



Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World

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This engaging study provides a new way of looking at Scripture--one that takes seriously the biblical idea of mission. Richard Bauckham shows how God identifies himself with particular individuals or people in human history in order to be known by all. He is the God of Abraham, Israel, and David and, finally, the one who acts through Jesus Christ.

Bauckham applies these insights to the contemporary scene, encouraging those involved in mission to be sensitive to postmodern concerns about globalization while at the same time emphasizing the uniqueness of Christian faith. In doing so, he demonstrates the diversity of Christian faith around the world. This book will be rewarding reading for pastors, lay readers, and students of Scripture, mission, and postmodernism.

Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World Details

Date : Published January 1st 2004 by Baker Academic

ISBN : 9780801027710

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Format : Paperback 112 pages

Genre : Religion, Theology, Academic, Grad School, Christianity

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Philip says

Richard Bauckham is professor of New Testament studies at the University of St. Andrews in the UK. He has written extensively on matters of New Testament interpretation. This book is based on a lecture series delivered in 2001.

The first chapter sets up Bauckham's theme of particulars and universals against the backdrop of a Rabbi who wrote an article after 9/11. The postmodern narrative is that of a return to the importance of particulars over against older worldviews that prioritized grand, universal narratives, presumably exerting power over particular, localized beliefs. This chapter lays out the issue of universals and particulars (1–10), discusses how one might examine the whole of Scripture with a view toward universals and particulars (11–20), and concludes with some observations about the open-ended nature of Scripture, that the Bible doesn't fully tidy everything up for us (21–26).

The second chapter examines four "thematic trajectories" of the biblical narrative (27) that demonstrate the missional move from particular to universal. The first three are strictly particular to universal. Move 1: Abraham's blessing was a blessing to all the families of the earth, particular as Bauckham traces the blessing theme in the OT and NT, focusing particularly on Matthew and Galatians (28–36). It is emphasized in this first move that Jesus puts an end to the curse in his death and opens up blessing in his resurrection. Move 2: Israel was called to be a nation to care for all nations (36–41). See particularly Isaiah 44–66. Move 3: David and his descendants were called to be a king who rules from Zion to the ends of the earth (41–49). Particular focus is given in this move to the book of Psalms and the tension between God's universal kingship and the particular human kings that is resolved in the universal and particular King Jesus (45). Move 4: The fourth move emphasizes the method by which God chooses to move from the particular to the universal: by way of the least of these (49–54).

In the third chapter, Bauckham points out that the Bible is well-aware of the peoples of the known world of its day (55–65), placing Jerusalem at the center of these peoples while neither degrading nor exalting foreign nations (65–72). The Bible envisions the nations moving centripetally toward Jerusalem and God's people moving centrifugally toward the nations (72–80) with the result that the people of God become displaced exiles with no firm geographical center, ministering from the margins (80–81).

The final chapter of the book returns to the explicit issue of particularity and universality (83–90). After addressing the state of the problem, the biblical narrative is considered as a type of narrative that pushes back against other universalizing metanarratives and the particularizing narrative of postmodernism (90–94). This unique metanarrative is a rebuttal to economic globalization (94–98) and to the diversity of truths made possible within postmodern ideology (98–103). And unlike postmodernism, with no absolutes, the biblical worldview is the only witness that is strong enough to critique globalizing power (103–109) while fostering a unique kind of universal diversity (109–110). While the Christian worldview is a global one, it is a vastly different one that elevates the particular diversity we know in localities across the globe (110–112).

Gino says

This short book, based on some lectures Bauckham gave, is dense and rich! I tried to read it as though he was speaking but found myself needing to slow down and dig into the richness of the theology.

What Bauckham gives us are some helpful guide posts for the movement of the mission of God as well as ways to bring this metanarrative into a post modern environment.

I found his views to drive me back to scripture while also sending my heart soaring with the possibility of what could be. Very grateful to have read these valuable book.

vittore paleni says

I wish the application was a little bit more teased out, although what he gave was quite rich despite its brevity.

Josh Maurer says

Good little primer on mission in a post-Christian context. Perhaps it's most valuable contribution is in his analysis of the biblical story and how it can actually function as a powerful apologetic in a post-modern context that values stories. It's weakness is that it is now outdated on some of the cultural issues (now a 10 year old book).

John Hewitt II says

A small, well written book on framing mission in a postmodern world. Bauckham lays out his argument well, but he's not really saying anything new. He seems to be relying heavily on Newbigin (particular for the universal), but does well in presenting Newbigin's arguments in a postmodern context.

Brittany says

Decent book. I found the beginning two chapters really interesting. However, I had trouble getting through the 4th chapter, I lost a bit of interest by that point. Bauckham raises very interesting ideas on particularity vs. universality in regards to the Christian message. I also appreciate his usage of scripture throughout. I would recommend at least the first two chapters.

Greg Baughman says

I really enjoyed, especially the first and last chapter. I lost the plot a bit in the middle as he says many things

I have heard elsewhere, but his concluding chapter is brilliant. While I don't agree with everything, this is a great model for viewing the way in which the Christian message speaks prophetically to both capitalist globalization and postmodernism. Convicting and insightful. I might have to buy a copy.

Zach Hollifield says

Solid.

Nathan says

Critically important in a world that attempts to make sense of the universalizing tales of the past - the Greek, Roman, Constantinian Christian, Islamic, Enlightenment, and Global-Capitalistic metanarratives (whew). What is the true story of humankind? Where are we going? Bauckham brings the post-modern impulse to abolish over-arching stories into conversation with the Biblical narrative. Beginning with Abraham, who was called so that all nations might be blessed through him, he traces the particular instances of calling in the Bible which have universal implications. Through Israel, Christ, and the Church, God's intention to draw all people to himself is evident and, most importantly, historically visible.

Tim Woody says

Fairly good short book on mission. One of the main criticisms I have was that his section on Capitalism wasn't expansive enough to fairly deal with the subject.

John says

Read this book. Bauckham is truly masterful. The first chapter or so leads you into the topic in a way that might not excite or engage you, but I promise the remaining chapters will (ought to) move both your imagination and heart. The book remains true to the biblical text and calls to decisive action as the church of God.

Kris says

I really enjoyed this book, though I feel that much more could have been said. There were a number of places that I felt needed elaboration. The overall theme of the book resonated with me on a number of levels.

Marc says

Not what I was expecting but really quite good and a fine complement to books on Mission by Ramachandra,

Newbigin and Fr Rommen. My main take-away was his honest distinction between a Gospel-centred universalism and zero-sum universalisms condemned by Rabbi Sacks and postmodernists such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard. We must follow the biblical pattern, moving from particular to universal and Jesus is that particular-universal presence of absolute value. All else flows from Him and The Spirit of Pentecost. Beginning here prevents us from falling into the trap of sacralising another point in history, where 'our/a group' has been hard done by, and making it central. (This is a problem in JB Metz and JH Cone's theologies-marxian rather than biblical.) Let me quote a section from near the end of the book- "The biblical story is not, as the narrative of economic globalization has been called, a cultural tidal wave sweeping away all the wonderful diversity of human culture. Perhaps the miracle of tongues at Pentecost in Acts 2 is a symbol of this. It is a miracle that symbolically transcends the diversity of human languages: they no longer divide people or impede understanding, as they did at Babel. But this diversity of human languages is not abolished. Everyone hears the gospel in their own language. The miracle was in one sense quite superfluous, since virtually everyone there could have understood Greek, Aramaic or Latin. There was no practical need for such profligate speaking in all kinds of local languages. But God reverses Babel in such a way as rather conspicuously to affirm human cultural diversity. When Paul states that in Christ there is no longer Jew, Greek, barbarian or Scythian (Colossians 3:11), what he denies is cultural privilege, not cultural diversity. The biblical story is not only critical of other stories but also hospitable to other stories. On its way to the kingdom of God it does not abolish all other stories, but brings them all into relationship to itself and its way to the kingdom. It becomes the story of all stories, taking with it into the kingdom all that can be positively related to the God of Israel and Jesus. The presence of so many little stories within the biblical metanarrative, so many fragments and glimpses of other stories, within Scripture itself, is surely a sign and an earnest of that. The universal that is the kingdom of God is no dreary uniformity or oppressive denial of difference, but the milieu in which every particular reaches its true destiny in relation to the God who is the God of all because he is the God of Jesus. We may recall once more the Bible's final book, where Babylon, the ruler of the kings of the earth, comes to nothing, destroyed by its clash with the narrative of God's kingdom, but where also the nations bring their glory and honour into the new Jerusalem, that is, they bring all they have to offer as glory and praise given to God (Revelation 21:24-26)."

Curtis says

In this series of lectures Richard Bauckham sets forth a vision of mission as part of the biblical metanarrative that extends from the particular to the universal. He frames this discussion in dialogue with the postmodern critique of the modern metanarrative of progress as most recently expressed in economic globalization. How is the Biblical metanarrative different from this modern metanarrative and in what ways does the postmodern critique offer challenge and encouragement to faithful witness to Christ? A fascinating read that will challenge and encourage the church's mission in our current age.

Ethan Hardin says

This is a truly provocative read, tracing God's interest in expanding from the particular to the universal in a way that leaves the faithful follower of Christ set in a story that must move forward to the ends of the earth. Within the particularity of Christ, all of humanity finds its universal fulfillment. That is our story, the story of humanity. Well done, Bauckham.
