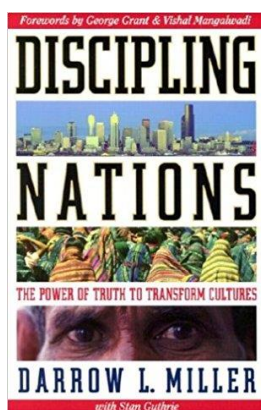

Discipling Nations: A Critique and Response

By Darrow Miller

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Recently, Richard Smith, an American expatriate serving in Argentina, published a “sympathetic critique” of Darrow’s book Discipling Nations. He raised issues about Disciple Nations Alliance teaching that have been noted by others from time to time. Because of that, and in the spirit of a free exchange of ideas, we offer here Richard’s critique and Darrow’s response.

When I first heard the title of Darrow Miller’s book, “Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures” (1998, 2001), something within me cringed. To me, “Discipling Nations” communicated theological and scriptural dissonance. I did not follow up on this sensation at the time, but my concern lingered. In November of last year I attended a conference where Miller was a featured speaker. He taught about Discipling Nations and I was troubled once again. I decided that it was, indeed, time to yield to my disquiet and investigate further.

After further reflection and study, I believe there are several weaknesses in his book and a serious conceptual flaw in his proposal. These should be acknowledged, investigated, and necessary adjustments implemented, for the sake of the church in [my nation] ... despite all the positive elements of his message. (If you are a Miller enthusiast, I ask that you assume an open mind, while we think about the phrase “Discipling Nations” together.)

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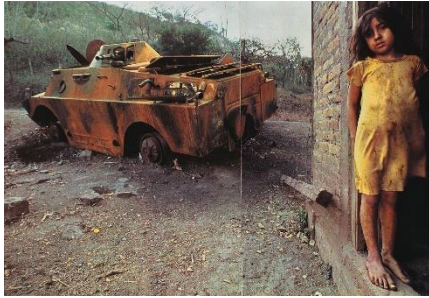
Thanks for taking the time to read and respond to my book, Richard. I so appreciate the carefulness and tone of your “sympathetic critique.” Your thoughtful review is worthy of careful response.

Let me say, too, that I have a heart for the church in your nation. It is not likely as dear to me as it is to you since you are living and investing your life in this wonderful nation. But, in fact, we at the Disciple Nations Alliance understand that the church is the Bride of Christ and has the

responsibility of bringing the gospel to the nation. In fact, the local church is at the heart of the DNA ministry (as seen in our foundation document, [Seven Transforming Truths](#)).

The intersection of worldview and poverty

The book you have critiqued was first written 20 years ago, after 10 years of personal reflection on the relationship between worldview and poverty. In fact, my life has been lived out at the unlikely intersection of worldview and poverty.



I began my journey in the world of poverty in 1981, working for an evangelical international relief and development organization. At the time I was what might be called an evangelical socialist. I thought the root of poverty was lack of resources and the solution to poverty was the redistribution of resources. In my work I discovered that billions of dollars were being spent to help the poor, with very little commensurate return. It was a shock to me to come to

understand that poverty was the result of lies stemming from non-biblical worldviews. Ten years of research, reflection and interaction with compassion workers around the world led me to write *Discipling Nations*.

Some of your critique is valid. This can be understood in that the book was originally written some 20 years ago. Obviously, as a serious, life-long learner, I have continued to study, read, dialogue and grow. Some of my previous insights have matured, some have shifted. We have now completed a more up-to-date edition of *Discipling Nations* that is likely to be out in Spanish (as well as English) in 2018.

Compassion and vision

According to the author, “*Discipling Nations*,” provides a “wholistic framework” for ministry to “the poor and hungry,” as well as to “redeem culture and see nations disciplined” (Preface, 2nd edition). His text is a manifesto for change and action. It is useful for laymen as an introduction to worldview, poverty, and development (though there are recent texts that are also helpful). He contrasts and critiques other perspectives from the biblical worldview. He urges Christians to “think independently, governed not by today’s current fad or trend but by reason” (109). He confronts the sacred-secular division, subjective spirituality, and anti-intellectualism prevalent among evangelicals today. He encourages Christians to “integrate their Judeo-Christian worldview into their professional lives” (107). All these features are very positive.

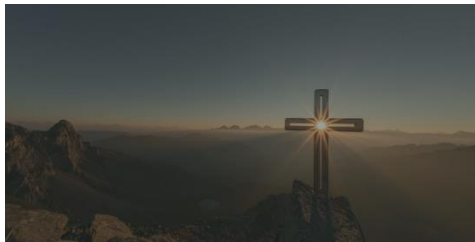
I do not know Darrow Miller personally. My impression is that he has great compassion and a broad vision. Friends who know him testify to his humility. He clearly has gifts of leadership and communication. He seems to be a pragmatic thinker, a man in search of solutions, particularly for poverty and development. Loren Cunningham (founder of Youth With A Mission) described Miller and his program in a way that reveals his priorities (27):

Darrow is not an intellectual; he is a Christian who is busy making a difference worldwide, and committed to seeing the minds of Christians renewed by God's truth in order to more correctly and effectively reflect and initiate His truth into every realm of society, and thereby "disciple the nations" – which is the key to solving the world's problems.

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Thank you, Richard, for the kind words you offer in the preface of your critique. My sense is that if we had time to meet, and I hope we will, we would find we have much in common and would likely become friends.

A social activist, not an intellectual



Miller describes himself as a "social activist" (27) and Cunningham says that he is "not an intellectual." Yet, his book deals with very important theoretical concepts, such as, the relationship between the church and the world, worldview, God's purpose in creation, and the role of the intellect. This is significant, because in reality his study is very broad, but not very deep. Sometimes, it is quite simplistic, confusing, or reductionistic. I will provide several examples.

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While I think in theological terms, I am not a trained theologian. As you have said, I am a social activist, one who has come to see the importance of ideas. The renowned Brazilian educator Paulo Freire noted two extremes: activism – doing without reflection, and intellectualism – reflecting without acting. While my inclination is to act, in my life and work I have sought to achieve a balance between action and reflection.

But although I am not trained as a theologian, I have sought to think deeply about my vocation from a biblical perspective. As you are aware, because of the sacred-secular divide, most Christians are Christians in their hearts but too often think like their culture thinks in terms of their work. My attempt, for over 30 years, has been to learn to think theologically about relief and development and the world of poverty.

So, it is with this in mind that I will seek to respond to the major points of your sympathetic critique.

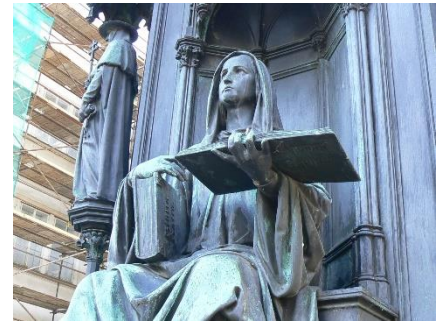
First, Miller cites few biblical scholars or theologians, though he deals with theology and worldview throughout his book. The majority of those quoted are social commentators and other activists, such as himself. On the research portal, EBSCOhost, I found only one review of

his book (partially negative). He does not appear to have written any peer-reviewed articles, except a brief exposé about his book in 1997 in the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. This is important. His entire project is based upon a biblical-theological hermeneutic that is subject to criticism (below). In other words, he is clearly a “how and when” thinker, but has not provided an in depth “what and why” biblical analysis to justify his program.

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You identify five weaknesses and one “serious conceptual flaw” in the book. Actually there are probably even more weaknesses than you have identified! But I would like to respond to your critique. My sense is that we will find considerable agreement as we dialogue, and at the same time identify issues that may need further discussion.

The first weakness you have articulated is that I cite “few biblical scholars or theologians.” This is true!



Faculty of Theology personified

In academic circles, this would be a critical flaw. If I were pursuing a PhD, this would be an imperative.

But, as I mentioned above, I am not a theologian. I am a social activist who seeks to think theologically about my work. Neither am I a scholar, nor have I ever pretended to be. If you judge me by my theological scholarship you will find me lacking.

My time at L'Abri

When I was in my twenties, my wife and I had the opportunity to live, study and work under Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland for three years. At the time, I had completed a year of seminary and had taken a year off to travel. I ended up spending the three



years at L'Abri. I learned more in two months as a student at L'Abri than in the previous nine months in seminary. When the Lord provided the opportunity for my wife and I to stay and work at L'Abri, we took it.

In the environment of L'Abri I found a radical way to learn. I came to understand that education was more important than schooling. I realized that I needed to develop the discipline of life-long learning. (My post at Darrow Miller and Friends, [School vs Education](#), develops this premise.)

At L'Abri I acquired the skill of helping common folks like myself better understand what Schaeffer and other thinkers were saying. I did not have an intellect like Schaeffer, nor the intelligence and scholarship of L'Abri friends like Os Guinness, Charles Thaxton or Nancy Pearcey. But I could make their teaching and writing accessible to the common man.

There is a distinction between “top,” “pop,” and “slop.” Schaeffer, Guinness, Thaxton, Pearcey, and likely yourself, are in the top category. I have sought to occupy the ground of pop - the popularizer. In this place I have blossomed. I trust that my writing and speaking is not in the slop category.

Many reviews

While it is true that I have had few academic reviews, I have had many non-academic reviews. These have come from peers, working professionals in the relief and development community. Those reviews have been mixed, partly because the positions I take often run counter to the philosophy behind industry practices. But over the years, the things I have written about in *Discipling Nations* have begun to impact the industry.

Other reviews have come from young leaders looking for solutions to the poverty and corruption that enslave their countries. In addition, missionaries, pastors of all stripes, and Bible school and seminary leaders have responded and given input on the book. These leaders have used our materials in books in seminary classes, in staff training for partnering organizations, and in shaping their own ministries among the poor and disenfranchised. Churches have developed customized applications that have begun to bring transformation to their churches and communities, and, in some cases, their cities.

I recognize these do not comprise the kind of rigorous academic reviews you mentioned. But hopefully these at least indicate that the ideas have been reviewed and applied by a variety of Christians ranging from pastors to seminary and university professors and missions and relief and development leaders.

Discipling Nations has been translated into 13 languages by those who have found it helpful. For the most part, the translations were done as gifts of love because of the perceived importance of the message for their nation.

Supportive scholars

Some scholars have been supportive, especially Dr. Wayne Grudem of Phoenix Seminary, Dr. Brian Fikkert of the Chalmers Center at Covenant College, Dr. Nancy Pearcey, Scholar in Residence at Houston Baptist University, and Dr. Tetsunao Yamamori, professor and missiologist.

You suggest that I am “clearly a ‘how and when’ thinker” who has “not provided an in depth ‘what and why’ biblical analysis to justify his program.”

Being at heart a social activist, I am a doer. Yet those in the relief and development community have criticized me for being too philosophical and theological!



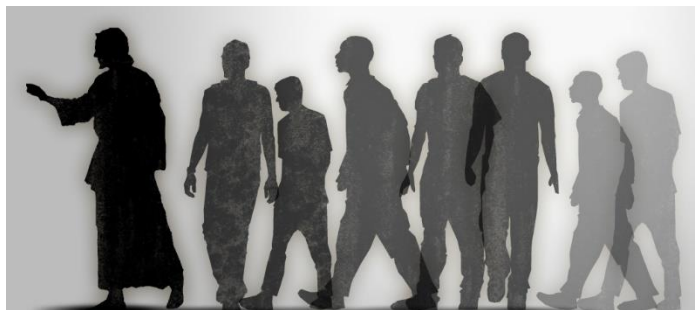
As a university student, I traveled to Mexico City and lived in an orphanage for six weeks. God broke my heart over the plight of the poor. When I began to work for an international NGO I realized a need for practical Bible-based solutions to the problem of poverty. Thus when I speak about worldview, I move towards the practical rather than the academic. Most people who teach on worldview emphasize the academic. At the DNA we stress the practical.

Similarly, my interest is in practical (applied) theology rather than systematic theology. We live in a broken

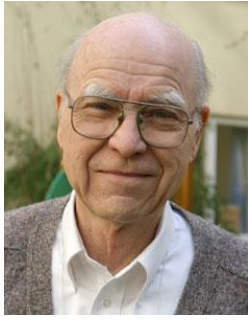
world; it is truth that sets us free (John 8:31-32). People and societies are poor because they have had little teaching about the treasure found in scripture. In addition to the treasure found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Bible's practical wisdom can be applied to everyday life. The scriptures challenge cultural lies such as fatalism, or "work is a curse," "men are superior to women," "ignorance is a virtue." All these lies are barriers to human flourishing. Fellow L'Abri alum, Vishal Mangalwadi, has written a profound book, [*The Book that Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*](#).

Few Christians have been taught to connect their daily work to the coming of the kingdom of God. My book [*LifeWork: A Biblical Theology for What You Do Every Day*](#), is a serious attempt to heal this flaw.

Second, his [Darrow's] depiction of how cultural transformation actually occurs is confusing. On the one hand, he stresses the role of ideas and criticizes the pessimistic and rudimentary "last days evangelicalism" (72) and "diluted pietism" (73) in the church today. He also declares: "The gospel is much more than evangelism." Yet, he often repeats the notion that societies change "one person at a time" (74) as they are converted. (See also 22, 136, 191, 271). However, is cultural change a mathematical formula based on true belief? Can social progress be equated with conversions? There are examples in history and "Christian" countries today, like Guatemala and the United States that belie this idea. Miller knows this, of course, but his text is not clear.



The second weakness you see in *Discipling Nations* is my “depiction of how cultural transformation actually occurs is confusing.”



I am sorry for the confusion. I mentioned above that I have learned many things since I first wrote the book. One of those things deals with the weakness you have articulated.

Perhaps the best piece I have read that deals clearly with this issue is by the renowned missiologist Dr. Ralph Winter. In 2007, shortly before he died, Dr. Winter penned perhaps his seminal piece, [“The Future of Evangelicals in Missions: Will We Regain the Vision of our Forefathers In the Faith?”](#) In this he makes a distinction between two kinds of evangelicals.

It would seem helpful to distinguish between First-Inheritance Evangelicalism and Second-Inheritance Evangelicalism (my terms). For this article we can define ... the First as that which was characterized by a broad dual social/personal spectrum of concern ranging from foreign missions to changing the legal structure of society and even war. The Second Inheritance focused mainly on the personal.

Personal and social application of the cross

First-Inheritance Evangelicals worked from a biblical worldview that was comprehensive and wholistic in its application. This led to the first Great Awakening. Wesley exemplified this. He preached Christ crucified for salvation but argued that true revival would be followed by reformation, a change in society stemming from consequential conversions. In other words, the cross has both a personal application and a social application. The Second Inheritance Evangelicals, working from the sacred/secular divide (what I call Evangelical Gnosticism), preached the gospel of personal salvation. They were interested in revival, but not necessarily in the reformation of society.

I wish I had had this language when I first wrote *Discipling Nations*. Perhaps I would not have created the confusion that you perceived.

You go on to write, [“However, is cultural change a mathematical formula based on true belief? Can social progress be equated with conversions?”](#)

The answer to the first part of your question is emphatically NO! We are proudly First Inheritance Evangelicals and do expect that the cross has both personal and social implications. But there is no formula. Churches today need to have the expectations of the First Inheritance Evangelicals, not the Second Inheritance.

Discipleship includes social impact

When people come to Christ through evangelism, they need to be disciplined. The discipleship needs to take place on two levels. The first is the personal level of the “spiritual disciplines,” i.e.

to read the word of God, to pray, to fellowship with believers and to share the gospel.

But a second level of discipleship has implications for the social impact of the gospel. This is discipleship *at the level of culture*. I would argue that this is the discipleship of the gospel penetration of culture as we find in Matthew 28:18-20. I will say more about this later.

Culture at its most basic level is a product of “cult” – worship. In scripture we are told that we become like the God or gods that we worship (e.g. Ps 135:17-18; Is. 44:9-20).

Theologian Henry van Til has stated this as clearly as anyone: “culture is religion externalized.” Or to say it differently, culture is the outworking of a people’s faith. When people come to Christ, they are leaving their pagan god behind, be it a local idol or money, and are turning to the living God. His character is different from the nature of pagan gods. As the focus of our worship/cult changes, so too there should be a change in culture. As an example, most pagan gods can be bribed. This leads to a culture of corruption. The living God “shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.” The worship of the living God should lead to a culture of justice.



Ken Meyers, journalist and graduate of Westminster Seminary explains it this way at Mars Hill Audio:

Discipleship is not engaging with another culture to present a small set of new propositions. Rather, discipleship is a work of alternative enculturation - to present a new way to understand life and the world in which we live, that is, a new way to understand 'what is real'. And this new way of understanding life is incarnated in alternative cultural forms that are sustained across generations and, when possible, shared with our neighbors.

If Jesus is Lord, what does that change?

Missionary statesman Lesslie Newbigin put it this way:

A preaching of the gospel that calls men and women to accept Jesus as their Savior but does not make it clear that discipleship means a commitment to a vision of society radically different from that which controls our public life today must be condemned as false.

In short, evangelism and conversion should lead to a change in society. We have seen this exemplified in the transforming of nations in Europe that took place following the Reformation. Later in England, Wesley’s preaching led not only to tens of thousands of people coming to Christ, but within a generation England was a radically different country. See “[England Before and After Wesley](#).”

The spiritual children of Wesley formed the Clapham Sect. God used this dedicated group of Christian politicians, businessmen, artists, newspaper men, pastors, and bankers, working together for over 40 years, to end slavery and to “civilize” pagan England. For this story see Eric Metaxas’s book [Amazing Grace](#).

Then there is Hans Nielsen Hauge, a farmer, evangelist and businessman whom God used to lead the transformation of Norway. A short essay by Sigbjørn Ravnåsen, "[Hans Nielsen Hauge, his ethics and some consequences of his work](#)" can be found on the Disciple Nations website.

We must not fail to mention the transformation of Korea in 50 years by the impact of the gospel. In his paper, "[Transformation: from Poor to Blessed](#)," missiologist Luis Bush reveals this remarkable story.

I hope this has cleared up some of the confusion and has provided some historic examples of what God has done in history through Christians and the Bible to bring transformation of societies. By God's grace, this can happen in Argentina as well.

Fourth, Miller credits humans with enormous power and determination. He expressed the idea that "man is the proactive creator of history" at least seven times (130, 225, 230, 250, 266, 275, 277). He is quite optimistic about human potential to improve societies: "We can dream of a better world and then make it happen." But, this notion appears to underestimate divine providence, as well as human finiteness and fallenness.

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Let's look at the fourth weakness you have identified: "Miller credits humans with enormous power and determination."

I agree with you that men are both finite and sinful. And at the same time God is sovereign and holy. However, man's sin does not make him insignificant.



Human beings, made *Imago Dei*, though fallen, are not nothing. Men and women have an ability to make decisions for which they have responsibility. They have the ability to name things, indicating their vice-regency over the creation. They have an ability to make decisions that will affect history. Men and women are "secondary creators," God being the Primary Creator. We can take things that God has made in the primary creation and make secondary creations. God intends for us to create art and music, to discover things hidden, like oil hidden in the ground or the hidden potential of sand to make glass and even computer chips.

I have attempted to describe the balance in the book you reviewed. The scriptures teach that man is both, and at the same time, *sinful* and *significant*. Chapter 9 of the book, *Rebel Servant*, describes man's rebellion against God and man's depravity. Chapter 11 – *Stewardship*, and Chapter 13 – *History Makers*, both seek to show man's greatness as well as his depravity. The

Bible reveals both about man. We need to seek to resolve this apparent contradiction.

God's sovereignty does not erase human responsibility

The Bible does speak about God's sovereignty. And it also speaks, with equal clarity, about human responsibility. Too often the church has tended to polarize around this tension, pushing one point or the other to an extreme. We see this between those who identify theologically as Calvinists and those who consider themselves Arminian. The Arminians tend to take human freedom to its logical conclusion, thus denying the sovereignty of God. This is a mistake. On the other hand, some Calvinists tend to push God's sovereignty to an extreme and end up denying human freedom and responsibility.

Is God so sovereign that man is not free? No. Or is man so free that God is not sovereign? Again, I think not. I suspect you would agree that either of these positions would be reductionist.

Are God's sovereignty and human responsibility mutually exclusive? I do not think so! Here is, in my mind, the perfect example of antinomy. There is an *apparent* contradiction. The key word is apparent. It is not a real contradiction. But this appears to be a contradiction to finite man. After all, as human beings we have the ability to ask questions our finite mind cannot answer. It does not mean the question is without answer. It simply means that some questions will not be answered until we are in glory.

Here we have a tension between God's sovereignty and man's real freedom. Mankind has the ability to shape history with his word and deed. We certainly acknowledge this when we recognize the consequences of Adam and Eve's free choice to rebel against their God and Creator. We are living in a world that reflects this historic decision.



I do not know if what I have written shows us as closer in our positions than we thought, or not. It may confirm your concern that we are farther apart. Either way, I so appreciate the opportunity to dialog with you on this level.

Fifth, his interpretation of scripture is questionable. He says, for example:

Our mandate includes bringing substantial healing to nature, standing against the decay, and causing deserts and gardens alike to bloom (163, 165).

We transform the world...to discover the design behind nature (science) and to apply those laws (technology) to attack the ravages of natural evil, the "thorns and thistles" (228).

In both cases his proof text is Romans 8:19-22, which is an odd theological interpretation of the text in its context or within the broader biblical narrative:

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who

subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

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Let's look at your fifth suggested weakness. You say that my "interpretation of scripture is questionable."

My own commitment has been to the classic historical-grammatical approach rather than the higher critical method of the rationalistic moderns, or the imagining approach of Postmoderns. My guess is we would be in agreement in our basic approach to hermeneutics. If not, this could be a reason to disagree with my interpretation of scripture.

Then you give two examples. The first relates to the nature of healing to take place in our broken world, and the second relates to my understanding of the concept of a nation.

In the context of the broader biblical narrative, I begin reading scripture from Genesis 1-2. This is critical because much of the biblical worldview is laid out in Genesis 1-3. Genesis 1-2 presents God's intention for mankind and creation, how things were meant to be. Genesis 3 tells us what went wrong, how things got broken. In Genesis 1, God makes the judgment, after each step of creation, "it is good" or "it is so." It is indeed as He conceived it. Everything God created was in harmony with God and with the rest of creation.



Genesis 3 reveals that man rebelled against God and thus all his relationships were broken. There was sin, evil and brokenness throughout the creation. Man's relationship with God was broken, his relationship with his fellow man was broken, his relationship with creation was broken, and his relationship with himself (he no longer knew his true identity as the image of God) was broken.

There are two types of Christians. The first group can be called Genesis 1 Christians as they begin their study of scripture with Genesis 1, understanding the broader biblical context beginning with God's good and perfect intentions for man and creation. Genesis 1 Christians understand the First Commission (or the Cultural Mandate) of the first two chapters of Genesis. They understand that man's rebellion had consequences for all humans and all of creation. Christ, who is sovereign over all (Col. 1:18), died on the cross to reconcile all things to himself (Col. 1:20).

I hardly think that Romans 8:19-20 is a proof text. In the larger context of Genesis 1-3, God has a love for both mankind and for creation. His intention is that, in the end, there will be shalom, and this peace will restore everything broken in the fall.

Francis Schaeffer was fond of saying that there should be "substantial healing" for man and all

his relationships. This simple phrase stands against two trends in Christendom. The first trend is the belief that man's relationship with God is the only thing healed by Calvary. The second is the expectation that man has the ability to reconcile all things by his own effort. Both of these are false. The truth, on the other hand, is that, in Christ, we should expect and work towards substantial healing in all our relationships, including our relationship with the rest of creation.

The second type of Christian I refer to as Genesis 3 Christians. They begin their reading of scripture with the fall and the impact of the fall, typically limited to man's broken relationship with God, and his fallen nature. When we begin in Genesis 3, we limit the cross and the work of redemption to the salvation of souls to go to heaven. Christ died on the cross for my sins so that I could be reconciled to God in time and in eternity. This, of course, is true! But Genesis 3 Christians begin with a narrow biblical context, starting with the fall and our brokenness rather than the broader biblical context beginning in Genesis 1.

The "Godfather of English Hymnody," Isaac Watts, certainly understood the comprehensiveness of salvation. In his wonderful Christmas hymn, "Joy to the World," the third stanza records these remarkable words:

No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

You then mention that "a more serious error is Miller's use of the term, 'nations.'"



Perhaps you have misread me. I fully understand the blessing on Abraham to be a blessing to the nations (Hebrew *miš-pā-ḥā(h)*: families, clans, tribes, peoples), and the commission given by Jesus to disciple *panta ta ethnē*: a race, people group or a nation. I find the Greek word *ethnē* fascinating as it is part of a family of words that include:

- ethos: distinguishing moral nature
- ethical: actions deserving moral approval
- ethics: governing principle of conduct; governing moral or social order

So, in a sense, the word *ethnē* entails a defining moral order, the distinguishing moral/behavior code. I think back to something we talked about earlier, that culture is derived from cult. Theologian and pastor Dr. George Grant writes of Augustine:

According to Augustine, culture is not a reflection of a people's race, ethnicity, folklore, politics, language or heritage. Rather it is an outworking of a people's creed. In other words, culture is the temporal manifestation of a people's faith. If a culture begins to change, it is not because of fads,

fashions, or the passing of time; it is because of a shift in the worldview – it is because of a change of faith.



All this to say that I understand the difference between the meaning of the word nation as used in scripture and the modern political-social-economic entity. Most modern states have many ethnē. However, whether we think of nations in the biblical frame of ethnē or in terms of the modern nation-states, the good news of Jesus Christ is to be brought to them.

But you raise another issue here as well, that is, the nature of the great commission. I would argue that the gospel is dynamic; it is to travel both *horizontally* and *vertically*. Jesus says in Acts 1:8 that we are to be his witnesses to the end of the earth, to every tribe and language and people and nation. It is to go to every ethnē. This is the horizontal aspect of the Great Commission.

Then it is to travel vertically; it is to penetrate culture. This is the commission as given in Matthew 28:18-20, to “disciple nations ... teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.” It does not say merely to disciple individuals in every nation, but to disciple all ethnē – people groups. This includes and begins with the discipling of individuals but it does not end there. (See [a graphical depiction](#), Our Approach: Transform the Nation Through the Church, at the DNA website.)

The Apostle Paul makes this clear in Romans 16:25-27:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him – to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

What is the end of the proclamation of the gospel? That nations might believe and obey! Paul speaks about panta ta ethnē believing and obeying. For a nation to believe and obey, there needs to be a critical mass of people who have come to Christ and who have been discipled, as we have discussed earlier, at the level of culture.

Order is the first need of any nation. The Kingdom ethos lays a foundation for building free, just and compassionate societies, which glorify God in their obedience and allow the glory of the nation to be revealed.

Matthew Henry’s comments on Matthew 28:19 shed further light on this question.



"[D]o your utmost to make the nations Christian nations;" not, "Go to the nations, and denounce the judgments of God against them, as Jonah against Nineveh, and as the other Old-Testament prophets,"... "but go, and disciple them." Christ the Mediator is setting up a kingdom in the world, bring the nations to be his subjects; setting up a school, bring the nations to be his scholars; raising an army for the carrying on of the war against the powers of darkness,

enlist the nations of the earth under his banner."

Christians and nations are to know and do. Jesus says that part of discipleship is to teach nations all that Jesus has commanded.

Since the Enlightenment and the reaction to the advance of secularism, evangelicalism has become more individualistic, and we don't like to think about social implications – of communities and cultures—as much. We are uncomfortable with this. But the Bible presents the radical impact of the gospel on both the individual and communities/culture.

As I noted earlier from Ralph Winter, First Inheritance Christians understand that the Great Commission is comprehensive and wholistic, to make disciples of all nations: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Second Inheritance Christians tend to reduce the Great Commission to the Greek Commission of saving souls for heaven.

Richard, I agree with you on the scriptural meaning of nations, but would argue that the Great Commission is indeed the GREAT commission. For more on this subject, I unpack the Great Commission in my book: [*Emancipating the World: A Christian Response to Radical Islam and Fundamentalist Atheism.*](#)

While many Christians affirm Miller's important stress upon ideas and the repudiation of the sacred-secular division, as well as the need to influence societies with the biblical worldview (I certainly do!), his eschatology is problematic. These statements are most revealing:



Our job is to help people see the big picture of what God is doing in history to restore the world, end hunger, and build his kingdom (117).

We are to tend the garden, build the city, fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, and bless and disciple all the nations (137).

The task given to the church in the Great Commission was nothing less than to disciple nations. If the church does not disciple the nation, the nation will disciple the church (192).

Note the close parallel between God's covenant with Abram to be a blessing to all the nations (see Genesis 12:1–3) and the Great Commission of the Church by Christ to make disciples of all the nations (see Matthew 28:18–20) (225).

And why is the blessing to be extended to all nations? Why are we to disciple nations? So that when the King returns, the glory of the nations will be brought by the kings of the nations into the City of God (263).

Man is to participate in and help hasten God's unfolding consummation of history...the transformation completed. And the blessing of the nations fully extended – this is our telos (277).

On that day, with the discipling of the nations complete, the kings of the earth will bring the glory of the nations to the Lamb—our King, Jesus Christ (see Revelation 21:24–26). Until that ultimate day, we all have work to do! (279)

Miller seemingly fails to discern deeply the two “commissions” (the cultural mandate, Genesis 1:26-28, and the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19) in light of our messy, complex world “under the sun” (Eccl 1:9) and in the “present evil age” (Gal 1:4). In this present epoch, the ideal state will never be achieved through any ideology or worldview: communism or socialism, democracy, capitalism or consumerism, Islam or any of the myriad alternative spiritualities. Never will there be a true “Holy (fill in the blank) Empire.”

~

We now come to what you describe as my “serious conceptual flaw.” As you point out, this is best defined as an eschatological matter.

You point out that “In this *present* epoch, the ideal state will not be achieved” You might be surprised that I agree with you that the ideal state will not be achieved this side of Christ's return.



We are in the time of the “now” and the “not yet.” As you so aptly put it, the current status is a “messy, complex world ‘under the sun.’” The final restoration of all things will not take place this side of Christ's return. But how are we to live our lives? We are to live the “now” in the context of the “not yet.” The context of our lives is not the pursuit of ever more consumption as the moderns

would argue. It is not the disappearance of the individual into a spiritual never-never land as

the Postmoderns and Eastern religions would argue. No, the context of our lives is first, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, HE CONQUERED DEATH, and we no longer need to live in the fear of death, and second, His certain return at the end of time to consummate history with the coming of the fullness of the kingdom of God.

In the time between Christ's first and second coming we are to seek *substantial healing* in all of our relationships. We are to live in light of these key events of history. We are to live the *proleptic life*, to live in the reality of the future, today. In other words, we are to live as if the future were present. We are to live in the world we now see, according to what we know is true in the unseen world, our lives revealing in the now, the not yet of the coming of the kingdom of God.

I would argue that while the First (Cultural) Commission given in Genesis 1 has been impacted by the fall, it has not been rescinded. The job description of Genesis 1 and 2 is still our first and current job description. Carrying out the first job description on this side of the cross is really what it means for the church to be salt and light in the broken world, what it means to think biblically in their family life and vocation, and that is what it means to disciple nations.

Miller appears to embrace an overly optimistic, post-millennial, triumphal outlook that envisions progressive, Christian cultural development and dominance of the world in preparation for the Lord's return. According to Miller's vision, the church should be centrally involved in nation-building. Interestingly, the one culture that appears to best fulfill his "development ethic" is North America, for he declares, "democratic capitalism is significantly better than any other system" (Kindle edition). (See more nuanced comments in the 2nd edition: 119, 138-139, 158.) As Cunningham said regarding Miller's vision: "discipling the nations" is "the key to solving the world's problems" [emphasis mine]. Miller said we "build the city of God" [emphasis mine].

~

There is a yes and no response to this. I can be as discouraged and depressed as anyone about the brokenness of our world. Having spent 30 years traveling in the world of hunger and poverty and more recently watching the moral and spiritual collapse of my own country, I am deeply troubled. But at the same time, I am highly optimistic because I know who won the battle of the cross and I know with certainty that Christ will return with His kingdom.

While I believe progress can be made in the material world, this side of Christ's return I am not a triumphalist. I would describe myself as an optimistic realist. While I affirm that Christ expects us to manifest His kingdom coming and His will being done on earth as it is in heaven, this leads to development but not "dominance of the world."



Christ's parable of the wheat and the weeds is instructive at this point. The wheat and the weeds grow up concurrently, side by side in the same field. They will be separated at the time of the harvest fulfillment. In the meantime, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness are growing simultaneously, more and more.

You may read me as postmillennial, but that is not how I would describe myself. In fact, since the endless argument experienced in seminary over the millennial question, I have not used any of these terms. Perhaps it was the theologian Dr. James Hurley, whom I met at L'Abri, that helped me the most. Jim identified himself as "pro-mil."

Some who hear me think that I must be advocating a Christian theocracy. Discipling nations doesn't mean Christians seizing political power and imposing Christianity through government force. To the contrary, this is the exact opposite of what a biblical worldview supports. The Bible is all about liberty and freedom. The freedom to choose God, or to choose hell. A biblically-informed approach to government and politics establishes that freedom. This is why I have argued that the framework of a biblical worldview leads to free societies where people govern themselves internally. The more that people exercise self-government, the freer the society and the more limited the government. If people do not self-govern, there will be anarchy or tyranny. In fact, it is the non-pluralistic faith of Judeo-Christian theism that leads to pluralistic societies. All other faiths, including secularism, will move in the direction of "theocracy" or tyranny. Again, for more on this see the book *Emancipating the World*.

It seems, therefore, that Christians construct the church, so that it can build the nation and develop culture, and thereby resolve the world's problems – all of this to prepare the earth for the Lord's return. However, solving, for example, Argentina's many social-political-economic problems and building the local branch of the City of God imposes an onerous burden upon the local church.

~

Richard, I beg to differ with you. As I travel around the world, including to Argentina, I find many pastors and Christians are dissatisfied with the state of the church and what they expect of the Christian life. Many people have asked me, "Isn't there more to what it means to be the church, to be a Christian?" I would say that the social-political-economic problems of Argentina are the church's problems.

One well-known example of this kind of thinking is Tim Keller's Redeemer Church in New York City. Their vision statement reads, "*As a church of Jesus Christ, Redeemer exists to help build a great city for all people through a movement of the gospel that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal to New York City and, through it, the world.*"

My colleague Dwight Vogt has written a helpful paper on this subject, [The Unique Role of the Local Church in Developing a Flourishing Community](#).

As I have argued previously, the cross of Christ has both personal and public application. There is a parallel between the individual process of salvation (justification, sanctification, and glorification) and the social/global process of Kingdom advance (the cross, the great commission and discipling of nations, and consummation).

Both applications are, in a sense, three-step processes. Both flow out of Christ's finished work on the cross and His defeat of Satan. The first (individual) makes possible the second (social/global). In both cases, the middle piece (personal sanctification and the public discipling of nations) is a messy process of victories and failures, advances and backsliding, ups and downs, wheat and weeds, living as new creations in a still fallen and enemy occupied world, etc. But both processes move in a definite direction. Christ promises that in both cases, he will bring to completion the work he has begun. That applies both to us as individuals (*teleios*, being perfect and complete, lacking in nothing) and to the world as a whole (the *telos* with the coming of the fullness of the kingdom of God to a perfect completion).



After all, the Great Commission is a CO-mission. We are called to engage WITH Jesus (He is leading) in the process of discipling the nations, with the full knowledge that there will be no perfectly disciplined nations until Christ returns. We are to be disciplined ourselves, and disciple others with the full knowledge that glorification won't happen on this side of Christ's return.

As I often point out, some person, power or ideology is always at work to disciple the world. The entertainment community has powerfully disciplined the West. The media is discipling nations. The digital/video industry is making disciples of our young people. Every Christian and every church bemoans these effects on society. Is it so inconceivable that Jesus Christ has sent His church into the world to disciple it according to His kingdom priorities? Is this not indeed the essence of the Great Commission?

Again, thank you for taking the time to read *Discipling Nations* and to write this sympathetic critique. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your critique. My sense is we have more in common than we have disagreements. May the Lord bless you and your ministry. Hopefully we can spend some time together when I am next in Argentina.

This paper ends with the following direct exchange between Darrow and Richard.

Darrow,

I was happy to receive your response to my blog ... While the site is gaining readership, I rarely get feedback. So, your thoughtful commentary was a pleasant surprise.

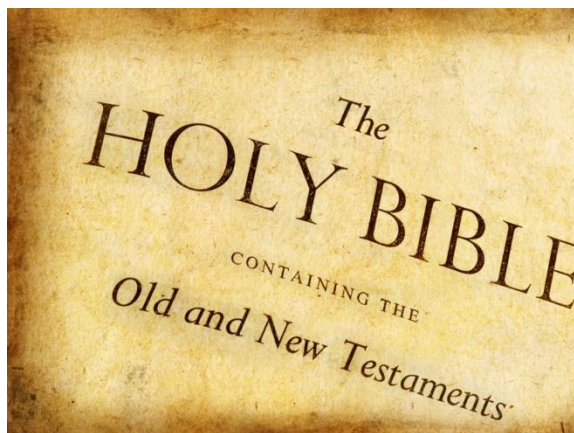
I will make three brief comments, because “an analysis as reflective as yours deserves an attentive response.”

First, I not only read your book (twice), I studied it. I took notes, made cross-references, searched for citations of your texts by others, sought other reviews, and I looked at your ministry website.

~

I am honored that you took so much time. It does speak of your seriousness, and affirms the need that I had to respond to your earnestness.

Second, you referred me to several, additional texts of yours and of others, and I am grateful. In my blog I referred readers to resources on my site, including two articles by myself. Might I suggest you read: “A Place at the Table: Christian Political Engagement in a Post-Christian Context” and “The Mission of God and Economic Prosperity.” (They are on the site in Spanish.



If you want English copies, I can provide them to you.) You will see in the article, “A Place At The Table,” that my vision for Christian social engagement is different than yours (though not incompatible). I also invite you to read some of my blogs (on the “English Page”).

~

Yes, Richard, I would like to read the two articles you referred to in English. I would appreciate it if you would send them to me. This could be further fodder for our discussion. I will also check out a few of your blog posts.

More about biblical principles than techniques

Third, if we assume your optimism is warranted, I wonder how it might be implemented. What is the infrastructure (institutions, economics, ideas, education, personnel) to make it happen? The infrastructure issue is what I raise in several of my questions at the end of part two. This is

a theme with which I am interested. Even if your optimism and vision are plausible, there would be massive, long-term changes needed in terms of education (theological and general), economic investment, and leadership in the church.

~

Richard, as you so rightly distinguished, there is a difference between an optimistic view of the future and the actual implementation of such a view.

I would say that the “secret” is not a how-to manual, but the application of biblical principles of government, economics, education, science, etc. Not “ten easy steps,” but a set of principles that, when applied, bring transformation. The ten steps are the “what.” It is the wonder and power of the “why” that will provide the motivation and set the direction of the work.

The Reformation in Europe, the Wesleyan Revivals in England, and the First Great Awakening in the USA are great examples that this kind of change can occur on a massive national (and even continental level) in a relatively short period of time, with the key instrument being what I like to call the “Monday Church.” Let me explain.



John Phelan [CC BY-SA 3.0 from Wikimedia Commons]

In today’s economy, we too often see the church as a building where people gather to worship on Sunday. This is the Sunday “go to meeting” church. But the church is not a building. The Bible speaks of the church as a people, as the bride of Christ, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, as koinonia (fellowship). The church gathers on Sunday for corporate worship and equipping and then scatters on Monday all over the society to disciple and serve. The same people that gather on Sunday are still the church on Monday. Most of

the work of the church takes place Monday through Saturday.

Biblical principles in all of life make the difference

The Reformation in Europe was not simply a spiritual revival; it was a reforming of the countries of northern Europe, a reformation that began with education, and eventually included science, economics and politics. The reordering and restructuring of societies was the outcome of the preaching of the whole counsel of God, and the embrace of policies based on biblical principles applied in all areas of life, by prince and pauper alike.

The Wesleyan Revivals produced reform in all of English society. Wesley’s spiritual sons and daughters organized themselves (Wesley’s “Methods”) for going deeper into knowledge and application of the word of God. The Clapham Sect, whose members included William Wilberforce, showed how one well-organized group of people could be used of God to reform

an entire society. They ended up reforming the prison system, ending slavery, bringing civility to British society, reducing drug and alcohol abuse, and more, all in one generation. They were committed, focused and organized to bring substantial change to Britain. And they did, under the leadership of and in concert with the Spirit of God. The Clapham Sect was a good example of the Monday Church.

The story of Arthur Guinness, founder of Guinness Beer, is a wonderful account of how one of Wesley's disciples sought to apply biblical principles in, of all things, a brewery. Stephen Mansfield tells the story in *The Search for God and Guinness*. Even an old Baptist like me can't help find it inspirational.

Space does not permit me to elaborate on how the First Great Awakening in America was the fire that led to the founding of our nation on biblical principles and the concept of covenant.

At the Disciple Nations Alliance, we have reflected on what others have done. Those reflections are available in a lecture and series of PowerPoint slides. You can find the PDF [here](#).

Yes, the changes are massive; and this is why the potential is so exciting. These changes have happened in history, under the power and direction of the Spirit of God and the agency of the church in a nation. After all, this is God's work, his mission, and he has called us to engage with Him, i.e. to CO-mission with him to disciple nations.

Finally I would enjoy a dialogue, as well ... I would like to tell you more about this site, Cosmovision Biblica, and the ministry of Global Scholars (including the upcoming Society of Christian Scholars).

I think, honestly, that we will discover areas where we can cooperate and areas where we should function individually or in parallel. In fact, I suspect that the ministries of Cosmovision Biblica and Global Scholars will support your work over the long term.

~

Richard, I too look forward to continuing the dialogue. It will be great for us to get some time together at the Global Advocacy Exchange next month in Argentina. I look forward to hearing more about your life and work and to pursuing together some of the issues we may still be interested in discussing. We could also explore specific areas where we might mutually collaborate.

Under the same wings,

Darrow Miller