986), *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989), and *Proper Confidence* (1995).

Those in the prophetic strand find support in Newbigin for their emphasis on ecclesiology and the missional witness of the church as an alternative community and in their critique of the ideological "powers" dominating Western culture. Newbigin, however, also challenges their tendency toward excessive idealism and confrontation and their failure to engage in mission

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

as dialogue and reconciliation. Those in the evangelistic strand discover robust support in Newbigin's work for the proclamation of the gospel as public truth (not simply the private opinion of Christian religionists), but they also find a powerful challenge to stop neglecting the mission field at home and stop narrowing the scope of the gospel's claims. Finally, those in the pastoral strand find encouragement for their worldview focus in Newbigin's insistence that the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ only make sense as the starting point of an entirely new way of understanding the cosmos and in his assertion that the gospel's claims are cosmic and universal, but they also find in his work a challenge to move beyond personal discipleship and cultural transformation and orient these truths toward a missionary encounter with our culture that is personal, communal, and public. Newbigin's most visible legacy is the Gospel and Our Culture Networks (GOCN) that developed first in the United Kingdom and New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s and subsequently in the United States, though his influence extends well beyond these areas.

Recent Responses

These three theological responses to the loss of faith following the Second World War—the prophetic, the evangelistic, and the pastoral—have interacted together since the 1970s and 1980s. Synthesized and catalyzed by thinkers and practitioners like Newbigin, the following missional responses have emerged over the last few decades: retrenchment, ecclesial mission, and "lay" ministry.[7]

7. Our common usage of the term "lay" to refer to Christians who are not clergy or church leaders is biblically and theologically problematic insofar as it designates a group of believers who are not "full-time" or "ministers." Such a notion is completely alien to Scripture and to the actual meaning and use of the Greek words underlying these English terms in the New Testament. *Laos* refers to the whole household of God. *Kleros* refers to those who are called. All ministry (*diakonos*) is service to God. Thus, all believers are *laos*, *kleros*, and *diakonos*. Our continued use of "lay" and "laity" in the way we often use the terms and the split between the ecclesial and lay ministry discourses that I am identifying are both therefore symptomatic of the continued influence of the sacred-secular divide and of Christendom models of church leadership.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

Retrenchment

As a response to these developments, retrenchment exists in relatively toxic and benign forms, but what is common to them is a desire to hold on to the historic mind-set of Christendom, to turn the tide back on ebbing Christian influence in society, or simply to continue doing what we've been doing without any reference to the significantly changed cultural context of Western societies.

The more benign form of this response is activist in nature. It seeks essentially to "try harder" to save a degenerate culture by evangelizing more or by praying more fervently for revival. It is hard to criticize either of these emphases in themselves. Clearly the empowering of the Holy Spirit is fundamental to the church, and effective evangelism is a foundational fruit of an empowered church. However, on its own, this kind of activism tends to see missional problems as "outside" the church, while holding to a very narrow view of the gospel (in which a "decision for Christ" is all that matters) and adopting a naive view of culture (thus being unaware of the challenges to effective mission presented by the cultural captivity of the church itself to unbiblical modes of thought and practice). This benign activism has been able to reach some on the edge of church who had backslidden or who still had some latent memory of the Christian story. This is something to be thankful for, but it is inadequate on its own.

The more toxic form of retrenchment is essentially Christian-energized culture wars. It is not so much "try harder" as "shout louder." In essence, this is the impulse to use political power to defend what remains of the legacy of Christian moral and cultural norms as embedded in Western institutional life and legal requirements. It is toxic because, while the norms that it seeks to defend or advance are generally good in themselves (thus enabling activists to appeal to a broad mass of moderate orthodox believers), the *way* in which they are defended or advanced is often inimical to the gospel. Further, the fact that they are being so defended only reinforces the stereotypes of Christianity and the church in the eyes of its detractors,

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

thus undermining Christians' reputation even further. Too often it ends up communicating the opposite of Jesus' command to love your enemies.

Ecclesial Mission

A second response to the postwar theological conversation is ecclesial mission, which is concerned to rethink and reform how we "do church" in the light of the huge changes in Western culture that I've sketched above. There are two main parts to this that can helpfully be distinguished in theory, though not always be divided in practice: the emerging-church "conversation," a strand that fundamentally concerns itself with the dialogue between Christianity and postmodern culture, and the missional-church movement, which is animated by a renewed recognition that every aspect of church life needs to be a contextualized expression of the gospel in its surrounding culture. Both of these types of ecclesial response developed in the 1990s, and both have drawn on Newbigin's groundbreaking work.

The emerging-church conversation can be traced back to a gathering in the late 1990s of North American leaders who sought to discuss the church's response to postmodernity.[8] Early leaders included Doug Pagitt, Brian McLaren, Chris Seay, Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, and Andy Jones. In particular, the writings of Brian McLaren, such as *A New Kind of Christian* (2001) and *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (2003), acted as a lightning rod by drawing in many other like-minded Christians in the wider Anglosphere who were having similar conversations. This broad global conversation about new forms of church in the postmodern West coalesced into distinct groupings, most helpfully categorized by missiologist Ed Stetzer as Relevants, Reconstructionists, and Revisionists.[9] "Relevants" seek to make church more relevant to a younger, postmodern generation by changing the style of practices such as worship, preaching, and leadership without changing basic evangelical theology. "Reconstructionists" are also theologically orthodox but more radical in wanting to

8. For a short firsthand account see Driscoll, "A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church," 87–93.

9. See Stetzer and Putnam, *Breaking the Missional Code*, 188–90.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

see a wholesale reimagining of the form of church to one that can genuinely change lives and reach society by advocating organic, incarnational communities in place of megachurches and other structures that fail to centralize genuine relationality and community engagement. Finally, "Revisionists" embrace postmodernity to the extent of adopting theologically liberal positions on a range of issues including salvation, gender orientation, the authority of Scripture, and evangelism. This third group has attracted a great deal of critique and led many theologically orthodox believers to disassociate themselves from the "emerging" label. It is this "Revisionist" group, led by Pagitt, McLaren, Seay, and Tony Jones, who have developed the Emergent Village organization in the United States and the United Kingdom.[10]

The missional-church movement shares concerns with the emerging-church conversation, but its different provenance lends it a somewhat different trajectory. At its core, the missional-church movement is not so much driven to respond to a particular culture (postmodernity) as it is determined to work out a missional ecclesiology for whatever culture a church may be situated in. Newbigin (alongside other missiologists such as David Bosch and Lamin Sanneh) stands firmly at the origin of this movement, which can be said to have begun in the United Kingdom in the 1980s when Newbigin began writing on this theme and initiated the creation of the Gospel and Our Culture Networks (GOCN) in the United Kingdom and then New Zealand. The resultant wave of church-planting activity began to be documented and directed through reports such as the Church of England's *Breaking New Ground* (1994) and *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004) and the Fresh Expressions organization that followed. A well-funded GOCN was founded in the United States in the early 1990s, a move that generated the landmark publication *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (1998), edited by Darrell Guder. Key North American leaders and organizations in this broad movement include Alan Roxburgh, Timothy Keller, the Verge Network, the Gospel

10. Thus, "emergent" is to be distinguished as only one part of the "emerging" conversation.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

Coalition, and most recently the Missio Alliance.[11] The following decade saw a major contribution to the movement from Australians Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, who have authored and coauthored numerous books on the missional church and cofounded the Forge Mission Training Network, now active in the United States, Canada, Scotland, Germany, Ecuador, Russia, and Australia.[12]

As will be obvious, the missional-church and emerging-church conversations are overlapping categories, and depending on who is using the terminology, they may be distinguished or equated. Individual authors may likewise self-identify with, or be claimed by, one or both labels.

Two further observations are in order. First, we might draw another distinction between these two categories. On balance, the core emerging-church conversation is a product of the *evangelistic* response to the postmodern context. Moreover, it is best seen as largely in *reaction* to it. Much of this reaction is understandable, both because the evangelistic strand has remained infected with the dualist mind-set of the sacred-secular divide far more extensively than other strands and because much of that strand, especially in the United States, held on to a foundationalist epistemology long after it had any plausible use as an apologetic strategy.[13] The emerging-church conversation

11. Some readers will be surprised to see me including the Gospel Coalition as part of the missional-church movement in North America because of its early debates and concerns with the missional church's meaning of the gospel. Although I am aware of these differences and explore them more fully in chap. 8, they don't alter my conclusion that the Gospel Coalition is an expression of the missional-church type of response to the end of Christendom.

12. For a fuller bibliography of missional church literature, see the online reading room at Tyndale Seminary: https://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/missional.

13. It is questionable whether the biblical foundationalism of fundamentalism was ever a good apologetic strategy, given that it accepted the Enlightenment quest for certainty acquired through the application of reason to evidence, differing only in that it allowed Scripture as providing admissible evidence. The strategy had some short-lived success in helping some people retain a biblical faith but has now detached many believers from the more biblical stance of the tradition—namely, that all knowledge begins with trust, not Enlightenment doubt, and ends in a humble confidence, not an arrogant certainty. The biblical stance of "faith seeking understanding" is also a more effective way to resist postmodern relativism and engage apologetically in postmodern culture. The argument between foundationalist evangelicals and relativistic emergent Christians is thus particularly distressing given that the entire conversation is taking place in a theological dead-end in which both sides appear ignorant of the intellectual history of their epistemological claims.

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

thus has something of great importance to teach us, and it is vital that in disassociating themselves from the extremes of the "liberal" wing of the emerging conversation, others do not abandon or neglect these important theological and philosophical critiques of an overly modernist evangelicalism. In contrast, the missional-church movement has tended to draw more heavily on the *prophetic* strand and is more *radical* in orientation, in the literal sense that it is calling for a return to the fundamental root nature of church.

A second observation concerns the different nature of the discourse in the United States as compared with the rest of the Anglosphere and Europe. In the former case, much discussion and practice has focused on reforming existing churches, whereas in the latter the emphasis has been more on church planting. This is to be expected given that cultural Christianity remains a significant vestigial force in the United States, more so than in any other Western country.

Lay Ministry

Taken together, the emerging-church conversation and the missional-church movement constitute a highly visible ecclesial outworking of the various strands of postwar theological reflection. Less prominent, but equally significant, has been the development of a diverse and somewhat eclectic renewal of lay ministry. Whereas the ecclesial response has been driven primarily by the prophetic strand in dialogue with the evangelical one, the lay-ministry response has found its inspiration primarily in the pastoral and evangelical strands. Before focusing on its recent expression, I will briefly rehearse its postwar antecedents.

Amid the general loss of faith that gathered momentum in the postwar period, church leaders and theologians were focused on Christianity's purity of witness and public proclamation. However, laypeople and some missionaries and theologians drew attention to the dramatic changes taking place in the workplace and society, as well as the growing gap between ordinary Christians' daily lives and the topics addressed in Sunday sermons. In response to these realities, the 1950s witnessed the birth of

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.

formal theologies of work and the laity. Anglican Alan Richardson published *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* in 1952, building on lay leader J. H. Oldham's *Work in Modern Society* (1950), and Dutch Reformed missionary Hendrik Kraemer authored the classic work *A Theology of the Laity* (1958).[14] These essentially pastoral writings were designed to help clergy and laypeople understand the daily life and work of ordinary believers in the context of Christian ministry to the world. This conversation was further reinforced by a series of theological and ministerial affirmations of lay ministry emerging from the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

Overall, this postwar renewal of lay ministry had three substantive drivers: a pastoral concern to help laypeople connect their faith with their daily life, a practical concern to show the relevance of Christian faith to all areas of life, and an ecclesiological concern that the church be missional *by* supporting lay ministry in the world. In other words, lay ministry was an attempt to retain faith in the social relevance and impact of the gospel. Many Christian professional groups were formed as a result, alongside organizations such as the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship, International Christian Leadership,[15] and Laity Lodge. Nevertheless, in his groundbreaking and careful study of lay ministry in the United States, David Miller concludes that this postwar renewal movement petered out by the 1980s for four primary reasons: its focus and culture became increasingly clericalized; the energy of the movement was channeled toward more lay involvement in the life of the church (rather than equipping them for their outward life); the theological academy regarded it as peripheral to its core focus; and in many denominations the prophetic impulse of preachers tended to involve critique of the business world without offering any theological resources for constructive engagement, leaving the clear impression that work in the modern economy was intrinsically compromised.[16]

14. Yves Congar's *Jalons pour un théologie du laïcat* is acknowledged as an influence by Hendrik Kraemer.

15. ICL is the organization behind the national prayer-breakfast initiatives.

16. Miller, *God at Work*. Miller identifies three modern waves of the movement, which he characterizes as "the Social Gospel era" (1890s–1945), "the Ministry of the Laity era" (1945–85), and "the Faith at Work era" (1985–present).

Paul S. Williams, Exiles on Mission
Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2020. Used by permission.