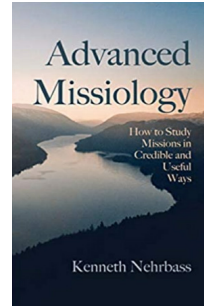


## Book Review

Kenneth Nehrbass.  
*Advanced Missiology:*

*How to Study Missions in Credible and Useful Ways*  
Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2021.  
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Reviewed by Martin Rodriguez, PhD (Intercultural Studies)  
Azusa Pacific University, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology

Taking as his point of departure Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18–20 to make disciples of all nations, missiologist Kenneth Nehrbass contends that cross-cultural discipleship is both the essence of the practical missionary task and the concern that drives the academic discipline of missiology. Nehrbass has taught missions at Biola University since 2014, and both his teaching and his writing draw deeply on a decade of experience in Bible translation with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Vanuatu, an archipelago country in the South Pacific. *Advanced Missiology* is his third major missiological publication after *Christianity and Animism in Melanesia: Four Approaches to Gospel and Culture* (2012) and *God's Image and Global Cultures: Integrating Faith and Culture in the 21st Century* (2016). In all these writings, Nehrbass argues that missiology should address twenty-first-century realities by generating academically credible theories that are useful for missionary-practitioners. This pragmatic approach to missiology will be familiar to theologically conservative evangelical students seeking to navigate the space between the anti-intellectualism and biblicism of more sectarian evangelicals like John MacArthur (cf. 241) on one hand and the relativism and religious pluralism of conciliar Christians like John Hicks (cf. 57) on the other. Informed readers seeking a

general orientation to Nehrbass' missiology can peruse Nehrbass' sidebar profiles of influential missiologists to compare the author's treatment of John Piper (46), Don Richardson (226), Tom Steffen (92), and Enoch Wan (279) to his treatment of David Bosch (91), Lesslie Newbigin (59), Lamin Sanneh (259), and René Padilla (167).

*Advanced Missiology* has two major sections: Part One studies disciplines that have informed missiology (chapters 1–7), and Part Two studies “theories” and “models” that have emerged from missiological discourse (chapters 8–11). Using his “missiology is like a river” metaphor, Nehrbass describes Part One as an exploration of the “tributaries” that have fed into missiology, and Part Two as a study of the “distributaries” that have emerged from missiology. Each chapter ends with ideas for further reflection, review questions, and reflection questions that college professors are likely to find particularly helpful.

In Chapter One, Nehrbass promotes an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to missiology as an alternative to Allen Tippet's well known three-fold approach, which focuses on theology, social sciences, and history. The arguments of the opening chapter address students who insist on a static or siloed approach to missiology and its tributary disciplines. Chapter Two advances “systematic missiological theology” as a technique for

establishing a biblical basis of missions. This technique “applies a missiological hermeneutic to scriptural themes [or traditional doctrines of systematic theology] to understand an overall approach toward missions” (43). According to Nehrbass, systematic missiological theology offers an alternative both to the proof-texting of evangelical missiologists (who “look for hints of cross-cultural evangelism under every stone in the Old Testament,” p. 37) and to the mission-of-God hermeneutical approach of conciliar missiologists (whose approach “eventually widens the term mission (without the ‘s’) to mean everything that God wills and does, thus diminishing the aspect of cross-cultural evangelism in missions (with the ‘s’)” p. 37). Chapter Three addresses the tributary of history, outlining a missiological historiography that incorporates six ways to examine missions history from a missiological perspective—namely, by exploring God’s guidance in missions, by following the lives of great missionaries, by celebrating legacies of missions organizations, by studying marginalized peoples, and by building missiological theory. Chapter Four examines how missiological anthropology helps exegete cultures to facilitate making disciples across cultures. Chapter Five addresses how intercultural studies is useful to missionaries who are making disciples across cultures. Chapters Six (co-written with Julie Martinez) and Seven (co-authored with Leanne Dzubinski) describe how evangelical missionaries have adopted development theory and educational theory to enhance missionary efforts across cultures.

In Part Two, Nehrbass turns to the “distributaries” (or frameworks and strategies) that have emerged from missiology. Chapter Eight examines the “fuzzy” (204) concept of cross-cultural discipleship—“the process

of teaching people to obey all that Jesus commanded” (199) and helping people with “thinking like God does, valuing the things that God does, and treating others like God does” (200). Chapter Eight is a crucial chapter that could usefully have been included earlier in the book. Chapters Nine and Ten are arguably the text’s most significant contribution as they provide a brief compendium of popular western protestant missionary strategies over the last century. Nehrbass argues that missiology should be considered a distinct discipline with its own unique and original theories and methods. Chapter Nine introduces and evaluates eight missiological frameworks (“theories”) that have been influential among western evangelical missiologists. The chapter explores Andrew Walls’ indigenizing principle and pilgrim principle, John Travis’ C1-C6 spectrum, Ralph Winter’s notion of people groups and his modality/sodality model, Luis Bush’s (via Lausanne II, Manila) concept of the 10/40 window, Donald McGavran’s homogeneous unit principle, Kenneth Pike’s emic and etic distinction, Paul Hiebert’s theory of the flaw of the excluded middle, and Don Richardson’s concept of redemptive analogies. Chapter Ten evaluates frameworks (“models”) that have more directly affected the strategies of western evangelical missionaries. Nehrbass cites Henry Venn’s three-self model, popular models of contextualization, oral story-telling, David Garrison’s church planting movements, Steve Smith’s training for trainers model, Enoch Wan’s diaspora ministries, Bible translation strategies, educational strategies, broadcast media models of missions (e.g., the Jesus Film), various forms of business as mission, and models of short-term missions.

Nehrbass’ bibliography is admirably inclusive, though missiologists representative

of other streams of missiological discourse are notably absent in Nehrbass' compendium of "major theorists and perspectives that have shaped the study of how Christianity spreads across cultures" (1) (cf., Johannes Hoekendijk, Steven Bevans, Roger Schroeder, Orlando Costas, Petros Vassiliadis, Scott Sunquist, Kirsteen Kim, Darrell Guder, and Craig Van Gelder). Of course, these absences should be attributed to the limited scope of the text and the target audience. Students of mission(s) looking for an advanced missiology textbook with sustained discourse on, for instance, the profound influence of global pentecostal-charismatic missiologies or on the massive changes in missiological ecclesiologies in the wake of Vatican II, will need to look elsewhere.

Nehrbass insists that missiology must be useful to missionaries. "By focusing on the sorts of research questions that missionaries are actually interested in, and not just the problems that academicians are interested in, missiology can remain alive and relevant" (291). It's no surprise, therefore, that Nehrbass is at his best when posing challenging questions to missions-oriented evangelicals: What are the core culture-transcending tenets of the gospel? How might we go about determining such culture-transcending tenets? How does your own community hybridize Christianity? *Advanced Missiology's* greatest contribution is that it helps evangelical students of missions ask better questions.

Yet there are other pressing missionary questions at the forefront of our evangelical imaginations that are not broached in *Advanced Missiology*—questions like: How is growing access to the internet in even the most remote areas of the world reshaping cross-cultural discipleship? How is the Holy Spirit challenging our traditional conceptions of church planting

movements amid the proliferation of virtual communities and online relational networks that span the globe? How is the Holy Spirit helping us imagine short term missions in the wake of a global pandemic? How is the Holy Spirit creating new opportunities for business as mission (BAM) amid volatile online markets? What new approaches to mission(s) research are needed in light of the growing power-asymmetries between missiologists of the West and missiologists of the global south? How are non-western disciples of Jesus helping expose the underlying values and priorities that are deeply embedded in western missiology? How is the Holy Spirit inspiring multicultural communities of disciples to rethink missiology in light of the unraveling of foundationalism, objectivism and propositionalism that have for so many years been tightly woven into the fabric of modern missiological studies? Of course, word counts don't allow Nehrbass to engage every question, yet these are the kind of questions this reviewer hopes will continue to inform cutting-edge missiological discourse in the coming years.

*Advanced Missiology* provides academically-minded missionaries with an annotative orientation to theoretical and methodological frameworks popular among western evangelical missionaries during the second half of the twentieth century. Retrospective in orientation, *Advanced Missiology* tends to focus on pre-Bosch (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 1991) missiological conversations. Many missionary methods and strategies (cf. chapter 10) were profoundly affected by the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019. Some readers will wonder at the absence of any mention of the massive disruptions experienced by western evangelical missions in a book that debuted on

Amazon in April 2021—particularly a book that opens with the claim that “by the end of this book, you should know...current and emerging global issues that impact missionary strategies” (1). The unfortunate timing of its publication may limit the long-term viability of *Advanced Missiology* for future missiological discourse.