

## WINDS OF CHANGE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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The Banner of Truth

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What happens when a civil engineer decide to pack up his work on the mission field and spend a year studying theology to find out what is behind the 'winds' which he sees blowing over the mission field? The fruit of a year's meticulous searching has been made available in a small and concise book entitled *Current Issues in Foreign Missions*.<sup>\*</sup> The engineer is Richard L. Heldenbrand.

Heldenbrand states in his introduction that 'a rule of thumb in engineering is that the definition of the problem is half the solution'. His research was time-consuming, but one senses in his writing that he is a man of few words. He chooses each phrase and sentence carefully. His purpose is to provide the busy missionary with a map or guidebook to the tremendous variety of changes which are swirling around him.

The current calls for changes in missionary methods have produced a spate of books, articles, films, and other materials. Heldenbrand admits that it would have been easier to produce one more such book describing the contributions of those who advocate change, rather than attempting to 'zero in' on the root source of many dubious changes now being accepted without enough questioning.

The style of this book is as clear as a spring-fed pool. The author guides one through the history of change as he deals with such notables as Karl Barth, Eugene Nida, Charles Kraft, and others. He starts from the subtle attack on the Bible by Karl Barth, whose legacy was a 'vulnerable' Bible, to Eugene Nida's 'relativism' with regard to culture. Nida, author of *Customs and Culture*, brought a frightening new thought into the missionary scene--'that there is no universal ethical system'.

Heldenbrand devotes another chapter to the 'wind of change' which suggests that we need mass conversions such as there were in olden times. Such conversions reduce the social dislocation of people who are dependent on a tribal culture. This is a grand idea to play with in theory, but as Heldenbrand points out:

Where he (J. Waskom Pickett) goes wrong is in giving priority to this anthropological observation, over a clear biblical principle: "unregenerate individuals are not converted in any biblical sense, and are incapable of profiting from Christian nurture, or shepherding," P. 27

As Heldenbrand observes, wherever the Gospel is preached you have those who accept it and those who reject it. Like a true detective following a trail, Heldenbrand explains how these various new thoughts have affected present-day voices in mission leadership. It is almost like following a mystery trail. He shows how the well-known leader, Donald

McGavran, proceeded to interpret his facts anthropologically. He gives this example from McGavran's book, "Understanding Church Growth":

"The great obstacles to conversion are social, not theological. Great turning of Moslems and Hindus can be expected as soon as ways are found for them to become Christian without renouncing their brethren, which seems to them a betrayal." P. 29

Immediately, one discerns the root of the very strong wind of change which is blowing in missions. In an effort to get results, to run ahead of God's time-line, so to speak, we find keen minds actually attempting to remove the 'offence' of the Gospel.

As might be expected, this small and pithy book has an important chapter on the new views of 'contextualization'. Likewise, the author does an excellent job of describing the new 'ethno-theology' which is being developed. He is eager to strength the Bible-believing Christian so that his 'red alert' will go on when he runs into some of these winds which are blowing in the wrong direction. He says:

"Kraft is advocating that Christian foreign missions should presuppose that doctrines of the New Testament are not absolute. This would strengthen Islam in its apologetic against Christianity. The history of Muslim-Christian interaction contains other instances where Muslim apologists have taken their ammunition against the Gospel of Jesus Christ from Christian writers and thinkers." P. 44

Heldenbrand speaks for many of us when he comments:

"No matter how sensitively you communicate the Gospel, there is an offense in the Cross which cannot be avoided. The major barrier to the effective communication of the Gospel is the totally depraved nature of man, and no human craftiness or science will ever suffice to circumvent this barrier. The proper method is found in 2 Corinthians 2-5, and it is theocentric rather than anthropocentric." P. 44

In conclusion, Heldenbrand points out that the chief danger in attempting to enlarge our missions to Muslims is that the 'doctrines of the Christian faith will be twisted or negated before they are proclaimed'. What a pity if the church 'no longer dispenses life to those who will receive it'!

In our contact with missionaries on the field, we know that Richard Heldenbrand is not alone in his concern over the direction of the various 'changes' which are being advocated. In a new Inter Varsity Press publication -- *Creeds, Councils, and Christ*, by Gerald Bray -- this professor at Oak Hill College in London, England, begins his book by saying that more changes have taken place in the churches in the past twenty years than in any comparable period since the Reformation. Bray observes:

"At a time when Christian commitment is lower than ever before, and when all branches of the Church have admitted the need for clear, incisive evangelism, it seems that the leading theologians of our colleges and universities are engaged in a kind of competition

to see which of them can deny the greatest number of central Christian doctrines without being disciplined.”

It is refreshing to see the side of the defense coming alive at last.

\*Available from Ministry to Muslims Project, Rt. 6, Box 227, Warsaw, Indiana 46580