

IJFM

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The Journal
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Frontier Missiology

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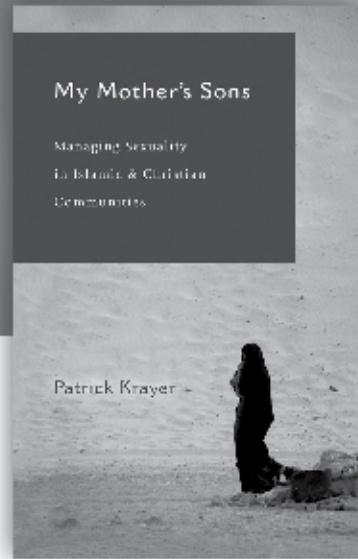
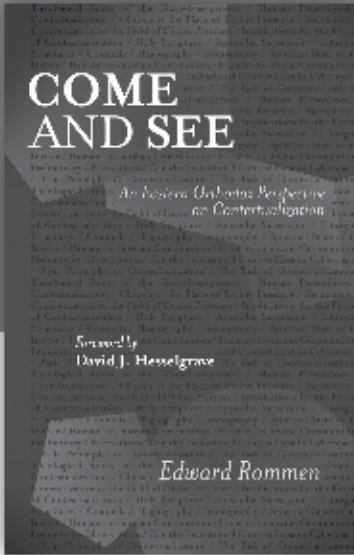
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Come and See (New) **An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Contextualization**

Edward Rommen

The primary thesis of *Come and See: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Contextualization* is that the kind of contextualization called for in promulgating the biblical gospel leads to more than correct information about the Christ of the gospel; it also leads to a personal and life-changing relationship with the Christ who is the gospel.

What we must never forget is that the gospel is the person of Christ and that contextualization begins with an invitation to a relationship with Christ and ends with the intimacy of divine-human communion. If the gospel is primarily information, then the task of evangelism is the proclamation of a particular message, and contextualization is the adaptation of that message to each socioreligious context it encounters. But if the gospel is a person, then the task of evangelism is to introduce that person, and contextualization is the process of creating a context within which the invitation can be meaningfully issued.

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ISBN 978-0-87808-534-7 Edward Rommen
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My Mother's Sons (New) **Managing Sexuality in Islamic & Christian Communities**

Patrick Krayner

My Mother's Sons provides a thoughtful model for how Western Christian workers can respectfully negotiate sexual boundaries and norms in Muslim contexts. Westerners are inclined to impose their own culturally shaped notions of gender equality and justice on non-egalitarian communities, alienating the very people they are seeking to serve. The author draws on his own research among Pakistani Pashtuns, intercultural theory, and exegesis of Christian and Islamic sacred texts to show that it is possible to work for transformational change without offending those who live within a patriarchal system.

List Price ~~\$19.99~~ **Our Price \$15.99**
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ISBN 978-0-87808-625-2 Patrick Krayner
WCL | Pages 290 | Paperback 2013

Getting Behind Our Labels

It's a bit difficult to keep up with the recent labels popping up across our mission enterprise. Organizations are re-branding themselves to fit a different generation, and each new model of ministry receives its own unique tag. We get impatient with terms that fail to capture the shifting realities we face in mission today, so we jigger them to fit our fresh perception. "Global" edges out "world," "narrative" takes precedence over "worldview," and "intercultural" is safer than "mission." One suspects that a new label is just the tip of an iceberg, that all this relabeling is symptomatic of a deeper unease in the way we think missiologically.

This unease could be felt at the 40th anniversary meeting of the American Society of Missiology (ASM).¹ Keynote speakers identified two forces that will bend the way we classify mission in the future. The first pressure point is from the Global South. In his prophetic address, African missiologist Jehu Hanceles hinted at three ways a relabeling was already underway. First of all, he mentioned the "bad titles" of seminary courses across Africa as one indicator that Western theological categories no longer correlate with the present realities of mission. It was part of his plea for a missiological scholarship that reflects non-Western priorities and the releasing of Africans and Asians to re-classify and re-label with integrity. Secondly, he suggested that the increasing global proximity of world religions requires us to pay more attention to the sociology of religion than to our traditional use of anthropology. Prioritizing a new discipline would require a whole new classification scheme that would generate new terms. It would certainly disturb taken-for-granted older labels. Thirdly, he anticipates new terminology to emerge where our Asian brethren are rethinking the relation of Christianity and world religions from their own indigenous vantage point. Undergirding Hanceles' entire appeal was his ironclad belief that Western categories and the corresponding labels will not suffice.

The second pressure point is from the Global North. New labels like "emergent" and "missional"—and neologisms like "post-evangelical" and "post-Constantinian"—indicate that a paradigm shift is taking place. Dwight Zscheile assessed the factors that constrain the missiology of a new generation in America. He claims that this "nomadic" generation is answering Jesus' question, "Who is my neighbor?" a bit differently. They're reclassifying difference and otherness in a more collaborative and participative manner, using labels like "faithful presence" to

Editorial *continued on p. 48*

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overcome the older Constantinian categories of power, control and elitism.² This generation doesn't answer the question, "Who are we in God?" with the same old categories, but prefers to reclassify their priorities when forming and restoring communities of faith. These Global North conditions aren't universal, but they're certainly a force affecting our missiology in the West.

With these contemporary influences in mind, the *IJFM* wanted to look behind some of the labels we use. Each article in this issue examines the concepts and models underneath labels like *insider*, *CPM* (*church planting movements*), *discipleship*, *religion*, and *evangelical*. The first two articles look particularly at the use of the term *socio-religious* and its attempt to describe the blending of culture and religion. Daniels and Waterman (p. 59) try to sort out the apparent confusion and reaction triggered by this term, and while you might not share their conclusions, we applaud their effort to get behind the term. Waterman offers a *singular* biblical category of "religion," while Harley Talman indicates a clear *duality* to the classification of religion in his study

of the Old Testament (p. 49), a duality that fits the socio-religious experience of insider movements.

Years ago Paul Hiebert steered our thinking to the models that lie beneath the language of mission. New books by Patrick Krayer and Edward Rommen expose how models of sexuality and liturgy can affect mission practice (see ads, p. 46), and Krayer especially exhorts us to emulate Paul's sensitivity to culturally-embedded models (see review, p. 88).

The models behind the methods we use in ministry—and the deeper categories we use to evaluate those models—are often not so apparent to us. Ted Esler has disclosed the underlying model of church planting we label "CPM" by offering a clear comparison with the priorities that still drive a more traditional model (p. 67). Larry Caldwell turns to Hiebert's use of "set theory" in order to get beneath our evangelical disagreements (p. 75). Models lie deep in our thinking, and our categories even deeper, but they could determine how progressive or conservative we are when it comes to any new label or term

introduced into missiological discourse. We hope these articles will help us to be more aware of the significance of the new nomenclature arising across the missions landscape. And in future issues we will continue to explore the deeper presuppositions that we use in evaluating missions today. Speaking of the future, we have some exciting issues lined up as we accelerate the process of getting the *IJFM* current again. We'll be bringing you articles from the recent ISFM meetings in Dallas and Korea, a special retrospective on "giants of missiology" who have gone before us, and much more. Stay tuned.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ "The Future of the Discipline of Missiology," ASM Conference, June 20-23, 2013, Wheaton, IL.

² The terminology of "faithful presence" was introduced by James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford University Press) 2010.

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.

The Old Testament and Insider Movements

by Harley Talman

The past several years have witnessed enormous controversy over the issue of the growing indigenous discipleship-to-Jesus movements within the world's major religious traditions. Within Christian mission discussions, these have been most commonly referred to as "insider movements." Despite the fact that a number of these movements were clearly initiated by the Spirit of God, some critics claim that these movements are merely the fruit of misguided Christian missionary strategies and without biblical or theological validity. This paper seeks to offer fresh perspective from an Old Testament theology of religions, so as to discover how theological foundations might inform our attitude toward these movements.

Before embarking on an exploration of biblical theology, we must remind ourselves that the Old Testament does not directly ask or answer the questions contemporary missiology is asking about the nature and validity of other religions. It does not even use a word for religion.¹ Nevertheless, biblical scholars have observed two contrasting elements in the OT's attitude toward the nations and their religions: particularism/exclusiveness/rejection versus universalism/acceptance/absorption. In our examination of the OT perspective on religions of the nations we will first look at the positive attitude.

Attitude of Absorption toward Other Religions

The argument of this section is as follows: *The image of God is still evident in humanity, despite the effects of the Fall. Thus, human cultures and religions will reflect this reality in some measure. The scriptures indicate that other cultures (which include their religions) do indeed provide many moral and spiritual insights and not just ignorance and error.² Evidences of religious influences on Israel's religion are unmistakable, and often acceptable, beneficial or useful as bridges to communication—even though they are not sufficient as sources of truth without the additional special revelation given directly by God through and to Israel.* Allow me to elaborate:

Harley Talman has worked with Muslims for three decades, two of them in the Arab world and Africa in church planting and theological education. He holds a ThM from Dallas Seminary and a PhD in Islamic studies from Fuller.

Many aspects of openness to other religious influences are evident in the patriarchal period. First, elements of other religions are borrowed. While theologically liberal critics view these strictly as a human phenomenon of cultural borrowing, some conservatives may fear that this is suggesting syncretism. Instead, we are on more solid ground if we understand it to be God's intentional contextualization through Abraham and other patriarchs to present a culturally meaningful witness to the surrounding nations. Charles Van Engen maintains that God's covenant relationship with Israel was a contextualization aimed at bringing light to the nations.³ The Book of Genesis, as a whole, records God's promises and their fulfillment in order to more fully reveal him. As Goldingay explains,

The purpose of God's particular action in the history of Israel is ultimately that God, as the saving and covenantal God Yahweh, should be known fully and worshipped exclusively by those who as yet imperfectly know God as El.⁴

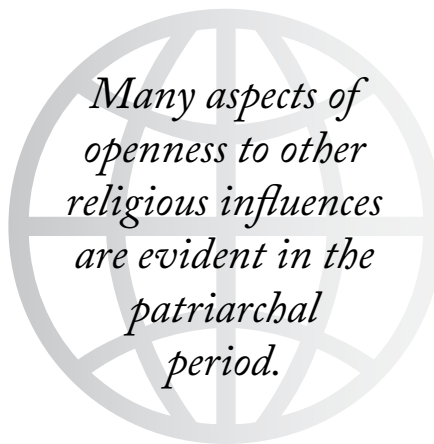
At the same time, the Old Testament infers that there are some constructive things that Israel could appropriate or learn from these religions.⁵

For example, it has been noted that the patriarchs worshipped at or near traditional Canaanite shrines, such as at Shechem (Gen. 12:6), Bethel (Gen. 12:8) Hebron (Gen. 13:18) and Beersheba (Gen. 21:33).⁶ In their early period, Israelites lived next to Canaanites in Shechem, even though the latter were Baal worshippers.⁷ Despite being immigrants from the desert, the patriarchs and early Israelites assimilated into the agriculturalist culture of the Canaanites, adopting their "language, architecture, farming, legal system, and values."⁸

Furthermore, the high god of other religions is viewed in certain passages as referring to the God of Israel, although not yet fully known. The Canaanite name for the high God, "El" was used for the

God of Israel.⁹ [This does not mean that the Canaanite conception of God was the same as the Bible's. I would view this as a divinely inspired appropriation. The sub-biblical Canaanite conception of El was redeemed and sanctified by attributing to it all of the attributes and acts of the God of Israel that are recorded in the Hebrew Bible]. Evangelical scholar Gerald McDermott asserts that Abraham's identification of El Elyon with Yahweh indicates that he considered that the priest Melchizedek [I do not think he would say this of the Canaanites in general] worshipped the true God, but by a different name.¹⁰ Goldingay states:

Apparently Abram and Genesis itself recognize that Melchizedek... serves the true God but does not know all



there is to know about that God. It is in keeping with this that Israel in due course takes over Melchizedek's city of Salem and locates Yahweh's own chief sanctuary there... Joseph and Pharaoh, too, seem to work on the basis that the God they serve is the same God¹¹ (see Gen 41:16, 39; and compare Pharaoh's giving and Joseph's accepting an Egyptian theophoric name and a wife who was a priest's daughter, 41:45).¹²

There are other absorptions as well:

The wilderness sanctuary of Exod 25–40 follows Canaanite models for a dwelling of El, in its framework construction, its curtains embroidered with cherubim, and its throne flanked by cherubim. Such adapting

continues with the building of the temple, the religion of the Psalter, and the ideology of kingship (divine and human). It continues in the oracles of the prophets, whose admission to the council of Yahweh is an admission to the council of El (cf. Ps 82) where they overhear El giving judgment, and in the visionary symbolism of the apocalypses. Occasional specific texts indicate concrete dependence (see Ps 104?). This is not to say that these institutions, ideas, or texts are unchanged when they feature within Yahwism, but that it was able to reach its own mature expression with their aid.¹³

Positive aspects in other religions also allowed for Jewish borrowing from them for law, literature, and wisdom. The OT refers positively to wise men of Egypt, Phoenicia, and Edom; the Book of Proverbs reflects Israel's willingness to incorporate Egypt's wisdom literature (while rejecting its polytheism).¹⁴

Furthermore, the OT emphatically affirms the oneness of humanity and that all peoples are under his sovereign rule, even those under pagan viceroys. Thus, Jeremiah attributed the Babylonian king's conquest of Jerusalem to Yahweh (32:26–28). Despite his eclecticism, Cyrus, the king of Persia who is called "God's Anointed" (Isa. 45:1), declared that "the God of Israel" moved him to allow the Jewish exiles to return (Ezra 1:1–2).¹⁵ We frequently find the Prophets proclaiming Yahweh's universal purposes and sovereignty over the nations. Sitting at the center of the chiasmic structure of the Book of Daniel is Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation, "I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored the one who lives forever" (Dan. 4:34), emphasizing it as the book's central point.¹⁶ Likewise, Darius confessed Yahweh to be the living God and ordered all those in his kingdom to "tremble and fear before" him (Dan. 6:26–27). Large sections of the Prophets are aimed at non-Jewish people (e.g., Isaiah 13:1–23:18; Jeremiah 46–51, Ezekiel 25–32, Amos 1:3–2:3, Obadiah, Jonah and Nahum).

Even the messages of severe judgment imply God's concern for these peoples.¹⁷ However, the prophets did not only pronounce judgment on pagan nations, they heralded salvation, peace and blessing to Egypt (Isaiah), Moab, Ammon, Elam (Jer. 48–49) and other nations so that they will “know that I am the Lord” (Eze. 36:23). The Psalms similarly emphasize that God's blessings and salvation are not intended just for Israel, but for all the nations of the earth (67:2).¹⁸

Noble and genuine faith is evident among Abraham's predecessors (such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Job), his contemporaries (Melchizedek, Lot, and Abimelech), his successors (Rahab and Ruth), and holy “pagans” outside of Israel (Jethro, Naaman, the Queen of Sheba and others). These men and women seem to have been in right relationship with God.¹⁹

Others see the contribution of “pagan” religions on God's call upon Abraham as natural and necessary, in order to build upon, correct and purify it through further biblical revelation. Senior and Stuhlmueller elaborate:

A message is being flashed to us that religion is never a pure creation by God but a synthesis of the best under a new inspiration from God. . . . A new religious experience took place without the creation of a new religion. Abraham remained within the Canaanite religious system. Despite this system's proclivity to sexual excess in the Baal worship, Abraham recognized a dignity and a genuineness about it, and through its instrumentality he acquired his own religious language, style of worship, and system of moral values. In fact the “God of the Ancestors” appeared to Abraham at Canaanite holy places. Religious practices and even the perception of God's special presence evolved within the geography and politics of a local area. Only by first accepting the worth and authenticity of preexistent religions were biblical people able to purify, challenge, and develop them.²⁰

T*he OT's critical attitude toward religions cuts both ways. Biblical faith must not be seen as merely a matter of belonging to the “right” religion.*

Thus, we have seen much evidence of an OT attitude of appropriation of positive elements in pagan religions. This seems to reflect Yahweh's desire to communicate his message with maximum impact by using ideas, terms, forms, and elements that were already familiar to the audience. This should inform our view of insider movements as well.

Attitude of Rejection of Other Religions

In contrast to the OT's attitude of absorption is a strong exclusivist strand. Stuhlmueller refers to this dual process as “absorption and rejection.”²¹ In that vein, Goldingay declares:

Gen 1–11 suggests that the religions, like all human activity, belong in the context of a world that needs restoration to the destiny and the relationship with God that were intended for them, which God purposed to bring about through the covenant with Israel that culminated in the mission and accomplishment of Jesus.²²

Thus we find in the OT an emphatic judgment on the dark, deceptive, destructive and sometimes demonic character of the religions of the Canaanites and other neighbors of Israel. This included prohibitions on adopting pagan practices such as mourning rites, eating unclean creatures, the abominable acts associated with the pagan worship and covenant breaking by pursuing other gods.²³ During the Mosaic Period a distinct religion with its own rituals, priesthood and teachings developed. And although outside influences continued, through the Mosaic Law, Israel acquired the religious apparatus by which it could accept or reject these influences.²⁴

Even where there was a positive influence from outside the Hebrew

tradition, as in wisdom literature, it could not substitute for the knowledge of Yahweh that came through his unique dealing with Israel.²⁵ Other religions, observes Goldingay,

are not inherently demonic or merely sinful human attempts to reach God. . . . Yet they are not equally valid insights into the truth about God. They may provide a starting point and certain areas of common ground, but not a finishing point. They cannot tell us about the special and vital activity of God in Israel that came to a climax in Christ. . . .²⁶

All human religion is not only inevitably tainted by our wayward life in this earth, but can be the very means we use to keep at arm's length the God we choose not to obey. Religion can express our rebellion as well as our response. . . . Religion always has this duality or ambiguity, a simultaneous seeking after God our creator and fleeing from God our judge.²⁷

Kärkkäinen suggests that where we find the OT being critical of other religions, it “is not so much a general principle but rather a desire to purify religions and focus on their major task, that is, the worship of the true God of Israel.”²⁸ When religion in Israel suffered from similar defects, the prophets were equally strong in their condemnation.

Consequently, the OT's critical attitude toward religions cuts both ways. Biblical faith must not be seen as merely a matter of belonging to the “right” religion (though the full range of biblical truth is indispensable for true worship—John 4:23–24). God is not partial in his critique of religions. There is great danger when the people of God enjoy a false peace at having “arrived”²⁹ or forget the possibility that other religions may have something to teach them.

Old Testament Criteria for Judging a Religion or Religious Tradition

Two fundamental criteria for assessing other religions stand out in the OT. The first was whether its adherents feared God—even if they lacked the fuller revelation possessed by Israel. As stated earlier, Abraham inferred that Melchizedek and Abimelech feared God (albeit by a different name) and Moses similarly viewed Jethro.³⁰ Of course, God's ultimate purpose was always that all might know him more fully:

In dealing with the ancestors of Israel, the living God, later disclosed as Yahweh, made an accommodation to the names and forms of deity then known in their cultural setting. This does not thereby endorse every aspect of Canaanite El worship. The purpose of God's particular action in the history of Israel is ultimately that God, as the saving and covenantal God Yahweh, should be known fully and worshipped exclusively by those who as yet imperfectly know God as El.³¹

The second standard was the pursuit of righteous behavior—what kind of morality did religion result in? Goldingay asserts:

What Elijah (and Yahweh) so vehemently opposed was not merely the worship of the wrong God (or rather of a no-god), as focused on Mount Carmel, but the hijacking of the whole social, economic and legal ethos of Israel by the religious vandalism of Jezebel's Phoenician Baalism, as focused in the Naboth incident (1 Kings 21). The struggle was not simply over what was the right religion, but over what was a right and just society for Naboth to live in. Baal religion undegirded, or at least imposed no restraint on, the way Ahab and Jezebel treated Naboth. It could be argued, therefore, that the moral, social, and cultural effects of a major religious tradition do give us some grounds for a discriminating response to it, though this can be as uncomfortable an argument for Christianity as a cultural religion as for any other.³²

These two criteria, fearing God and pursuing righteous living were expressed in the OT by "conversion." There were two different forms of conversion: non-proselyte and proselyte.

Non-Proselyte Conversion in the Old Testament

God's plan since the time of Abraham has been to bless all of the nations, peoples and families of the earth (Gen. 12:3). His redemptive program focused on Abraham's descendants, Isaac, Jacob and the nation of Israel who were to serve as a "light to the nations." There was no clear or specific command to engage in proselytism, and thus for many centuries the Jews did not send



out any evangelists or missionaries. Yet even this attracting power and purpose of Israel's light did not necessarily have proselytism and religious cultural conformity in mind. For conspicuously absent from the Old Testament is a call for the nations to follow Israel in observing the Mosaic Law.³³ Accordingly, the prophet Amos pronounces judgment on other nations on the basis of their treatment of human beings, but when the prophet condemns Judah and Israel, the covenant becomes a standard of judgment. A principal reason is because the Law was the covenantal expression of its national religion, the legal code of Israel's theocratic government. God's purpose for giving the Law was not to create a world religion,

but to reveal his identity, character and ways to the nations through his dealings with Israel as it lived in covenantal relationship with him through the Torah. Thus, Israel would be a "light to the nations," showing them that they too could enjoy the presence and blessing of Yahweh by acknowledging him as supreme and treating people according to the moral standards reflected in the Torah (Isa. 2:2–4).

As mentioned earlier, the OT affirms the faith of people of faith who were outside of the stream of Abrahamic revelation, such as Melchizedek, Abimelech, and the Queen of Sheba. Jethro, the priest of Midian, rejoiced in God's great deeds through Moses, but returned home without joining Israel. The message of Israel's prophets pronounced judgment on the surrounding nations for their sins of idolatry, injustice, oppression and wickedness, but nowhere do we see a call for them to adopt the Jewish way of life and system of worship prescribed in the Law of Moses. A case in point is YHWH-fearing Naomi who exhorts Ruth to return to her own people and god; Ruth has to persuade her mother-in-law to allow her to go with her to join Naomi's people and worship her God.³⁴ Even the prophets sent to Israel's enemies (Obadiah to Edom, Jonah to Nineveh and Nahum to Assyria) do not call for adopting the religion of Israel or temple worship in Jerusalem. The Lord commissioned Jonah to preach repentance to the Ninevites lest they perish, but there is not a hint that proselyte conversion was required for them to be "saved." Repeatedly, we hear that God's purpose for the nations was that they "know that I am the Lord" (Eze. 36:23) which demanded that they, like Israel, recognize his supremacy and "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). The details of what this would look like in each nation were not spelled out,³⁵ but it may be implied that to the degree Israel showed its light to the

nations, they were to abide by the ethical principles exemplified in the Torah. In the eschaton, Isaiah (2:2–9) pictures the nations coming to God’s temple to learn “his ways” (the standards of morality that God requires of people).³⁶

A famous example of that purpose being fulfilled is found in the case of Naaman the Syrian. His healing from leprosy (2 Kings 5) provides an example of non-proselyte conversion. The witness of a captured Israelite servant girl leads Naaman to the king of Israel and then to the house of Elisha. The prophet is determined to demonstrate the power and grace of God. The result is that Naaman declares his new faith that “there is no god in all the world except in Israel.” He asks for two mule-loads of dirt so that he can build an altar to the Lord, in keeping with his vow that he will not offer a sacrifice or burnt offering to other than Yahweh. (While YHWH can be worshipped anywhere, Scripture also supports the notion of sacred space. Exodus 20:24 legislates that altars be constructed of soil, *’adamah*, the same word that Naaman uses. Whether Naaman knew this is not important, for biblical characters often “know” more than they actually know.³⁷ “The petition to get earth of Israel indicates the clear intention to worship YHWH alone,” observes Daniel Baeq³⁸ and indicates that Naaman had no intention of being a “secret believer.” (It would have been well nigh impossible to keep his faith a secret, given the visible proof of his miraculous healing, his entourage’s hearing of his vow, the mules carrying dirt, and then a constructed altar.) But neither does Naaman consider participating in Jewish religious rites in Jerusalem’s temple. As Baeq suggests:

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

T*his explanation is more convincing to me than suggesting that Elisha gave tacit approval for syncretistic idolatry.*

forget that he is, in fact, worshipping 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.³⁹

However, returning to his country, people and job will entail fulfilling his duties as the king’s top general—one of which was to escort the king into the temple of Rimmon. With the king leaning on his arm, Naaman must assist him in bowing in worship and for this Naaman asks “forgiveness.” Some, like Timothy Tennent, interpret this request for “forgiveness” as springing from Naaman’s feelings of guilt for what both he and Elisha “knew was wrong.” But Baeq shows how “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 “worshipping”... 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.”⁴⁰

Naaman’s confession made clear his complete faith that only the Lord is God, as he swore full allegiance to and exclusive worship of him. So it appears to me that Naaman is not asking for permission to engage in an act of idolatrous syncretism. In assisting the king to bow, he must bow with him—but Naaman’s bowing is not one of worship of the idol. As Baeq explains:

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.⁴¹

Thus, the best interpretation of Naaman’s request for “forgiveness” was that he was seeking “understanding” from Elisha.⁴² As Frank Spina concludes:

The new convert wants to make sure Elisha realizes that, appearances aside, under no circumstances are his actions to be taken as sincere acts of worship...⁴³

His request is not for advance pardon of actual sin, but for the potential for misunderstanding based on mere appearances. This explanation is more convincing to me than suggesting that Elisha gave tacit approval for syncretistic idolatry—for that was the one thing that the prophets of Israel did not permit. That Elisha was not at all troubled by Naaman’s requests is evident from his reply: “Go in *shalom*.”

But regardless of how one interprets the significance or meaning of this concession, many Christians today would have acted differently than Elisha, had they been in his place. Many of us⁴⁴ would have insisted that Naaman avoid even an appearance of syncretism by joining our community of faith, becoming a Jewish proselyte through covenantal circumcision, and living according to the true religion of God (the Mosaic Law). That Elisha does not even suggest this option indicates to me divine sanction for God’s saving deeds being made known to the nations by non-proselyte converts, such as Naaman.

Was Naaman an Insider?

It is somewhat anachronistic to refer to Naaman as an “insider” as defined by insider movement proponents, since he preceded the church age,

and life under the lordship of Jesus Christ. However, even though we lack sufficient information to be certain, Naaman might have illustrated the two key characteristics of an insider (as defined by Lewis in 2009⁴⁵):

1. *Pre-existing families and social groupings develop into fellowships of believers as they become followers of Christ; so the pre-existing community becomes the church, rather than a new social group being created or “planted” as a church.*
By not becoming a Jewish proselyte and instead returning to Aram, he could have remained within his pre-existing social network, his household, which could have become his “church.” (In the ancient world, members of a household normally followed the faith of its head. Moreover, we know for sure that his wife’s servant-girl was a believer in Yahweh, and it seems likely that Naaman’s servants who encouraged and witnessed his healing, would have also believed).
2. *The believing families in insider movements remain inside their socio-religious communities by retaining their God-given birth identity while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.* By fulfilling his duty as the king’s adjutant, it appears that he could retain his identity as a *member* of his socio-religious *community* (even though he did not retain some of the fundamental tenants of what we would call the “religion” of his socio-religious community). Remaining part of this community would not have been possible had he joined the socio-religious community of Israel.⁴⁶

Socio-religious Community Versus Religion

The difficulty in differentiating between a “religion” and “socio-religious community” has proven to be an insurmountable difficulty for many critics of insider movements: “How can someone

be a Hindu follower of Christ when Hindus are idolatrous polytheists and believe in reincarnation?” This response reflects an “essentialist” view of “world religions” that defines them and their adherents by a monolithic set of basic beliefs and practices in contradistinction to other religions.⁴⁷

While the essentialist view is often assumed, contemporary research in the field of religious studies seriously challenges this view. For example, Heinrich Von Stietencron asks, “Why is ‘Hinduism’ so difficult to define? This is because we always try to see it as one ‘religion.’ Our problems would vanish if we took ‘Hinduism’ to denote a socio-cultural unit or civilization which contains a plurality of distinct religions.”⁴⁸



A 19th century British census report from the Punjab testifies: “It would hardly be expected that any difficulty or uncertainty should be felt in classing the natives of the Province under their respective religions. Yet, with the single exception of caste, no other one of the details which we have recorded is so difficult to fix with exactness....⁴⁹

Dietrich Jung expresses similar sentiments about Islam:

I have asked myself why Islam is so frequently represented in the holistic terms of an all-encompassing socio-religious system. How is the persistence of this specific image of Islam to be explained against all empirical evidence? Having worked and

lived in various Muslim countries in the Middle East and beyond, I have been confronted with so many different Islams. No scholarly erudition is required to see the enormous variety.... Why, so the mind-boggling question, do then so many Muslims and non-Muslims nevertheless retain this essentialist image of “true Islam” in their minds?⁵⁰

This sociological or cultural perspective accounts for the diversity in the history, beliefs, practices, and customs in the various religious traditions. It calls for us to speak in the plural (Christian traditions, Hindu faith traditions, and Islams) or in particulars (Algerian Berber Tijaniyya Sufi Islam).

Contemporary NT scholars tell us that the same was true of first century Judaism. J. Andrew Overman states, “So varied was Jewish society in the land of Israel during this period, and so varied were the Jewish groups, that scholars no longer speak of Judaism in the singular when discussing this formative and fertile period in Jewish history. Instead we speak about Judaisms. In this time and place there existed a number of competing, even rival Judaisms.”⁵¹

Matthew’s Gospel reflects one of these Judaisms. He did not view the break from the synagogue as a break from Judaism, but more akin to the Qumran community’s self-perception of itself as the “true Israel.” Matthew’s Judaism had a different center (Jesus rather than Torah), a different view of the will of God (the kingdom of God rather than the nation) and different leadership (the apostles in place of the unfaithful synagogue establishment)—but he still perceived the followers of Jesus as within Judaism [whereas we view them as Christians].⁵²

A sociological perspective helps explain how Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews or others outside of traditional “Christianity” may be regarded as members of their socio-religious communities, even though they do not adhere to

certain beliefs or practices of a religion (as prescribed by textbook definitions). Often even atheists can be considered part of such a socio-religious community, as long as they do not forsake it by becoming proselytes to a different socio-religious community.

Hence, given the frequency of such diversity within a given religious tradition, it is quite feasible for a movement of Christ followers inside it to retain an affiliation within that tradition that is distinctively different from other groups (due to its biblical character). It needs to be mentioned that such diversity is also evident among various insider movements. Sometimes even within the same geographical area, they do not look, act, interrelate or self-identify monolithically.

Proselyte Conversion in the Old Testament

Conversion in the OT was not essentially a change to another religion (i.e., proselytism), but rather the conversion of the person to faith in the God of Israel. Nevertheless, proselytism was one way in which faith in the God of Israel was expressed.

God's stated intent was for Egypt to know that he was the Lord and serve him. Some of the fruit of God's mission through Moses was the "mixed multitude" that joined Israel's exodus. These would become "proselytes," becoming members of the covenant nation (formalized with their participation in circumcision with the Israelites in the wilderness). Thus the proselyte model of conversion does have a valid place in redemptive history. But at least in the case of the Egyptians and Edomites, the Law stipulated that only in the third generation could children of foreigners integrate into the community of Israel, "the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:9). Moreover, the Midianites (Num. 10:29ff) joined Israel while retaining their identity, of whom the Kenites (Jud. 1:16; 4:11) dwelled among the Israelites in

This provides New Testament substantiation for the non-proselyte conversion model that is followed in insider movements.

Canaan. Non-Israelite aliens dwelling with Israel were to participate in feasts and Sabbath and abstain from drinking blood, but to participate in Passover, they had to be circumcised (Ex. 12:48–49). All of this points to a degree of religious inclusion without religious conversion (becoming a proselyte).⁵³ Thus, it appears that non-Jews could affiliate with Israel either as "god-fearers" (who were not required to abide by the Law in its entirety) or as proselytes (who entered by circumcision, baptism, temple sacrifice and Torah observance, yet even the latter could never regard Israel's patriarchs as their fathers).⁵⁴

Two of the most notable proselytes are Rahab and Ruth who made the God and people of Israel their own. In contrast to women who were unaffected by it, circumcision was a major obstacle to proselyte conversion for men. Even so, sources outside of the OT testify to the fact of proselyte conversion, as it required Gentiles to become Jews through ritual baptism, as purification from their pagan past. However, there is scant evidence for significant numbers of conversions to the religion of Israel in its early period.

Later in the Hellenistic period Jewish missionaries actively pursued the proselytizing of Gentiles.⁵⁵ While such Jews sought to make god-fearers into proselytes, Jesus did not. He never required anything of Gentiles beyond simple faith. In his method of mission, his Jewish disciples remained Jews (but did not adhere to the false teachings of the religious establishment); Samaritan believers remained Samaritans (but now offered true, spiritual worship to the Father through the Savior of the world—John 4); and Gentile followers remained Gentiles, as Jesus' witnesses to what "great things God had done for them" (Mark 5:19). As

we all know, after an intense struggle, the church eventually followed the model of Jesus in not requiring Jewish proselytism of Gentiles (Acts 15). Noteworthy for this study is how the apostle James validated what they saw happening on the ground by quoting from the OT (Amos 9:11–12 LXX): "in order that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name..." (Acts 15:17–18). James concluded that if the Gentiles were bearing God's name, then they were necessarily included in the people of God as *Gentiles*. This provides NT substantiation for the non-proselyte conversion model that is followed in insider movements.

Implications of this Study for Insider Movements

There are several implications that the OT attitude of openness toward other religions has for insider movements among non-Christian religious communities. Factors supporting insider movements include:

- The recognition that God created all peoples and that human diversity reflects the will of God. Moreover, religions do not save—not even Israel's [nor ours]—only God does. This should temper our temptation to follow the paradigm of proselyte conversion which requires the adoption of identity and forms belonging to our Christian religious tradition.
- OT openness provides a counterbalance to the exclusivist approach that other peoples are excluded from a relationship with God and their identity should be eliminated. Although YHWH chose a particular people to be participants in the story of his revelatory and saving acts, belonging to this

socio-religious group was insufficient apart from a right response to him. Likewise, not belonging to this socio-religious group did not preclude others from making this story their own and becoming a chapter in it. In fact, religions may provide a “starting point for people on their way to recognizing that the definitive acts of God are found in the story of Israel that comes to a climax in Jesus.”⁵⁶

- The significance of religion in Israel was not as a set of beliefs and practices for all to follow, nor in the number of its distinctive features, nor as a comparison with other religions. Rather, it was its testimony to God and his acts. As Goldingay affirms:

Israel’s significance lay in its status as witness to the deeds of the living, active, saving God. This is the repeated thrust of Isa 40–55: written in the context of overbearing religious plurality, the prophet did not encourage Israel to compare its religion with the Babylonians⁵⁷ and feel superior, but directed their thoughts to the acts of Yahweh in its actual history and declared, “You are Yahweh’s witnesses.”⁵⁸

Likewise, what validates insider believers is their bearing witness to their community of what God in Christ has done for them and for the world.

- Furthermore, other religious traditions can even enrich our own spiritual life and worship.⁵⁹

At the same time, OT exclusivist attitudes toward other religions, call for an approach of duality.

- The Old Testament’s attitude toward other religions “apparently varies not only with the nature of the religion, but also with the nature of the power and the pressure exercised by its adherents, but both openness and guardedness seem to feature in all contexts”⁶⁰—as they must in

insider movements. Thus, where a socio-religious tradition exerts more negative pressure on the insider community, greater resistance and rejection to it will be needed.

- The OT’s dual stance toward other religions provides a foundation for insider approaches today,⁶¹ with negative features of other religions being rejected, and positive aspects emulated. “Along-siders” testify that this is in fact what they observe happening as insider believers seek to remain within their socio-religious community of their birth. As they evaluate their religious heritage, they retain the good and reject, reinterpret or relegate the bad. More specifically,



1. They can *retain* anything that is compatible with the Bible.⁶²
2. They *reject* those elements of religious teaching that contradict the Bible (such as Jesus did not die on the cross, the Bible has been corrupted, Jesus is not the Savior, or salvation is by works).
3. They *reinterpret* aspects that can be redeemed. For example, Muslims might continue to fast during Ramadan, no longer to earn salvation, but to pray for the salvation of their community. Those who continue the practice of ritual prayer would do so according

to Jesus’ instructions (Matt. 6:5–15), making whatever adjustments they deem necessary to “worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24).

4. They *relegate* (diminish or marginalize) the role that any previous religious authorities or writings had over their lives.⁶³
- Furthermore, an approach of duality should be reflected in each insider movement’s identity (i.e., they should have a dual identity). The first Jesus community retained their identity within Judaism, while adopting a second identity as members of a renewal movement (the Way) that was a sub-group of their corporate Jewish identity. Published evidence of the dual, hybrid and multiple identities among Muslim Followers of Christ living in Islamic communities is provided by Jens Barnett.⁶⁴ Dudley Woodberry, regarded as the leading authority on insider movements, maintains that all insider movements do end up with some kind of dual identity.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate possible theological foundations that would support insider movements. After becoming acquainted with the historical origins and a definition of insider movements, an Old Testament theology of other religions revealed dual attitudes of acceptance and rejection. We also determined that the OT’s two fundamental criteria for assessing religions was their promotion of the fear of God and the pursuit of righteous living and that this could be expressed in “conversion.” Two types of conversion were found in the OT: non-proselyte and proselyte. Naaman fits the non-proselyte model and illustrates conversion in the insider paradigm.

Critics of insider movements holding to an essentialist view of religion cannot

reconcile the idea of followers of Christ remaining within a non-Christian socio-religious community. But we saw that contemporary scholarship argues against the essentialist view in favor of the cultural view of religions. The diversity inherent in the cultural view of a socio-religious tradition makes feasible the existence of a sub-group of Christ followers within it who develop a dual identity: one is socio-religious identity that reflects their affiliation with that socio-religious tradition; a second is a spiritual identity (as Christ followers) that is distinctively different from the larger group.

The second type of OT conversion was the proselyte pattern. Though it was uncommon in early Jewish history, it became prominent during the later Hellenistic period. But Jesus opposed the proselytizing of Gentiles (as well as Samaritans); his only requirement for them was simple faith. By Acts 15 the church opted for the model of Jesus in not requiring Jewish proselytism of Gentiles. This decision was rooted in the theology of the OT (Amos 9). Hence, the NT favors the non-proselyte conversion model that is followed in insider movements.

Lastly, implications of this study for insider movements were offered. The OT's attitude of acceptance sanctions the appropriation of prior cultural forms and identity that enrich spiritual life and worship. What truly matters is the Jesus community's witness to what God has done in Christ. But OT exclusivist attitudes call for an approach of duality: negative features of other religions must be rejected (or reinterpreted or relegated), but positive aspects can be retained. Duality should also be expressed in identity: in socio-religious identity, as well as a spiritual identity (being in Christ and his Body).⁶⁶ **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Kwesi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism* (Maryville, NY: Orbis, 1991), 7.

² John Goldingay, "How Does the First Testament Look at Other Religions?" 2–3. This is an expansion and revision of a paper written for the Tyndale Fellowship Conference on Religious Pluralism in 1991, revised in light of comments by Christopher J. H. Wright as respondent and published under both names in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism*, Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (eds.), (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991), 34–52; 2nd ed., (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 43–62. Page numbers in the book differ from those in the paper that I accessed at <http://campusguides.fuller.edu/content.php?pid=190354&sid=1671168>

³ Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 102–103.

⁴ Goldingay, 4.

⁵ Goldingay, 4.

⁶ Goldingay, in contrast, asserts that "the ancestors' words and deeds do not imply the belief that other peoples in Canaan have no knowledge of God, though the ancestors do seem to establish their own places of worship, near those of the Canaanites, rather than making use of Canaanite sanctuaries," p. 3.

⁷ Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis*, p. 355, cited in Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 17.

⁸ Senior and Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 18.

⁹ Goldingay, 7. The name "Baal" ("owner") might also have been appropriated, but it seems that his status as a lesser deity was a main cause for its being rejected, as worship of Baal implied worship of other gods than Yahweh.

¹⁰ Gerald McDermott, "What If Paul Had Been from China? Reflections on the Possibility of Revelation in Non-Christian Religions." In *No Other Gods Before Me: Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, John G. Stackhouse (ed.), (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 18–19. Of the same persuasion are Goldingay, as well as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹¹ This could not be said of the Pharaoh of Moses' time.

¹² Goldingay, p. 3, elaborates: "Yahweh roars from Zion" (Amos 1:2); indeed, "El, God, Yahweh" shines forth from Zion (Ps. 50:1). A similar implication emerges from Abraham's calling on God as Yahweh El Olam in Gen. 18:33. El Olam appears only here as a designation of Yahweh,

but comparable phrases come elsewhere to designate Canaanite deities. Such Canaanite texts also more broadly refer to El as one who blesses, promises offspring, heals, and guides in war, like Yahweh.

¹³ Goldingay, 5.

¹⁴ Dickson, 20.

¹⁵ Dickson, 16–17.

¹⁶ R. Torpin, "Lessons from a Study of Daniel," unpublished paper, February, 2012.

¹⁷ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 40.

¹⁸ Kärkkäinen, 40.

¹⁹ Clark Pinnoch, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 92. We cannot be sure that all of them obtained full knowledge of all revelation that had been given, but the latter ones may have been regarded as righteous under the terms of the Noachic covenant.

²⁰ Senior and Stuhlmueller, 18.

²¹ Senior and Stuhlmueller, 17.

²² Goldingay, 2.

²³ Dickson, 11–14. This last reason was the primary factor in the injunctions against intermarriage with non-Jews.

²⁴ Senior and Stuhlmueller, 18.

²⁵ Goldingay, 2.

²⁶ Goldingay, 2.

²⁷ Goldingay, 3.

²⁸ Kärkkäinen, 47.

²⁹ Senior and Stuhlmueller, 20.

³⁰ Kärkkäinen, 49.

³¹ Goldingay, 4.

³² Goldingay, 8.

³³ Note in Amos 1 and 2, these nations are judged on the basis of treatment of humans, but when the prophet comes to Judah and Israel, the covenant becomes a standard of judgment.

³⁴ Homer Heater in email to the author, July 28, 2012.

³⁵ Perhaps the legal and religious life of the Gentiles would be analogous to a comparison of codes of law in two countries today, many of the moral demands of the law are the same (prohibiting murder, theft, etc.), but dissimilarities reflect their different contexts and cultural values. Some later Jews (as in the Talmud) viewed the Gentiles as being under the Noachic covenant.

³⁶ The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C., 2005): footnote 11, 1265.

³⁷ Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story*, Grand Rapid, MI: Eerdmans, 2005, 86.

³⁸ Daniel Shinjong Baeq, "Contextualizing Religious Form and Meaning: A Missiological Interpretation of Naaman's Petitions (2 Kings 5:15–19)," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27:4 (Winter 2010), 200.

³⁹ Baeq, 203.

⁴⁰ Baeq, 204.

⁴¹ Baeq, 203.

⁴² Baeq, 204.

⁴³ Rebecca Lewis, "Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26:1 (Spring 2009): 16.

⁴⁴ This surmising of mine may be due to my being the product of a Western individualistic culture. One colleague noted that most Christians are now from the collectivist south and said that those he knows are much more sympathetic to the pressures that lead other collectivists to continue going along with certain things as they go through a process of redefining them internally.

⁴⁵ Rebecca Lewis, "Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26:1 (Spring 2009), 16.

⁴⁶ Homer Heater finds in 1 Kings an ironic parallel in the case of Obadiah (email to author, July 28, 2012). Obadiah faithfully followed the Lord, even while serving in the court of Ahab and Jezebel, the arch-promoters of idolatrous worship and persecutors of God's prophets. Yet he remained part of the same socio-religious community (Israel), but rejected Ahab and Jezebel's form of "religion."

⁴⁷ Jan-Erik Lane and Svante O. Errson elaborate: "In the essentialist approach to religion, the emphasis is placed on its core ideas. The core of a religion is a set of beliefs or values which are in some sense fundamental to the religion in question, at least in the eyes of its virtuosi. It may be a controversial task to specify this core, but often religions have key sources from which one may distil its core beliefs or values. However, one may have to be content with laying down a variety of core interpretations of a religion since these will have been interpreted differently at various times. For instance, Christianity received a number of authoritative interpretations when it was established as a state religion, but this did not prevent it from later splitting into several core sets of beliefs and values. The same process has taken place within Islam." *Culture and Politics: A Comparative Approach* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 147.

⁴⁸ Heinrich Von Stietencron, *Hindu Myth, Hindu History: Religion, Art and Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 228.

⁴⁹ Denzil Ibbetson, *Report on the Census of the Panjáb Taken on the 17th of February 1881* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1883), 101.

⁵⁰ Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Essentialist Image of Islam* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2011), 1. For additional challenges facing essentialist approaches to describing Islam, see Ronald Lukens-Bull, "Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam," *Marburg Journal of Religion* 4, no.2 (December 1999), 1–10.

⁵¹ Cited by Charles Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Ethical Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 5.

⁵² Talbert, 5–6, expressing the position of NT scholar Anthony J. Saldarini.

⁵³ Dickson, 25–26.

⁵⁴ Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 161, cited by Dickson, 27.

⁵⁵ The zeal of the Pharisees in traveling "land and sea to make one convert" (proselyte) (Matt. 23:15) may have been a reference to this. But others see this as an attempt to convert Jews to the stricter Pharisaic traditions of *halakah* (Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 115.

⁵⁶ Goldingay, 6.

⁵⁷ Although Isaiah did exhort the exiles of Israel to depart from Babylon and return to Palestine ("Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord" —52:11). The apostle Paul cited this in 2 Corinthians 6:17 (as did Isaiah) to warn against participation in idol worship; biblical sanctification should include forsaking anything that defiles. However, this verse is frequently cited by critics to argue that insiders should leave their non-Christian socio-religious community. However, associating with unbelievers should not be equated with participation in evil. Paul's instructions to the Corinthians in regard to non-association with immoral people meant that they should separate from immoral believers, not from immoral unbelievers, "for then you would have to go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5:9–11). This lends support to insiders living godly lives while remaining amidst unbelievers in their communities. In this Paul followed the

teaching of the Lord Jesus who did not seek his followers' withdrawal from the world, but their protection from evil/the Evil One ("My prayer is not that you will take them out of the world, but that you will keep them from the Evil One" John 17:15). This duality reflects the tension between what Andrew F. Walls calls the "Pilgrim Principle" and the "Indigenizing Principle" of the Gospel ("The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 7–9.

⁵⁸ Goldingay, 11.

⁵⁹ Dickson, 61–66.

⁶⁰ Goldingay, 9.

⁶¹ Goldingay, 14.

⁶² This is not to say that all Jesus followers will arrive at the same understandings of what the Bible teaches (e.g., Calvin allowed only what was explicitly permitted in the Bible to be used in worship; Luther and Zwingli rejected only what the Bible forbade).

⁶³ Adapted from John J. Travis who uses "reassess" in place of "relegate."

⁶⁴ Jens Barnett, "Conversion's Consequences: Identity, Belonging, and Hybridity amongst Muslim Followers of Christ" (M.A. thesis, Redcliffe College, August 2008).

⁶⁵ Woodberry has stated this on many occasions, as well as in an email message to the author, February 29, 2012.

⁶⁶ This study has attempted to at least show that non-Israelites in the OT could be saved without becoming Jewish proselytes. It has not attempted to specify exactly what they had to believe or practice in order to be saved. For example, the OT is not entirely clear whether or not non-Israelites had to believe in/worship YHWH alone for salvation. Some theologians do not believe Nebuchadnezzar was saved, even though he recognized the supremacy of the God of Israel, because he did not offer exclusive worship to him. (Note that the same could be said of Solomon and Gideon). Another question is whether they could in some sense be saved even if they did not know YHWH, a corollary to the contemporary issue of whether some who have not yet heard of Christ could be saved because of what he has done. But these issues are not central to insider movements where disciples of Jesus proclaim salvation through Christ while remaining in their non-Christian socio-religious communities. The possibility of the salvation of those communities apart from the gospel of Christ is not in view.

Coming to Terms

Bridging the “Socio-Religious” Divide: A Conversation between Two Missiologists

Gene Daniels and L. D. Waterman

This article captures a conversation between two missiologists, Gene Daniels and L. D. Waterman (GD and LDW below), which took place over more than one year. During that time, the authors both spent a week at “Bridging the Divide 2013,” a consultation on contextualization in the Muslim world (for more information on Bridging the Divide, see www.btdnetwork.org.) The impact of that meeting on their conversation and this issue will become apparent during the course of the article.

The term *insider movement* (IM) has generated much controversy, along with the description *socio-religious insider*. Is *socio-religious* a helpful descriptor in this discussion? If not, are there more accurate ways to describe the diverse experiences and stances of Christ-followers from a non-Christian background who want to stay connected with their roots in significant ways?

GD: Several years ago, I started working closely with another missionary on a training project. Although from very different cultures, we seemed to “speak the same language” when we talked about how we wanted to train local Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) to lead the church that was emerging in our context. After two years of working closely together, however, it became obvious to all that we had very different ideas about ministry, the local church, indeed most of the things we were trying to teach in the training center. As I later reflected on that experience, I realized that the core problem was not so much our differences of opinion, but the fact that we used the same terms to describe very different ideas.

While this story was not in any way related to the controversy over insider movements, it does point to something that the present authors both see as the root problem, namely that the two “sides” of the IM controversy might be arguing past each other because we use some of the same terms to mean very different things. The term that locates most of the contention in this controversy is *socio-religious*, that strange place where society meets belief, where worldly behaviors start taking on other worldly significance. But hyphenated

Gene Daniels and his family spent 12 years working with Muslims in Central Asia. Now he is involved in mission research and training.

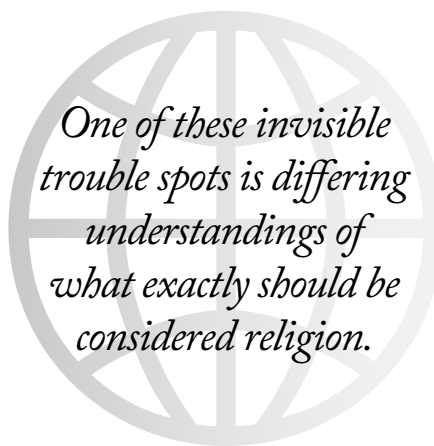
L. D. Waterman (pseudonym) pastored for 10 years in the US. He is a leader of church planting teams with Pioneers, working among Muslims in Southeast Asia, where he has served for the past 20 years.

words are notorious for being slippery, and this one is no exception.

LDW: In addition to the problem of using some of the same terms to mean very different things, we also have the problem of using different (and apparently conflicting) terms to describe the same thing. Socio-religious is a term borrowed (or cobbled together?) from the vocabulary of the social sciences. The Bible has abundant descriptions of societies and commands related to social relationships and dynamics. It also speaks of religion. Yet it seems that the category *socio-religious* is not fundamentally a biblical category; rather, it is a category brought to the discussion from anthropology and sociology and used as a grid for understanding and strategizing, with Bible verses added for support as they can be found to fit the grid.

One of my concerns is that I think use of the term *socio-religious* has caused misunderstanding. It communicates to many people something more problematic than the meaning apparently intended (by at least some of those using the term). Most Christian readers perceive religion as primarily a matter of beliefs and practices related to God and spiritual or theological dynamics as applied to life. For many Christians concerned about the dangers of syncretism or heresy, saying a person or movement is remaining socio-religiously inside Islam stirs up or confirms their worst fears: that the people being described are *religiously* Muslim (meaning they worship at the mosque, believe the Qur’an to be God’s word, and do and believe the things that most religious Muslims do and believe). To the extent such things are being encouraged or are continuing as a life pattern for followers of Christ, I (along with many others) consider it a major problem. But that apparently is not what at least some users of the term *socio-religious* have been trying to communicate.

GD: Missiology is by nature interdisciplinary, a place where theology shares space with sociology, anthropology, history, etc. Thus, unless we intend to devolve missiology into a synonym for theology, it will naturally include social science concepts. Of course the challenge to missiologists is to use social science concepts without compromising the Bible. In dealing with a sociological term like *socio-religious*, perhaps we should start by stripping away the compound to get at the root. In this case it should not pose a major problem, since we can say without fear of contradiction that *socio-* is not the actual locus of the problem. That leaves us with *religious* or *religion*. That should be better—



right? After all, any missionary knows what “religion” is. Or do we?

Could it be that Augustine’s famous observation about time applies equally to religion: “if not asked, we know what it is; if asked, we do not know.” It is almost as if religion lies just outside the capacity of our language to describe or explain accurately. Or at least that is how some feel about it. There are others among us for whom religion is a more settled matter.

The two of us have been part of the larger discussions concerning contextualization in the Muslim world, over the appropriate degree of “insiderness” that a follower of Christ can

exhibit. We believe that we in the missiological community have repeatedly stubbed our collective toe on unseen wrinkles in the rug. Upon closer inspection it appears that one of these invisible trouble spots is differing understandings of what exactly should be considered religion.

LDW: I propose that our first tools in the exploration should be the Bible and any related tools that can help us understand what the Bible might say on the subject. To be comprehensive, we would explore not only the English word *religion*, but any other biblical words or concepts that would fit within the normally understood meaning of the idea *religion*. I also propose that this is not a complicated endeavor. Some understanding of biblical languages (and use of relevant tools) may be helpful in the process. Yet I believe that the goal of mission work—and, in particular, of describing movements toward Christ—is to give God glory for the great work he is doing to show forth his glory among the nations. If things are being done that are not consistent with biblical teaching and commands, we should patiently and kindly bring those to light as well (in the spirit of 2 Timothy 2:24–26).

But my point at present is that I don’t perceive this to be a discussion primarily for experts and the highly educated. I see this as an opportunity for God’s people—as many as are interested—to take the Bible in one hand and stories of “what’s happening” in the other, and evaluate what seems to be a work of God (for which we should praise him), what seems to be at odds with Scripture (and thus requires us to ask the hard questions and even possibly move toward correction or reproof (2 Timothy 2:16–17)), and what seems confusing and needs further discussion or clarification. Starting from a biblical perspective, I don’t see religion as a difficult subject to understand.

GD: For those who approach the issue from the anthropological angle, religion

is particularly difficult to define; the discipline has always struggled to give a clear definition to the term. Although it may be a bit extreme, Jonathan Smith captured this struggle when he wrote,

Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization (1982).

Those who place greater weight on the anthropological component of missiology will usually see religion as an analytical category, one of the bins we place things in as we sort through the human behaviors we observe, study and attempt to reach. But the corollary of that is that we as outsiders have to pitch things into the "religion" bin to make sense of what we see precisely because for those we study, it is so intertwined in their activities that they do not see a distinction.

LDW: Contrary to Jonathan Smith, I think many biblically informed readers tend to think of religion not as a "creation of the scholar's study," but rather as an everyday category used to describe human behavior relative to spiritual experience and practice. A standard English dictionary defines "religion" as: "A specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects."¹ I suspect this kind of definition resonates with most readers, and for most Christians, religion is not "particularly difficult to define."

I don't think it's profitable to use a term that stirs up dissention and turmoil, then defend its use by claiming that the term "lies just outside the capacity of our language to accurately describe or explain." I propose that the New Testament's description of religion offers a *relatively* straightforward view of its meaning. I'll focus for the moment just on the Greek word *thrēskeia*, which is defined as "*the worship of God, religion, esp. as it expresses itself in religious service or cult.*"² This word is used four times in the New Testament:

I suspect this kind of definition resonates with most readers, and for most Christians, religion is not "particularly difficult to define."

- Acts 26:5 "They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our *religion*, living as a Pharisee."
- Colossians 2:18 "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the *worship* of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind."
- James 1:26 "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their *religion* is worthless."
- James 1:27 "*Religion* that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (NIV, emphasis added)

All English translations surveyed translated *thrēskeia* as "religion/religious" in both Acts 26:5 and James 1:26–27. It seems clear to me that this biblical usage has substantially shaped (and rightly so) the understanding of religion for many evangelicals. The anthropological concept of religion has some value in its own sphere and for missiological discussion. But given the significant difference between the "simple" concept of religion (as reflected in a dictionary definition, common understanding and New Testament usage) and the anthropological definition, it seems to me very unhelpful for evangelicals to write for an evangelical audience using an implicitly anthropological definition of religion rather than the one likely assumed by many readers.

GD: This has actually been a point of frustration for me. This debate has

primarily taken place between missiologists within the pages of mission journals thus I expected to see a willingness to grapple with the complexity of "religion" rather than what I have observed namely, a tendency for many to over-simplify the matter. I find this quite problematic because like many other missiologists who are more anthropologically inclined, I see religion as something very amorphous that naturally slides into and blends with different domains. For example, prayer is most certainly a religious activity, as communication with one's deity lies at the core of all religion. Nevertheless, its practice is also highly cultural, which determines whether you pray standing, loudly in a cacophony of voices with other believers (as in Korean Pentecostalism), quietly alone as many Evangelicals do, or even on your face as many MBBs do. The act is religious, but the expression is cultural. For the missiologist the difference between orthodoxy and heresy is in content, not posture, and yet posture seems to loom so large.

LDW: I think for everyone discussing these issues, the difference between orthodoxy and heresy is in content. I don't see any major debate happening about posture (i.e., the posture of prayer), but rather about religious context and substance. We can all agree that the form of prayer varies widely among different cultures and subcultures. So I propose that we focus our attention on the heart of the issues that the Bible considers to be of primary importance: What is happening in human hearts? What spiritual dynamics are at work? Where is God being glorified? Where are people being deceived? I believe that the term *socio-religious* tends to distract us from attention to the biblical main thing and pull us toward unhelpful disputes.

NOTE: At this point in our discussion, we attended "Bridging the Divide 2013." One part of the agenda included lively and productive discussions about this very issue by missionaries from all points on the spectrum.

GD: As you know, I realized during the discussions at Bridging the Divide 2013 that there is a semantic shift happening in the missions community; it seems to me that the term *socio-religious* is losing traction. Several of us who have defended its use as the most accurate way to describe the phenomenon are now turning away from it because the risk of miscommunication is greater than its value for the sake of social-scientific accuracy.

LDW: I'm delighted to see former defenders of the term now turning away from its use, that it's "losing traction." I think we're gaining a shared awareness that the misunderstanding caused by use of this term may well have exacerbated tensions between those with differing perspectives on these issues.

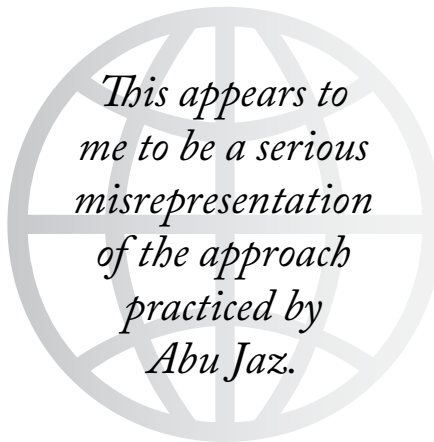
GD: Well, I still do not think the terms *cultural insider* or *social insider* are adequate by themselves, but perhaps the best way forward is the term coined by our mutual friend from East Africa, Abu Jaz. He has stated that people in his movement are "cultural insiders and theological outsiders," or *CITO*.

LDW: I think *CITO* is very clear and concise, and has potential to go a long way toward allaying unnecessary fears about syncretism in movements like the one described by Abu Jaz in the interview published in *Christianity Today*.³ If this is really what people have been intending when they have described "socio-religious insider movements," I would like to hear them say so clearly. It would alleviate many of my concerns and the concerns of many others. From my current vantage point, part of the problem seems to be that the ministry of a person like Abu Jaz sometimes gets portrayed by well-meaning Westerners in ways that

make it appear less biblically sound than the reality.

One clear recent example of this was the presentation of Abu Jaz's interview in *Christianity Today*, which I considered unhelpful in at least three different ways. I deeply appreciated the interview itself, but felt that its presentation in the context of the rest of the issue was perhaps more harmful than helpful. First, the cover title, "Worshiping Jesus in the Mosque," proclaimed Abu Jaz's movement to practice something that Abu Jaz himself strongly disavowed. He wrote in protest of *Christianity Today's* title:

They are not worshiping Jesus in the Mosque. They have no right to



practice worship in the mosque in our legal and theological context.⁴

Second, John Travis' article in the same issue described movements in which Muslims are "remaining within the socioreligious community of their birth" and remaining "inside the religious communities of their birth."⁵ This is very different than what Abu Jaz described in his movement. Abu Jaz stated numerous times that his movement is culturally Muslim, but *not* religiously Muslim. He said: "The church should reflect Muslim culture, not Muslim theology" and "when they understand the gospel more clearly, they don't want to have an Islamic religious identity. Yet they also do not want to let go of their cultural identity

as Muslims."⁶ Travis and Abu Jaz appear to be describing two somewhat different phenomena. *Christianity Today's* presentation confused rather than clarified the vital distinction.

The third problem with *Christianity Today's* presentation was the editorial framing of all the pieces included on this subject. The editor's introduction directly mixed the "cultural insider and theological outsider" approach of Abu Jaz with the religious insider approach of Travis and those who view Muhammad as "a prophet of God" and worship in the mosque,⁷ writing as if they were all pursuing a similar approach. The editor offered this blanket description:

They reject or reinterpret features of their religion when necessary (e.g., Muhammad can no longer be the prophet, though he can still be viewed as a prophet of God and honored as such), but they otherwise follow Jesus in the midst of their religion. As the interview with Abu Jaz shows, there is something right and true about this approach as well. Like many, we are cautiously optimistic about this deep insider strategy.⁸

This appears to me to be a serious misrepresentation of the "cultural insider and theological outsider" approach practiced by Abu Jaz and those in his movement. So I would be thrilled to have *CITO* become a major component in the ongoing discussion about contextual ministry among those coming to Christ from non-Christian religious backgrounds. I consider Abu Jaz's terminology to be far less confusing and far more helpful than the term *socio-religious insider*. I don't believe *CITO* will erase all the problems or concerns, but I think it has potential to move the discussion much further down the road.

GD: I want to give you some pushback about the interview. As you know, neither Abu Jaz nor I were happy with the title *Christianity Today* gave to that interview. However, I felt the

framing articles did a good job of covering the breadth of “insider” as a *movement*, while the interview balanced that breadth with a much closer portrait of one particular group.

One of problems in this debate all along has been the persistent fallacy that insider movements are a monolith with unified characteristics. I personally think *CT* did a fairly good job of demonstrating that there is a wide range of practice. However, I realize that in doing so they may have inadvertently sent a confusing message, but that is a problem any time we try to describe a complex phenomenon such as a movement.

Nevertheless, I am not sure this is the best place to go any deeper into that article, so I want to move us back to the term “cultural insider and theological outsider.” One of my concerns is that it does not fully communicate everything some of us are trying to describe. The last thing I want is to appear to be hiding something by using a more palatable term. So let me briefly explain the positives and negatives I see in this new term.

The “theological outsider” portion of the phrase is great. It does a perfect job of locating where I think our missiological boundaries should be—syncretism is a theological issue.

The downside is that this new term is not robust enough to enclose all the ways that believers might appropriately stay inside their natal community.

Thus in order to avoid syncretism, followers of Christ will be “outside” generally accepted Islamic theology.⁹ The downside to this new term is that “cultural insider” is not robust enough to encompass all of the ways that believers might appropriately stay “inside” their natal community. If we are going to start using this term widely, I would personally be much more comfortable if it were framed by a diagram something like the one below (see Diagram 1).

This diagram expresses important nuances as well as the overlap between the terms *culture*, *religion*, and *theology* that many of us have been keen to communicate with the term *socio-religious*. So, while the phrase *cultural insider and theological outsider* is not without its own potential problems, it seems to be the best way forward because it appears to capture the consensus that is emerging on this issue. What do you think?

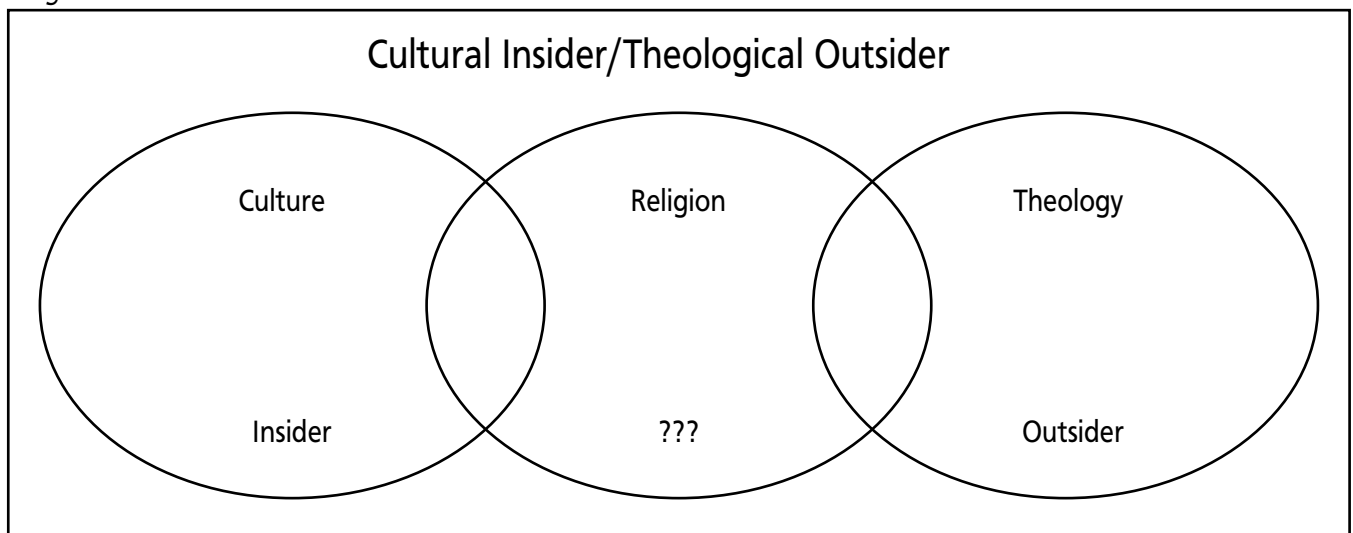
LDW: I agree that CITO seems to be the best way forward (at least among options we’re aware of at present). And I think your diagram is quite helpful.

But I’d like us to press on a bit further if possible and talk some more about what’s happening (and what, from our best understanding of Scripture, God *wants* to have happening) in the middle area of your diagram (Religion) where you’ve drawn the question marks. Is there more that we can propose or fruitfully wrestle with in that sphere? Can you attempt to say more about what things are not spiritually or theologically inside Islam but are *religiously* inside in a way that’s beyond *culturally* inside? I feel like we’ve not yet sufficiently clarified the “no-man’s land” represented by the middle part of your diagram.

GD: I can offer a couple of examples of what I see as belonging to what you have called the “no-man’s land” between culture and theology.

First, let’s consider attendance at the mosque. This is certainly a religious, even distinctly Islamic, practice. But what if a person’s motivation for going to the mosque is not worship? What if they go to maintain standing within their community as a righteous person? What if their reason for attending the mosque is

Diagram 1



so they can witness for Christ? Might we say that in that case, they appear to be involved in the same religious practice but motivated by different theology? If that is so, then it is an example of how theology, not religion, is the dividing line between contextualization and syncretism.

Of course, this raises the question, “How often can/should a follower of Christ attend a mosque?” Is it acceptable to go to the mosque once or twice a year at festivals only, or can someone go there on a regular basis as long as their motivation is “biblical”?

LDW: This is a helpful example. To make it perhaps more helpful, I would suggest that “attendance at the mosque” is still too broad a category. You’ve distinguished two motivational factors, which is a helpful start. I would note that for someone from a Muslim background, “attendance” seems to certainly imply ongoing participation in the entire ritual of *salat* together with the worshiping group. (In other words, quite a different kind of spiritual dynamic than a Christian-background believer like you or me “attending” a service at a mosque with a motivation to witness for Christ.) So I’d suggest we frame the example in terms of *joining the non-Christ-following Islamic community in their ritual worship*. This enables a sharper focus of our attention on the attempt to distinguish the social/cultural from the spiritual/theological. And it does show clearly how “religion” becomes an appropriate field for dispute about the meaning and propriety of the activity.

GD: Another issue that points toward the ambiguity surrounding the domain of religion, one that was very contentious in a field partnership we were once part of, was the matter of participation in Islamic festivals—*Korban Eid* in particular. This is clearly a religious practice, but where does it fall on the diagram above?

There were foreign workers and MBBs who were adamant that 1 Corinthians 10:20–21 shut the door conclusively.

But the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.

At the same time, others were just as sure that chapter eight, of the very same book, was the better text for addressing the matter. As you know, concerning food sacrificed to idols Paul writes:

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that



“There is no God but one.” For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. (1 Corinthians 8:4–8)

The confusion and contention in that particular setting was complicated even more by the fact that some of the MBB leaders involved had changed positions over time; some were at first for participation in the *Eid*, but later decided against it, while others did just the opposite! No one argued whether or not *Korban Eid* was “religious”; it clearly is. But the point of contention was in meaning: was participation primarily an issue of theological agreement or cultural solidarity? It is realities like this that make me very apprehensive about making a clear-cut distinction between culture and religion.

LDW: This is also a very helpful example. And I think your mention of 1 Corinthians 8–10 highlights two important things:

1. The Bible (and this text in particular) gives us some very helpful foundation for wrestling with complex and intertwined cultural, religious, theological and spiritual issues.
2. Serious multi-faceted grappling with this text and its principles as applicable to Islamic contexts would be a useful pursuit, especially for mature believers from a Muslim background.

It seems to me that perhaps the no-man’s land of religion (neither culture alone nor theology alone) is describing a set of religious *practices* or *religion-related* practices, which is what makes them matters for valid discussion and, perhaps, valid difference of opinion and practice among believers. (I would note, though, that Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 8–10 is stronger than in the somewhat similar discussion in Romans 14:1–15:7 and he’s discussing a different set of issues, which seem to have deeper spiritual (idolatrous and demonic) relevance.

I would also propose that what needs to be guarded in the circle on the right side of the diagram is not simply theology, but also the *spiritual dynamics* of what is involved, implied, and/or

understood by observers to be a part of a given activity. An individual believer’s motivation and conscience are obviously very important factors for consideration, but Paul’s handling of the issues makes it clear that personal and internal factors are not the only relevant factors to be considered. Social and spiritual dynamics must be carefully weighed as well.

Another relevant aspect of the discussion that I would consider vital to be considered is what Jonathan Edwards described as the “religious affections” of the individual believer. For many twenty-first-century readers, religious affections¹⁰ can sound like a confusing and not very helpful phrase. But in this case it seems uniquely fitting, as it can help us distinguish the outward religious practices (“no-man’s land” in the diagram) from the intent and affections of the heart. If, to cite a disputable example, a follower of Jesus continues to join in the Friday *salat*, it would be relevant to know not only his theological views (about Jesus, Muhammad, etc.) and his motivation (witness vs. avoiding persecution) but also his affections: who and what does he love? What does he hate? In what ways is his heart being shaped and drawn by the truth and person of Christ? In what ways are his affections being pulled by the world, the sinful nature and the powers of darkness?

It seems the distinction between religious practice and religious affections holds great potential for better understanding.

In light of these issues, I propose adding to your diagram a few more elements, so it looks like Diagram 2 below.

I think CITO has great potential as a relatively simple description of the dynamic being lived for God’s glory in Christ by great numbers of followers of Jesus from a Muslim background (including many who would differ in some of their religious practices and self-descriptions). The research of Katherine Kraft among Arab followers of Christ from a Muslim background tends to support this. She writes:

Most converts I met separate this necessary doctrinal rejection from their cultural identity. Many informed me that, upon rejecting Islam as a faith, they were still Muslim; they did not cease to be Muslim until they chose a new faith. In some ways, they say, they have added a Christian faith identity to their Muslim cultural identity.¹¹

Jens Barnett, also writing of the Arab context, notes that

the process in which new believers negotiate their identity in Christ can be fraught with ambiguity and

ambivalence due to this sense of dual belonging.¹²

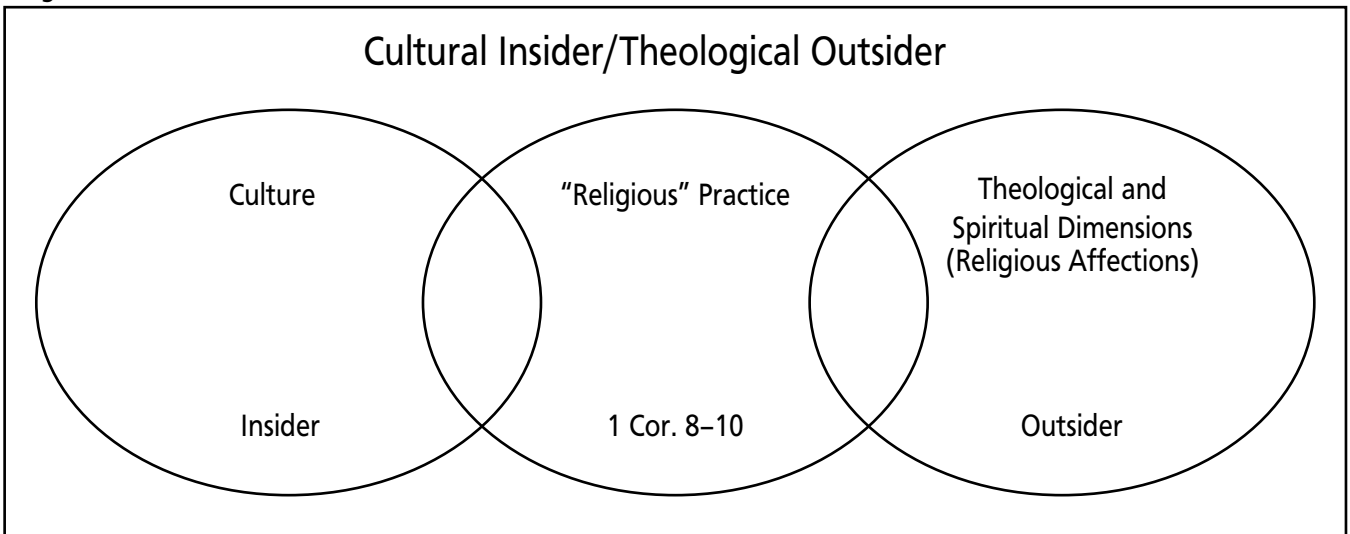
The description of that “dual belonging” bears great resemblance to CITO. For example, he quotes the testimony of a man named Khamis who uses language almost identical to CITO to describe his identity:

There are *two aspects to my identity: horizontal and vertical. Horizontally, I am a Muslim*, you see? This line is my life, my community, my family, my history, my culture, and my tradition... It is Muslim; it is me. I can’t deny it. It is a part of who I am. I am happy to follow these traditions; no problem at all. But don’t ask me—or try to force me—to believe it... And here, this is *the vertical aspect to my identity, which is my faith, my relationship with God*. This is private. It can’t be forced because it is inside... I just don’t believe in what has been sent down to Muhammad. You can’t force me to believe this.¹³ (emphasis added)

Kevin Higgins, interacting with a draft of this article, notes that

we need to be clear: theologically outsider (relative to some local version of orthodox Islam), does not ipso facto

Diagram 2



mean the believer is now going to be accepted as a card-carrying "theological insider" to a given expression of orthodox Christian faith (for example Reformed, Wesleyan, Anabaptist, or Pentecostal, etc.).

Gray areas will still remain, in the case of some movements and individuals.

I don't consider CITO to be the final answer to this discussion, but I consider it a large step forward toward clarity, and a great improvement on the "socio-religious insider" phrasing which I think has brought much dispute, some (but not all) of which has been unnecessary. I see great potential in ongoing discussion of the relationship between "religious" practice and religious affections, built on sound and multicultural exegesis, especially of 1 Corinthians 8–10.

Conclusion

The ambiguity of the *religious* part of the phrase *socio-religious insider* has caused significant misunderstanding. We hope that the so-called insider discussion can move beyond that phrasing in nuance and specificity. It seems that Abu Jaz's preferred description, *cultural insider and theological outsider*, can move the discussion ahead. Nevertheless, there remain many "religious" issues to be sorted out, and different groups and individuals will likely come to different conclusions on some of those issues. It seems the distinction between religious practice and religious affections holds great potential for better understanding. It is also important that we give careful consideration to spiritual dynamics as we continue to wrestle with two vital questions: Which elements of past belief and practice can honor the Lord, and thus be continued? Which elements must be forsaken or radically transformed? May this ongoing discussion bear fruit for the true worship of God and the glory of Christ among his people. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition Unabridged, New York: Random House, 1987, p. 1628.

² Arndt, William and Gingrich, F. Wilbur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 364.

³ Daniels, Gene, "Where's Christian?" *Christianity Today*, January/February 2013, 57:1, pp. 22-27.

⁴ Jaz, Abu, "Clarification," *Christianity Today*, April 2013, p. 56.

⁵ Travis, John, "Jesus Saves, Religion Doesn't," *Christianity Today*, January/February 2013, 57:1, p. 30.

⁶ In Daniels, *ibid.*

⁷ John Travis does not believe or encourage these things, but some socio-religious insiders do. The use of one term to describe a wide range of beliefs and practices is, in my view, part of the problem.

⁸ "Discipleship Is Messy: A Christianity Today Editorial," <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/discipleship-is-messy.html>. Posted 1/17/2013, accessed 1/22/2013.

⁹ We must be careful to delineate between "Islamic theology," i.e. understandings about God, and Muslim patterns of thought. New believers may very well continue in similar patterns of thought without being syncretistic, in fact they probably will if and when they begin to self-theologize. But this is very different from continued adherence to Islamic understandings of God, salvation, Jesus, etc.

¹⁰ Edwards, Jonathan, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1*, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984, pp. 236-343

¹¹ Kraft, Katherine "Relationships, Emotion, Doctrine, Intellect—and All that Follows," in Greenlee, David, ed. *Longing for Community*. Kindle Edition. Kindle Locations 689-691. (Print edition, p. 17.)

¹² Barnett, Jens, "Refusing to Choose: Multiple Belonging among Arab Followers of Christ," in *Longing for Community*. Kindle Locations 775-776. (Print edition, p. 21.)

¹³ *Ibid.* Kindle Locations 789-794. (Print edition, p. 22.)

Coming to Terms

Two Church Planting Paradigms

by Ted Esler

Over the past two decades, with the publishing of David Garrison's book *Church Planting Movements*, (Garrison 2004) many missionaries have shifted the focus of their strategies toward church planting movement (CPM) principles. In some agencies a disagreement has arisen, with proponents of CPM on the one side, and proponents of the "traditional model" on the other. As I have watched this debate unfold it has been rather one-sided. Because the CPM Model is fairly defined the antagonists have had a rather easy time of critiquing it. The traditional model, on the other hand, has not been articulated with similar, well-defined terms and methodologies. This makes effective evaluation and comparison difficult.

It is important for me to state upfront that I personally side, in most respects, with proponents of CPM. From my perspective the debate within my own organization has produced healthy changes. At no time in my ministry do I remember so much great conversation about what church planting is and how to go about it. For those of us who like the intensity of serious peer review it has been an exciting season! There is room, however, to further elevate the conversation by defining the "traditional model." Doing so will make critiquing the model possible while also giving some good comparisons to the CPM approach.

It is with some hesitancy that I put forth my understanding of the traditional model. For the past few years I have challenged traditional model proponents to put forth their own definition, complete with training programs, acronyms, evaluations, and all the "stuff" that accompanies a mission strategy. They have not done so. This vacuum works against the traditional model. It is never a good idea to only be against something. I trust that in the future they can be for something. I apologize to both views because I am not the best advocate for the traditional model.

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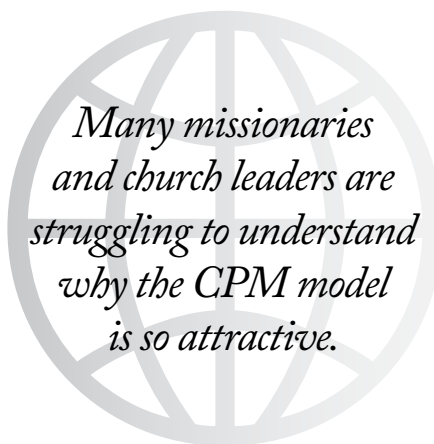
I also hesitate because I don't believe the church in the United States appreciates simple church forms, an assumption of the CPM model. The Protestant Reformation brought many good things to our understanding of ecclesiology. Yet, it also cemented church forms that are relatively inflexible, difficult to multiply, and Western. In particular, by defining the traditional model I am concerned that I will further embolden the critics of simple church forms at a time when we desperately need to be supporting these simpler church structures. Simple church forms are necessary where hostile governments make them the only plausible way to structure church. In the West, simple church forms may be one answer to the renewal of the church in secularizing societies.

Despite these reservations I have concluded that the traditional model must be defined so that it can be evaluated. Many missionaries and church leaders are struggling to understand why the CPM model is so attractive. Part of the answer is to compare the two models.

Definitions

When it comes to church planting the power of polemic is at play. Up to this point I have used the word *traditional* as the moniker for the alternative model to CPM. Who wants to be traditional?¹ In its place I propose a more descriptive and positive term, the *Proclamational Model*. Other terms have been used to describe the traditional model. I have chosen to use Proclamational Model because proponents proposed it and the model itself emphasizes the role of teaching and teachers. This makes the word *proclamational* well-suited as a label for the model.

CPM will be used to refer to the church planting movement model. This title, like *traditional*, is also suspect. Advocates of the Proclamational Model also seek to see self-replicating church planting movements. However, it remains the best title for this model because the methodology is arranged primarily around the movement emphasis. Some advocates of CPM methodologies prefer another acronym, DMM, for *disciple making movement*. The reasons for this will be described further a bit later. For the purpose of this analysis the type of CPM being described is broad: it does not focus on any single implementation of CPM methodology. Rather, it's an attempt to get at the heart of CPM philosophy and avoid the minutiae.



Neither of these definitions is to be considered exclusive of the other. It does not follow that by using the Proclamational Model no CPM will emerge. Similarly, CPM strategies encourage wide-scale proclamation of the Gospel message.

Eight attributes are examined below, followed by a summary table. I have chosen to embed leadership issues throughout the analysis of these attributes because they are not easily separated from them.

Discipleship

At the heart of both methodologies is an objective focused on discipleship. What differs is the manner of getting there, with a particular emphasis on the role of the church in that process. To describe these differences let us consider two different church signs that one might encounter while driving through a small town in the American Bible Belt. As we roll down Main Street we come to our first sign, which says, "If You Want to Grow in the Lord, Come To Church." This concept should be well understood by people living in church-saturated environments. The idea is that the church provides the best environment for spiritual growth. The church is the source of teaching and fellowship. By being a part of a group of committed believers one can mature spiritually and attain to being a disciple of Christ.

A few blocks later our second sign startles us with the phrase, "Read Your Bible, It Will Scare the Hell Out of You." Behind this sign lies the evangelistic concept that reading the Scriptures will enlighten the sinner, provide conviction of sin, and bring a person into the Kingdom.

These two signs provide us with a jumping off point to understanding the first contrast between the CPM and Proclamational Models.

In the Proclamational Model the church (and just as importantly, its leaders) is the main influencer in the process of discipleship. If one seeks spiritual growth the church is the primary means for making this happen. Alternately, the CPM Model suggests that it's only when there are healthy disciples that a church can be

	Proclamational Model	CPM Model
Discipleship	Discipleship happens in the context of the church. Healthy churches produce healthy disciples.	The church happens in the context of discipleship. Healthy disciples produce healthy churches.

	Proclamational Model	CPM Model
Pedagogy	Training is paramount—the argument is that somebody needs to “rightly handle the Word of God.”	Learning/Learners are paramount—the argument is that “the Holy Spirit is able to teach anybody.”
Missionary Role	Missionary is incarnational and participative. They teach, disciple, and lead.	Missionary is catalytic and incidental. They organize, shepherd, and coach.

produced. At first glance this might sound a bit like a *chicken and egg* conundrum—which comes first, after all? You need one to have the other. But the methodology employed by each model is affected by the philosophy of church planting each suggests.

In the Proclamational Model leaders within the church environment are a necessary component for discipleship to occur. This leadership must be in place before a church can exist. Church planting is the result of strategic spiritual shepherding built upon a foundation of maturity. Scriptures that emphasize the supremacy of preaching and teaching are part and parcel of this model. Church planting is the result of careful and consistent leadership oversight provided by the church.

The CPM Model, in stark contrast, sees church planting as a much more organic process. Churches are formed when people are exposed to the Scriptures and grow spiritually. This most often happens using a self-discovery model rather than through a leader-centric model. The church, more or less, springs into existence as a result of discipleship. The leader does not make this happen directly; it’s the result of growing disciples. This is one reason why some CPM advocates prefer the phrase *disciple making movement* instead of CPM.

Pedagogy

How people learn is tied to how they are taught. This is an area of significant difference between the two models.

I would remind the reader once again that these are not exclusive categories. However, the major pedagogical assumptions of each model influence the role of the missionary substantially. The pervasive assumption in the Proclamational Model, that trained teachers are central to the growth of the church, is something the CPM Model purposefully seeks to *overcome*.

Advocates of both models look to the Scriptures for support. Advocates of the Proclamational Model point to verses like 2 Timothy 2: 15 for support, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” CPM supporters look to the presence of the Holy Spirit’s guidance, working through the power of the Scriptures to guide believers. Who guides believers in all truth? Jesus said, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13a).

Missionary Role

The lack of trained teachers makes the growth of the gospel difficult. Is there a way to overcome this obstacle? CPM practitioners believe that the role of the teacher needs to be shifted from the professional missionary to people within the culture being reached. Doing so frees the professional missionary to instead focus on being more “catalytic.” By this they mean that the role of the missionary is to start the fire, not tend to its ongoing burning. The role of the missionary is incidental in that the missionary is

not a central figure in the movement but comes along at certain key points and “fans the flames.” My personal experience indicates that most often the movement is actually taking place regardless of the missionary’s involvement. The use of *apostolic* gifting is emphasized (this is not to be confused with Apostolic offices within the church historically).

This stands in contrast to the incarnational approach of missionary service that has been the staple of cross-cultural work for decades. The model of Jesus, who came to be one of us, has been upheld as a model for learning language and culture, and living long-term among the people in an attempt to identify and understand the culture being reached. The Apostle Paul is presented as the prototypical leader of the New Testament church planting movement and his role as a cultural insider is emphasized. He understood the people he was seeking to reach. He was one of them; he became one of them (“a Jew to the Jew, and a Gentile to the Gentile” cf. 1 Cor 9).

The distinction in missionary roles is no doubt one reason why the CPM Model is controversial among some long-serving missionaries who have labored under an assumed Proclamational Model. It highlights the need for a different sort of person and gift mix.

Message Delivery

Because of different assumptions about the role of the missionary, the Gospel message itself is delivered in a different way. The Proclamational Model tends

toward delivering the message as a systematic and concise set of doctrinal truths. These are not separated from the larger Biblical narrative but they tend to be presented as statements of propositional truth rather than principles to be discussed. New Testament sermons are pointed to as the delivery model used in Scripture.

The CPM Model uses a Socratic method that emphasizes self-discovery. People are encouraged to read the Scripture directly, without the leader intervening to explain and provide guidance. They are encouraged to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give them insight. New Testament examples of self-discovery include Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch, Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Many CPM strategies rely on chronological Bible storying as a primary means for communicating the gospel.

Learning Style

Following on the heels of message delivery are the implications for the learners.

Because the Proclamational Model emphasizes the teaching of Biblical truths (rather than self-discovery) learners are encouraged to handle the Scriptures through deduction. Starting with

foundational Biblical truths, learners are trained to understand subsequent texts through those truths. One may, for example, be taught that God is faithful. In subsequent teaching the leader may select texts that build on that Biblical truth. The learner is encouraged to look for this foundational truth in subsequent texts. One must pull from the text the foundational truth that has already been established. This is a systematic approach to teaching not unlike that found in much of Western education. The teacher seeks to draw the student into ever-widening circles of theological understanding. A potential problem with this sort of “foundation building” is that it may lead to an over-emphasis on systematic theology. It can bring to a text theological assumptions not present in the text itself, imposing theological interpretation rather than letting the text speak for itself.

CPM advocates challenge people to read the Scriptures, seek to understand the text in its immediate biblical context, and then ask the question, “How do I apply this to my life?” One must pull from the text a personal application. The larger theological system on which the text may be built is not emphasized in the same way it is in the Proclamational Model. Rather

than attempting to wrap a text around a topical theology the student is encouraged to understand and apply the text to real life experience. There is also potential for abuse in this CPM learning style. Some texts are not meant for personal application. Forcing one onto them distorts the text and separates it from its original context and intention.

Note that while the above description of learning styles generally holds true (traditional being more systematic/deductive, the CPM model more Socratic/inductive), proponents of each model will seek to overcome problems inherent in their own approach.

Church Form

The CPM Model pragmatically requires a simple, organic church form. The small group size necessary for self-discovery processes, the purposeful avoidance of leader-centric polity, and the desire for growth apart from institutional trappings all lead to this conclusion. The sort of large church structures apparent in the Western church are simply not possible with a CPM strategy. While attempts have been made to incorporate small groups into institutionalized churches the polity differences make these two forms distinctly different.

	Proclamational Model	CPM Model
Message Delivery	The message delivery is didactic and directive.	The message delivery is Socratic and self-discovery.
Learning Style	Emphasis is on deduction (Understand a general principle then apply it specifically to the text. The criticism is that it relies on systems of theology.)	Emphasis is on induction (Understand a specific text then apply it to your life. The criticism is that it is too subjective.)
Church Form	Favors “higher” or more formalized church government. The church is more stable, organized, and potentially more institutionalized.	Favors “lower” or less formalized church government. The church is discontinuous, less structured, and potentially more transient.

House church forms are discontinuous by nature. This means that they rise and fall within a relatively short span of time. Authors and advocates of this sort of church form often ask, “Why do we think any one church should last forever?” Further, the structures of the church are not as formal as they are in large churches. It is not typically a hierarchy and usually has lay leadership. Elders may lead over a network of house churches. The concept of “Pastor” is tied closer to gifting and less so to an office of the church. House churches are typically transient and do not have the “staying power” that institutionalization brings. A personal observation is that a new and growing movement has less structure than an older and stabilizing movement.

The Proclamational Model makes allowances for leader-led church forms. The forms most often seen in the Western church are the same forms that missionaries seek to plant cross-culturally. If advocates of the Proclamational Model are involved in house churches it is usually because local hostilities force it on them rather than because they see it as a favored form of church. These churches tend to have well-established leadership identities, offices and roles. They are prone to institutionalization as specialization in ministry grows. There is often a marked distinction between the professional clergy (most of whom will have received formal training) and the laity.

House church forms are discontinuous by nature, rising and falling within a relatively short span of time.

Growth

Clearly, the CPM form of church is easier to start while the Proclamational form tends to stick around.

Advocates of the Proclamational Model argue that the church needs deep roots. Only when a firm foundation is established can the church see significant and lasting growth happen. The emphasis on depth is not only in personal discipleship. It extends into such areas as theological training, professionalization of the clergy, recognition of the church by the government and other areas. Leadership development and a focus on pastoral training are common attributes of strategies using the Proclamational Model.

Many of these latter issues are not a concern for CPM advocates. They believe that numerical growth will come as the discipleship process takes off. CPM advocates look to the oft-repeated illustration of doubling a number with each successive cycle for growth. A critique of CPM has been that it is all about speed. This is actually not a fair assessment because the original stages, as put forth in the theory, are slow-growth stages and large-scale growth does not occur until later on. Most CPM advocates also believe that broader leadership training should occur but not at the initial stages of the movements lifecycle.

Timeline

Each model has its own timeline and each seeks to *begin with the end in mind*. For the Proclamational Model, the timeline is linear and the desired end goal is withdrawal of the missionary team. The concept of working oneself out of a job is reflected in a church planting effort that is mature enough to stand on its own. This is reflective of “The Steffen Scale,” a set of milestones that missionaries should seek to accomplish as they work through the process of church planting (Steffen 1997). From establishing the team, to language and culture acquisition, evangelism, selection of leaders, etc., Steffen provides a rough outline of what a church planting effort should look like. In the final stages the church becomes responsible for itself and the missionary moves on.

The Proclamational Model does not preclude a cycle in which a church plants a church. Such replication, however, is comparatively rare when compared to the CPM Model. This is a major distinction. In the CPM Model the reproduction of the church is central. Unlike the Steffen scale, the timeline is not focused on the efforts of the missionary but on the reproductive capacity of the church that has been planted. In this cycle, the missionary is active only in the initial stages of group

	Proclamational Model	CPM Model
Growth	Growth tends to be slow, steady, and deep. Numerical growth will follow depth.	Growth is fast, sporadic, and wide. Numerical growth will follow discipleship.
Timeline Model	Fits well with the Steffen Scale. Tends to be linear.	Fits well with the CPM Cycle. Tends to be cyclical.

formation. The overriding goal is to install the appropriate “DNA” or church culture to enable replication.

Summary

The table represented below summarizes the attributes noted above.

At the core of each of these two contrasting models is the role of the missionary and leadership issues central to the planting and maturation of the church. For those of us coming from Western churches the Proclamational Model

makes the most sense. It is the standard church-planting model utilized in the United States and is therefore relatively easy for us to comprehend and implement. The vast majority of pastors from the United States will tend to resonate with this model as the “correct” one and will seek to justify it from the Scriptures.

Missionaries who have labored for many years under the Proclamational Model have had two distinct reactions to presentations of the CPM model. One group sees the CPM Model as a

potential game-changer for the Great Commission. They have enthusiastically adopted it and are implementing it among their agencies and are training national church partners as fast as they can. Another group has been antagonistic toward the CPM Model. In their view, it is a fad that will fade in time. Further, they accuse CPM advocates of being consumed with speed in the church planting process. They are calling their agencies and teams back to a focus on more historically accepted methodologies.

	Proclamational Model	CPM Model
Discipleship	Discipleship happens in the context of the church. Healthy churches produce healthy disciples.	The church happens in the context of discipleship. Healthy disciples produce healthy churches.
Pedagogy	Training is paramount—the argument is that somebody needs to “rightly handle the Word of God.”	Learning/Learners are paramount—the argument here is that the “Holy Spirit is able to teach anybody.”
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Message Delivery	The message delivery is didactic and directive.	The message delivery is Socratic and self-discovered.
Learning Style	The emphasis is on deduction (Understand a general principle then apply it specifically to the text. The criticism is that it relies on systems of theology).	Emphasis is on induction (Understand a specific text then apply it to your life. The criticism is that it is too subjective).
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Timeline Model	Fits well with the Steffen Scale. Tends to be linear.	Fits well with the CPM Cycle. Tends to be cyclical.

From my perspective, the debate itself has been a healthy and robust dialogue about church planting that has been sorely lacking over the past few decades. The challenge that CPM philosophy has made to the more traditional approaches has strengthened the missiology present in both. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ One criticism that has been made against CPM advocates is that they seem to have discovered the CPM principles only recently. It's important to point out that CPM ideas have been around a long time and may actually be more traditional than the so-called "traditional" models. Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson (writing in the mid-nineteenth century), John Livingstone Nevius (mid-to-late nineteenth century) and Roland Allen (early twentieth century) all espoused ideas quite similar to CPM orthodoxy. See their works in the References section below for more information.

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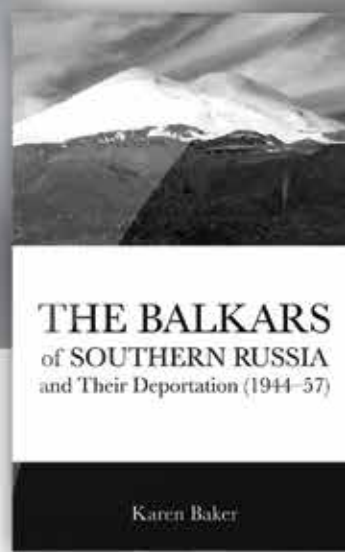
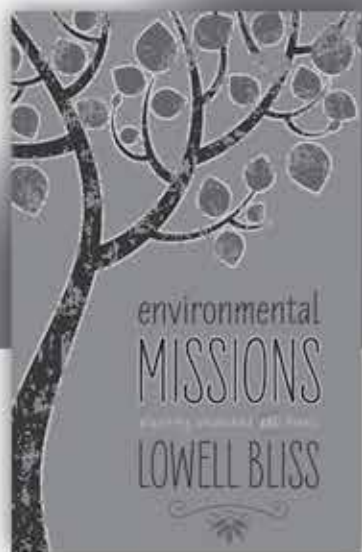
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Coming to Terms

Why Can't Evangelicals Agree?

Clarifying Evangelical Responses to Insider Movements and Familial Language Translations

by *Larry W. Caldwell*

While it is vital that evangelicals dialogue about insider movements and familial language translations, little effort has been made to understand the basic underlying assumptions of those doing the dialoguing. I contend that evangelicals engaged in such discussions come at the issues with different foundational epistemological presuppositions that possibly prohibit agreement from ever happening in the first place. Until such presuppositions are understood, the question “Why can’t evangelicals agree?” will remain unanswered. This article will attempt to shed more light on these underlying foundations by seeking answers from two very diverse fields: mathematical set theory and epistemological theory. Insights from these fields may help all involved to better see where the other side is coming from, and thereby gain a better appreciation for why each side believes as it does.

The first section of this article begins with an examination of set theory. I will demonstrate how evangelical theologians/missiologists/Bible translators,¹ broadly speaking, fall into one of two different categorical “sets.” As a result, set theory, in general terms, may describe these two different evangelical groups who not only categorize reality differently, but differ in real ways on how some specific theological/missiological issues are to be pragmatically worked out. I will also demonstrate that, in the final analysis, set theory helps to show that these two groups of evangelicals—despite the real differences—are really not that far apart in their thinking, as far as some of these root theological/missiological issues are concerned. If this is so, why can’t evangelicals agree? In the second section of this article I will further explain that one possible reason for the lack of agreement among evangelicals is that something deeper is working to separate them. This “something deeper” is found at the level of their basic epistemological foundations. I will show that it is the differences in their epistemological foundations that cause evangelicals from each set to categorize reality differently and to come to different pragmatic conclusions concerning the same theological/missiological issues.

Larry W. Caldwell (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) was Professor of Missions and Hermeneutics at Asian Theological Seminary for 20 years, five of those years serving as Academic Dean, and directed the Doctor of Missiology program at the Asia Graduate School of Theology-Philippines. He was editor of the Journal of Asian Mission for many years, and has written and presented numerous papers in journals and forums across Asia and the Western world. He recently returned to the USA to become Director of Missionary Training and Strategy for Converge Worldwide, and serves as Visiting Professor of Intercultural Studies at Sioux Falls Seminary.

Moreover, it is these epistemological foundations that keep them apart even though they are able to agree on most other root theological/missiological issues. Once this extended background has been given, I will apply insights gained to the current disagreements among evangelicals concerning insider movements and familial language translations, with a view to helping clarify why evangelicals respond as they do to these particular issues.² Finally, I will conclude by briefly touching upon some factors that may help each group gain a better appreciation for the other, whatever their real epistemological differences.

Set Theory, Epistemological Foundations, and Evangelicals

Set theory has been an integral part of mathematics for over one hundred years. During the years 1874 to 1897 Georg Cantor, a German mathematician and logician, was the first to create a theory of abstract sets of entities. So influential were Cantor's ideas that today almost all mathematician theory derives itself from a common source, namely, Cantor's Theory of Sets.³

Simply put, a set

is a collection of definite, distinguishable objects of perception or thought conceived as a whole. The objects are called elements or members of the set. (Hashisaki and Stoll 1975:238)

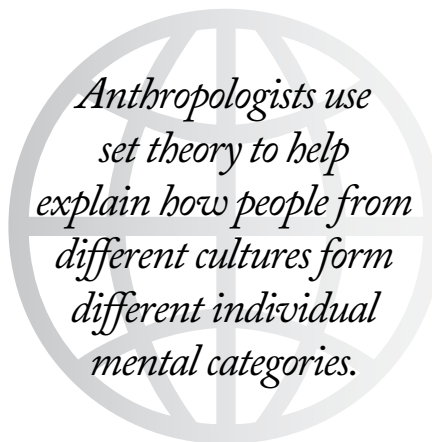
Cantor's genius lay in the fact that his set theory not only allowed for the ease of determining the members that could be included in a set (up to infinity), but also the members that could be excluded from a set (again up to infinity). This paved the way for complicated mathematical formulations involving the relations between sets.

Set theory in its modern development can be an incredibly complicated subject; the above summary merely scratches the surface. Nevertheless, the implications of set theory extend far beyond mathematics. Today, for example, anthropologists use set theory to help explain how

people from different cultures form different individual mental categories in order to systemize their perceptions of reality and the world around them.⁴

In this article, I have chosen not to go into the minutiae of set theory and how it is used in anthropology. I am assuming that it offers a good model. Rather, I want to examine the implications of set theory for evangelicals in order to attempt to show how evangelicals form their mental categories as they systemize reality as they perceive it.

One person who significantly cut through the complexities of set theory and showed its applicability to missionaries and missiologists (and by extrapolation to all evangelicals) was



the late anthropologist and missiologist Paul G. Hiebert (1978, 1979, 1983, 1994⁵). Hiebert succinctly described the three different categories of sets that make up the central core of set theory: bounded sets, centered sets and fuzzy sets. The following study will be limited to bounded sets and centered sets.⁶ We turn first to a discussion of bounded sets.

Bounded Sets

Bounded sets are those mental categories formed in the mind whereby

the mind puts together into a set those things that share common characteristics. . . . Bounded sets have certain structural characteristics—they force us to look at things in a certain way. (1994:112)

Hiebert gives further descriptions of bounded sets using the category “apples” as the basis of comparison:

1. The category is created by listing the essential characteristics that an object must have to be within the set. For example, an apple is (1) a kind of *fruit* that is (2) usually round, (3) red or yellow, (4) edible, and (5) produced by a *rosaceous* tree. Any fruit that meets these requirements (assuming we have an adequate definition) is an *apple*.

2. The category is defined by a clear boundary. A fruit is either an apple or it is not. It cannot be 70 percent apple and 30 percent pear. Most of the effort in defining the category is spent defining and maintaining the boundary. Not only must we say what an *apple* is, we must also clearly differentiate it from *oranges*, *pears*, and other similar objects that belong to the same domain but are not apples. The central question, therefore, is whether an object is inside or outside the category.

3. Objects within a bounded set are uniform in their essential characteristics—they constitute a homogeneous group. All apples are 100 percent apple. One is not more apple than another. Either a fruit is an apple or it is not. There may be different sizes, shapes, and varieties, but they are all the same in that they are all apples. There is no variation built into the structuring of the category.

4. Bounded sets are essentially static sets. An apple remains an apple whether it is green, ripe, or rotten. The only change occurs when it emerges from the flower, and when it ceases to be an apple (e.g., by being eaten.) The only structural change is a move from outside to inside the category or vice versa (1994:112-113, emphasis his).

Evangelicals as a Bounded Set

What are the characteristics of the category “evangelicals” if they are defined in terms of bounded set theory? Let's examine each of Hiebert's above four descriptions point-by-point.

Description #1: Essential Characteristics
“Bounded set evangelicals” can easily be defined in terms of a set of essential

characteristics. But precisely what distinguishes bounded set evangelicals from both non-bounded set evangelicals and non-evangelicals? While evangelicals in general—and bounded set evangelicals in particular—sometimes disagree on who is in the evangelical camp (and who is not), believing in *the authority of the Bible* is clearly the most essential characteristic.⁷ Other essential characteristics include the death, resurrection and bodily second coming of Jesus Christ; the reality of sin and the need for atonement for that sin through Jesus Christ; the reality of heaven and hell and accompanying beliefs in eternal rewards and eternal punishment; the concept of a triune God, and so on. But these other characteristics, while essential, are subordinate to the main characteristic, the authority of Scripture. Even within this main characteristic various subdivisions exist, depending on the average bounded set evangelical being asked. Typical subdivisions are “inerrancy,” “the role of women in the church,” and “the authorship and dating of books of the Bible,” to name but a few.

As can be readily observed, all of these essential characteristics deal more with concerns for right doctrine (orthodoxy) than with right practice (orthopraxy). Not that bounded set evangelicals are not concerned with issues of practice; they certainly are. Still, orthopraxic concerns are often secondary to issues of orthodoxy. Regardless, whether in matters of orthodoxy or orthopraxy, it is their commitment to the authority of the Bible to prescribe the belief and actions of Christians that establishes the overall boundaries of the set “bounded set evangelicals.”

Some of the complexities of bounded set evangelicals can perhaps be better explained by reference to a diagram (see Figure 1, right). Notice that all of the boundaries for bounded set evangelicals are closed, as illustrated by the solid lines surrounding each specific area (fundamental doctrinal beliefs, other orthodoxy issues, and other orthopraxy issues). These solid lines reflect the fact

that bounded set evangelicals are quite uniform concerning what they do (and do not) believe and practice.

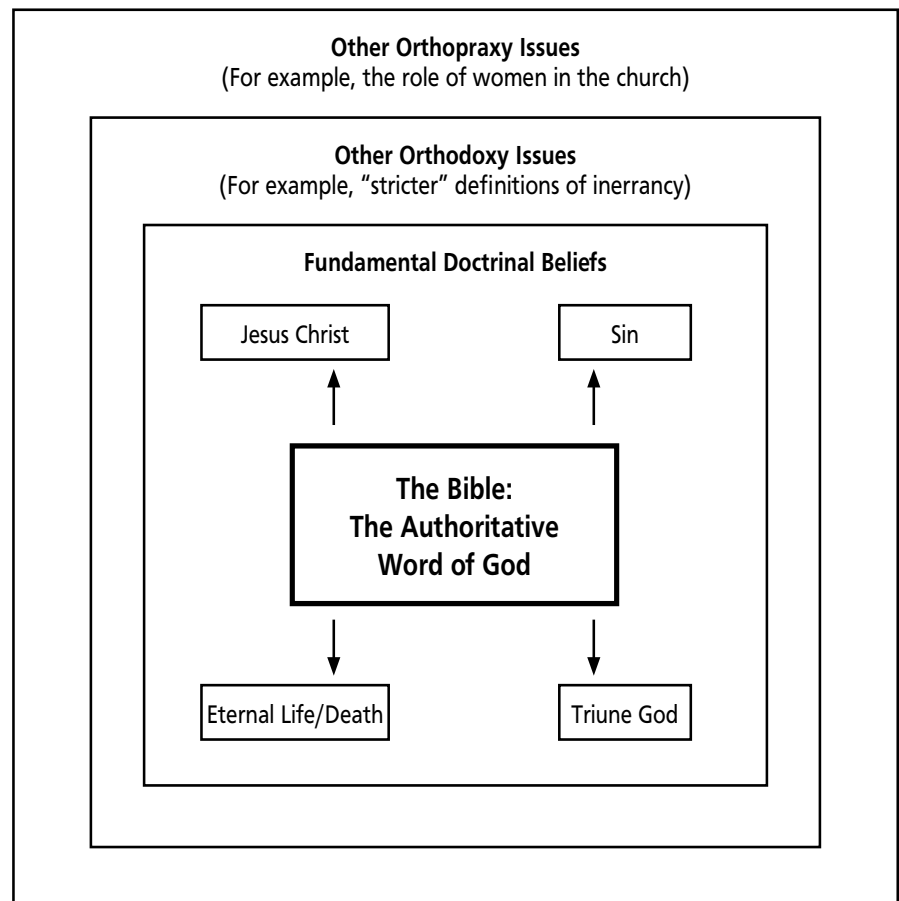
Description #2: Well-defined Boundaries
Hiebert’s observation that “Most of the effort in defining the category is spent defining and maintaining the boundary” (1994:112) is truly apt here. There certainly is a desire among such evangelicals to maintain a clear distinction between just who is a bounded set evangelical and who is not. The amount of debate concerning the inerrancy of Scripture in years past proves this point easily enough. Generally speaking, bounded set evangelicals can be characterized positively by the words *uncompromising* and *resolute* and negatively by the words *unyielding* and *closed*.

Description #3: Homogeneity
Bounded set evangelicals are typically fairly uniform or homogeneous

when it comes to their set’s essential characteristic—belief in the authority of Scripture. Either one believes in the authority of Scripture or one does not.

Description #4: A Static Set?
Are the bounded set evangelicals really a static set in terms of the Hiebert model? Yes and no. Yes, in that a bounded set evangelical believes in the authority of the Bible; not to do so, by definition, automatically places one outside the boundaries of the set. No, in that, despite the restrictiveness of the set, some flexibility remains within the subdivisions of the set’s various essential characteristics. Even with disagreements among bounded set evangelicals on the nuances of many of these sub areas (see Hiebert’s structural characteristic #1, above), those who claim the name “evangelical” are typically considered part of the evangelical family as long as they believe in the authority of the Bible.

Figure 1: Bounded Set Evangelicals



Centered Sets

Not all people create mental categories in the same way and thus, not all people have a bounded set mentality. There are other ways to perceive and categorize the world around us. One alternative to forming bounded sets is to form centered sets. Again, according to Hiebert, centered sets can be distinguished by the following:

1. A centered set is created by defining a center or reference point and the relationship of things to that center. Things related to the center belong to the set, and those not related to the center do not...

In a centered set, members are things that move toward a common center or reference point. Non-members are things moving away from it.

2. While centered sets are not created by drawing boundaries, *they do have sharp boundaries* [emphasis his] that separate things inside the set from those outside it—between things related to or moving towards the center and those that are not.

Centered sets are well-formed, just like bounded sets. They are formed by defining the center and any relationships to it. The boundary then emerges automatically. Things related to the center naturally separate themselves from things that are not.

In centered-set thinking, greater emphasis is placed on the center and relationships than on maintaining a boundary, because there is no need to maintain the boundary in order to maintain the set.

3. There are two variables intrinsic to centered sets. The first is membership. All members of a set are full members and share fully in its functions. There are no second-class members. The second variable is distance from the center. Some things are far from the center and others near to it, but all are moving toward it. They are, therefore, equally members of the set, even though they differ in distance from the reference point. Things near the center, but moving away from it, are not a part of the set despite their proximity to it.

4. Centered sets have two types of change inherent in their structure. The first has to do with entry into or exit from the set. Things headed away from the center can turn and move toward it...

The second type of change has to do with movement toward or away from the center. Distant members can move toward the center, and those near it can slide back while still headed toward it (1994:123-124).

Another way to understand the differences between bounded sets and centered sets is by means of a visual diagram. Figure 2 (below) gives a pictorial explanation of the differences. Note that the boundary line of the bounded set is solid black and of uniform shape while the boundary line of the centered set is dashed and shaped to fit the relationship of its members to the center.

Evangelicals as a Centered Set

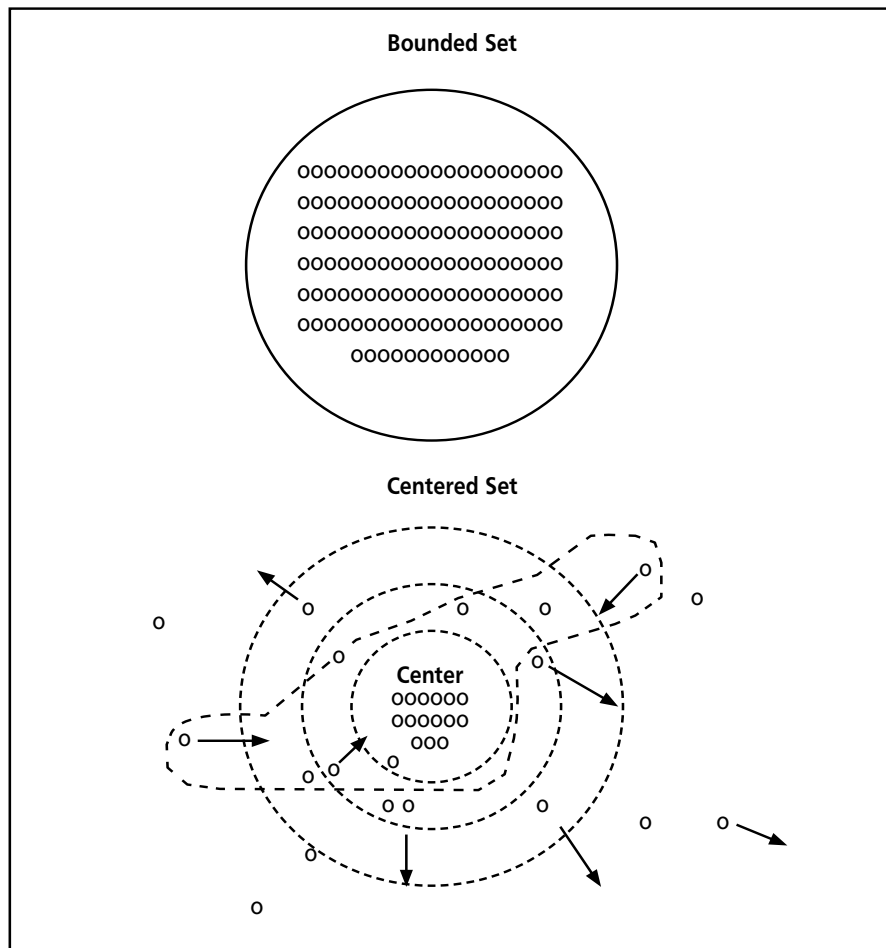
What are the characteristics of the category “evangelicals” if they are defined in terms of centered set theory? Again, let’s examine each of Hiebert’s above four descriptions point-by-point.

Description #1: Essential Characteristics

Centered set evangelicals are not as easy to classify as are bounded set evangelicals. Still, it is not difficult to determine what the “center” for centered set evangelicals is since they share with bounded set evangelicals the same essential characteristic: a belief in the authority of the Bible to prescribe the belief and actions of Christians.

Unlike bounded set evangelicals, however, centered set evangelicals tend to be more flexible with regard to the specific subdivisions related to the authority of Scripture. For example, a centered set

Figure 2: Bounded Set and Centered Set



evangelical does not have to believe in the definition of inerrancy of one particular person (or group) in order to be accepted as a member of the centered set. In fact, many different opinions on this issue are allowed as long as the center—a belief in the authority of the Bible to prescribe the belief and actions of Christians—is maintained. While the particular belief and actions of individual centered set evangelicals may well differ from those of their bounded set counterparts, their belief and actions are nonetheless similarly rooted in the authority of the Bible.

It goes without saying that bounded set evangelicals and centered set evangelicals hold in common the other essential characteristics (the death, resurrection and bodily second coming of Jesus Christ; the reality of sin and the need for atonement for that sin through Jesus Christ; the reality of heaven and hell and accompanying beliefs in eternal rewards and eternal punishment; the concept of a triune

Centered set evangelicals often feel uncomfortable with the boundary-setting characteristics of their bounded set brothers and sisters.

God, etc.). Yet even here the particularities of these essentials are given much more latitude in the belief system of the individual centered set evangelical.

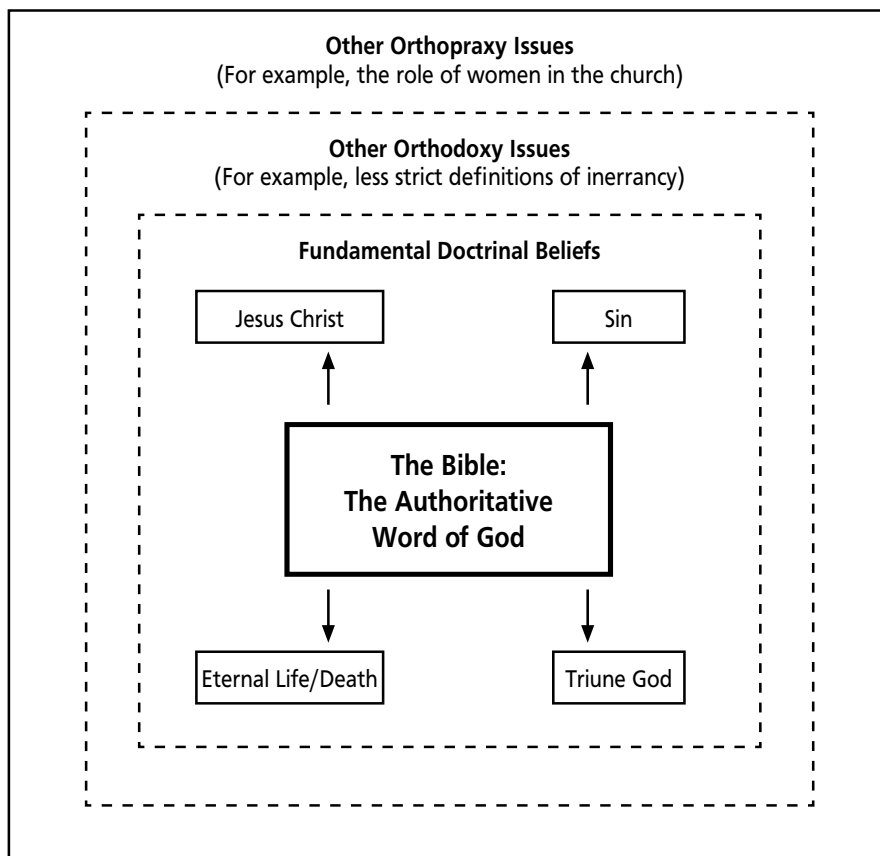
Description #2: Lack of Boundary Maintenance

Centered set evangelicals are also concerned with just who is (and who is not) an evangelical, as exemplified by their commitment to the authority of the Bible. For them, this belief is a sharp boundary. What distinguishes them from bounded set evangelicals, however, is their lack of preoccupation with who is “in” and who is “out.” Hiebert’s words regarding centered sets clearly applies to centered set evangelicals here since for them there is “no need to maintain

the boundary in order to maintain the set” (1994:124). Generally speaking, centered set evangelicals can be characterized positively by the words *flexible* and *tolerant* and negatively by the words *accommodating* and *liberal*.

Some complexities related to centered set evangelicals can be better explained by way of reference to Figure 3 (below). Figure 3 has the same general framework as Figure 1 above, but with some significant differences. While in Figure 3 there is still a strict boundary concerning the authoritative Word of God (as well as for the other essential characteristics listed), the remaining boundary markers for centered set evangelicals are more fluid, as illustrated by the dashed lines surrounding the other areas. These dashed lines represent the more flexible and tolerant nature of centered set evangelicals concerning what they do (and do not) believe and practice.

Figure 3: Centered Set Evangelicals



Description #3: Lack of Homogeneity
Centered set evangelicals would readily concede that, within their category, variation and the lack of a simple common uniformity are the order of the day. Moreover, they see such variation as desirable. They tend to welcome the views of all as long as the center—the authority of the Bible—is acknowledged. Centered set evangelicals often feel uncomfortable with the strict boundary-setting characteristics of their bounded set brothers and sisters and the desire to determine just who is in (and out) of the set.

Description #4 Dynamic Set

Because centered set evangelicals are more flexible they also can be categorized as being more *dynamic*, in the sense of being open to or moving toward change. That is because, again by definition, centered set evangelicals are allowed more freedom to explore new

ideas due to their lack of concern for strict boundaries other than that central belief in the authority of the Bible.

Preliminary Conclusions and Further Questions

What conclusions can we draw from this investigation of bounded sets and centered sets? First, by analyzing all evangelicals through the criteria of set theory it is clear that evangelicals in both sets are not so different in their root level theological beliefs. The “center” is the same for each group. Moreover, the essential characteristics that help form that center are also basically the same. There are, of course, vast differences in how a bounded set evangelical and a centered set evangelical will answer specific questions concerning, say, the inerrancy of Scripture, the role of the women in the church, and the dating and authorship of books of the Bible. Still, all things considered, this analysis has shown that, at a root level, the bounded set and centered set evangelical are not far apart.

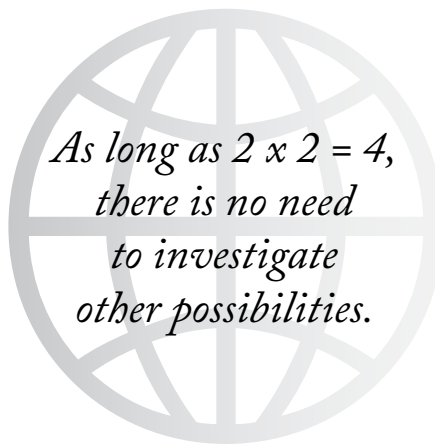
Yet, if this is true, why do they not communicate with one another better than they do at times? Why do bounded set evangelicals tend to be more uncompromising and resolute in their theological and/or missiological thinking, and centered set evangelicals more flexible and tolerant? What accounts for the differences that lead one evangelical to become a member of the bounded set and another evangelical (who holds to the same root level beliefs) to become a member of the centered set? Obviously categories of set theory alone do not answer such questions. Set theory is merely one helpful tool in delineating the parameters that differentiate evangelicals from one another. It does not explain how or why these differences develop in the first place. To explain this something else is needed.

The Need for Another Model: Epistemological Foundations

To answer such how and why questions we need to develop another model. Such a model needs to go

beyond the root level beliefs of evangelicals (which, as we have seen, are essentially the same) to the deeper, more basic level of epistemological foundations. I believe that it is these epistemological foundations that account for the differences between the two groups.

Epistemology can be defined as “the theory or science that investigates the methods or grounds of knowledge”⁸ or “a theory of knowledge or an inquiry into how we gain knowledge” (Erickson 1986:49). In other words, epistemology is that which attempts to understand how knowledge is gained; more simply put: how we know, and how we *know* that we know! When this definition is applied to the question at



hand—namely, why evangelicals can all believe in the authority of Scripture and at the same time can believe so differently about other theological/missiological issues—the answer lies in the fact that bounded set evangelicals and centered set evangelicals have different basic understandings concerning how knowledge is gained. They have basic epistemological differences that influence all of the subsequent theological/missiological decisions they make.

What are these epistemological differences? Hiebert, in an important article entitled “Epistemological Foundations for Science and Theology” (1985a), once again offers us much insight into

this question.⁹ In this article Hiebert devised a “taxonomy of epistemological systems, a meta-epistemological grid by which we can compare and contrast various epistemological options” (1985a:5). The grid runs the spectrum from positions of absolute idealism to determinism. Most of Hiebert’s “Taxonomy” is reproduced in Figure 4 (opposite page).

A brief perusal of Hiebert’s taxonomy readily reveals that the epistemological options available to evangelicals are limited to either naive idealism/naive realism or critical realism. The other positions—especially absolute idealism and determinism—are simply not tenable options for evangelicals, though some will occasionally fall from naive idealism/naive realism into critical idealism or from critical realism to instrumentalism.

Since the word “naive”—used in reference to naive idealism/naive realism—may be perceived as pejorative, I will substitute the word “conservative” to describe these evangelicals. In keeping with that change, I will likewise refer to “critical” realist evangelicals as “progressive.”

Evangelicals as Conservative Realists

What characterizes conservative realist evangelicals? Such evangelicals do believe that the external world is real. They believe that the human mind can understand the external world exactly, as it is, without bias. But more than just viewing science as a photograph of reality, these evangelicals see theology/missiology itself as a photograph of reality. For them knowledge is reduced to simple mathematical formula: 2×2 always equals 4. As long as $2 \times 2 = 4$ there is no need to investigate other possibilities. A proper answer to the question has been found, thus there is no need for further investigation.

In terms of their main essential characteristic (the authority of the Bible), conservative realist evangelicals tend to reason along these lines: “The Bible is not only the authoritative Word

of God, it is the inerrant Word, and obviously my (or my group's) definition of inerrancy is the correct one since my (our) definition is what the Bible states." Or, "Women are not allowed to teach men, that is what Scripture says and there is just no alternative." Likewise, matters surrounding the dating and authorship of particular books of the Bible are very important to conservative realists. Regarding the authorship of the Pentateuch, for example, they

would argue something like this: "Since Jesus referred to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, there is simply no other option." Hiebert's words accurately describe conservative realist evangelicals: "Because knowledge is exact and potentially exhaustive, there can be only one unified theory. Various theories must be reduced to one" (1985a:6).

By now, the similarities between the epistemological foundations of conservative realist evangelicals outlined here and

the previously described bounded set evangelicals should be obvious. Indeed, these similarities are no accident, for the epistemological foundations that form the conservative realist's understanding of reality are pragmatically worked out in bounded set ways. Bounded set evangelicals tend to be uncompromising and resolute in their theological and missiological thinking because their epistemological foundations allow them no other choice. For them to change

Figure 4: A Taxonomy of Epistemological Positions

Positions	Nature of Knowledge	Systems of Knowledge
Absolute Idealism	Reality exists in the mind. The external world is illusory. E.g., Vedantic and Advaita Hinduism.	Each system is an island to itself. Systems are incommensurable. Unity is possible only as everyone joins in the same system.
Critical Idealism	Reality exists in the mind. The external world is unknowable. Order is imposed on sense experience by the mind.	Each system is an island to itself. Systems are incommensurable. A common ground is found in human rationality which is assumed to be the same for all humans.
Naive Idealism/ Naive realism	The external world is real. The mind can know it exactly, exhaustively and without bias. Science is a photograph of reality. Because knowledge and reality are related 1:1 this is naive idealism or naive realism.	Because knowledge is exact and potentially exhaustive, there can be one unified theory. Various theories must be reduced to one. This leads to reductionism such as physical reductionism, psychological reductionism or sociocultural reductionism.
Critical Realism	The external world is real. Our knowledge of it is partial but can be true. Science is a map or model. It is made up of successive paradigms which bring us closer approximations of reality and absolute truth.	Each field in science presents a different blueprint of reality. These are complimentary to one another. Integration is achieved, not by reducing them all to one model, but to see them all in their relationship to one another. Each gives us partial insights into reality.
Instrumentalism (Pragmatism)	The external world is real. We cannot know if our knowledge of it is true, but if it "does the job" we can use it. Science is a Rorschach response that makes no ontological claims to truth.	Because we make no truth claims for our theories or models, there can be no ontological contradictions between them. We can use apparently contradictory models in different situations so long as they work.
Determinism	The external world is real. We and our knowledge are determined by material causes, hence knowledge can lay no claim to truth (or to meaning).	There is no problem with integration for all systems of knowledge are determined by external, nonrational factors such as infant experiences, emotional drives and thought conditioning.

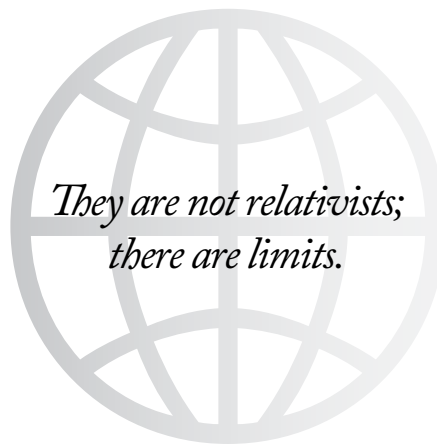
their theological or missiological thinking—for them to think in centered set ways—would require nothing short of a paradigm shift in their understanding of reality. It is no surprise that they sometimes have trouble dialoguing with centered set evangelicals, despite the fact that the root level beliefs of the two groups are essentially the same.

Evangelicals as Progressive Realists

What characterizes progressive realist evangelicals? Like their conservative realist counterparts, progressive realist evangelicals see the external world as real. However—and this is the key difference—progressive realists believe that their knowledge of this real world is indeed partial but can be true. Science, and thus theology/missiology, is not a photograph of reality, instead it is a map or model. Theology/missiology is still viewed as something akin to mathematics. Now, though, the simple $2 \times 2 = 4$ type formulas are expanded to allow for more variables: $__ \times __ = 4$, where there are more acceptable answers allowed: 1×4 , 2×2 , -2×-2 , -1×-4 , $2 \times \text{square root of } 4$, and so on. All of these answers are correct as is the original $2 \times 2 = 4$. The difference is that the number 4 is not derived solely from one mathematical expression. I do not mean to imply that progressive realist evangelicals will allow for any and all possibilities. They are not relativists; there are limits. As is true mathematically (where only multiples of the number 4 will properly fit into the $__ \times __ = 4$ equation), so, too, limits are placed upon Bible interpretation and translation possibilities.

In terms of their main essential characteristic, progressive realist evangelicals tend to reason along these lines: “The Bible is the authoritative Word of God, but just how it is also the inerrant Word depends on how a person defines inerrancy, since the biblical evidence appears to give us different options.” Or, “Women may or may not be allowed to teach men. We must examine all of the possible contexts of male and

female roles and commands concerning teaching in the Bible, and then, and only then, can we come up with some tentative conclusions based on that overall data.” Likewise, progressive realists are more open to possible explanations concerning dating and authorship issues. Again, regarding the Pentateuch, they would certainly not discount Mosaic authorship. However, they would answer the authorship question something like this: “Jesus referred to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, but did he mean that Moses was the only author, or that Moses highly influenced the material in the Pentateuch and thus his name should be attached to it as the tradition



demand, or was he saying that Moses was mainly responsible for a work that was subsequently redacted by others?”

Thus, following Hiebert, the nature of knowledge for progressive realists “is made up of successive paradigms which bring us closer approximations of reality and absolute truth” (1985a:6). Using the $2 \times 2 = 4$ example once more, increasing the number of variables likewise increases the chance of getting closer to the reality of what makes up the number 4. In the mind of progressive realist evangelicals, being open to several possible acceptable answers to many non-doctrinal theological/missiological issues helps them to come closer to reality for a particular issue.

As has already been shown, the descriptions of progressive realist evangelicals and centered set evangelicals bear obvious similarities. Once again, this is because the epistemological foundations one finds in the progressive realist’s understanding of reality are pragmatically worked out in centered set ways. Centered set evangelicals tend to be flexible and tolerant in their theological and missiological thinking because their epistemological foundations do not allow them to be otherwise. What was true for conservative realists is likewise true for progressive realists: to change their theological or missiological thinking—for them to think in bounded set ways—would require nothing short of an entire paradigm shift in their understanding of reality. As a result, they, too, sometimes have trouble dialoguing with bounded set evangelicals, despite the fact that the root level beliefs of the two groups are essentially the same. Figure 5 (opposite page) helps to illustrate the relationship between evangelicals, their epistemological foundations, and set theory. (Note: This graphic is meant to be read from the bottom up.)

Still other questions arise at this point. Can an evangelical have conservative realist epistemological foundations and pragmatically work them out in centered set ways? Or can an evangelical have progressive realist epistemological foundations and pragmatically work them out in bounded set ways? These are valid questions, to be sure, and it is difficult to arrive at definitive answers. On the whole, however, I believe that, by definition, an evangelical with conservative realist epistemological foundations will *in general* work out such presuppositions in bounded set ways. Likewise, an evangelical with progressive realist epistemological foundations will *in general* work out such presuppositions in centered set ways.¹⁰

To summarize, evangelicals are by default in the evangelical camp when

they all have the same essential theological/missiological beliefs centered in the authority of the Bible. How they pragmatically work out their individual beliefs in areas of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, however, depends upon the basic epistemological foundations to which they subscribe (conservative realist or progressive realist). In the final analysis, it is these epistemological foundations that determine whether or not a particular evangelical will pragmatically work out his or her individual beliefs in bounded set or centered set ways.¹¹

Clarifying Evangelical Responses to Insider Movements and Familial Language Translations

In this article I have not referred directly to those evangelicals who are advocating for or against insider movements, or to those who are debating the merits of various familial language translations. In fact, I have purposefully used other issues—the inerrancy of Scripture, the role of women in the church and the authorship/dating of particular books of the Bible—to give readers an overall feel for how different epistemological foundations can lead to different evangelical responses. Thus, I believe the prior discussion of set theory (and, especially, of epistemological foundations) is essential to better understand and clarify why many evangelicals differ in their views on key theological/missiological issues like insider movements and familial language translations. In light of the above, I believe that arriving at a conclusive “one view fits all” evangelical response to these issues may prove to be impossible, as illustrated in Figure 6 (pg. 84). That said, our earlier discussion also shows that on these particular issues, evangelicals who maintain vastly differing viewpoints still share much common ground, providing space where they can unite rather than divide. Let us look at each issue in turn.

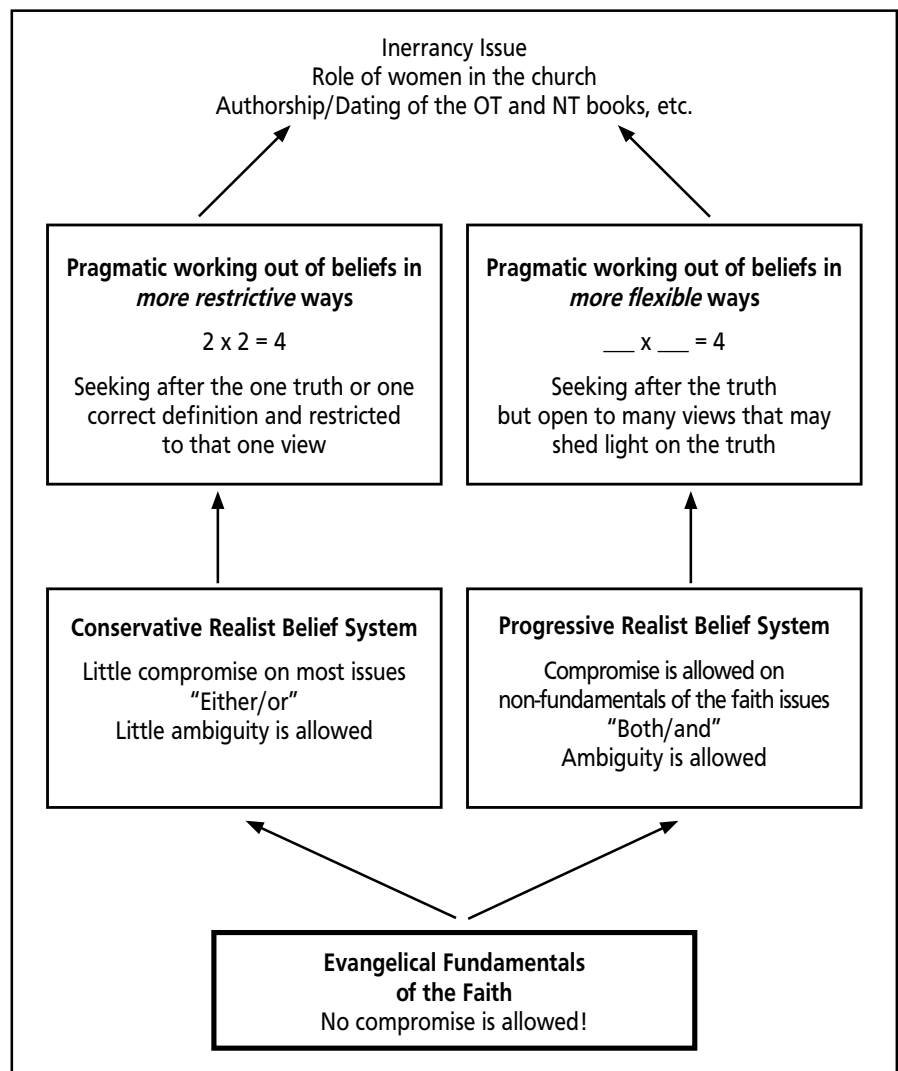
Evangelical Responses to Insider Movements

First, let us consider evangelical responses to insider movements and those insiders who have decided to follow Jesus. While there is much that evangelicals agree about, several key areas of disagreement remain. These concern both orthodoxy belief issues (“What should insiders believe?”) and orthopraxy conduct issues (“What should insiders practice?”). Key orthodoxy issues include an understanding of Jesus as God’s Son and how best to communicate this understanding; the concept of and use of the word “Trinity”; whether or not Muhammad can be viewed positively as God’s messenger; and whether or not there are some

truth elements found in the Qur’an. Key orthopraxy issues include reciting the *shahada* (“There is no God but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God,” although this has an orthodoxy element as well); reading the Qur’an for personal and corporate edification (again, there is an orthodoxy element to this as well); participating in ritual prayer (*salat*) in a mosque; self-identifying as a Muslim, and remaining within Islam.

What is to be done regarding these orthodoxy and orthopraxy disagreements? Though both sides agree on the evangelical foundations (especially that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God) their basic epistemological starting

Figure 5: Evangelicals, Set Theory and Epistemology



points lead each side to reach different conclusions about these issues.

I would argue that, *generally speaking*, evangelicals who are more positive toward insiders and insider movements are more likely to be centered set progressive realists. As a result, while they fully believe in the authority of the Bible as their center they are, at the same time, more flexible concerning some of the key orthodoxy and orthopraxy issues referred to above. They are also more flexible concerning whether or not Jesus followers can remain within their own religion and culture. Centered set progressive realists are also more tolerant of missionaries who have come alongside insider movements. One key concern of these centered set progressive realists is whether or not Jesus followers are truly being disciplined while remaining insiders, since discipleship is an essential characteristic of their fundamental belief system. *How* this discipleship occurs, however, is not so important; *that* discipleship occurs is the main orthopraxic issue for them. They see that discipleship can still happen while insiders remain within their religious/cultural systems. These centered-set progressive realist evangelicals do not see insider movements as a fundamental faith issue and therefore are tolerant of some ambiguity when it comes to insiders and insider movements, which is a part of their tendency toward “both/and” thinking.

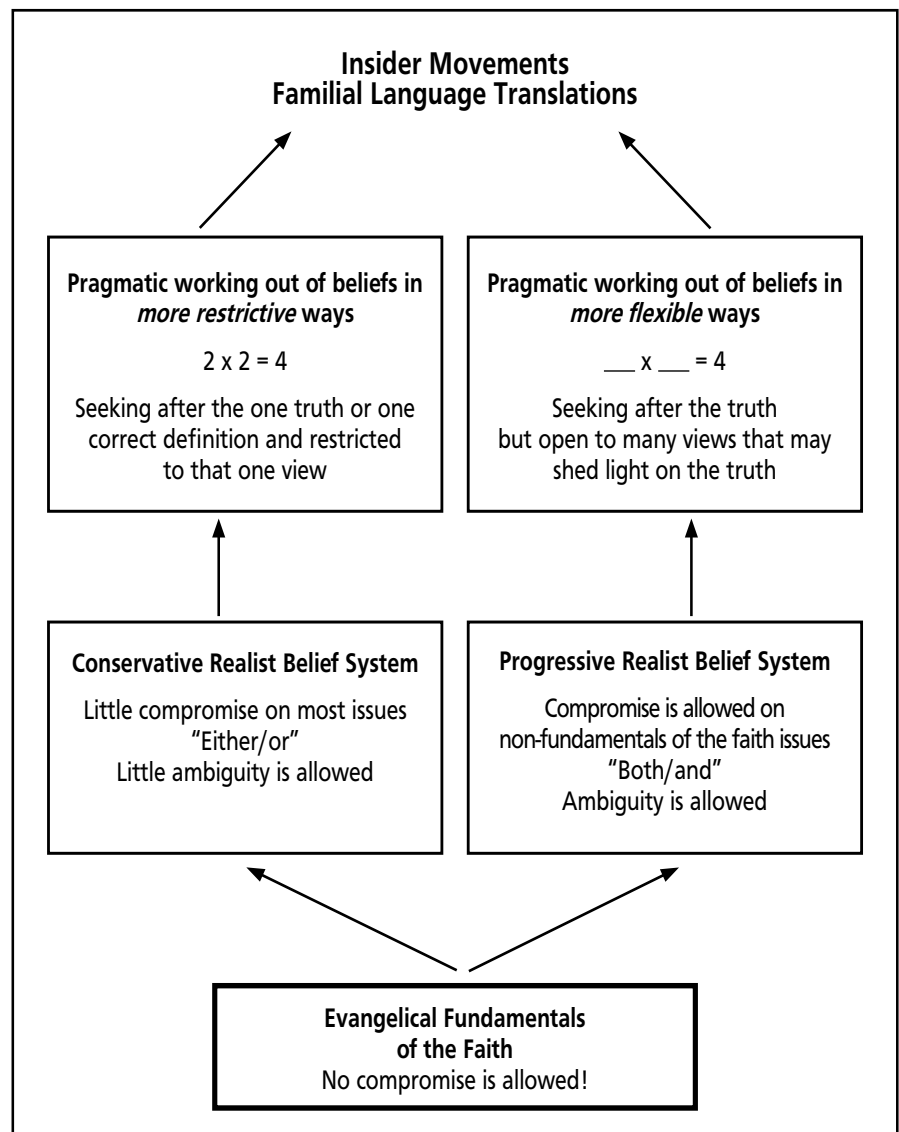
Conversely, I would again argue that, *generally speaking*, evangelicals who are more negative toward both insiders and insider movements are more likely to be bounded set conservative realists. As such, these evangelicals, in believing in the authority of the Bible as their center, are less flexible concerning some of these key orthodoxy and orthopraxy issues; they view insider movements as compromising the very essence of the Christian faith. They are less flexible concerning whether or not Jesus followers can remain within their own religion and culture. Bounded set

conservative realists are also less tolerant of those missionaries who come alongside insider movements.

As with centered set progressive realists, one main concern of these bounded set conservative realists is whether or not Jesus followers are truly being disciplined while remaining insiders, since discipleship is also an essential characteristic of their fundamental belief system. *How* this discipleship occurs is very important to them. They contend that in some cases it is better for insiders to leave their religion/culture because its false beliefs and practices prevent good

discipleship from happening properly within the old religious system. These bounded set conservative realist evangelicals see insider movements as a fundamental faith issue and therefore are less tolerant of any ambiguity when it comes to insiders and insider movements, which is a part of their tendency toward “either/or” thinking. Despite this either/or tendency, bounded set conservative realist evangelicals generally remain compassionate toward both the followers of Jesus within insider movements and the missionaries ministering to them.

Figure 6: Evangelicals, Set Theory, Epistemology, Insider Movements and Familial Language Translations



What unites both groups on this issue is the desire to see the lost reached with the gospel and that missionaries are necessary for this to happen.

Evangelical Responses to Familial Language Translations

Concerning evangelical responses to familial language translations, much of what I have said earlier applies to this issue as well. Evangelicals who tend to be more center set progressive realists will be more flexible concerning translations and familial language choices while evangelicals who tend to be more bounded set conservative realists will be much less flexible.

The issue of familial language translations, however, is further complicated

Our epistemological foundations even influence the conclusions we draw about those whose understandings differ from our own.

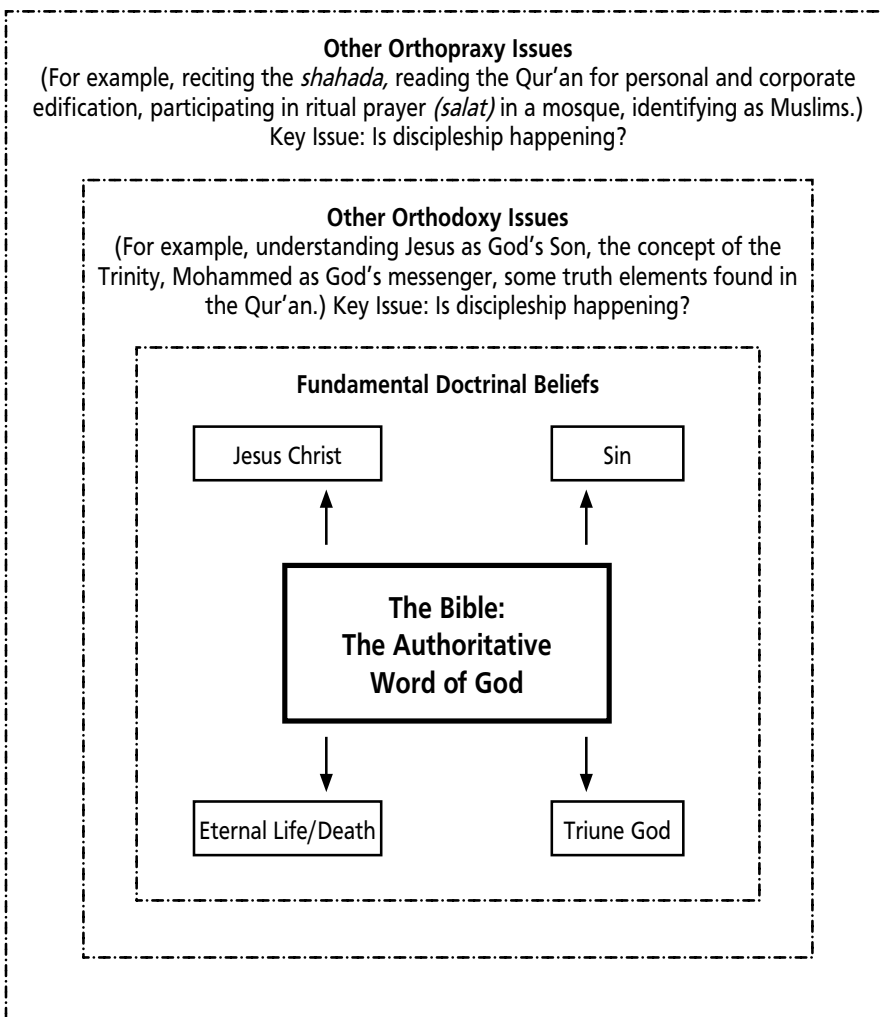
because it directly relates to one of the main evangelical fundamentals of the faith: an understanding of Jesus as God’s Son and how best to communicate this understanding in Bible translations, especially those destined for use among Muslim people groups. Since this familial language translation issue directly impacts the fundamental doctrinal belief in the triune God, it is taken seriously by bounded set conservative realists and centered set progressive realists alike. Christians through the centuries have dialogued about and

debated various theological understandings of the triune God; it is such a key fundamental element of evangelical faith that the issue of familial language translations naturally deserves close attention by both groups. On this issue the two sides have many more common understandings of the triune God than they have differences.¹²

What unites both groups is the desire to see the Bible translated into the languages of the various people groups of the world and that these translations be as accurate as possible.

I believe that Figure 7 (left) helps illustrate the complexities facing both groups of evangelicals in relationship to insider movements and familial language translations. Note that the borders in the figure in relationship to orthodoxy and orthopraxy issues are porous dot-dash lines that indicate the struggle both groups have in trying to figure out what the actual borders are.

Figure 7: Evangelical Responses to Insider Movements and Familial Language Translations



Conclusion: Toward a Greater Appreciation for Each Other

Why can’t evangelicals agree? This article has suggested that one primary reason is that evangelicals—when addressing key theological/missiological issues like insider movements and familial language translations—approach such issues from very different epistemological starting points. Whereas differing epistemological foundations may not allow agreement to take place, understanding the other’s (and even one’s own) epistemological foundations may help all concerned to gain a greater appreciation for the other.

With this possibility in mind, I propose the following practical steps for all evangelicals discussing these crucial issues:

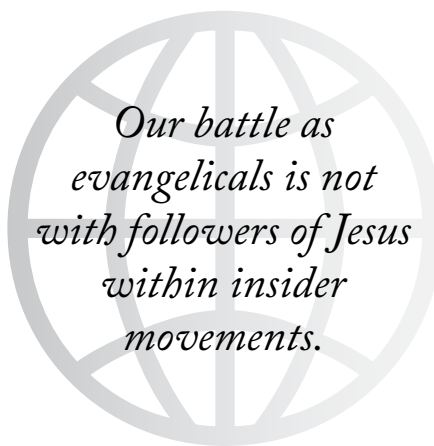
1. *Recognize the reality of epistemological foundations.*
All evangelicals must come to

realize that our epistemological foundations greatly influence how we approach any issue, especially key theological/missiological issues like insider movements and familial language translations. Further, while we need to understand and appreciate our own epistemological foundations we also need to recognize the reality of the differing epistemological foundations of those with whom we disagree. We also need to see that our epistemological foundations even influence the conclusions we draw about those who hold to understandings that differ from our own.

2. *Acknowledge that while agreement may not be possible, fellowship still is.* Whereas agreement on these key issues may never be fully achieved by all evangelicals, it is still a valuable exercise for both sides to continue to dialogue: to attempt to understand where the other side is coming from, to acknowledge the real differences and to be respectful of the other's views. To do this each side will need to see both the strengths and the weaknesses in their various approaches and appreciate the Spirit-driven possibility that, although agreement may not happen, fellowship can still be maintained.
3. *Explore the possibility that core common beliefs may help bridge the divide.* Whereas agreement may not happen on these key issues, it still is important for both sides to understand and acknowledge that we do agree on the same basic core evangelical fundamentals of the faith. As a result, there is infinitely more that unites us than divides us. Exploring more fully this overwhelming agreement on core evangelical beliefs can hopefully help bridge the divide.
4. *Realize where the true battle lies.* It is crucial that both groups recognize that, in the final analysis, our battle as evangelicals is not with the followers

of Jesus within insider movements, nor with those missionaries who are finding themselves in the midst of insider movements, nor with Bible translators who are trying their best to communicate the truths of God's Word to their particular people group. Rather, our true battle is only with Satan and his forces. Consequently, it behooves both groups of evangelicals to realize that as important as these theological/missiological issues are, they should never distract us from the overarching goal of reaching our lost and dying world with the Good News of Jesus.

Attempting to understand the pros and cons of various theological/missiological approaches to insider movements



and familial language translations is appropriate and necessary. At the same time, such discussions should be done in a spirit of love and harmony, without malice and dissension. It is hoped that this article will help both groups better appreciate and value one another, and to move forward in reaching the lost. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Note that although this article is specifically addressed to evangelical theologians/missiologists/Bible translators who are dealing with the issues of insider movements and familial language translations, for sake of space and clarity I will refer to this specific group simply as "evangelicals."

² In this article I will not discuss the particulars of either insider movements or

familial language translations; it is assumed that those reading this article are familiar with these two issues as well as with some of the controversies concerning them in evangelical circles. For those who do need more information see back issues of the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* which has been dealing with these issues since 2000, and more recent issues of *Christianity Today*.

³ For further information on set theory see, for example, Cohen (1966) and Hatcher (1966).

⁴ Cf., for example, Hiebert (1978).

⁵ Hiebert championed various aspects of set theory in his 1978, 1979 and 1983 articles. His 1994 article, however, encapsulates his most comprehensive understanding of set theory for the mission task and it is this article that will be referred to throughout the remainder of this article.

⁶ The whole category of fuzzy sets seems, by definition, to be something outside of mainstream evangelical theology/missiology. Fuzzy sets have no clearly defined borders. Instead "there are degrees of inclusion. Things may be one-quarter, one-half or even two-thirds in the set" (Hiebert 1994:118; cf. 118-122 and 131-133). Such ambiguity is usually outside the realm of evangelicalism, thus the disregard of fuzzy sets in this particular discussion is legitimate. The study of fuzzy sets, however, may give us much insight into the categorical sets and thus the epistemological foundations of insiders in insider movements. Hiebert himself acknowledged this when he began his 1994 chapter with the story of the Indian peasant, Papayya, and the question of whether or not a nonliterate peasant can "become a Christian after hearing the gospel only once? If so, what do we mean by conversion?" (1994:107). Although Hiebert's death in March 2007 occurred before the controversy over insider movements really began to escalate, this chapter sets forth some good characterizations of insiders who may appear to fall into this category of fuzzy set.

⁷ Some would argue that an understanding of a sovereign triune God is the most essential characteristic and should be at the center. While I agree that God is indeed central to everything, at the same time I believe that our human understanding of God is primarily found in his authoritative word, the Bible. Thus, for the theological/missiological agenda of this article I place the Bible at the center.

⁸ A composite definition taken from the Webster and Oxford dictionaries.

⁹ Cf. Hiebert (1985b).

¹⁰ The emphasis here is on the phrase, *in general*. These are not absolute categories; there is room for movement. Furthermore, there is a process to all of this. An evangelical, for example, may have initially been a conservative realist and through the years shifted to a progressive realist position. The reverse can also be true. But *generally speaking* these categories are helpful.

¹¹ For a case study of how set theory and epistemological foundations influenced the issue of inerrancy in the Asian context see Caldwell (2004).

¹² The report of the World Evangelical Alliance Global Review Panel (finalized on April 26, 2013) has done a good job in helping both sides come to terms with some of the complexities involving familial language translations. See "Report to World Evangelical Alliance for Conveyance to Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL International from the WEA Global Review Panel" available at www.worldea.org/images/wimg/files/2013_0429-Final%20Report%20of%20the%20WEA%20Independent%20Bible%20Translation%20Review%20Panel.pdf.

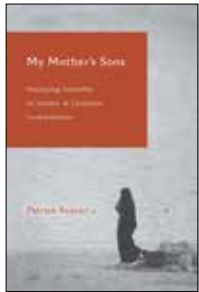
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Book Reviews

My Mother's Sons: Managing Sexuality in Islamic and Christian Communities, by Patrick Kraye (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013, pp. 269)

—Reviewed by Harley Talman



Should Western Christians conform to Islamic cultural norms that oppress and devalue women, or should they resist customs like purdah and speak prophetically against them? This emotionally charged cultural and religious issue is obviously relevant for those working for social justice and spiritual transformation in conservative Muslim contexts.

Patrick Kraye, executive director of Interserve USA, spent a quarter century in South and Central Asia, seeing firsthand the fruit of the range of various attitudes and approaches to these issues. He affirms God's desire for cultural diversity as well as the biblical imperative for transformation. He purposes to sensitize intercultural workers to the reality that how we perceive and manage sexuality cannot be separated from our own cultural heritage. Kraye exhorts Western readers to recognize that different ways of managing sexuality (like so many other aspects in diverse cultures) are not wrong, just different. Therefore, we must first understand, and then affirm all that is good in the Islamic ways of dealing with sexuality, yet work to inject biblical values that will eventually transform those societies from within.

This book is marked by three divisions. The first examines Islamic (specifically Pakistani Pashtun) management of sexuality, explaining how and why it functions as it does, especially in regard to the influence of the sacred texts of Islam. These texts instruct Muslim communities to "create two safe spaces.... Public space is meant to be safe for men... Domestic space is meant to be safe for women" (45).

Part II examines Christian views of sexuality and its management, as informed by central biblical passages. This enlightening discussion examines both egalitarian and complementarian perspectives on these passages and will introduce almost all readers to new theological and exegetical insights. Kraye acknowledges his preference for the complementarian, but acknowledges how significantly it is shaped by Western culture. As such it is not a directly transferable paradigm for Muslim societies. On the other

hand, the complementarian view does not adequately promote the Scriptural imperative of reformation of Islamic social systems. Hence, Kraye proposes a third way.

Based on the creation narrative in Genesis 1–3 which ran contrary to Greco-Roman values and assumptions, Kraye shows how the apostle Paul integrated this theological foundation regarding sexuality with the managing of it in the various social contexts to which he wrote (1 Cor. 11; Gal. 3:28, Eph. 5:22–23 and 1 Tim. 2:9–15). His research thoroughly interacts with contemporary scholarship on the cultural and exegetical issues involved. Most readers will profit (and be challenged) by understanding the cultural backdrop of the varied contexts which Paul addresses in each of these passages.

For example, aristocratic men in Corinth were covering their heads with their fine togas to draw attention to themselves. By removing the symbol of propriety and marriage, elite women were shaming themselves, as well as their husbands, thus a woman is obliged to have a veil [*exousia*] on her head. Kraye explains:

In the Greco-Roman world and especially within the redeemed community, a woman was to exercise her own will and assent to her marriage. Wearing a head covering in the corporate assembly while praying and prophesying apparently was a statement by the wife affirming the value, integrity, and sanctity of her marriage relationship before the community (132).

In his analysis of 1 Corinthians 11, Kraye demonstrates how Paul seems to accept the Greco-Roman hierarchy of relationships, but subverts the idea of ontological difference between the sexes. Moreover, he obliges men to reflect the image of God by acting as servants, not lords, of their wives. Thus, Kraye argues that Paul accepted and worked within the social constraints of his society while at the same time being countercultural in rejecting the assumptions and values upon which they were built.

In Part III, Kraye integrates the preceding research to suggest ways that Western workers can more effectively engage Muslim societies so as to promote biblical transformation. Cultural immersion and building relational trust lay the foundation for impactful dialogue. A central premise of Kraye's Pauline model is that changing values can lead to changes in structure, but failure to work within the existing system leads to reactionary refusal to listen, contemplate, and negotiate, and thus to wholesale rejection. The implications of this premise are enormous and affect many areas of intercultural ministry and missiology. For example, insider movements seem to be following Paul's approach to existing social, cultural and religious systems by working within them, eventually transforming them through the injection of biblical understandings and values. The traditional mission paradigm that demands rejection of a religious system in its entirety causes unnecessary social dislocation and

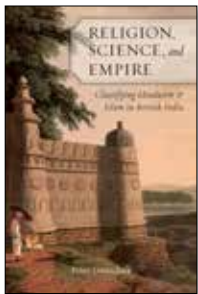
Christian workers in conservative Islamic contexts who minimize the importance of learning the local language for effective service can equally dispense with *My Mother's Sons*.

upheaval, provoking widespread communal rejection. (See my “The Old Testament and Insider Movements” in this issue for further biblical precedent for this approach).

My Mother's Sons is extremely well researched, organized, and straightforward. Kraye is balanced, and judicious in his own views and respectful in representing alternative views. Despite the immense anthropological and biblical research which undergird this study, the author's writing style is extremely clear and readable. It is hard to find fault with the book. While Kraye does not expect every reader to agree with him, all readers can expect to be surprised by the untested and often unwarranted assumptions which affect their understanding and attitudes toward Muslim and Christian views of sexuality and its management. I am hesitant to become one more reviewer adding one more book to readers' “must read” list. So instead I will say that Christian workers in conservative Islamic contexts who minimize the importance of learning the local language for effective service can equally dispense with *My Mother's Sons*.

Religion, Science and Empire: Classifying Hinduism and Islam in British India, by Peter Gottschalk (Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 421 + xx)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This is not a book for the faint-hearted, as Peter Gottschalk takes on a panoramic survey of the colonial impact on India by focusing on a largely forgotten town (Chainpur) in Bihar. His survey of cartography, travel writings, census work, ethnology and archaeology add up to a devastating exposure of misguided colonial efforts

to implement a scientific approach to India. A final chapter introduces Chainpur today and the impact of Western “scientism” on modern developing India.

Reams of data are powerfully presented to support the position that

Since the fifteenth century, a system of knowledge has been in development in Europe that would form a matrix of inter-related disciplines used not only by Europeans to understand, exploit, and control non-Europeans, but also by non-Europeans to understand and control their own societies, and by others while resisting European power. (pg. 5)

Central to this Eurocentric perspective is the concept of religion. Matched with the idea of science, it became a powerful tool that provided a mistaken sense of certainty about subtle and complex matters that needed (and need) more careful handling.

For example, even in the realm of cartography the idea of religion came to hold a central place. Revenue surveys were vital to the taxation plans of the East India Company, but their surveyors sought to present accurate data of many kinds, and that included identifying the religious identity of buildings and populations. Yet,

Both the 1853 key and 1845 map of Chainpur illustrate the tendency of the British to classify Indians first according to religious categories, which commonly reflected British expectations rather than Indian self-identification. Far from the mutually exclusive and antagonistic Hindu and Muslim communities of many British imaginations, actual practices and interactions demonstrated a complexity that belied such easy sorting. British persistence in their views of a bifurcated India, strictly separated into primarily religious communities (despite the evidence of many of their own surveys and personal encounters), suggests the impact of the scientific classification paradigm... (pg. 77)

The core problem here is the binary assumption that one must be either Hindu or Muslim, with no intermediate category or overlapping hybridity possible. Two chapters analyzing accounts of India written by British travelers (one on Christian writers, one on humanist) demonstrate how central “religion” was in the British episteme; “mutually exclusive, essence-defined, religious categories” (pg. 183).

This same assumption of scientific water tight compartments was also attempted in the identification of caste groups, with the resulting necessity of even more illegitimate forcing of categories. The censuses of 1871, 1901 and 1941 are very helpfully analyzed with a focus on confusion related to religion, tribe and caste denomination. Gottschalk helpfully compares the process to the difficulty of categorizing the platypus, which after a century of debate was defined as having its own biological order.

The development of ethnographic studies and even the birth of archaeological work are similarly documented as assuming a “scientific” basis that simply is not valid. However, basic to Gottschalk's study are the dual realities that, first, “when coupled to the powers—both persuasive and coercive—of the state, classification regimens can alter the on-the-ground realities they presumably represent” (pg. 332), so that British categorizations

“inscribed, or reinscribed more deeply and broadly, communal boundaries and social rankings supposedly derived from indigenous communities” (pg. 187). And second, Indians fully embraced the “scientific” perspective of their colonizers.

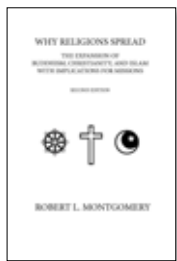
If the surest evidence of hegemony is the adoption of the paradigms and structures of the hegemon by those attempting to resist it, then the scientific hegemony is secure in Chainpur, and India in general. People routinely reference “the cause of science,” “scientific accuracy,” “scientific precision,” and “scientific objectivity” as though science is a monolithic, self-apparent enterprise defined by its perfection of knowledge and devoid of obfuscation or selfish motives. The scientism that Indians have adopted along with particular forms of cartography, demography, ethnography, ethnology, historiography, and religious studies evidences the pervasiveness and persuasiveness of British epistemic hegemony. (pg. 335)

This could be described as the crisis of post-modernity; we (both “Occidentals” and “Orientals”) see the folly of scientism, the world religions paradigm, and Euro-centrism, but we do not know how to escape our own linguistic and epistemic bondage.

Gottschalk’s book is vastly better than this review which attempts to highlight a few of his key points. His data and argumentation enlighten and convince. This is not an easy read, and the shifts of intellectual paradigm necessitated by such presentations can produce deep discomfort. But slovenly missiologial work which fails to wrestle with the innate complexities of human life and cultures cannot expect to be blessed by God. Fresh hope and revitalized faith lie beyond the abandonment of simplistic paradigms, even when often there is no alternative but to walk by faith and not by sight.

Why Religions Spread: The Expansion of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam with Implications for Missions, by Robert L. Montgomery (second edition, Ashville, NC: Cross Lines Publishing, 2012, pp. 461 + xxvii)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This book is a creative effort to understand the spread of what are understood to be the three great expansive religions. In the course of presentation the author shows a distinct understanding of the complexities of religious studies. Yet an inadequate paradigm is allowed to dominate the book despite clear indications of awareness of the reductionistic simplicity of the “world religions” paradigm.

The author defines his project quite clearly.

I have chosen to focus my study on the spread of religions across socio-cultural borders, which are usually also geographical borders, by propagation leading to the change of religious identities in new locations. In other words, I am considering primarily why religions have spread or not spread across borders through propagation and ensuing acceptance of new religious identities. (pg. 8)

He then points out that it is Buddhism, Christianity and Islam that have successfully spread according to his definition. But there is serious question as to what the “spread” of Buddhism might mean; there were powerful transformations of the Buddha’s teaching and no real sense of a “unified religion” until the late colonial period. One could argue similarly even related to Islam and Christianity. (This is largely acknowledged at places, as on pg. 369.)

The author also acknowledges the importance of differences within the religions he considers (pp. 15, 112, etc.). But these caveats do not hinder his pushing ahead with an analysis of seven factors that speed or inhibit the spread of religions.

Focused faith on an individual along with tangible contact points for mass consumption is the first important factor. Moral and organizational factors are also included among “religious content factors.”

Two macro and two micro level social factors are then also outlined; five insightful sub-points are discussed under the first macro factor of conditions in the receiving society. The second macro factor is relations between the sending and receptor societies. Social relationships within the receptor society and motivations within that society complete the seven factors that affect the spread of religion.

There is a section of missiologial application that discusses some cutting edge issues related to insider movements. The author points out that “religion as an ethno-cultural identity marker will continue to be a major obstacle to the spread of religions” (pg. 377), yet he sees the information age undermining this traditional position so that “religious leaders will have to give up their attempts to maintain followers on the basis of their religion as cultural marker” (pg. 377). This theme is touched again later;

We have to ask, is it possible for Christianity to enhance Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim identities and vice versa? There may be cultural aspects to all three of these religions which Christianity would enhance and would in turn enhance Christianity. (pg. 417)

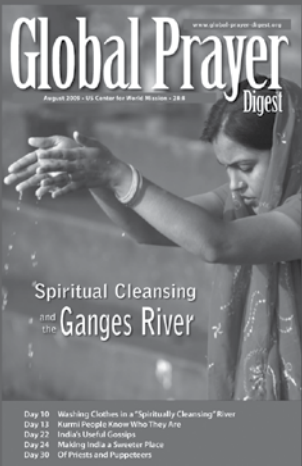
A concluding truism is worth noting again here; “the greatest danger to Christianity is bad Christianity, which can infect almost all branches of the faith” (pg. 420). This is a book recommended for its contribution to understanding the spread of religion, but hindered by internal tensions regarding the nature of “religion” and the “world religions” being considered. **IJFM**

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