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July–September 2014

“For it is not ultimately about how to define the ‘unreached,’ but how can we enter into life-on-life relationships in which the gospel can be shared and lived out in the ‘everydayness’ of life, and in which the transformative process of discipleship can take root. Prayer, spiritual vitality and spiritual resilience are critical if we are to reach into the hard places..”

—Dr. Joshua Bogunjoko, SIM International Director



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SIM is an international Christian mission organization with a staff of nearly 3,000 workers from 70 nationalities serving in more than 65 countries. SIM serves on every continent in areas of medicine, education, community development, public health and Christian witness.

Beyond the Minefields

Minefields are a haunting modern reality. I recall staring across a minefield on the edge of the Sahara desert a few years ago and being prohibited from venturing forth in our Land Rover. A disputed political borderland had shut down the nomadic routes which had historically crisscrossed this arid tundra. I was there to assist the research of Malcolm Hunter, an expert on the world's nomads, and his disappointment was evident as we were forced to surrender our plans to this modern weaponry. Our predicament that day made the nomads seem even more remote and inconsequential to our developed world. The problem of access certainly complicates mission to these least-reached peoples.

History tells quite a tale of these nomads and their influence on the margins of civilization. Through the centuries, hordes of them swept in from the Eurasian steppes to shape, define and transform Europe, Russia and China. The Christian conversion of Celtic nomads sent the first wave of evangelizing monks across barbarian Europe. And from the Bedouins of Arabia an Islamic monotheism exploded west across North Africa and eastward into South East Asia. Yes, the nomad's place is far more consequential in the history of our globe than modern notions might admit. They ruled those vast interstitial regions which linked major civilizations, and were capable of leveling empires. Like the Great Wall of China, the minefield I encountered was just the latest technology to control these nomadic regions.

Geographers suggest there was no more room for global expansion by AD 1900 when the great Age of Discovery ended.¹ Since then, globalization and technological advance have intensified the connectivity of our civilization so that we simply expect the inevitable assimilation of nomads to a settled existence. But the authors in this issue of the *IJFM* point out the tenacity of nomadic peoples' freedom and the value they place on liberty of movement which flows like "capital" through their economy of life. It's a value I recognize from my years living adjacent to *transhumant* Berber shepherds who would frequent North African markets. Those "freemen" (*amazighan*) gave no hint of wanting to settle down unless forced to do so. Throughout history, nomads have had to maintain a delicate symbiosis with sedentary civilization, and their interaction and conflict with this modern juggernaut has caused an erosion in their numbers. (Estimates differ on the global population of nomads).² But don't confuse nomadic peoples with any modern

Editorial *continued on p. 112*

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diaspora or the many refugees who migrate under duress from one settled place to another. The nomad's movement is voluntary and constant, and for this reason presents an exceptional test for cross-cultural mission.

God is not unfamiliar with this nomadic challenge, and Malcolm Hunter makes that ever so clear in his highlighting of the biblical narrative (p. 123). Neither are mission agencies unfamiliar with this challenge, as Rowland Bingham's historic piece from 1916 suggests (p. 136). But after a century of nomadic mission, Caleb Rome observes persistent realities which test our mettle as a mission movement (p. 113). There's something elusive for us moderns when it comes to the nomadic *zeitgeist*, and S. Clement captures the rhythms of that life in a vivid page out of his diary (p. 133). Together these articles make one wonder what it will take for any metropolitan church to effectively train up and equip those able to meet this challenge.

Two other articles strategically intersect this nomadic theme. L. D. Waterman introduces the LIFE scale as a new

synthesis of the present missiological debate over the various identities of Muslims who turn to Christ (p. 149). Many nomadic populations are Islamic and any movement to Christ among them will require nuanced discernment. Just how do we imagine a wandering nomad might follow Christ? What do we expect for a nomadic church? I've heard Malcolm Hunter frequently say that if a church can't fit on the back of a camel, it won't work among nomads. (Might we get any hints from the Celtic nomads in Patrick's day?) We hope Waterman's LIFE scale will help stimulate a broader discernment in these radically different contexts.

We've also included Tom Steffen's quick history on how the orality movement was birthed and refined across many tribal contexts (p. 139). It runs in tandem with the new access nomads have to the *visual* "storying" of the gospel—an access derived largely from the leap forward in mobile phone technology (see p. 161).³ In a day of increasing urban focus, let's remember that mission within the constraints of smaller and seemingly inconsequential tribal worlds has generated some very

strategic approaches in mission. I recall when the insight of Don Richardson's *Peace Child* alerted us to the redemptive analogies which God has placed in different cultures. Nomads are just one more tribal challenge which might yield to these perceptive approaches.

It's time for a new generation to get around the minefields and into these least-reached nomads.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ See Robert Kaplan's *The Revenge of Geography* (Random House, 2012), p. 63.

² See the report of the UN Commission of Nomadic Peoples.

³ On this technology see "The Little Phone that Could," in *IJFM* 27:3 Fall 2010, p. 139, and more recently, see *Mission Frontiers* 36:3, May/June 2014 at www.missionfrontiers.org.

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 Elusive Nomad

Consider the Nomad: A Felt-Needs Approach

by Caleb Rome

The initial contact came when we visited an area where we knew a nomadic tribe camped for several weeks at that time of year. My colleague, a national who had been exiled for his faith fourteen years earlier by this same Muslim nomadic clan, advised me to drive the vehicle to a town some distance from this area while he searched from the passenger's seat for anyone from his boyhood fraternity of warriors. These would be the only safe clan members for him due to the lifelong covenant bond forged as young men. My job was to drive slowly and pray for the improbable. "Stop!" and with that he was out of the vehicle. I watched from the driver's side as longtime mates exchanged warm greetings and renewed their relationship. This was the beginning we had prayed for. Cell phone numbers were exchanged and we were on our way, eight hours driving for a five-minute meeting.

Two months later, our colleague received a call. Some sort of disease was decimating the clan's camel herds, and they asked if the foreigner could help. We were able to mobilize colleagues who had a veterinary program, who were mystified by the disease or virus, but prayerfully guessed what might help the herds. In the end, only 13 of the clan's camels died, whereas all over that region thousands of camels died. Ten years after being banished from the clan for his belief in Jesus, this colleague of mine (the first believer) had now become a hero. He was warmly welcomed to return with his foreign friend. God had opened the door. This wonderful breakthrough stands in even greater relief when one considers the history of ministry to the nomad.

A History of Nomads and Missions

Any mission to nomads in our globalized world is rare nowadays. Nomads almost seem anachronistic—vestiges of a long-forgotten era when blue-veiled men in camel trains crossed the Sahara carrying salt and gold for trade. Long ago, Europeans fanned out across the world colonizing huge swaths of land that had only ever been the domain of nomads, such as the North American Plains

Caleb Rome and his wife served in the Horn of Africa for 12 years. They worked among a nomadic pastoralist Muslim group who herded camels, goats and cattle. Today he works as a development consultant for new outreach in North Africa.

Indians or the New Zealand Maori. They fought wars for control of the land, fighting against vast nomadic societies who valued their land as a living resource which created and provided food for people and animals. As lands were seized, nomadic peoples fled to wherever they could until there was almost nowhere left to go. From the plains to the jungles, North and South America were no longer fertile places for hunter-gatherer nomads.

Those who survived were summarily contained. Children were rounded up by new governments and in some cases placed under the care of missionaries. Missionaries generally did their level best to transform pagans into Christians. They also helped ‘civilize’ them by placing nomadic children in boarding schools, dressing them smartly, and renaming them, all in an effort to educate young generations and to instill in them new values. The idea was to bring salvation to these peoples while at the same time saving them from their less useful nomadic ways. Nomadic lifestyles were demonized not only as backward but as against progress and antithetical to a (post-Industrial Revolution) Christian understanding of Genesis 1:28.

Eventually nomadic peoples were subdued and controlled. Many became Christians through the efforts of these and future generations of missionaries. They received the Gospel—but lost their cultures. Against this backdrop, ministry to these same peoples today (in Australia, New Zealand and in North America) has become a very sensitive issue. It’s quite natural for descendants of these nomadic peoples to view evangelistic efforts as an activity that will inherently destroy their cultures. They blame purveyors of Christianity as those who use the Bible to eliminate their customs and culture. There are those among them who blame the Bible and thus the Christian religion as a whole for this. Evangelists are perceived by many nomads as those who work hard to persuade their

people to sell their souls to western religion and to “settled culture,”—two sides of the coin in their minds.

This is the state of things today: where hunter-gatherers once roamed freely throughout the world’s most beautiful places, nowadays they are simply disparaged and misunderstood. Nomadic pastoralist cultures continue to exist, but now, for the most part, only in the world’s most remote and desolate places, places where today’s economic colonizers have a more difficult time displacing nomads.

The Threat of Missions to the Nomad

Most nomads instinctively know their way of life is under threat and



they know from where these threats emanate. The colonial mercantile companies of the past are today’s international developers. Wealthy developers dangle huge sums of money before needy governments so that they can gain legal access to remote lands. As a result, nomadic lands are under threat from mammoth mineral extraction projects and water diversion schemes for irrigation and power generation. More often than not, today’s missionaries come from the very same countries as today’s developers, and nomads naturally consider missionaries part and parcel of this wider threat. They fear those from a settled world who devalue their lifestyle and who

would attempt to convert them to a new religion.

Before men and women of God set foot in any nomadic setting they would do well to assume they will be viewed as enemies until proven otherwise. Because of this assumption, missionaries to nomads need to be careful to clearly identify themselves as ambassadors of the Light of Life rather than as ambassadors of the various dominant settled cultures who are bent on extracting riches from nomad lands. My thesis is that righteous missionaries to nomads are not developers, neither primarily nor secondarily. They are, instead, representatives of Jesus Christ, of His love, His salvation, His power, His truth and His body. They may, indeed, be involved with development, but not the kind that is primarily informed by today’s settled cultures.

Generally speaking, good missionaries are those who are scrupulously careful to allow the scriptures to challenge and inform their “settled” worldview. They learn to recognize not only where their own culture may be thoroughly unbiblical, but also where its values may be questionable or where it may appear to have overstepped its authority. They examine their own values and their culture’s values, constantly learning to compare and contrast these with scriptural values. This exercise in self-reflection is critical for those missionaries who would be effective in following God to nomadic peoples.

Loving or Pitying Nomads?

It is of paramount importance to recognize that nomadic societies have no desire or ambition whatsoever to create a “settled culture.” They know their lives are difficult, but from their point of view, the life of the nomad is a life of freedom. Perhaps this can best be explained by the western concept of camping. Many settled Westerners, whether urbanized or not, fancy the idea of camping. Although few people actually go camping in remote places,

the idea is somehow attractive to them. People will take a week or two or even three, drop everything and take up a life of 'suffering' on a mountainside or in a chain of lakes. They do it because they love it. They find peace in a canoe or on a trail or sitting on a rock at a remote campsite. It is not unreasonable to say that a nomad is a perpetual camper. The life that we might value in order to get away from it all is exactly the life that nomads love as their norm and they have no desire to give it up.

Nomads are raised from birth to live in a manner in which life and death impinge on almost every action. For them this is normal. Nomadic pastoralists find safety and security by relying on the land and the predictable changes of seasons to guide them from place to place. Their herds represent security in both the short and medium term. The long term is out of their control but in the hands of far greater powers, which they deeply revere. They may painfully watch their families struggle with issues of life and death, but this does not mean that they secretly desire the so-called securities of living in a house and a village.

Look closely. The weather-beaten face of a woman living in a yurt perched high in a mountain valley is a peaceful face. She may be marked by daily wind, rain, and even snow, but she loves her life so close to the land. To assume otherwise is to look down upon a society, and to project a longing for change when that longing simply is not there.

Missionaries need to take care not to confuse different lifestyles with ungodliness. To be sure, just as is true with every culture, so also every nomadic culture is laden with the ugliness that sin produces, but in no way does this make a nomadic lifestyle somehow sinful or destructive in and of itself. I cannot tell you how many times visitors to the desert where we worked have said, "How do these people live like this? It is so hard and they

They can only survive in the desert by herding camels, cattle and goats. There is no other way to live out there. They have adapted beautifully.

are so poor." The insinuation is palpable, even if they don't realize what they are saying. When we dig down to the core of our western Christianity, we often find a simplistic and flawed belief that wealth and comfort equate with God's blessing. Therefore, if a culture is wealthy, it is somehow the result of godliness. Conversely, this same logic leads to the conclusion that poverty and discomfort are primary signs Satan has been given authority to wreak havoc with a people group. Simply put, if you serve God, you will get health, wealth and comfort; but if you don't, you will get sickness, disease, poverty and stress.

With this flawed logic, the redemptive work of God through missions morphs into proclaiming the salvation of the Lord through programs meant to alleviate poverty. As a result, some organizations attempt to demonstrate godliness to nomads by building all manners of settlement infrastructure—as if this will somehow help the people see that "God's way of life" is the best way. By this they hope to save some. By teaching nomads to settle down, and thereby to gain wealth and comfort, they hope in this way to reveal God to them. This kind of missions is not found in Jesus' life, the Acts of the Apostles or in the letters of Paul. This kind of missions is little more than development, a spiritualized development, based on the value of settled life over nomadic life. And it is precisely this type of reasoning that has foolishly diverted vast amounts of funding from church planting missions into Christian development endeavors over the past fifty years.

We are naïve if we miss the similarities of these kinds of spiritually motivated endeavors with the endeavors of national governments. Sometimes

missionaries mistake the friendliness of these governments to be part of God's leading—"open doors," if you will. But, it may very well be that the will of God for some nomads will not at all please the national governments which intend to settle them. It is not easy to walk a road that reveals Christ to nomads in a country where a government might have ulterior motives behind its plans to settle and restrict nomads—and many governments do have those plans.

There is no need to list all the nomadic peoples in the Bible to demonstrate just how much God loved them and blessed them just as they were. Others have done that work.¹ From a strictly spiritual perspective, there is absolutely no need to settle nomads. There may be cultural reasons, political reasons or economic reasons, but there are no good spiritual reasons even when people are sick and dying.

If we look at desert-dwelling nomadic pastoralists, the truth is that these people can only survive in the desert by herding camels, cattle and goats. There is no other way to live out there. They have adapted beautifully, guaranteeing survival for decades through the size and health of their herds. They don't see themselves as poor, but as having that which is sufficient to survive. Some even see themselves as wealthy because they have such large herds. Take a second and closer look and you will find that they are at peace. They even enjoy life.

Accepting the Nomadic Otherness

Jesus helps us here. The story of the Good Samaritan has a clear message that many have missed. A priest, a Levite and a Samaritan all come across

a Jewish man who has been beaten and robbed. Only the Samaritan helps him. We know the unfortunate soul is Jewish because Jesus purposefully locates the parable on the main road that skirts Samaria, the road Jews used to avoid setting foot in Samaria. Samaritans and Jews despised one another, yet this Samaritan lovingly cares for this particular Jew. Besides this, he makes sure he is well cared for until he has fully recovered. We know the story well.

This parable comes on the heels of a botched test of Jesus by a Jewish legal expert. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” he had asked. Jesus had responded with a question of his own, “What is written in the Law . . . How do you read it?” Forced to answer his own question, he had replied,

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

Jesus commended the man and called him to live out these words. The legal expert had failed to test Jesus even slightly, so to save face, he then followed with a new question, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered with this parable of the Samaritan and then followed with one last question for the expert. “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The answer was obvious to this Jew. The neighbor was the loathed Samaritan, but the only words he could extricate from his mouth were “The one who had mercy on him.” The story vexed him. Jesus had created a story with a Samaritan as the hero. That was untenable. But Jesus wasn’t finished with him. “Go and do likewise,” he commanded.² Jesus had made it clear to this Jew that the neighbor he was to love as he loved himself was in fact his own enemy. That is the point of this parable.

I’m suggesting we have the same problem as this Jewish expert. We don’t

like certain peoples and we look down upon them. If we are honest, people from settled cultures don’t easily value nomadic peoples. Sure, we may find documentaries of them fascinating, and we might even pity their plight, but we accept the inevitability of their absorption into the mainstream of the global economy. If, as missionaries, that is the way we work with nomads, then we will remain their enemies even though we are lovingly focused on alleviating what we perceive their needs to be. Loving a people goes far beyond doctoring or developing a people. It means accepting a people for who they are. It means lifting them up. It means submitting to them and serving them in ways that they perceive



will truly bless them, not in ways that fulfill us or our development ideals.

The missionary who arrives on the scene of an unreached nomadic people group with an “I can help you” or an “I can fix you” posture actually stands in judgment of that people group. He has judged them and found them wanting. That missionary thinks he loves the nomads, perhaps comparing himself to the Good Samaritan who loved that Jew, but he is actually not focused on the nomads’ real problems like the Samaritan was focused on the man’s real injuries. He only pities their condition and therefore wants to alleviate that which makes them so pitiful to him. It is as if he has pulled out a comb and

a new set of clothes and is focused on tidying up the poor Jew who had been beaten and robbed. The end result of his actions might be a neat and tidy people who are left suffering, lost and certainly not loved. This is reflected in what has happened to the nomadic peoples of North and South America and Austral-Asia.

Learning to “Love in Motion”

If the compassionate love of missionaries is lost on nomads (when we assume that God calls us to help develop or settle them), then it is important to rethink and clarify our task in missions. Consider the mission statement we operate under:

By demonstrating the love, the truth and the power of Jesus, we desire to locate, evangelize and disciple (name of people group) who will grow and lead the indigenous (name of people group) Church of Jesus Christ.

God sends missionaries to peoples who have not heard the truth of the Gospel. He sends them to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, to love the people with the love of the Father and to introduce people to the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The vision is to see people transformed into the image of God as His church is birthed and grows. A missionary is never sent by God primarily to economically develop an unengaged people group as his first priority. A Christian development worker may have that role, but not a missionary.

So what does it look like when a mission worker really loves nomads? After all, dealing with people that are constantly moving about is not easy business. Some might be in the camp one week but off in a completely different location the next, while the others stay in the camp. This presents all kinds of problems. Nomads can easily frustrate us because we cannot find the same people in the same place with any regularity. That does not mean we give up. It means we find how the function

of regular meetings in a settled culture might be matched in a different way in a nomadic community.

We have already stated that it is best to value nomadic culture in its own right. If we miss this, then we will most likely struggle to be valued by the nomads we are trying to reach with the Gospel. Our appreciation of them grows the more we learn. Therefore, education is key, and we need to read all we can about the culture and then enter the culture as a continual learner. We know that learning language goes hand in hand with learning culture. We must ask questions and seek to understand. The posture of an eager learner quickly endears people to the learner.

Seek earnestly those ‘Aha!’ moments of discovery. Allow the Lord to fascinate you with what He has revealed of Himself in their culture. It is easy for the Christian to point a finger at the myriad number of godless and sinful customs in a culture. While a strong working theology of the desperate condition of mankind before God (Romans 1:18-32) is foundational in ministry, it is all too easy to point a finger of judgment at any culture not our own. If we do, we pass judgment on ourselves.³ It is much more useful to look for the marks of God in the culture. Find out what they believe and why they believe it. Watch for customs that reflect the image of God.

A Personal Experience

We were living in a large city in East Africa, waiting for the day that God would open up contacts with certain nomads in a desert region. Our primary work until then had been radio. I was learning the culture of these nomads through the radio staff, who were from that nomadic culture. The dominant culture of the city came from different people groups and was marked by systemic begging. People respond to incessant begging in various ways and I had become aware that many of these beggars were tied to

As we respect them and desire to learn from them, we demonstrate love and begin to act less like the enemies they first expected.

handlers who took a cut of the generosity. More than this, the city seemed to exude a beggar mentality. To me everybody had his or her hands out, including the government. I felt that I was little more than a bank with legs to many people. As a result, I closed my wallet to multitudes of needs all around us in that city.

Sometime later, I was travelling into the desert with my friend who was one of the radio staff. As we came into town, this excellent fellow asked if I could give him some money. My own concept of the private ownership of money and property, (my wallet and its contents in this case), influenced by the constant begging in the city, caused me to hesitate just slightly. I gave him the money but I had betrayed my concern.

A short while later, my friend took it upon himself to teach me his nomadic ways with finance. He explained that in a clan of extended family members, individuals hold all property on behalf of the clan. One man’s herds might grow very large and his family might become influential in the clan, but if one of his relatives has need of a few dollars or a goat or even a camel, he would give him whatever he needs. It wouldn’t be a loan; he would give it outright. Later on, the man who gave that gift might find himself in need of a few dollars when he goes to town. He would go to any one of his relatives, ask for what he needs and he would receive it with no expectation of repayment.

Then my friend turned to me and reminded me of the way I had handed him money a short while before. I felt ashamed, because he is my brother, my spiritual brother. Two things were exposed that day: the tight grip I had on my wallet, learned as it was from my culture; and the godliness and generosity of his culture with respect to

needs and gifts.⁴ I am still fascinated with the way these people handle possessions and property for the benefit of all.

When we learn to seek out that which is good in a society, even in the worst of societies, we will find it. In the act of seeking, we demonstrate care, which to a lot of people in that culture will look like real love. This kind of care and attention builds credit with nomads. When we first come to them, they are severely suspicious, and rightly so. As we respect them and show our desire to learn from them, we demonstrate love and begin to look and act less like the enemies they first expected us to be.

Two Simultaneous Approaches

Long before we ever made contact with nomads in the desert, we had determined to follow two approaches that we believed would help us learn to love the people. For the first, I am indebted to Roland Muller, who compares and contrasts Friendship Evangelism with what he calls Teacher-based Evangelism.⁵

Rather than making friends with Muslims, while holding onto an ulterior motive of someday exposing them to the Gospel, Muller espoused something he believed was more honest and loving. He claimed that of all the practitioners he had interviewed, every

successful evangelist had the reputation of being spiritual men and women of God in their own communities.⁶

[They] all played the role of teacher, imparting spiritual knowledge and truth.⁷

The advantage these evangelists had was that it immediately became clear to the Muslim that he was sitting at the feet of a man of God, who could speak with authority and communicate effectively.⁸

Having learned this, we determined that upon our first encounter with any nomadic Muslims they should immediately learn that we were worshippers of God who followed Jesus Christ and who taught with His same authority. This meant that our first agenda would be to share Jesus with these highly resistant and fierce nomads and then to continue with a program of evangelism and discipleship.

Secondly, we determined that we would allow the felt needs of these particular nomads to serve as a pathway of discovery for God to meet their ultimate needs. A felt need approach is not new,⁹ but for nomads especially it is a good approach. As described above, nomads are leery of outsiders and their grandiose ideas of societal development. If we can encourage them to voice their own needs, even if only their immediate physical needs, and then faithfully work to address those needs with them, in so doing we will demonstrate God's great love to them.

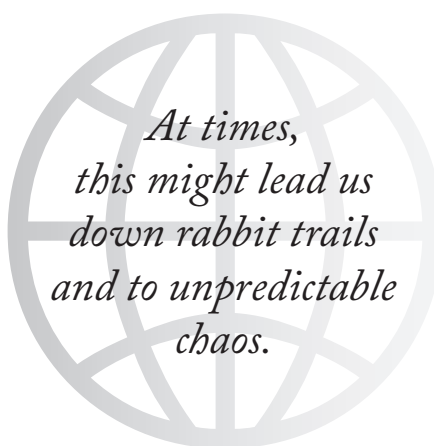
We learned that the key was to listen well at the front end so that we could head in the right direction with the right needs. As we developed ideas to alleviate or address any need, we worked closely with the people, carefully incorporating our ideas with their plans. This is very difficult for an educated missionary, but absolutely essential, especially in the context of nomads who may have little or no formal education. On the contrary, if we work to incorporate their ideas into our own, ready-made plans, we could accidentally be responsible for assisting nomads in becoming settled people, for that is what we settled people naturally do. Instead, we must resist the urges to create the best solutions ourselves, and allow nomads to direct their own development with our assistance.

The Tension Between Teacher-Based Evangelism and a Felt-Need Approach

When we combine these two ideas of teacher-based evangelism and a felt

need approach, a tension arises. The missionary with the reputation of being an authoritative spiritual teacher will become someone to whom the Holy Spirit will draw men and women for guidance into all truth. That missionary will rightly take responsibility for putting forward a teaching agenda as God directs him or her. On the other hand, a felt need approach puts the ball in the nomad's court. They pitch their needs and the missionary responds. How can these two strategies coexist?

In matters of discipleship, we can have a fair idea of what we want to present and when, but if people have an urgent need to solve a basic human problem, then we need to give our immediate attention to that need. If



we have planned to teach from the Lord's Prayer, but one of the people we wanted to teach has been called away because his brother is dying a few kilometers away, then maybe we ought to make the journey with the man. At the very least, we must dedicate those days to prayer for the brother and look to find what our responsibility should be in ministering to him.

At times, this might lead us down rabbit trails and bring a certain amount of unpredictable chaos into our days, but Jesus had many days like this. After the deliverance of the man with a legion of demons, Jesus purposed to go back across the lake and continue teaching. In

those days, he was busy laying a foundation of truth in the region of Galilee that would later serve the early church well in that region. As soon as he docked, he was swarmed by crowds of people. According to Luke, Jesus may have been headed for the synagogue, but the synagogue ruler's 12-year-old daughter was dying, so he immediately started towards the house where she lay. People pressed in from all sides. In the midst of the mêlée, one woman reached out and managed to touch the edge of Jesus' cloak and she was healed. Jesus stopped and ministered to her before continuing on to the young girl.¹⁰

Jesus spoke as one with authority. He had strong agendas and strategies, but he followed his Father's guidance, ministering to needs that presented themselves. In this case he may have been headed for the synagogue but a felt need changed his course. Then, while on the way, yet another felt need delayed him. Love for the people created his agenda and love for the people changed that agenda. We need to be just as willing to live in this tension.

A mission to nomads ultimately needs to be a mission of God's love. That love will drive us to learn the culture, value the culture and search for godliness already preexistent in the culture. That love will put the Gospel in front of the people early and regularly as missionaries build up a reputation of being captivated by God and speaking authoritatively in their teaching. That love will make us available to the myriad number of felt needs with which people confront us. Some of these needs will mobilize projects, which will create the development that the nomads are asking for and want. That love will allow the people themselves to shape and direct appropriate nomadic development.

A Case Study of Nomadic Ministry

Fourteen years earlier the leaders of a certain clan almost murdered the first from their midst to encounter believers

from a neighboring ‘Christian’ tribe. They brought a 15-year-old lad to a river, tortured him by drowning, and then left him for dead, unconscious and abandoned. When he regained consciousness, he was forced to flee as an outcast. He wandered around in the desert for ten years, slowly deepening in his faith. Soon he began to testify of Christ. That led to imprisonments and ultimately to banishment from the entire people group of two million. God led him to a city hundreds of kilometers away where he met several of us and was recruited to become the producer of a very effective radio broadcast to his own people.

For three years we focused on prayer, research, and the development of a ministry strategy. We learned to pray in faith that a clan leader would be the first to come to Christ. Through discipleship and prayer, God prepared us to return to the clan who had kicked our colleague out in the first place.

When we felt it was time, we prayerfully visited an area to which his people sometimes migrate, an area where another people group had settled. As I shared earlier, there we had found one of his boyhood friends, and had been warmly welcomed. God used that renewed relationship as the means to cure a large herd of camels. Our dear brother instantly became a hero to his people. Two weeks later we learned that his clan leader, Mohammed (psuedonym), the one who had ordered my colleague’s drowning years earlier, was sick and in need of help. We provided a way for him to come to the city and go to the hospital. It turned out to be a severe case of giardia (intestinal parasites). God then decided a miracle was in order and healed him instantaneously after he had seen the doctor. Days later, we showed him the Jesus film and read him Isaiah 53. This Muslim man was in awe of Jesus and proclaimed, “A great light is coming into the darkness of our people.” Then he formally

In the evening the elders would gather—we trusted that God would use the clan leader to open the door at that meeting.

invited us to visit his people. God had dramatically answered our prayer.

The following is an account of our first twenty-four hours (and some general results) of what turned out to be a long-term encounter with this clan of Muslim nomadic pastoralists. That first day we determined to do two things. First, we knew that in the evening the elders would gather for their nightly meeting. We trusted that God would use the clan leader to open the door at that meeting. Then I planned to share with them my deep heart for God and begin to introduce them to Jesus. We believed that God intended for us to go way beyond friendship evangelism, just as Roland Muller had espoused.

These nomads suspected that national evangelical Christians gain cultural dominance by doing good works. They believed the agenda of Christians is to commandeer all other cultures in order to take over their land. This is not true, but it is a perception that must be recognized and reckoned with especially where Christians are the dominant culture. For that reason, we had decided to use the Muslim name for God (Allah), because the only other option was the name from the language of the dominant Christian culture. My friend was originally from the Muslim nomadic clan and I was a foreigner. Neither of us was from the people group (of national Christians) with whom the nomads associated all “Christians.” Simply using that “other” name for God would instantly render us “the enemy” in the nomads’ minds. We wanted to present ourselves simply as surrendered worshippers of God who followed and loved Jesus Christ, avoiding links to any peripheral issues that would put up a barrier to the Gospel.

Secondly, we desired to meet the entire clan in order to learn from them what

their biggest challenges might be. We had prepared ourselves for many of the felt needs they might mention.

After many hours of driving to this extremely remote place, we arrived at the main camp and asked for Mohammad. It turned out that we had driven right on past him. He was twenty kilometers back, staying with his daughter in a small town. We thought it wise that I turn around and drive back there and pick him up, while my friend stayed in the camp to rekindle relationships.

An hour later, I arrived in the little town and located Mohammad. He was excited to see me. God was working. We ate together and then I prepared to take him to the camp. We were on task, but Mohammed had something he wanted me to do before we drove off. His daughter’s husband was very sick, so sick, in fact, that he was confined to the local clinic. Mohammad wanted me to visit him because he had seen the Jesus film and knew that he could be healed. I, on the other hand, figured that they probably wanted money to transport this man to the hospital 300 kilometers away.

We walked over to the clinic. I soon found myself at the bedside of an emaciated figure. The doctor on duty said that the man had AIDS and would soon die. It turned out that my surmise had been correct, and the rest of the family did indeed ask me for money. Foolishly, I had not brought extra funds with me on that inaugural trip, but suddenly I heard Acts 3:6 in my mind, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”

“Oh no, God!” I thought. “I cannot try this. This is my first trip into this territory. We are at the beginning of our ministry. I cannot ruin my reputation

with a failed healing attempt. This is asking too much!”

But the same verse kept running through my mind. My attempts to argue with God were futile, so I finally relented. I explained that I did not have nearly enough cash on hand, but I would pray that God would raise this man up and give him health. Before I prayed, I told him that I was about to pray in the name of Jesus Christ and that Jesus himself would be responsible for any healing that occurred. Then I asked for permission to pray. The sick man agreed. I put my hand on his chest and prayed that God would heal him. The man lay there just as sick as the moment I had arrived. I didn't know what to think. I had been faithful, but he was still sick.

I took that as my cue to drive back to the camp with Mohammad. I wondered what he was thinking. Soon we were onto other matters and then we arrived at the main camp. The welcome was hearty. They fed us well, and even slaughtered a goat. After nightfall, the elders gathered for their meeting. My heart pounded with exhilaration. I knew we were on the very frontlines of reaching the unreached, but I was also keenly aware that what I had prepared to say might not be accepted. My friend had warned me that these men would likely want to know why we had come to visit them. The answer to this question had eluded me as I prepared ahead of time. Nothing seemed like a good answer.

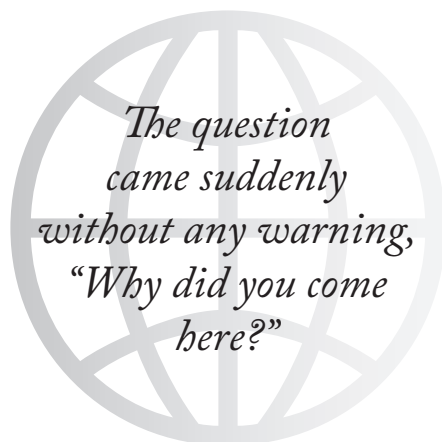
After no more than a few minutes, the question came suddenly without any warning. “Why did you come here?” they asked. I could have flippantly answered that Mohammad had invited me, but I knew they wanted to know why I was interested in Mohammad in the first place. Nobody is permitted to visit these nomads without an invitation and a vetted purpose. I was suddenly on trial. I had the very real sense that my reply would either bring persecution or blessing. I needed the

words of the Holy Spirit and I needed them at that very moment.¹¹

I took a deep breath and the Holy Spirit put the words in my mouth. I said,

God placed such a great love in my heart and in my family's hearts for your people that we had to leave our country and come to you. Secondly, we have come to be agents of God's blessing to you. Thirdly, we are here to give you the light of God's truth. May I tell you a story that Jesus once told?

Looking back at that answer, I marvel at what God led me to say. In no uncertain terms I had expressed not only our love for them but, more



importantly, God's love for them. I had also affirmed them by expressing God's desire to bless them and I had introduced Jesus as the light of God's truth.

Some might think that introducing ourselves as agents of God's blessing is dangerous, but most nomads are not thinking of riches and comfort when they speak of blessings. In the desert, blessings are usually associated with the coming of the rains: they think of fat, healthy animals that produce lots of babies and milk; they think of a household at peace without sickness; and they think of children growing strong because they have enough to eat.

I was exhilarated and found it difficult to sleep that night. God had not only opened an opportunity for us to come to these people but he had clearly spoken

to them. Now we had a wide open path before us. Those three statements are still remembered by the people. I have heard them quoted back to me. From the beginning, they knew why we were there.

The next morning, about one hundred people gathered under a tree to hear what we had to say. It was time to begin a felt need approach and we left nothing to chance. After introductions, I was given the floor. News had spread throughout the clan. They had all heard why I said we had come to them. I gave them greetings and expressed how blessed we felt to be permitted to be with them that day. I told the people that God loved them and loved to bless them. I said enough so that they could see our hearts. Then I decided to be just as clear with them as they had been with me. I have since found that during the daytime, nomads don't tolerate much in the way of long conversations. That is for the nighttime. I simply asked them, “What are your challenges?”

One of the men said, “Something in our water is making us and our animals sick.” I was not happy to hear that. Water work is expensive. Selfishly, I had expressly decided ahead of time not to do water development if asked. Once again, I was forced to reconsider the ways we would minister to these people.

Another man followed with, “We want our children to learn how to read and write in our own language.” The most outstanding challenge of doing any education amongst nomads is the fact that the students keep moving with their families. At that time, less than 1.5% of the entire people group could read and that figure included nobody in that particular clan.

I think it was an older woman who spoke up next, “We need a hospital or a clinic.”

I replied immediately to that one.

In this country, it is the government that is responsible for clinics and they are building them, but people still

suffer. What we would be prepared to do is to train your women to handle up to 90% of all your sicknesses.

They liked that idea.

Finally, a fourth person spoke up. “We would like help to start up small businesses,” he said. That one surprised us. I looked around. All I could see in any direction was camels, goats and a relatively desolate landscape. My friend and I smiled at each other. We would certainly be looking to the people on that one.

The meeting was adjourned and we were off to the water source, a large stream, to collect samples to learn what was wrong. Later that day we drove away by another route. It had been a day of beginnings.

Before long we left the country for home assignment. Upon our return three months later, one of our radio workers came to me with a story he thought I should know about. “Do you remember the man you visited in the clinic who was very ill?” It took me a moment to recall but then I remembered, so he continued, “Two hours after you drove away he got out of that bed, packed up his belongings and left the hospital.”

My skepticism was noticeable. “Was he well?” I asked.

“Perfectly well and he has not been back to the hospital since,” he replied, adding, “and he says that you are a holy man.”

With as much clarity as I could muster I said,

You go back and remind him that I told him any healing that occurred would be accomplished by Jesus Christ, not me.

It was then that I learned that although this man was the clan leader’s son-in-law, he was a notorious figure who had murdered many men and abused many women. I believe that God healed him that day in order to

Rather than blindly obey the government and build another failed school, we tried to accommodate their nomadic ways.

reveal his glory and accomplish his will in that man and his family.

Ever since that eventful first day with the clan, we have been working by day with these dear people to address their major felt needs and by night, reciting Bible stories. Eight years later many developments have taken place.

First, their felt needs. The problem with the water turned out to be one of extreme fluorosis. For two years we scratched our heads, researching the situation with the government until we finally came upon a little known fact. The entire area was a gravel pit with a massive reservoir of water only 30 meters below the surface. The people welcomed this news. Today there are four solar powered camel watering centers, which they located, helped design and continue to manage.

Literacy was the need that we could begin work on from the outset. There were two constraints we had to deal with. The first is that the government insisted on classrooms with desks and they demanded that schools be in session when all the other schools across the country were in session. That schedule did not coincide with the best times of year to teach these nomadic children. The second dilemma was that these particular nomads travel an annual circuit with three stops.

Rather than blindly obey the government and build another failed school among these people or clandestinely work around the government rules, we worked to adapt to the variables with which we were presented. We asked the people to form a school committee and then put an idea before them. We proposed to build two identical campuses located at their two major encampments. This would allow the students to go to school when the government

mandated—as required—despite moving with their families. The teachers would live at whichever campus the students could access. To save money and keep the classrooms cool, we would build adobe-like structures instead of the usual concrete block buildings.

They could see that we were wrestling with and trying to accommodate their nomadic ways. This pleased them greatly. Eight years later this ‘mobile’ school has several students who have reached Grade 7. These are the first seventh graders in the region. The local government looks to the school as the model for others and relies on us to influence all the schools in the whole area.

Life at the school has not been smooth. Many children would rather be out herding the goats. Parents are sympathetic to children who do not want to go to school. With the direction of the school committee, we have tried to stagger daily start times. We have also worked to provide other options to help the community deal with the stresses that education brings into the lives of both the children and the parents. Success with the children in literacy has attracted adults who want to read. So now they attend night classes with the aid of simple solar powered lighting.

Perhaps the most difficult of the needs to address have been the health issues. These people have the worst levels of health in the country. The average lifespan is 42 years. More than 125 live births per 1,000 end in death before the age of 5. The women are the gatekeepers of treatment and medication. Their ideas of treatment often equate with what we believe would be the very worst things to do. For instance, when a woman is in her third trimester of pregnancy, they believe it best that she not drink water and that she

cut back on food intake. This results in widespread anemia and malnutrition in mothers and newborns.

Health is a very spiritual topic for these women. People equate health with blessings and sicknesses with demonic curses. In that respect they are not very different from some Christians

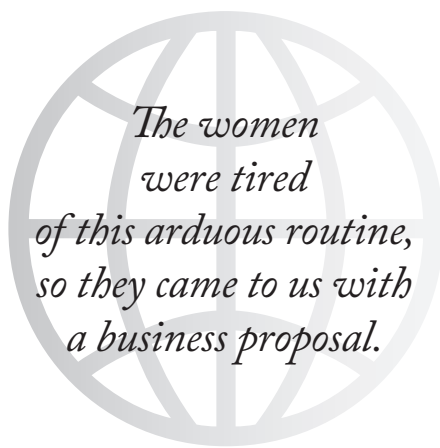
The program we adapted established small groups of women for training and discussion. These women have held on fiercely to their tightly gripped, long held views about sickness and health, so we proceeded gently and lovingly even though that meant more sickness and even deaths at the outset. The work is slow, but we are seeing progress, especially as we allow these women to wrestle over time with new ideas of care. This kind of approach builds the trust required to enable effective change.

The most surprising development from an expressed felt need has been the creation of small businesses. Today, a women's cooperative operates a storehouse. Before the existence of this store, all the women used to traipse to the nearest market twenty kilometers away. One-by-one, each would go with her baby, her donkey, and a few goats. At the market they would trade the goats for flour, oil and sugar. Then they would make their way back home. The two-day journey would force them to sleep under the stars with their babies.

The women were tired of this arduous routine, so they came to us with a business proposal. For \$300, they would stock a storehouse, then sell the goods for a small profit. When the need would arise to buy more goods, they would round up the goats that they were owed, herd them to market and restock supplies. It has worked beautifully. Women in the community no longer need to leave their families, the cooperative gets better prices at the market because of bulk buying and the women don't mind paying a little extra because they no longer have the

added burden and expenses associated with the market trips. This produces a healthy profit. Remarkably, the cooperative now manages a socialized healthcare program with these profits. Anyone who uses the store is eligible for free medications and hospital treatment. (In case you were wondering, these women paid the \$300 back in full only three months later.)

Meanwhile the men in a nearby clan run a similar store. With their profits, they buy young animals from the market and strengthen the clan's herds. Now these same men want to start a livestock market in order to create economy in the desert. Until now, these people have only ever purchased camels from distant markets, but have never sold camels to



them because outsiders run the markets. Little did we know what would transpire when they expressed their need for business development.

At the very same time, we have been revealing Jesus and his Gospel to the people. We began in secret with the clan leader. At first, much of the teaching took place at night because the night is when nomads have time on their hands. The night is when they gather to reminisce and tell stories. Surprisingly, these people consistently wanted stories of Jesus in the beginning. Our training had predisposed us to use the Old Testament to prepare Muslims for the Gospel, but these people wanted more and more stories

of Jesus. This addressed their felt needs best. Today, stories from the Old Testament abound. Scriptural discussions now happen in public settings. A few believers have now become more than a dozen. Two elders have been chosen from among them to care for this burgeoning church. Those elders are linked to other elders who oversee more than a hundred believers elsewhere among this vast group of desert nomadic pastoralists.

We have endeavored with all that we are to come to these people with the Father's great love. That love has caused us to proclaim the Good News with hearts full of love and it has caused us to address felt needs in ways that the people believe are appropriate. I sat down with Mohammed and my friend not long ago. Muhammad stroked his beard and said,

What you have done with the camel watering centers is very good for us, but that is not the best thing that is happening here. The best thing is that my people are beginning to follow Jesus, the Light of the World. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ See David J. Phillips, *People On the Move*, 2001, Piquant, Carlisle, UK.

² Luke 10:25-37.

³ See Romans 2:1.

⁴ Compare what I have described with Acts 2:44, 45.

⁵ Roland Muller, *Tools for Muslim Evangelism* (Belleville, CA: Essence Publishing, 2000), chapter 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹ See Tim Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs: A felt need approach* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981) pp. 140-155.

¹⁰ See Luke 8:40-56.

¹¹ See Mk. 13:11.

The Elusive Nomad

God and the Nomads: Highlighting the Biblical Narrative

by Malcolm Hunter

Does God have favorites amongst all the peoples of the earth? To be politically correct, if not theologically sound, we have to say no. But certainly in the Old Testament you get the impression that God has a special interest in those who wander around in deserts looking after their animals. It is not just the experience of Abraham after God called him and his family out of the advanced urban complex of Ur. Right from the beginning of Genesis, the Book of Beginnings, it appears as if the nomadic experience was God's preferred way of life for all peoples. I realize this is a bold assertion, but after a half century of working in and amongst nomads from Mongolia to sub-Saharan Africa, I have begun to see and feel the nomad's preference for what most of us would consider stark and unreasonable circumstances. These are the very same circumstances that God called Abraham to enter. And it's become more and more apparent to me that it's in the particularities of this nomadic context that God is able to establish and shape his covenantal relation to a very special people. I offer here some reflections on the Genesis narrative and some concluding biblical perspectives.

Filling the Earth . . . through Nomads?

God's favor is noticeable very early in Genesis. The two sons of Adam should have learned a lesson for the ages when the cultivator Cain brought the fruit of the soil as an offering to the Lord, for "the Lord looked with favor" on Abel who brought some of the first born of his flock. Instead, Cain murdered his brother, and so began the enduring conflict between the farmers and the pastoralists which continues even today across Africa.

When Noah and his extended family came out of the ark and started life once again on land, the Lord twice told him to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." The fact that Genesis 8:1 (NIV) specifically says that there were wild animals and livestock in the ark suggests that the only way God's command was going to be fulfilled was by hunting the wild animals and

Malcolm Hunter and his wife Jean went to Ethiopia in 1963 with a clear call to find the people who would be the least likely to hear the gospel. He was an engineer and she a nurse, and under SIM they launched five decades of work among nomadic peoples across the world. They lived for ten years on top of a Land Rover in West and East Africa doing field research that led to a PhD in Appropriate Development for Nomadic Pastoralists (OCMS). At the invitation of Dr. Ralph Winter, they started the Institute for Nomadic Studies and founded the Nomadic Peoples Network.

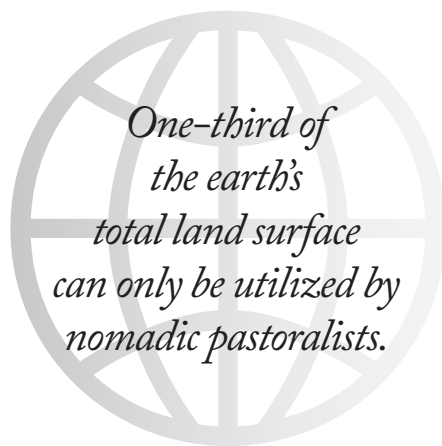
herding the domesticated livestock. This has been the pattern all over the earth at different periods and places. Early generations of men survived by hunting and gathering, and still do so to this day, until the time comes when they find it more convenient to train certain animals to stay near them and to serve their needs. In fact, God gave even more explicit details about the relationship between animals and humans:

The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, and upon every creature that moves on the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

An even clearer example of God's plan for all peoples to scatter and fill the earth comes in Genesis 11 at the tower of Babel. The stated reason for this early construction project was for men "to make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." God's immediate intervention resulted in a total breakdown of communication, with the inevitable outcome being, "The Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth." Before the days of mass transportation, this could only have been accomplished by nomadic pastoralists moving with their animals to occupy the vast empty spaces of the earth. This would have been in the *paradisiac* period when there were apparently no deserts and the great Sahara was a particularly fertile pasture land with many trees and animals. Some of these global wanderers may have settled down in the most verdant areas to grow crops, but it was the nomadic pastoralists who kept moving outwards, fulfilling God's command to fill the whole earth. Farmers don't like to move unless they are desperate in times of drought, but nomads with their "harvest on the hoof" can keep moving to wherever the rain falls.

Different Types of Nomads

The nomadic way of life is described by academics as "utilizing the resource of special mobility," and applies to hunter/gatherers and nomadic pastoralists, as well as to the other smaller category of nomads—the peripatetics (service nomads). Before the farmers of the world began ploughing up the best grazing land for their crops, pastoralism must have been successful all over the earth. A good herder can double the number of his animals every year and live off their milk before choosing to kill one for special occasions or for visitors coming by. It is reckoned that even today, up to one-third of the earth's total land surface (and probably up to two thirds of Africa's



land surface) can only be utilized by nomadic pastoralists. These lands include the low altitude deserts found mostly in Africa and the Middle East, as well as high altitude lands, often covered in snow and ice, inhabited by nomads in Asia and northern Europe. The latter are frequently known as *Vertical Nomads* because they move up and down according to the snow lines, as compared with the *transhumant* nomad who migrates horizontally in lowland areas.

Abram on the Move Again

At the beginning of chapter 12 we read that the Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and

your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Perhaps he was afraid to head out alone (chapter 11), for there were at least five of his father's house with him when he got stuck at a place called Haran, presumably named after Abram's brother who died in Ur. In typical nomad practice, they waited in Haran for Abram's father to die before Abram was ready to set out again "as the Lord had told him." We don't know how long they stayed in Haran, but they must have been semi-settled for a number of years. The story tells us that besides his wife and nephew,

he took all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. (Gen. 12: 5)

By this time, Abram was seventy-five, he had now arrived where God wanted him, and the great promises began:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (Gen. 12:2-3)

The three dramatic encounters mentioned above all took place during a twenty-four-year period in which Abram travelled throughout the land and then down into Egypt at a time of famine, all the while acquiring more and more wealth. Even when this nomad showed a serious lack of faith and moral courage in Egypt and Sarah was consequently taken into Pharaoh's palace (Gen. 12:16), nevertheless, after Pharaoh had sent him on his way, he ended up with many more possessions: sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels. This is the first recorded instance of camels appearing in the Bible, so Abram may have acquired these most important additions to desert nomadic life during his dubious venture into Egypt, where he tried to give his wife away to the Pharaoh to

save his own skin. Fortunately, for the fulfillment of God's grand purposes for the seed of Abram, the Pharaoh had more marital scruples than the chosen patriarch.

It is surprising, and yet can be encouraging for less celebrated chosen people of God, that Abram (now called Abraham in Genesis 17), showed the same lack of faith when he moved into the territory of King Abimelech. Once again, he persuaded Sarai (now called Sarah) to say she was his sister for fear he would be killed because of her beauty were it known she was indeed his wife. And once again, the Lord protected Sarah by telling Abimelech he was as good as dead if he were to touch her. When the King asked Abraham why he had done this shameful thing, he could only come up with the pathetic reason,

I said to myself, there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife... When God had me wander from my father's household I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'

This was no doubt the custom of the day for sealing peace agreements and alliances by giving valuable unmarried sisters and daughters to important rulers. Again, however, the feared ruler showed more honor and understood the fear of God better than did Abraham when he returned Sarah to her husband with a thousand shekels of silver "...to cover the offense against you." To the erring Abraham, he brought sheep and cattle, and male and female slaves, and additionally gave him the unexpectedly generous offer, "My land is before you; live wherever you like." (Gen. 20:14–16)

Desert Life and Dependence on God

On his way back from Egypt through the Negev we read that Abram went from place to place until he came to the place between Bethel and Ai where

These examples from nomadic life help us understand why God took so long to get Abram into the place where his name could be changed.

he had earlier placed his tent and built an altar. "There Abram called on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 13:3). At last he obeyed the command he had received so long ago in Ur when he had left his father's house. He separated from Lot, who chose to go and pitch his tents near Sodom, showing what would prove to be a fatal attraction to that wicked city. After Lot had departed, the Lord said to Abram,

Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All this land you see, I will give to you and your offspring Go walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you. So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord. (Gen. 13:18)

These typical examples from a meandering nomadic life help us understand why God took so long to get Abram into the place where his name could be changed and he would even be called the friend of God.

We might ask, then, just how significant was Abram's life in the desert, and his growing dependence on God, to his ultimately achieving that sort of personal relationship? It seems likely that after more than a hundred years of trying to "help" God fulfill his repeated promise of a son and heir, Abram learned the lessons most effectively from the consequences of his own efforts. The narrative includes his pitiful act of readily agreeing to Sarai's false reasoning which blamed God for her infertility.

The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maid servant; perhaps I can build a family through her. (Gen. 16:2)

Again, this was no doubt a culturally acceptable expedient at that time, but

it certainly was not according to the promise God had given Abraham. He even tried to put pressure on God, that if he did not soon produce a son himself, then his servant Eliezer would be his heir.

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.'

And then came the promise which would have been most meaningful to a desert nomad: "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them ... So shall your offspring be." This promise is followed by the statement for which Abram, despite his later lapses of faith, is forever remembered: "He believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:2–6).

The result of Abram's ready acquiescence to Sarai's suggestion of using her Egyptian maid servant, Hagar, to produce an heir led to another sub-narrative in this nomadic wilderness. Hagar was probably one of the Egyptian servants collected by Abram and Sarai on their ill-advised attempt to escape famine by going down into Egypt, contrary to God's promise to give him all the land of Canaan and bless them there. Hagar had no experience of the living God, nor a God-fearing heritage. And when she became pregnant, she began to despise her mistress to the point that she was banished from the camp. God showed his amazing compassion for the victims of Sarai's and Abram's compounded misadventure by sending an angel to meet this rejected pregnant mother. God called her by name when she was sitting beside a spring in the desert, presumably feeling very sorry for herself, and understandably resentful of Sarai. The angel of the Lord told Hagar to go

back to her mistress and submit to her, and added the unexpected promise which presumably encouraged her to do so.

You will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility to all his brothers. (Gen. 16:7-12)

Ishmael was born when Abram was eighty-six years old, so he must have been thirteen when God appeared to the ninety-nine year old nomad with the final covenantal promise that he would, indeed, have a son through Sarai. When he heard the amazing promises Abraham fell facedown, laughing and saying to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" Incredulous, Abraham found it easier to believe that Ishmael could somehow become the heir of promise than that Sarah could give him a son. "Yes," the Lord replied,

I have heard you and I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year. (Gen. 17:17-21)

God continued his promise to the as-yet-unconceived son that he would establish his covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him in Genesis 17:19. Part of that covenant included instructions for the circumcision of all males. And so, as soon as God went up from Abram on that same day, he took Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money and circumcised them, including himself, as God had instructed (Gen. 17:10-14). This was the introduction to the sign of the covenant practiced by all Jewish males from that time until today.

Hearing God in the Desert

It isn't so much that God loves nomads, but it appears that he is able to speak to men and women much more easily in desert places than in the hustle and bustle of the city. In the desert, it is impossible to ignore God; in fact, you will never meet a pastoral nomad who does not have a high view of a God who sends rain, abundance, and health. Notwithstanding, they may still spend much of their time and money trying to appease the bad gods, demons, or jinns (as they are referred to by Muslims), or by trying to escape the curses of enemies. And they might not have heard yet of the power of the Lord Jesus, the one who has defeated all these evil forces, and who can bring them to



the good God. This is a universal message for all people who are troubled by demonic powers and curses!

It is because of the saving power of Jesus that Christianity is so relevant to nomads. If we are prepared to enter their world of relationships, it will require we prioritize people over buildings, projects and programs. The other great advantage to entering their world is the nomadic emphasis on hospitality—when you bow your head and enter the tent, you are welcomed to stay. This common depiction of nomadic hospitality appears in Genesis 18:1-8 when "Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day." Despite the heat, when "he saw three men standing

nearby he hurried to meet them and bowed low to the ground."

His gracious salutation and invitation to rest under a tree while water was brought to wash their feet are all normal traditions in most nomadic societies. Abraham's seemingly minimal offer to get them something to eat led to great efforts on the part of his wife and servants to bake bread and to kill and cook a choice calf from the herd. Much later would come the generous feast of curds and milk and well-cooked calf veal, which anyone familiar with nomadic pastoralist hospitality will appreciate. It is well worth the wait!

The supreme test of Abraham's trust in God came in chapter 22 when he was instructed to take his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved, to a place about three days walk away, and offer him there as burnt offering on one of the mountains God would eventually show him. The fact that he cut enough wood to make a burnt offering before he set out presumably means that he thought he would be going to a treeless place. But when Abraham got to the mountain, it must have been thickly wooded, as he did not see the ram that was caught by its horns in a thicket until he took the knife to slay his son. Abraham showed complete obedience and willingness to sacrifice his son, even to the point of hauling the wood for three days. God, however, had already prepared a response to Abraham's unconditional obedience. Such faith and obedience must surely have impressed Isaac (whose reaction as his father bound him and placed him on top of the firewood is not recorded). We can imagine that Isaac was much relieved to hear the voice of the angel calling out from heaven telling Abraham not to lay a hand on the boy. Isaac must have been at least somewhat willing to submit to his father's readiness to sacrifice him, because he probably could have easily outrun the old man (Abraham would

have been 110 years old) if he really had wanted to escape.

I do wonder if such faith and confidence in God comes partly from life in arid and semi-desert places where a nomad has to be dependent on God for his survival. In Abraham's case, the totally unexpected gift of a son at 100 years old, and the promise to make a great nation out of him, must certainly have taught him to trust God. This excruciating test of his faith in God's promises is richly described in Hebrews 11:19: "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from death."

A Storybook Made for Nomads

The middle chapters of the book of Genesis (chapters 23–37) are extremely interesting to most nomadic people, as they can so readily identify with the experiences of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (up until Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt). Whether they are literate or not, all nomadic pastoralists are oral learners and they love stories, especially those that feature animals, deserts, and wells.

Another very important element of nomadic life is how people are buried. Some groups I have known will bury a man who has died as a respected elder or warrior above ground under a pile of rocks wrapped in the skin of his most prized cow (whose meat is eaten as part of his funeral rituals). After a few years, during which the termites will eat all the flesh and organs, the bones will be uncovered from the rocks, wrapped in a new cow skin, and the blood of that cow will be poured over the bones. All the warriors of that age-set will come to pay their respects and even pray to the dead man for his protection from sickness and enemies. Other nomadic ethnic groups bury their men vertically in a well-like hole, so that they will be remembered as standing tall to the very last, while others place them in a crouching position, as if ready for action.

Very few nomadic peoples take much trouble to bury their wives; that is why the story of the death of Sarah is so impressive to nomads.

Very few nomadic peoples take much trouble to bury their wives or even remember them. That is why the story of the death of Sarah is so impressive to nomadic people. Like most nomads, Abraham had no land of his own, so he had to buy a plot from one of the alien Hittites among whom they were living. The fact that the whole of Genesis 23 is devoted to the elaborate ritual of bargaining in the politest manner makes for a fine example of culturally exemplary behaviour. Abraham had probably chosen this grave site near the great trees of Mamre much earlier. The point of the seller overcoming his initial reluctance to take any money from Abraham is a typical move in a game played among wealthy men. "Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth 400 shekels of silver, but what is that between me and you?" (Gen. 23:15).

Even more interesting to nomads who have camels is the story in the very next chapter, where Abraham sends his trusted chief servant to get a wife for his son Isaac. Though his name is not actually given in this long chapter, the chief servant was probably the same Eliezer that Abraham thought might one day be his heir. The patriarch, now too old to make the journey back to his relatives in Haran, gave strict instructions to his servant:

I want you to swear by the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.

He also twice reiterated that in no case should Eliezer take Isaac back to the old country at Haran, for God had promised the land of Canaan to him and to his offspring, and presumably

Abraham thought that Isaac might be tempted to stay in that old homeland. Eliezer agreed to the instructions of his master and swore an oath to him in a manner that is peculiarly significant in societies where nothing is written down, putting his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham. He certainly did not make his journey alone, as he had ten camels and many valuable gifts and clothes to carry and protect. (Note that later in the chapter the men who formed the caravan are invited into the house with Eliezer to eat and drink and spend the night.)

The most fascinating part of this story is when the caravan arrives at the precise well where God's chosen wife for Isaac would make her appearance. As a shepherdess, she came to get water for her sheep. Eliezer prayed before she arrived,

O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming to draw water. May it be when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar so that I may have a drink, and she says 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master. (Gen. 24: 12–14)

Eliezer was no doubt a God-fearing man, and the way his prayer was answered before he had even finished praying is a tremendous affirmation of his faith. This sort of experience is most significant to a pastoral nomad.

Even more impressive to a camel herder, and maybe only fully appreciated by them, is the offer that Rebekah made to Eliezer: she did not just give him water to drink, but also drew water for his camels "until they have finished

drinking.” If his camels had traveled for ten days, as seems likely given the distance to Haran, they each would drink about thirty gallons of water. The text says explicitly that the camels did drink all they wanted “until they were finished.” The ten camels could have consumed as much as three hundred gallons of water—about three thousand pounds. The text also says that

she *quickly* emptied her jar into the trough and ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. (Gen. 24:20)

It is no wonder that Eliezer was impressed with this young lady, who was also described as “very beautiful.” The quickness was necessary since a camel can drink those thirty gallons in seven minutes.

This story is so impressive that it is recorded twice in this chapter, as Eliezer recounts it again for Rebekah’s family that night in their house where they were offered true nomad hospitality: straw and fodder for the camels first, then water for Eliezer and his men to wash their feet. The food came later, but Eliezer refused to eat anything until he had told the whole story of his wife-searching venture. When they had heard it, Rebekah’s brother and father could only say,

This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has directed.

It is typical that neither the lady in question, nor her mother, were consulted; yet, it’s probably significant that the costly gifts were given to her mother and Laban, the dominant and acquisitive elder brother, while her father, Bethuel, is not mentioned as receiving anything. Eliezer insisted that they should return immediately, but her mother and brother wanted him to remain ten days with them before taking Rebekah away. When Rebekah was asked what she thought the next morning, her quick answer

to leave immediately gives the impression that she was quite happy to leave the shepherding life to pursue a more exciting future with marriage to a wealthy kinsman she had never seen. In proper pre-wedding custom, she would not travel alone with the men, but took along her nurse and her maids. The story concludes by saying, “they all got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.” Eliezer was no doubt a very happy and successful man, departing on the day following their arrival at the house. This story is one that only a camel-herding nomad can fully appreciate; indeed, most of the book of Genesis is best understood and perhaps therefore most interesting to pastoral nomads.



God’s Purpose for the “Detestable” Nomad

The tragic-dramatic account of how Joseph went down to Egypt is worthy of a great operatic rendering, but it had to wait until the 20th century when Andrew Lloyd Weber could do it justice in his early musical, *Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Coat*. Many of the lines in that show are highly memorable, but what seems to have been lost is that God is the one who orchestrated the whole scenario. And he did it to accomplish his grand purpose for the children of Israel—that they would become a tribe and then a nation. They became a distinctly

different tribe, as they could not assimilate with the Egyptian people, for all shepherds were “detestable” to the Egyptians (Gen. 46:34). There is no reason given for this strong repulsion, but this was the factor, which God and Joseph knew would keep them from any possibility of being accepted and assimilated by the powerful pagan peoples in Egypt. Joseph chose five of his brothers to introduce them to Pharaoh, who asked them what their occupation was. Joseph had advised them to reply:

Your servants are shepherds, just as our fathers were. We have come to live here awhile because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants’ flocks have no pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen. Pharaoh then said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen.” (Gen. 47: 3–4)

Pharaoh finished his generous invitation by adding what at first appears to be a rather selfish request, “And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock.” This was probably an indication of Pharaoh’s high regard for Joseph’s outstanding usefulness to all of Egypt, and the basis of his assumption that one or more of Joseph’s brothers could be equally gifted and useful.

The narrative in Genesis 47:7–10 seems to indicate that immediately after the introduction of his brothers to Pharaoh, Joseph brought his father in and presented him before Pharaoh. Jacob, in true patriarchal manner, blessed Pharaoh at the beginning and the ending of their encounter before he exited his presence. It would be interesting to know what words of blessing Jacob spoke to Pharaoh, as the record we have of Jacob’s other spoken blessings shows them to be most insightful and significant.

Jacob also had a personal encounter with God on the journey down to

Egypt, where he heard the words of divine approval of this migration with a specific purpose. The opening of Genesis 46 tells us that “Israel set out with all that was his and when he reached Beersheba he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.” Beersheba was probably the last settlement of any significance in Canaan, and the old man Jacob knew he was going into a very uncertain future, away from the promised land, so he probably entertained many doubts about this move. God met him in a vision at night calling him by name,

Jacob! Jacob! I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes. (Gen. 46:2–4)

Here we see the real purpose of this diversion of the children of Israel into Egypt. Had they stayed in Canaan where everyone was a livestock herder, they would no doubt have intermarried with Canaanite women, as Esau had very deliberately done to show his resentment against his father and mother. This conniving of his led to the loss of the blessing of the first born which should have been his. Most important, there is no record of any intermarrying amidst an Egyptian civilization.

The end of Genesis 47 relates the fulfillment of that promise, as well as the death of Jacob after seventeen years in Egypt.

The Israelites settled in Egypt in the land of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number... When the time came for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.” (Gen. 47:27–30)

The description of the death of a family patriarch is appealing to nomads who value venerable old men and elaborate funeral traditions.

These funeral instructions were repeated at the end of Genesis chapter 49, which concludes with the moving account of Jacob’s death.

When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into his bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his fathers. (Gen. 49:23)

This description of the timely death of a family patriarch at a ripe old age is appealing to any society that respects their elders, but even more so to nomadic people who have such elevated values of venerable old men and elaborate funeral traditions. How they die and are buried seems more important than anything in life.

The last chapter of the book of Genesis describes the forty days needed for the embalming of the patriarch and the seventy-five days that the Egyptian nation mourned for him. After this time came the grand funeral procession that Pharaoh ordered, led by prime minister Joseph, and accompanied by all of Pharaoh’s officials—the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt—as well as all the members of his father’s household. Chariots and horsemen also accompanied him (Gen. 50:7–9). So Jacob’s sons did as he had commanded them. They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place. To complete the story, as Joseph neared his own end, he said to his brothers,

I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Gen. 50:24)

Joseph then made his brothers swear to carry his bones back to the land of Canaan. So Joseph died at the age of 110.

After his death he was embalmed and was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

From Clan to Nation

The first three patriarchs of the Abrahamic clan slowly learned the essential skills of herding animals that can be found most easily in a desert, but God subsequently took their descendants into a very different environment. They began their new life in Egypt in great favor under the care of their brother Joseph, and consequently their birthrate exploded. Generally, spending nights away from home looking for pasture keeps population growth in check, but that was not an issue for the people in their new home in Goshen.

The Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

Their population growth was such that it began to frighten the later Egyptian rulers, who did not know about Joseph or his extended family. Clearly the children of Israel were still very ethnically distinct from the Egyptians, who saw them as a potential threat. The new king said,

The Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country. (Ex. 1:7–10)

This suspicion led to the rulers’ proclaimed policy of slave labor for all the people, and of male infanticide (an ancient Egyptian version of the more modern pro-choice policies now prevailing in supposedly civilized western nations).

Over the four hundred years that the tribe of Israel spent in Egypt, the increasing oppression of the slave masters

and the forced labor did not seem to diminish their birthrate.

The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all the hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly. (Ex. 1:11–14)

This brutal treatment was presumably God's way of ensuring that his people would never settle comfortably in Egypt and of preparing them for that most momentous event, their exodus from Egypt.

Boot Camp in the Desert

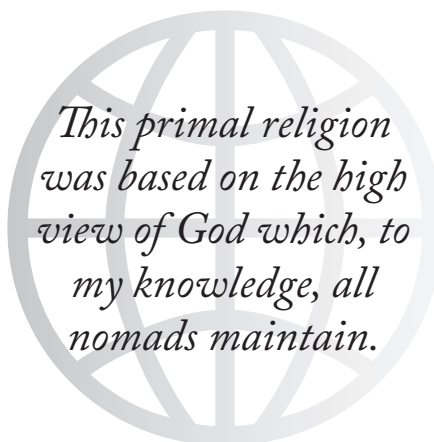
Before they could leave Egypt, God had to prepare Moses, their Deliverer, who would lead them out of Egypt. Moses was an exceptional child from birth, and by God's ingenious plan was rescued from his papyrus basket and from drowning in the River Nile by the daughter of Pharaoh.

The Bible does not tell us how long Moses spent with his birth family before being handed over to Pharaoh's daughter, but it must have been long enough for him to learn his ethnic identity. The scriptures do tell us that "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action" (Acts 7:22). At forty years old he felt compelled to take action when he saw an Israelite being beaten by an Egyptian and he killed the aggressor. This could have been an impulsive reaction, but it would have come from a long held awareness of his ethnic roots, as well as from the injustice meted out to his people. This action likely emanated from his growing sense of personal obligation to his people.

Because of his impulsive actions, Moses fled from Pharaoh's palace to the desert of Midian, where God wanted him to learn how to become the leader who would deliver God's people out of

Egypt. Here again we see the spiritual value of living under the big sky in the wide-open spaces of a desert or a typical nomad grazing land. Midian is in present day northern Saudi Arabia. To get there, Moses must have crossed the Sinai Peninsula, precisely where he would bring the Hebrew nation forty years later. This initial crossing served as a useful learning experience of the geography and rugged features of that rugged desert land.

The most important lesson Moses needed to learn was dependence on God, requiring him to give up his proud confidence in his own abilities



and in the ingrained training for leadership that had come with his privileged upbringing. God knew there was no better way to bring about that transformation than for Moses to spend the next forty years looking after the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. This Jethro happened to be a priest of Midian, presumably a simple practitioner of a primal religion. Whatever other beliefs it held, this primal religion was based on the high view of God which, to my knowledge, all nomads maintain. Moses had transitioned from the Palace of Pharaoh, which had the most advanced technological and high religious society of his day, to probably one of the most basic and simplest of societies there in the house of Jethro and his seven daughters in the Midian desert.

This transition to the desert context must have been a devastating blow to Moses' sense of his unique ability to help deliver his people. But why did it last for forty years? Forty years was the length of time that God gave Moses to enjoy all the wisdom and pleasures of Egypt, and to learn that these would never compare to his sense of purpose in God's call on his life to be the deliverer of his people. It took another forty years to bring Moses to a place of brokenness and willingness to trust entirely in God, rather than his own leadership and eloquence.

From Leading Sheep to Leading People

I should note that sheep are the most foolish and uninspiring animal of all the livestock kept by nomads, and certainly the most unresponsive in conversation. The breakthrough for Moses came when he took those pathetic sheep to the far side of the desert, to Horeb, described in Ex. 3:1 as the mountain of God. Moses presumably had no idea of the significance of this place when he arrived, but later that day God said to him,

I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain. (Ex. 3:12)

Before the exodus, Moses had a most personal encounter with God, via a burning bush that was not consumed. Moses may have seen other bushes burning in the desert, but this one got his attention and he said to himself, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." This is the first recorded evidence in forty years that Moses was ready to pay attention to a supernatural work of God.

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And Moses replied to God, 'Here I am.' (Ex. 3:4)

Moses may have thought that God had completely forgotten about him, but now the long-delayed dialogue begins with God's historic declaration, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God (Ex. 3:6). He had already been commanded to take off his sandals, as the place where he was standing was holy ground, so his experience of God's presence must have been overwhelming from head to toe. Here was a nomad being prepared for his big migration, in which he would lead a nation, not a flock of sheep. They were to go into the wilderness for another forty years. "So now, go." God said, "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt" (Ex. 3: 9–10). The response of Moses is that of a broken man—"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"—showing that Moses had learned the essential lesson for a godly leader, true humility. The conversation that ensued between Moses and his now very personal God should be encouraging to any who feel inadequate for the task to which God calls them. Not in our own strength but in his!

The Discipline of Wilderness Conditions

Moses was eighty years old when he loaded his wife and children on a donkey and trekked back from the land of Midian to meet Pharaoh as God had commanded. The discipline of forty years of grinding, discouraging work in the deserts of Midian would have aided Moses when, after returning to Egypt, he faced rejection by his people and by Pharaoh.

He returned to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.' (Ex. 5:22–23)

T*he children of Israel needed to learn to trust their God all over again, and there is no better training ground than a desert.*

And while the deliverance from Egypt must have been an incredibly exciting time for all those who joined the exodus, the transition from settled slavery to freedom in the desert was both a traumatic experience as well as an enormous learning opportunity. The children of Israel needed to learn to trust their God all over again, and there is no better training ground than a desert, where obtaining food and water are a constant struggle.

The Israelites wandered throughout at least forty-one different locations those forty years, which are listed in Numbers 33, but how long they spent in each location is not recorded. It must have taken a great deal of time to get several million people packed up and mobilized between each campsite, but that was an important part of God's teaching process: the Israelites were learning to be a pilgrim people living in very inhospitable country. They had to know that God was not only the provider of all their food and water, he was also their protector from wild animals, plagues, and enemy tribes (like the attacks and seduction of the Amalekites and the Midianites). In that hot and hostile desert, they began to understand that God alone could satisfy their deepest needs. There was nothing in that environment to entertain, amuse, or titillate them, just hard grinding survival and communal living.

Even before they finally entered the Promised Land, Moses gave them strict instructions not to forget what sort of people they were. Whenever they presented the fruit of the land to the priest they were to "declare before the Lord your God: my father was a wandering Aramean" (Deut. 26:5). God had indeed promised their forefathers that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan, but they

were not like other nations, whose identity was tied to one piece of real estate. The land was given on condition that they would not be like other nations. If they did not remain faithful to the God who gave it to them, they would lose it, but they would still be his people, and when they repented he would bless and restore them again. The history of the Jewish people has confirmed that covenant relationship, with a pattern of blessing followed by rebellion, rejection, exile, repentance, and restoration.

A Pilgrim People

The principle of God's pilgrim people remaining set-apart from settled, unbelieving people appears frequently in the New Testament. Peter gives an interesting new definition of the community of believers in Jesus before the words 'Christian' or 'church' had even emerged:

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which was against your soul. (1 Pet. 2:9–11)

The King James Bible rendering of the key word "alien" as "pilgrim" gives what I believe is a more helpful picture of people who are on the move to a more certain destination, rather than as suspect foreigners.

Finally, the fact that deserts continue to have an important purpose in the development of strong leaders in the New Testament brings us again to a certain conclusion: it's not a nomadic lifestyle

that is so valuable in learning about the nature and power of God, as it is the outcome of having lived a nomadic existence in the desert. That is where the inevitable austerity and rigors of daily survival concentrate the attention on the grandeur of empty space and the immensity of the heavens at night. This is presumably why certain key figures in the New Testament were sent into a desert or chose to spend time there in solitude. John the Baptist, Jesus himself, and the apostle Paul found the desert a threshold for new ministry.

This is apparent in the book of Hebrews which adds several other helpful insights to this principle of a pilgrim people. Referring back to the patriarchs in the book of Genesis, we read,

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them at a distance. And they admitted they were aliens [pilgrims] and strangers on

the earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:13–16)

And more specific to the heavenly city: “Here we do not have an enduring [continuing] city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14). There are more details of that heavenly city called the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation, but the concern of this study is what we do here on earth before we arrive there. How then should we live? All examples indicate that we are meant to be a pilgrim people, travelling lightly through what is still a beautiful world, but alien to us in its present unredeemed state. We are pilgrims moving to a wonderful and assured destiny, but on the way there, as long as we are on the earth, we want to be available to do the work of the rightful ruler of it all. We will want to walk as does the nomad. **IJFM**



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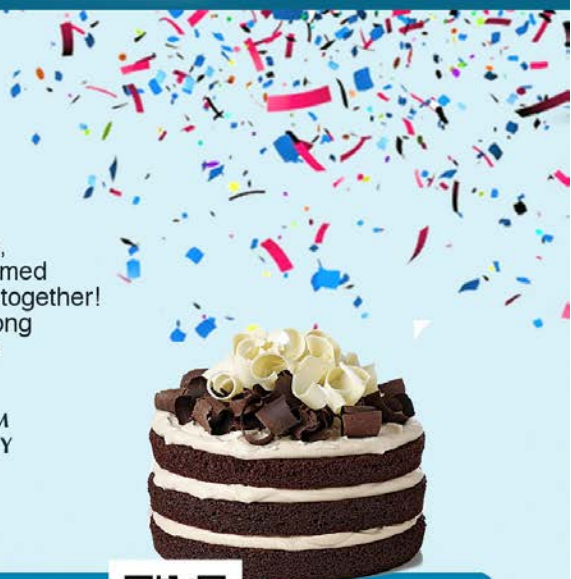
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The Elusive Nomad

On the Road with Nomads in Central Asia: A Page Out of My Journal

by S. Clement

It's almost 6:00 p.m. on the twentieth of the month. This afternoon we left the small town around which our lives and travel have revolved for the last ten days, starting our trek back to the international border. The drive would normally have taken about six hours straight through, but we bailed off of the national "highway" (much of it no more than poorly maintained gravel track) and headed across country to see the last of the nomad camps before crossing the border.

We've driven over miles of some of the most desolate country you can imagine. Were it not for the occasional scrubby tuft of grass, this area could be described as lunar.

Since about two o'clock, a light to moderate rain has been falling, the mist adding to the sense of dreariness already induced by the largely monochromatic hills and barren rocks.

(Hours later) We are now seated in the round tent of a herding family. Rain is pattering on the roof. The camp is situated on the side of a valley, and several streams descend from the surrounding hills, converging in the middle of the little community of yurts. The roar of the running water makes a lulling backdrop to the sound of the rain and the quiet and familiar noises of nomadic housekeeping: the opening and closing of the stove door; the tapping of a metal poker as someone stirs the fire; the jostling of pots and kettles as tea is prepared.

Dusky light drifts down through the plastic sheeting that covers the center roof hole of the yurt, inducing a drowsy restfulness that follows nicely on a day of hard road.

Outside, most of this nomadic community is engaged in the evening milking of cows. The yard is muddy and wet, and everyone is bundled in what inadequate rain gear they can muster: old coats, plastic sheets, damp hats and old boots. Though I know that fairly intense work is being carried out in the



S. Clement spent nearly 25 years doing pioneer church planting, both in Latin America and among nomads of Central Asia. There, in partnership with local believers, he and his family saw a fully nomadic church formed among nomadic herders. He is active in the Nomadic Peoples Network.

rain just yards from me, I can hardly think of a more restful setting than that which I have just described.

One of the men of the family has come in from the damp and a kettle of tea has just been filled. It looks like we guests will be treated to something warm to drink—a welcome blessing on a cool, dreary and damp evening.

The colorful cloth is laid out on the floor before us and our evening tea is served. In addition to the cream, yogurt, and baked bread, there are two kinds of fried bread offered. One is like a fried pastry we called elephant ears that we used to get at the state fair; the other more like a New Orleans *beignet*. Both are tasty, especially spread with fresh cream and sprinkled with sugar.

They tell us that the rain has been falling for ten days straight. This is problematic as they are in hay harvest season. If the rain doesn't slacken up soon, winter could be tragic. A good supply of hay is critical to bring the livestock through the next few months of heavy snow and temperatures far below freezing. Muddy ground and damp grass do not make good hay.

Our driver tells us that the road will be difficult tomorrow due to the rain. We will see how that adventure develops.

For now, we'll catch up on our rest. I think I'll take a stroll outside, survey the community, get the lay of the land in case one of our party needs to step out during the night, and then come in to visit with our hosts as the night deepens. A pot of hot soup has been promised later in the evening.

We may be locked inside later due to the inclement weather, but that may prove to be beneficial. With nothing to do but wait out the rain, we will, hopefully, have a good, profitable visit, learning more about life for herding families in these harsh environs, and how people like us can engage, serve and share.

(A few hours later) The sun has set: the light of the full moon is diffused through a heavy canopy of clouds, giving a luster to the country that makes moving about outside easy, even in this unfamiliar place.

I am sitting on a pallet of pads and blankets on the floor of our host family's main yurt. The light of that full moon and the scant flickering of the dung fire escaping from the stove box barely illuminate the inside of this tent.

The patter of rain on the tent has stopped, but the murmur of the mountain streams outside seems to have become nearly a roar in the dead quiet of this lonely mountain night. I seldom feel this at peace, this at ease, this at home.

I almost don't want to go to sleep, preferring to sit awake and enjoy the reality of where I am.

The warmth of the stove bathes my face. The lightly acrid but pleasant aroma of the dung fire brings back memories of evenings spent with dear, beloved friends in other regions.

After stepping out this evening for a bit of fresh air and a half-bowl of tobacco, I returned to the yurt to find our supper spread. Two plates were piled with boiled mutton, and we were each served a big bowl of steaming mutton broth. Finely chopped onion and fried bread crumbled into the broth made a thick and tasty soup. Our host served us happily, and the conversation—through our driver-cum-translator—was full of laughter and learning.

Yes, I think that I'll just sit here on my pallet for a while and enjoy where I am.



Sleep is at my door, but she will have to wait. I must be sure to give thanks to my heavenly Father for blessing me so richly. He is good, and here I find it most easy to deeply enjoy him in the midst of his beautiful creation.

(Next morning) As day was breaking, the first light sneaking over the eastern ridge and chasing away the tentative light of the full moon, our host, a middle-aged nomad man named Rachim, could be heard outside making his morning prayers. The soft singing of “Allah hu akbar” drifted through the walls of our yurt.

The day starts early in a herding camp. As the sun crests the horizon, livestock is milked, then turned out to graze. The fresh milk is taken into the yurts to be processed. Cream will be separated; butter will be churned; yogurt will be started.

Once calm was brought to the activity of milking and the turning out of

T*his is an inhospitable land, inhabited by a singularly hospitable people . . . Who will be willing to answer the call?*

livestock, our breakfast was brought in. Rice boiled in milk was the main course, accompanied by the ubiquitous bread and dairy. Salted milk tea and black tea were passed around to finish it off.

We visited a while longer with our hosts while our driver checked over the truck. These are good people. As I shake hands with Rachim and thank him for his hospitality, he embraces me kindly and the word “honorable” comes to mind. Though I know that there is none righteous, there are some folk out there that we can, by worldly standards, call good. I think these are good people. But they still need the good news that we hope to share with them.

This is an inhospitable land, inhabited by a singularly hospitable people. Our quick, expeditionary pass through their

lands and lives has allowed us to meet a few of them and learn some potentially useful things about their world and the challenges facing them. With this information, we hope to be able to prepare and equip people who would be willing to answer the call and rise to the challenge.

Will someone hear, as did Paul in Corinth, the message that “I have many people in this place”?

How then will they call on him whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

Pray, indeed, that the Lord of the harvest would raise up workers for his harvest. **IJFM**





by Rowland V. Bingham

Editor's note: This article was originally printed in The Evangelical Christian, May 1916, in Toronto, Canada. It is a reminder of the first call to reach the nomads of the world a century ago. Reprinted by permission.

If one would like to get a picture of 1800 B.C. when Jacob and his sons were the wandering herdmen of Palestine, all one needs to do is visit the Fulani tribe of Northern Nigeria today [in 1916].

With their ever increasing herds of cattle they scour the country for the pasture which they need, in the rains inhabiting the upland regions, but in the dry seasons they are driven to follow the river courses to the valleys.

Indignantly refusing to be classed with the negro races, but having so mingled the blood of his ancestors with the captive women slaves which he was ever adding to his household from the native races through whose country he wandered, at first sight there is often little in the color of his skin to distinguish him, and little to warrant his claim to relationship with the white man.

But there is no doubt that the Fulani is different. The long, straight hair of the women, the absence of the flat nose, the frequent reversion of the lighter skin and the general demeanor separate them from the ordinary native of Central Africa.

Then they are the real nomads. While they do have a few towns and villages, the Fulani is "at home" when he is wandering through the country. He flourishes in the pilgrim life, he degenerates when he settles down. He has no love for any other occupation than herding his cattle, and he prefers ever to add to his milk and meat diet by raiding or trading. He despises the comforts of the settled life and builds his only abode of the cornstalk. We have called them "the people of the cornstalk," because they are adept in its use for all purposes. Even when they degenerate to town life they still build the walls of their higher house of cornstalks, make

the rafters of its roof by binding the cornstalks together, and then use the same material for their first thatch. When in these civilized (?) surroundings it is necessary to delimitate his landed possessions by fencing in his compound, the cornstalk serves him still, and I have known him to finish up by making his gate of cornstalks.

The simple life is the life of the Fulani, and he regards it as the superior life. He looks down on every other race but the white, with whom he claims equality. Since by conquest they brought under their sway the large cities of the northern central Sudan, they have furnished quite generally the rulers of the cities, but not the subjects.

The little bands of Fulani with their great herds of cattle are generally hated by the tribes into whose domain they travel, but they have generally been able to look after their own interests in much about the same way and with sometimes about the same principles as Jacob and his sons. The pagan generally complains that he has been taken in by the Fulani, who has the name of offering his own price in the exchange of commodities, and failing a satisfactory bargain simply helps himself to the thing he wants.

In trade, the women who generally conduct it, know how to get value for their goods. They are shrewd and clever. We stopped a woman one day some miles from town who had a calabash half full of buttermilk on her head. We were very thirsty, but we put restraint upon our desire, as we enquired whether she had watered it, as they so often put in water from their filthy pools in order to increase the quantity. She looked at us as though we were lacking in intelligence as she said,

White man, don't you know how far it is from town? Do you think I would water it here when there is a stream right near the place at which to water my milk?

The Fulani loves his cattle. Before he was won over to the Moslem faith he worshipped his kine, and in some regions some few still follow the custom. They handle their immense herds with consummate skill. We have seen them lead them across rushing rivers from which the cows would certainly have turned back but for the voice of the herdman.

They are worse off than their cattle—the cattle have a guiding voice, and protecting care, but the Fulani has no herdman to guard or guide.

Why are we writing of these people? Because they are worse off than their cattle. The cattle have a guiding voice, and protecting care, but the Fulani has no herdman to guard or guide. No missionary has mastered the language of this wandering race and no word of the Gospel has been translated into the tongue of this people, spoken, we think, by at least a half a million.

The missionary to this tribe has no easy task before him, but a tremendous opportunity. He will need to be another Gilmour, who lived in his tent and followed the nomad Mongolians in all their wanderings. He could learn their language and make his headquarters in one of their few towns, and then he would have to spend half of his time in the saddle following his flock, who are as wandering sheep having no shepherd, or to use the Fulani figure, as a scattered herd with no herdman's voice to call them together.

The Christ who died for this people has bidden us to pray that missionaries be sent to them.

The bright-eyed little children that we met, of whom there are thousands, ought to have some further prospect than a cornstalk shack as the beginning and end of existence. The women and girls ought to know something more than the milking of cows and the making of butter, and to be able to possess other wealth than the trifling ornaments with which they lavishly adorn themselves. These men who for long time have furnished the rulers for the strongest kingdoms of the Sudan surely ought to know of a coming kingdom and the King of Kings.

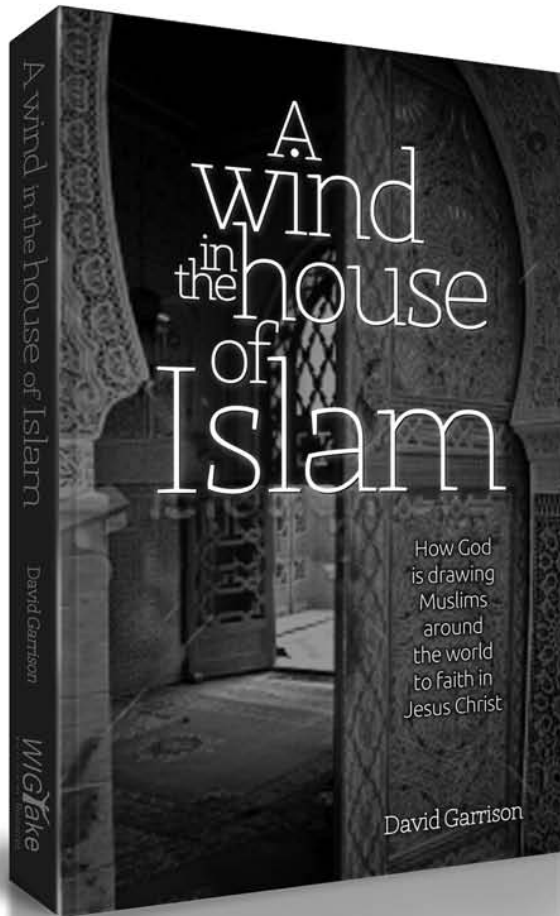
Pray for God's man, God's men for this tribe, for the ambassadors of God who shall make known to them the way of life, tell of the saviour of sinners, and invite them from cornstalk huts to become heirs of a mansion. **IJFM**

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Orality Comes of Age: The Maturation of a Movement

by Tom Steffen

“There’s truths you have to grow into.” H. G. Wells

Not everyone has the opportunity to live during the birth and maturation of a movement. Fewer still have the opportunity to participate in one. This article¹ considers the present-day orality movement within the missions world, one in which I have had the privilege to participate over the years. It’s a movement that continues to offer opportunities for immediate participation at home and abroad in the majority of the world’s peoples. So, to set the stage, I will begin with a brief overview of its origins. Since I have already developed the details of the orality movement elsewhere (Steffen 2007; 2013), this article will focus primarily on documenting the pertinent directional changes and innovations within its almost 40-year history.

The Orality Movement is Birthed

In 1975, Dick Sollis of New Tribes Mission (NTM) organized the first South East Asian (SEA) Leadership Conference to be held in Manila. Since syncretism was a major issue found in NTM tribal ministries in Brazil and Colombia,² Sollis sought someone who could provide a more effective evangelism model. Bob Gustafson, then NTM Field Chairman of the Philippines, suggested Trevor McIlwain as someone who had been reflecting on the gospel message and the syncretism that had emerged among the Palawanos of the Philippines.

In 1975, McIlwain spoke to these SEA field leaders on “The Gospel,” a presentation of his quiet experimentation with the Palawanos that would later provide a critical foundation for a chronological approach to tribal evangelism and church planting. McIlwain eventually returned to a NTM training center in Australia from 1976-1979 where he taught and continued to develop the chronological model before returning to the Philippines in late 1980. It was then that I spoke with McIlwain in Manila and learned about the chronological model. Seeing its potential for the SEA Leadership Conference in Thailand just weeks away, I immediately talked to the Field Chairman, Dell Schultze, about getting McIlwain on the agenda. Before heading to Thailand,

Tom Steffen served 20 years with New Tribes Mission, 15 in the Philippines where Chronological Bible Teaching was birthed. He is Professor Emeritus in the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University. He has authored two books on the subject of this article, The Facilitator Era (written in story format), and Reconnecting God’s Story to Ministry.

McIlwain presented an overview of his model to the Philippine field at the annual conference in January of 1981.

At the SEA Leadership Conference held in Pattaya, Thailand, in 1981, McIlwain again presented his model. He introduced his ideas daily for four hours from mimeographed notes, and was tape recorded and videoed. His seven-phase story model was driven by biblical theology and emphasized, among other things, that

- the Bible is history (His Story);
- the Bible is one story—the story of Jesus Christ;
- the gospel requires a firm Old Testament (OT) foundation;
- we should tell Bible stories and define the nature and character of the God conveyed in the stories;
- the Bible not only tells us what to teach, but by example, shows us how to teach it—chronologically;
- we should not talk about Jesus (the solution) until listeners understand their separation from a holy God.

The assumption at the time was that these steps (and others) would help preserve an objective gospel, thereby resulting in a movement of authentic followers of Christ.

The SEA Leadership conference held in Thailand in 1981 became the seminal moment when McIlwain's chronological model began to spread within NTM beyond the shores of the Philippine Islands. Field leaders returned to their respective fields of ministries with materials to disseminate with a singular goal in mind: multiplying tribal churches that would remain true to the Bible.

Eventually, McIlwain entitled his model "Chronological Bible Teaching" (CBT), and while no one had anticipated or expected it, a modern-day movement had just been born. But this did not go unnoticed. In *Scripture and Strategy* (1994), David Hesselgrave identified CBT as one of the major contributions to missions in the twentieth century.

A New Movement Pioneers in the Philippines

McIlwain returned to the Philippines and taught seminars on his chronological model to foreign and national NTM missionaries on the various islands. It should be noted that his model assumed extensive culture and language acquisition, and was designed for long-term, incarnational, church planting driven by an exit strategy.

McIlwain's ever-expanding mimeographed notes eventually resulted in a nine-volume series entitled *Firm Foundations*. The first volume, published in 1987, provided the philosophy for the CBT. It claimed that this was "God's way," "follows divine guide-



lines," and had a "divinely revealed order of teaching."

The remaining volumes were Bible lessons designed specifically for tribal peoples. The evangelism phase (Phase 1) consisted of 68 lessons, 42 from the OT, and 26 from the New Testament (NT). Five other CBT phases followed the evangelism phase. Phase 2 reviewed Phase 1, this time focusing on security rather than separation from a holy God. Phase 3 covered Acts, setting the foundation for the Epistles. Phase 4 surveyed the Epistles, culminating with Revelation. In a rather short period of time, the listeners were exposed to the metanarrative of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Phases 5-7 repeated the cycle focused on issues of sanctification for maturing believers. Few storytellers, however, have ventured into the final three phases. See Figure 1 on the next page.

Jim Slack, church growth consultant for the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (IMB), formerly known as the Foreign Mission Board, served in the Philippines as a church growth consultant. He had read Hans Weber's book *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates* in a doctoral seminar with Cal Guy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the early 60s. He and his wife Mary, along with Susan Stokeld, had used both Weber's ideas and George and Mary Ingram's *30 Bible Stories for Church Planters* (from India) at the Southern Baptist College in Mindanao in the early 70s.

As friends of NTM's Dell Schultze, Slack soon heard about McIlwain's chronological Bible story model in the early 80s. Impressed, he invited McIlwain to teach seminars for the IMB in Luzon (Baguio, 1983) and Mindanao (Davao, 1984). Some 600 IMB missionaries and nationals attended one of the two one-week seminars. So, CBT had now moved beyond NTM to the IMB, who re-labeled it Chronological Bible Storying (CBS). And it did not stop with the IMB.

Changes Within the Orality Movement

Far from being monolithic, these types of movements tend to find themselves morphing in multiple directions at the same time, often to the consternation of the initial founder(s). The innovators, however, usually feel that their adaptations can increase the breadth and health of movements. One can't expect all to be in agreement or on board with the new directions, and this was certainly the case with the fledging orality movement. I offer below some reflective observations on significant developments along this movement's journey

Figure 1. McIlwain's Seven Phases of Chronological Bible Teaching

Old Testament		Gospels	Acts	Epistles-Revelation
Phase I	Unbelievers Mixed groups Believers	Separation Solution		
Phase II	New believers	Security		
			Phase III New believers Preparation for Epistles	
				Phase IV New believers Function of NT church Christian walk
Phase V	Maturing believers God's work in OT individuals Training of disciples	Sanctification		
			Phase VI Maturing believers Expository teaching	
				Phase VII Maturing believers Expository teaching

Source: Adapted from McIlwain, 1981:12a-12c, 1987:131

(they are introduced chronologically although their development overlapped).

Observation 1: It's More Than Systematic Theology

Biblical theology drives McIlwain's CBT, and the same could be said of Chronological Bible Storying (CBS). While a number of versions of biblical theology exist (see: Klink and Lockett, 2012), McIlwain relied on the historical events presented in "successive installments" in Scripture to frame the story of redemption. The parts (individual stories) were embedded in concrete events that built the whole (big story).³

Systematic theology begins with our questions. Biblical theology and narrative theology begin with the biblical author's questions. The orality movement

recognizes that starting points matter because of the assumptions that drive the different theologies. They also recognize that the sequence matters in which the theologies are used. Rather than stamping systematic theology as superior and beginning there, they prefer to see its value when it makes summaries from the concrete character and events of Scripture. The biblical author's questions should lead to our questions. Sequence matters.

Observation 2: It's More Than the New Testament

CBT does not begin in John;⁴ it begins in the beginning, Genesis. This meant most evangelists and church planters had no local-language Scripture from which to teach. To meet this need, Bible translators who normally

would have begun translating the book of Mark⁵ now began with Genesis instead. Influenced by CBT, translators recognized that just as Jesus required a forerunner, John the Baptist, so the NT required a forerunner, the OT.

The New Testament was never intended to introduce Jesus Christ to the world; too much of the gospel story ends up on the cutting floor (Is. 40:90). CBT has been instrumental in changing the Bible translation culture from starting in the New Testament to starting in the Old Testament.

Observation 3: It's More Than Chronology

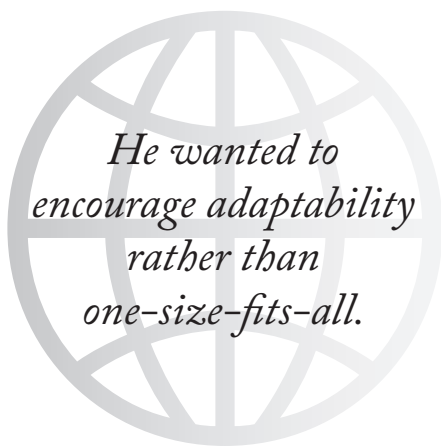
Jim Slack enlisted J. O. Terry, a media specialist for the Asia-Pacific region with IMB, to help develop NTM's

CBT. Terry had been experimenting with using stories in various countries beginning in early 1988. He joined Slack in 1991, and they traveled the world co-teaching CBT. Terry then went out on his own to East, South-east, and South Asian countries, though he was heavily focused in Bangladesh, Orissa (India), Pakistan and Myanmar, and in the process became the quintessential Bible storyteller. He continued to update his materials from what he had learned on his own and from information that began streaming in from his many contacts around the world. From all this first hand field experience and this feedback Terry was ready to announce a major change.

Over time Terry had become less and less comfortable with McIlwain's highly expositional stories and the rigidity of CBT. He also felt McIlwain's model was too geared to the literate person. Terry preferred telling the Bible story, not just talking about it. He preferred to risk the power of the story and let the listeners discover the meaning. Interactive dialogue rather than top-down exposition would provide the necessary feedback. For Terry, providing guidelines with options would offset CBT's rigidity. All of this led him to conclude that a name change was necessary. In 1992 Terry renamed CBT "Chronological Bible Storying" (CBS).

Within two years, Terry made another name change—to *Bible Storying*. While he agreed that a strong foundation to the gospel was necessary, he felt that this could be accomplished through shorter story sets that fit the more limited contact times experienced with some people groups, and would work better for short-term mission trips. Terry was also exploring what he called "fast-tracking," i.e., covering Genesis all the way through to the cross in just a few minutes or over a few days by the telling of a sequence of stories without stopping for dialogue or exposition.

Terry also wanted the storying to become less dependent on chronology and more conversational, situational, and topical for those specific ministry opportunities and contexts with time constraints (such as short-term missions). He wanted to encourage the flexibility and adaptability of Bible Storying to fit different strategic situations and ministry needs rather than having one-size that fits all (see Terry, *Basic Bible Storying*, 2008). He also wanted to give one-on-one storying opportunities the same attention that one-on-group had received. And he wanted the evangelistic theme to be initially more subtle, with more focus given to a relationship with God, but then becoming increasingly more pronounced toward the latter stories.



To meet these various felt needs, Terry wrote *Hope Stories from the Bible* (32 stories), *Food Stories from the Bible* (44 stories), *Death Stories from the Bible* (42 stories), *Water Stories from the Bible* (22), *Grief Stories from the Bible* (39 stories), *Bible Storying Handbook for Short-Term Mission Teams*, *Mission Volunteers* (32 stories), *Oralizing Bible Stories for Telling*, and *The Holy Rosary Gospel Stories of Jesus* (20 meditations).⁶

Sometime around 2005, another name change occurred. Some within the NTM training schools were dissatisfied with the original title CBT. So, they replaced it with Foundational Bible Teaching (FBT) for the following reasons:

1. chronological (CBT) represents only one aspect of the way the model was being taught (see Phases 1-3)
2. Phases 4-7 are laid out in a more logical sequence, as it pertains to the believer's spiritual growth and development, rather than telling Bible stories in historical sequence
3. many only think of Phase 1 (evangelism) when they hear the term CBT
4. the title FBT better reflects an entire program premised on providing a strong OT foundation for the gospel

McIlwain's concern, however, was that dropping out the term "chronology" would cause many to interpret FBT to mean a topical teaching of foundational doctrines (rather than Bible stories that were told chronologically). He preferred, therefore, to reference the program as "Foundational Chronological Bible Teaching" or "Chronological Expositional Bible Teaching" (personal communication, July 11, 2011). Today it is simply called Foundational Teaching.

Fragmented topical teaching has dominated the evangelical world and its mission arm for decades. McIlwain has helped Christian workers consider the need for grasping and communicating the big picture of Scripture, sketched out over the landscapes of both Old and New Testaments.

Observation 4: It's More Than Story

In the beginning of the orality movement, "story" received the greatest attention from most contributors and advocates. Being able to embed abstract doctrinal concepts and ideas into concrete events and characters (stories) was so liberating that often other genres were unintentionally overlooked.

Even as Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* educated the emerging movement about the distinctives of a continuum covering both primary orality (those who communicate through verbal and visual means because they

Figure 2. A Holistic Model of Orality



cannot read) and secondary orality (literate people who prefer oral and visual means to learn, imagine, and communicate), many understood orality to refer solely to stories. Scriptures such as, “Listen to the village musicians gathered at the watering holes” (Judg. 5:11, NLT), or biblical insights into ethnodoxology, would have to wait. Story drove and defined everything for most within the movement in the early beginnings. But then that began to change.

Charles Madinger (2010), a key strategist within the orality movement, designed a chart to capture the breadth and complexity of orality, helping to advance the movement beyond simply

story. He concluded that seven disciplines converge to define orality: culture (interpret), literacy (understand), networks (relate), memory (learn), language (receive), media (deliver), arts (feel) (see Figure 2). The latter discipline of the arts alone could include drama, song, symbols, visual literacy, testimonies, proverbs, folktales, poems, and so forth.

Observation 5: It’s More Than Individual Bible Stories

Following a linear biblical theology, McIlwain’s evangelism phase called for teachers to present one lesson after the other until the 68 lessons were covered. No introductory lesson provided a brief overview or anchored the

cosmic drama being fought between the protagonist and an antagonist. A metanarrative lesson at the beginning that introduced the series helped create an overarching mystery and give direction to the question, “Who is the promised mystery man?”⁷ The same lack of a metanarrative was true of CBS, and the resulting problem was that unanchored stories often ended up misinterpreted.⁸

A growing number within the orality movement have recognized this shortcoming on at least two levels: pedagogical and theological. On the pedagogical level, many people from around the world seem to prefer to learn from whole to part to whole,⁹ a

learning style that is the exact antithesis of the way most Westerners learn, which is part-to-whole. When CBT and CBS are taught in this Western pedagogical style (part-to-whole), it makes author-intended meanings in the Sacred Storybook difficult for many to understand, opening the door for misinterpretation. Jerome Bruner (1996) captured the overall problem when he said that, “Pedagogy is never innocent. It is a medium that carries its own message” (p. 63). Mixing different pedagogical styles can result in cultural noise¹⁰ and the hijacking of intended meanings of the biblical metanarrative.

Teaching a series of Bible stories, therefore, does not necessarily tie the individual stories to the intended metanarrative of Scripture. To illustrate, if each lesson heard by an audience represented a piece of clothing, how would the listeners be expected to hold all the clothes without dropping them? We might suggest a linear or circular clothesline to remedy the situation. Metaphorically, this illustrates the need for a metanarrative of the Sacred Storybook. Offering listeners a clothesline provides not only a place to hang the individual stories, but also a means to bring more informed definition to them (different types of clothes representing different segments of the sacred story). Each single story finds meaning in the overall arrangement of the big story. This is the preferred pedagogy of many, i.e., whole-to-part.

On the theological level, the entire metanarrative of Scripture, not just the New Testament story (Gal 3:8; Is. 40:9; 52:7; 61:1), provides the framework for the gospel story. Both Testaments help guard the gospel against either detrimental abbreviations or “cultural and doctrinal biases” (Fleming, 2005:301), even as the gospel story drives the entire metanarrative from creation to consummation.

The metanarrative serves to set direction from start to finish while the individual Bible stories spiral around

the metanarrative, offering choices and consequences through concrete human and spiritual characters as it advances, sometimes even backtracking to a previously telegraphed conclusion or vague mystery. This “big story” becomes the rival metanarrative that challenges deeply held worldview allegiances.

Where is the use of the metanarrative applicable? A growing number within the orality movement would argue that the metanarrative of the Sacred Storybook is central not only for those “where the name of Christ has never been heard” (Rom. 15:20, NLT), but also for a post-Christian world. So, “metanarrative evangelism” is central to global outreach.



Observation 6: It’s More Than Country Folk

The Orality Movement has done much more than just go global; it has also migrated from country dwellers to city residents. It has accomplished this by reaching both primary and secondary oral communicators. When NTM missionaries returned on home assignment, many used CBT in small groups and Sunday Schools and a problem arose: more focused lessons for a North American audience were needed.

To meet this growing demand, McIlwain, along with the tireless efforts of Nancy Everson (who was burdened to reach the U.S. churches as well as tribal peoples), published a fifty-lesson

volume, *Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ* (1991) to be taught over a year. CBT had officially shifted its focus from the country to the city within NTM.

Building upon the shoulders of NTM, the IMB personnel have played a major role in the expansion and depth of the Orality Movement both in the country and the city through research, training, conferences, consulting, and curricula. It was the IMB’s focus on lowland Filipinos that took them almost immediately into cities. Reaching oral learners in the orality movement slowly but steadily found the distinction between country and city beginning to blur. The challenge of primary orality morphed into secondary orality, and vice versa, across both rural and urban worlds.

Observation 7: It’s More Than Non-Formal Education

The orality movement has moved beyond non-formal seminars, conferences, and Oral Bible Schools to formal courses and concentrations offered for credit through the academy. In 1995, I introduced the course “Narrative as an Educational Philosophy” at the Cook School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University, to help (primarily) graduates to recapture the power of story in ministry. In 2011, Cook added a graduate concentration of 8 courses (24 units)¹¹ on oral communication for those preparing to serve among “oral-preferenced” peoples (this concentration addresses both primary and secondary orality). Roberta King introduced the course “Communicating Christ through Oral Performance: Storytelling & Song” at the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, in 2004. And through the assistance of Avery Willis and Grant Lovejoy, Bob Dawson set up an orality minor at Oklahoma Baptist University in 2007 (the minor includes two courses on CBS, plus a practicum).¹² The different Southern Baptist seminaries¹³ now offer courses on storytelling, and a growing number of

dissertations addressing various aspects of orality are now available.¹⁴ One can expect the academy to continue to contribute theory-based application to the orality movement.

Observation 8: It's More Than Church Multiplication

Over the decades the orality movement has formed multiple tributaries beyond the planting, maturing, and multiplying of churches. It has moved into the arts, home schooling, community development, TESOL, business, and so forth. As noted above, it is used in non-formal education, such as Oral Bible School, and courses and concentrations in formal education. In the summer of 2012, Samuel Chiang, Executive Director of the International Orality Network (ION), launched a related field that focused on theological education in formal as well as non-formal institutions. ION plans to investigate every area: curricula, textbooks, facilities, seating arrangements, pedagogy, andragogy, and hermeneutics.

One area of investigation focused on helping faculty (who had been trained through literate means) to interact with oral-preferenced students, those who Jonah Sachs identifies as “digitorals.”¹⁵ These students prefer watching over reading, screens over paper, interacting over writing, dialoguing over listening to lectures, group activities over individual activities. Knowing something was amiss, but not having the vocabulary or categories to identify and articulate it (much less fix it), an uneasiness began to grow among the more observant faculty. How can orality impact theological education to minimize this pedagogical divide so that spiritual transformation has opportunity to advance?¹⁶

Three consultations to date have been held to discuss these interrelated issues: Wheaton (2012), Hong Kong (2013), and Houston (2014). Two books compiled from papers that were given, resulted: *Beyond Literate Western*

They normally have a good understanding of the host culture's worldview, but they often fail to consider how locals actually tell stories.

Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts (2013) and *Beyond Literate Western Practices: Continuing Conversations in Orality and Theological Education* (2014).

Observation 9: It's More Than Guilt-Innocence

Part of the ION consultation's focus held in Houston in July of 2014 was the role of honor-shame (H-S) in formal and non-formal theological education. While anthropological studies address all sorts of cultural dynamics, what became immediately crystal clear was the strong and unconscious emphasis in storying that was given to guilt-innocence (G-I) and all the accompanying legal language which typically dominates a Western mindset.

Westerners tend to:

- read the Bible through G-I eyes
- teach the metanarrative of the Sacred Story book, the Bible books and topics, and even theology through G-I eyes
- evangelize, disciple, and develop leaders through G-I eyes
- use G-I oriented review and application questions
- conduct community development through G-I eyes.

Somehow most westerners have missed the strong emphasis given to H-S where relational language dominates in Scripture. This is true for them even when they teach it and demonstrate it through “good works” in countries that are driven by H-S moral values. Participants in the ION consultation also noted how the U.S. itself is fast changing from G-I to an H-S culture.

Participants also discussed a third leg to H-S and G-I: fear-power (F-P). Those engaged in cultures where

power language dominates, such as animists daily in touch with the spirit world, will connect strongly with F-P. The participants called for evaluation of all non-formal and formal theological education in relation to this trilogy of G-I, H-S, and F-P at every level.

Observation 10: It's More Than the Storyteller's Worldview

Some within the orality movement began to ask questions related to worldview studies: Is there more than simply telling Bible stories? Should there be some worldview studies conducted *before* beginning to tell Bible stories? Would such research improve the selection, development, and communication of appropriate story sets? Would it help to understand the local pedagogy? Would it help minimize syncretism or legalism? How much worldview study is too much or too little? What cultural noise disrupts and distracts?

McIlwain's CBT assumes that the Christian workers have conducted extensive anthropological studies before beginning to teach. They normally have a pretty good understanding of the host culture's worldview,¹⁷ and have identified bridges and barriers to Christianity by the time they begin evangelism. What they often failed to consider, though, was how locals themselves actually told stories.

The IMB eventually introduced worldview studies to their personnel in 1995. While some in leadership pushed to plant more churches, Terry noted their lack of success was in part due to the use of imported story sets. He concluded that their missionaries needed at least the worldview perspective to assist them in story selection and to instill the means for discovering evangelism bridges and barriers. While storytelling does not require a lot of

interesting and extraneous cultural detail, it did need some.

To call attention to the need to understand the host's culture, Terry designed a tool, labeled the Lome Y (after being introduced in 1995 in Lome, Togo). The dual flow of worldview information enters at the top of the "Y" and results in insights that inform the curriculum development process (as they siphon through the base of the Y). Missiological and theological themes, however, still take precedence over the cultural data discovered. The diagram is presently entitled "Worldview Informing and Instructing Bible Storying." IMB continues to produce other simplified worldview study aids.

At this writing, there are some within IMB that feel that CBS takes way too long to story through the 40 to 60 lessons in CBS. They feel that worldview studies of the host cultures can help select the Bible stories and make them more relevant. Besides, the effectiveness of CBS was not always the drip, drip, drip of one story after another!

This view raises a number of strategic questions. What do the locals consider too long? How do the locals view chronology? What are the local's pedagogical preferences? David Garrison responded to the last question this way: "This question presupposes that expatriates are the driving force of what is happening. That is an unfortunate 'old paradigm' misunderstanding" (Schattner 2014:108).

Kevin Pittle, an anthropologist at the School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University, teaches a course in the orality concentration entitled "Traditional Oral Narrative: Analysis and Interpretation." This class challenges the assumption that all peoples tell stories the same way. He considers various models to analyze stories¹⁸ so that the storyteller can story in a way that sounds natural to the hearers, making reproduction normal. This helps minimize noise.

What about worldview research? Again, Garrison interestingly gives the same answer to worldview studies as he did to pedagogical studies: "This question presupposes that expatriates are the driving force of what is happening. That is an unfortunate 'old paradigm' misunderstanding."¹⁹

How important are pedagogical and worldview studies in helping to reduce cultural noise?²⁰ Will minimal research produce noise that results in nominalism, legalism or syncretism? Are pedagogical and worldview studies part of an "old paradigm" that is no longer necessary for today's cross-cultural worker? Many within the



orality movement today would argue that storying is much more than the storyteller's worldview.

Concluding Reflections

In an evolving movement, not every traveler is in the same place on the path. Some recognize certain of these observations and others do not. For example, a speaker in an orality session at Lausanne 2010 in South Africa apologized for using ppt (powerpoint) in his presentation, as if story was the only thing that mattered. Many have moved on from fundamental observations, encouraging and incorporating other observations like those I introduce above. The orality movement is a work in progress, and must remain so if the disciple-making process is to improve in its journey cross-culturally

at home and abroad. The legacy of this movement attests to H. G. Wells' adage that, "There's truths you have to grow into."

What might be some of those future growth areas? I believe we can expect new development and interaction with narrative theology, a theological orientation that Gabriel Fackre defines as "discourse about God in the setting of story."²¹ I've noticed that while Christian workers may be well-versed in systematic theology, fewer are familiar with biblical theology, and even fewer with narrative theology. Since the Bible is a Sacred Storybook, a Sacred Drama, with narrative as the predominant genre of choice by the Holy Spirit (approximately 55% of scripture), I fully expect new observations in narrative theology to impact the orality movement in the next decade. But this is just one example. We can expect other new research to emerge in the near future that will influence and mature this orality movement. Yes, there is more to the story. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ This chapter comes from a forthcoming book entitled *Making the Case for Symbol-Based Storying* in the series *There is More to the Story*.

² View this story of syncretism and the solution experienced by Tim and Bunny Cain, who serve among the Puinave that reside along the frontier borders of Colombia and Venezuela, through New Tribe Mission's DVD *Now We See Clearly*.

³ C. S. Song's perspective on story is appropriate for orality and theology: "Who says theology has to be ideas and concepts? Who has decided that theology has to be doctrines, axioms, propositions? ... God is not concept; God is story. God is not idea; God is presence. God is not hypothesis; God is experience. God is not principle; God is life... For in the beginning were stories, not texts... Story is the matrix of theology." (in C. S. Song, *In the Beginning Were Stories, Not Texts*. (Cambridge: United Kingdom. James Clark & Co) 2011, pp. 6, 7, 17, 18.

⁴ In 20-20 hindsight the problem is obvious. If one starts in John there is no

Old Testament background which a quick reading of John 1 would demonstrate.

⁵ Translators chose the book of Mark to begin translation, because it was the New Testament, was the shortest book, and was written in simple Greek. This strategy was translator centric, not host-society centric.

⁶ Forthcoming ministry-themed story sets include: *Heaven is for Women; God's Gift of Forgiveness; Peace for Hindu Women; Ebenezer Stories; HIV Hope; Let's Just Talk*. The books are available through www.churchstarting.net/biblestorying/Books.htm. Digital downloads can be requested at jot2@sbcglobal.net.

⁷ A metanarrative is "a trans-historical, all-encompassing, culture-specific, informally learned, tenaciously held (T.A.C.I.T.) story of reality, that provides a present-tense grid whereby individuals of a culture interpret and interact with all aspects of life." (Matthews, Michael Vern, *Is there a Reader in this Text? The Place of Metanarrative in the Problem of Meaning*. PhD. Dissertation presented to Canterbury Christ Church University and Trinity Theological Seminary, 2013, p. 230)

⁸ One wonders how the lack of an Old Testament foundation creates noise in the understanding of *The Jesus Film*. See: Steffen 1993.

⁹ For Whole-Part-Whole Learning Theory from a western perspective see *The Adult Learner*, by Malcolm Knowles, Elwood Holton III, and Richard Swanson (1973/2014). What adaptation could be made to make this useful in cross-cultural contexts?

¹⁰ "Noise can be external, internal, or semantic. External noises are sights, sounds, and other stimuli that draw people's attention away from the message... Internal noises are thoughts and feelings that draw people's attention away from the message... Semantic noises are emotional distractions aroused by specific word choices." Verderber, et. al., *Communicate!* (Wadsworth Cengage Learning: Boston, 14th Edition) 2014, p. 12.

¹¹ The Cook orality concentration includes the courses: Narrative as an Educational Philosophy, Sign, Symbol, and Structure, Comparative Mythology and Folklore, Learning the Story, Telling the Story, Narrative and Song, Scripture-In-Use, Oral Literature.

¹² www.okbu.edu/go/academic/oralmirror.html.

¹³ Southeastern, Southwestern and Southern Baptist Theological Seminaries

¹⁴ One can expect continual contributions of theory-based studies related to

orality. But it goes further, and includes dissertations with a number of chapters written in narrative style: Jay Moon, *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture: A Narrative Portrayal of Builsa Proverbs Contextualizing Christianity in Ghana*, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2005; and Aminta Arrington, *Hymns of the Everlasting Hills: The Written Word in an Oral Culture in Southwest China*, Biola University, 2014. One can expect more dissertations to follow these pioneers.

¹⁵ Sachs, Jonathan 2012.

¹⁶ Werner Mischke asks this provocative question: "Could it be that the days of colonialism in mission methods may be largely behind us—while colonialism in theology is still an issue?" (2014, p. 169).

¹⁷ Paul Hiebert defines (cultural) worldview as the, "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives." (2008, p. 15)

¹⁸ Levi-Straussian and Proppian structural approaches, Jungian psychological approaches, Campbellian literary approaches, to suggest a few.

¹⁹ Schattner 2014, p. 108.

²⁰ "Cultural noise refers to impediments to successful communication between people of different cultures... (of) differences in language (e.g., the same words have different meanings), values (e.g., importance of being on time or setting work schedule times in a culture), non-verbal cues (e.g., interpretation of body language), and many others." (O'Connell, 2004, p. 86).

²¹ Fackre, (1983:343).

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2014 *Communicate!* (14th edition). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, than Church Multiplication.

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LIFE Scale: Exploring Eight Dimensions of Life in Christ

by L. D. Waterman

The predicament of personal identity among those who turn to Christ in the Muslim world is not an abstract exercise. It often proves to be a very disorientating experience.

"I'm really confused," wrote Mahmud. "Since I started following Jesus, I've gotten different advice from different people, and I'm not sure which ones to follow. My friend, Mustafa, who first told me about your broadcasts, says it's vital to stay well connected to our community. So he advised me not to say or do anything that would shame or shock my family or the community. He continues to pray and attend the mosque just like he did before, and he says it's not a problem to be a good Muslim and also believe in Jesus. He has some other friends who also think as he does."

"At the same time, I've visited a church in the city a few times, and they were excited to hear about my dream and that I've been listening to your broadcasts and that I believe in Jesus. But they told me if I'm serious about following Jesus, I should get baptized as soon as possible and start a new life with a new (Christian) name and renounce everything that's tainted with Islam. I want to follow Jesus with all my heart and obey His commands, but I'm confused about where that puts me in relation to everyone else. I was born a [member of my tribe], and I want to truly follow Jesus as a [member of my tribe]. Is that possible? Is that what Jesus wants? And if so, how can I do that?"¹

How would you respond to Mahmud? Would you tell him to follow the advice he has received from one group or the other and simply join one of those groups? What issues and factors would you want to consider and help him think through? I suspect many of us have given significant thought to the challenges of spiritual growth for someone in Mahmud's position: what transformations might the Spirit of the Lord want to bring in beliefs, practices, attitudes, and relationships? These questions loom for *every* new follower of Christ in every culture and for every group of his followers. Yet the questions loom more sharply for those who come to follow Jesus while living in the midst of their Muslim birth communities.

Some efforts have been made to describe different choices being made by communities facing these issues in a Muslim context. Notable among the tools to describe such choices is the "C Spectrum," developed by John Travis

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in 1998.² This scale has been frequently cited as a point of reference to describe different types of communities of Jesus' followers in various parts of the Muslim world (and to a lesser degree, the Hindu and Buddhist worlds). While this scale has been useful in many ways, it has also allowed, or perhaps reinforced, an ongoing assumption that a group's aggregate representation of beliefs, practices and identity can all be plotted at one and the same point on a line. It seems that much confusion has arisen when facing the reality that groups of Jesus' followers (and the religious forms they embrace) are often more complex than can be represented by a single number (i.e. "C4" rather than "C5").

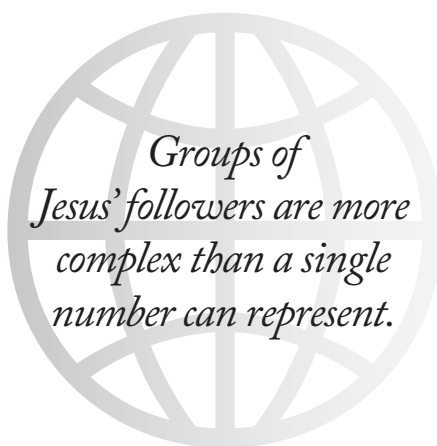
In one discussion with a fellow worker among Muslims, I realized that he and I were discussing simultaneously a number of categories that would be impossible to chart on a one-dimensional scale. Contributing to that realization was our interaction over the past few years with a wide spectrum of workers among Muslims (including some from a Muslim background) in the Bridging the Divide network (www.btdnetwork.org).

One fruit of those discussions was the creation of a scale that can be used widely to describe either a group or an individual following Christ (or some other path). This multidimensional scale aims to give a more comprehensive picture than could be offered by a one-dimensional scale. By way of disclaimer, the purpose of this tool is not to judge a person or group from the outside, but to help us all better understand and discern where we ourselves and others currently stand before God and the world around us. Looking only at the "spiritual" issues is insufficient; the multifaceted and vital questions of identity call for careful consideration as well.

Admittedly, the assessment of many of the dimensions on this scale will be somewhat subjective, and any assessment

is dependent on the quality of our interaction with others. Yet the scale allows and encourages us to sharpen a process that we already tend to do intuitively and somewhat randomly. It should simply refine what we already do. It hopefully will enable us to distinguish more precisely a number of essential elements in the life and witness of a child of God or a church of God. Thus the scale can also be used as a diagnostic tool to discern areas in which the Lord might want to transform a fellowship or a person, ourselves included.

A user of the scale can offer an estimation of where a group or individual stands by assigning a value of 1 to 5 to each of eight dimensions:



1. Heart ("religious affections")
2. Beliefs (doctrine)
3. Spiritual activities
4. Lifestyle
5. Core (ego) identity
6. Social identity
7. Collective identity
8. Cultural embeddedness

Note that dimensions five through eight relate to different aspects of the identity of an individual or group, and increase our perception beyond the more typical dimensions of one to four. The labels and descriptions of three of these dimensions (core, social and collective identity) are borrowed from Tim Green,³ whose recent work

along with other key mission researchers has given us a new way of viewing identity among believers in the Muslim world. He comments on his three-dimensional scale:

This framework, while over-simplified and too static to show how identity evolves over time, at least enables us to explore relationships between different layers of identity. It also sheds light on issues of 'multiple identity' within each layer which are highly relevant to believers from a Muslim background. Finally, considerations of identity may help us develop more multi-dimensional models than the 'C Spectrum' and a more nuanced discussion of insider movements.⁴

This article will contain just a brief look at issues of identity, utilizing some insights I have found practical and vital, on a topic very much under current consideration in sophisticated articles and books. As a simple way to summarize these eight dimensions describing a person or group, I've chosen four broader diagnostic concerns that I call the LIFE Scale:

Lifestyle

Identity

Foundations (heart and beliefs)

Expression (spiritual activities)

While for some of the eight dimensions (especially the first six) a higher number can be seen as "better" or more biblically appropriate, this is not necessarily the case with all eight dimensions. So it would be misguided to try to add all the scores and arrive at one number as a helpful descriptor.

Here is a description of the eight dimensions:

1. Heart ("religious affections"): toward Christ vs. away from Christ
 1. Enmity toward Christ and passion for false "gods"
 2. General desires away from Christ and toward other things
 3. Significantly divided loyalty

4. Real but mixed affection for Christ
5. Deep and primary love for Christ

The first and most important of the eight dimensions is the heart, or what the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards described as “religious affections.” Proverbs 4:23 describes the heart as foundational to everything else: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” While the heart is the most essential of all eight dimensions, it is also the most challenging to assess, since, as the Lord reminded Samuel, “People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Yet consideration of this dimension based on available clues is vital to a useful assessment.

This dimension addresses questions such as: What does this person or group love? What do they hate? What do they yearn for? What do they despise? Where do they look for their spiritual power? What engages their spiritual affections? To put it differently, how much do their affections and desires point *toward* Christ and his commands, and how much do their passions and longings point *away* from Him? This dimension aims to look at the foundation God laid through Moses and that Jesus reiterated as the first and greatest commandment:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Matt. 22:37)

2. Beliefs (doctrine): biblical vs. unbiblical

1. Staunchly holding to numerous unorthodox and unbiblical beliefs
2. Tentatively holding to some major unorthodox and unbiblical beliefs
3. Fuzzy and confused on some major biblical beliefs
4. Generally holding to orthodox and biblical beliefs
5. Solidly holding to orthodox and biblical beliefs

The most important of the eight dimensions is the heart, or what the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards described as “religious affections.”

The second dimension to be considered is the person or group’s religious beliefs or doctrine. To what extent are their beliefs consistent with or contrary to biblical teaching, especially concerning the core doctrines of the Christian faith? Among those core doctrines could be listed the inspiration of the Bible, the full deity and full humanity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith, forgiveness of sin through Christ’s death, and the necessity of obedience to Christ’s commands as an expression of faith.

As the scale is applied by different individuals or groups, there could be some variation in the precise criteria used. The purpose of this dimension is not to get bogged down in specific denominational or sectarian points of doctrine, but rather to consider doctrines generally held by all believers in the Bible as God’s Word. The command Paul gave to Timothy was:

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:16)

3. Religious activities: to glorify Christ vs. human conformity, attempted merit or selfish gain

1. Religious activities engaged in very intentionally for conformity, merit or selfish gain
2. Religious activities generally engaged in for conformity, merit or selfish gain
3. Religious activities engaged in with little or no intentionality
4. Religious activities engaged in generally aimed at glorifying Christ
5. Religious activities engaged in consistently aimed at glorifying Christ

The third dimension to assess is religious or faith-motivated activities. What practices, expressions and

patterns of behavior does the person or group carry out for spiritual or devotional purposes such as worship? And what is the motivation behind those practices? It can be tempting to (either mentally or in print) think in terms of two lists of religious practices: one set “good” and the other “bad.” For example, one might say that praying to the true God and singing praise songs are good, while going to the mosque and reading the Qur’an are bad. However, we know from Jesus and the prophets that even the best of religious activities can be unacceptable. God warned through the prophet Amos: “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me” (Amos 5:21). Jesus pointed out that the prayers of many Pharisees (theologically sound and addressed to the true God) were useless.

Jesus also warned:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven (Matthew 6:1).

Thus he made clear that the reason or motivation for a religious activity has a strong bearing on its usefulness or true value. He also taught (in this verse as well as others) that doing “religious” activities out of merely human-oriented motivation (to be seen by others or to make a positive impression on others) weighs against any true spiritual value.

The Apostle Paul applied this perspective to a variety of pastoral issues, as in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 through 10. The latter discourse concludes with a principle of essential motivation applicable to a wide range of activities: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Thus even activities such as

attending a mosque or reading the Qur'an (for the purpose of making effective connections to share the Gospel with Muslims) would be considered by many mature Christians to be useful and pleasing to God.

In this dimension, the goal is not to get muddled in dispute over whether a specific activity is right or wrong, good or bad according to the opinion of the one assessing. (This can be a separate and sometimes useful discussion.) Rather the goal is to try to discern as much as possible the *motive* behind various religious or spiritual practices. How much is the goal to glorify Christ and how much is the goal some contrary motive, whether human conformity (social habit or pressure), attempted merit, or some other selfish gain? This dimension aims to help us consider various religious activities with the kind of discerning nuance found in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.

4. Lifestyle: increasing conformity to Christ's will vs. patterns of the world and sinful nature

1. Strongly ingrained in lifestyle patterns of the world and sinful nature
2. Tends to follow lifestyle patterns of the world and sinful nature
3. A mixture of genuine biblical and worldly/sinful lifestyle habits
4. Tends to live in conformity to Christ's will
5. Very intentionally attempts to live all of life in conformity to Christ's will

The fourth dimension to consider is an essential counterpart to the preceding three, namely lifestyle. This is the evidence of what is in the heart, the outworking of beliefs and the daily life complement of religious practice. These are the works without which faith is dead (James 2:17), the love for neighbor that evidences love for God (Matt. 22:39), and the manifestation of living as Jesus did (1 John 2:6). This is the living out of Kingdom life

patterns as described in texts such as Romans 12, Ephesians 4-6 and Matthew 5-7. This dimension seeks to measure not perfection but overriding direction. Is a person or group growing in conformity to Christ's will, or are they stuck in patterns of the attitudes, thoughts and behaviors in the world around them and their sinful nature (with the attendant ties and vulnerability to spiritual powers of darkness)?

In assessing factors of lifestyle, we need pastoral and missiological awareness of the dangers of external conformity motivated primarily by the desire to be accepted by those considered "more spiritual." This danger, known to many who grew up in conservative churches of an earlier generation,



can be lethal to new believers from a Muslim background, especially when entering into the fellowship of non-BMB (Believer from Muslim Background) churches. Tim Green notes:

The pressure to perform can be especially strong for new believers already experiencing rejection from their own community and who consequently feel their survival depends upon acceptance within the ethnic Christian community.⁵

The appropriate goal is not external conformity, but transformation by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2). The temptation to external conformity can also happen at a corporate level, where a fellowship aspires to become "a real church," as measured by factors

such as a noteworthy "church building" or a distinctive class of clergy.

5. Core identity: "Who I am in my inner self" (identity privately or unconsciously experienced by the individual)

1. Identity solidly rooted in something other than following Jesus
2. Identity generally found in something other than following Jesus
3. Spiritual identity fuzzy or unclear
4. Identity generally found in personal relationship with Jesus
5. Identity solidly rooted in personal relationship with Jesus

The fifth dimension looks at Core identity:

Who I am in my inner self...[identity] privately or even unconsciously experienced by the individual.⁶

It addresses issues such as "Who am I (who are we), at the deepest level of my/our being?" "Who or what defines my/our existence and my/our ultimate meaning in life?" "Who or what is my/our lord?" The term "core" identity is used because this describes the deepest and most basic type of identity held by an individual or group. In a Western (individualistic) context, this identity is "a personal choice, an achieved identity."⁷ In more collectivist contexts such as most Muslim societies, the line between core and social identity (described next) may be less clear.

6. Social identity: "Who I am in relation to my group or groups"

1. No known identification with Jesus in any social group
2. Identification with Jesus in few social groups
3. Identification with Jesus in some social groups
4. Identification with Jesus in most social groups
5. Transparent identification with Jesus in all on-going social groups

The sixth dimension describes social identity: "Who I am in relation to my group or groups."⁸ Involvement in

some social groups inherently implies a spiritual or religious dimension, with certain social assumptions (not necessarily accurate) about one's perspective toward Jesus. Other social groups carry no such attendant assumptions, so an individual may freely choose how much or little to make known their identification with Jesus in the context of that group.

Green notes: "In reality, nearly everyone today learns to juggle several social identities."⁹ For example, a person may have a social identity as a member of their family (which in some contexts is a very strong identity marker), as a member of a local religious institution or group, as having a certain role at their work, as a member of a musical performing group, as a member of a sports fan club, and so on. In many cases, these diverse social identities are not experienced or perceived to be in significant conflict with one another. Only on occasion might the demands or expectation of one identity conflict with the expectations of another—perhaps in terms of time or effort invested. Yet when a shift in allegiance and faith commitment enters the equation, it may impact various pre-existing social identities in ways that cause tension or conflict. However, the best goal is not to escape that tension by a simple shift from one social identity to another.

In an earlier article, Green commented:

Even in terms of biblical theology, let alone sociology, it is reductionist to insist that believers must opt for only one social identity....Without believers' involvement in the world there can be no witness either. Witnessing Christians, and especially first generation witnessing Christians, inevitably have a dual social identity. They did in the early church and they do today.... Equal loyalty to both groups is not usually realistic. But to be a member of one group and simultaneously an affiliate of the other is often possible. This in fact is the solution many converts achieve: not always a comfortable solution, but survivable.¹⁰

This highlights the challenge for those who have a core identity as a follower of Jesus yet a social identity as a Muslim.

The tension of dual social identity is usually felt most keenly by individuals who come to faith in Christ as a lone individual (having no one else close to them at or near the same point in their faith journey). Though more mature believers may help and encourage these individuals in many ways, they have to navigate the journey of social identity adjustment somewhat alone. In cases of a group decision to follow Christ, there is usually significantly less dislocation experienced by the individuals involved, as they are bringing part of at least one of their social groups with them in following Christ.

As mentioned above, in more collectivist contexts such as most Muslim societies, the line between core and social identity is less clear than in individualistic contexts. This highlights a significant challenge faced by individuals or movements who (sometimes as relatively new followers of Christ) have a core identity as a follower of Jesus yet a social identity as a Muslim.

This social identity dimension considers the extent to which a person is known as a follower of Jesus in one or more of their social identities. It reflects the possibility that one identity or another may be dominant or that a person or group may have a hybrid or mixed social identity,¹¹ or a social identity that is unclear or inconsistent. Various contexts may give more or less space for an individual or group to function with a dual identity. The social identity dimension does not attempt to tease out all the nuances of possible mixed and hybrid identities. For our present purposes, we simply note these possible realities along with the importance of distinguishing possible differences and tensions in a person's various identities.

A score of 3 on the social identity dimension might be less than the Lord's best, or

for a certain stage in some believers' lives it might actually be the most effective posture to accomplish the Lord's purposes, allowing them growing space before they become more fully transparent with more or all of their social groups. This point may be debatable, but such a debate seems worth engaging. It seems to reflect a reality experienced by many who come to faith gradually, especially in a hostile environment. At first they reveal themselves as Christ's followers when among fellow-believers but not when they are with their Muslim relatives or neighbors, at least for a period of time. In any case, the point of this dimension is not to pass judgment on those who would best be described as a 3 (for example) but to be able to more helpfully understand and accurately describe the reality of their current situation.

7. Collective identity: "My group's identity in the eyes of the world... identity as defined by the group"

1. Clearly labeled as not a group associated with Christ
2. Labeled by most as a group not associated with Christ
3. Collective identity unclear
4. Labeled by some as a group associated with Christ
5. Labeled by all as a group associated with Christ

The seventh dimension measures collective identity (group labels): "My group's identity in the eyes of the world... identity as defined by the group."¹² This does not address many issues of group identity, such as family, clan, club or vocational identity. Green explains:

From the moment of birth, people are labeled with a collective identity, or rather a set of collective identities. Their nationality, ethnicity, and sometimes religion are entered on their birth certificates before they make any choice for themselves. These are

ascribed identities. The more collectivist ... a culture, the more controlling are such ascribed identities, and the harder it is to change them even in adulthood.¹³

Collective identity is often related to, but not the same as, social identity. To distinguish collective identity from social identity, Green, quoting Kathryn Kraft, writes:

Collective identity 'is rooted in a symbolic group or a social category' and is ascribed to a person at birth as a label, while social identity is absorbed gradually by that person through actual relationships with 'significant others.'¹⁴

Kraft summarizes:

While individual (or core) identity is generally defined in terms of personality and development, and social (or relational) identity is defined in social interactions such as a person's jobs and friendships, collective identity is about the social structures and groups in which a person roots him/herself.¹⁵

Or one might rather say,

collective identity is about the social structures and groups in which a person *finds* him/ herself to be rooted (by providence or fate).

Collective identity is very difficult, or in some cases impossible, to change; it is ascribed by others, based on factors over which an individual often has no control.

In some contexts, a person's legal identity would be a part of their collective identity or their set of collective identities. For example, the Apostle Paul, when arrested by Roman soldiers, stated: "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city" (Acts 21:39). He identified himself with his ethnic identity as a Jew and his legal identity as a Roman citizen, making use of this to gain an opportunity to proclaim Christ. Later, on trial before the Sanhedrin, he used his collective identification with one Jewish sect to gain support from them over against the opposing sect. He,

knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called

out in the Sanhedrin, 'My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.' (Acts 23:6)

Many societies hold a shared assumption that religion and ethnicity are inseparably fused. Thus to state one's ethnicity triggers assumptions at the collective level about religious identity. For example, Bosniaks are assumed to be Muslim, Croats assumed to be Roman Catholic, and Serbs to be Serbian Orthodox. A Bosniak friend comments:

One *cannot* be a Serb and at the same time a Muslim, or a Bosniak and a Catholic. Nationality and religious affiliation are synonymous.

This can constitute a great problem for those who desire to hold religious



views different from the majority of their ethnic group. As Green observes:

Traditional societies tend to fuse collective identities of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Therefore a person who changes one element of these is seen as betraying them all. It means 'going over to the other side' or even 'going over to the enemy's side.'¹⁶

Yet on occasion it can provide a way of avoiding unwanted conflict. Green reports:

Pathans make the same automatic linkage, and one of the tiny number of Jesus-followers among them told me how he uses this to advantage: 'If they ask me 'Are you Muslim?' I

reply, "I am Pathan," and that is sufficient.' This answer saves him from detection without having to deny Christ, perhaps the best that can be expected in a situation where 'religion' and 'ethnicity' are so strongly fused at the collective level.¹⁷

This might not be an ideal response, but it recognizes the tightrope some believers have to walk.

As already noted, a higher number on this dimension (and the next) should not be seen as "better" or more biblically appropriate. In fact, if a person or family is from a group whose collective identity is strongly Muslim (with all that that label normally entails), yet that person or family has a core identity (and perhaps social identity) as a follower of Jesus, this can be a point of interest and witness. The contrast between reality and people's assumptions can become an opportunity for God to surprise people with His amazing work of salvation. Surprised curiosity can open doors for giving a reason for the hope within: "What? You're an 'X', but you follow Jesus? How can that be?"

8. Cultural embeddedness (non-spiritual aspects)

1. Functioning essentially in the patterns of own birth culture
2. Functioning largely in the patterns of own birth culture
3. Evaluating many aspects of birth culture as they become aware of other cultures
4. Adopting many elements of another culture—multiple cultural functioning
5. Functioning largely in the patterns of a culture other than one's birth culture

The eighth dimension shows "cultural embeddedness," considering how much a person or group is connected with or functioning in their birth culture's patterns vs. other cultures' patterns. Some aspects of birth culture (those directly related to obedience to Christ) are considered in "Lifestyle,"

discussed above. Many other cultural factors and patterns do not inherently reflect closeness or distance from the person of Christ, yet they significantly impact a person's or group's sense of connectedness with those of their birth culture and/or some other culture(s). Jens Barnett describes one source who speaks of "cultural identity,"¹⁸ and Barnett describes another person, whom he calls 'Awal,' this way:

To presuppose Awal's inner dialogue involves only Christian and Muslim voices is unhelpful. Voices associated with other cultural influences also need consideration. Firstly, from the time of his birth, Awal has internalized Arabic, tribal, and nationalist narratives as well as Islamic. Secondly, globalization has brought all manner of cultural narratives into his life and home.¹⁹

One end of the cultural embeddedness spectrum portrays life patterns commonly found in the individual's or group's birth culture. The other end describes functioning largely in the patterns of a culture *other than* one's birth culture. The middle portrays evaluating many aspects of one's birth culture as one becomes aware of other cultures and other ways of behaving and thinking. A "4" portrays simultaneous (mixed) or multiple cultural belonging, a stance commonly desired by those aiming for effective cross-cultural witness.

It would be very possible for a person or group to seriously follow Christ and remain long-term at a "1," functioning essentially in the (non-sinful) patterns of their own birth culture. Also, a person following Christ might, in some contexts, be more likely to become aware of other cultures and some positive elements of those cultures. By the same token, though, a person far from Christ could also become aware of other cultures in ways that might cause them to evaluate, change or question elements of their birth culture (a "3"). And it would be possible for both a believer and an unbeliever to come to a place of simultaneous (mixed) or

Voices associated with other cultural influences also need consideration ... globalization has brought all manner of cultural narratives ... (Barnett)

multiple cultural functioning, or to live more like those of a culture other than the culture of their birth. Thus a higher number on the cultural embeddedness dimension reflects greater cultural diversity, but it would not necessarily indicate greater *spiritual* maturity.

In addressing the challenge of bringing the gospel to people of diverse cultures, the Apostle Paul wrote:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews....To those not having the law I became like one not having the law....To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Cor. 9:20-22)

Thus cross-cultural witness will happen most effectively for those at a 4 or a 5 on the cultural embeddedness dimension. Yet very effective witness and worship could happen monoculturally for those at a 1 or 2 on this dimension.

Pictorial Representation: Three Examples

These eight dimensions can be charted on a radar graph to give a picture of any given individual or group. Below are three possible examples, not in any

way intended to describe all individuals or groups which could be given the descriptor used, but showing how a specific fellowship or individual might be described.

As noted above, for the first five dimensions (heart through core identity—the top, bottom and right side of the graph), a higher number (more gray, out to the edge) is more positive (more consistent with the will of God). I consider these five to be essential indicators of spiritual health. For the three dimensions on the left side (social identity through cultural embeddedness), the different numbers are an invitation to explore and try to understand the unique situation of any given group or individual as they wrestle with the commands of Scripture and the culture(s) of their birth and current residence. Each of these categories reflects a vital issue for kingdom dynamics and growth, but each resists a simple good/bad categorization that can easily be reduced to numerical evaluation.

This believer, in Figure 1, is generally sound in doctrine, but sadly low in the other four essential indicators of spiritual health. Some would describe this person as a "carnal Christian"; others

Figure 1. A nominal Christian in the southern USA

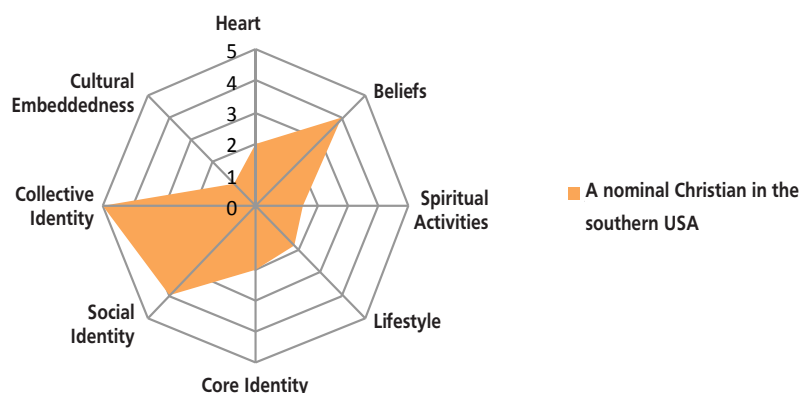
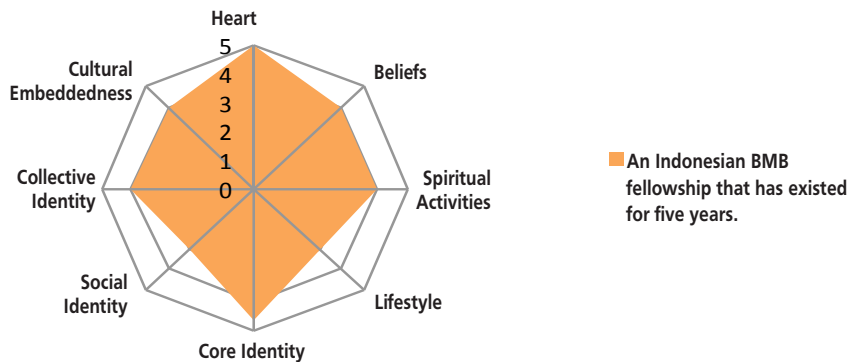


Figure 2. An Indonesian BMB fellowship that has existed for five years



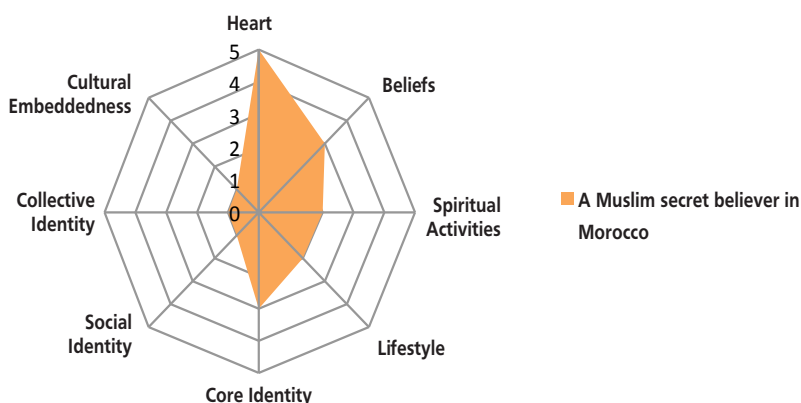
would consider it dubious that this person has true saving faith in Christ.

This fellowship of believers from a Muslim background, Figure 2, is quite strong in most of the essential indicators of spiritual health, though many members and some leaders still struggle significantly with a mixture of biblical and worldly/sinful lifestyle habits. Their fellowship (collective identity) is known by most as a group associated with Christ and they have adopted numerous elements of Indonesian church culture (a 4 on the cultural embeddedness dimension). The social identity score of 3 indicates that the

Christ is very strong, yet some major biblical doctrines are not yet clear, and many areas of life and identity are at a “low” level and in a tumultuous internal process of struggle.

From just these three examples, we can see that this model has potential to facilitate useful discussion of case studies, especially those in which followers of Christ have different evaluations of what is happening. In some cases, strong disputes have arisen among those holding differing perspectives on the cases in question. Some of the disputes have been less fruitful than they could have been, partly because of

Figure 3. A Muslim secret believer in Morocco



social identity of many members and attendees is a mixed bag.

This dear believer, Figure 3, has recently come to Christ because of a vision of Jesus. Heart affection for

misunderstandings and miscommunication. For too long, some Christians have assumed that Muslim identity (assuming collective, social and core identity to all be identical) = Islamic practice = orthodox Islamic belief. At

the same time, others have sought to describe cases where a core identity of biblical faith is paired with Islamic religious practice and social identity. Still others have encouraged greater acceptance of a mixture of Islamic and Christian beliefs, Islamic and Christian religious practices, Islamic and Christian heart attitudes, and so on. Inadequate consideration of multifaceted identity issues has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the disagreements. Hopefully the LIFE Scale proposed here can help improve on this shortcoming and increase the fruitfulness of such discussions.

Application of the LIFE Scale to “Insider Movements”

I have intentionally chosen not to chart an example of a socio-religious “Insider Movement” of the C5 type, lest readers of one persuasion or another react emotionally (either positively or negatively) to the example. I don’t want readers to assume I’m offering an example as my verdict on all socio-religious Insider Movements. Some of my questions and concerns about Insider Movements and related concepts have been published previously.²⁰ For the purposes of this article, suffice it to say that Insider Movements and individual “insiders” could potentially have significantly different descriptions on the LIFE Scale. Also, there could be a group which one observer would describe as an “Insider Movement” while another observer might strongly reject that description. I have personally heard such discussions. Hopefully this tool can improve the quality of such interactions, at least to spotlight differences of perspective and help take the discussion to a more profitable level.

Conclusion

The LIFE Scale will not resolve all differences or end debates about C5 and Insider Movements. Hopefully, though, it can serve as a tool to facili-

tate more fruitful discussion and help all interested parties better understand where we really disagree and where we might agree.

I hope to see more effective reaching and discipling of people from all nations come from such discussion. I hope and pray the LIFE Scale can help us move toward more biblical clarity and faithfulness, more Christlike love and acceptance, and more energy invested in the launching and encouraging of Christ-honoring lives and movements throughout the world. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Mahmud is a fictitious character; this scenario is a composite of real situations and people.

² Travis, John, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of 'Christ-centered Communities' ('C') Found in the Muslim Context," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 34/4, 1998, 407-408.

³ Green, Tim, 2013, "Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories," in *Longing for Community*. David Greenlee, (ed.). Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, Kindle Locations 1288-1300.

⁴ Green, "The Dilemma of Dual Belonging" in *Longing for Community*, Kindle Locations 1778-1781.

⁵ Green, "Conversion," *ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1017-1019.

⁶ Green, *ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1300, 1290-1291. I follow Green in preferring the more easily understood "core identity" over the technical term "ego-identity."

⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1348-1349.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1300, 1289-1290.

⁹ Green, "Dilemma," *ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1535-1537.

¹⁰ Green, Tim, 2012 "Identity Issues for Ex-Muslim Christians, with Particular Reference to Marriage," *St. Francis Magazine*. August 2012, Vol 8, No 4, 471, 472.

¹¹ For more background on these terms and concepts, see the writings of Green, Barnett and Kraft, cited in the notes below.

¹² Green, "Conversion," in *Longing for Community*, Kindle Locations 1300, 1288-1289.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1302-1305.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, "Dilemma," Kindle Locations 15 Kindle Locations 1326-1329, quoting Kathryn Kraft, "Community and Identity among Arabs of a Muslim Background who Choose to Follow a Christian Faith" (PhD dissertation, Bristol: University of Bristol, 2008), 156.

¹⁵ Kraft, Kathryn, *Searching for Heaven in the Real World: A Sociological Discussion of Conversion in the Arab World*, Kindle Edition 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1441-1443.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1308-1311.

¹⁸ Barnett, Jens, 2013, "Refusing to Choose: Multiple Belonging Among Arab Followers of Christ," in *Longing for Community*. Kindle Location 791.

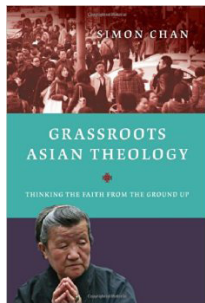
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 876-879.

²⁰ Waterman, L. D. 2007, "Do the Roots Affect the Fruits?" *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, Summer 2007, 24:2; Waterman, L. D., 2008, "Contextualization: A Few Basic Questions," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, April 2008; Waterman, L. D., 2011, "What is Church? From Surveying Scripture to Applying in Culture," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, October 2011.

Book Reviews

Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up, by Simon Chan (IVP Academic, 2014, pp. 217)

—Reviewed by Patrick Krayter, Ph.D.



western academic circles the opportunity to enlarge their field of vision.

By comparing the theologizing of these elite intellectuals with that of actual faith communities across Asia, Chan is able to show the significant difference between grassroots and elitist theologies. Ironically, these often Western-trained Asian theologians appear to use presuppositions and methods shaped by Enlightenment thinking rather than by those arising from Asian cultures. Chan also unveils the theological diversity of these grassroots theologies, a diversity that exists because these Asian faith communities seek to address in a biblical manner the needs and questions that arise in daily life, and which differ from context to context.

Chan begins by laying a methodological groundwork for his reflections. Fully aware that such theological diversity across Asian communities could be negatively perceived as relativizing the gospel, he asserts that these faith communities demonstrate continuity with the Church and historic Christian traditions not by alignment with specific dogmatic articulations but by being an integral part of the Church. As a “community with a history,” the Church is a faith community that exists across time and space in historical continuity with the story of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, the sending of the Spirit, and his *parousia* (pp. 11-12). Chan asks us to view these faith communities through the Catholic and Orthodox lens of *ecclesial experience*, thereby allowing us to affirm these faith communities. Their *ecclesial experience* clearly demonstrates their continuity with the historic, global Church: they live out the Gospel under the instruction of the Scriptures, and are led by the Holy Spirit in each of their specific contexts. The

benefit of this lens is that it avoids the temptation to reduce theology to objective propositions, subjective experiences, or to view theology as an individual rather than a corporate endeavor (pp. 15-18).

Chan’s scope of analysis is quite broad. He looks at how elite theologians and faith communities living in Muslim, Indian (Hindu), and Chinese (Buddhist-Confucian) contexts theologize about God (chapter 2), humanity and sin (chapter 3), Christ and salvation (chapter 4), the Holy Spirit and spirituality (chapter 5), and ecclesiology (chapter 6). Chan’s analysis is a bit weak when looking at the theology of God by those within Islamic contexts. This weakness is understandable, since one individual cannot master every area. However, his reflections about how faith communities theologize about humanity, sin, Christ, and salvation (Chapters 3 and 4) are particularly valuable. Chan shows how key contextual constructs of family, honor and shame can shape grassroots readings of Scripture, and how these constructs, so central to Asian contexts, have been largely ignored in western theological discourse. For example, the issue of shame arises 300 times in the Old Testament and 45 times in the New Testament. In contrast, guilt is mentioned 145 times in the Old Testament and only 10 times in the New (p. 83). This data alone should awaken us to the significance of Chan’s reflections.

Grassroots theologies also tend to emphasize Christ’s victory over our enemies, such as Satan, sin, sickness, and death. Chan is sensitive to a grassroots Christ who allays our fears. In contrasting elitist theologies with grassroots theologies, he points out how elitist theologians tend to focus on the socio-political dimensions of life. Such a view is largely irrelevant for those at the grassroots level. Chan writes:

“It does not occur to these [elitist] theologians that the poor might be looking for another kind of liberation; spiritual liberation from fear and fatalism created by centuries of internalizing the law of karma; freedom from the fear of spirits; deliverance from demonic oppression, real or perceived; healing for their sicknesses, and so on” (p. 103).

An intimate understanding of Jesus as the Victorious Lord stems from personal encounters with Jesus and their reception of the Holy Spirit (see Chapter 5). Liberating, transformative, personal encounters with God in Christ through the Spirit open new vistas for them. This emphasis on the Spirit is drawn largely from Pentecostalism, a field in which Chan has tremendous analytic expertise, and this global movement tends to influence the shape many of these grassroots theologies take.

Chan points out how conversion in Asian contexts, though sharing similarities with western cultures, has its own distinctives. In Asian contexts there is a dynamic interplay between an individual and one’s community, a dynamic very apparent in the Confucian family. Chan writes: “In

Every intercultural worker should read this book in order to become sensitive to how local cultures not only do theology, but also how they should impact the process of doing theology.

a Confucian culture that highly values family solidarity, conversion transforms family relationships from that of domination to that of respect and reciprocity” (p. 121). There is a complexity and variety to conversions in Asia that defies the Western categorization of conversion as an individual decision and momentary event. Conversions may begin with a hazy understanding of Jesus and faith may develop over time, making conversion more of a process than an instantaneous event. In addition, group conversions are more likely to occur in some contexts.

Variety also exists in the ecclesiology of these diverse Asian grassroots communities (chapter 6). Chan addresses a cross-section of ecclesial movements that includes “Churchless Christianity,” informal fellowships, and indigenous church organizations. Chan asserts that the established institutional church does not “exhaust the meaning of the church as the body of Christ since it is still *in via* ... There are individuals, loose fellowships and informal ecclesial bodies that are not formally associated with the church, but that does not make them any less a true part of the body of Christ” (p. 170). He suggests that all these individuals and groups be placed at different points on an

ecclesial continuum, all being in process towards the goal of final unity as the holy city (p. 171).

There is a particularly interesting development in the Japanese Indigenous Christian Movements (JICM). Ancestor veneration is a major concern in the Confucian cultures of East Asia. Recognizing that salvation is found in Christ alone has led the JICM to institute rites for the evangelism of and prayer and baptism for the dead (p. 174). Since I personally have never lived in that context, I acknowledge that I am unable to even fully consider this. I look forward to the lively discussion that will arise among faith communities in East Asia about this important ritual.

In conclusion, though some may take issue with particular aspects of the theologies of these Asian grassroots faith communities, every intercultural worker should read this book in order to become sensitive to how local cultures not only do theology, but also how they should impact the process of doing theology. Chan clearly lays out the diverse theologizing that is arising across the Asian world. He also shows that the Spirit enables contextual theologies to emerge as the church seeks to faithfully model and represent Christ in each new situation. **IJFM**

In Others' Words

Editor's note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase. Finally, please note that this July–September 2014 issue is partly composed of material created later in 2014. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience caused by such anachronisms.

Global Oppression and Martyrdom

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) puts its latest estimates of the numbers of Christian martyrs at 100,000 per year in the early 21st century. In that light, here is a must-read article, a hard-hitting review by Mark Noll of two books, in *Books & Culture* July/Aug 2014: *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* by John Allen, Jr., Senior Correspondent for *The National Catholic Reporter*; and *Christianophobia: A Faith Under Attack* by Rupert Schortt, Religion Editor for *The Times Literary Supplement*. Also don't miss *Christianity Today's* cover story in November 2014 by Philip Jenkins on "The Lost Christians of the Middle East" (This is posted in its entirety on Baylor's Institute for the Studies of Religion website). No one speaks with more authority on the subject of the persecuted Christians in the Middle East than Canon Andrew White, known as the Vicar of Baghdad. There is a poignant interview with him Nov. 18, 2014 in *The Huffington Post UK*. Another clergyman remaining in Syria at great personal risk is the Chaldean Bishop Audo from Aleppo, Syria. Mindy Belz interviewed him for the second time in an article entitled "Forgotten Survivors" in the November 2014 issue of *WORLD* magazine.

The Syrian Circle, a 30-day prayer initiative was launched in December 2014, and called upon people everywhere to pray for the Syrian people. Check out their website for the amazing details of what transpired: <http://thesyriancircle.com/next-chapter/>. Don't miss the moving true story "I Kill People in the Name of Religion; You Pray for People in the Name of Jesus."

Ebola

Mike Soderling, M.D., Director of the Center for Health in Mission at the William Carey International University, takes a look at the clash of worldviews that contributed to the sudden leap from virus to epidemic which has characterized the spread of Ebola in West Africa (<http://darrowmillerandfriends.com/2014/10/20/ebola-crisis-worldview/>). Check out GMI's striking missiographic, "Breaking the

Ebola Cycle," on p. 162. See also *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year 2014" featuring the Ebola Fighters, including Dr. Brantley, a medical doctor with Samaritan's Purse. And in a web-exclusive article in *Books and Culture* Dec. 2014 looking back at this year's Global Medical Missions and Health Conference, resident Matthew Loftus reviews Dr. Kenneth Brantley's reflections on Ebola presented to a crowd of medical doctors and medical students who are headed overseas.

The Salvation Army's Historic Holism

Some critics have charged past generations of missionaries with a truncated focus on evangelism only. In *IBMR* (October 2014), there is a fascinating article on the missiology of William Booth, founder of The Salvation Army. Written by Andrew Eason, a professor of religion and author of the 2003 book *Women in God's Army: Gender and Equality in the Early Salvation Army*, this article is entitled "The Strategy of a Missionary Evangelist: How William Booth Shaped the Salvation Army's Earliest Work at Home and Abroad." Nowadays, Salvationists are held up as proponents of kingdom theology, a gospel that is holistic and transformational. This article is a great example of how a focus on evangelism first, but contextualized for its different arenas, led naturally into holistic ministry (<http://www.internationalbulletin.org/system/files/2014-04-183-eason.html>). To read this and all other *IBMR* articles for free, register on their website today.

World Religions

Missiologists everywhere should welcome a brand new *Norton Anthology of World Religions*, published in late 2014. Edited by the Jesuit scholar Jack Miles, professor of English and Religious Studies at UC Irvine, this anthology has one distinguishing characteristic which will make it invaluable to serious scholars of world religions. Each of the world's "six major, living, international religions"—Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—deliver their wisdom "in their own words." Jennifer Schuessler, writing in *The New York Times*, noted the larger controversy in the academy over just what "religion" means:

But it also comes at a moment when religious studies is caught up in a continuing debate about its fundamental premises, starting with the term "religion" itself. In his introduction, Mr. Miles cites an anecdote about a forum hosted by the American Academy of Religion, where an effort to define the term—is it a matter of belief? practice? cultural and ethnic identity?—sent half the participants stomping out.

More specifically, some scholars have questioned the notion of "world religions" as a Western construct originated by European scholars who "discovered" the East, transforming its dizzyingly complex practices into monolithic, text-based "isms" resembling Christianity. Even today, such scholars argue, the field is haunted by an "undead Christian absolutism," as Tomoko Masuzawa put it in her influential book *The Invention of World Religions* (2005).

Ms. Masuzawa, as it happens, is married to Donald S. Lopez Jr., the editor of the anthology's Buddhism section.

The full review can be found at nytimes.com/2014/11/03/arts/nortons-latest-anthology-explores-world-religion.html.

Global Trends

From the Oct-Dec *EMQ* 2014 comes an article by Samuel Chiang on a "Quintet of Issues" he sees as vital in the going forward of mission:

There are five trends which have achieved 'critical mass' as we write: (1) multiplicative development of screens and devices impacting worldview and contextualization; (2) Business as Mission providing 'wholeness' in discipleship going forward; (3) orality speaking into matters of stewardship of our resources, learning, and communications; (4) online education as distribution of theological knowledge; and (5) the incarnate Church taking responsibility to translate scripture. Chiang says, 'Could this quintet drive the agenda of missions for the next decade? What magnitude of factors will they enact on planting churches and making disciples? What are some things the Church must address and align in order to work to minister globally?'

Nomads and Mobile Ministry

As the *IJFM* reported in 2010 ("The Little Engine that Could: Mobile-Empowered Ministry"), nomads now pick their camps by the location of cell phone towers instead of wells (*IJFM* 27:4, 2010). Mobile phone usage is rising steeply around the world. According to *e-Marketer*, 4.55 billion people are using mobile phones in 2014 and this number is projected to reach 5.13 billion by 2017. Last May 2014 *Mission Frontiers* took an entire issue to consider "From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg." The editors looked at the orality movement and new technologies impacting it, including mobile phones. Here is a more recent compilation of further mobile ministry resources, courtesy of Sabeel Media. First and foremost, they recommend *Mobile Ministry Made Easy - 2014* by IMB (Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board), a comprehensive introduction to the use of mobile devices in ministry. If you are new to mobile ministry, this is a great place to start.

The Preference for Mobile Phone Viewing

To illustrate the rise in cell phone usage, Sabeel Media offered the *IJFM* some raw data. They tracked the views of their most popular short online video clip "The Wisdom of Solomon" in Bedouin Arabic which has a total running time of 3:38 minutes. With 319,000 views on Youtube alone, this video clip can also be found on Ikbis, Vimeo, and Facebook. In January 2013, when device analytics on this clip began to be gathered by Youtube, 58% of the views came from computers and only 33% from mobile phones. But in 2014, mobile phone views rose to 40% and in the past three months, mobile phone views have surged past computer views bringing them to 52% of all views for this single video! Further-

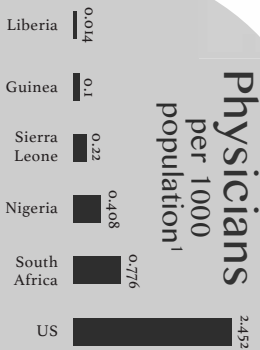
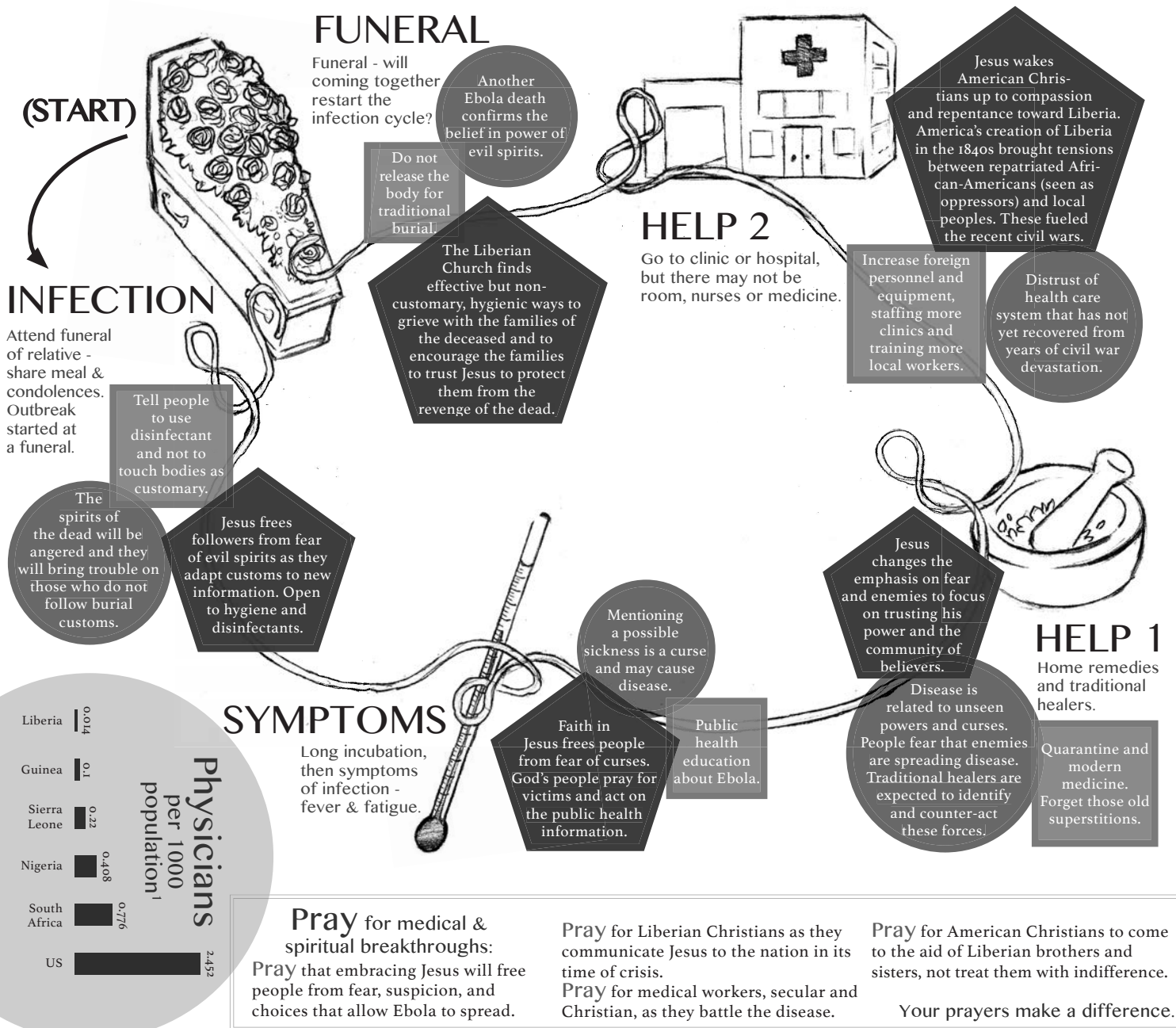
more, in terms of audience retention, the average length of view increased from 1:28 minutes to 1:41 minutes in just the last 90 days (when mobile phone use was even higher), leading some to speculate that length of viewing increases on mobile phones as opposed to computers.

General Links about Mobile Ministries:

The Mobile Ministry Forum has also posted details about its upcoming annual conference, this time in the Netherlands. In case you missed T. Wayne Dye and Tim Hatcher's outstanding article looking at the impact of Bible translation as it moves in a video format from the printed page to mobile devices, see their January 2014 article originally published in *Global Missiology*: "Video Translation: Opportunity and Challenge." There is a fascinating article documenting the use of Facebook across North Africa and the Middle East which highlights especially how many are accessing it through mobile phones (Google "Facebook Cashing in on Video Ads as MENA Users Reach 74m"). And check out this Pakistani mullah who is posting daily sermon notes on Facebook via his mobile phone: "Afghan mullah offers ancient wisdom to youths on Facebook." Finally, there are some statistics you can find online about Twitter usage all across the Arab World: "Twitter in the Arab Region - Arab Social Media Report." **IJFM**

Breaking the Ebola Cycle

● Traditional Belief, ■ Secular Medicine & ◆ Christian Response



Pray for medical & spiritual breakthroughs:
Pray that embracing Jesus will free people from fear, suspicion, and choices that allow Ebola to spread.

Pray for Liberian Christians as they communicate Jesus to the nation in its time of crisis.
Pray for medical workers, secular and Christian, as they battle the disease.

Pray for American Christians to come to the aid of Liberian brothers and sisters, not treat them with indifference.
Your prayers make a difference.

More about Liberia:
Population = 4.294 million²
Ebola impact = 2,836 dead, 6,822 infected (as of Nov. 9, 2014)³

Two civil wars between 1989-2003 caused an estimated 500,000 deaths and massive displacement of peoples.⁴

Religious Makeup⁵
(Compared to traditional religions of 23.31% in Sierra Leone and 6.9% in Guinea.)

Traditional Religions	42.5%
Christian	41.4%
Muslim	15.5%
Other	0.6%

Sources: www.missiongraphics.com/medical-services-liberia



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IJFM
Perspectives
 On the World Christian Movement

Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

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

Articles in IJFM 31:3

	Lesson 1: The Living God is a Missionary God (B)	Lesson 7: Eras of Mission History (H)	Lesson 9: The Task Remaining (H)	Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)	Lesson 11: Building Bridges of Love (C)	Lesson 12: Christian Community Development (S)	Lesson 13: The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches (S)	Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)
Consider the Nomad: A Felt-Needs Approach Caleb Rome (pp. 113–122)			X	X	X	X	X	X
God and the Nomads: Highlighting the Biblical Narrative Malcolm Hunter (pp. 123–132)	X			X				
On the Road with Nomads in Central Asia: A Page out of My Journal S. Clement (pp. 133–135)					X			
The People of the Cornstalk Rowland V. Bingham (pp. 136–137)		X						
Orality Comes of Age: The Maturation of a Movement Tom Steffen (pp. 139–147)		X		X				
LIFE Scale: Exploring Eight Dimensions of Life in Christ L. D. Waterman (pp. 149–157)								X



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MIDDLE EASTCONSULTATION2015

Discipleship Today: Identity and Belonging in the Middle East & North Africa

The Institute of Middle East Studies at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut, Lebanon, will again be hosting its annual Middle East Consultation. MEC 2015 will focus on specific challenges related to “identity” and “belonging” that face followers of Jesus within the MENA context. These challenges are particularly important given the diverse socio-religious and cultural backgrounds of Christ-followers in the region and of the leaders who disciple them.

We live in a world where belonging to multiple social and cultural traditions is the reality for many. Identity is a complex and multi-dimensional aspect of human life, formed in part as a response to a variety of dynamic social, cultural, historical, political, religious and spiritual experiences and commitments within today’s interconnected world.

MEC 2015 will consist of listening to and reflecting on personal testimonies from those who live in the midst of specific challenges pertaining to identity and belonging. Conversations with diverse global missiological thinkers and practitioners, as well as round-table discussion groups will provide a unique context for reflection on the practice of discipleship in the MENA region.

This hermeneutical dynamic (or process of accountable theological reflection) provides a framework for mutual enrichment within the worldwide Body of Christ, one that we are convinced will impact the future of Christ-centered witness in and beyond the MENA region.

To apply for MEC 2015, please visit

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For more information or to apply, please contact:

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