

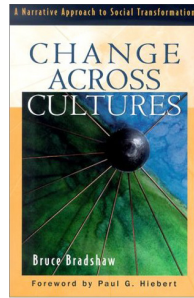
de Oliveira: Change Across Cultures: A Narrative Approach to Social Transformation  
 tained that Scripture trumps or confirms experience, not the other way around as suggested in this part of the book (187).

One of the good features of the book is that it also provides study questions at the end of each chapter. This helps the reader to situate his/her particular context with that of the book. It also helps the reader to reflect on what was just presented and/or read.

Overall, *Called to be church* is a unique and timely book in its category. It brings together biblical theology (exegetical studies) and fresh practical pastoral applications from the book of Acts which are so vital for the life and mission of God's church in today's world. Robinson and Wall have provided a much needed and balanced combination of biblical scholarship with contemporary pastoral insights.

*Called to be church* in my view is mostly for pastors and theology students, but it can also be used by church lay leaders as it will help to orient them to current trends of contemporary Christianity. The book allows the reader to grasp both the meaning of Acts and its application in a wider context. Such knowledge in turn becomes a bridge between past and present facilitating the application of this understanding of Scripture into the life and mission of the church.

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Bradshaw, Bruce. 2002. *Change across cultures: A narrative approach to social transformation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 272 pp. Paperback. \$24.99.

*Change across cultures* is Bruce Bradshaw's call for a biblical view of the *kosmos*. He argues that every culture has its narratives or deeper traditions and stories that work as a background to everything visible in a culture. These narratives are stories that explain the world and shape the concepts, perspectives, actions, reactions, and behavior of every social group. The narratives take command of the daily life of people because they carry the values and beliefs of the society. Real changes in society will happen only when the narratives are altered. Bradshaw's emphasis is not just on social change, but he also suggests that these narratives influence the way people interpret Scripture. Producing social change through the use of narratives is more than changing behavior; it is changing the ways people relate to Scripture and the way they do theology.

Bradshaw proposes several biblical elements needed to change narratives. He uses different case studies to exemplify frustrated, as well as successful attempts at introducing change

into a culture. In all of them, however, changing the stories underlying the attitudes was central to the success or failure of the intended change.

Bradshaw balances his passion for social development with evangelism as a justification for the production of this work. He argues that many mission activities and social development projects have experienced failure because the theology and ethics influencing them were propositional and not narrative in nature. Further, he explains the difference between these two approaches and what he means by them. He also believes that narratives influence one's interpretation of the Bible because narratives are full of worldview and moral assumptions. Understanding a people's narratives is a way of understanding the worldview and values underlying the culture. Narratives are also essential in any process of cultural change.

Bradshaw defends the thesis that sustainable cultural change requires the transformation of the values that permeate the cultural narratives. These narratives are stories that give a social group meaning, explanation, and boundaries about the world around them. A given culture needs new stories in order to shift their understanding. Bradshaw argues that Jesus' stories in the gospels are examples of such new narratives that had the power to deeply transform the values empha-

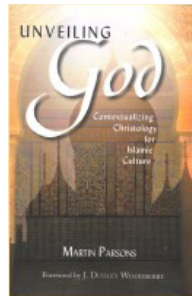
sized in a culture. Furthermore, he challenges Western readers to check their Western culture narratives in the light of Scripture. His approach is very much in line with the anthropological understanding of the need to change the deep worldview assumptions to affect lasting change, and the argument that stories encapsulate worldview, values, and beliefs of a people. People in different cultures are imprisoned by lies and the biblical narratives can be used to set them free to fully understand God's purpose for humanity both socially and personally. The biblical narratives may also expose the lies of a given culture. Bradshaw's concepts provide a guide in developing a well-informed contextual ministry.

Bradshaw's suggestion that narratives carry the underlying values of a given culture appear to be very much like worldview concepts. To focus on the deeper level of assumptions instead of on superficial or surface behavior as a means to any kind of genuine transformation is the main point of his book. If those working for social or religious change only focus on the superficial levels of social agreements they will fail to realize the deeper level of change in allegiance. By following the approach of using narratives many conflicts can be avoided and the changes implemented will have a better chance of being permanent.

Changes at the deeper levels of culture should be a main focus of missionaries and ministers. Mission is to call people to a solid transformation with Jesus Christ as the center. A narrative based approach that is shaped by biblical concepts will enable people groups to develop a biblically shaped worldview and approach to life. Biblical narratives present Jesus as the liberator for all people and should empower them to engage in the process of redemption, including the redemption of people, the social environment, health, worship, all socio-cultural aspects, as well as their spiritual relationships and allegiance to God.

Bradshaw uses literature research, personal experiences, as well as biblical hermeneutics to construct his argumentation throughout the book. This work presents a helpful bibliography for those interested in further study of the subject and related topics. In addition, he refers several times to internet resources that I found particularly helpful. This book is recommended as a textbook for students as well as for pastors, missionaries, administrators, and anyone interested or involved in leadership and the social change processes.

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Parsons, Martin. 2006. *Unveiling God: Contextualizing christology for Islamic culture*. Pasadena: William Carey Library. 400 pp. Paperback, \$29.99.

Martin Parsons has ministered to the Church in two Islamic countries. It became apparent to him during these years that the Church was attempting to communicate its understanding of Jesus in the language of the Graeco-Roman creeds of the Church. This only perpetuated the misunderstanding that the Christian has more than one God (Jesus is the second “person” of the Godhead), that the Christian God could have biological children (Jesus is the “Son of God”), and that their God is not the Almighty God (Jesus brings God down to our level). Obviously, the Church needs to find a way to communicate that will help those of the Islamic background understand the true Jesus. The first chapter of *Unveiling God* describes and evaluates some of the approaches used throughout mission history to communicate Christ in Islamic cultures.

Parsons correctly observed that the Christological hurdles between Muslims and Christians today (and the Quran and the Bible) are very similar to what the first century church