

Nehrbass, Kenneth. *God's Image and Global Cultures*. Eugene, OR: Cascade (Imprint of Wipf and Stock), 2016. 250 pp. \$30 Paperback.

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Kenneth Nehrbass served as a pastor in Indiana before becoming a Wycliffe translator in Vanuatu, where he worked from 2002 to 2012. He is now an assistant professor at the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University. His cross-cultural experience comes across nicely in this well-researched book that thoroughly examines the relationship between Christians and culture. Christians continue to wrestle to understand this relationship. Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option*, which advocates some degree of withdrawal of Christians from the predominant US culture, was published in 2017. Nehrbass approaches the relationship between Christians and culture differently than does Dreher, but he shares his global perspective.

Nehrbass frequently refers to cross-culturally competent Christians as “world changers” in their various cultures. For example, he says, “World Changers capitalize on the affective power of symbols and use them to empower people to glorify God and enjoy him” (165). In the final chapter, he lists the competencies needed to be a World Changer (212–213). This terminology is inspiring, and hopefully, it will motivate readers to achieve the necessary competencies.

The globalization chapter contains some valuable insights. Nehrbass explained, “The phenomenon of increased migration raises questions for world changers about how people should acculturate” (9). He mentioned a double standard: “When it is *us* living among *them*, our acculturation is voluntary, measured, and temporary (i.e., adjustment). When *they* are living among *us*, we expect acculturation to be permanent and unfettered (i.e., assimilation)” (12). Migration is one of the primary concerns of the relatively new field known as World Christian Studies. In a later chapter, Nehrbass mentioned Andrew Walls, the recognized leader of the new field (80). A discussion of the indigenizing and pilgrim principles (as described by Walls) would be a useful addition to the book.

An important point is made about sinful and neutral aspects of cultures. Nehrbass states, “So while we can say with certainty that God is not responsible for the sinful parts of culture (e.g., widow emollition), we cannot say with certainty that God created the good parts of culture, since so many ‘good’ patterns are objectively neutral. Eating cows, for instance, is seen as wrong in some cultures and good in others” (65). This point, when understood, can help newly arrived missionaries use good judgment in the host culture and understand their ethnocentrism.

Nehrbass elucidates a present reality that is not widely understood: “Therefore, in addition to being highly integrated, we have discovered that

cultures are dynamic or adaptive. . . . However, due to high rates of migration and urbanization, even ethnic groups that were previously isolated are becoming quite heterogeneous” (47–48). This new reality has huge implications for contextualization. General cultural characteristics can still be described for various people groups, but an increasing variety of cultural characteristics within people groups must be recognized. Nehrbass correctly distinguishes between generalizations and stereotypes (116).

A long chapter is devoted to the general characteristics that distinguish one culture from another culture (174–207). These contrasts include individualism/collectivism, task/event, monochronic/polychronic, ordered/flexible, vulnerable/non-vulnerable, short-term/long-term, fate/responsibility, deductive/inductive, planned/spontaneous, hierarchy/equality, ascribed/achieved, tough/tender, and competitive/cooperative. This section is extremely helpful to students who are studying cross-cultural ministry.

Not surprisingly, Nehrbass evaluates the categories outlined in H. Richard Niebuhr’s influential *Christ and Culture* (126–133). He points out problems with Niebuhr’s taxonomy, including its lack of “a consistent definition of Christ,” “its failure to incorporate the approaches of the majority world church,” and Niebuhr’s “low view of Scripture” (129–130). Nehrbass draws a contrast between “an emphasis on heaven against earth (two kingdoms) and a holistic heaven-and-earth emphasis” (135). Nehrbass favors the holistic emphasis. He says, “An emphasis on two competing kingdoms will cause us to see pleasure, even sexuality within marriage, as ungodly. It will cause us to feel ambivalent about our employment, since the only truly legitimate occupations would be church work and missions. . . . We will emphasize evangelism over social action, since heaven ‘matters more’ than earth” (135). The conflict between prioritism and holism was well described by David Hesselgrave in his *Paradigms in Conflict* (2005). This reviewer emphasizes evangelism over social action and thus favors prioritism while respectfully disagreeing with Nehrbass on this point.

The cited works and the general academic quality of this book were impressive. Nehrbass utilized tables that are exceptional aids to understanding. The reflection and review questions at the ends of chapters are excellent discussion starters in classroom settings. This book is a valuable contribution to the field of cross-cultural ministry.