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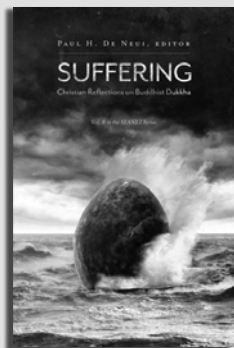
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# New Books! from William Carey Library



## **Suffering: Christian Reflections on the Buddhist Dukkha**

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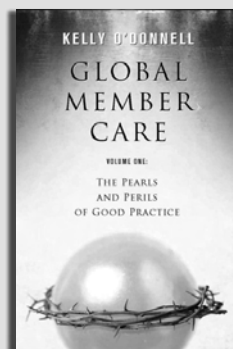
This is a collection of articles by global Christ followers for those who want to delve deeper into one important aspect of Buddhist worldview. It is written for the practitioner privileged to live and serve in the Buddhist context, and for the Buddhist seeking to understand the Christian perspective on existence in today’s world where suffering is our ever-present reality.

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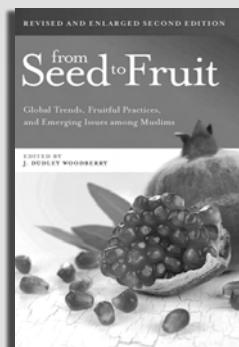
directions in light of global realities. Part Two examines the crucial area of health/dysfunction with specific suggestions for good relationships, management, and governance. Part Three explores core ethics and human rights principles that are essential for good practice.

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Editor Kelly O'Donnell

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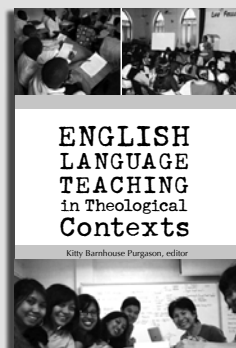
The Global Trends Research Group has continued to update the demographic materials on Muslim people groups, their access to Christian witness, and when and how Christian groups covenant to provide meaningful access. This is included in the updated CD-ROM that accompanies the new edition.

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# From the Editor's Desk

# IJFM

October–December 2010 Volume 27:4

## Reassessing "Peoples" in the Global Push-and-Pull

Globalization is a much contested term, but there's no debate that it's transforming civilization as we know it. The Western unidirectional flow of modernity has suddenly turned multidirectional, and the inability to predict outcomes is evident in a torrent of competing scholarship. Amidst all this analysis, our journal wishes to focus on a single question: how does globalization impact populations and peoples where a vital and authentic movement of the gospel has yet to take place?

Our ISFM meetings last Fall launched our study of globalization, and the addresses by Todd Johnson and Gary Fujino are included herein. While both include perceptive definitions of globalization, they each independently narrow their focus to the question of identity. Whether cultural, social or religious, the inner compass of identity will determine a person's preferences and orientation when the gospel is received and believed. Johnson offers a broad perspective on Christian identity, while Fujino offers a street-level feel for the intersecting identities of Japanese in modern Tokyo. We added Enoch Kim's study of the "YEU" of China (a social demographic of "Young, Educated, and Urban") to bend the subject of identity towards the question of community (church) and how global technologies may be strategic in restricted areas of the world. We hope this is a good start on the subject.

We find ourselves grateful for the academy and the Ph.D. process, for it forces frontier practitioners to get their thinking into print. Two biblical studies, one by Kevin Higgins and his translation team, and the other by Daniel Baeq, keep us alert to biblical interpretation when encountering difficult issues on the frontier.

Finally, make sure to read Edwin Zehner's review of a new cultural anthropology textbook by Howell and Paris. It carries a whole section on the anthropology of globalization, but uniquely filtered through the minds and hearts of two authors who share a deep concern for Christian mission.

We need to apologize for the lateness of this issue. A perfect storm of domestic, editorial and production transitions kept this from going to press. We hope to make it up to you.



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Senior Editor

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Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

Whether you're a Perspectives instructor, student, or coordinator, you can continue to explore issues raised in the course reader and study guide in greater depth in **IJFM**. For ease of reference, each **IJFM** article in the table below is tied thematically to one or more of the 15 Perspectives lessons, divided into four sections: Biblical (B), Historical (H), Cultural (C) and Strategic (S). *Disclaimer: The table below shows where the content of a given article might fit; it does not imply endorsement of a particular article by the editors of the Perspectives materials.* For sake of space, the table only includes lessons related to the articles in a given **IJFM** issue. To learn more about the Perspectives course, visit [www.perspectives.org](http://www.perspectives.org).

Articles in **IJFM** 27:4

	Lesson 1: The living God Is a Missionary God (B)	Lesson 9: The Task Remaining (H)	Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)	Lesson 11: Building Bridges of Love (C)	Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)
<b>Globalization, Christian Identity, and Frontier Missions</b> Todd M. Johnson (pp. 165–169)		X			X
<b>"Glocal" Japanese Self-Identity: A Missiological Perspective on Paradigmatic Shifts in Urban Tokyo</b> Gary Fujino (pp. 171–182)		X		X	X
<b>A New Mission Tool in Creative Access Nations: Christian Virtual Community in China</b> Enoch J. Kim (pp. 183–188)				X	X
<b>Diverse Voices: Hearing Scripture Speak in a Multicultural Movement</b> Kevin Higgins (pp. 189–196)			X		X
<b>Contextualizing Religious Form and Meaning: A Missiological Interpretation of Naaman's Petitions</b> Daniel Shinjong Baeq (pp. 197–207)	X		X	X	

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The *World Consultation on Frontier Missions* and the *International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions*. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.

# Globalization, Christian Identity, and Frontier Missions

by Todd M. Johnson

In compiling the recently published *Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910–2010*, it became clear that there was much to be said regarding globalization and Christian identity, and their impact on frontier missions. I noticed in ever-increasing detail two developments across the demography of Christianity and frontier missions: 1) Numerically, Christianity has shifted to the Global South. 2) Amidst all the global migrations and increasing proximity of once distant peoples, Christians have maintained limited contact with Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. These and several other significant trends have been mapped, graphed, and analyzed in the Atlas, with its special focus on religious traditions, religious freedom, religious diversity, and religious affiliation both at the global and provincial level.

## ***Trend 1. Christianity Shifts to the Global South Demographically but Not Culturally.***

At first glance there has been little change in the status of global Christianity over the past 100 years. For the entire 100-year period, Christians have made up approximately one-third of the world's population. This, however, masks dramatic changes in the geography of global Christianity. While 66% of all Christians lived in Europe in 1910, by 2010 only 26% lived there. By contrast, fewer than 2% of all Christians lived in Africa in 1910, skyrocketing to almost 22% by 2010. The Global North (defined as Europe and Northern America) contained over 80% of all Christians in 1910, falling to under 40% by 2010.

Unfortunately, Christians of the Global South—to their dismay—have “discovered” that their forms of Christianity are largely Western. Moonjang Lee notes with irony,

it was through the modern missionary movement that Christianity became a worldwide phenomenon, and in that process Christianity came to acquire the image of a Western religion. The subsequent globalisation of the image of Western Christianity poses a problem for non-Western Christianity. Though we talk about a post-Christian West and a post-Western Christianity, the prevailing forms of Christianity in most parts of the non-Western world are still dominated by Western influences. (Johnson and Ross, 104).

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### ***Trend 2. Christians Have Little Significant Contact with Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists.***

Recent research reported in the Atlas reveals that as many as 86% of all Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists do not personally know a Christian. This is surprising in light of the more than 200 million people who are now on the move across national borders—putting diverse peoples in closer proximity. In fact, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are increasingly found living in ‘Christian’ lands but, apparently, increasing access has not generated closer relationships. This lack of contact has to be viewed negatively in light of the strong biblical theme of incarnation that is at the heart of Christian witness. Christians should know and love their neighbors! In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is important to realize that the responsibility for reaching Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists is too large for the vocational missionary enterprise. While missionaries will always be at the forefront of innovative strategies, the whole church needs to participate in inviting people of other faiths to consider Jesus Christ.

### ***Globalization and Christian Identity***

I’d like to take a step and suggest that these two trends can be examined from the perspective of globalization and Christian identity. Manfred B. Steger’s excellent little treatise *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004) is helpful in understanding these dynamics. Steger is concerned that “narrow accounts often leave the general reader with a shallow understanding of globalization as primarily an economic phenomenon.” This reductionist tendency can ignore or confuse our vital concern for Christian identity amidst vast demographic shifts. Steger is helpful in his insistence that “globalization is best thought of as a multidimensional set of social processes (economic, political, cultural, technological, and

ecological) that resists being confined to any single thematic framework.” It is this complexity in globalization that has strong implications both for Christian identity and for frontier missions.

Steger suggests we use the term *globality* to signify a *social condition* of interconnectedness. Conversely, the term *globalization* should be used to refer to a set of *social processes* that are thought to transform our present social condition into one of globality. Steger further defines globalization as “a multidimensional set of social



processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant.” (8–13) At its core, then, globalization is about shifting forms of human contact.

Defined this way, globalization impacts both of the trends I have identified earlier. First, increasing contact between Christians around the world sparks reflection on identity. Christians see ways in which they differ (ethnicity, language, denomination) as well as ways in which they are the same (practice, core theology, creeds). Second, lack of contact between Christians and non-Christians hinders the frontier mission enterprise because crucial information on the latter’s lives and religions is not widely understood or discussed.

### ***Characteristics of Globalization***

Steger further defines some tools for understanding global Christian identity (or identities) by presenting four distinct qualities or characteristics of globalization:

1. Globalization involves the *creation* of new and the *multiplication* of existing social networks and activities that increasingly overcome traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries.
2. Globalization involves the *expansion* and *stretching* of social relations, activities, and interdependencies.
3. Globalization involves the *intensification* and *acceleration* of social exchanges and activities.
4. Globalization involves the subjective plane of human consciousness. Thus, globalization refers to people becoming increasingly conscious of growing manifestations of social interdependence and the enormous acceleration of social interactions. In the last case, Steger states, “Their awareness of the receding importance of geographical boundaries and distances fosters a keen sense of becoming part of a global whole. Reinforced on a daily basis, these persistent experiences of global interdependence gradually change people’s individual and collective identities, and thus dramatically impact the way they act in the world.” (12)

In global Christian relations we see each of these four characteristics at play. The global Christian community has seen an increase of communions and networks for relating both within and outside their traditions. Many of these networks have expanded their activities through deeper and broader cooperation. At the same time, relations have become more intense and conflicted, producing a staggering amount of ecumenical documents in the past two decades. Finally,

Christians of all traditions have been challenged to think more broadly of their own identity as a follower of Christ.

In Christian–non-Christian relations we also see these dynamics at work. People of different religious backgrounds are forming new social networks to relate to each other. These networks are taking on broader mandates in international relations. They are also intensifying as peoples live in closer proximity in both the Global North and the Global South. Finally, many religionists are sensing commonalities across the religious spectrum based on universal human experiences and challenges.

### *Globalization Is Uneven*

There is always the human tendency to see the experience of globalization through our own ethnocentric grid. Steger is quick to point out that

Globalization is an uneven process, meaning that people living in various parts of the world are affected very differently by this gigantic transformation of social structures and cultural zones. Large segments of the world's population—particularly in the Global South—do not enjoy equal access to thickening global networks and infrastructure. (16)

For global Christianity this means that many Christians (especially in the Global South) lack an awareness of the broader body of Christ. This is especially noteworthy because so much of the growth in Christianity has been where networks are the thinnest (i.e., where contacts are few). In frontier mission situations, where contacts can be very significant, there is little potential for interaction between Christians and non-Christians. Christians in thin networks are even less likely to be interacting with their non-Christian neighbors.

### *Same and Different*

Does globalization make people around the world more alike or more different? Steger identifies “pessimistic hyperglobalizers” as those who

**T**he emphasis in the study of world Christianity to date has been almost exclusively on the indigenizing principle, or “the particular.”

argue in favor of the former. They suggest, Steger says, that

we are not moving towards a cultural rainbow that reflects the diversity of the world's existing cultures. Rather, we are witnessing the rise of an increasingly homogenized popular culture underwritten by a Western ‘culture industry’ based in New York, Hollywood, London, and Milan. (70)

“Optimistic hyperglobalizers” agree that cultural globalization generates more sameness but they consider this outcome to be a good thing. (73)

At the same time, some assessments link globalization to new forms of cultural expression. Sociologist Roland Robertson, for example, contends that global cultural flows often reinvigorate local cultural niches. “Glocalization” is a complex interaction of the global and local characterized by cultural borrowing. The resulting expressions of cultural “hybridity” cannot be reduced to clear-cut manifestations of “sameness” or “difference.” The contemporary experience of living and acting across cultural borders means both the loss of traditional meanings and the creation of new symbolic expressions. Reconstructed feelings of belonging coexist in uneasy tension with a sense of “placelessness.” Cultural globalization has contributed to a remarkable shift in people's consciousness. (Steger, 75)

### *Ethnicity and Language*

Ethnicity and language are two of the most significant features in both sameness and difference. While these characteristics often separate people, there is also potential to bring people together (e.g., a separate language but a unifying lingua franca). Artificially airtight twentieth-century taxonomies of race and language have been rightly deconstructed by the academy, revealing weaknesses and frightening

implications (such as eugenics). But today it is appropriate for a modest project of reconstruction—building taxonomies that recognize both differences and similarities.

### *Globalization and Global Christian Identity*

This interesting assessment of globalization can naturally lead to the question, “What is world Christianity or global Christianity?” In describing the history of Christianity, Andrew Walls utilizes the tension between an *indigenizing* principle and a *pilgrim* principle. He acknowledges that Christianity can and should go deep within each culture of the world but at the same time is never fully at home in any particular culture. It's in this dynamic between the particular (indigenous) and the universal (pilgrim) that we can better understand global Christian identity. Steger states,

Indeed, the tensions between the forces of particularism and those of universalism have reached unprecedented levels only because interdependencies that connect the local to the global have been growing faster than at any time in history. (6)

As stated earlier, globalization tends to make one more aware of both the particular (by contrast) and the universal (by commonality).

The emphasis in the study of world Christianity to date has been almost exclusively on the indigenizing principle, or “the particular.” Thus, compendiums on world or global Christianity contain case studies from different cultures around the world, emphasizing their differences from Western Christianity. Of course, it is vital to understand the trends that have left us with a “post-Christian West” and a “post-Western Christianity.” But some scholars go as far as defining “world Christianity” as “Christianity

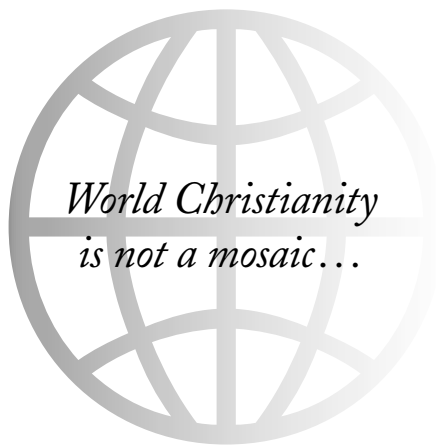
in the non-Western world.” There is also an increased use of the term “Christianities,” as in the recent *History of Christianity* volumes published by Cambridge University Press (2006–2009). In this context, it is critical to emphasize also the pilgrim principle, or universal side, of world Christianity.

In one sense, I am arguing against an overemphasis on “the particular” that can lead to what in other disciplines has been called *atomism*: any theory that holds that an understanding of the parts is logically prior to an understanding of the whole. I am advocating “the universal” that emphasizes *holism*: the theory that whole entities, as fundamental components of reality, have an existence other than the mere sum of their parts.

Recent reflections on world culture, global culture, and globalization can certainly help us to better understand the unifying or universal aspects of world Christianity. But it’s vital to understand that these unifying forces do not diminish cultural differences. Cultural globalization is a double process. On the one hand, it differentiates. On the other hand, differences play out within a common framework. Guided by global ideas and norms, Christians become more similar in the ways they identify themselves as different (e.g., Africans and Asians identifying themselves as non-Western). World Christianity helps us both to articulate and to bridge these differences.

A useful parallel can be found in world music. In his *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Philip Bohlman examines the inherent tension between what world music tells us about human diversity and what it tells us about human similarities. Neither tells the whole story. Bohlman tries to strike a balance in his description of world music by emphasizing difference as one feature and similarity as another. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma takes this a step further. He also recognizes the way in which

world music is, at the same time, both local and universal. For him, the next iteration of classical music posits Western and non-Western styles, as well as classical and vernacular traditions, on equal or near-equal footing. It mixes popular and folk music with Eastern and Western art-music structures, tonal and atonal. This music appeals to younger audiences whose iPods are loaded with an astonishing variety of sounds from past centuries and from every spot on the planet. He further utilizes the ecological concept of the “edge effect”: where



two ecosystems meet one will find the least density but the greatest variety. Ma has actively promoted this effect in music by inviting musical strangers (from different cultures) to meet each other and to compose music together. Ma writes,

As we open up to each other, we form a bridge into unfamiliar traditions, banishing the fear that often accompanies change and dislocation. In other words, when we broaden our lens on the world, we better understand ourselves, our own lives and culture. We share more in common with the far reaches of our small planet than we realize.

Steger also recognizes this process of “hybridization”—the mixing of different cultural forms and styles facilitated by global economic and cultural exchanges.

I believe we find similar dynamics in world Christianity. There is enormous difference at the same time as

clear similarity. This is true even in the larger categories of “North” and “South” that frame most discussions on world Christianity. In the North, French, American, and Russian Christians are very different from each other. In the South, Nigerian, Chinese, and Papua New Guinean Christians are profoundly dissimilar. And yet, Christians from all cultures are part of a global unified body of believers. When these differing forms of Christianity meet (especially in conferences and compendiums), an “edge effect” is apparent. Interaction between Christians adds an important dimension to world Christianity.

### *Defining World Christianity*

With this parallel to world music in mind, and borrowing language from the literature on global citizenship, it is possible to consider what world Christianity is *NOT*:

- World Christianity is not simply the sum of the thousands of local expressions of Christianity.
- World Christianity is not created by stirring old ideas into a melting pot; it represents something new over and above previously existing forms of Christianity.
- World Christianity is not a mosaic, since that metaphor conveys a picture of neatly juxtaposed and unchanging cultural forms of Christianity. Instead, differences are fluid and relative when they are caught up in ever-shifting global interactions.
- World Christianity is not an alien global force suppressing difference; as long as global symbols are freely appropriated, they can be anyone’s authentic Christian experience.
- World Christianity is not the opposite of diversity; rather, it harmonizes diversity. Far from hovering abstractly above the planet, world Christianity provides ideas and symbols, concepts and models that seep into daily



life and thereby add a layer to a Christian's local experience.

Uniqueness and diversity are not lost in these metaphors. Piet Hein stated, "We are global citizens with tribal souls" (Dower, 11). The Christian parallel could be "we are global Christians with unique cultural locations." With that in mind, world or global Christianity might be defined as the interaction and sharing between local Christianities. More fully, world Christianity is a world-cultural fellowship comprising norms and knowledge shared across ethnic, linguistic, temporal, and political boundaries, practiced and extended by churches and parachurch organizations, enacted on particular occasions that generate global awareness, carried by the infrastructure of world society, spurred by market forces, driven by tension and contradiction, and expressed in the multiple ways particular Christian groups relate to universal ideals (adapted from Dower).

### *Globalization and Frontier Missions*

Let me finally address how these tensions between the particular and the universal within world Christianity are relevant to frontier missions. Contact between humans is the foundation of mission. Therefore, the lack of personal contact between Christians and non-Christians identified at the beginning of this paper should be of great concern to the missions community. Globalization often increases contact between humans, with a resulting tension between the local and the global. Frontier missions exists to bridge the possibility of a fully indigenous form of Christianity and one that is tied into the whole of Christianity around the world and throughout human history. Somewhat obvious is the fact that lack of contact will not allow either. Each new form of Christianity then contributes to our global understanding of Christ, Christianity, and the gospel. In this sense, our de facto lack of contact with Muslims, Hindus, and

## *Our de facto lack of contact with Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists limits the fullness of our own Christian experience.*

Buddhists limits the fullness of our own Christian experience.

For Christians these ideas are not recent inventions of our globalized world context. Sixteen hundred years ago, Augustine wrote in his *City of God*,

This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognizing that, however various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of earthy peace.

With the recent expansion of Christianity around the world and the anticipated spread of the gospel into all peoples, we can hope to realize the beauty of both the particular and the universal in a truly global Christianity. **IJFM**

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# ISFM 2010 Report

## Contesting Ethnicity, Religion and Globalization

by Brad Gill

The ISFM 2010 met in Charlotte, N.C., in September 2010 to assess the impact of globalization on “people groups” across the frontiers of mission. Over 100 assembled for two days to examine the contested realities of ethnicity so central in defining the frontier mission mandate.

Todd Johnson and Gary Fujino, whose talks are presented in this issue of the journal, opened the conference by sifting multiple definitions of globalization. Johnson’s macro approach<sup>1</sup> was complimented by Fujino’s “glocal” study of the Japanese of Tokyo.<sup>2</sup> The take away was clear: we must reexamine our missiological “givens” among unreached populations.

The subject of globalization and religion created some of the most stretching moments of the two days. Kan San Tan filtered this subject through a Buddhist perspective, and challenged us to entertain “multi-religious belonging” as a new global reality.<sup>3</sup> His argument for “in-religionization” stretched us to consider how radically incarnational God desires us to be in religious settings.

Due to a cancellation, the conference bypassed the subject of “caste” and instead revisited this theme of religion in the Hindu setting. H. L. Richard challenged historic assumptions concerning religious categories, that religion is an imposed classification which amalgamates huge hunks of humanity in a reductionist fashion. Many found themselves aggravated or uneasy, but all were provoked to reexamine the utility of our religious categorizations.

We also heard of the new religiosities and neo-fundamentalisms emerging in a globalized Muslim world.<sup>4</sup> Len Bartlotti offered an exacting study of Pashtun identity as it played out between political, ethnic and religious pressure.<sup>5</sup> From Buddhist to Hindu to Muslim, it was clear that we must address the impact of globalization on religious identity and belonging.

Robert Priest and Steve Hawthorne offered historical depth to the contested concept of ethnicity across mission circles.<sup>6</sup> Priest focused anthropologically on the manner in which we have traditionally categorized peoples, while Hawthorne unpacked the historic argument for the frontier mandate “A Church for Every People.” The insufficiency of our mission terminology was clear from both sessions, and many critiques of “people group” thinking were endorsed. But rather than retreat the entire conference encouraged participants to refine their missiological toolkit in light of globalization. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> “Globalization, Christian Identity and Frontier Missions,” p. 165.
- <sup>2</sup> “The ‘Glocal’ Dimension: The Case of Japanese Identity,” p. 171.
- <sup>3</sup> “The Religious Dimension: With Special Reference to Christian-Buddhist Encounter” (upcoming article Fall 2011).
- <sup>4</sup> “Globalization, Sociology and Islam” (speaker’s name withheld).
- <sup>5</sup> “The Case of Pashtun Identity.”
- <sup>6</sup> “The Anthropological Dimension” (Priest) and “The Missiological Dimension” (Hawthorne).

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Globalization and Identity

# "Glocal" Japanese Self-Identity: A Missiological Perspective on Paradigmatic Shifts in Urban Tokyo

by Gary Fujino

The question of identity is fast becoming a missiological issue of global proportions. Fundamental questions such as “Who are *we*?” and “Who are *they*?” have become ever more complicated and intricate amidst the contemporary forces of globalization. A new “glocal” reality is impacting and shifting personal identities at the core, at the level of a person’s daily life, creating an intermingling of identities that could potentially affect our missional efforts to reach people in terms of who *they* are.

This complex mix of identities is quite apparent in the context of urban Tokyo dwellers where I live and minister. I’m convinced that if I fail to grasp the nature of identity amidst the modern mix of Tokyo, it will hinder my efforts to reach these urban Japanese. And I believe this is just as true for similar populations across the globe. Identity and the sense of self—and how they interact with globalization—affect how we answer the key question of how the Japanese can be reached in terms of who *they* are.

I’d like to focus this article on how multiple identities emerge in the lives of these urban dwellers. I first want to introduce a location in central Tokyo that affects identity beyond mere geography, then examine how multiple identities function within the Japanese context. Next we will consider globalization and glocalization in reference to urban Japanese self-identity, exploring missiological implications within each section.<sup>1</sup>

## *A Tokyo-Based Case Study of Urban Japanese Identities*

I live and work downtown. Twenty-three wards and twenty-seven towns make up the city of Tokyo proper; our home is in one of the eight central wards. The greater Tokyo/Yokohama megalopolis has a population of 35.7 million, according to the United Nations.<sup>2</sup> Tokyo is a part of the Kanto plain, the largest flat area in Japan, which accommodates around 44 million persons, more than one-third of the country’s population of 127 million souls. The cry of the Lord for that great Old Testament city, Nineveh, is mine as well for that great 21st-

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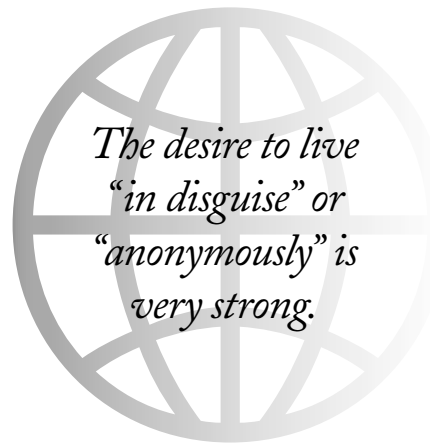
century megalopolis, Tokyo. "Should I not be concerned for that great city?" (Jonah 4:11, NIV)

In Shibuya Ward, where I live, there is an amazing variety of cultures and subcultures, each of which have a profound effect on urban Japanese identities. For example, one of the stations we frequent, Harajuku/Meiji-jingumae (hereafter, "Harajuku station") is where two subway lines and a train line meet and one can view in microcosm the cultures and sub-cultures representing urban Japan, any of which can mold urban Japanese identity, *creating multiple identities within the same person*. Here's a picture of one microcosm of globalization that creates this intermingling of identity:

- Immediately west of the station is one of the largest Shinto shrines in Japan. Meiji Jingu, or "Meiji Grand Shrine," that was named after the Emperor Meiji, who ruled when Japan was re-opened to the West in 1853. During the most important holiday of the year, New Year's, nearly four million worshippers visit between December 31<sup>st</sup> and January 2<sup>nd</sup> to observe a "two year pilgrimage" (*nin-nen maeri*) or to buy charms to ward off evil and give good luck for the coming year. Meiji Shrine is visited throughout the year but the New Year holiday is what it is known for. "Religious" and "spiritual" best describe the effect this part of Harajuku has on a Japanese urbanite's variegated identity.
- In front of the station, adjacent to the entry gate of Meiji Shrine, is a large open area which is home to street artisans, couples on dates and tourists. On weekends especially this space is frequented by fans of Gothic clothing and music, or by "CosPlay" ("Costume Play") advocates—men and women who dress as popular Japanese cartoon or comic characters. Fans descend on Harajuku station

from all over to see and meet these normal citizens turned faux idols, photographing them or having their pictures taken with them. Here, living "as another self" or having "a second life," as it is called in Japan, is prominent. The desire to live "in disguise" or "anonymously" is very strong.

- Going east from Harajuku station, taking a different exit, one comes onto Takeshita-dori. This short, narrow street extends only a few blocks eastward, yet it is a mecca for Japanese youth culture.



Youth from all over Tokyo, and even other parts of Japan, flock here to eat, shop, play, congregate, and hang out. Even the parents of 'tweens, teenagers and college students like to be in this trendy place, where those under age thirty feel right at home. Some mothers shop there with their daughters to buy designer "twin clothing." This part of Harajuku addresses the need of urban Japanese to belong—i.e., mothers trying to identify with their daughters' culture.

- To the south and paralleling Takeshita-dori is the larger Omotesando road. It has become a brand name equivalent to Park Avenue or Rodeo Drive in the USA, and is associated with designers such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, GAP, Coach, etc. As with Takeshita-dori and Meiji Shrine, Japanese come from all over to be seen there or to buy from one of its

exclusive shops. Talent scouts and pimps alike haunt these trendy streets looking for rising stars, or victims. Buying or finding "another self," as well as consumerism and materialism best describe how this part of Harajuku influences the diversified, urban identity of Tokyo Japanese.

- Within the same 1.5 kilometer radius of Harajuku station that enfolds Omotesando, Meiji Shrine, and Takeshita-dori is Yoyogi Park to the west, and the former Olympic National Gymnasium and its park area to the southwest. These places are a stone's throw from the station and are visited by Tokyoites regularly for sporting events, concerts, picnicking and cultural festivals. The Canadian circus, Cirque du Soleil, has been a fixture here for years. For many urban dwellers Yoyogi Park means peace and open space, gardens, old trees, and nature in a city where everything else seems too crowded, narrow and made of concrete. Life seems slower there and you will often see people doing group exercises or sports.<sup>3</sup> "Communal," "natural," "cultural" and "event-oriented" describe how these locales around Harajuku affect Japanese urban identities.

Japanese coming to this area of Tokyo may choose to be involved in only one of these locations, or all, or in parts of some. But their choices are intentional, flowing from who they are, how they perceive themselves *at that time*, and how they want to be perceived by the group *within each of these contexts*. These shifting identities are not dependent upon mere geography, but upon affinities like those listed above, as well as music, film, business, language, entertainment, religion, friendship, etc. Add on the hierarchies of age, gender, social standing and the backgrounds of people with whom they interact, and identities become quite multifaceted.

For example, the mother who shops along Takeshita-dori to identify with her teenage daughter may also go a few blocks over to Omotesando and buy herself a \$2,000 Gucci purse. Later in the week she may return to catch a show at the circus or visit Yoyogi Park with her family for a picnic. At the end of the year she may go to Meiji Shrine to pick up a charm or take part in a ritual. What is important for this paper is that *multiple and interdependent identities exist in the same person*, with much of the shift between identities being intentional and specific to context and relationships. Missiologically, we must engage such persons “where they are at,” complicated as that might be (cf. 1 Cor. 9: 19-23).

### **Multiple Japanese Self-Identities and Context**

Sociologist Erving Goffman<sup>4</sup> called this manifestation of identities “the presentation of self in everyday life,” the manner in which people take on different social roles for various aspects of their lives. This relates back to those missiologically questions of “Who are our people?” and “How can we best reach them?” But some Japanese social scientists have pushed these contextual understandings of self-presentation beyond Goffman.

Psychoanalyst Takeo Doi<sup>5</sup> was one of the first to popularize *honme* and *tatema*, the idea that who Japanese really are on the inside (*honme*) is often at variance with what they present on the surface (*tatema*). This is important when speaking of multiple self-identities because while the *honme* remains a constant, the way in which the *tatema* is made manifest can vary from person to person, even within the same situation.<sup>6</sup> While this may be true for other cultures as well, the idea of shifting and multiple identities is more than a concept to the Japanese; it is a way of life even at the unconscious level.

Later writers, such as Takeshi Ishida<sup>7</sup>, challenged Goffman’s “front region” and “back region” motif<sup>8</sup> by saying

**T**he idea of shifting and multiple identities is more than a concept to the Japanese; it is a way of life even at the unconscious level.

that the Japanese “*omote-ura* (front-back) can be defined only in relative terms; hence the border between the two remains flexible”<sup>9</sup> (Goffman proposed a more fixed front and back). What Ishida says is important missiologically because it shows that self-perception and identity can differ between cultures. Just a year earlier, Smith had foreshadowed Ishida’s idea of “a flexible border” between front and back when he stated, “There are no fixed points, either ‘self’ or ‘other’ . . . there is no fixed center from which, in effect, the individual asserts a noncontingent existence.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Japanese self is depicted here as constantly changing.

Other Japanese researchers point out that the Japanese self is contextual or situational, even acting differently toward different persons within the same situation. Sociologist Eshun Hamaguchi calls this *kanjinshugi*, literally, “the principle of what is between persons” (in English, “contextualism”). His neologism is crafted against the Western idea of individualism, or *kojinshugi*. The similarities in spelling and phonetics between the words are intended. The word is fabricated from *kan*, meaning “space” or “between,” and *jin*, or “person.” So, one could literally interpret it as “the space between persons which ties them together” (*my translation*). Both the wording and the concept is an assault on the idea of humans existing in isolation from other humans. In Japanese self-theory, self is always seen in relation to others, never apart from them. Thus, identity becomes situational to a great extent and Japanese “individuals” are in some respects “multi-cultural” *within themselves*.<sup>11</sup> Identity, then, is about *where* one is, i.e., the situation, and *whom* one is with in that situation.

### **Globalization and Tokyo Urban Identity**

The word “globalization” was coined by sociologist Roland Robertson in his 1992 book of the same name. He defines it this way:

Globalization as a concept refers to both the compression of the world and intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole...both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole.<sup>12</sup>

While “globalization” is a new term, Japan has been influenced by global forces almost since its beginnings. What is different today is “the speed, the scale, the scope, and the complexity of global connections.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Japan and “That Which Is From Without”: Contextualization through *Wakon-Yosai***

Japan has long imported, adapted, and indigenized (or, “contextualized”!)<sup>14</sup> what it receives—yet, always in a discriminating manner. Robertson calls this “Japan’s high degree of careful selectivity concerning what is to be accepted or rejected from without.”<sup>15</sup> A traditional proverb offers further insight. *Wakon kansai* means “Japanese spirit, Chinese learning,” which shows a bent towards bringing in ideas, technology, and goods from outside Japan, but then making it Japanese. The proverb shifted to *wakon yosai*, literally, “Japanese spirit, Western learning,” after the opening of Japan to the West in the late nineteenth century. This proverb captures both Japan’s interactions with global forces—with China, then Europe, and later America—as well as the ideas of *honme-tatema* and *omote-ura*, where the surface or “front” might change but not the core of one’s self. William Dyrness affirms Pierce Beaver’s assertion that “in one sense... none of the generalities of Asia apply to Japan. It is ancient, medieval, and

modern; it is Eastern and Western. And all these characteristics exist in dynamic interrelationship."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Japanese deal with global forces by selectively taking what is foreign and indigenizing it so that its foreign origins are eradicated, synthesized, forgotten, or overlooked. So complete is this transformation that whatever "it" becomes a part of Japanese life and is no longer considered foreign. A clear example is that many Japanese think the McDonald's restaurant chain originated in Japan. The *wakon yosai* spirit allows for global interaction, yet, at the same time, protects the *sui generis* mystique of Japanese ethnicity and national identity.

### The Advent of the Home Telephone: Keeping the Boundaries

The telephone is an example of a foreign technology that transformed not only communications but also influenced Japanese self-identity. According to social commentator Toru Takeda, home telephones only became commonplace in Japan after World War II, and were in just 3.6 million homes by 1960, when the country's population was at 93 million. That number swelled to 30 million by 1975, with 54 percent of the population using home telephones, and to 70 percent in the 1980s.<sup>17</sup>

In its early days, the telephone was generally placed in the *genkan*, the entryway of the traditional Japanese house. Thus, in order to answer the phone people would have to come from inside the house to the front door, near the *genkan*, to talk. British anthropologist David C. Lewis talks about the *genkan* as being

where one leaves behind one's shoes and the outside dirt carried on them.... In modern houses, these former "peripheral" areas have been brought within the confines of the house itself but the social boundaries are kept distinct. Spatial and footwear boundaries automatically keep the *genkan*, toilet, bath and *tokonoma* rooms distinct.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the *genkan* serves as the transition point or boundary between the world outside (*soto*) and the world within (*uchi*). This entryway motif, both real and conceptual, links to Japanese sensibilities of pollution and purity. It functions to keep what is unclean *outside* the house in order to keep one's *insides* clean, both physically and spiritually. In individualism-collectivism studies, these are known as in-groups (*uchi*) and out-groups (*soto*). This *uchi-soto* combination relates directly to *honne-tatemae* and *omote-ura*, but *uchi-soto* is more vitally



connected to interaction of the self with others.<sup>19</sup> *Uchi* is more like "self-identity toward others," and relates to a locality, a group—in this case, one's "inner circle." *Uchi* can include friends, fellow workers, and other close relationships. Conceptually *uchi-soto* can help us understand how Japanese relate to others in a group setting, and especially with social networking, as we will see below.<sup>20</sup>

### The Telephone as *Genkan* and Shifting Boundaries of the Self: Toward a Portable *Uchi*

The significance of the telephone was that it carried people outside of their houses, i.e., outside of themselves, even though one could be at home while conversing. A University of Tokyo researcher describes it this way:

[W]hen we are using the telephone, even though physically we are in the home, in our consciousness we have left the house and have to share a

phone line with our conversation partner. In other words, within the confines of our home, the telephone has become another (boundary) like the *genkan*... thus, there is no more appropriate location for the telephone to fulfill its role than to place it in the boundary area (*genkan*) where this community called the family makes contact with society.<sup>21</sup>

Like the *genkan* the home telephone in Japan served as a boundary marker between the outside world and the inside of the home and, by extension, of the Japanese self. So, the eventual movement, literally, of the telephone from the *genkan* to the inner parts of the house reflected not only a physical shift of the telephone but a mental shift in how the Japanese self interacted with the outside world.

At first "telephone space" was halfway between the public and private realms, in the border territory of the entryway (*genkan*), but with the emergence of cordless phones, extension phones, and cell phones, telephone space became increasingly personalized.<sup>22</sup> The shift from the *genkan* to anywhere in the house created a malleable boundary between inside and outside worlds, similar to what Ishida argued against Goffman above. And the change from the cord telephone to cordless, and then to wireless, made the telephone portable, which caused a revolution in how Japanese related to others. Now, not only was the self movable, but a call home—to one's *uchi* (one's in-group)—could fit into a pocket or purse and be taken anywhere.

In the *genkan*, all phone conversations were *public*. One's voice could be clearly heard. But when moved inside the house, to one's own room, for example, inquisitive family members could be kept out of hearing range, which allowed for truly *private* conversations and a further inward (*uchi*) withdrawal of the self. This correlates with Naoko Odaka's observation that

earlier generations of Japanese have been very conscious of the eyes of others, while the post-bubble genera-

tion sets its own personal space and is unconcerned with those outside that space. They open the channel of communication with those they want to talk to or with those they judge to share their own way of thinking but coolly close off communication with those who don't get it.<sup>23</sup>

Odaka references new cell phone-based, virtual communities, an intensified focus on an individual's phonemate community, to personal choice, and to how increased individualism all contribute to the increased variegation of Japanese urban self-identity. This returns us to the Harajuku case study above, where identity is selected and displayed in multiple ways, but only to those who "get it." Japan's post-bubble generation (born after 1970) tends to exclude or include others based on personal choice and displays an even more severe in-group (*uchi*) and out-group (*soto*) distinction than their parents' generation.

The transformation of this *uchi-soto* reality raises important missiological questions. Does the church function as the primary *uchi* or in-group for the individual? In most cases, the response would be negative, but metaphors of the Body (1 Cor. 12), or of Israel and God being the centerpiece of the nations (Ps. 67), might offer a different answer. Or how might this Japanese sense of self implicate how we share the gospel? While the urban Japanese self is increasingly portable and private, it is never alone, so, when sharing the gospel, one must take into account that a Japanese person is not simply an individual self. Each person represents a larger, unseen community, instantly available by technology, and consolidated into that person's identity, made manifest for that moment. Distinct *personas*, i.e., multiple identities, form in the same person because of that individual's interactions with numerous and often contiguous communities, virtual and otherwise. Individuals become their own bosses by their lifestyle choices and the networks in which they become involved. I call this "matrixed identity," where interaction with various groups—particularly

**W**hen sharing the gospel, one must take into account that a Japanese person is not simply an individual self.

virtual but not limited to that—creates different selves within the same person<sup>24</sup>, all combining to make up a single individual. An additional problem is that not all of these selves are healthy. In Takeda's words, these virtual connections between persons can

form a community (*kyodotai*), but not a public society (*kokyoteki na shakai*). By shutting out any diverse opinion and contact with those outside their closed group, they are hindered in developing a healthy sense of self and interpersonal social skills through interaction with outsiders.<sup>25</sup>

The influence of technology upon human existence, particularly self-identity, cannot be underestimated. Marshall McLuhan's pithy dictum still holds: "The message *is* the medium." Use of the telephone and the internet, too, creates non-neutral contexts which literally change identity. And as one of McLuhan's interpreters notes, "[e]very medium is an extension of our humanity... All forms of media (i.e., any human invention or technology) extend or amplify some part of ourselves."<sup>26</sup> So, for us as persons created in the image and likeness of God, the way in which the self (or selves) permits itself to become extended by technology is the missiological crux.

### Self-Contextualizing through the Internet in Japan

If the telephone caused a national identity shift, then cell phones and the Internet initiated a sea change as Japan embraced online communities. There were more than 94 million Internet users in Japan at the end of 2009, with 78 percent of Japan's population of 127 million accessing the Internet regularly. As in other countries, the Internet allowed the creation of virtual communities where people interact without meeting face to face, but the difference in Japan is how these interactions take

place. One example is the challenge American behemoth Facebook is facing in the Japanese social networking market.

### Social Networking, Facebook and Anonymity

Compared to 60 percent of US Internet users, only 2 percent of Japan's online population logs on to Facebook. Japanese prefer native-born internet service providers.<sup>27</sup> The three major Japanese-created social networking sites have more than 21 million members each. Facebook Japan, which arrived in mid-2008, is dwarfed in comparison, hovering at a paltry 2 million members.<sup>28</sup> Why the difference?

One reason is that Japanese social networking sites permit anonymity. A person does not have to share name, gender, or anything personal, to become a member. Anonymity relates to our discussion above about "disguise," "another self" and "a second life," as well as to multiple identities. Marketing research has borne out this Japanese penchant for privacy. "In a survey of 2,130 Japanese mobile web users by Tokyo-based MMD Laboratory, 89 percent of respondents said they were reluctant to disclose their real names on the Web."<sup>29</sup> One woman was adamant, "I don't want to give it my real name... what if strangers find out who you are? Or someone from your company?"<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, the appeal of Facebook is its openness and the way it allows people to share with people they know and like. Whether it be finding old grade school acquaintances or chatting about the latest, Facebook thrives on people sharing who they are via their true identities. "She friended me" or "I un-friended him" have become common phrases for the English-speaking online population. We are able to "friend" or "unfriend" because

we know, at least to some degree, who is knocking at our cybernetic door, which allows us to decide whether that person becomes our newest "friend." Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg shared his thoughts on a "map" for networking people:

"We're trying to map out what exists in the world," he says. "In the world, there's trust. I think as humans we fundamentally parse the world through the people and relationships we have around us. So, at its core, what we're trying to do is map out all of those trust relationships, which you can call, colloquially, most of the time, 'friendships.' He calls this map the social graph, and it's a network of an entirely new kind."<sup>31</sup>

A natural outcome of Zuckerberg's map of friendship and being able to "friend" or "unfriend" is that Facebook Japan insists that people use their real names to join. How "friendship" is defined comes into question here, but, for our purposes, it is safe to say that Mr. Zuckerberg's logic does not necessarily follow when taken outside of the United States. A 2010 Microsoft survey asking about Asia-Pacific social networking sites found that of 3,000 people in 11 countries,

only about one-quarter of their friends on social networking sites were close friends. In Japan more than half of all respondents said that *Not one* of their acquaintances on social networks was a close friend.<sup>32</sup>

Further,

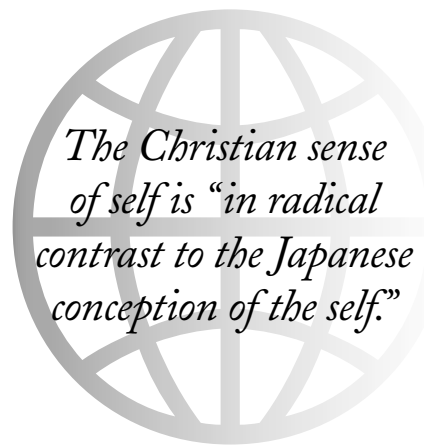
specialists say that while Facebook users in the United States tend to recreate real-life social relationships online, many Japanese use Web anonymity to express themselves, free from the pressure to fit into a conformist workplace.<sup>33</sup>

What is at work is that intuitive, contextualizing forces *within* Japan are selectively resisting non-Japanese globalizing forces, such as Facebook, which require Japanese users to do it *their way*. The point of contention is whether a person's identity is conveyed openly or anonymously, i.e.,

whether to use Zuckerberg's map, or another map. In Japan, should "trust relationships" be the criterion for mapping, or anonymity?

### Epistemological Maps and Japanese Understandings of the Self

Paul Hiebert gives us some direction at this juncture. Hiebert likened human perceptions of reality to viewing a map or a blueprint. Unlike a photograph, with its literal correspondence to reality, a map or blueprint gives an accurate outline, such as that of a house, yet not exact.



It is "'true', but in a certain way."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, maps or blueprints of reality will differ from person to person and culture to culture. This challenges Zuckerberg's assumption that humans "fundamentally parse the world through the people and relationships we have around us." It raises the question: fundamental for whom? Does Zuckerberg's sense of "human" include the Japanese? This last question might seem strange, yet his map of trust relationships is in conflict with the Japanese map of multiple identities.

These differing maps of reality also come into play when discussing Christianity in Japan, particularly as it relates to self-identity. John Clammer notes the difficulty for Japanese in incorporating a religious identity that links individuality, autonomy and "the possession of an essence (a permanent core of being) into a seamless whole in a way very distinct from the images

of personhood found in many Asian societies, especially in India, China and Japan."<sup>35</sup> Clammer compares this "globalist, inclusive and democratic" image—which he sees as coming directly from Christianity—to a mainstream self-identity in Japan that is "shifting, other-directed, dependent, multiple and based ultimately on a dynamist epistemology in which the being is the expression or embodiment of universal energy or *ki*."<sup>36</sup> At its base, then, the Christian sense of selfhood is "in radical contrast to the Japanese conception of the self."<sup>37</sup>

What this means for Facebook, and Christianity, is that epistemological maps must be taken into account and *acknowledged* as being *different* for a starting point, otherwise, friction and misunderstanding are sure to result.

The assumption that one idea or application or product or worldview applies to all peoples is one reason for the slow growth of both Facebook and Christianity in Japan. But in responding to the missiological questions of *Who are we?* and *Who are they?* we need to return to the topic of differing self-identities. Do we view urban Tokyo Japanese as being the same as us? Do they view us as being the same as them? Should the starting point be, *We are all the same?* How we answer this question will affect how we engage those we are trying to reach with the gospel. It will also inform how they respond to that message.

We can conclude, therefore, that Japanese urban dwellers should not be dealt with as if they were mere individuals, at least as Americans understand individuals. We must try to see the communities that exist behind and within them, and which vary depending upon the situation and who is else involved. We must allow for differences yet recognize that many urban Japanese are looking for better communities to which they can belong.

In our case, this would be a community of faith, the church, which might serve the needs of these com-



plex individuals in ways that non-religious groups cannot. Too often, though, we “clothe” our evangelism, disciple making and “doing church” in Western patterns. These urban Japanese can sense a deficiency when they fail to discover real belonging and identification in fellowship with the body of Christ. Healthy, culturally appropriate community can be as important as spiritual conversion.<sup>38</sup> We can provide this only by respecting the way they map their multiple identities.

### *Glocalization and Tokyo Urban Identity*

Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter was one of the first to discuss “glocalization” in a Christian context, though he credits Roland Robertson for coming up with the term in 1995.<sup>39</sup> Schreiter describes glocalization in this way:

Even as globalizing processes homogenize the world, they create at the same time a heightened sense of the particular. This attention to the particular and to the local takes on a considerable variety of forms which can range from accommodations of the global to an assertive resistance to it.<sup>40</sup>

Schreiter’s sense of local accommodation and resistance to global forces is indicative of urban Tokyo identity, but he is quick to assert that “neither global, homogenizing forces nor the local forms of accommodation and resistance can of themselves provide an adequate explanation of the phenomenon.”<sup>41</sup> We can see this in our case study—the urban Tokyo identity is globally influenced yet, in its essence, Japanese. For example, the trendsetting Omotesando area—where “\$1.2 million in handbags, watches, luggage and other accessories” were sold on the first day Louis Vuitton opened there in 2002<sup>42</sup>—is less than half a kilometer from the respected and austere Meiji Shrine. Global and local can meld seamlessly in central Tokyo, yet, as with Facebook, often do so only selectively.

**T**hese urban Japanese can sense a deficiency when they fail to discover real belonging and identification in fellowship with the body of Christ.

Where global and the local touch, they become “glocal,” and at that point they affect culture and identity, which in turn is influenced by ethnicity.

### **Ethnicity and Its Relationship to Glocalization in Tokyo**

I have not spoken of ethnicity until now, and have purposely subsumed it under glocalization because, in Tokyo, it is difficult to separate the two. Ethnicity and race are classifications that can be difficult to categorize,<sup>43</sup> yet are what we deal with every day. Here I follow the definition of Romanucci-Ross, who describes ethnicity as being more a “self-perceived group” than having a “common lineage.” Thus, ethnicity is always made and remade, especially by politicians.<sup>44</sup> “Being Japanese”<sup>45</sup> is so ingrained that it has even been called a religion, *Nihonkyo*, or the “religion of being Japanese.”<sup>46</sup> Harumi Befu compares how Japanese view their identity to buying ready-made clothing off the rack. Each person buys something that fits his or her personality, tastes, etc., but they are all off the same rack.<sup>47</sup> As with buying clothing, Japanese make choices in revealing their inward selves. As the clothes suit the person, so the identity suits the context—for that day or even that moment.

In his seminal work on ethnic boundaries, Fredrik Barth uses the idea of “border-crossing,”<sup>48</sup> a corollary to our discussion of global and local. Barth’s approach changed how anthropology viewed ethnic groups. The focus went from bounded, static communities to groups on the move. He studied those who crossed over rather than the group that was left behind. It was “the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (emphasis his). “Barth also allow(ed) for multivocality of meaning *within* an ethnic group through

a multiplicity of self-identities.”<sup>49</sup> “Border-crossing,” “on the move,” “multivocality,” where “a single symbol may stand for many things,”<sup>50</sup> are ideas reflective of glocalization, which was birthed in part from Barth’s pioneering thought.

So, is it possible to have a glocal identity? If so, what are the missiological implications? In answer to the first question, Schreiter, Hiebert and the Japanese themselves would give a resounding “yes.” Interestingly, Hiebert applied the concept of a glocal identity to *missionaries*, calling them “inbetweeners,” “transcultural persons” and “glocal mediators” because “the heart of missions has always been—and remains—the task of bridging the gulf between the gospel and the world.”<sup>51</sup>

Schreiter speaks more generally of what has happened with identity in the world as context has changed. He names three distinct shifts: First, “context as a concept has become increasingly *deterritorialized*”; second, “contexts are becoming *hyperdifferentiated*”; and third, “contexts are more clearly *hybridized*.”<sup>52</sup> Essentially, he’s saying that the nature of context itself needs to be assessed. As Lamin Sanneh underlines,

context is not passive but comes preloaded with its own biases, ready to contest whatever claims it encounters. Contexts, after all, are constructed strategies. As such, a context sensitive approach should be responsive without being naïve.<sup>53</sup>

### **Missiological Implications of Glocal Identities**

In this final part of our discussion on glocalization I would like to address four issues on this matter of context: first, the effects of changes in context and contextualization; second, the non-neutrality of context; third,

the effects of the urban context on identity; and, finally—to answer the second question above—What are the missiological implications of a glocal identity among urban Tokyoites, both non-Christian and Christian?

First, let's begin with the effects of globalization on context outlined in Schreiter's *The New Catholicity*:

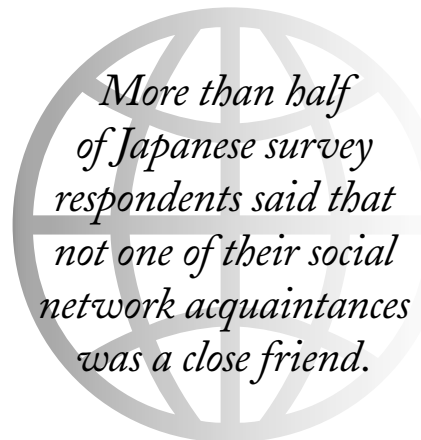
1. **Deterritorialization:** Fueled by immigration, diasporic movements and the Internet, deterritorialization has "ensur(ed) that our cultural experiences, identities, and practices are becoming separated from the places we inhabit."<sup>54</sup> Schreiter attributes deterritorialization to the compression of global space, and believes it as focused around boundaries of difference, not territory. "Because the space along boundaries is often a space of great semiotic activity, this has importance for understanding how cultures are being reshaped and what consequences this holds for theology."<sup>55</sup>
2. **Hyperdifferentiation:** This is Schreiter's term for globalization and glocalization, which, he says, has humans "participating in different realities at the same time—there is multiple belonging. This has to be taken into account in any attempt to express identity where multiple cultures interact at the same time... occupying the same space."<sup>56</sup>
3. **Hybridization:** On maintaining cultural purity, "in a globalized world it becomes increasingly untenable as a concept."<sup>57</sup> Kapchan says of ethnic identities, "hybridity is effected whenever two or more historically separate realms come together in any degree that challenges their socially constructed autonomy"<sup>58</sup> and Lewellen asserts that "all cultures are *already* hybrid, so what we are witnessing today is

one hybrid culture mixing with another."<sup>59</sup>

We have discussed *hyperdifferentiation* and *hybridization* in the Japanese context, though we used the terms "matrixed identity," *tatemaehonno*, *omote-ura*, and *uchi-soto*; the idea of multiple belonging was depicted in the Harajuku case study. But what about deterritorialization? How does that relate to Japanese self-identity?

The Zuckerberg Facebook article also included this utopian scene:

You'll be working and living inside a network of people, and you'll never



have to be alone again. The Internet, and the whole world, will feel more like a family, or a college dorm, or an office where your co-workers are also your best friends.<sup>60</sup>

Again, more than one half of Japanese survey respondents said that not one of their social network acquaintances was a close friend. So, the virtual intimacy predicted by Facebook doesn't work, at least, on Japanese social network sites. But there *is* a contextual manifestation of deterritorialized relationships, known as "tele-cocooning." This is practiced using mobile phones and is "the production of social identities through small, insular social groups."<sup>61</sup> Research in Japan has found that while the average user may have one or two hundred contacts in their phone, they exchange a vast majority of their information with only 2-5 of those persons. On this level, Zuckerberg's vision of "living inside a network of people" has come

to pass in Japan, in its deterritorialized form. However, its realization was not through social networking sites like Facebook or Mixi, but *through portable cell phones* (perhaps because the overwhelming majority of the heaviest users, teenagers, access the Internet only from their mobile phone).<sup>62</sup>

The second issue, the non-neutrality of context, means that from the outset, an agenda must be assumed. Beginning with Sanneh's analysis, identity comes "preloaded with its own biases, ready to contest whatever claims it encounters." Identity is shifting and variegated, but is neither neutral nor passive, since one's identity (or identities) always exist in context. In other words, Japanese make conscious choices based on how they want their identity to be manifested *in a particular context*.

Jonathan Ingleby argues in this way,

By definition, contextualization has to pay close attention to the context. The question is, are all contexts equal or are some more equal than others? When we enter a context with the gospel and attempt to identify with it, are we not usually confronted by a variety of cultures? What seems at a distance to be homogeneous is, the more we understand it, various and uneven... more confusingly, there may be more than one culture existing and indeed intermingling in the same locality. Furthermore, discovery leads to the need for decision. If we find we are dealing with a multiplicity of cultures within one locality, some sort of choice will have to be made among them. And how do we make this choice? Should the choice itself be based on some external criteria, and if so, what are they? What will be the reaction to the gospel be for those who belong to the culture or cultures that are not, at least for the time being, the chosen ones?<sup>63</sup>

The missiological implication is that we should assume nothing, and while engaging the context—and the people in that context—one "should be responsive without being naïve," as Sanneh suggests. In this way,

when the global and local converge, the cross-cultural worker will not be tempted to say, “it’s just the way the Japanese do it,” or the Japanese to say, “this is from America, it must be good.” Rather, “that which is from without” must be evaluated at the point of convergence and be received or put aside.<sup>64</sup>

A third issue for glocalization and contextualization in urban Tokyo is the city itself. Tokyo is one of three “global cities,”<sup>65</sup> according to urbanologist Saskia Sassen, who categorizes it with London and New York. This means that Tokyo is different not just from other cities in Japan but also from almost every other city in the world. This makes it difficult to generalize from Tokyo to the rest of Japan. As Manuel Castells observes, while cosmopolitans—or what I call glocal urban Japanese—do exist, they are in the minority. He documents that “barely 13 percent of people surveyed worldwide” consider themselves to be “citizens of the world.”<sup>66</sup> Tokyoites are among these barely 13 percent.

Life in the city is obviously different from life in the countryside, but what is not obvious is that standard techniques of evangelism, church planting and discipleship are often used with no attention to the realities of urban living. For example, the traditional pattern of mission in Japan has been to situate headquarters and churches in suburban Tokyo. This is cost-effective because downtown is exorbitantly expensive, but it also means that most missionaries cannot comprehend the city because they are not there. So, one of the most strategic changes that a number of mission organizations have initiated in the last decade is to gradually move personnel into the city, purchasing or renting apartments, establishing storefront churches, and meeting in *downtown* residences. This change is simple but profound because context, especially urban context, influences identity and practice.

## When a Japanese believer is “crucified with Christ,” and the “I” no longer lives, many sincere Japanese believers struggle.

The city also provides opportunity for Japanese. The scale, anonymity, and depersonalization of urban living allows, paradoxically, free and open interactions which would not be possible in the countryside, where family and societal networks are tight.

Finally, what are the missiological implications for this urban context? Hiebert agrees with Sanneh, suggesting, “there is no such thing as passive response to globalization.”<sup>67</sup> As noted earlier, the Japanese, especially urban dwellers, are constantly changing their identities, not all of which are healthy. Thus, a key response is to act proactively rather than be repeatedly surprised by these changes.

A second implication is that missionaries must show respect and help Japanese believers “navigate” themselves. Clammer declares that modernity has left the Japanese as “privatized and atomistic individual(s).”<sup>68</sup> This does not bode well for people who have been brought up in an interdependent context. What this means missiologically is that ministry, whether sharing the gospel with not-yet-Christians or discipling believers, should be done in a group setting, with as little one-on-one as possible.

For followers of Jesus a third implication is that the foundation of identity must rest in Christ—yet this is no mean feat. How does a Christian Tokyoite consider all these influences on his/her self-identity and affirm with Paul that “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20a)? What part of the Japanese self is represented in that verse? Who is the “I”? This is not a glib question. It ties into the Japanese Christian’s identification with his or her faith and to believers being “in Christ,” yet is linked to the

social construct of multiple selves. Tadataka Maruyama, inaugural president of Tokyo Christian University, explains that the battle within a Japanese believer is whether to go by the designation “Christian Japanese” or “Japanese Christian.” The ordering of the two is the point.

[T]he term *Christian Japanese* assumes a prior allegiance to the universal religion of Christianity before any particular association with the nation of one’s birth. As Scripture says, “For he [God] chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world” (Eph 1:4), so the one who was chosen to be a Christian was born as a Japanese and now practices his or her faith as a Christian who happens to be Japanese. Although this concept may be biblical and correct, for the Japanese—even among Christians—it is unnatural and difficult to comprehend.<sup>69</sup>

This struggle is common among Christians in Japan and is best exemplified by well-known Catholic novelist, Shusaku Endo, who grieved that his conversion to Christianity meant for him that he would become less Japanese. When a Japanese believer is “crucified with Christ,” and the “I” no longer lives, many sincere Japanese believers do struggle. So, the missiological imperative is to make sure that the gospel is properly conveyed, with faithfulness to its content, while at the same time ensuring that those who hear it do not sense an unnecessary contradiction with who they are in their *identity*.<sup>70</sup>

### Conclusion

I have led you down a long road of negotiated identities, globalized contexts and missiological considerations. Harajuku in the heart of Tokyo served as our contextual backdrop for variegated selves and multiple belongings. We pondered the intricacies of

Japanese multiple self-identities and their sensibilities on how the presentation of self differs from those in the West. We examined *wakon-yosai*, and how it lets Japan contextualize foreign things, such as the telephone, the cellphone, and social networking, especially as they relate to the flexible boundaries of the matrixed self. We considered epistemological differences in mapping and how they engage in border-crossing. Finally, we touched on glocalization and the effects of glocal identity on ethnicity in contexts that are inherently non-neutral.

Many will agree that human identity is humanly created, that it exists as a social construct but, from both a biblical and theological point of view, this is not enough. We must go beyond identity to the *imago dei*, which is not a social construct, nor of human derivation. It is the image and likeness of God imparted to all humans and is the *essential* part of our being, superseding any form of identity. All persons are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), marred though it may be by the Fall. To say it another way, the *imago dei* is the true foundation, identity is the conveyance. Personal identities can shift and be perceived as multiple or singular, and can impact how we proceed missiologically. But the *imago dei*, while difficult to define, is that mirror to God containing aspects of the divine that are common to every person on the planet. Identities are not common or universal; only the *imago dei* relates to all humankind. And it is here in the *imago dei* that we find our fundamental departure for all missiological studies of identity. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Jan B. Hansen, Jerry Vuncannon, How Chuang Chua and John Mehn for their input on an early draft of this paper. Whatever was helpful from them has been incorporated into this text and is to their credit. For any errors or problems with what is written above, the responsibility is all mine.

<sup>2</sup> 2007 statistics from *Urban Agglomerations 2007* chart, UN Department of

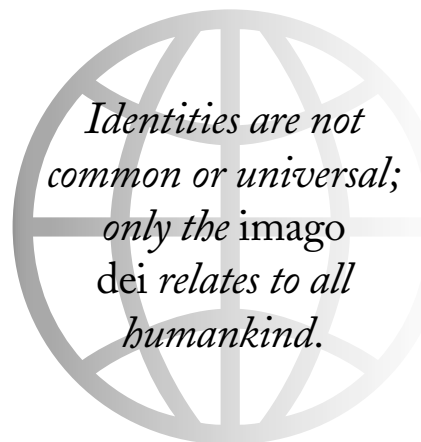
Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wup2007/2007\\_urban\\_agglomerations\\_chart.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wup2007/2007_urban_agglomerations_chart.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Jan Hansen for this apt description of the Yoyogi Park area.

<sup>4</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Doi Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence*. Translated by John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> See Yamazaki Masakazu, *Individualism and the Japanese: An Alternative Approach to Cultural Comparison*. Translated by Barbara Sugihara (Tokyo: Japan Echo, 1994).



<sup>7</sup> Ishida Takeshi, "Conflict and Its Accommodation: *Omote-ura* and *Uchi-soto* Relations," in *Conflict in Japan*, eds. Ellis S. Krauss, Thomas P. Rohlen, and Patricia G. Steinhoff, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 16-38.

<sup>8</sup> This is similar to Doi's *honnetatemae* above.

<sup>9</sup> Ishida, 20-21

<sup>10</sup> Robert J. Smith, *Japanese Society: Tradition, Self and the Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) in Wetzel, Patricia J. "A Movable Self: The Linguistic Indexing of *Uchi* and *Soto*," in *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language*, ed. Jane M. Bachnik and Charles J. Quinn, Jr., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 75.

<sup>11</sup> My thanks to Jerry Vuncannon for this innovative thought and turn of a phrase.

<sup>12</sup> Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Darrell Whiteman, "Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Globalizing World," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in*

*an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 61.

<sup>14</sup> My assumption here and throughout this article is that contextualization has already taken place and that it occurred at the initiative of the Japanese, making what is foreign "Japanese." How to contextualize from a Christian perspective is a separate topic.

<sup>15</sup> Robertson, 90.

<sup>16</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books/Zondervan, 1990), 141.

<sup>17</sup> Toru Takeda, *Wakamono wa naze "tsunagari" tagaru no ka* [Why do young people want to be "connected"?], (Tokyo: PHP Interface, 2002), 15.

<sup>18</sup> David C. Lewis, *The Unseen Face of Japan* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1993), 130.

<sup>19</sup> In terms of identity, Bachnik sees this "as the locus of the 'self,' *uchi*, [and] is thus linked to the *organization of self*, which is defined within a collectivity." Jane M. Bachnik, "Uchi/soto: Challenging Our Conceptualizations of Self, Social Order, and Language," in *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language*, ed. Jane M. Bachnik and Charles J. Quinn, Jr., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28, her emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Conrad Phillip Kottak shows how *uchi* and *soto* work on a macro level: "The (majority) Japanese define themselves by opposition to others, whether minority groups in their own nation or outsiders—anyone who is 'not us.' The 'not us' should stay that way; assimilation is generally discouraged" (*Mirror for Humanity*. 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill College 1999), 44-45). Such xenophobia, though not unique to Japan, creates an "us-them" (or, "inside/outside") dynamic; see Charles J. Quinn, "The Terms *Uchi* and *Soto* as Windows on a World," in *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language*, eds. Jane M. Bachnik and Charles J. Quinn, Jr., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 38-72; and Paul G. Hiebert, "Are We Our Others' Keepers?" (vol. 22, no. 5, 1995), 325-337). *Nihonkyo*, or *Nihonjinron*, as this ideology is more commonly called, is rooted in nationalism, informing the larger Japanese *uchi* identity.

<sup>21</sup> Jun Yoshimi of the Societal Information Research Institute at the University of Tokyo in Takeda, 16, my translation.

<sup>22</sup> Janet Ashby, "When in Doubt, Just Say 'wakarimasen'" (*Japan Times*, 5/12/2002)

<sup>23</sup> Ashby, "When in Doubt," quoting Naoko Odaka of the Dentsu Research Institute.

<sup>24</sup> Manuel Castells describes 3 major forms of identity: legitimizing, resistance, and project, relating them to the growth of the internet and globalization. "Resistance identity" is the closest to what is being described above because its focus is on "the formation of *communes*, or *communities*," in *The Power of Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 8ff.

<sup>25</sup> Janet Ashby, "When in Doubt".

<sup>26</sup> Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 34.

<sup>27</sup> Mixi, founded in 2004 and now at 21.6 million members, is Japan's original and formerly largest social network site. Mixi was dethroned in early 2011 by upstart Gree, currently with 22.5 million members. Rival Mobage-town completes the triumvirate with 21.7 million members.

<sup>28</sup> The data for this paragraph is taken from an article in *The New York Times*, "Slow Growth in Japanese Facebook" (1/10/2011).

<sup>29</sup> *The New York Times*, "Slow Growth in Japanese Facebook" (1/10/2011)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> TIME, 12/27/2010, pp. 57-58.

<sup>32</sup> "Slow Growth in Japanese Facebook," emphases added.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 76.

<sup>35</sup> John Clammer, *Japan and Its Others* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001), 169.

<sup>36</sup> Clammer, 169-170.

<sup>37</sup> Clammer, 171. He thus infers here that it is difficult for a Japanese to be a Christian and Japanese at the same time, but the missiological imperative is to find a way through that.

<sup>38</sup> Clammer speaks of the Japanese need for *shutaisei*, the "independence of spirit and the ability to define and manage the individual self autonomously," and of the conflict which often occurs inside Japanese Christians as they try to create a psychic bridge between this Western image of self "and cultural views inculcated through socialization." Clammer, 169, 171.

<sup>39</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 12.

<sup>40</sup> Schreiter, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Schreiter, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Zielenziger writes that

## National identity binds [Japan] into a cohesive whole; religion functions only on the periphery.

when Louis Vuitton first opened its doors to Japan in 2002 at Omotesando, four thousand consumers—some of whom had lined up for days—partook of a "frenetic seven-hour sales orgy" which broke "all of its own retail records." See *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 158.

<sup>43</sup> See the masterful and exhaustive survey of the literature on ethnicity and national identity from a missiological perspective, "A Review of the Literature on Ethnicity, National Identity and Related Missiological Studies," in *Global Missiology: A Review of the Literature on Ethnicity, National Identity and Related Missiological Studies*, by Enoch Wan and Mark Vanderwerf [http://www.globalmissiology.org/portugues/docs\\_pdf/featured/wan\\_literature\\_ethnicity\\_april\\_2009.pdf](http://www.globalmissiology.org/portugues/docs_pdf/featured/wan_literature_ethnicity_april_2009.pdf); see also, the American Association of Anthropology's Statement on Race, <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Gary Fujino, "Continuing the Conversation: Starting Points—Crafting Reconciliation through Identity" (*Common Ground Journal* vol 1, no. 2, 2004). <http://www.commongroundjournal.org/volnum/v01n02.pdf>. The danger of "identity politics" should also be underlined here, where identity is used to pit one group against another.

<sup>45</sup> Nothing is more central to a Japanese person than "being Japanese." Naturally, such patriotism could be said to be as true for those other nations, but in Japan, belonging is everything (cf. Fukuda Mitsuo. *Developing a Contextualized Church as a Bridge to Christianity in Japan*. (D.Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1992), 103; Lebra Takie Sugiyama, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 24ff). National identity binds the country into a cohesive whole; religion functions only on the periphery. Geertz says religion is important because of "its capacity to serve, for an individual or group, as a source of general, yet distinctive conceptions of the world, self, and the relations between them" (see Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Language, Truth and Religious Belief: Studies in Twentieth-Century Theory and Method in Religion*, eds. Nancy K. Frankenberry and Hans H. Penner, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 212), but this description better describes

the presuppositions of identity generated by *Nihonkyo*, that is, of being a citizen of Japan.

<sup>46</sup> See Peter Lundell, "Behind Japan's Resistant Web: Understanding the Problem of *Nihonkyo*," (*Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 2, April 1997), 183).

<sup>47</sup> Befu, Harumi. *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron*, (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001), 64.

<sup>48</sup> "[B]oundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them," said Barth (1969, 9). Also, because "stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries... frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses" (1969,10) in Fujino, <http://www.commongroundjournal.org/volnum/v01n02.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Fujino, <http://www.commongroundjournal.org/volnum/v01n02.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 50.

<sup>51</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 120, 198, 179.

<sup>52</sup> Schreiter, 26-27, emphases his.

<sup>53</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 5.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Hopper, *Understanding Cultural Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 48.

<sup>55</sup> Schreiter, 26.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Deborah A. Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong, "Theorizing the Hybrid" (*Journal of American Folklore* 112 no. 445 Sum 1999), 242.

<sup>59</sup> Ted C. Lowellen, *The Anthropology of Globalization: Cultural Anthropology Enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Westport, CT; Bergin and Garvey, 2002), 102, emphasis his.

<sup>60</sup> TIME, 12/27/2010, 60.

<sup>61</sup> Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda, eds. *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>62</sup> "Teens in Japan almost exclusively access and download Internet content

through their handsets." [http://www.dynamiclogic.com/na/research/whitepapers/docs/MB\\_POV\\_Advertiser\\_Forget\\_Pick\\_Phone.pdf](http://www.dynamiclogic.com/na/research/whitepapers/docs/MB_POV_Advertiser_Forget_Pick_Phone.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Ingleby, "Is Contextualization Neutral?" *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 2, April 1997, 183.

<sup>64</sup> There is some harkening back to Hiebert's "Critical Contextualization" here, but my focus is more on the glocal, whereas Hiebert's is more on the local.

<sup>65</sup> Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>66</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), xxiii.

<sup>67</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 248.

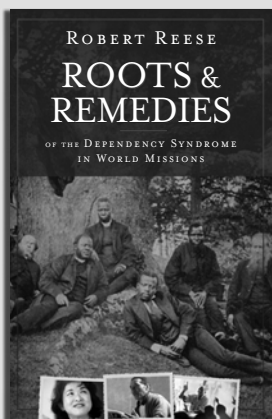
<sup>68</sup> Clammer, p. 169

<sup>69</sup> Tadataka Maruyama, "The Cross and the Cherry Blossom: The Gospel and Japanese Culture at a Crossroads" (*Trinity Journal*, vol. 21NS, no. 1), 59.

<sup>70</sup> See Priest, Robert J. "Missionary elenctics: Conscience and culture," *Missiology* 22, no. 3 (1994): 291-315.

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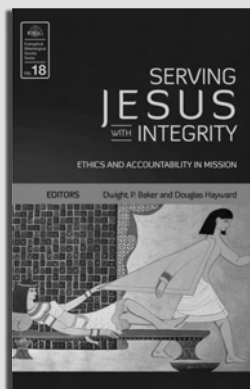
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# A New Mission Tool in Creative Access Nations: Christian Virtual Community in China

by *Enoch J. Kim*

**T**he house church movement of China is in desperate need of an infrastructure for communication. Over my fifteen years in China, I have seen many Chinese house churches and their leaders suffer because of the lack of freedom. Naturally, because many of their house church programs and activities function under a veil of secrecy, they have difficulty communicating with the outside world, and even networking among themselves. I have struggled to determine just how churches within a creative access nation might engage in alternative forms of communication.

This article is my response to this challenge.<sup>1</sup> It is based on research regarding our ability to harness global communications technology to build a virtual community model for missions. Because of its two-way communication function and freedom from geographical limitations, a virtual community model seems to have a huge potential as an effective alternative to other communication tools in the creative access nations.<sup>2</sup> I want to suggest several new ways to enhance current Christian websites and promote effective virtual communities. I'll also suggest a new master plan for real world church planting using a virtual space communication network. Ways to effectively harness the talents of scholars, missionaries, and churches to bolster the strength of online evangelism plan are included here. However, the crucial factor in this plan is still the local church's initiative.

In creative access nations, where there are limitations to open evangelism and discipleship, building virtual communities seems to be an appropriate supplementary tool to help local churches with this need. Of course, there is intervention and checking from a higher realm in the Internet world. Christian Internet activity could also easily become suppressed or strictly regulated. However, from my surveys, I was astonished to discover that many healthy Christian online networks are actively running today in China.

This article specifically focuses its research on the YEU-Chinese and other YEU-classes in Chinese minority groups. YEU is an acronym for the young, educated, and urbanized Chinese. As such, the hypothesis posed here is that

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the YEU class as an emerging group with modern leadership skills and as early adopters of new information are well placed to influence their own larger people group in the future in highly significant ways. Whether Muslims or majority Chinese, the YEU class consistently demonstrates a preference for personal, mobile, digital, multimedia tools that are quickly accessible and customizable.<sup>3</sup>

Given the YEU's media preferences, this article delves further into research about the YEU and implications of the group's media preferences in terms of new evangelism methods directed at them. At the center of these YEU media preferences are the current tools of computers and the Internet. Nevertheless, traditional mission approaches with the older and more familiar technology of radio or printed media, approaches which struggle in creative access nations where there is lack of religious freedom, can be revolutionized by the full-broadcasting capability of the Internet.

One by-product of current Internet technology is a social networking which creates virtual communities across virtual space. I anticipate that Christian activities initially forming as virtual communities can provide alternative communication tools for churches in creative access nations. Consequently, no matter the specific external circumstances, a relative freedom to share ideas and get information will ensue, freeing collective imagination and creativity, allowing the church to operate effectively within its specific socio-political setting. Therefore, the development of virtual space communities should provide a more effective approach for evangelizing unreached people groups around the world where the Internet is accessible.

To determine the probability of using a virtual community model successfully in creative access nations, this article summarizes both theoretical approaches and field research results regarding the virtual community movement in China.

### *Research Design and Sampling Plan*

Actual field research was done on the virtual community situation in China. The key problem we faced in this survey was the lack of understanding of Christian virtual community and the lack of effectiveness of current Internet mission strategies for China.

There are four research questions in addressing this problem:

1. What is the current Internet users' situation in China?



2. What are the Internet missions to China doing?
3. How do Internet missions and virtual community mission strategy work in China?
4. What is an effective strategy for planting actual 'offline' churches through virtual community?

In order to gather the necessary information, I used ten questionnaires to gather standardized observations from 60 recommended websites.<sup>4</sup> Rather than asking participants direct questions, as is traditionally done with questionnaires, the websites were evaluated using a questionnaire. Therefore, the method relied on both a questionnaire and observation. To guarantee reliability and reduce the potential subjectivity of an external observation, our researchers and native speaking coworkers joined as Internet community members, and observed the members' behavioral patterns. That is, because the researcher joined the community, the process was

more likely to provide an emic view from these case studies.

### *Data Report to China's Current Internet User Situation*

In 2008 China became the country with the largest number of Internet users in the world—235.1 million users.<sup>5</sup> In January of 2007, the demographic report of The China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) defined the typical Internet user as one aged 6 and above who is online at least one hour over a week.<sup>6</sup> An analysis of this report distinguishes several clear characteristics of Chinese Internet users: they are the YEU we spoke of earlier. First, the Chinese Internet users are young. More than half of them were younger than twenty-four years old, and more than 70 percent were younger than thirty years old, and 57.8 percent were unmarried.<sup>7</sup> Second, Chinese Internet users are educated. More than 83 percent of users have more than a high school diploma. Moreover, a large number of these Internet users appear amenable to pursuing higher levels of education in the near future.<sup>8</sup> Third, the Chinese Internet users are urbanites. According to mobile phone and Internet users' locations, about 83 percent of users live in an urban setting.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a large portion of China's Internet users are of the YEU group.

### *Two Groups: Tendencies toward Forming Community*

The first step of analyzing the sample involved categorizing them into two groups, *high tendency* and *low tendency*, according to how actively they tried to form both online and offline communities (see Table 1 on page 186). The question asked of the sites was whether they had a plan for building a virtual community. Naturally, those that seem to have plans for a virtual community identified themselves by checking more answers and were categorized in the high tendency group. Those with few answers, or those seeming to have a plan but with few answers, were categorized as low tendency. Based on



this, twelve sample sites were categorized into the low group, and thirteen into the high group.

However, further questions needed to discover just what these sites were targeting, so we introduced two questions to sort out their goals and their primary receptor groups (Table 2 on page 186). Since the high and low tendency sample numbers were not the same (thirteen and twelve), the numbers are expressed as percentages for equal comparison. You'll note that among the high group samples, 46 percent seemed to seek to build a virtual community, and 15 percent seemed to have a plan for offline community from the beginning. On the other hand, lower group samples were very passive in forming offline community. Only 25 percent of the low group had virtual community planning, and none of them had offline community plans. Therefore, developing online and offline communities seems to require planning before designing a website toward that end.

In Table 3 (p. 186), when we asked about primary recipients, websites did not seem to target specific recipients. Especially for our purposes, note that only 31 and 17 percent of websites in each group seems to be designed for YEU Chinese. Web designers need to have more strategic approaches because most of Chinese web users are YEU groups.<sup>10</sup>

We also wanted to check what kinds of cultural and social themes the websites use for screening out general users from their primary receptor group. A shocking result is that no matter how high or low the group tendency, about half of all sites do not seem to have any screening systems for users, like having a membership system or focusing on special themes to attract specific groups of web users. People from any background can join these current sites if they just agree to the policy. This kind of membership system cannot screen users. If the site deals with special themes, tools, or programs and intends only a specific group of users to join, these systems and themes can

**S**eventy percent of the sites could link to other sites, but most of them were linked to other Christian sites, not secular ones.

automatically screen proper members. But, as Table 4 (p. 186) indicates, websites generally did not have a cultural screening system for their users, except that consideration of social situation and ethnic issues in high tendency groups was slightly higher than in low groups.

Most of the high tendency groups and more than half of the low tendency groups used direct methods for evangelism. Approximately 38 percent of the high tendency group tried to meet members' felt needs as they introduced the gospel. Since most of sites seem to be designed for Christian believers, the sites were more likely to be information networks for Christians themselves rather than primarily for introducing the gospel.

The high tendency group are slightly more user friendly, and they have a higher percentage of multiple functions: web searching tools, weather forecasting, opportunities to locate old friends, cafés, blogs, and virtual communities (Table 6 on p. 186). You'll note that one of the crucial functions is linking with other sites, especially in advertising the site to new visitors. Seventy percent of the sites could link to other sites, but most of them were linked to other Christian sites, not secular ones. This means it may not be easy for both seekers and non-Christians to find these sites. Though some of the websites introduced the gospel indirectly through secular professional interests, these were very few. Most of the free downloadable content consisted of Christian materials—gospel songs, apologetics articles, the Bible—which would be of little interest to non-Christians.

The primary condition for forming a virtual community is maximizing the Internet's two-way communication functionality (Table 7 on p. 186). This would indicate their readiness for an offline community. Yet, none of the sites offered

a two-way communication system that enables users to have conversation, such as you find in counseling. One interesting fact is that none of the websites in the low tendency group had counseling or debate functions, but fifty-four percent of the high tendency group did.

While most of sites offered the manager's email address, phone number, and postal address, most sites were unfortunately not ready to encourage or channel users into an offline community. In fact, as you can see in Table 8 (p. 186), only one case proved ready to introduce people in person; however, even in this case, the strategy only offered a small amount of group management, rather than any systematic church planting.

Amidst all this data, there were several cases of spontaneous networking, where website members tried to organize themselves into offline communities from the online community. On one website, the *Christian Student Web*, there were links to local virtual communities. On one occasion, a Christian looking for a campus Christian community received six replies on the site. Another private Christian website in China's Shenzhen City, *Light of Spiritual Love*, had online community groups and offered an offline community meeting.<sup>11</sup> This was a good example of how the community develops from online to offline by including the time and place of regular meetings and a contact person's phone, email, and MSN address. Then there is the *Chinese Christian's Blog* website which has facilitated the formation of a virtual community among Chinese Christians by using a blog.<sup>12</sup> They fall into geographic districts in which members choose their common concerns and topics. And then there's the Christian lawyer from WenZhou who provided online law consulting for free or at a low price. In the middle of such web consulting, the lawyer introduced the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

Table 1: High and Low Tendencies for Forming Virtual Communities.

	Low Tendency Group	High Tendency Group	
Number of answers checked	between 0-3	between 4-7	Total
Doesn't seem to have plan for virtual community	8 sites	0 sites	8 sites
Seems to have plan for virtual community	4 sites	13 sites	17 sites
Totals	12 sites	13 sites	25 sites

Table 2: Website Goals.

Goals	High Tendency (%)	Low Tendency (%)
Minister to missionaries	0	0
Introduce the gospel	100	58
Provide Christian information	62	83
Build Chinese virtual community	46	25
Build offline community	15	0
Provide agents for offline community	0	0
Other	0	8

Table 3: Primary Recipients.

Receipients	High Tendency (%)	Low Tendency (%)
Foreign missionaries	0	0
Chinese all over the world	23	8
Young, educated, and urban Chinese	31	17
General Chinese Muslim	0	0
Young, educated, and urban Chinese Muslims	0	0
General Chinese in mainland	85	83

Table 4: User Screening.

Focus of Screening	High Tendency (%)	Low Tendency (%)
No screening system	46	58
Appropriate themes	46	33
Appropriate education level	15	17
Cultural context	31	33
Social situation (job, locality, preference)	15	8
Ethnic group issues	0	0
Touching felt needs	31	31
Using special language	0	0
Discussing their religion	0	0

Table 5: Evangelism Methods.

Methods	High Tendency (%)	Low Tendency (%)
Directly introduce	92	58
Touching felt needs	38	25
Cultural themes, common ground (filial piety, life issues, etc.)	8	0
Others	8	25

Table 6: Attraction of Newcomers.

Choices	High Tendency (%)	Low Tendency (%)
Provide a variety of tools	62	25
Linked to other sites	77	75
Offer rewards	8	0
Free downloads	92	42
Online counseling/debates	54	0
Christian yellow pages	31	8
Updating secular/Christian news, events	31	42
Provide more secular and professional materials (e.g., medical news and experts)	31	17
Others	0	17

Table 7: Two-Way Communication Functions.

Functions	High Tendency (%)	Low Tendency (%)
No functions	0	8
Email, message	92	75
Dialogue board	85	50
Chatting	31	8
Audio/video communication	0	0
Provide contact information	85	58

Table 8: Readiness for Offline Community.

Readiness Functions	High Tendency (%)	Low Tendency (%)
Do not provide services	92	100
Persons are ready to contact	8	0
Organization is ready to contact	0	0
Local churches are ready to contact	0	0
Others	0	0
Provide contact information	0	0

### *An Interpretation*

The good news is that techniques for developing a virtual community in China were far more developed than expected. In contrast to the fact that many Western and Korean church websites employ a one-way communication method—static pages, video sermon, and announcements—many Chinese Christian sites were equipped with hyperlinks connecting to a variety of functions. In addition to static pages, they offered forums, blogs, photo galleries, calendars, events, and many communication systems. These abundant two-way communication systems offered a fertile ground for forming online communities in China. In order to build an offline community among Chinese, there are several areas that need to be developed for an Internet strategy.

1. Many of the websites' goals need to have a clearer focus. Many of their primary receptor groups were the general Chinese population, and many sites did not have a screening system for their members.
2. There is a need of improving the strategies for evangelism to non-Christians. Only a few sites seem to meet the needs of seekers and non-believers. Of these sites, two-thirds of their methods were direct evangelism, and most of their data and documents were for the discipleship of believers. Redesigning the site with specific cultural themes will allow the sites to have highly concentrated target users only.
3. The sites need to offer a variety of service to attract users. The content and functions were too simple to be attractive. Additionally, most of their hyperlinks were linked with other Christian sites, not with secular sites. This disconnects the network from the secular world and reduces the chance of contact with non-Christians. As a result, the community can become a Christian ghetto.

**T**he key to the whole process of offline church planting is the activity and involvement of local church members.

4. Many of the websites' discipleship programs need to be more active in order to hold users' attention. Similar to department store sites, they passively wait for visitors to choose them. With this approach, the site may not easily attract visitors to enter and stay.
5. Both the local church-initiated web management and offline community-building were poor. Many domestic sites seemed to get help from foreign missions though they gave their domestic address in the sites. The key to the whole process of offline church planting, however, is the activity and involvement of local church members. The lack of experts for the local situation also seemed to be a serious problem.
6. More systematic plans for building offline communities are important. So far, it seems that very few churches and individuals have successfully developed offline communities from online communities. It is necessary to educate and encourage local churches to take initiative in virtual community projects.

### *A Master Plan for Online to Offline Church Planting*

Based upon field research in China and my assessment of the current social environment, I suggest that an integrated ministry plan of church planting through virtual community become a model applied to creative access nations. There are three steps in weaving a virtual community model into a ministry plan: (1) Website design and virtual approach, (2) Offline meeting for evangelism, and (3) Discipleship and formation of an offline church. The earlier stages depend on online tools, but as seekers participate in

the later stage, the online presence becomes a supplementary one, with offline interaction assuming a prominent role in the community.

### **Step 1: Website Design and Virtual Approach**

When web design teams plan the first stages of their websites, it is important to keep the final picture in mind—an offline church. In this initial stage, the issue is how to make the site easy to access and attractive to their primary target users. For this, those websites need to provide three elements: links with appropriate sites, the opportunity to touch felt needs, and the cooperation of interpersonal networks.

Local churches in China need to participate in this process from the outset. Along with the local church, international teamwork is important for a virtual community project. Even before the website is designed, web designers, supporters, foreign churches, communication experts, ethnographers, and sociologists need to share ideas and plan the whole process together with the local church. The emphasis on the local church does not mean that expatriate roles would be diminished, but rather changed. Expatriates can provide foreign networks, resources, and experts to assist the local person who needs the website.

It is important to advertise and provide links at non-Christian sites frequently visited by the intended target audience. Since many of the YEU Chinese are familiar with Internet bars, accessing the Internet is very convenient in China. As they develop a positive attitude toward the gospel, an offline team can develop personal relationships.

But for this to happen, sites should connect with the target receptor users' needs, not just purely introduce the gospel. Again, to accomplish this, web designers, communication experts, ethnographers, social anthropologists,

and local church leaders need to cooperate. Some will address appropriate cultural themes, while other expertise is mobilized to discern how to touch those needs.

In designing for receptors' needs, having hypermedia in the website moves beyond just static pages and is recommended for building any potential community. Hypermedia can include blogs, discussion tables, and forums, offering many kinds of opportunities for communication. Additionally, hypermedia websites can facilitate the creation of many small communities, so that they can independently meet any social group's unique needs. Such small groups are also relatively safe when persecution comes.

Following this first step, the local church's role will become crucial. This means that by the local church's leading, they need to prepare both an online team and an offline team. The initial design of the website must ensure a high probability of success in developing online activities into offline meetings. One example is the way Christian medical websites facilitate the relationship between their offline agents and local clients. The agent may physically visit patients offline, comfort the families, and work between virtual contacts and the web medical experts. This is a model I'd like to push towards.

### Step 2: Offline Meeting

The local church should lead offline activity that grows out of online activity. The offline team members should have already participated in virtual activities as community members, so some who had been seekers in virtual community are already familiar with each other as they enter an offline setting. As the relationship between the offline team and the seekers matures, they should proceed to evangelize. In some cases, they may need to connect with a totally different website for assistance in evangelism, a site the content of which includes an introduction to the gospel and spiritual encouragement.

### Step 3: Online and Offline Discipleship

At this stage, the online community and its system becomes a supplementary tool, as the offline community becomes the major network for discipleship. This new contextualized offline church helps define the new identity of believers, has a culturally appropriate worship style, prayer, and praise style, and instructs believers on strategies to study the Bible. The final goal of this whole process is to let seekers in creative access nations direct their own indigenous churches by using online and offline communities.

### Conclusion

As one who works in the country with the largest number of Internet users in the world, where the majority of users are the YEU Chinese, I feel compelled to approach this layer of society through the strategic use of the Internet. In creative access nations like China, building a virtual community is a new alternative and supplementary tool to help local churches. The Internet is free from geographical limitations, and the opportunities for multiple forms of communication enable the formation of virtual communities. I believe Internet mission is a proper alternative in a country where there is a certain amount of persecution and oppression, where there are not enough offline churches, and where there is a lack of Christian resources.

But to be effective in this strategic opportunity, Internet missions need to be culturally sensitive, strategic, and networkable with local churches, foreign missions, and other resources. Local churches and expatriates need to cooperate in website development and use the sites to plant future offline churches. To be successful, Internet missions need to integrate with the local church's active evangelism and discipleship strategies. At the same time, foreign resources should not be excluded, but should serve the local churches' new online and offline communities with their resources from within and outside of China. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article is based upon a field survey of my Ph.D. dissertation and its context is China.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk defined a creative access nation as "a country which limits or forbids the entry of Christian missionaries and for which alternative legal means of entry are required to enable Christians to live for Christ" in Johnstone and Mandryk, *Operation World: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition*. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Publishing, 2001), p. 755. This article is based on this definition of Creative Access Nation.

<sup>3</sup> Kim, J. Enoch, "Receptor-Oriented Communication for Hui Muslims in China: With Special Reference to Church Planting." Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pp. 207-211.

<sup>4</sup> From the sixty recommended websites, I screened appropriate samples through specific criterion, primarily whether that the each site had a mission to mainland China. I used SPSS (v 13.0) and Microsoft Excel for analyzing and calculating the data. Since, all the websites were public sites, this article determined that sensitivity to any security issues was the responsibility of the websites owners.

<sup>5</sup> See, "Worldwide Internet Users Top 1.5 Billion in 2008: China Tops 235M Internet Users." In *eTForecasts*, Juliussen, Egil, [www.etforecasts.com/products/ES\\_intusersv2.htm#1.3](http://www.etforecasts.com/products/ES_intusersv2.htm#1.3), updated 2007, accessed August 30, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> The title of report is "CNNIC Released the 19th Statistical Survey Report on Internet Development in China," [www.cnnic.cn/html/Dir/2007/02/05/4432.htm](http://www.cnnic.cn/html/Dir/2007/02/05/4432.htm), updated January 2007, accessed July 13, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>10</sup> Even though these few sites were specifically targeting YEU groups, it should be considered that, according to the analysis of the CNNIC report, since Chinese Internet users are mainly YEU, the users are automatically screened as part of the YEU group.

<sup>11</sup> This is a Chinese version website, 灵爱之光, [www.godislove.cn/forum\\_view.asp?forum\\_id=11&view\\_id=1867](http://www.godislove.cn/forum_view.asp?forum_id=11&view_id=1867), updated 2007, accessed June 12, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> This is a Chinese version website, and its address is [www.ccblog.net](http://www.ccblog.net), accessed June 17, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> This is a Chinese version website, 基督徒法律网, [www.jdfw.com/](http://www.jdfw.com/), updated 2005, accessed June 15, 2007.

# Diverse Voices: Hearing Scripture Speak in a Multicultural Movement

by Kevin Higgins

This paper will explore the unique potential of “relevance theory” in illuminating some of the hermeneutical dynamics encountered as a multi-lingual community of Muslim followers of Isa wrestle with the text of Luke, chapters 1–3. Following a brief introduction to relevance theory as it applies to translation, the paper will present notes taken during a one week inductive study of Luke involving 16 men from six language groups.

## *Translation and Relevance Theory (RT)*

Translation is a complex discipline that has evolved to incorporate multiple approaches and theoretical assumptions drawn from fields as diverse as linguistics, anthropology, hermeneutics, discourse analysis, theology, and communications theory. King describes many of the facets of that complexity, especially in seeking to describe how meaning is processed.

Meaning arises out of a dynamic interactive relationship between the actual message transmitted, the signal systems used, the environment in which the message is transmitted, the people who receive it, the relationship between the people, and the manner of transmitting the message. In the end, however, it is the receptors who make the final decision on what the message means to them within their own context and cognitive environment.<sup>1</sup>

King aptly outlines the role that the receptors play, and in particular the way that context, and what she calls cognitive environment, factors into the processing of meaning. However, this is not merely a modern concern or sensitivity.

In the 2nd century B.C.E. the translator of Ecclesiasticus into Greek summarized in a remarkably lucid way the struggle translators have always faced. After explaining the purpose with which the original author, Jesus Ben Sirach, undertook his work, the translator goes on to say the following.

You are invited therefore to read it with goodwill and attention, and to be indulgent in cases where, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to have rendered some phrases imperfectly. For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this book, but even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original. (Ecclesiasticus, Prologue, New Revised Standard Version, emphasis mine)

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Though the translator here does not make reference to how his reader might be affected by their context, he does acknowledge that the result of even the most careful and diligent translation work can result in a text which does not have “exactly the same sense” as the original once it has been re-created in a new language. This implies that the context of the new language plays a role in how the text is received and its meaning is processed.

Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.), roughly a contemporary of the above citation and regarded by many as the founder of Western translation theory, developed his thought regarding translation primarily in the context of training orators to translate from Greek into Latin. In one of his major works on the subject, *The Best Kind of Orator*, Cicero describes his own approach to translation.

I did not translate...as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the “figures” of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage.<sup>2</sup>

Cicero foreshadows an approach that would in later generations be referred to as a meaning based or even dynamic equivalent approach to translation. He refers to translating ideas, not words. And in referring to “our usage” Cicero is directly referencing his concern for the receptor in his work. Cicero provides more detail about his approach.

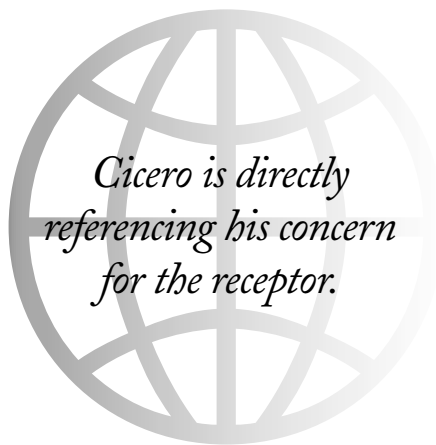
I did not hold it necessary to render word-for-word, but I preserved the general style and force of language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were.<sup>3</sup>

As we shall see, one of RT’s distinguishing characteristics is its relatively greater emphasis on the receptor, and the receptor’s context. However, I have cited these three references as a means of making the simple point that although RT may emphasize the role of the receptor more than other theories of communication have done, we should not assume that sensitivity to receptor context is something new. We see it in Ecclesiasticus and in

Cicero. If space allowed we could trace evidence of this concern in Jerome and on through all the standard works on Bible translation theory and approach.<sup>4</sup>

In the interest of space I am going to jump over many of the various historical approaches to translation and focus on just a few of the particularly suggestive insights that might be gleaned from RT.

RT could be summarized this way: Communication takes place as recipients make inferences about a communicator’s intentions based on what they



deem to be relevant as determined by their cognitive environment. The specific elements of RT are covered in the literature which I will cite below and in my references. In this paper I will focus on the last element, that of cognitive environment, and its potential insights for translation upon which I will focus in this paper.

### *Cognitive Environment*

The seminal work for RT is the book by Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1986). In a subsequent revision the authors responded to critiques and further clarified their thinking (2nd Edition, 1995).<sup>5</sup> In the course of developing their theory, Sperber and Wilson interact with the code model of communication (e.g., Shannon and Weaver), its subsequent application and modification in semiotics/semiology (e.g., Saussure), the linguistic approach to semiotics (e.g., seeing meaning as

the “grammar” of a culture, Chomsky 1954),<sup>6</sup> and the application of semiotics in structural anthropology (Levi-Strauss). They also give extended attention to an earlier inferential model developed by Grice (1989).<sup>7</sup> As such, RT is developed within the broader movement of interest in human cognition evident in a variety of disciplines including psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy.

“Cognitive environment” has already been referred to several times as a key term in RT. As Sperber and Wilson state it, “A cognitive environment is merely a set of assumptions which the individual is capable of mentally representing and accepting as true” (1995: 46). Thus cognitive environment includes a person’s current and potential matrix of ideas, memories, experiences, and perceptions.

New assumptions and thoughts that occur in the communication process might reinforce existing assumptions, or could lead to changes in the receptor’s cognitive environment. Since it is only partially possible to predict the new thoughts and assumptions that will result in the receptor as a result of this altered cognitive environment (1995:58), the success of communication cannot be measured by an exact transfer of thoughts from communicator to receptor, a standard assumption in code models of communication. As Sperber and Wilson put it, “We see communication as a matter of enlarging mutual cognitive environments, not of duplicating thoughts” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 193).

So, in RT, accuracy in communication is described as an increasingly shared cognitive environment. Note that one of the implications here is that in communication both communicator and receptor will have their cognitive environments changed, and the goal implies a process of increasing understanding.

Ernst August Gutt (1989, 1992, and 2000) was the first to apply RT to Bible translation.<sup>8</sup> Following his discussion of other theories of translation, Gutt

develops a line of argument that leads him to conclude that RT is sufficient in and of itself as a theoretical framework for translation of the Bible (2000: vii and 22). Gutt goes to great length to demonstrate that every principle found in current theories of translation can be explained by reference to RT (2000: 198). As such he accepts the definition and description of cognitive environment discussed above.

However, because Gutt approaches RT as a Bible translator, he is attuned to the even greater complexity involved in this particular type of communication. Translation theories and approaches share an awareness that in translation the communication event involves not only a communicator (which would be the original author) and a recipient (the original audience), but also a new recipient (the translator's audience) and a new communicator (the translator).<sup>9</sup>

One of the key arguments in RT is that the cognitive environment of a recipient of any given communication is what determines how the recipient processes the meaning of the communication they receive. This does not mean that the intention of the communicator is not a factor, and Sperber and Wilson address this. However, for the receptor, the cognitive environment rules the day.

My purpose in the remainder of this paper is to describe in concrete ways how the preceding discussion of cognitive environment and communication sheds light on understanding what takes place when a group of Muslims from different language groups engage scripture in a group discussion.

In particular, I will highlight:

1. How people process the meaning of the Biblical text from within their own cognitive environment, highlighting how cognitive environment shapes meaning and frames questions that are brought to the text.
2. Ways in which the interpretation of scripture involves a process that results in readers increasingly sharing the cognitive environment of the original text.

**T**he five day gathering included 16 men from two countries and six mother-languages (not including this author).

3. The reality that translation is itself an iterative, interpretive process.

With this summary of RT, albeit extremely brief, and with these three points serving as lenses for what follows, I turn to my record of the process questions, and insights gleaned from the week-long study of Luke 1–3.

Following that discussion, I will return to summarize a few conclusions.

### *Study of Luke, July 19–23, 2009*

The five day gathering included 16 men from two countries and six mother-languages (not including this author). The studies were conducted in the lingua franca of the country, and each man in this group was literate though the levels of literacy ranged widely.

These men were leaders in an insider movement: followers of Jesus, remaining Muslim. As leaders, they meet several times in a year for sharing each other's stories and problems, encouraging each other, and studying together. Studies have included topics (such as Quranic verses regarding Jesus), and books of the Bible, studied for the most part in an inductive way.

Of the 16 men, two have received considerably more training than the others. They have studied the Bible regularly, are familiar with Christian terminology and teachings such as the Trinity, and have been introduced to basic interpretation methods and concepts as well as a one week introduction to "manuscript Bible study" (MBS) using the Gospel of Mark.<sup>10</sup>

The text of the Bible studied together was characterized by the following major elements:

1. The language was the lingua franca, the trade language or national language of the country.

2. The text was translated for Muslim readers. In keeping with MBS, there were no verse numbers, though we did add chapter numbers.

3. Each new section began with the Bismillah, "In the Name of God the Compassionate and the Merciful I begin..." Again, this is in keeping with Islamic style.

4. As reference material for this new translation the main team of translators referred to two other projects within the country. Both can be said to belong to the meaning-based or dynamic equivalent school of translation. One of the two works used as reference has been published with an explanatory translation on one page and an inter-linear version on the facing page that incorporated Greek and the receptor language in a word for word version. The version used in this study, however, was far more Islamic in its style and terminology than either of the two versions used in reference.

The format of our studies needs some description. Each day, for five days, we met together from about 9:30 a.m. until about 3:30 p.m., with breaks for tea. However discussions frequently continued avidly through the tea breaks.

Before commencing, prayer was offered, first in a very Islamic style by one leader, in Arabic, standing and holding a stick. Then followed more spontaneous prayers by the group.

The first two days I suggested a set of simple questions to serve as starting points. Before beginning the study I told them to be looking for and listening for: Who did what? Where? When? How? Why? After that, the format had become pretty internalized and there was little need for me to repeat the key questions or process.

Then one person read aloud an entire chapter. The others followed along.

Then we gave them one smaller section from the chapter to discuss in detail, using the questions as a guide. We divided into two groups, with the two leaders who had received more training serving as facilitators for each group. They did not direct the groups. I listened carefully, sitting to one side and not joining or visiting the groups. Sometimes the two leaders did the same so as to avoid overly guiding the process.

We gave no time limits,<sup>11</sup> the groups simply discussed and re-read and discussed until they felt “satisfied.” Then each group presented their insights, as well as a list of new questions which had emerged as they read. As will be clear in what follows, these questions normally had nothing at all to do with the original suggested questions. After both groups shared feedback, which was delivered with frequent interruptions and clarifications from men in both groups, and after both had been able to share all their questions, we re-divided and they were told to search for answers to these new questions in the text. If nothing was found they were told to simply place their questions on the “side” as it were, and consider them not yet answered. Only rarely did we allow answers to such questions to be brought in from other Biblical books or other reference material.<sup>12</sup>

Then the men presented the answers they had found, or not found. This too, frequently led to considerable debate and discussion. As the notes will reveal, I as the resident “expert” did not escape being questioned. In at least one case, documented in my notes, my suggested answer was vigorously disputed and overturned by the group.

The following descriptions of the discussions and insights and questions have been distilled. These notes are not technically attempting to be a verbatim. As such, I fully appreciate that my own selectivity will shape how this material is presented, what was included, what was passed over.

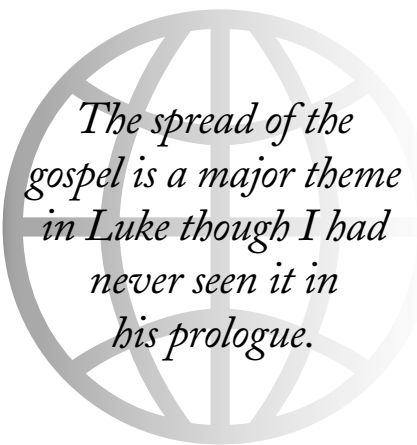
Having said that, the material relating their insights is far more subject

to my editing than the lists of their questions as those emerged. I preserved their questions very much intact and I repeated them back to the group before they began discussing them so that they could state whether I had captured the question well or not.

In the notes which follow, since my purpose in this article is to highlight the concept of cognitive environment, I will take space from time to time to make references to this along the way.

#### Luke 1:1-4

The basic question intended to help



lead them into the inductive process was, “Why did the writer write this? Why is this text here? What is the purpose of the writer?”

Here is a summary of the types of responses given after the group discussions:

- He wrote to people who were not present for these events so that they could know what really happened.
- He wrote in order to guard these things. The phrase used to refer to this was, literally, “keep them safe.” This is a term related to a Hafiz-ul-Quran, a person who guards the Quran by memorizing it. So this respondent was seeing the writing of Luke in a similar way: to make sure it was not lost. This is an example of how cognitive environment shapes what we see and how we describe it.

- He wrote to make sure future generations would know about these things.
- He wrote to encourage other people to also share these things with other people.

This last point is not something explicit in the text at all. My theory is that these men see this point in the text because of their background. Many of them are from an Islamic movement, Tableeq-i-Jamaat, that sees spreading the message of Islam as a sixth pillar of their faith. This is part of their context, their cognitive environment, and as such has shaped how they read the text.

It is worth noting that exegetically, the spread of the Gospel is in fact a major theme in Luke though I had never seen that theme in his prologue. The insight of my Muslim brothers, based on their cognitive environment, may well be illuminating something my cognitive environment had not prepared me to see in these verses. As such this is a case of RT’s concept of communication as an increasingly shared cognitive environment. In this case, mine was enlarged by this process.

#### Questions

There were no real questions after this section, however, at the break, one of the two group leaders came to me and said something like this, “When we used the traditional \_\_\_\_\_ Bible or other Bible society Bibles in other languages, it would take us forever to get the people studying the scripture with us to actually discuss the meaning like this. Instead, when we read those versions, everyone was arguing or asking about why we were reading a Christian book, and why the Prophets were not written about with respect, and why there was such strange terminology, etc. But today, we just got right into talking passionately about what the words mean and the message.”<sup>13</sup>

#### Luke 1 and 2

We actually took this section in a number of smaller divisions but I have condensed the feedback into one.



In this case, the groups went almost immediately into asking questions. They were getting the main flow of the narrative and who did what, and where, etc. But the narrative prompted many questions. I am fascinated by how many of these are questions I never would have thought to ask. On reflection I saw how this process also prompted me to ask the text new questions as well, and to see things I would never have considered being part of Luke's purpose. I did not see Luke's environment as clearly as some of these questions illuminated if for me.

### Questions

1. *Why was Zacharia afraid when he saw the angel?* Some comments included these:

He was a holy man, an Imam. He should have known better. This ties to Islamic ideas of holy men as perfect or nearly perfect. That is, this question arose because of the cognitive environment. However the Quran clearly shows even Muhammad having questions and doubts about things [Surah 10:94]. This raised some questions for me: *Is this a place where the Quran can help us in Bible translation? Would it be a reference in a footnote? Is it too sensitive a subject to handle that way?* But at the least this seems an example of where the Quranic cognitive environment overlaps more with the Biblical cognitive environment than it does with the common Muslim cognitive environment in this country.

Which prayer was answered when Jibril (Gabriel) said to Zacharia, "Your prayers have been answered"? Was Zacharia praying for a child right then? Or was it before this?

2. *Why did Mary go to see Elizabeth and not her own family?* The answer to this ended up being discovered when the groups went back to the text: Elizabeth IS family, etc. So, it was a normal thing. The process of circling back to the text over and over and of the way in which interpretation can happen as a process is highlighted in this example.

## **T***his seems as an example of where the Quranic cognitive environment overlaps more with the Biblical cognitive environment.*

There was also curiosity about Jibril's message concerning Elizabeth.

3. *Why did Elizabeth stay in her home for five months?* As the respondent went on to say, "No woman would do that. It seems very strange."

Of all the questions that I might have foreseen or guessed would arise (so-called theological questions, etc.), it was this last question about why Elizabeth remained in her house for five months that prompted the most passionate, heated, intense, and lengthy discussion. Clearly this was something important, though I have never found any other group in my studies in the USA who thought so!

As the groups went round and round three possible answers emerged as the main contenders:

1. Perhaps this was their culture? This took a long time to come to, until one man related how he had become aware that women in peoples within his country other than his own cultural group did have different customs after the birth of a child.
2. I suggested that perhaps since Elizabeth was elderly, she was worried that too much exertion would endanger the baby (it seemed so natural a possibility to me, given my cognitive environment).
3. She remained five months as an offering of special thanks and praise to Allah for this special child.

Suggestion number two was vigorously debated and in the end rejected with great fervor, drawing on the argument that Elizabeth could not possibly be afraid for the welfare of the child. The reasoning proceeded like this:

Jibril had already told Elizabeth what Allah was going to do in this child's future, so that meant that this future would happen. There was no risk.

Answers 2 and 3 are wonderful examples of how our cognitive environment shapes even the things we think are conceivable answers, let alone what we settle on.

In the end they left this as an open question. If we had voted I think #3 would have beat out #1 as the favored answer. It might have been a close vote, but #3 would have won the debate. Again, in a culture where men elect to go on various lengths of tableeq trips in order to fulfill vows or compensate for a sin, or gain favor, or draw near to Allah, and where Sufis travel from one place to another as a part of various rituals and initiations, the idea of someone deciding to remain five months at home for a religious reason would be a natural contender for understanding Elizabeth's actions.

### Luke 3

The summaries of main points more and more tended to turn into mere repetitions, verbatim, of things that happened in the passage. One man even simply started to read the whole passage again when asked to summarize it. I want to ask more about that in the future. The important and unique insights came in the questions:

*Why did Yahya live in the desert and how old was he?* The participants found the answer when they went back to the text: God had told him to live there, and it was spoken earlier by another prophet that he would do this. They could not figure out his age. In part this was a translation issue: the text they had made it sound like John began to live there in his childhood. When the group pressed me to say if I knew anything, I began to reply, "This is a translation issue..." One of the leaders gently and subtly tapped my arm and it was clear I should not go down that road. I don't recall what exactly I said to change gears.

Later the leader and I processed this interchange. There were two concerns behind why he stopped me:

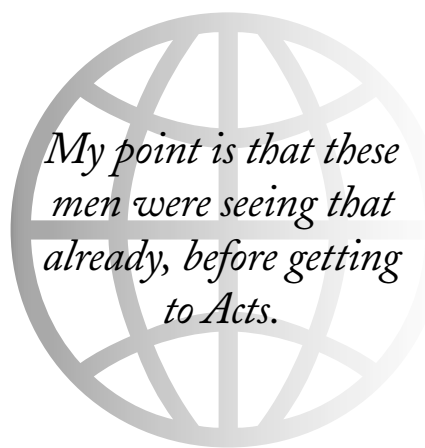
1. He did not want the men in the room to know that others in the room were doing this translation work, especially since he was heading up the translation team. This was a security matter in a place where although we were meeting with believers, we have had people turn against the work later and it is wise if not everyone knows what everyone else is doing.
2. In a Muslim context, talking about this as a translation problem and implying that we could change it would raise major questions. This is an extremely touchy issue in Islam. Already the Bible is seen as changed, corrupted, and unlike the original. This leader was worried that my explanation was going to inadvertently raise questions about the authenticity of the Bible in front of the whole group. He is fully aware that the original Greek text is the one that matters, and it would seem that in Islam with its high value on the original Arabic Quran this would be easy to explain.<sup>14</sup> But it is not.

The discussion proceeded. Although is a possible, though unlikely reading of Luke's Greek that Yahya lived in the desert from his childhood, later someone did put it together that if Isa started at about 30 (stated later in Luke), and he and Yahya were about 6 month apart, then maybe Yahya was older than a child when he went to live in the desert. This became a great example of how scripture builds its own context and also of the way in which translation needs to focus on translating ideas and meaning not just words.

This further highlights a point about cognitive environments we made above. The goal of communication is an increasingly shared cognitive environment. In this case, the cognitive environment of our readers was changing, growing, and increasingly sharing that of the text.

### More Questions

*What did he eat out there?* I realized how I, as a Christian, immediately supplied an answer in my head: locusts and wild honey. But it is nowhere in Luke, not even in chapter 3. I automatically supplied it from other Gospels. Luke apparently does not care, or assumes his readers know. Most Western readers would either assume the answer based on prior knowledge (their cognitive environment would include biblical information perhaps), or even more likely, just would not be interested in that ques-



tion. It would not occur to them to wonder about it. But these men, many of whom had spent lots of time in the desert, were keenly interested in what Yahya would have eaten. Cognitive environment arises again.

*How did the news spread so fast about Yahya?* The easy answer would be that we just don't know. But I noted that they had picked up again on a major theme in Luke: the rapid and ongoing spread of the message. He even seems to construct Acts around that theme to some degree by referencing at various points the numerical growth in the number of believers. But my point here is that these men were seeing that already, before getting to Acts, as a key thing. I have already suggested that this is due to their own context as men involved in the Tableeq movement.

*Where was this happening?* They found the answers in the text.

*Why the 8th day for circumcision?* "We do it on the 6th day, according to Shariah. *Why the 8th back then?*" Again, for Muslims, all the biblical prophets were Muslims. So they would assume these good people in Luke, such as Yahya and Isa, are Muslims. Muslims circumcise on the 6th day. Thus the question comes, why the 8th day?

The translation of Luke 2:21 we were using says they circumcised on day 8 "according to their custom." This reference to custom was added to explain the ceremony. But as we observed the discussion, the main translator suggested to me in a side conversation that he realized we would need to strengthen the translation to show that the "custom" was not just cultural, but was a part of the Shariah of Musa (Moses). Verse 22 makes it clear that the family followed the Law of Moses relative to the offering for purification. We realized we need to make it clear for circumcision as well in our context.

This is a good example of the living and ongoing, iterative translation process. Even in studying the scripture new insights come for improving how it communicates. Indeed there are even deeper insights into what it means. So, the next edition will say "8th day according to the Shariah of Musa." It is perfectly acceptable that there could be changes in the Shariah given to Muhammad, compared to an earlier Shariah given to, say Musa. This again points to the importance of cognitive environment in the interpretive process.

*Who was the first person Yahya actually spoke to?* We held that to see if we would find out later, but there was no clear answer in the text.

*Why does the verse say "Lord of Israel?"* And why does it mention only help for His chosen people, and not for all people? Isn't He Lord of all things? Answers came as we read on and people saw Luke's references to the universal concern of Allah: all nations, all people, etc. Again, it was worthy of note that scripture was pro-

viding the answers directly, though in a process that took time.

*How did Zacharia tell Elizabeth what to name Yahya?* This is not in the text, but clearly she already knows when it comes time. They applied logic and decided that in the same way he wrote it for the crowd that was there, he might have written it for her too. Others thought maybe the angel told her too.

*Did Yahya have disciples/companions? If so, who?* This is left unanswered in Luke, though the issue resurfaces later, as in Paul's discovery of disciples in Acts who knew only the baptism of John/Yahya. We did not go to John's Gospel.

*Was Yahya married?* General assumption was "of course."

*Was Yahya only preparing a way in the desert? Nowhere else?* At first this was seen very literally, as a real road, a path. Only after ongoing discussion did someone suggest, and others agree, that it was a religious, spiritual thing.

## Summary

I began by introducing the reader very briefly to RT. In particular I highlighted RT's notion of cognitive environment. I suggested that I would focus on three aspects of how RT sees cognitive environment's implications for communication. I used those three aspects as lenses for my record of the study of Luke I have just outlined. Those three lenses were:

1. How people process the meaning of the Biblical text from within their own cognitive environment, highlighting how cognitive environment shapes meaning and frames questions that are brought to the text.
2. Ways in which the interpretation of scripture involves a process that results in readers increasingly sharing the cognitive environment of the original text.
3. The reality that translation is itself an iterative, interpretive process.

I have paused at various points to draw attention to how the study of

**T**he cognitive environment of the recipient of communication determines what the recipient will assume to be the meaning of the text.

Luke illuminated the task and process of translation when viewed through those lenses. Rather than repeat those insights here, I will instead attempt a few concluding and encompassing summary statements:

### Translation Is a Process.

Translation as a process includes many of the same elements as are common to communication theory.

Translation is also an interpretive or hermeneutical process.

So far, nothing I have said would be new at all, much less controversial, for translators. However, what RT suggests, and what is borne out in my survey here to at least some degree, is that the cognitive environment of the recipient of communication (in this case, a translation of the Bible) in fact determines what the recipient will assume to be the meaning of the text. As the translator of Ecclesiasticus put it centuries ago, "what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language." As that same translator also said, no amount of diligence in translation effort will make this to be less true.

At best the translator aims at a process whereby his or her own cognitive environment, and the cognitive environment of the recipient, might over time increasingly share the cognitive environment of the original text, however imperfectly that may be true at any given point in the cycle of interpretation and subsequent repeated editing of the translation.

Returning to another author referenced near the beginning of this article, perhaps Cicero's metaphor has much to commend it. He described his aim in translation by saying, "I did not think I ought to count them (i.e.,

the words) out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were."

May our work as translators contribute not just to the completion of New Testaments and Bibles and portions in various languages, as important as that goal is, but also to the living and ongoing process whereby men and women are captured by the "weight" of the Biblical message and find their cognitive environments, indeed their very, entire lives, utterly transformed. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Roberta King in Van Engen, Charles Edward, Whiteman, Darrell L., Woodberry, John Dudley. 2008. *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness: Insights from Anthropology, Communication, and Spiritual Power: Essays in Honor of Charles H. Kraft*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Manuel Jinbanchian's article, "Introduction: The Septuagint to the Vernaculars," in Noss, Philip A., Editor, *A History of Bible Translation; Rome, Edzioni Di Storia E Letteratura*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> I refer the reader to works such as Beekman & Callow. 1974. *Translating the Word of God*. Dallas: I.A.B.; Nida, E. A. Taber. Charles, R.; 1969. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden, E.J. Brill; and Shaw, R. D. 1988; *Transculturation: the Cultural Factor in Pasaden and Other Communication Tasks*. Pasadena, Calif., William Carey Library.

<sup>5</sup> Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson, 1995. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd Edition. Oxford, Blackwell.

<sup>6</sup> Chomsky's model has been seriously criticized by Daniel Everett, particularly Chomsky's claim that recursion formed a universal grammar of cognition (in a 200 page chapter found in Desmond C. Derbyshire and Geoffrey K. Pullum, eds., *Handbook of Amazonian Languages*, Volume 1, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Sperber and Wilson briefly address each of these models and authors in their introduction (1995:3-8). However they carry on an extended dialogue with and critique of Grice through the book.

<sup>8</sup> Asserted by Phillip Stine in his introduction to Gutt's lectures for a group

of Bible translators and later edited for publication (Gutt 1992: 6). I can find no evidence to the contrary. Gutt's thesis was written under Wilson's mentorship and published later as *Translation and Relevance* (2000). The literature that engages Gutt's work can be conveniently traced in the references found in Stephen Pattemore's article, "Framing Nida: The Relevance of Translation Theory in the United Bible Societies" found in Noss, Philip A. Editor; *A History of Bible Translation*; p. 217 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw and Van Engen provide a very helpful and non-technical description of this complex communication reality. Shaw, R. Daniel; Van Engen Charles Edward; 2003; *Communicating God's Word in a Complex World: God's Truth or Hocus Pocus?* Lanham, Md.; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> "Manuscript Bible Study" was developed as a methodology by Paul Byer in his work with InterVarsity. Similar to inductive study the main features of MBS include: far fewer questions are pre-formed and directed to the text than in other inductive study methods; all introductory comments such as are frequently added in paragraph headings of English Bibles are removed; there are no paragraph divisions; chapter numbers and verse numbers are also removed. The reason for these changes is to remove as many of the later additions to the text as possible, rendering the form far closer to how it might have come to the original readers, and allowing the flow of the text itself to guide the reader in seeing the breaks in thought and topics, rather than depending on the opinions of later editors and Bible publishers to provide these.

<sup>11</sup> Though my notes indicate that we spent almost 20 hours on Luke 1 and 2.

<sup>12</sup> In strict MBS methodology, if the answers to new questions are not in the text under consideration the principle becomes something similar to "this is not a question the author seems interested in" and is dropped. We did use this principle at times, but also allowed free range for discussion of what seemed initially to be completely outside the range of Luke's concerns or intent. I did this because I was personally seeking to understand how the context and cognitive environment of these men shaped the types of questions they saw as important, and they ways they saw the text giving answers.

<sup>13</sup> I mentioned above that we were using a new version of Luke written for Muslim readers and seeking to employ Quranic style and use explanatory description for concepts that frequently give Muslims concern.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one of my questions, which I did not think to ask then, is whether part of the problem was in how I phrased the

question. I used the word "translation" instead of "interpretation." The latter is more in keeping with Islamic thinking. And, I know better! But in the flurry of the moment I used the word "translation." If I had said it was an interpretation problem, I might not have had the tug on my sleeve (other than the security concern).

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# Contextualizing Religious Form and Meaning: A Missiological Interpretation of Naaman's Petitions (2 Kings 5:15-19)

by Daniel Shinjong Baeq

In his vivid portrayal of mission over twenty centuries, Lamin Sanneh illustrates in account after account the necessary postulate that Christianity must be translated whenever it crosses cultural boundaries (Sanneh 1989). Missiologists have also insisted that to make the gospel message comprehensible, messengers need to put greater efforts into translating the linguistic and cultural “appropriateness” of the gospel message for the recipients (Kraft 2005).<sup>1</sup> This article suggests that this same appropriateness in communication is witnessed in the cross-cultural, inter-religious encounter of Naaman and Elisha in 2 Kings 5:15-19, and can provide one more biblical filter for sorting and sifting our contextualization efforts. By using linguistic analysis and cultural hermeneutics, I hope to penetrate the complexity of this Old Testament encounter and categorize the possible combinations of biblical meaning when attached to heathen forms.

When God called Abram, a “worshiper of pagan gods” (Josh 24:2), to become Abraham, the founding ancestor of people of faith, he was not called from a vacuum, void of religious or cultural context. God chose to make a covenant with Abram, knowing fully that he was limited by his current religious culture in the understanding of God and the covenant that He wanted to make with him. God used the practices of the Ancient Near Eastern treaty and the epitome of idol worship that Abraham was accustomed to in calling him (Gallagher 2006, 146-147; Petersen 2007, 118-119). Beginning with Abraham I believe God reveals a model of contextualization for His kingdom ministry among people groups of other religious traditions.

In recent decades, missiologists have put greater emphasis on contextualization in presenting the gospel. While many creative and bold efforts have been made, many others feel unsure about making decisions about what degree of contextualization is appropriate. There is fear among the largely Westernized Christian community that contextualization, if unchecked, can lead to syncretism. Recent efforts in contextualization among the Muslims is one such attempt that has received scrutiny.

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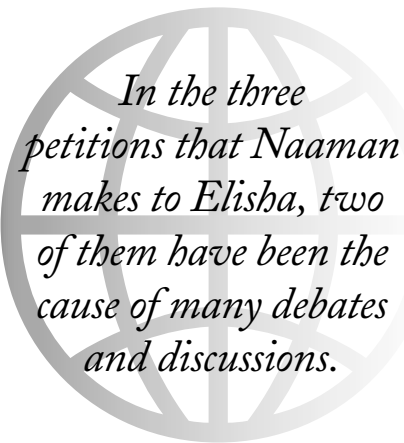
### A Review of Discussions on Mosque Attendance

In “Contextualization Among Muslims” (1989), Dudley Woodberry shed a new light on missionary practices in the Muslim context as well as on the missiological understanding of contextualization. He argued that the “five pillars” in Islam, in fact, are “all adaptations of previous Jewish and Christian forms” (Woodberry 1989, 283). By pointing out that Paul and James continued to attend Jewish synagogues even after the community of new faith was formed, he among others provided biblical evidence that permitted the “followers of Isa” to attend Mosques (Woodberry 1989, 289). His argument resulted in strong support for the “followers of Isa” movement and led to many successful case stories in Muslim contexts, to the development of the C5 “Insider” Movement,<sup>2</sup> and to reaching out to the forgotten peoples behind the formidable walls of religious traditions (Travis 1998; Caldwell 2000; Culver 2000; Massey; Massey; DeNeui 2006).

Those not so enthusiastic about the C5 and Insider Movement cautiously disagreed, believing that any legitimization of attending Mosques will make the “followers of Isa” vulnerable to religious syncretism (Parshall 1998, 409-410). This paper will especially address one particular argument from Tennent’s list of the possible dangers in the C5 movement (Tennent 2006). In his brief exegesis of 2 Kings 5:18-19, Tennent states that practitioners of C5 movement inappropriately legitimize the Mosque attendance of Muslim background believers (MBBs hereafter) by misinterpreting Elisha’s response to Naaman as a positive agreement between Elisha

and Naaman (Tennent 2006, 108). It is this use of the Naaman account in contextualization discussions that has led to this paper’s further examination of 2 Kings 5: 15-19 discourse.

I believe this Old Testament account offers us another biblical case in our missiological discussions surrounding the contextualization of the gospel. I will present different interpretations of Naaman’s petitions and Elisha’s response, using biblical exegesis and theology of mission as it relates to contextualization. In addition, the relationship between form and mean-



ing as described by Paul G. Hiebert (1989) will be utilized. The strength of the link between form and meaning, evolved from Hiebert’s discussion on the “connectedness” between form and meaning,<sup>3</sup> will also be explained in order to develop a model of contextualization. Using this model, the Naaman narrative will be re-examined to find the strength of relationship between forms and meanings embedded within the narrative and deepen our understanding of issues related to contextualization. Further, lessons from the narrative will be used to reevaluate some issues in the

interpretation of the Naaman narrative raised by Tennent (2006).

This story is especially interesting to the study of contextualization, since it is a conversion story of a Gentile that returns to his home culture. This story is similar to situations and dilemmas that many missionaries and newly converted Christians experience in countries where Christianity is scrutinized. In the three petitions that Naaman makes to Elisha, two of them have been the cause of many debates and discussions because they involve Naaman’s actions after his conversion and seem to overlap with his previous religious practices.

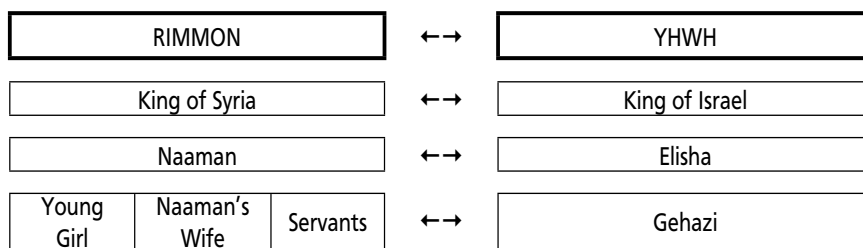
### Synopsis of the Naaman Narrative

The pinnacle of the Naaman narrative is his confession of faith in YHWH after the miraculous healing of leprosy. In the Ancient Near Eastern culture, the disease and its cure signified judgment and divine salvation for the patient. In Smith’s words, biblical healing “is not limited to the relief of physical suffering; healing generally refers to much larger theological issues as well” (1994, 205). Therefore, the narrative<sup>4</sup> of Naaman’s healing is not only an account of who the true God is and who finds favor with God, but also provides the foundational plot of the narrative.

The broader plot of the narrative is the clash of two religious worldviews: YHWH, the true God, against the false god of Syria, Rimmon. By considering parallel characters<sup>5</sup> from the domain of YHWH in contrast to those of Rimmon as shown in Figure 1, readers are prone to assume that those siding with YHWH have a covenantal relationship with God and are the beneficiaries of an unfathomable grace, while those in the domain of Rimmon are heathens. This premise, however, is challenged as the narrative progresses.

Subplots appear as different characters are introduced. There are three contrasting pairs of characters. The first pair of contrasting characters are the King of Aram, Ben-Hadad II, and Johoram of Israel (Kaiser 2000, 42; Schultz 2000, 180). Both are kings of their respective

Figure 1. Contrasted Characters in the Naaman Narrative.



countries and both would be vitally dependent on their god for the wellbeing of their kingdom. The King of Aram was a man who did not know or have a relationship with YHWH. He served and worshiped his god, Rimmon, according to their religious traditions and cultural rituals. But when the healers of Rimmon could not cure “the honorable and highly regarded general,” he released the general to the hands of the prophet of YHWH with a considerable amount of treasure (Kaiser 2000, 44).<sup>6</sup>

The King of Israel shows all the signs of despair when he is approached with Ben-Hadad II's request. Sweeney concludes that the King of Israel “demonstrates his own lack of confidence in YHWH and the prophet of God in his own capital city” (2007, 299). Although Johoram was outwardly connected to YHWH, he neither knew the breadth of God's power nor sustained any expectation that God would help him.

The second set of contrasting figures are the servants of Naaman and Elisha. The young female servant of Naaman's wife is presented as a special person of faith. Despite her sufferings and hardships as a casualty of war, she did not give up her faith in the God of Israel. It is possible to conclude that her faith in the true God enabled her to be confident enough to suggest that Naaman visit Israel, knowing fully that if the mission turned sour it would bring calamity on her. Unlike the king of Israel, however, she did not lose her connection to God. The unshakable faith that a young girl showed throughout sufferings and hardships in her life is often used as an important hermeneutical device in the Asian context to encourage believers in the face of persecution and oppression and to give reasons for endurance.<sup>7</sup>

Naaman's wife, as well as the servants who accompany her, persuade their lord to follow through on the good news. Naaman's wife, upon hearing the news of her husband's hope for cure, persuades Naaman to seek help. The servants

**T***he evaluation of his questionable petitions should be based on the quality of his “spiritual transformation.”*

also contributed positively to the overall configuration of the plot because without their input Naaman would never have washed himself in the Jordan River.

On the contrary, the servant of Elisha, Gehazi, despite his position as YHWH's servant, was not controlled by his faith in YHWH but instead by his material greed. As a consequence of his choice, the curse of leprosy from which the general was released became a shackle to this servant of Israel's prophet (2 Kings 5:27).

Lastly, two most prominent contrasting human characters are Naaman and Elisha. The prophet, Elisha, was a man who had a strong relationship with YHWH. Naaman did not know YHWH nor had any relationship with him, but he came to the prophet of YHWH in desperation to be rid of leprosy that was “beyond everyone's control” in his homeland (Brueggemann 2007, 265). Naaman is clearly disappointed at the reception that he received and the method proposed for healing (v. 11,12). Being fully immersed in his religious culture, he expects rituals similar to those he had previously experienced in his homeland.

After the miraculous healing of Naaman, which may not have happened without the plea and persuasion of his faithful servant, Naaman returns to Elisha to make his confession of faith, which is the climax of the narrative to which all devices of the narrative plot lead.

I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel...your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord (v.15b, 17b, NASB henceforth).

Although YHWH caused the victory of the Aramean general (v. 1), the general was still devoid of the knowledge of the Lord. However, by the sovereign

activity of YHWH, Naaman is brought into an invisible divine congregation of true believers. Of those who were on the Israelite side, the only true believer proved to be Elisha. The King of Israel and Gehazi were not true servants of the Lord. From the religious world of Rimmon, however, Naaman, a foreign general, found favor with God. The critical roles played by the servant girl, Naaman's wife and the servants testify that they were under the will of God, unconsciously obeying God so that they fulfilled their part in this story.

Therefore this narrative suggests that the conventional manner of separating those who belong or don't belong to the true God simply by their religious association is not a valid assumption. We often assume that conversion is simply switching from one religious world, or religious association, to another. But in this narrative we can see that identity in YHWH is not that clear-cut. This narrative forces the missiological question of religious identity and what true conversion involves. It forces us to ask what indicators of change should be present when a person of another faith identifies with Christ.

### *Naaman's Conversion*

Despite the consensus among scholars on Naaman's great confession of faith,<sup>8</sup> their reactions to Naaman's petitions, which shortly follow his confession, display a wide theological spectrum. However, the evaluation of his questionable petitions should be based on the quality of his “spiritual transformation” (Long 1991, 73). Scholars have raised a series of questions on Naaman's conversion and his petitions: Was Naaman's conversion partial or perfect? (Nwaoru 2008, 35) Was his faith faultless or bound to his old belief system? (Buttrick 1962, 490) Was his confession monotheistic, henotheistic,

or monolatric? (Gray 1970, 507; Kaiser 2000, 46; Nwaoru 2008, 37) How then should we evaluate the conversion of Naaman?

According to the theologians of conversion, there are two aspects in the Greek word for conversion, *epistrophe*: directional *metanoia* (repentance) and confessional *pistis* (faith) (Berkhof 1996, 482; Peace 2004, 8). In the case of the Naaman narrative, there is a faith confession that Naaman makes to Elisha, "there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (v.15). On the contrary, it is not easy to find his repentance immediately from the narrative. Naaman could repent of many crimes he may have committed in his military career. There is, however, no evidence of his repentance of any of his previous crimes, and his conversion may seem to be incomplete.

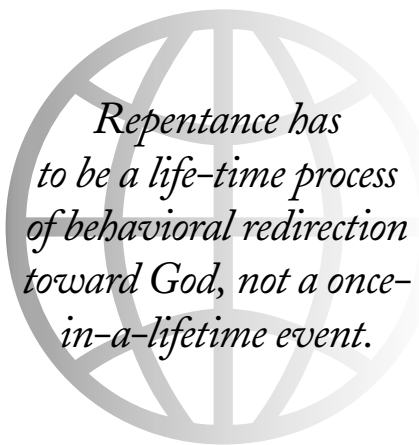
Here we have to carefully examine the biblical words for repentance. The Greek word for repentance, *metanoeo* or *metanoia*, focuses on the "emotional change of one's mind" (Arndt, Danker, and Bauer 2000, 640). But the Hebrew word, *nibam*, is closer to a "directional change" of behavior (Kromminga 1984, 936). In the Old Testament, when the prophets urged the Israelites to repent, it meant a behavioral turn from their idol-worship to become true worshippers of the YHWH. Repentance, therefore, has to be a life-time process of behavioral redirection toward God, not a once-in-a-lifetime event, since people are always under a constant inclination to fall away from God.

If repentance is a directional change of behavior, Naaman's second statement of faith can be accepted as an evidence of repentance: "[Y]our servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD." (v. 17) Directional change is apparent in Naaman's confession. Therefore, I cautiously conclude that Naaman's conversion, which shows his confession of faith and *repentance of directional change*, meets the theological requirement of conversion. However,

it is premature to accept Naaman's subsequent petitions and behavior as indicative of genuine conversion without closer examination.

### *Debate on Naaman's Petitions*

Naaman's petition to take some dirt from Israel back to his country and the request to be pardoned of bowing down at the Rimmon temple have been the center of much controversy and debate among scholars of the Old Testament and of theology of mission. These petitions arose because Elisha refused to accept Naaman's gifts.



### **First Petition: Please Take These Treasures!**

Scholars speculate on why Elisha refused Naaman's gifts. Brueggemann claims that Naaman is acting according to the religious and traditional customs of his country, where heathen prophets often offered their services for money (2007, 269). Just as Naaman's expectation of what Elisha would do to heal him was based on his experiences with heathen prophets in his own country, likewise his offering of gifts after the healing was a compensation for the healing received (Brueggemann 2007, 269).

Also, if the prophet accepted the gifts, Naaman would consider his debt to God or to Elisha fully repaid, or maybe that God can be coerced into doing miracles in return for riches and treasure. Elisha wanted this man to fully understand that it was God's divine will and His power alone that had healed him. This idea is concurrent with the moral and functional perspective of

Sweeney, who says that "by declining to accept the gift, the narrative portrays both YHWH's and Elisha's magnanimity and highlights once again the relative power of Naaman and Elisha" (Sweeney 2007, 300). Elisha's acceptance of the gifts would have sent the wrong message that somehow this miracle was Elisha's doing and thus take the glory away from YHWH.

### **Second Petition: Soil for an Altar?**

Just after Elisha declines Naaman's plea of accepting his gifts, Naaman says, "If not," which indicates a conditional statement. The rejection of the former petition gave cause for the second petition, to obtain "two mules' load of earth" (v.17). Some scholars criticize this petition as an act of "idolatrous superstition" because it reflects his polytheistic territorial concept of divinity and limits the almighty God to the soil of Israel (Keil and Delitzsch 2001, 3:226; Hobbs 1985, 13:66). Others criticized this petition as having a "monolaterous"<sup>9</sup> intention (Nwaoru 2008, 37). Scholars find it difficult to judge whether Naaman decided to *worship* God exclusively (monolatry) or to *believe* God exclusively (monotheism) from the given text. Gray's quote from a German theologian widens our understanding of the context of the narrative.

(Naaman's) reason consented to monotheism but convention bound him practically to monolatry. Eissfeldt has argued that there was already a tendency to monotheism in the cult of *Baal-shamaim* in Syria, so that Naaman was the more prepared to confess that the one God was Yahweh (Gray 1970, 507).

This observation suggests that it is unreasonable to conclude that Naaman's petition was rooted in "idolatrous superstition" or "territorial concept of divinity." Other scholars evaluate his request as a decision to maintain his faith in YHWH using the dirt as a "sacramental attachment" (von Rad 2001, 35) or for simply building his own altar for YHWH (Bullock 1861, 161; Provan 1995, 193; Nwaoru 2008, 35). Whether he intended to build an altar



or to use it as a sacramental attachment, the petition to get earth of Israel indicates the clear intention to worship YHWH alone.

### Third Petition: Worship in the Heathen Temple?

The third petition is even more controversial. Naaman says,

When my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon—when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter (v.18b, NASB).

Many scholars negatively interpret Naaman's petition as based on "polytheistic superstition" (Keil and Delitzsch 2001, 3:226), "religious compromise and superstition" (Hobbs 1985, 13:60,66), or a "pagan notion of territorial deity" (Maier III 1997, 187). Similarly, Kaiser asserts that Naaman "mixes his new Yahwehism with strands of an old paganism" (2000, 47). Smith is most severe and regards this petition as an excuse to get permission for "worshiping another god" (1994, 210). Nwaoru takes this further and surmises that Naaman experienced only a "partial conversion" (2008, 35). A few scholars such as Brueggemann, however, take a more generous position and regard Naaman's petition as "only a social

**M**issionaries must uncover the deeply rooted underlying connection between the cultural form and meaning.

requirement and not a serious theological act" (2007, 269).

To understand Naaman's true intentions, Elisha's response must also be taken into consideration. To Naaman's third petition of pardoning his bowing at the temple of Rimmon, Elisha succinctly replies, "Go in peace" (v. 19a). Scholars differ in their opinion of Elisha's answer as well. Some interpret Elisha's response as a simple farewell in Hebrew (Edwards, Rogers, and Dwight 1839, 2:741; Grieve 1920, 306). Other scholars suggest a neutral interpretation. They propose that Elisha did not give any decisive answers, neither approval nor disapproval (Keil and Delitzsch 2001, 3:227; Fritz 2003, 260; Maier III 1997, 190-191; Kaiser 2000, 48-49). They interpret Elisha's response to mean that now with a new faith in YHWH, Naaman should go back to his country, depending on the guidance of YHWH alone. A number of others are of the opinion that Elisha's answer is a positive affirmation,<sup>10</sup> which acknowledges the "social requirement" and "unavoidable occasions" in Naaman's situation (Provan 1995, 193; Brueggemann 2007, 269).

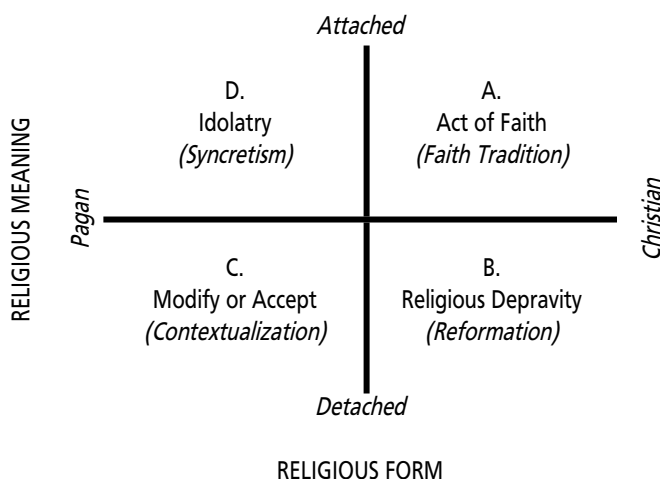
### A Principle of Contextualization

The core discussion of the Naaman narrative has to do with using religious patterns of heathen culture (form) to express Christian faith (meaning). Tillich (1964) defined the relationship between form and meaning by identifying differences between "religious sign" and "religious symbol."<sup>11</sup> Borrowing a theory of linguistics, he contended that if form and meaning have a strong and natural connection, it is a symbol. If the connection is weak (or detached), it is a sign. His account of the relationship between religious symbol and meaning provides a clearer understanding of religious symbolism, especially in the use of Christian symbols.<sup>12</sup>

[S]igns do not participate in any way in the reality and power of that to which they point. Symbols, although they are not the same as that which they symbolize, participate in its meaning and power.... The difference between symbol and sign is the participation in the symbolized reality which characterizes the symbols, and the non participation in the "pointed-to" reality which characterizes a sign (Tillich 1964, 54-55).

Paul G. Hiebert also observes that the development of scientific theory in the West has led to the merging of the cultural form and meaning as an inseparable entity (1989, 103). He advocates the necessity of a *divorce* between form and meaning. According to Hiebert, form and meaning can be connected differently, either arbitrarily, loosely, or tightly. Therefore missionaries must uncover the deeply rooted underlying connection between the cultural form and meaning if they intend to impart a different meaning through accustomed cultural forms (Hiebert 1989, 104). If a local form has an indivisible connection to the pagan religious meaning, it may need to be rejected (Hiebert 1989, 110-115).

Figure 2. Interpretative Graph of Religious Symbols.



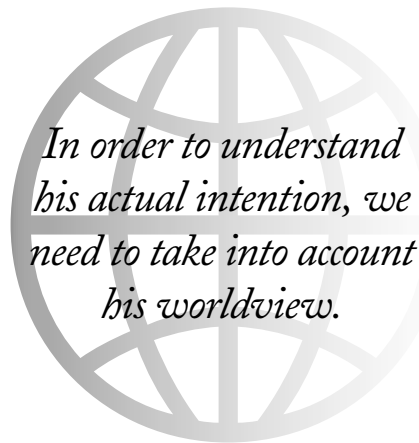
Interpreting the form-meaning relationship of religious symbols is complex, for the Christian context as well as in the context of other religions. Based upon theories of Tillich and Hiebert, a graph might help us see the different realities of religious symbolism (Figure 2 on p. 201). Within a "faith tradition," a Christian form may be attached to a particular Christian meaning as an "act of faith" (Quadrant A). Missionaries can often make the mistake of thinking that this form will carry the same meaning as it crosses religious and cultural boundaries. Since the bond between the Christian form and meaning is very strong in the mind of the missionary, he or she feels compelled to impose it upon the new believers in the mission field. But missionaries should avoid the absolutization of Christian traditions and any grafting of those traditions on to a foreign context by simple transplanting or translation. These traditions should also be contextualized appropriately within any other intellectual, linguistic, and cultural setting.

The area of religious depravity (Quadrant B in Figure 2) is where the Christian meaning is detached from a Christian form, and can often indicate a place in need of reformation and revival. Extensive renewal is constantly required when a Christian symbol or form has lost its meaningfulness. When these forms are transferred to the context of other religions, appropriate contextualization has to be applied with great caution.

When a Christian form and its Christian meaning are detached or are only arbitrarily linked, the form has lost much of its religious connection in the missionary's home country and may easily be dismissed as not having any religious value in the foreign context. While pushing the form onto the target culture is not advisable, the missionary needs to restore the lost meaning of that form and see whether it could be used in the target culture.

When pagan forms are detached from pagan meanings (Quadrant C), the forms become a characteristic of culture with another religious heritage, rather than a form that is crucial to that religion itself. Missionaries often assume that since the form has lost its religious meaning, it can be used to convey Christian meaning. Sometimes, however, minor modifications may be required to create a distance from certain previous meanings.<sup>13</sup>

The final quadrant represents a dangerous area where syncretism often occurs (Quadrant D). This is where



pagan forms and pagan meanings are tightly linked. Therefore, when a non-believer in the mission field comes across that form, it potentially conjures up all the idolatrous meanings associated to that form. Attempts to disassociate the pagan meaning from pagan form and give it a new Christian meaning are extremely difficult and have more often created syncretism rather than effective contextualization. Missionaries, however, should avoid directly attacking or passing judgment without the proper understanding of deep-level meaning and function of religious symbols in this area. If, as Paul Hiebert posited, the level of connection between religious symbols and their meaning can be arbitrary, loose, or tight, then this particular area where religious symbol and meaning are tightly linked requires extensive discussion. Further interaction and examination among local leaders and

believers as a "hermeneutical community" can determine whether (or how) the form and meaning can be detached or not (Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw 1999, 385).

### *Re-evaluation of Two Petitions Using Form-Meaning Dynamics*

The various viewpoints of scholars on the second and third petition of Naaman were reviewed earlier. Now, in light of the previously discussed relationships of form and meaning, the two controversial petitions will be re-examined using form-meaning connection to shed greater clarity on the debate and its implications for contextualization in mission contexts.

#### The Significance of Soil (v. 17)

Altars of animal sacrifice are prominent structures in religious cultures of the Ancient Near East. Israel also had altars for burnt offerings. Even though Naaman used an ancient worldview with a pagan notion of God, we need to be cautious in judging his petition as paganism or syncretism. As was mentioned in the previous exegetical review, some scholars believe that Naaman's petition reflects a "polytheistic territorial concept" of divinity, that the link in his worldview between the almighty YHWH and the soil of Israel is too strong (Keil and Delitzsch 2001, 3:226; Hobbs 1985, 13:66). Although this attachment of pagan theological form is true, a deeper level of speaker's intention still needs to be interpreted.

Naaman's second request of two mule-loads of soil can be analyzed with "deep-level semiotic narrative structure" (Pavel 1985, 91).<sup>14</sup> In order to understand his actual intention, we need to take into account his worldview. In linguistics, an utterance contains a surface meaning and a deep-level meaning; thus, let us examine these levels in Naaman's petition.

Naaman's actual utterance to Elisha is a request to take the soil of Israel, which is the surface meaning. Biblical scholars sense the syncretism in his request because they see an embed-

ded connection between his petition and the old religious worldview. Fritz points out that in the Ancient Near Eastern context, soil and deity are intermingled (2003, 260), and von Rad interprets Naaman's intention as reflecting the belief that there is a "sacramental attachment" between dirt and YHWH (2001, 35). These views, including Hobbs and Keil above, all agree that in Naaman's belief system, the form (soil) had an intricate connection to meaning (god of that land).

This is, however, only a partial interpretation of the deep-level semiotic structure. A fuller interpretation takes the connection one step further. When Naaman confessed his exclusive monotheistic faith (v. 17b) in his heart and mind, he had already replaced Rimmon with YHWH. Thus Naaman's final and deep-level intention can be interpreted as Naaman's intention to worship YHWH.

Let's add our work in Figure 2 to this deeper analysis of Naaman's request. In his theological frame, Naaman was unable to detach the meaning from the form. In his mind, dirt was a direct representation of the deity. When he realized that YHWH was the only true God, he immediately attaches YHWH to the dirt from Israel. In essence, he has taken a biblical meaning, YHWH, and attached it to a pagan framework of worshiping a deity. Naaman's request, however, is a dangerous attempt to contain biblical meaning, the worship of YHWH, in a pagan religious form. As we see in Quadrant D in Figure 2, if there is a tight form-meaning connection

**S**ince Naaman confessed to not worship any of his former gods, it is more reasonable to interpret Naaman's petition in the context of his duties to the King.

in pagan religious symbols, the use of a pagan form endangers Christian meaning with syncretism, even though Naaman was personally able to detach the pagan meaning from its form.

It is improbable that Naaman worshiped YHWH exactly as the Israelites did. More likely, he would have offered up sacrifices in the most reverent and worshipful way he knows. Certainly the likelihood of his generating syncretism was there, but more likely, because the material that made up the altar was from Israel, he would never forget that he is, in fact, worshiping God. That altar would represent no being other than YHWH, the God who searches the hearts of men, the God who would accept his sacrifices.

#### Bowing at the Temple: Detachable Meaning (v. 18)

Naaman's third and final petition to excuse his bowing in the temple can yield deeper meaning with narrative analysis. *Structural semiotic analysis* (Wolde 1989, 24-28) of Naaman's discourse reveals an interesting symmetric meaning structure (Figure 3). The utterance can be divided into six phrases where the first three phrases are mirrored by the last three phrases. In the first and last phrase, Naaman begs pardon (A, A') from the Lord for his bowing (C') in the house of Rimmon (B'). When his master goes

there to *worship* (B), Naaman has to support the King next to him (C). You'll notice that B-B' and C-C' have formatic (syntactic) similarity; yet, even though the discourse is symmetric in form, the meaning behind is not the same. Nelson endorses this in stating, "because his loyalty is to his king and not to Rimmon, as his overfull speech tries to make clear, his request does not undercut his monotheism" (Nelson 1987, 179). In other words, Naaman's bowing is not because of his faith in Rimmon, but because of his duty to the King. Since Naaman confessed to not worship any of his former gods (v.15), it is more reasonable to interpret Naaman's petition in the context of his duties to the king.

As was discussed earlier, our interpretation can only be complete when it includes Elisha's response. Naaman had to return to his home in Aram. But what will happen next is a critical question both to Elisha and Naaman. Naaman knows that as the commander of the army and a notable and powerful official, he is unable to excuse himself from all the state functions, which usually entailed religious rituals. Thus, rather than trying to hide what he would be required to do, he is earnest and honest before Elisha, voluntarily informing Elisha of an unavoidable, inevitable activity in his home land. The fact that he even brought up this subject strongly indicates that Naaman had already considered the future and foreseen what serving YHWH would entail in his home country. In essence, Naaman is explaining to Elisha that even though he has to physically bow down before the idol, he is not worshipping the idol. He wants Elisha to know where his heart is, what his true intentions are.

In this context, the form is the act of bowing in the temple. The meaning associated with this form is the

Figure 3. Symmetric Structure of Naaman's Second Petition (2 Kings 5:18).

A In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant:  
 B when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to *worship* there,  
  
 C and *he leans on my hand* (to **bow** in the house of Rimmon)  
 C' and I *bow* myself in the house of Rimmon,  
 B' when I **bow** myself in the house of Rimmon,  
 A' the LORD pardon your servant in this matter  
 (2 Kings 5:18, NASB, parenthesis and emphasis is mine)

worshipping of Rimmon. Based on Naaman's confession of faith, one cannot assume that he will be worshipping Rimmon by bowing at the temple, since he explicitly confessed that there is no other God other than YHWH. Thus even though he bows out of necessity, he has detached any spiritual meaning from this transaction and is only performing an empty act.

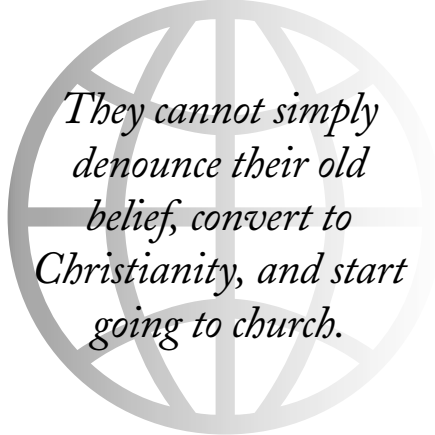
### *A Short Response to Tennent*

What is the potential contribution of this interpretation of Naaman's narrative to the theology and practice of contextualization? Can we develop a principle of contextualization based upon this story? As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Tennent is critical about the mosque attendance of an MBB. He presents two arguments. In his first argument, he states that if Naaman accompanied the king because the King was frail, it would legitimize mosque attendance only in cases where the new convert had to dutifully accompany "his ailing and feeble father" (Tennent 2006, 108).

However, as it was pointed out earlier, the reason for Naaman's temple attendance was because of the "social pressure" and expectation that came with his position as the chief general of the King (Brueggemann 2007, 269). Muslim "followers of Isa" can be said to be under similar social pressures. They cannot simply denounce their old belief, convert to Christianity, and start going to church. They will be disowned by their families, communities, and society at large and possibly face life-threatening situations. Tennent asserts that C5, if social pressure is the case, is comparable to Naaman's case: it is not a C5 movement anymore because the condition is more likely close to C6 (hiding identity and faith in Christ). In the passage, there is no explicit clue as to whether Naaman concealed or disclosed his new faith to the king and people around him. Yet, since the king and the people in the palace will hear about Naaman's miraculous healing, it is plausible that they

may also know about Naaman's new faith in YHWH. If this is the case, Naaman's case can be applied to the C5 movement as well.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, Tennent assumes that Naaman already had guilty feelings when he asked Elisha for "*forgiveness*" because "they both knew (it) was wrong" (Tennent 2006, 108). This interpretation, however, has shortcomings because the symmetrical structure of his petition explicitly showed that his bowing did not have the same meaning as his master's bowing, which was described as



*They cannot simply denounce their old belief, convert to Christianity, and start going to church.*

"worshipping" to Rimmon. If he does not attach a pagan spiritual meaning to his form of bowing, it should not be interpreted as an act of idolatry. Naaman in fact sought *understanding* from Elisha because even though he appears to be bowing at the temple of Rimmon, he is only going through the motions and has detached spiritual significance from the act of bowing to Rimmon.

### *Conclusion*

As all theologians acknowledge, biblical messages are not always found in the literal meanings of the scripture. It is important that in a narrative discourse like that of Naaman's story, the interpretations of passages be in agreement within the context and not in conflict with each other. The Naaman narrative shows a positive inner coherence between his conversion and consequent petitions. Naaman's petitions, though their

surface structures indicate an affinity to his old belief system (form), should be interpreted from a conversion that indicates his genuine commitment to YHWH (meaning). Further, since Jesus comments positively about Naaman's healing story in Luke 4:27, inter-textual agreement is reached when Elisha's response to Naaman is also accepted as positive.

Contrasting characters in the narrative raised a question of who the true people of God were. Those who have a "theo-centered directionality,"<sup>16</sup> whose inclinations lean toward God, consciously or unconsciously, are the people of God in reality. A conventional boundary of religious culture, one which was used to divide Jews and Gentiles, was found to be inaccurate. Therefore, the readers of the Naaman narrative should acknowledge that God is at work not only among the Israelites but also among the Gentiles, in and through situations prior to their conversion experience. Traditionally, mission in the context of other religions has often focused on extracting a new believer from their pagan religious context. Then the new convert becomes isolated from the community of his own people with lesser possibilities to bring others to Christ. There has been less appreciation for the *theo-centered directionality* of those like Naaman who find themselves within other religious associations.

Can we simply allow new believers to attend religious rituals at a Buddhist temple or worship at a Mosque? Or should we ban the pagan temples altogether? Stuart Caldwell, a practitioner and scholar of the insider movement, takes a negative view on the "place-location" interpretation of the pagan temple issue. In his research on "Jesus in Samaria," Caldwell concludes that Jesus' response to a Samaritan woman, "not on this mountain nor in Jerusalem temple" (John 4:21), actually implies his recognition of both places (Caldwell 2000, 26). His interpretation indicates that if a worshiper can revere God "in spirit and in truth," the actual place does

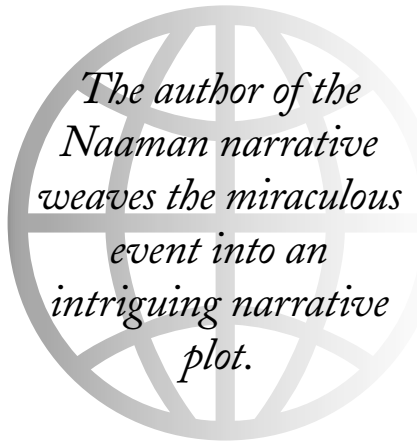
not matter.<sup>17</sup> However, although Caldwell's view respects the subjective position of the worshipers, it does not adequately deal with objective understanding and the relationship one has with other members of the faith community.

The lesson of the Naaman narrative advises us to allow a new believer to remain in the person's own familiar context while consistently discerning and developing better ways for the new believer to express his new faith in God. The task of the missionary is not only to coach new believers in preaching the gospel, but to assist them in cultural analysis, and to apply the form-meaning dynamics in religious symbolism as they seek together to contextualize the gospel. **IJFM**

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- and worldview for a better communication, the gospel message that they preach will remain a foreign religion.  
<sup>2</sup> John Travis (a pseudonym) developed "C1-C6 spectrum" to portray the degrees of "Christ-centeredness" in the expression of Muslim background believers (Travis 1998). His article provided and pioneered the C5 movement. According to Travis, the C5 believers identify themselves as "Muslim followers of *Isa Al Masi*." They do not dramatically change their religious practices even though they do so in faith confession. The C5 movement has brought controversial discussions among both practitioners and missiologists (Parshall 1998; Travis 2000; Tennent 2006).  
<sup>3</sup> Hiebert's idea of connectedness between form and meaning is compatible to the linguistic and theological concept of sign and symbol. The prominent French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), identified the level of connection between "signifier" and "signified." If there is an arbitrary connection between the "signifier" and the "signified," it is a "sign." If there is a natural connection, it becomes a "symbol." (Saussure 1972, 65-68) The German theologian, Paul Tillich, also identified similar relationship between "religious sign" and "religious symbol." (1964)  
<sup>4</sup> Provan also suggests that the books of First and Second Kings should be studied as narratives in which "plots" are found as literary devices (1997, 27). To portray this conversion story of a Gentile, the author of the Naaman narrative weaves the miraculous event into an intriguing narrative plot. Following this informed suggestion, it is proper for us to start finding literary plots and their hidden meanings.  
<sup>5</sup> As a literary plot, Alan Smith focuses on two "major characters," Naaman and Elisha (Smith 1994, 205). By eliminating the *minor* characters, he limits his research without taking account of the bigger picture of the narrative in its reductionism. Kim tries to expand this concept of "main character" by marking the importance of the slave girl's role in the whole plot. However, the overall effort of Kim's feministic hermeneutics made this young slave girl (female) stand alone, even without Naaman's wife, against the other male characters (Kim 2005). In the given text, we observe that there are non-dismissible characters whose relationships positively contribute to the Naaman narrative; his wife, a young slave girl, the king of Syria, and servants who accompany Naaman to Israel. Elisha was also present with the king of Israel and his servant, Gehazi.



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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> While missionaries need to deculturate their mother culture so that they become messengers of the gospel, they also need to find contact points or common grounds to present the gospel that is meaningful to the hearers as well. Unless they actively research and evaluate local culture

<sup>6</sup> The true intention of the King is uncertain, as some speculate that the reason for sending Naaman to Israel may have been a way to create an excuse to wage war against Israel. However, what is certain is that YHWH orchestrated all things so that Naaman would arrive at Elisha's door and later be healed.

<sup>7</sup> Nwaoru accounts for the meaning of the Israelite girl's situation missiologically, suggesting that the young girl "saw the problems of her life as opportunities to propagate her faith and to bear witness to the healing/saving power possessed by YHWH's representative." (Nwaoru 2008, 29) It is not certain whether the Israelite girl actually acknowledged Naaman's diseases as an opportunity of evangelism or not. However, it is evident that YHWH used her life to make the narrative happen for Naaman's salvation under his sovereignty. It is also interesting to compare a similar story in contemporary Ethiopia in which a kidnapped girl, Kakalla Amale, was forced to become the third wife of a Muslim man, Ato Jate Malegu. This laid a foundation for the Kale Heywet Church and the conversion of the whole village (Dindamo 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Naaman's confession indicates a major shift in his worldview. He denounces the existence of any other god except YHWH and that is why he will no longer offer burnt offerings nor make sacrifices to other "gods." He declares that the Lord, who resides in Israel, is the true God. Unlike Naaman's confession of YHWH as Israel's regional God, the plot of the narrative as a whole proves that YHWH is the True God of the earth and His power goes beyond the limits of ethnic, religious, and national boundaries (Smith 1994, 207; von Rad 2001, 30-31). Gray and Jones gave Naaman's confession high marks in comparison with the Islamic monotheistic *shahada* (Gray 1970, 507; Jones 1984, 418) However, Gray carefully diagnosed Naaman's situation as a form of "monolatry." (Gray 1970, 507)

<sup>9</sup> The dictionary meaning of this word is "worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods."

<sup>10</sup> Mackay re-narrates Elisha's response; "Your heart is now filled with peace through the knowledge of Jehovah's grace; now wherever you go, whatever you do, take heed that you never lose that peace which is now your portion." (1882, 111)

<sup>11</sup> His idea is very similar to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a prominent French linguist who claimed that "no word is inherently meaningful. Rather a word

## Instead of showing "lotus hands," Christians [in Cambodia] press the palms firmly so that they become "prayer hands."

is only a 'signifier,' i.e., the representation of something, and it must be combined in the brain with the 'signified,' or the thing itself, in order to form a meaning-imbued "sign." If there is a natural connection between the "signifier" and the "signified," it becomes a "symbol." (Anon. 2010)

<sup>12</sup> Though Paul Tillich perceived religion as a system of symbols (1964), his failure of cognition of religious reality imprisoned faith in a philosophical and religious symbolic system. Therefore, his cognition of God cannot overcome the religious symbolism. Unlike the evangelical cognition of God as a personal and relational being, God, to Tillich, God became an impersonal being imprisoned in a symbolic religious system. The following statement clearly reflects Tillich's cognition of God: "The fundamental symbol of our ultimate concern is God." (Tillich and Scharlemann 1988, 252)

<sup>13</sup> For example, Cambodians greet each other by pressing palms together in front of face and bowing at the same time (hands should be shaped as if they hold an egg). This is called *sompeab(k)*. The shape of lotus hands symbolizes dedication of life to the Buddha. Therefore, in some Cambodian churches, missionaries taught new believers the Korean bow or the Western "hi" (waving one hand over one's shoulder), which is improper and absolutely foreign to the local non-believers. In this case, simple modification and rendering with new Christian meaning would bring cultural appropriateness. Instead of showing "lotus hands," Christians press the palms firmly so that they become "prayer hands." When they greet each other, they can confess in their heart, "I pray for you."

<sup>14</sup> In order to interpret the intension behind Naaman's request, one needs to consider Noam Chomsky's famous theory of "transformative syntax." In his book, *Aspect of the Theory of Syntax* (Chomsky 1965), he observed a deeper meaning behind the syntax, the surface structure; of a language. In *Language and Mind* (Chomsky 1972), he argues that linguistics should not be a study of utterances, but of the "human mind" revealed in the "inner relationship between sound and meaning." (Chomsky 1972, 100-114)

<sup>15</sup> A Muslim writer in her article titled, "Secret War: Protecting Yourself, Your Family, and Your Community from

Missionaries," views the C5 believers as "heretical or confused Muslims" since they profess a different faith from the Muslim majority (Zaid 2006).

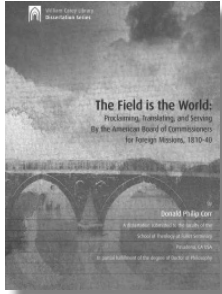
<sup>16</sup> To articulate this, the concepts of "centered-set" and "directionality" are borrowed from Hiebert (Hiebert 1994, 123).

<sup>17</sup> Caldwell's view, however, is also deficient in dealing with the weak believers (1Cor 8:1-13) who cannot worship YHWH "in spirit and in truth" with full knowledge, genuine emotion, and sound judgment of their socio-religious context.

# Book Reviews & Notes

*The Field Is the World: Proclaiming, Translating, and Serving by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-40*, by Donald Philip Corr  
(Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, 320pp.)

—reviewed by Scott Hedley, research associate in Asia



Corr's research in this volume is important because it carries us back to the early nineteenth century and reveals the strategic goals of America's first voluntary mission organization: the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

The division of chapters displays the scope of Corr's considerations:

(1) introduction, (2) sermons preached

to the ABCFM annual meeting, (3) proclamation on the field by ABCFM missionaries, (4) proclamation by indigenous preachers, (5) Bible translation by board missionaries, (6) Education, medicine and social concern.

*Strengths of the book.* The book highlights an important goal of America's first and, for a significant period of time, largest mission organization. ABCFM administrators, supporters and missionaries between 1810 and 1840 considered propagating the Gospel to be the highest priority, with Bible translation an important complement to preaching. As someone involved in Bible translation in Asia, and who shares its noble objective, I wanted to read this historic record of the ABCFM. Indeed, the book shows that the ABCFM emphasis on *preaching the Gospel to all nations* was found in the sermons given at the annual meetings of the ABCFM.

The book was also helpful in exposing some of the appropriate and inappropriate strategies of the ABCFM. One helpful ABCFM strategy was encouraging new believers to develop their own theology statements. It seems that some of the believers in China were able to develop a complete statement of Protestant doctrine (p.165). This type of indigenous effort, if true, is very noteworthy and a bold challenge to modern methods of contextualization. It goes hand in hand with the ABCFM's strategy of encouraging the missionaries to learn the vernacular languages and of addressing the native audience in their own vernacular language (p.175). Some ABCFM missionaries went as far as producing vernacular dictionaries, as Goodell did in Turkish (p. 229). (Unfortunately, Corr did not provide any bibliographic reference for this dictionary).

However, Corr also highlights ABCFM practices that we might today consider inappropriate. First, he points out that International Journal of Frontier Missiology

ABCFM missionaries seemed at times more interested in Christianizing natives *out* of their culture rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to transform them *within* their culture. For example, instead of training indigenous church leaders to baptize new believers, the missionaries insisted on baptizing new believers themselves (p.82).

A second aspect of the ABCFM "Christianizing approach" was that the ABCFM missionaries insisted on nationals taking on "Christian" names which were chosen by ABCFM donors. Corr proposed two possible reasons for this naming practice. First, the original names of the nationals were thought to be tainted by Hinduism or other religions (p.146). Secondly, native names were often hard to pronounce by Westerners (p.147). However, the problem with requiring new names for these new believers was that they usually had no relevance within the indigenous cultures. Individuals with such names often stood out as not being a part of society. Finally, Corr notes that this naming practice created serious complications when the nationals wanted to get married.

A third aspect of the ABCFM "Christianizing" approach was the "mission station approach." This practice involved the extraction of national children out of their families in order to live on the mission compound, both to keep them away from their "heathen parents" and to facilitate the preaching to the young people. But the "mission station approach" does not facilitate indigenous, self-propagating fellowships of believers.

A fourth shortcoming of the ABCFM approach was the reliance on literate means of scripture distribution, a means foreign to most unreached people groups. Corr mentioned ABCFM missionaries who used preaching and tract distribution for delivering the gospel (p.170). But, since he made no mention of oral Bible storying, the reader can only assume that the ABCFM missionaries did not use this method.<sup>1</sup>

A fifth shortcoming of the ABCFM approach was that it seemed that the ABCFM missionaries did not allow the local people to choose their own orthography, the orthography which would eventually be used to produce the Bible in the local languages (p.236).

*Potential weaknesses of the book.* The book often refers to concepts that are never defined for the general mission audience. For example, Corr refers to a concept called the *New Measures* (p. 18f), yet he never defined the term. Corr also referred to the *Lancasterian schools* and the *Lancasterian method* but he never defined those terms either. As a reader of the book, I felt the need for more historical aids to help me follow the text.

Corr has a tendency to make blanket statements which may require some further missiological development. He mentioned at one point that the converts of ABCFM missionaries became overqualified and unable to live on a native salary and return to rural life (p. 138). I would disagree with this blanket statement and say the "over-qualification" would



depend on the type of training that the converts received. But the author fails to develop the context in which we can see just how this “over-qualification” happened and how it prevented them from returning to native life. For instance, if ABCFM missionaries trained these new converts in Koehler’s oral Bible story telling methods, this “over-qualification” might not have been the case (Koehler 2010).

Overall, I found Corr’s research to be helpful for understanding the history of the ABCFM and some of the appropriate and inappropriate strategies that they implemented. This was especially true of the latter, the inappropriate strategies. Understanding how and why these inappropriate strategies did not work can help prevent the same mistakes in our mission endeavors.

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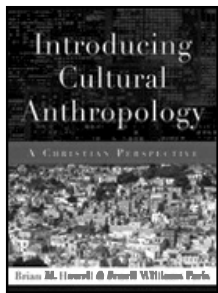
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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Paul Koehler, in his book *Telling God’s Stories With Power* (2010 William Carey Library) shows the power of oral Bible story telling in facilitating people movements to Christ in India.

*Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, by Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, 261+xiipp.) [Projected release date is December 2010; as of this writing, the pagination does not include the projected index]

—reviewed by Edwin Zehner



Evangelical Christians have long needed an introductory anthropology text designed especially for them, a text that introduces anthropological topics in ways understandable to the uninitiated, that takes Christians’ concerns into account, and that demonstrates contemporary anthropology’s relevance to them as people living, ministering, and serving

in increasingly complex and multi-cultural situations.

*Introducing Cultural Anthropology*, by Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, addresses this need beautifully. Privileging no particular perspective, other than the value of being grounded in contemporary anthropology while also being grounded as faithful Christians, they introduce standard anthropological topics and concepts—and also a few less standard ones—in language and with examples that are close to home, that draw on their personal field experiences, and that

take into account the specific concerns, themes, and ministerial potentials that may be of greatest interest to Christians.

Drs. Howell and Paris are ideal authors of such a text, and their personal backgrounds make the book especially useful not only for those considering preparation for frontier mission at home and abroad, but also for those who would like an accessible introduction to how anthropology treats certain topics today. In many ways the text is an extension of their personal experiences as anthropologists who have studied Christian communities, who are active in local congregations, and who incorporate an engaged Christian perspective in their teaching at leading Christian institutions.

Brian Howell is associate professor of anthropology at Wheaton College (Illinois). He studied at Wesleyan University, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Washington University (St. Louis), and did a Ph.D. dissertation drawing on work among Southern Baptists in the northern Philippines. He writes in the areas of globalization, global Christianity, and short-term missions, and to a lesser extent on race and religion in churches in the United States. He is also president of the Network of Christian Anthropologists.

Jenell Williams Paris is a professor of anthropology at Messiah College. A graduate of Bethel University (Minnesota), where she also later taught for several years, she earned her Ph.D. in anthropology at American University (Washington, DC), doing dissertation research focused on political activism and community formation in a low-income neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Her work focuses on urban anthropology, race, gender, and sexuality, with attention also to urban ministry, cultural pluralism, and service to the poor.

As for the book, it is well organized, with a good selection of topics. The first chapter introduces the discipline of anthropology while the second discusses ways to think about the central concepts of “culture,” “cultures,” “ethnocentrism,” and “cultural relativism.” Middle chapters discuss topics ranging from language, to social structure and inequality, to cross-cultural and anthropological studies of gender and sexuality, religion and ritual, kinship and marriage, power and authority relationships in society, and globalization and cultural change. The next-to-last chapter provides a brief introduction to contemporary anthropological theory, and the final chapter focuses on practical applications, with special focus on the work of Christian anthropologists.

Each chapter begins with discussion of general concepts and their contemporary relevance, and then proceeds to issues and questions of special interest to Christians. Each chapter ends with a glossary of key terms and a pair of “devotions” that draw on passages of scripture to spark thinking about the chapter’s relevance to our lives as Christians in society.

As they proceed, the authors draw frequently on their own research and on the experience of other Christian anthro-

pologists. Short set-aside boxes discuss such questions as whether the United States is a uniquely “Christian” culture (the answer depends on how you look at it), whether “American” can be conceived as an ethnic category, John Calvin’s theology of politics, the significance of the “kinsman redeemer” in the biblical story of Ruth and Boas, and examples of Christian anthropologists studying such topics as Islam and globalization.

Several of the chapters deserve special praise. For example, the chapter on culture discusses how and why this notion has changed over time, and why anthropology’s “cultural relativism” concept is useful and how it differs from the more problematic notions of moral or epistemological relativism. It also discusses common metaphors for the culture concept, ending with the notion of “culture as a conversation,” a metaphor highlighting anthropologists’ recent focus on how shared cultures engage humans with each other while not necessarily homogenizing them.

The chapter on gender and sexuality is especially important, discussing complex issues with sophistication while remaining accessible. Many of its discussions introduce conceptions that will be new to many of this journal’s readers, but in doing so it points out the cross-cultural observations that made these considerations necessary, the biases they seek to address, and some of the biblical and ministerial issues to which they may relate. Many of these issues have been little discussed in missiological training to date, yet they are directly relevant to situations that may be encountered in the field, and to a degree they are already in the awareness of the younger generation entering ministry. Consequently this chapter is a must-read even for missionary trainers and administrators, while its footnotes suggest routes into further reading.

The chapter on globalization is equally useful, providing conceptual frameworks for thinking about the larger global processes that often impact local communities and ministries. In doing so it notes some of the real-world issues and conflicts that have been associated with these processes, and it discusses some ways Christians have been responding.

The chapter on anthropological theory deserves special praise. Despite its brevity, it works better than anything else I have seen in helping evangelicals understand how they can integrate recent conceptual developments with their prior work and faith commitments. Opening with discussion of early theories from Durkheim to functionalism to structuralism, it presents newer developments like post-modernist and feminist anthropology as necessary supplements addressing specific needs and omissions rather than revolutions sweeping away all that preceded them.

This is a sensible approach, and it helps that the authors have themselves worked within the newer frameworks (in Brian’s case even using feminist “standpoint” theory to argue for greater anthropological attention to evangelical Christians’ perspectives). This enables them to discuss

recent developments in straightforward terms while demonstrating both in this chapter and elsewhere in the book why anthropological theory matters even for those who do not plan to become anthropologists.

The final chapter builds on this point, discussing the unique contributions anthropological methods and perspectives can provide on practical issues, and pointing out ways they can be useful in personal and ministerial life, especially in cross-cultural ministries serving the global Christian community. Drawing on examples from corporations who have asked anthropologists to help them design better products for people in developing nations (flashlights on cell phones, for example), to a former anthropology major who used his linguistics training to learn how to communicate better with his autistic daughter, to discussions of why anthropology matters in ministry and mission, the authors make a persuasive case.

I am aware that there already exist significant works addressing anthropology and Christianity, including well-known efforts by Charles Kraft, Sherwood Lingenfelter, and Paul G. Hiebert.<sup>1</sup> Also deserving special mention are such people as Ralph Winter, who was trained as an anthropologist, and the culturally astute Donald McGavran.

However, the best known of these works are nearly thirty years old, and none of them have digested recent theoretical, conceptual, and methodological developments in quite the way that Howell and Paris do. It is hard to think of another recent work by Christians that so effectively introduces contemporary anthropology’s central concepts, that addresses issues of practical relevance to evangelicals, and that familiarizes readers with the work of other Christian anthropologists who are modeling ways of being loyal to their faith while engaging with the mainstream of their discipline.

In sum, this book is a re-invitation to anthropology. I highly recommend it not only for the undergraduate students it addresses but also for more advanced readers who desire an accessible introduction to how anthropologists think today, the topics they address, and how that may help their lives, work, and ministry. **IJFM**

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### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kraft’s *Christianity in Culture* (1978); Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Meyers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (1st ed. 1986, 2nd ed. 2003); Paul G. Hiebert’s (1985) *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, and the introduction to the second edition of Paul G. Hiebert’s *Cultural Anthropology* (1st ed. 1976, 2nd ed. 1983).

# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, we point you to resources outside of the IJFM that we hope you'll find helpful: other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, YouTube videos, etc. We welcome suggestions, but cannot promise that we will publish each one we receive. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes just give the title of the article and the main web address or a suggested Google search.*

## The Son and the Crescent

Collin Hansen's anticipated article in *Christianity Today*, "The Son and the Crescent," finally hit the presses in February 2011 (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/february/soncrescent.html>). Hansen offers his take on both sides of the debate about the translation of the phrase "Son of God" in the Scriptures among Muslim majority populations. He has most likely provided the broadest circulation to this issue among American Christians to date, an issue that has been debated almost exclusively by mission personnel over the past decade. He makes it clear that the paraphrasing of this Christological title is effective in certain translations and allows Muslims for the first time to respect and read the Bible. He both interviews Rick Brown and quotes from two of his 2005 *IJFM* articles on this topic (22:3 and 22:4, see [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org)). But he also lines up theologians who examine the fidelity of this paraphrasing. One is suspicious that Hansen's terse quotes at times can fail to contain full perspectives on such complex translation matters. The *IJFM* may call on certain of these theologians to give more complete positions in upcoming issues.

## Interpreting Insider Movements

The January issue of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* highlighted articles which attempt to reconcile perspectives on the insider approach to contextualization. Lowell de Jong's article, "Insider Believers and the Empathy of God," as well as Robert Johnson's "Toward a Greater Unity in Muslim Ministry," each examine aspects of this debate and try to increase sensitivity and better communication. The January issue of *First Things* also included an article by Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Evangelizing Islam," which attempted to address this issue.

The *Cape Town Commitment* that emerged from Lausanne's continuation efforts this past October also maintains an open and sensitive posture towards insider movements (<http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment>). It states the following:

### *Love Respects Diversity of Discipleship*

So-called "insider movements" are to be found within several religions. These are groups of people who are now following Jesus as their God and Saviour. They meet together in small groups for fellowship, teaching, worship and prayer centred around Jesus and the Bible while continuing to live socially and culturally within their birth communities, including some elements of its religious observance. This is a complex phenomenon and there is much disagreement over how to respond to it. Some commend such movements. Others warn of the danger of syncretism. Syncretism, however, is a danger found among Christians everywhere as we express our faith within our own cultures. We should avoid the tendency, when we see God at work in unexpected or unfamiliar ways, either (i) hastily to classify it and promote it as a new mission strategy, or (ii) hastily to condemn it without sensitive contextual listening.

In the spirit of Barnabas who, on arrival in Antioch, "saw the evidence of the grace of God" and "was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord" ([www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#\\_ftn72](http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#_ftn72)), we would appeal to all those who are concerned with this issue to:

- Take as their primary guiding principle the apostolic decision and practice: "We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God" ([www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#\\_ftn73](http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#_ftn73)).
- Exercise humility, patience and graciousness in recognizing the diversity of viewpoints, and conduct conversations without stridency and mutual condemnation ([www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#\\_ftn74](http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment#_ftn74)).

## Mobile Phone Partnering

In the last issue of *IJFM* (27:3, Fall 2010) we presented "The Little Phone That Could: Mobile-Empowered Ministry." Recently, sixteen participants from fifteen mission agencies and ministries continued in this same vein, tackling the broad picture of mobile ministry and details of how a partnership might emerge around their common vision, "that within ten years every unreached person will have had a chance to encounter Christ and His kingdom in a compelling, contextualized fashion through their personal mobile device." If you are interested in an executive summary of this meeting, you can read it at <http://tinyurl.com/MobileSummitSummary>. Feel free to write if you have any questions or comments. **IJFM**

ANNOUNCING: THE SECOND ANNUAL

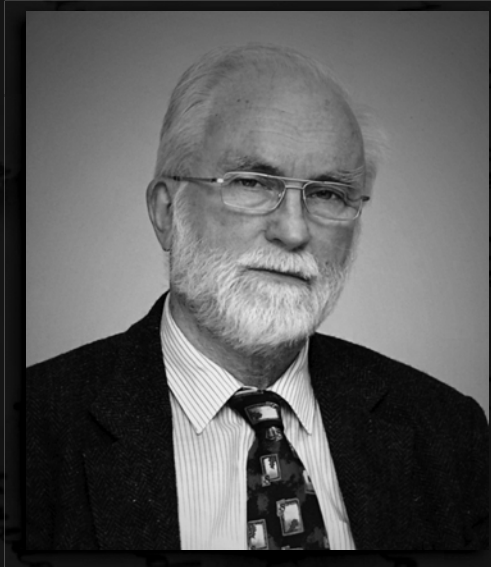
# Ralph D. Winter Lectureship

To be convened on the campus of  
**The U.S. Center for World Mission,**  
Pasadena, California

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April 12th-14th, 2011

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THEME:

*“Turning Points in World  
Church History”*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

Andrew Walls, Ph.D.

The second annual Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship will be held at the U.S. Center for World Mission on April 12-14, 2011. Dr.

Andrew Walls of Scotland will present five lectures on Turning Points in World Church History. Special venues for missiological interaction with Dr. Walls will be offered. Complete details will be released in the coming weeks.

For more information, please go to [www.uscwm.org/rdwlectureship](http://www.uscwm.org/rdwlectureship)