

## **MCC's Development Paradigm(s)**

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**I**n this chapter I explore whether or not MCC, in both its international and North American work, is guided by a single, coherent development paradigm, with my working assumption being that it is not. If this assumption proves sound, the question next becomes what multiple presuppositions do underlie MCC's work.

I begin by summarizing sociologist Vernon Jantzi's chronological account of the rise and fall of various development paradigms. While Jantzi's is not the only taxonomy of development theory, it provides a useful summary of historical trends within the so-called "development industry" and helps define critical assumptions that, implicitly or explicitly, drive development work carried out by bilateral and multilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGO) alike. After this summary I proceed to analyze how these paradigms play out across the broader work of MCC, evaluating how Canadian and American constituents, support staff, and program staff as three distinct groups all arguably subscribe to differing development paradigms even as they all embrace the work of MCC. I then conclude with an examination of critical theological themes that should help MCC either critique or affirm elements of the development paradigms laid out by Jantzi.

## DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS

Jantzi summarizes four distinct paradigms that have driven international development work in the post-World War II period, all of which, it could be argued, continue in one form or another among "development industry" practitioners to this day.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while the four emerged more or less one after the other in the half century following the end of the war, elements of all can be found in current development practice.

The first paradigm in Jantzi's periodization of development approaches emerges from the assumptions of *modernization theory*. According to this paradigm, which dominated development thinking in the 1950s and 1960s, development is stifled because societies are unable to generate sufficient capital, either because of a lack of cultural "know-how" or because these societies are bound to "traditional" worldviews that lack a sufficient "future-focused" orientation. The problem facing underdeveloped societies is internal to those societies themselves and is solved through the "modernization" of those societies, a process aided through the transfer of technology (knowledge and physical resources) and values to the societies in question. External financial assistance is critical to solving the problem in this model.

In the 1970s the modernization approach gives way to what Jantzi labels the *growth with equity* paradigm. For true development to occur, the benefits of economic growth must be distributed more equitably among the most marginalized members of society (acknowledging that such marginalized groups may, in fact, make up the majority of the world's population). Providing access to marginalized groups requires decentralized programming and appropriate technology and service delivery. The development problem is internal to underdeveloped societies, consisting of an infrastructure unable to reach and benefit the poorest. External assistance to organize widely dispersed programs and engage marginalized groups in appropriate development activities is the key to addressing underdevelopment, growth with equity proponents insist. Technology transfer is still critical but must be made appropriate to the local situation and developed with a high degree of participation of poor people. Jantzi suggests that these first two paradigms are "assimilative" in nature in that they seek to assimilate economically underdeveloped nations into a global economic and social system.

The late 1970s and the 1980s, meanwhile, witnessed the rise of the *liberation from dependence* paradigm. Unlike the previous two paradigms that defined the problem of underdevelopment as internal to

poor nations, this approach to development, originating in Latin America, sees the source of the problem as external to "underdeveloped" countries; poverty in the Global South, from this perspective, is a byproduct of international economic and political structures that subordinate local needs to those of wealthy "developed" nations, structures that also benefit the minority of elites who rule the poorer countries. The extractive and oppressing structures that keep people poor are a leftover of the colonial era and the world economic order is merely a neo-colonial structure. Development cannot occur within the structural constraints of this system.

For development to occur liberation from the dominant neo-liberal economic order is necessary and can only be accomplished through a broad raising of consciousness ("conscientization") among the marginalized themselves. As the poor organize to restructure their societies, they must also link arms with brothers and sisters around the world to bring about new international structures that are responsive to their needs rather than the needs of elites of all nations. Jantzi also refers to this paradigm—in contrast to the assimilative approaches—as being transformative in nature, in that it seeks the fundamental transformation of oppressive structures.

The fall of the Soviet Union discredited Marxist-inspired approaches in the eyes of many and dealt a blow to liberation from dependency models of development. With the onset of a new wave of globalizing forces (certainly not a novel phenomenon, but one that gained impetus in the post "Cold War" era), issues of poverty and welfare have since the late 1980s been increasingly seen to be everyone's concern.

From the perspective of this *global interdependence* paradigm,<sup>2</sup> the problem is a world that is so connected that everyone's actions risk affecting everyone else—be it environmental degradation, global financial structures, food production, energy, or debt. The source of the development problem can be found in a lack of coordination at a global scale and the solution is greater concerted action, greater market integration, and a need to lay aside ideological differences. Recent examples of the application of this paradigm include the large "global health partnerships" (Roll Back Malaria, Stop TB, the Global Fund, Global Vaccine Initiative, etc.), recent FAO-sponsored food "summits," the Kyoto and Copenhagen climate meetings, G8 and now G20 meetings to discuss international financial regulation, the emergence of the WTO, and the list could go on.

Jantzi observes that each of these paradigms seeks to answer a series of questions about development: 1) What is the problem that im-

pedes development? 2) Where is the source of the problem located—internally or externally? 3) What is the general solution to the problem? and 4) Where is the source of the solution located? Furthermore, each successive paradigm evolved, to some extent, Jantzi contends, because of the failures of previous paradigms to describe what was happening (or perhaps *not happening*) in the field of development.

### OTHER PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT

The above taxonomy can be rightly criticized for not including some important recent innovations in development thinking such as “rights-based development”; Amartya Sen’s “freedoms” motif; macro-level, largely econometric analyses such as those done by Paul Collier; those that challenge the importance of “aid”—declaring it of limited value relative to the overwhelming importance of “trade”; and the entire body of literature known collectively as “post-development” theory.<sup>3</sup> Space does not permit a full analysis of these alternative perspectives but a few words are in order.

#### *Rights-based development*

Rights-based development (or rights-based approaches—RBA—to development) is less a new development paradigm and more a way of naming: a) the ends of development (grounded in customary and formal laws, treaties, and declarations at local, national, and international levels) and b) the obligations of various actors to assure that these ends are achieved. In one sense, RBA is a handle or lever by which change can be promoted. In reading various articulations of RBA one is struck by their simultaneous appeal to modernization, growth with equity, and liberation paradigms.<sup>4</sup> None of this is meant to disparage or downplay the importance of RBA to current development discourse but rather to point out that it can be articulated while accepting various elements of several of the development paradigms surveyed above. The same might be said of Sen’s “freedoms” model, which might adopt the approaches implied by several of the above summarized paradigms to accomplish its ends.

#### *Aid-versus-trade*

Other macro-level and aid-versus-trade studies and debates stand more as critiques of how aid-based development is done as opposed to offering an alternative paradigm of development. Again, these critiques are useful and, in some ways (perhaps counter-intuitively) support certain notions implied in the liberation ap-

proaches—especially the liberationists’ insistence that poverty and exclusion are often produced by factors (macro-regional and global) outside the context in which the poor live. Their prescriptions are not at all in line with liberation approaches but tend to be more consonant with the global interdependence paradigm in terms of their reliance on global economic integration.

#### *Post-development views*

While some post-development thinkers might describe their views as articulating a new development paradigm, most critics view post-development more as a broad and inclusive critique of “development” in general. A useful summary of post-development views and critiques is Adam Shanko’s *A Taste of One’s Own Medicine: Assessing Post-Development*. Shanko notes: “The ‘post-development’ scholars, as they came to be called, sought to uncover the ways in which the notion of development as proffered by the global North through its various agents was a means of domination over the economies, politics, and peoples of the global South.” Post-development thinkers adopt postmodern language analysis (how “discourse” is used to “define” the world) and conclude, according to Shanko, that “A discourse can thus be understood as a regime through which the powerful define social relationships so as to justify the exercise of their power over others.”<sup>5</sup>

While the post-development approach might seem similar to the “liberation” paradigm described above, it goes beyond liberation thinking to call into question the very idea of development, arguing that even the concept of poverty is a construct that is neither a natural given nor a cultural universal but was instead created to define the relationship between the powerful elites over those without power and to impose a system of domination and dependence. While critics of post-development focus on its inability to articulate alternatives, post-development ideas are useful in forcing those engaged in development to examine how their use of language conditions or defines actions and relationships.

The foregoing provides a taste of the many directions that development thinking has evolved over time. It does not, however, directly address three distinctive elements of MCC’s work, namely, relief, peacebuilding, and advocacy. These aspects of MCC work can be linked to the dominant development paradigms in multiple ways.

*Relief*

While the concept of relief (punctual, largely unplanned-for aid given during times of crisis or in an ongoing manner to highly vulnerable populations) is not explicit in the four paradigms discussed above, one could argue that it follows assumptions embodied in the "modernization" or "equity" position. It is a pure transfer of "technology" (knowledge or goods), is external to the situation and, because relief does *not* question the underlying causes of the crisis in question, it by definition accepts internal causes of underdevelopment as largely given. It matters little that the causes are natural disaster or war: the lack of articulation of an appreciation for structural factors which may have led to or exacerbated the crisis exclude consideration of a liberation approach. Indeed, the existence of a "material resources" network across the North American MCC system that functions as a material transfer mechanism demonstrates a commitment to ongoing external transfer in the belief that such transfer will improve people's lives. Relief, then, is closely aligned to modernization or equity concepts.

*Peacebuilding*

Jantzi and Jantzi have argued that various peacebuilding "change theories" actually "fit" within one or more of the first three paradigms. MCC's peacebuilding work around the world adopts—explicitly or implicitly—nearly all the change theories they address. MCC's peacebuilding work is varied, with some of it based on technology-transfer assumptions, and still other peacebuilding work fitting more closely with liberationist approaches.

*Advocacy*

MCC engages in advocacy work in a variety of ways but most notably through its Washington, D.C., Ottawa, and New York (United Nations) offices. Jantzi and Jantzi suggest that advocacy is not consistent with the liberation perspective because it takes the existing power structures as a given, seeking to speak into them rather than fundamentally alter them. While this may be true to some extent, there are ways of approaching advocacy that focus on "enlarging the table" or changing the dynamics of who is permitted to speak into policy issues. Such approaches would seem to fit into the liberation paradigm.<sup>6</sup> I would argue that some of MCC's advocacy work is about this very thing: bringing excluded voices to the table. Further, much of MCC's advocacy work is driven by "solidarity commitments," which means that MCC speaks as partners urge or instruct it

to speak. This too would seem to be the result of successful "conscientization" processes at work in MCC programs around the world.

**HOW THE PARADIGMS PLAY OUT WITHIN MCC**

In general, all of the first three paradigms can be found guiding the work of parts of MCC, depending on whom one talks to within the broader MCC world in Canada and the United States. Given its history and evolution, MCC only rarely engages in acts that would indicate acceptance of the global interdependence paradigm (periodic attendance at the international AIDS conference being the only example that comes to mind), and thus it will not be further considered here.

To understand who holds to which paradigms, I propose an analysis of MCC constituents, support staff, and program staff as three broadly defined groups that subscribe to differing views of what MCC's development (including relief) work is all about. Of course, these three categories of MCC stakeholders are not mutually exclusive. In some situations, for example, constituents may hold views similar to those of programs staff, especially when said constituents served previously within MCC programs. These three categories of MCC stakeholders should also not be taken as homogeneous but rather understood as representing "ideal types."

*Constituents*

MCC constituents are most likely to hold to either a modernization or an equity paradigm as they reflect on the development work of MCC. Many constituents identify deeply with the relief efforts of MCC, responding with cash donations and to material disasters such as the 2004 tsunami and the 2010 Haitian earthquake and regularly donating a wide array of material aid. MCC's relief work assumes many of the elements of the modernization or equity paradigms. Indeed, some MCC constituents articulate a "discomfort" with development approaches they perceive to be more in line with the liberation paradigm. One hears such discomfort in statements like: "we don't want to get involved in that 'peace' stuff." Such comments, I suggest, reflect less a negative judgment about MCC's peacebuilding work and more a critique of approaches that name and seek to deal with structural oppression, particularly when such approaches issue in advocacy against government entities or policies.

In this sense, most constituents adopt, in an uncritical way, modernization theory's assumptions that underdevelopment should be

addressed via the transfer goods and know-how from the north to the south and that most problems of underdevelopment are due to internal problems (including corruption, lack of infrastructure, and lack of education) within underdeveloped nations. Additionally, most constituents would probably feel most comfortable with the assumptions of the equity paradigm and are content that MCC seeks out the "least" and the most marginalized. They would express satisfaction that MCC uses participatory approaches, builds capacity of local organizations, and engages in relationships with them to enable them to "develop themselves."

#### *Program staff*

Because program staff experience firsthand the complexity of poverty and the various forces that cause it, most of them adopt ways of viewing development that fall between the equity and liberation paradigm or somehow blend the two into a hybrid approach. Indeed, in some countries the equity paradigm would dominate and the focus would be on enhancing participation of marginalized groups in their own development projects, thus responding to the internally generated constraints to development. One could argue that most of MCC's work in Canada and the United States (perhaps with a few exceptions, including immigration, anti-racism, and First Nations work) follows the equity paradigm's assumptions.

In some places (and in relation to some programs like First Nations work) program staff might gravitate toward more of a liberation view as they focus on the externally determined constraints to development—especially the role of powerful nation-states (the United States in particular) and/or large corporate entities. In such cases program staff seek to foster local conscientization efforts and to link MCC's local work to international advocacy and public education efforts. Program staff holding to a liberation paradigm are likely to feel a certain amount of frustration about MCC's inability to speak truth to reticent constituents. Those program staff operating within the equity paradigm, meanwhile, are likely to find their work much more acceptable to the broader organization.

#### *Support Staff*

Since support staff (resource generation, human resources, communications) are the public face of MCC's programming to constituent stakeholders in Canada and the United States, they typically find themselves in a place of tension, especially when asked to articulate a vision for liberation-type activities. Indeed, most would feel a

need to downplay efforts that are based on liberation assumptions and focus more on rallying support for relief and development efforts that conform more to either the modernization, or more likely, the equity paradigms.

While the foregoing is a very rough sketch of tendencies that exist within MCC, it should provide a useful starting point for considering which assumptions dominate across the organization as a whole. It is important to note that board members (across the various MCC offices) could hold to a variety of assumptions given that they are either constituents or former program staff. It is also critical to note that it is extremely rare that philosophical assumptions about development are even raised within MCC, be it at program, support staff, or constituent levels. Like many organizations of its size and complexity, MCC seeks to maintain a large "tent" under which various paradigms can fit and tries to avoid the messiness of dealing with the natural tensions that exist when differences begin to emerge.

### THEOLOGICAL THEMES OF IMPORTANCE TO MCC

To close this paper I turn briefly to a limited number of theological themes that could help MCC either critique or affirm elements of different development paradigms—or perhaps even move beyond them to consider its unique role as an Anabaptist agency.

#### *Christology*

Anabaptists articulate a historical understanding of the importance of the incarnation for faith and practice. Because Jesus' life and teaching provide a normative social ethic for Anabaptists, the idea of Christ's "emptying" and choosing a life of poverty and service provides a critical example for Anabaptists to emulate. The image of Christ as one who came to live in "solidarity" with a broken world is a critical motif in this ethic. Key concepts that illustrate this commitment would be simplicity, empathy (in distinction from sympathy), identification with the suffering of others, walking with the oppressed, taking the side of the downtrodden, and welcoming the stranger. Further, Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4 represents a vision for how the church is to live as it anticipates the coming reign of Christ.

MCC should ask which of the above-described development paradigms enables it most faithfully to model an incarnational way of being. What does this mean in terms of understanding and ad-

addressing the structural causes of poverty and exclusion? What does the incarnation imply about the "ends" of development: are "socio-economic" considerations sufficient? In what ways could MCC appropriate and more formally adopt Jesus' mission as its own?

### *Ecclesiology*

Anabaptist theologian John Howard Yoder wrote in *The Christian Witness to the State* that the church bears the inner meaning of history.<sup>7</sup> In Yoder this idea was tightly linked to a consideration of the role of the state versus the role of the church in the world and he concluded that the church does *not* present an ideal social program to the state but rather acts as an ongoing corrective to the state using language the state itself has adopted (his "middle axioms") to challenge it to do what God has "ordered" it to do. In this conceptualization the church takes very seriously its dual identity of "aliens and strangers" and "ambassadors of reconciliation." In these roles the church models and lives the coming kingdom ethic and calls the powerful to fulfill their role as providing for security, peace and care for the least.

As MCC evaluates development approaches, it should ask questions such as these: Which of the development paradigms makes space for MCC to live the dual identity? Should MCC more explicitly articulate its own understanding of the role of the state and of the church's role vis-à-vis the state? If so, how might clarity on this point change the way MCC works in Canada, the United States, and abroad? How can MCC move beyond considerations of ecclesiology from a narrow focus on governance considerations (that is, representational issues related to who should sit on board) to a broader consideration of how its understanding of ecclesiology might help form or re-form the way it works?

### *Eschatology*

Though there is great variety in Anabaptist understandings of the "end," most Anabaptists hold tightly to a vision of God's work as ultimately being about the reconciliation of all things to God. This view of the end implies not a destruction of earth, its cultures and social realities, but rather a transformation of them to accomplish God's purposes for the world. In this way Anabaptists see God as using the church to participate in what might be called the great unwinding of the Fall. Various scriptural images—swords into plowshares, the healing of the nations, each person under his/her fig tree, jubilee, etc.—paint a picture of a collective future reality into which the church is invited to live today.

Which of the development paradigms best enables MCC to live into this vision of our collective future? Is it possible to use the visions of the kingdom to articulate a vision for ministry in the present? Given the idea that the kingdom functions as yeast does, working its way through a lump of dough, how should MCC think about results, scale, and impact?

### *The "Powers"*

Anabaptists have been at the forefront of rediscovering and re-articulating a theology of the "powers."<sup>8</sup> In these (and other non-Anabaptist) writings on the powers one finds the idea that the powers—ordained for good, fallen, and in need of redemption—are embodied in states, institutions, and ideologies that enslave and dehumanize people created in God's image. This consideration of the powers leads to a recognition that the local, national, and international institutions that *should* serve the needs of the least of these find their purpose diverted and distorted in a way that leads them to participate in the oppression of the most vulnerable members of society. The church's role is to expose the powers for what they are and to work for their redemption so that they might fulfill the role that God intended them to play.

To what extent do various development paradigms acknowledge the role of oppressive power structures in perpetuating poverty and exclusion? What would it mean for MCC to "expose" the "deeds of darkness" of the powers? How might MCC better articulate its own understanding of the role of fallen powers in oppressing, marginalizing, and dehumanizing people created in God's image? What might such an understanding mean for the creation of deeper spiritual disciplines within MCC's work?

### *Evangelism*

While many people in MCC would say that MCC is not an evangelistic organization—indeed many would not support MCC if they felt it was—their discomfort with the term is less about its true meaning and more about what it has come to mean in the contemporary Canadian and American contexts. The gospel is simply the announcement of good news, the good news of the reign of Christ. Evangelism is the announcement, in word and deed, of the reconciliation of all things, the restoration of God's "good" earth, and the reconciliation of broken relationships. This "good news" is possible because of the victorious Christ who overcame death, revealing the domination system's "justice" as unjust and oppressive.

Which of the development paradigms make space for the announcement of the good news of the change that God is bringing to the world? Should MCC spend more time re-articulating the meaning of evangelism and then "owning" the moniker of being "an evangelistic organization?" What would it mean for MCC to see itself as "an announcer of the good news of the reign of Christ?"

### *Pneumatology*

Christ said that his followers would do greater things than he did because he was going to the Father. He added that he was sending a comforter—the Spirit of God—who would lead his church to truth and bestow gifts on the church so it might bless the world. The early church was overwhelmed by the power of God's Spirit, and it was clear to everyone that what was happening was *not* the result of human power but the outcome of the Spirit's work in and through a band of (mostly) weak and unremarkable people.

In terms of "results," "outcomes," and "impacts," what would it mean for MCC to articulate a commitment that acknowledges that results are God's work? How can MCC avoid communicating a sense of complacency or lack of rigor as it articulates this acknowledgment that the results of its work are ultimately attributable to God? What would it mean for MCC to be "weak" so that God's power might be manifest through it?

### A FINAL QUESTION (OR TWO)

The foregoing discussion of development paradigms and how they play out within MCC was developed under the overarching assumption that "development" is largely an economic question. Indeed, all the paradigms assume that underdevelopment (whatever its cause) is essentially about a scarcity of goods and services considered important for the full realization of human potential. Another way to say this is that the overarching assumption in all of the paradigms is that the poor and oppressed experience a "deficit" while those in the global north live with an "excess." As Paul Farmer has said of the broader development project of which MCC is a part: We must move resources down a gradient of inequality from those who have to those who do not. Jeffrey Sachs would concur.

And yet . . . this view of development sees it as, essentially, a "one-way street." "We" have what the rest of the world needs and it is incumbent upon us to assure they get it. But is this really so? Is "development" really about (even mostly about) economics? Is there re-

ally only *one* gradient of inequality? While it is true that better health-care, clean water, and transparent governance structures are important to enabling people to experience the kind of life that God intended, are they (and the other typical development priorities) *all* that matter? Are there other "poverties" and "oppressions" more common in the Global North that are not named in the typical discourse on development?

These questions, perhaps, lead us back to some of the critiques of post-development theorists. But more than that they lead us back to our own understanding of the fallenness and brokenness of all people and the realization that there are multiple "lacks," failures, and deficits, many of which are not the object of development work. Until the Global North recognizes its own poverties of violence, anomie, social disintegration, and overconsumption (to name only a few), one must wonder how well it can ever be equipped to engage in activities of "development" elsewhere. One can hope that MCC will develop its own paradigm of development taking into account the bi-directional nature of the "gradients of inequality" and that it will use its considerable resources to create relationships of mutual aid, accountability, and liberation for a global church.

### NOTES

1. See Vernon Jantzi, "Helping Developing Nations: Socio-Political Paradigms of Development," in *Christian Perspectives on Social Problems*, ed. Charles P. Desanto, et al. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesley Press, 1990), 60-79. Jantzi's taxonomy can also be found in R. A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop, and Vernon E. Jantzi, *Development to a Different Drummer: Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives* (Intercourse, Pa., Good Books, 2004) and is updated in Terrence L. and Vernon E. Jantzi, "Development Paradigms and Peacebuilding Theories of Change: Analysing Embedded Assumptions in Development and Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 5/1 (2009): 65-80.

2. Jantzi has more recently moved away from this global interdependence as a separate paradigm, preferring instead examine how those operating within any of the first three paradigms are using the effects of globalization to advance their development approach. Thus, for example, we see even those who operate under the liberation from dependency paradigm developing global "people to people" networks—e.g. Via Campesina or "demobilized soldier" networks.

3. For Sen, see especially *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor, 2000). Collier's best-known work is *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can be Done About It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For critiques of aid efficacy, see Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2010) and William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden: Why*

*the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York: Penguin, 2007).

4. For an excellent example of this from a faith-based perspective see *Rights-Based Development from a Faith-Based Perspective* by the "Rights and Development Group" (Bread for the World, Christian Aid, Church of Sweden, DanChurchAid, EED, ICCO, Norwegian Church Aid, and Lutheran World Federation).

5. See Shanko, *A Taste of One's Own Medicine*, 2-3. Available online at [http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/0/9/8/0/9/pages98090/p98090-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/9/8/0/9/pages98090/p98090-1.php).

6. See, in particular, L. VeneKlasen, V. L. Miller, et al., *A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* (Bourton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire, UK, Practical Action Pub., 2007) and G. Gordon, *Advocacy Toolkit: Understanding Advocacy*. (Teddington, UK: Tearfund, 2002).

7. John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1964).

8. See especially *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System*, by Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) and Chapter 8 of John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994).