

The Biblical Compass (East vs. West)

The North represents God, the Bible, and biblical faith.

North

In western cultures, God is viewed as 'my God' and the local church is often neglected.

In eastern cultures, God is viewed as 'our God' and the church may have too much authority.

N

westward deflection

eastward deflection

The West represent cultures in which the individual is stressed.

The East represents cultures in which the group is stressed.

West

East

S

In eastern cultures, being different is usually considered sinful.

In western cultures, group pressure to conform is considered sinful.

South

The south represents sin, evil, and biblical repentance.

Ideally, believers in the East and the West believe exactly the same thing based on Scripture. In reality, however, cultural factors distort the beliefs of people in eastern and western cultures, just like large metallic objects that are nearby distort a compass needle.

a few thoughts on the distortion of biblical truth via sociology

- 1.) The compass diagram is helpful in explaining cross-cultural factors in missions, but the growing impact of sociology in American evangelical circles make it helpful here, at home, as well.
- 2.) The stress upon 'community' in evangelical circles which has become so wide-spread in recent decades is not so much a return to the biblical emphasis on fellowship and the church (as is claimed) as it is an undetected turning to secular sociology.
- 3.) Like socialists, sociologists stress the importance of social connections. Therefore their thinking is usually far more "eastern" than "western." As a result, evangelicals who have adopted the sociologist's stress on community develop a distorted view of God and sin in an easterly direction as shown in the compass diagram. (Of course, a distorted view of God and sin in a westerly direction also exists.)
- 4.) The phrase '*community of God*' is often substituted for *church*, but the meaning of *eklesia* and *community* are vastly different. *Community* stresses having things in common and coming together, whereas *eklesia* has to do with being called out of the world (out of the surrounding culture) and being different.
- 5.) One of the leading advocates of a new evangelical theology which stresses community and sociology is **Stanley Grenz**. His theology text, *Theology for the Community of God*, has been quite influential. Thankfully Millard Erickson has written some in opposition to Grenz. In non-scholarly evangelical circles, however, few realize that there is even a problem.
- 6.) The stress upon social factors in evangelism is, of course, helpful to some degree. Yet, stressing it is like creating **a fat compass needle**, which does not respond quickly to biblical truth regarding God and SIN. The horizontal stress makes the fat needle sluggish in its response to biblical truth.
- 7.) A careful study of the biblical concept of **fellowship (*kononia*)** shows that it has far more to do with serving and suffering together than simply being together. Grenz and others like him, however, talk about community using verbs of being more than verbs of action. For instance, he does not stress the work of each person of the Trinity. Rather he simply speaks of the Trinity as *being* a community. This is warm and fuzzy thinking, which distracts from the emphasis on service found in Scripture.