

[Overcoming the World Missions Crisis: Thinking Strategically to Reach the World](#)

by Russell L. Penny, ed.

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Dr. Penny joins eight other contributors to identify key problems which threaten the very nature of missions in our age. These threats are considered to be of such seriousness as to constitute a “*crisis*” in missions.

The most serious threats are identified as: (1) minimizing the importance of theology in missions in an attempt to achieve ecumenical cooperation (at the cost of doctrinal purity); (2) substituting experience and pragmatism for exegesis of God's Word; (3) a denial of the atonement of Christ as the only means of salvation; (4) a dwindling number of believers entering the ranks of full-time missionary work; (5) a corresponding reduction in the perceived importance of missions; and (6) an embracing of postmodernism and its denial of the existence of objective, knowable truth.

In discussing the crisis in missions, the book is divided into three major parts.

Part 1 defines the crisis in missions--which, at its core, is due to an implicit denial of the sufficiency of Scripture as the foundation for missions theology and practice.

Part 2 delves into key theological concerns which underly the symptoms of the crisis. For example, the tendency in modern missions to adopt practices derived from *experience* rather than *Scripture*.

It is not surprising that many of the problems which threaten missions are the same which threaten the local church. A key problem is the reliance of Christians upon *experience* as the ultimate measure of truth. This denies the sufficiency and priority of Scripture and unwittingly opens the flood gates for postmodernism where truth is determined by personal opinion and experience rather than the objective measure of God's Word:

*A paradigm shift has taken place with the result that many missionaries are now unknowingly interpreting the spirit world in light of existential rather than exegetical principles.*

The chapter titled *Demonology and the Mission Field* by John F. Hart is particularly noteworthy. Hart explores the modern aberration which is prevalent in Christian circles today: the focus and pursuit of “territorial spirits” which must be identified and “bound” before the gospel can successfully go forth in a geographic region. Hart unmasks this popular but faulty demonology and shows that its ultimate authority is existential (experience) rather than objective (God's Word). Endorsing practices which are nowhere taught in Scripture, advocates of such “power encounters” with spiritual forces of darkness seem unconcerned that they are advocating practices which *the all-sufficient Scriptures fail to address*. The implicit message is that Scripture is not sufficient for the spiritual work of the Church and that important new techniques in the area of demonology are required in order for the gospel to be effective in our age.

Hart's examples are all the more important because they illustrate a growing tendency to place experience over the revealed truth of Scripture--part-and-parcel of the postmodern movement and its elevation of personal (subjective) truth over revealed (objective) truth from God. This is the real foundation behind the crisis in world missions (and the

church).

Part 3 of the book deals with practical matters related to missions such as methods of financial support, the responsibility of the local church in missions, the role of mission agencies, etc. Jennifer Collins offers a particularly valuable chapter on the strengths and weaknesses of short-term missions. She does an admirable job surveying the benefits of short-term missions in light of related liabilities which many may not have considered. Collins concludes--and we would agree--that the benefits of short-term missions outweigh their weaknesses--weaknesses which can be mitigated with awareness and careful planning. She offers numerous helpful suggestions which anyone involved in short-term missions will find valuable.

The book closes with several helpful appendices, including planning forms which might serve as a starting point for people new to missions.

We recommend this book to anyone interested in an introduction to missions and recent developments, which if unchecked, threaten to undermine the effectiveness of missions work in coming generations.

Reviewed by Tony Garland, [www.SpiritAndTruth.org](http://www.SpiritAndTruth.org).