

critical scholarship, even by evangelicals. Thus the Gospels are rarely read anymore as treatments of the life of Jesus, but as collections of stories about and sayings of Jesus (often viewed as freely created by the evangelists, a view of which Stanton's essay "Matthew as a Creative Interpreter of the Sayings of Jesus" is a classical example) used to address issues facing the particular "church" for which the author writes. It is certainly true that each of the evangelists writes from within a particular community situation and that this would naturally influence the selection of their material and even how they present that material. But I think it is a mistake to say that the Gospel reflects merely (or even primarily) the situation of the Matthean community. Matthew is telling the story of Jesus. He may indeed be telling it to a particular group, but he is primarily referring to the life of Jesus, not the life of the community. So we would not expect a perfect fit to the community situation; the traditions are chosen to meet their needs, not to describe the community or its history. Despite this, both books are mines of information and will make profitable study.

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Shenk, Wilbert R. *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995. 119 pp. \$10.00.

Write the Vision is the second in a series of books dealing with Christian mission and modern culture that seeks to (1) examine modern culture from a mission perspective, (2) develop a theological agenda that the church must address in order to recover its integrity, and (3) test new conceptualizations of the nature and mission of the church as it engages modern culture.

Shenk's thesis for this book is that as the church has engaged modern Western culture the Christian faith has been seriously marginalized. To be renewed and to regain its integrity the church in the West must relate to its own culture as it has already related to cultures in so-called mission lands.

Write the Vision developed out of a series of lectures Shenk gave at the Emmanuel School of Religion in the fall of 1993 on the theme "Why Mission to Western Culture." The book is divided into four chapters that look at "Integrity," "Mission," "Evangelization," and "Church" from the perspective of how the church should relate to culture.

In Chapter 1 Shenk argues that the credibility of the church in Western culture has been seriously undermined by the church's lack of integrity. The church has become controlled by its culture, has forfeited its prophetic role in society, and has ceased to faithfully witness to the reign and rule of God. This lack of integrity has discredited the church both in the eyes of its own members and in the eyes of the general public. If the church is to be what God intends it to be the first step is to recover its integrity.

The thesis for the second chapter is that the church was instituted for the service of the *missio Dei*. But Shenk charges that the church in the West has largely forgotten that mission and has settled down in happy compromise with modern culture. That compromise expresses itself in the all-too-common distinction

separating evangelism and mission. Evangelism is for the people of Christendom who are perceived as already Christian to some degree, whereas mission is what the church does when it encounters non-Christian cultures. This view has lulled the church in the West into a false sense of security and allowed it to accommodate itself towards the surrounding culture.

Chapter 3 looks at the question of evangelization. Evangelism in the first century was different from present practice in that it produced a crisis, it turned the world upside down, it challenged the status quo, and invited people to repent. In contrast modern evangelism has too often been centered on charismatic, powerful pulpiteers who created new methods and techniques, who focused on individual conversions while forgetting the corruption of the structures, and who rarely approached the evangelistic task biblically and theologically.

In this chapter Shenk lets his bias against church-growth thinking and practice clearly show. He criticizes churches that develop needs-driven ministries, that provide specialized services to reach the various segments of society, and that promote programs and activities to establish contact points with secular people. He accuses churches of recycling the saints instead of proclaiming the good news and freeing power of God to the sick, the blind, and the oppressed.

I believe that Shenk's brush is too broad as he describes how churches in the West have caved in to the pressures of modern culture and the demands of a consumer society. What about the many churches that do all that he criticizes churches for doing, yet in addition have strong discipleship programs that help free people from addictions, bondages, and sin? What about the many practicing pastors who share Shenk's concern about the church selling out to modern culture, but have spent years of their lives ministering to the hurting in our society through the very type of activity that he criticizes? I share Shenk's concern that the church not sell its soul to culture, but I am more optimistic in that I see glowing examples of churches that are not caving in to cultural practices and that are calling men and women to deep discipleship to Jesus Christ.

In his final chapter Shenk takes a long, hard look at the state of the church as it relates to modern culture. He sees the church sitting in the midst of awful human tragedy yet lacking the courage or will to be a saving presence. He sees a church that has lost its integrity and that has sold out to its culture.

The church is most definitely the people of God, but they must also be defined by their faithfulness to mission. The church today has too often declined to accept the *missio Dei* as its chief focus and has instead been much too willing to allocate most of its financial resources to self-maintenance. Renewal is possible if God's people turn their backs on their cultural idols and once again become agents for mission to their own culture.

Wilbert Shenk has once again been a prophet to the church in the West. His book, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* challenges and rebukes a church that has allowed its culture to shape it rather than having a radical impact on its surroundings. Every pastor and church administrator would benefit from this clear call to return to biblical Christianity so that the church can be renewed and become faithful to its mission.