Linking Missiology

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ORBIS BOOKS by Kwame Bediako

JESUS and the GOSPEL in AFRICA
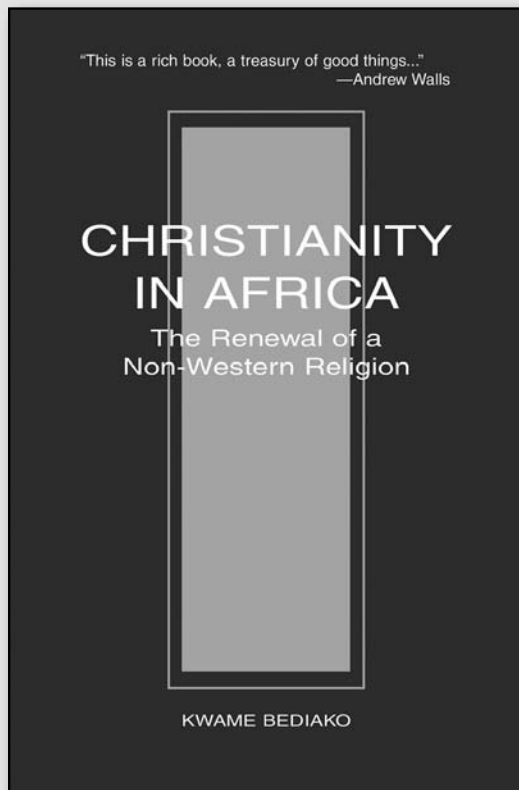### *History and Experience*
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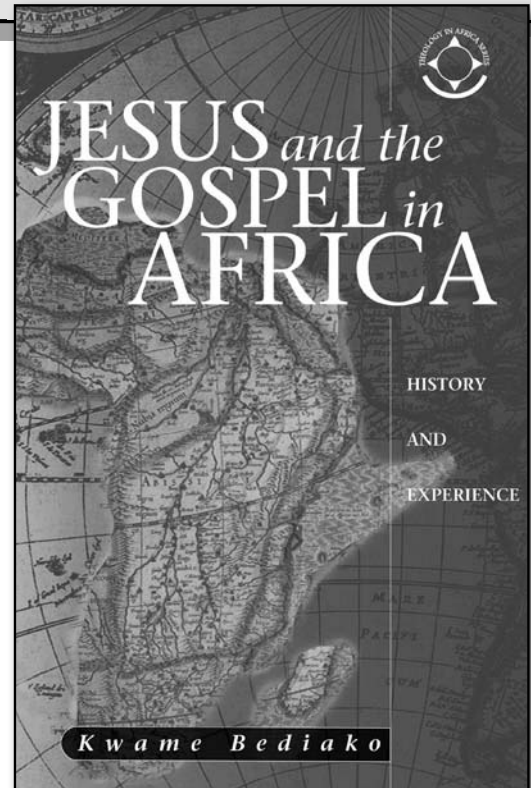
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CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA
The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion

KWAME BEDIAKO

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284pp., notes, index, **$34.00**

CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA
The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion

Christianity's center of gravity has shifted in the modern world from the continents of the North to the global South, with Africa playing a significant role in the resurgence of the faith. Here, Kwame Bediako is the first to examine this global transformation from an African perspective, offering a unique and compelling survey of the new role African Christianity is playing today. He examines the intellectual legacy of Edward Wilmot Blyden, the "Black Spokesman" who questioned the suitability of Western Christianity to Africa; discusses the Afrikania Moment of the twentieth century; and explores the prospects of the modern African experience in the future shape of Christianity.

Kwame Bediako (1945-2008), a native of Ghana, was trained as a patrologist and historian. He served as rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission, and Culture in Akropong, and was a pioneer in the exploration and advancement of African Christianity.

From the Editor's Desk

Continents in Conversation

On a recent trip to Africa I was third party to a bilateral African-Chinese exchange. It began on a hotel shuttle when I found myself sitting next to a Chinese gentleman who was ministering in a major Muslim city. It was fascinating to hear how his family—without any hint of Western Christendom—was strategically placed. One could see that he was thriving. Earlier that same day my cab driver had pointed out the Chinese cars, the Chinese buses, the Chinese highways, and the impressive buildings which had all been built by the Chinese. China had arrived and was investing in Africa, and I was suddenly alert to the missiological conversations I might overhear between African and Chinese colleagues at the conference we were attending.

Of course, over the past half century, a global, multilateral missiology has already been flourishing. Associations like the Lausanne movement (LMWE), the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (IFEMT) have brokered global conversations on the various dimensions of the *Missio Dei*. This cross-pollination brings depth and new insights that can shift our mission priorities. But how might this global interaction impact frontier missiology with its singular focus? Should we expect such international conversations to help us overcome the seemingly insurmountable barriers to reaching the unreached?

The articles in this issue provide some African and Asian observations on three very critical issues in frontier missiology: the orthodoxy of new insider movements, the role of ancestor veneration, and the "prophetic" role of Muhammad. Daniels and Nussbaum (165) lead off by comparing the historic analysis and categorization of Africa's indigenous movements with Muslim insider movements across Africa and Asia today. Richards insists that these types of movements require that we "cultivate reticence" if any fresh mission activism is to effectively engage in discipling an unreached Hindu world (173).

On the subject of ancestor veneration, we include the final installment of David Lim's treatment of this difficult barrier for the peoples of East Asia (183), but we've placed it in tandem with Kwame Bediako's treatment of similar phenomena in the African experience (195). Orbis Books has graciously given us permission to republish a chapter from Bediako's *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa,* and you won't want to miss the way he weaves the ancestors into a biblical interpretation of Hebrews (198–200). We look forward to hearing how our Asian colleagues respond.

Finally, we continue to roll out responses to Harley Talman's recent treatment of the "prophethood" of Muhammad (see *IJFM* 31:4). In that issue we heard from Lebanese missiologist, Martin Accad. Now we welcome Egyptian scholar and professor, Ayman Ibrahim. Professor Ibrahim's response and Talman's interaction with it were originally presented at the 2015 EMS/ISFM meetings. In the next issue, we continue with a second set of interactions between Talman and Ibrahim, but we will also add a response from John Azumah, the Ghanaian missiologist who teaches at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA. There is no doubt that Talman has assaulted traditional notions of Muhammad, and let the reader be forewarned that the resulting dialogues are heavy and technical. These provocative (American–Arab–African) conversations are nevertheless crucial for reimagining our missiology for modern encounters with Islam.

I say "reimagining" intentionally, because these kinds of civil multilateral conversations—with very divergent points of view—will eventually reshape our missiological imaginations. They force us to explore our well-established paradigms of mission, and allow a maturation of frontier missiology. The African-Chinese encounter I witnessed at the conference indicates something significant about the place of Africa in our global conversation. But beyond the development of these Global South relationships and the emergence of invigorating new pulses of mission, might we ask just how this partnership across the two very different religious landscapes of Africa and Asia will profit our missiological imagination?

Missiologists like Bediako (195) and Turner (166–167) remind us of the vital role of the primal religious imagination in African mission history. They recognize that Africa retains a traditional religious consciousness even amidst rampant globalization. Years ago, one missiologist suggested that this primal imagination

> may survive the loss of its overt religious system and continue to provide at least part of its terms of reference in a new and more complex situation…[1]

That African complexity has certainly demanded new terms of reference that have then spawned a new political imagination in African missiology.[2] This issue of the *IJFM* posits that it's the lessons from Africa's history of mission to a primal religious world that must be heard laterally across frontier missiology. If indeed a primal religiosity also lies at the grassroots of Asian religious worlds,[3] then it seems that an intentional African-Asian linking of missiology should benefit greatly the ministries on those religious frontiers. The pairing of articles in this issue was designed towards that end.

In Him,

Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

[1] John B. Taylor quoted in Bediako, Kwame, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa* (Orbis: Maryknoll, 2004), 86.

[2] William Dyrness & Oscar Garcia-Johnson, *Theology Without Borders* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2015), 60–66.

[3] Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology* (IV Press: Downers Grove, 2014), 63.

Letting Africa Speak:
Exploring the Analogy of African-Initiated Churches and Insider Movements

by Gene Daniels and Stan Nussbaum

Gene Daniels (pseudonym) and his family spent twelve years working with Muslims in Central Asia. He continues to focus on the Muslim world, now primarily through research and training. Daniels has a doctorate in Religious Studies from the University of South Africa.

Stan Nussbaum, Staff Missiologist at GMI Research Services, has been involved with indigenous African church movements since 1979 when he began his doctoral study at the University of South Africa with M. L. Daneel and David Bosch. He was recruited by Harold Turner for teaching in Birmingham, England, at a research center devoted to the study of such movements. For almost two decades he edited the Review of AICs, *a journal for specialist practitioners in this field. With three international colleagues he authored* Mission in an African Way, *reflecting on how African movements see and carry out their mission.*

I nsider movements are raising a host of contentious issues for God's people working in the Muslim world,[1] and a vigorous debate continues to unfold. The normal framework for this debate has been to compare the faith and practice of these insider movements (IMs) to the early church model during and soon after the New Testament period. Many field workers and missiologists invoke this "Jesus movement" from Judaism into a Greek world as a single comparison for these movements today. While this early church correlation has been chosen for various reasons, it is most often the only one offered simply because missionaries have had no other model with which to compare them. Unfortunately, the singularity of this comparison has severely constricted the discussion, and we believe it's preventing an understanding of these insider movements that is robust enough to be theologically sound.

Furthermore, when we limit ourselves to this one comparison, we routinely overlook the possibility of a third model that could contribute greatly to our insight and evaluation. What if there were another time and place in history where "Greeks" became Jesus-followers en masse without adopting the cultural-religious package of the gospel messengers? What if we had another distinct Christian tradition to which we could compare insider movements, something well established and widely studied which offered multiple parallels? Would a different framework for consideration help alleviate some of the contention?

We believe there is a third option, hitherto unexplored because of the geographical and academic distance between different missiological fields—the Muslim World and sub-Saharan Africa. We wish to suggest some helpful comparisons and contrasts between insider movements and the African-Initiated Churches (AICs). These AICs rarely if ever come up as a point of reference in the evaluation of IMs, for seldom is someone familiar with both of the models. This article will attempt to overcome this predicament through

the combined experiences of two authors who happen to be friends: Daniels, a worker in the Muslim world, and Nussbaum, an expert on African-Initiated Churches.[2]

For the past century or so, in a wide variety of contexts across Africa, an incredibly broad spectrum of these African-Initiated Churches has emerged, ranging from the multi-million member ones like the Zion Christian Church of South Africa, the Kimbanguists of Congo, and the several Aladura movements in Nigeria, to thousands of tiny denominations, some consisting of just one congregation of fifteen to twenty people meeting in the home of their self-appointed "archbishop."

These vastly differing movements have presented many of the same challenges to foreign missionaries and local Christians in older churches that insider movements are now presenting in the Muslim World today:

- Are they Christian at all?
- Are they "Christianity on the cheap," allowing locally valued but unbiblical practices for the sake of acceptance? Is this syncretism or valid contextualization?
- If they are real Christians, why can't they just join existing churches? What is their problem?

The difference between these challenges in Africa and the Muslim World is that in the African case, we have the benefit of a century of missiological hindsight. Issues that look totally new in the Muslim World actually have a long and complex history of debate in an African context.[3] Even though Africa and the Muslim World differ in important ways, the current discussion in the Muslim World can benefit from considering some of the parallels and their implications.

A major caution for us as we consider insider movements is to note the way the evaluation of African-Initiated Churches has shifted over time. For example, AIC drumming and dancing were rejected as pagan a century ago but now are seen as

essential by most of the churches that rejected them earlier. Roland Allen in his 1912 classic, *Missionary Methods,* had already raised the question very poignantly:

> Our missions are in different countries amongst people of the most diverse characteristics, but all bear a most astonishing resemblance one to another.… There has been no new revelation. There has been no new discovery of new aspects of the Gospel, no new unfolding of new forms of Christian life.… There was a day when we rather…prided ourselves upon the fact that no strange elements had produced new and perhaps perplexing developments of Christian thought and life. But today…we desire to see Christianity established in foreign climes putting on

In the African case, we have the benefit of a century of missiological hindsight.

a foreign dress and developing new forms of glory and of beauty (Allen, 1912, quoted in Nussbaum, 2003).

This is saying, in effect, "Why don't AICs exist? If the gospel is the gospel, they should be popping up somewhere." They were just beginning to take root in southern Africa when Allen wrote but were scorned for several decades by people who had not taken Allen to heart.

About a century later, another Allan (Anderson), one of the foremost authorities on African-Initiated Churches, dares to write from a staunch evangelical perspective that AICs are,

> living, radical experiments of an indigenized Christianity that has consciously rejected Western

ecclesiastical models and forms of being Christian. (2008, 5)

Although insider movements are not an identical phenomenon, it is not hard to see how Anderson's description might reference some of them as well.

We believe there might be great benefit to introducing the AIC phenomenon into the current discussion and debate—especially in its application to insider movements in the Muslim world. In this paper we will explore some of the ways that insider movements in the Muslim world are both similar to and different from African-Initiated Churches. We will also suggest some implications for our understanding of IMs, in the hope that this analogy might reshape how we think and talk about these movements.

We assume that readers will be familiar with the basic contours of the insider movement controversy;[4] however, we also assume that those who are will not be as conversant with the African-Initiated Church phenomenon. In order to survey and understand the rather large body of knowledge collected about AICs over the past fifty years, we will begin with a four-part typology of AICs developed by Harold Turner,[5] a scholar who became fascinated with African-Initiated Churches while teaching religious studies at a Nigerian university in the late 1950s. He later founded a specialized research center on this phenomenon at the University of Birmingham (England) where he mentored one of the authors of this article (Stan).

Turner's Crucial Category Distinctions

Turner's great contribution to this field of study was a typology of religious interaction movements that have occurred globally as a world (or missionary) religion entered the space previously dominated by a single traditional (tribal, primal) religion. Some indigenous people will leave their religion

and join the missionary's church, but often others will start religious movements of their own. For these movements, Turner introduced the four categories of *neo-primal, synthetist,*[6] *Hebraist,*[7] and *independent church.*[8]

Note at the outset that even though these categories are academic distinctions, they are made not for academic purposes, but deliberately practical because of their huge implications for the way that mainstream Christians relate to various categories of new religious movements in these settings. If they are not distinguished, all four are tarred and feathered with the same brush (and rejected), thus unnecessarily dividing the true Body of Christ. By rejecting the entire phenomenon, mainstream Christians actually separate themselves from one of the four types, the independent churches, that they would have embraced had they understood the distinctions better. That one type, and only that one, is what this article will refer to as the African-Initiated Churches.

Also, note that the label "insider movements" does exactly what Turner was warning against—it lumps all the categories together. We are digging into Turner because we believe the IM debate can benefit if we distinguish different kinds of insider movements by adopting his categories.[9]

Turner's constant emphasis was to consider the *intentions* of the movements when categorizing them. He identified three different intentions at work in these four types of movements: first, an intent to revitalize the traditional religion to counter the new Christian threat (neo-primal movements); secondly, an intent to create a new mix of Christian and traditional primal religious culture (synthetist movements); third, an intent to break with traditional, primal religion and become Christian—and this intent was represented in both the Hebraist movements and the independent churches (Turner 1997).[10]

> *If the categories are not distinguished, all four are tarred and feathered with the same brush, thus unnecessarily dividing the true Body of Christ.*

The first two categories and their respective intentions are obviously outside the bounds of biblical faith. The term AICs should never have been understood to include movements from the first two categories, although at the popular level it often does. The distinction between the other two categories was a matter of theological judgment by outsiders. So-called "Independent churches" (more properly called AICs) passed the Christian theological test and were welcomed as fellow Christians, while the Hebraists are much more problematic. They intend and claim to be biblical but in the judgment of most Christians they fail to be so. Yet we must recognize that among African movements the distinction is not always so clear. There are Hebraists who are heterodox—that is they *almost* qualify as churches—and then there are AICs who share some characteristics with Hebraists but still fit within a generous biblical orthodoxy. This is why Turner believed the issue needed more missiological reflection. The tendency was to lump both categories together as Hebraists, and to fail to see that a large proportion of them actually belonged in an independent church category. It seems to us that a similar kind of overgeneralization is common in discussions about insider movements.

Going back to Turner's typology, we should be clear that as a theologian he was not a pluralist; he was not prepared to ignore nor excuse the unorthodox theologies of new movements.[11] As a theologian he would call a spade a spade, and theological failing was recognized as error. But as a scholar committed to the study of religion from a phenomenological perspective, he cautioned outsiders not to assume truth to be error just because they could not recognize it in unfamiliar cultural trappings. In

other words, Turner realized that many of the African movements were attempting to restructure the centuries-old, missionary-defined relationship between Christianity and African-ness. Turner's typology is an assessment of the African experience in what Andrew Walls has called the "serial transmission of the gospel": throughout history the gospel must "continuously enter into the vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades" (2005, 29). And it is this very point, the vigor or withering of gospel transmission, which suggests commonalities in the dynamics of African and insider movements that should help us in our evaluation of these newer IMs.

Similarities between African and Insider Movements

To begin, we are not suggesting that all of Turner's categories have clear parallels within insider movements in the Muslim world; however, we do believe there are important similarities even if some of them are hiding a bit under the surface. A good example of this is the neo-primal category. While it does not have a parallel with IMs among Muslims, Turner's focus on motivation opens a very interesting space to be explored. Neo-primal movements are reactionary. They occur when a primal (or ethnic) religion has encountered a foreign, evangelistic religion, when that ethnic religion has reacted to the foreign religion, and when the primal or ethnic religion has then taken on new forms that will reinforce its ethnic identity as a defense against a religious invader.

It is not hard to imagine a similar factor in the development of an insider movement, even those that are biblically sound. While this is yet to

be researched across a large sample, there are already a few examples of IMs which developed as a reaction against alien religious forms, such as in my (Daniels') interview with the East African insider, Abu Jaz (2013).

Turner's second category of intent describes those new movements which were attempting to synthesize religions, or in the case of IMs, those which might be trying to somehow reconcile the contradictions between two distinctly different religions that still share significant overlap—Islam and Christianity. But by using the term "synthetist" he deliberately avoided the term "syncretist." Turner was trying to steer away from the more loaded theological judgment and develop a phenomenological classification. That said, in our comparisons on this point we are not restricted to Turner's phenomenological approach. We would feel it essential to recognize the obvious reality that *some* insider movements will tend towards the syncretistic. This is nothing new in Christianity throughout history, since various levels and kinds of syncretism have plagued new churches and church movements from the very beginning. Nor is it strictly a problem on the frontiers of mission. One is reminded that mature and established American churches can easily fuse with the American cult of wealth and prosperity. This syncretistic tendency is clearly indicated and addressed head-on in those New Testament epistles to the (church-planting) movements in places like Galatia (chapters 3 and 4) and Colossae (chapter 2).

The main advantage in acknowledging the potential problem of syncretism in some insider movements is that it helps us avoid a binary—right or wrong—dichotomy when discussing them. Turner's analysis of African-Initiated Churches reminds us that there will be a spectrum within the IM world, and that some movements will actually be syncretistic.

However, this raises a tangential but valuable point about the term "syncretism" that is worth briefly pursuing. This term seems to be used in different ways by different schools of thought in missiology. For those who lean more toward theological studies, the term has a pejorative connotation which indicates that something is heretical or sub-Christian. However, for those who lean toward the social sciences, syncretism is a somewhat neutral term that refers to the mixing of religious concepts that naturally results from cultural contact (Mullins 2001 in Richard 2015, 368). Thus, even when strong advocates of insider movements recognize the inevitability of syncretism (Lewis 2015, 543), they

> *By using the term "synthetist" he deliberately avoided the term "syncretist."*
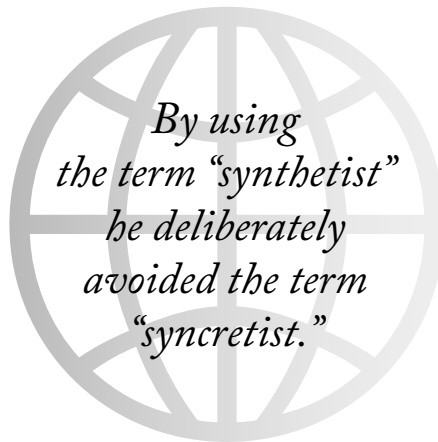
are not necessarily talking about the exact same thing as their detractors. Perhaps the colloquial term "damnable heresy" would be helpful to clarify the differences in usage between the two camps, but this is beyond the scope of this article.

Perhaps the most appropriate and important commonality between African and insider movements is the third intent, which represents the attempt of believers to redefine the interplay of religion and culture. These movements which have sprung up across Africa affirm the ability to maintain their cultural identity while having a new religious loyalty to Jesus. Turner used the term "Hebraist" for this kind

of group because of the affinity that many Africans displayed toward the Hebrew patterns of life typified in the Old Testament. Obviously "Hebraist" would have a negative connotation for many believers from a Muslim background, so we would suggest a shift in terminology when associating this orientation to Islamic contexts. Perhaps "Semitic" might be a more accurate way to capture the essence of the majority of insider movements among Muslims. Like the "Hebraist" in Turner's typology, the term "Semitic" emphasizes the commonality these groups sense with the Semitic ethos of the Bible.[12] By using "Semitic" rather than "Islamic" we clarify that we are not indicating that these believers intend to continue in the religion of Muhammad. We would note that the practical expression this commonality takes is quite different between African and insider movements. In the case of the AICs, the believers often coin new ceremonies or institutions from biblical material, whereas for insiders in Muslim contexts this commonality is more of an affinity for, and a sense of affirmation by, the cultures depicted in the Bible.

Because most of us are vastly removed from these Semitic values and patterns of life, we need to remember Turner's advice and give this careful missiological reflection before making any judgments. As outsiders, it is easy to miss important nuances of difference between groups who are almost biblical (heterodox) and those that are truly biblical, but just in ways with which we are unfamiliar.

The most recent scholarship on insider movements seems to confirm this line of thinking. While never specifically using this term "Semitic" in the way we suggest, the new compendium *Understanding Insider Movements* argues for a deep, even intrinsic connection between Islam and the Jewish/Semitic faith (Talman & Travis 2015). In this volume, Talman devotes an entire

chapter to the relationship between insider movements and Old Testament theology, and Woodberry goes so far as to state that Islam is an Arab contextualization of Jewish monotheism (412). Obviously, not all Muslims are ethnically Semitic peoples, but it's important to recognize that the meta-narrative and universal cultural markers of Islam are clearly Semitic. Many believers who turn to Christ inside a Muslim people group will resonate with this Semitic ethos when reading the Bible. Their cultural filters are distinct from our Western cultural filters.[13] The implications of this are so huge we feel we can only scratch the surface in this article. Consider the following contentious issue as one example.

Many insider movements advocates have originally pointed to similarities between insiders and Messianic Jews (Travis 2000), which has in turn caused some opponents of IMs to accuse them of giving the religion of Islam a status similar to that of Judaism (McKeon 2014). However, by identifying IMs as Semitic instead of Islamic we could shift the perspective on this perceived similarity and encourage more objectivity on a highly-charged theological point. By recognizing that both spring from a common meta-cultural framework, perhaps both would agree on this: that both the modern Messianic Jewish movement and IMs are in their own ways a reaction to the lack of Semitic cultural values in the Evangelical Church, even though those values are present in the Bible.

This reaction parallels that of primal religious Africans when they realized that physical healing power and visionary experiences, both very prominent in African culture, were equally so in the Bible—but nearly totally absent in mission-initiated churches. The Africans resonated more strongly with the Bible than with the mission-initiated churches which looked sub-biblical from their African cultural perspective on power.

Also, one of the reasons both the Hebraist and the insider Semitic movements tend to develop is because neither of them identify with nor trust the Christian establishment (the churches of Christendom). It looks and feels like the unbiblical imposition of a foreign culture. In the case of the African movements, the source of this foreignness was the white missionaries. In the case of IMs, the sense of foreignness comes more often from the cultural distance between the language and ritual of a previously established Christian group in the host society and the new movement of believers from a Muslim background. For example, in Egypt, the Coptic church worships in the Coptic language—a language not even known by most Egyptians. African and insider movements alike regard that foreignness as a ball and chain that ought not to slow down the beautiful feet of those who bring good news.

A final point of commonality seems to be that both African and insider movements usually emerge in the context of power cultures[14]—dreams and visions often play significant roles in the beginning of these movements. Such supernatural encounters on the part of leaders project a charismatic rather than textual authority. These supernatural powers perhaps give leadership the confidence needed to launch new movements. As a general rule, this similarity to sub-Saharan African cultures exists in those contexts where folk Islam is strongest. Thus insider movements in folk Islamic settings may be expected to more closely parallel African-Initiated Churches than those IMs in more orthodox settings.

Points of Divergence between African and Insider Movements

Although the thrust of this paper is to evaluate the potential similarities between African and insider movements,

Both African movements and IMs usually emerge in the context of power cultures. Dreams and visions often play a significant role.

our arguments would be superficial and even specious if we did not at least briefly touch on some of the contextual limits of this analogy. We suggest a few more obvious distinctions between these movements below:

1. African movements developed in a regional and ethnic context where an animistic religion involved the placating of spirits, and sometimes idolatry, whereas orthodox Islam is both monotheistic and universal.[15]

2. African movements have a strong element of anti-colonialism, whereas insider movements do not demonstrate this feature, *per se.*[16]

3. African movements make an open break with their previous religious identity[17] (African traditional religion) whereas insiders do not, because for them Islam is a cultural as well as a religious identity.

4. AICs and Hebraist movements in Africa set up formal church structures with names, offices, memberships, etc., and they see these institutions as alternate structures running parallel to the Christian churches identified with Christendom.

This list is not exhaustive, nor is it surprising. But our assertion is that while African and insider movements share significant commonalities, they do not display identical realities in different religious contexts. Major distinctions do exist. Nevertheless, we believe the commonalities detailed earlier in this paper are broad and deep enough to warrant a fresh new lens on insider movements, even one that perhaps might generate a new way of talking about them.

Insider-Initiated Ecclesias

Our initial consideration of these parallels between African and insider movements has brought into sharp focus a problem with current terminology. Despite the fact that advocates have consistently argued to the contrary, the term "movements" seems to project—to us at least—an absence of locally gathered believers. This is unfortunate, since current field research in Africa indicates insider movements include a multiplicity of locally gathered fellowships of believers (Naja 2015). This terminology of "movements" is a serious problem that we believe unfairly prejudices many against insider movements that are actually quite biblical in their ecclesiology. Therefore, we propose a change of terminology to better reflect the patterns of faith in some of the groups in question—Insider-Initiated Ecclesias (IIEs).

Like all new terms, IIE may sound strange to the ear at first, but it might help dispel this unfortunate ambiguity. This new term makes it clear that the kind of insiders we are talking about are neither cowards trying to avoid detection and persecution from Muslim religious authorities nor naïve believers who think they can be primarily Muslims (in the full religious sense of the word) and only secondarily followers of Jesus. On the contrary, our point is that most IMs do consist of gatherings in ways that fit the biblical ideal of "called out ones." Like all other believers, they are called out of darkness (1 Pet 2:9); and yet these insider believers, like most of those reading this article, do not feel that "called out-ness" means leaving their culture or society, but rather involves living a noticeably different life within it.

Some advocates of insider movements such as Rebecca Lewis have argued that many insider gatherings are close approximations of the extended Greco-Roman *oikos* (family unit), which was a fairly common early church pattern (Lewis, 2008). This new term

makes it explicit that those movements that gather under this rubric of *oikos* do, in fact, practice a form of gathering comparable to the biblical *ecclesia,* even if it is vastly different from Western models. Furthermore, this focus on the gathering of believers is consistent with the earliest discussions of insiders in the missiological literature. In his seminal article on the subject, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum," John Travis offers a descriptive spectrum which

> compares and contrasts types of "Christ-centered *communities"* (groups of believers in Christ) found in the Muslim world [emphasis ours]. (1998)

Although Travis and others have repeatedly tried to define the ecclesial nature of these insider movements,

The term "movements" seems to project an absence of locally gathered believers.

a new terminology such as Insider-Initiated Ecclesias would make the issue of community more explicit. By simply appropriating a Greek word which is already part of our theological vocabulary, we can also avoid the entire debate about what exactly constitutes a church. It keeps the focus on the typical Pauline usage of ecclesia to indicate a local assembly or gathering of believers in Christ.

Of course not everything happening under the umbrella of the term insider movements will fit well with the term Insider-Initiated Ecclesias—and this is to be anticipated in a typology of movements. We propose to retain the term insider movements for the whole

spectrum but apply this new term to only one certain type of movement, the type that parallels the African-Initiated Churches in Turner's typology. These would be the insiders we recognize and relate to as fellow members of the Body of Christ. Of course, we may still have some theological debates with them, but they will be akin to the debates between Presbyterians and Methodists, not between evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses.

We believe that refining our categorization of insider movements, using the label Insider-Initiated Ecclesias for only some of them, is a good first attempt to establish some biblical boundaries without trying to force-fit groups into Western ideas of church. Gatherings of IIEs may be almost unrecognizable to outsiders as church services, for they may be daily rather than weekly, or they may be comprised of extended family groups rather than community groups; but, they will define the life of the group and its members in locally appropriate ways.

Conclusions

In his landmark book, *Schism and Renewal in Africa,* David Barrett described African-Initiated Churches as "the product of African spirituality stripped of support from other cultures," a Christian way of life which expresses biblical theology in ways that are unfamiliar to Westerners (1968, 163). In this article we have asserted that insider movements in the Muslim world are doing much the same. To substantiate that claim we explored some of the commonalities between African and insider movements, three of which stand out:

- They both assert that religion and culture are separable, i.e., one can remain a loyal member of a society or culture without believing or practicing 100% of the religion traditionally associated with that culture.
- They both have what we might call a transitional zone where believers are attempting to redefine the

relationship between religion and culture as they affirm a new religious loyalty to Jesus.

- Many adherents of both African and insider movements have a deep affinity for Hebraic or Semitic patterns of life and thought. This suggests that rather than thinking about IMs maintaining Islamic culture, it might be more accurate to say that they are preferential to Semitic traditions and forms. As with many Hebraist movements, and especially many AICs, this preference causes them to read the Bible through a very different lens than most Western Christians.

In light of several points raised in the article, we suggest it is time to stop approaching insider movements as a single category. We might need to generate a more accurate typology in the spirit of Turner, and this seems promising with the increase of field research among these movements. We would suggest that a good first step in this direction could be the use of a new term "Insider-Initiated Ecclesias." This term frames such groups within biblical orthodoxy and better captures their "gatheredness" without misrepresenting them as following the patterns of "church" with which we are familiar in the West.

As is obvious by now, the authors take a generally positive view of what is usually referred to as insider movements in the Muslim world. However, that does not mean we advocate an uncritical acceptance of everything which has been presented under that rubric. Rather, this article should be seen as an attempt to offer an historical analogue from Africa through which to reanalyze IMs. In so doing, we hope to bring a new perspective that promotes more objective discussion and analysis and that opens the door to new ways of comprehending, evaluating, and relating to what we are calling Insider-Initiated Ecclesias. This term intentionally pushes gatheredness to the forefront, thus setting them apart

Many adherents of African and insider movements have a deep affinity for Hebraic or Semitic patterns of life and thought.

from other IMs that are sub-biblical on this important point. It also leads us to consider how IIEs experience and articulate their mission, another area that has been profitably explored in Africa,[18] but is beyond the scope of this article.

Judging from the African experience, we would say that Western missionaries correctly rejected many of the sub-Christian movements, but they tended also to judge the truly biblical AICs too harshly and too quickly from the 1920s through the 1950s. This gradually shifted in the 60s, 70s, and 80s as closer investigation often revealed more true Christian substance than had been expected in the unconventional Christian practices of many African churches. Questions and concerns about some of these churches remain to this day, but they are fewer when compared to a century ago. Will this pattern of increasing discernment repeat itself with insider movements throughout the Islamic world? The African experience may offer a timely comparison. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] The ideas in this article are exclusively concerned with insider movements among Muslims. We neither affirm nor deny their relevance to insider movements among Hindus or Buddhists. (African traditional religion also qualifies as an "other religious tradition" and we want to assert we are indeed concerned with that tradition.) This is due to limitations of our experience: the lead author (Daniels) is reflecting on almost 20 years of involvement in ministry to Muslims, and the supporting author (Nussbaum) has more than 30 years of experience in research and ministry with African indigenous churches (and only slight involvement in the Muslim World).

[2] The AIC acronym has been variously unpacked in the past half century. First it meant "African Independent Churches," then some writers used "African Indigenous Churches," then some others pushed for "African-Initiated Churches."

[3] Serious study was launched with Sundkler's classic, *Bantu Prophets,* in 1949. Barrett's *Schism and Renewal in Africa,* 1966, analyzed the movements statistically across Africa.

[4] In the past several years there has been a massive amount of ink spilled about insider movements. *Understanding Insider Movements* by Talman and Travis (William Carey Library) is a major new resource on the phenomenon. Also, *IJFM* has carried some very thoughtful articles in the past, including some well-written critiques, such as Tennent (2006) and Corwin (2007).

[5] Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979).

[6] Turner deliberately avoided the word "syncretist," feeling that it was too loaded as a theological judgment. He was trying for a phenomenological classification, that is, classification by intention, prior to any theological judgment. Theology was used only to distinguish the two types of movements that both have the intention of being Christian, that is, Hebraist movements and independent churches.

[7] Hebraists were so called because they resonated so closely with the Old Testament and had such difficulty comprehending the way that the Messiah's arrival reconfigured theology and practice. For example, prohibition of pork is common among Hebraists, and animal sacrifice may be practiced as a means of thanksgiving to God.

[8] In the African Independent Church context, the term "independent church" has a much different connotation than it does for many in the West where the term is usually synonymous with non-denominational Protestant churches. It is a stronger term—in some cases even placing such groups independent of or outside what can properly be called Protestantism, yet clearly still within the bounds of the wider orthodoxy of the historic Church.

[9] Turner's personal experience was in Africa but his typology was global, and his Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements documented the phenomena globally in great detail.

[10] See especially Turner, *A Typology for African Religious Movements* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979) 79–108. Also see Stan

Nussbaum, "African-Initiated Churches" in *A dictionary of Mission Theology,* ed. John Corrie (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

[11] He was, in fact, a good friend of Lesslie Newbigin and an ardent proponent of the "gospel and Western culture" movement after retiring to his native New Zealand.

[12] In the case of AICs, the believers often coin new ceremonies or institutions from biblical material, whereas for insiders in Muslim contexts this commonality is more of an affinity with the cultures depicted in the Bible.

[13] This issue is much broader than just insider movements in Islam; it is also noticeable in Western cultural bias deeply rooted in Protestantism. For example, Martin Luther's well-known disdain for the book of James still echoes in the neglect in our Evangelical pulpits for this most Jewish of the epistles.

[14] In the case of African movements we might say they have all emerged in the context of power cultures since power is a fundamental aspect of African life. However, although many Muslim cultures are also very oriented toward the supernatural, it is still too early to make such a categorical statement about the development of insider movements.

[15] Or course there is a great deal of folk Islam that is, strictly speaking, neither universal nor monotheistic. At this point the authors do not know of any research which considers if that plays a factor in the development of insider movements, although this would be a fascinating study.

[16] It could be that whereas we see African movements as a reaction to actual physical, political colonialism, IMs are a reaction to the psychological "colonialism" known as globalization.

[17] Here the focus is on three of Turner's categories: Synthetist, Hebraist, and Independent Church.

[18] Thomas Oduro, et al., *Mission in an African Way: A Practical Introduction to African Initiated Churches and Their Sense of Mission* (Wellington, South Africa: Bible-Media, 2007), www.biblemedia.co.za.

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Cultivating Reticence:
The Supportive Role of the Alongsider in Hindu Ministry

by H. L. Richard

T he emergence of a global Christianity with thousands of local expressions raises again the question and problem of the cross-cultural worker. Particularly when Western missionaries have a record of failure in the Hindu world, is it perhaps time to throw in the towel and let others do the job? But the Hindu world remains a challenge beyond comprehension, and engagement by non-Hindu disciples of Jesus is essential. With tens of thousands of Hindus now resident in cities throughout the Western world, rather than withdrawal, there is a need for new terms of engagement with Hindus by Western followers of Jesus—terms that must be radically revised from the modus operandi of earlier missionary encounters.

This paper assumes the legitimacy of insider movements, although it recognizes that there is a wide range of insider phenomena and, like with all church movements, there are some expressions that are not particularly healthy. Another crucial assumption is that insiders need to be the decision makers, and outsiders who take a role of standing alongside need to *cultivate reticence* and insist on the principle that leadership must come from those within. As my experience is with Hindu contexts, the focus of this paper will be on work among Hindus in relation to Hindus who are in Christ, although the principles stated certainly can apply to other contexts as well.[1]

John and Anna Travis contributed a stimulating and helpful paper on the role of alongsiders in *IJFM* 30:4 (Winter 2013). I originally shared a first draft of the thoughts presented here at a Rethinking Forum (RF) gathering in April of 2012, and was encouraged by some at that time to share those thoughts more publicly. I developed the material further at two later RF gatherings, leading to the current presentation, which retains some of its original oral flavor. My thoughts complement but also at times supplement those outlined in the Travis' article, so this paper is presented to further the discussion begun by my esteemed colleagues who originated this "alongsider" terminology.

H. L. Richard has been involved in ministry in the Hindu world for three decades and is one of the founders of the Rethinking Forum. He formerly directed the Institute of Hindu Studies and has published numerous books and articles on the Christian encounter with Hinduism.

Four Roles of the Alongsider

My attempt at summarization has resulted in this presentation of *four roles* and *four qualifications* for outsiders to be effective alongsiders. Readers are welcome to mix and match these with John and Anna's *six challenges* and *seven roles* and come up with new configurations. One vitally important issue precedes any discussion of roles and qualifications, and that is the matter of one's identity: Who are you? What are you doing? And why do you want to befriend Hindus? You need a clear identity, and that of a salaried worker with a professional career is definitely best. This is an important preliminary topic, but not the focus of this paper, so I will move on to outline the *four roles*.

Role One: Evangelist

Roles are very dependent on spiritual gifts and the calling of God, but also on the situations in which God places us. The first of the four roles is that of an evangelist. There is no more strategic need among Hindus than for evangelists, so if you have this gift you will have great scope to exercise it. I should say here that intercessory prayer and strong personal relationships undergird all of the roles I will describe—but they are most vital for the evangelist. Evangelism is not just sharing a message; it is meeting heart to heart with another person. Everything done effectively among Hindus will be done on a vibrant relational foundation. And we are dealing with the spiritual and eternal, so prayer is vital beyond all measure. I don't think there are many truly gifted evangelists around, and even such persons will find a patient process is necessary with Hindus. Nevertheless, we can all aspire to learn (and practice) what is involved in evangelism and ultimately to become effective evangelists.[2]

Role Two: Discipleship

The second role relates to discipling or coaching gifts.[3] The tragedy in mission history which has been repeated regularly up to the present time is that Hindus who come to Christ are not properly or adequately assisted to grow in their faith. If you have discipling gifts, there is a huge scope for ministry among Hindus. This role can be further divided into three areas where discipleship is needed; biblical coaching, pastoral coaching, and missiological coaching. Very possibly people will end up focused on just one of these three areas. Once again, I am assuming a foundation of deep relationships and prayer. While all valid discipleship must be based on the Bible, the first aspect to be emphasized here is a discipleship into biblical understanding. (This will be by far the largest subsection of this paper, as this point is important and is particularly complex in ministry to Hindus.)

Moving beyond accepted evangelical formulas is a necessary venture.

Everyone recognizes the need to develop biblical understanding in Hindus who turn to Christ, but the common process of sending a Hindu who is new in Christ off to a Bible college is deeply harmful. This necessarily removes a person from their familiar context and introduces alien Western thought patterns. Perhaps still worse, particularly in India, attendance at a Bible college is almost inevitably a step into the world of dependence on Western financing. Not a few Hindus in Christ have found Bible colleges suffocating, and have abandoned their course of study. Many others have become fine Christian leaders, but Bible college graduates usually do not go on to make a significant impact in their own Hindu family or community, largely due to the foreignness of the Christianity they absorbed in the course of study.

Discipling a Hindu into maturity in Christ within his or her Hindu context is a massive challenge. There are no current programs or curricula that can be followed. And the vast variety of Hindu contexts should indicate to us that many different expressions of discipleship to Jesus need to develop with varying terminologies and emphases. (This is comparable to the hundreds of theologically acceptable—shall we say orthodox—denominations that have developed in the West with their various distinctions, all the while centering on the resurrected Christ.) History illustrates the challenge of moving beyond accepted Evangelical formulas in teaching the Bible to Hindus, but it is a necessary venture if a long-term impact is desired.

In 2008, the Rethinking Forum produced a document in lieu of a traditional statement of faith. This perhaps gives further insight into the matter of not imposing traditional understandings of biblical faith.

> The Rethinking Forum was formed in 2001 as a network of like-minded people committed to the birthing and development of Christ-centered movements in Hindu cultures and communities. The primary representatives of Jesus in the Hindu world will be Hindus who have bowed before the Lordship of Christ and sought refuge in Him. The RF is not particularly for these people, although due to circumstances some from Hindu homes may identify closely with the RF. The RF is more about followers of Jesus from non-Hindu families who sense a call from God to service of Christ in the Hindu world.
>
> Hindus in Christ need to work out their discipleship to Jesus in ways that are natural to their context and which resonate with their traditions and lifestyles. For non-Hindus entering into this process, it is about contextualizing

the gospel for the Hindu world. Non-Hindus need to study carefully and learn about the many aspects of Hindu life and culture and faith and what it means to speak the gospel of Christ into Hindu contexts. Yet this must be a servant role, always recognizing that leadership and decision making rest with Hindus in Christ.

The Hindu world is vast and complex, so multiple Christ-centered movements need to develop among many different Hindu caste and community groups. The movements that develop need to be self-propagating, self-supported, self-governing and self-theologizing, not in any exclusive way but in the healthy sense of leadership and growth from within. The RF network can perhaps play a catalytic role in linking various developing movements for the sake of a larger unity and mutual learning and correction.

The RF and its associates may also be privileged to engage in deep interaction with Hindus in Christ as self-theologizing movements develop in the Hindu world. Western disciples of Christ in the RF network will bring to such discussions their own insights from Western theological traditions. Western theological statements arose out of situations of need and crisis and are neither the only nor the final words for theology. There is great value in studying and understanding those statements, and neglecting the earlier history of disciples of Jesus in other contexts would diminish the vigor of disciples of Jesus in the Hindu world. But different needs and crises will arise among Hindus, and formulas from other cultural contexts will not neatly answer the questions that develop among Hindus.

The RF does not disparage Western doctrinal statements, nor will it encourage Hindu disciples of Christ to neglect insights from Western theological study. Yet we opt not to state our own position with a list of agreed doctrines, in light of our clearly stated purposes and principles above.

This might come across as rather pedantic theorizing, but some practical examples below should clarify why

*T*he core issue is that alongsiders simply do not know exactly what discipleship to Jesus in a Hindu context should look like.

this is so important. The core issue is that alongsiders simply do not know exactly what discipleship to Jesus in a particular Hindu context should look like. A process of exploration and development is necessary; decisions must always be made by Hindus due to their intuitive grasp of their own context, and due to the fact that they will live with the repercussions of each decision.

Biblical Coaching

Four core issues in biblical understanding will be briefly considered here. Thinking and speaking about God will be examined first, followed by understanding Jesus Christ and then particularly the exclusivity of Christ. Finally, sin will be discussed. These four topics only illustrate the kind of issues that arise when any biblical concept is taught in Hindu contexts.

1. Understanding God

Growth towards a biblical understanding of God is clearly foundational for all thought and life. But attaining such an understanding is itself a lifelong challenge, and understanding and communicating about God in a Hindu context is not a simple matter. "God" is one of the simplest terms in the English language; among people influenced by a biblical worldview it immediately suggests an almighty creator. But no such connotations are present with any of the many Sanskrit terms that can be (and are) used to translate "God" *(theos/elohim)*.

The history of Bible translation in India shows different choices for the core term for God, and there is no reason why uniformity across many languages (or even within a language group) must be sought.[4] Different Christ-centered Hindu movements may well use different terms (not only for God, but for Lord, grace, faith,

etc.) according to their background and the predilections of the leadership that develops. An alongsider needs to focus on biblical meanings and not the choice of terminology. But this focus must not ignore worldview differences, particularly that Western Christians like neat definitions (not least when related to God), but Hindus tend toward mystery, recognizing that much is beyond human perception and understanding. Extremes in either direction, towards either definition or mystery, can be disastrous for a biblical understanding of God.

2. Understanding Christ

A second complexity relates to the deity of Christ. It is very easy for a Hindu, particularly for a Hindu in Christ, to affirm that "Jesus is God." Most Hindus have a clear conception of an ultimate being who is one. But that ultimate reality is manifested in many ways and forms, so that in practice there is a strong polytheistic element to Hindu life and thought. What, then, does the designation that "Jesus is God" mean within such a worldview? Clearly Jesus was a figure in history, so an affirmation of his divinity in this polytheistic context really means little more than that he is one of many manifestations of the Supreme Being. But, of course, this is *not* the biblical meaning.

The biblical meaning of the deity of Christ is more nuanced than the simple affirmation that "Jesus is God." Technically, Jesus was the name of the man who was God incarnate, and, in a Hindu context, it might be better to altogether drop the phrase "Jesus is God." This has practical implications as well. Since there are so many gods, Hindus at a practical level do not take gods very seriously. Jesus can be affirmed as a god and yet completely

ignored, as there are simply too many gods to pay much attention to beyond a few. When this type of (very common) mindset is encountered, it might be better to emphasize "Jesus as guru," since among Hindus a guru is an authority to heed and obey, compared to the rather minimal acknowledgement often proffered to gods.

The supreme spirit *(paramātmā)* is generally recognized as the final reality. When speaking English it is advisable to regularly say "the almighty creator God" rather than just "God." The good news is that this final reality of the universe, the almighty creator God, loves us and sent Jesus to fully reveal himself. When we understand Jesus, we understand God and his love and forgiveness. Of course, Jesus existed prior to his human form, and the Trinitarian mystery will need to be explained as well from passages like John 1:1–4.

3. Understanding the Only Way

Among modern Hindus there is no more difficult topic than the claim that Jesus is the unique savior. This theological issue gets mixed up with colonial history and Christian triumphalism and is usually viewed as extremely arrogant. I've never seen this problem stated better than in Hendrik Kraemer's study for the 1938 World Missionary Conference:

> The Hindu mind, by virtue of its historical background, easily hears in the claim for truth and exclusive revelation in Christ a contempt for other religions and a lack of modesty in the face of the great mystery of Ultimate Truth. Christians and missionaries almost as easily make the mistake of conveying the impression that they possess and dispense Ultimate Truth, which in this Indian atmosphere suggests coarse irreverence and vulgar mediocrity, and often is so. (1938, 368)

Questions related to the uniqueness of Christ are the tip of an iceberg; below the surface are questions of humility and respect. When such questions arise, it is imperative for the disciple of Christ

to make clear both that no disrespect for other faith traditions is intended in speaking of Jesus, and that the disciple of Jesus is very far from having an exhaustive understanding of the being and ways of Almighty God. A Hindu who is drawn to Christ should be not be pressured to profess the uniqueness of Christ, but rather should be pointed to passages like John 1:1–4 that show the glory and all-sufficiency of Christ, leaving no room for a comparison with anyone else.

4. Understanding Sin

Finally, sin is another complicated topic in dealing with Hindus, and this includes Hindus in Christ.[5] Many Hindus are genuinely good people, so their sins are comparable to those of the scribes

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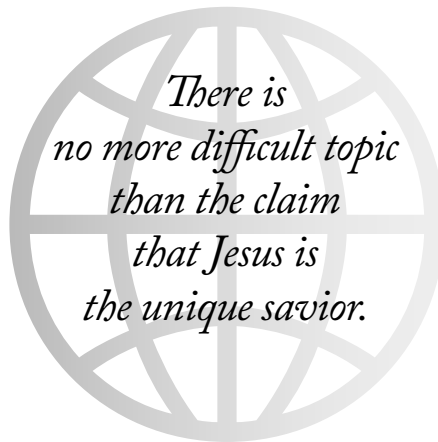
and Pharisees of the New Testament, not to those of the publicans and sinners.[6] In English there is a distinction between sin and evil acts, since most sins are not as socially reprehensible as acts we refer to as evil. Every disciple of Jesus confesses to being a sinner, and the more mature in spiritual understanding also acknowledge an evil heart, but few have done truly evil deeds. This distinction in English, however, is not so clear in Indian languages and in Hindu worldviews. Suggesting that a Hindu is a sinner is close to calling him or her a despicable human being, and the charge is simply ignored as ridiculous.

Apart from this problem of understanding, most Hindus do not come

to Christ due to a sense of sin. This is something of a truism among those involved with Hindu-Christian issues. The truism is that while in the West a sense of sin often leads a person to Christ, among Hindus it is more normative that after coming to Christ one develops an understanding of sin. Vengal Chakkarai, a follower of Christ from a high caste Tamil family, stated it this way in his book *The Cross and Indian Thought*, first published in 1932:

> To strike a personal note which our readers may pardon, the writer never felt the awfulness of sin and probably does not feel it now as some of the European Christian *bhaktas* [devotees]. It was fuller acquaintance with Jesus in the beauty of His holiness and matchless and moving character that has made him realize the Protestant feeling of sin and its enormities. In one word, it is the positive character of Jesus that has brought out the negative character of sin as the very opposite of all that He stood for. (Chakkarai 1981, 298–299)

It is Christ himself, his person and his approach to people and to life, which draws Hindus. There can be no biblical objection to people turning to Christ simply because Christ is wonderful; sin and its subtlety and spirituality can best be taught to someone who has humbly surrendered to Christ.

These are just four examples of biblical truths that need to be taught with particular sensitivity in Hindu contexts. But the alongsider needs to learn as much as teach. People need to disciple Hindus into deep biblical knowledge through inductive Bible study sessions over hours and days and weeks on a regular basis, and if it is truly inductive Bible study, the "teacher" will learn a great deal in this process, both with and from Hindu friends.

Pastoral Coaching

There is a second aspect of discipleship that is worth bringing into focus, and that is pastoral discipleship. When a Hindu comes to faith in Christ there

are massive familial and social issues which must be faced. Traditional missions have failed in this area by too casually accepting the rupture of family ties (often even subtly encouraging that break by promoting a change of name and/or diet, attendance at a Bible college, etc.) If you have pastoral gifts, you are needed in Hindu ministry. But just as when teaching the Bible, you need to take an approach of humility—of learning together—because you do not have all the answers for Hindu contexts. Pastoral concerns are even more complex than theological questions. Who has the wisdom to negotiate the problems and challenges of Hindu families?

Issues of caste and idolatry are central, but caste is much less an issue today than in previous generations. "Family" among Hindus is much more than parents and siblings, and this broader meaning is also the biblical meaning. Individualism is assumed in America, but is often deeply unbiblical; don't make an individualist out of a Hindu and think you are making a disciple of Jesus. The complications of pastoring and assisting a Hindu who is in Christ are many, and every Hindu home practices idolatry with significant differences of intensity and meaning. Outsiders simply cannot answer the complicated questions that arise, but we can support and assist Hindus in "working out their salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

If you feel helpless, know that this is how many Hindus in Christ feel: they need pastoral engagement, biblical counsel, and especially encouragement—even just the encouragement that someone cares enough to listen and pray. You cannot say what is right and wrong to do in a Hindu family; you can support someone through his or her failures and successes in Hindu contexts. Older people can perhaps best fill this role, but everyone involved with Hindus will be in this highly sensitive role to some extent.

*P*astoral concerns are more complex than theological questions. Who has the wisdom to negotiate the problems and challenges of Hindu families?

Missiological Coaching

Finally related to discipleship, there are missiological issues. This especially is the missing element in traditional mission models. Why has God worked in a particular Hindu's life? Surely God wants him to impact his own family and people, so how can that happen? What would hinder that? These questions seem never to be asked of Hindus who come to Christ. Attending a local church might be a good way to learn about the Bible, but if it strains or shatters family relationships it is neither wise nor helpful.

This paper is mainly a discussion about roles for alongsiders, but what about the roles of the insiders themselves? How are they to deal with family idolatry and rituals? This is the great gray area, as affirmation of family along with rejection of personal involvement with idolatry do not easily match. A simplistic rejection of everything associated with idolatry means a rejection of the family itself. A pastoral (not merely theological) approach to idolatry needs to be developed which keeps in focus the centrality of the family in God's plan for human life.[7]

There is a great need for sensitive missiological thinkers in every field where Hindus are hearing about Christ (although the term "missiology" itself is out of place in Hindu contexts, and should not be introduced). God wants a Hindu who turns to Christ to bring blessing to her family, not to alienate her family. In Christ we can affirm the *dharmic* values of the centrality of family and respect for elders. In all teaching and coaching, a concern for being a blessing to the family and clan must always be kept in focus. Sensitive understanding of Hindu life based on case studies from the past, biblical familial examples and the careful discernment of

realities in Hindu families can provide a basis on which Hindus in Christ can find their role among their own people for the kingdom of God.

Biblical, pastoral and missiological aspects of assisting a Hindu in Christ should always be in focus. We do not have answers and even the wise ones among us cannot see clearly all the nuances of other cultural contexts; who is sufficient for these things? God will assist those with discipleship gifts who walk humbly before him alongside Hindu friends.

Role Three: Friendship and Networking

Having invested much in the critical role of discipleship, let me suggest a third role in Hindu ministry that is vitally needed, and one that requires neither an evangelist nor a discipler. If you do not resonate with the first two roles, you can still fill a vital and strategic need in the Hindu world. Friendship and the offering of human encouragement are alone important contributions. There are millions of Hindus in the United States, and few have a Christian friend. If you feel like this is all you have to offer, it is more than enough.

In all the roles outlined here the question of contextual practices by non-Hindus is important and complex. Hindus are rarely, one dares even to say never, offended by sincere engagement by alongsiders in "Hindu" practices such as contextual worship, traditional arts or festivals. The alongsider will never become an insider, but can and should participate in aspects of insider experience not only corporately but even in private life.

A key here is to supplement this role with being alert and willing to link sensitive Hindus to other Hindus who can point them to Christ. Being a

pre-evangelistic contact person might be the most strategic role for a business person. The centrality of festivals in Hindu life means there will be many opportunities to observe and participate in events in Hindu homes, and these opportunities should be embraced without fear. This then opens the opportunity to invite a Hindu who serves Christ to come and share in your home with your Hindu friends during a Hindu or Christian festival. Some work needs to be done to find people who can effectively do this, but it is a strategic supplement to friendship. Be the aroma of Christ among Hindu friends, and network others into the lives of Hindus who are spiritually needy and open. Much prayer and strong relationships are again vital.

Role Four: Artistic Involvement
A fourth role is related to every type of artistic and creative endeavor. Appreciating the place of art has been a huge oversight in Protestant missions and here I will only note the need. Writing is difficult and a lot must be learned before one can even think about writing into the Hindu world. But all types of edifying literature are needed, including better Bible translations that make sense to Hindus. This is certainly a long-term project, but God bless those who take up the development of better literature for Hindus. Painting, drawing, dance and music are all wonderful realms in which to engage Hindus. Don't worry about being an evangelist; just get into that world and be a contact person. Anything related to communication and art needs to be pursued and developed for the glory of God among Hindus. More people need to step into these vitally important roles.

Four Qualifications of the Alongsider
Everyone engaged with Hindus will develop differently, often based on the Hindus God brings into our lives. There will be overlap between the four roles outlined above, and even the four

qualifications discussed below will vary related to roles and gifts, since each person is unique and will bring his or her own specific skill set into Hindu ministry.[8] Yet these are four general matters that everyone needs to develop.

Qualification One: Biblical Character
First, there are many foundational qualifications which can be summarized as biblical character. The basic biblical character traits and disciplines of biblical understanding, prayer, humility, love, integrity, zeal, submission, transparency and spiritual mindedness must all be manifest and increasing. Most of these are rather obvious and easy to learn about; if only they were as easy to actually learn and live out!

Be humble and go along with what seems to be an error.

The last one on spiritual mindedness is an old Puritan idea. My point with it is that we should not be centered on doctrines or traditions or rituals, but rather on matters of the heart, on the spiritual core of biblical teaching. In practice this means that as alongsiders we *embrace personal spiritual discipline over perceived correctness of any kind*.

Let me try to illustrate what I mean by this challenging point. We must be ready to say, "Okay, I know I am right on this point, but it is more important for me to be humble and go along with what seems to me to be an error (perhaps a misunderstanding of a biblical text or an unwise act in a family) rather than for me to be right and stand for

the right." This is not about murder and adultery, but certainly relates to caste and idolatry issues as well as biblical interpretation. Even if I think I "know" what should be done, more often than not I should not say anything, considering this a part of the humility and spiritual mindedness essential in cross-cultural situations. Pointing to different biblical passages that may be applicable and sharing stories of other disciples of Jesus faced with similar situations can provide helpful data without usurping decision-making authority. We teach far more by what we do than what we say. To think I always know the right answer and that I should give the answer is modeling something un-Christlike. I must model deep humility. If I always have to give my opinion and state the right answer, I am modeling something else. I need to go along with some things that I am uncomfortable with. As you, in turn, practice this reticence, you will find sometimes that what you "knew to be right" was not actually right, and you will be glad you kept your opinions to yourself.

If you don't have biblical understanding, prayer, humility, love, integrity, zeal, submission, transparency and spiritual mindedness you will find yourself in big trouble; if you think you have all these, then you are in even bigger trouble! Lord, help us to learn these things. Also foundational is basic missiological understanding and cultural sensitivity. Emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence are vital, particularly empathy. These are the core requirements, the biblical character traits that God wants to develop in each of us.

Qualification Two: Acceptance of Limitations
The second qualification for effectiveness among Hindus is the acceptance of your limitations. You must see how little you can really do that is effective, how little you will really even understand. Worse still, you will always do harm. You will always be an outsider. You will

always be severely limited. You will always, by what you *are,* compromise what you *believe* and *teach* (because you are not and cannot be a Hindu disciple of Jesus). From a biblical perspective this should not be a problem, and this perspective should not defeat us as we understand how God uses the weak and inadequate to shame the wise and fulfill his purposes. This is the treasure of God in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). This is Paul celebrating weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Are we ready to learn, and are we constantly learning? After nearly 30 years of study related to Hindu contexts I am constantly surprised by new things that I never heard of before. There is so much diversity in Hindu beliefs and practices. If you need one word for Hinduism, it would be *diversity.* Never assume that you know anything, because really you do not; accept your limitations.

Related to this is the need to be adaptable. This is part of being modern, certainly part of survival in India. The days of missionary visas for India are over, and it is good that there is no longer a colonial government giving shelter. So there is no choice but to be adaptable and to accept change. So accept your many limitations, expect disappointment, and persevere through all types of change, failure, and necessary adaptation.

Qualification Three: Submission to the Leadership of Hindus in Christ

Third, be insistent on submission to leadership from Hindus who are in Christ. That is not easy. It is already a real problem at this stage that more and more internationals are engaging Hindus but there are very few Hindus who are mature in Christ; and Hindus who are mature in Christ need to be engaging Hindus, not primarily internationals. We alongsiders have visions and goals and we can lead, but we cannot afford to minister in our own name; somehow we need to be under the authority of fellow believers who are Hindus in Christ. You may need to work for a decade or more to create this kind of

*I*nitiatives and leadership must come from the insiders, and if we are privileged to serve at their right hand it is a great honor.

situation. Maybe this ideal is simply out of reach for those who serve in North America, but we should be seen to be functioning under our brothers who are Hindus in Christ and we should go to great lengths to make this a reality. We have inherited a terrible history of ministry that can only be considered both colonial and dollar-driven. These are patterns that must be broken and must be manifestly seen to be broken, and I would make this a fundamental requirement for effective ministry.

I remember being invited to a meeting of insider advocates a few years ago and being shocked after arriving there and learning that it was a gathering of insider advocates and their right-hand men (insiders). I did my best to point out that no insider advocate should have a right-hand man or woman, rather they need to *be* right-hand men and women. Initiatives and leadership must come from the insiders, and if we are privileged to serve at the right hand of such people it is a great honor.

Qualification Four: Cultivating Reticence

My last point, mentioned already in the opening paragraph, is that we must *cultivate reticence.* Only the reticent individual can be an effective alongsider. Missiologically it is J. H. Bavinck's *possessio* that defines how we view the gospel and cultures—that we take possession of culture for Christ; but this is triumphalistic and imperialistic despite it being biblical. The key is that this taking possession of cultures is not for internationals to do; we must back off and see that locals do the real thing. This is not my role and responsibility; I am not qualified for this. I must keep backing off and allow others, genuine insiders, to take initiative and move forward. God bless those who want to be right hand persons in this process.

These issues in Hindu ministry are not *our* issues. Internationals are engaging with these matters and internationals are zealous, and while I want to encourage that, I fear we do not know anything about reticence; this is a quality we need to study more carefully and zealously cultivate. We are in the Hindu world as guests, and it is not our world. It is at the largesse of our Hindu friends that we are there; in *all* matters we defer to others, in *all* matters we are constantly stepping back. Even theologically we must shift back from the matter-of-factness of our doctrinal statements to a sense of mystery. Doctoral statements are often our rather desperate attempts to define biblical mysteries, and usually end up defining those mysteries with extra-biblical terminology. All Protestant doctrinal statements are clear (at least implicitly) that they are not final; they are flawed attempts to explain sacred scripture. We go with the mystery of the infinite and eternal God into the complexity of new languages and cultures. We can help if we truly go to serve, but we need to break many of our own cultural patterns and cultural habits.

Conclusion

It is not unusual to hear calls for cross-cultural workers to become catalysts and change agents. But, technically, a catalyst is the last thing we want to be. In a scientific formula, a catalyst introduces change without itself changing; the greatest enticement of cross-cultural work should be how much a person will be changed by the process of deep engagement with new cultures. Alongsiders especially need to expect to learn and change and experience a transformation themselves that is beyond what they can even imagine. To that end, these roles and qualifications have been outlined. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] "Hindu" is a complex label that carries no definite theological connotations. A "Hindu in Christ" is a disciple of Jesus who maintains his familial and cultural and community roles in Hindu society.

[2] I produced a list of practical pointers for sharing Christ with Hindus that has appeared in a number of different versions over the years; most accessible is "Ten Tips for Ministering to Hindus" at http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/ten-tips-for-ministering-to-hindus.

[3] As I finished editing this paper my co-worker Tim Shultz sent an email about his reading in mentoring and coaching, referencing Gary Collins, *Christian Coaching,* from NavPress. Coaching as distinct from mentoring calls for reticence, recognizing that the coached person must take initiative and develop beyond what the coach suggests.

[4] I discuss this in "Speaking of God in Sanskrit-Derived Vocabularies," an article forthcoming in the *IJFM.*

[5] Hindu cultures fit better under the designation of shame cultures than guilt cultures, but this important topic is somewhat tangential to my discussion and so will not be addressed in this paper.

[6] There is no space to draw out the implications of this point in this paper. A careful study of Jesus' ways with the Pharisees is instructive. One reason for attrition among Hindus who profess Christ in traditional Christian evangelism is that Hindus in Christ are taught to profess what they do not feel; they say they are sinners but they do not understand and have not internalized this reality.

[7] Often idolatry is not about God or gods, but about family and tradition. Many Christians want to insist on the theological aspect of idolatry even when Hindus minimize this. These types of questions and concerns do not make the issue easy, but rather illustrate that outsiders/alongsiders should not presume to make decisions in this area.

[8] One of my coworkers, on reading a draft of this paper, suggested that it perhaps assumes modern, educated, independent Hindus, whereas with some Hindus there will be less willingness to take initiative. There can be no blueprints as the personality and gifts of both the alongsider and the Hindu will need to develop with wisdom and humility.

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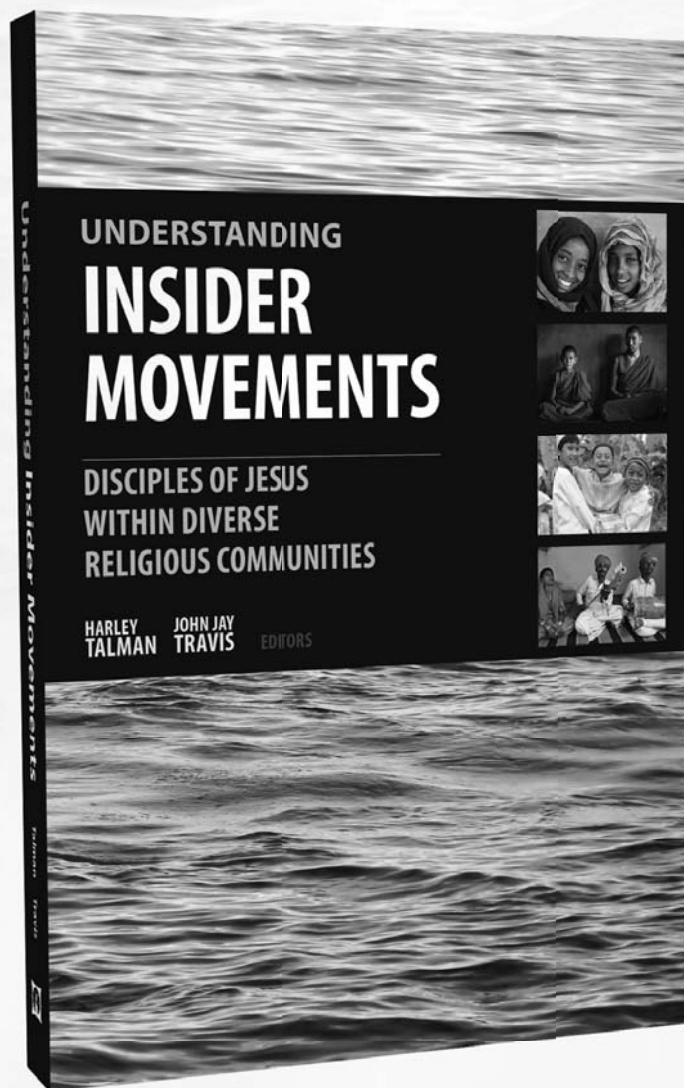
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Linking Missiology

Contextualizing Ancestor Veneration:
A Theological Survey and Practical Steps for Implementation

by David S. Lim

David Lim (PhD Fuller Seminary) is from the Philippines, and serves as President of the Asian School for Development and Cross-Cultural Studies. He previously served as Professor of Biblical Theology & Transformation Theology and as Academic Dean at both the Asian Theological Seminary (Philippines) and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (UK). He also serves as President of China Ministries Int'l – Philippines, and is a key facilitator of the Philippine Missions Mobilization Movement which seeks to mobilize a million Filipino tentmakers to reach the unreached.

Editor's Note: In the previous issue of the IJFM *(32:3 Fall 2015) the author contributed his first installment on the theme of ancestor veneration with a historical survey of this missiological controversy.*

In the most recent issue of this journal, I introduced the theme of contextualizing the gospel for cultures that practice ancestor veneration. That first installment was a necessary review of the history of this missiological controversy and how it has embroiled venerable mission orders, agencies and denominations. Although we are in a changing global context today, it is crucial we understand the insights and insufficiencies of previous efforts to confront the deeply embedded values and rituals of ancestor veneration.

Part II: A Theological Survey

In this next section, I would like to move from history to a biblical study. To do so, I surveyed Scripture to find out what it teaches about ancestral practices. The main theological framework that developed is best expressed in a dual emphasis of the Apostle Paul: for expatriates it is "to become all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:19–23) and for local converts to remain in their socio-religious identities (7:18–19). The overall intention is that we may not only be able to win some (especially heads of households, clans and communities) and thereby disciple them to win the rest, but also to be true to the essence of a faith that is both biblical and multi-cultural. My study has yielded several correctives to commonly understood theological assumptions about ancestor veneration. These are based on a deeper understanding of Chinese worldview and culture. I go on to formulate some missiological principles based on the theological implications of these correctives. I outline these as three theological tenets and three missiological principles.

Theological Basis

First, there are three tenets that underpin a contextualized biblical understanding of ancestor veneration. My conviction is that theologically they are not idolatrous, in practice they are not religious, and culturally they fit a communitarian worldview.

1. Filiality, not Idolatry

The Bible clearly condemns the worship of gods and the making of idols (Ex. 20:4–5). Numerous passages such as 1 Cor. 10:4–21; 5:11, Rev. 21: 8; 21:18–19, and Deut. 4:2 teach that God abhors idolatry, and those who practice it have no part in him. The object of any worship, ceremony, and ritual must be God alone.

I have yet to know, however, of even one Chinese who considers ancestors as gods to be worshiped. Most, if not all, will find the idea of their ancestors actually being gods both ludicrous and abhorrent. Chinese Filipinos believe in only one universal spirit whose manifestations *(hua shen)* include all the religious figures on earth (Buddha, Jesus Christ, etc.). They believe this spirit is the source of existence, is benevolent and effective, performs miracles, and brings good fortune. So the Chinese lean towards monotheism, although for many the "supreme spirit," *tien* (heaven) or *tao* (way or word), may not be at all personal as in the Judeo-Christian and other theistic faiths.

Hiebert (1999) has helped us understand the primal worldview as one with three levels of reality. The bottom level is the empirical world as experienced through the human senses. The top level includes cosmic realms beyond human experience. In between, we find a middle level that includes the unseen or trans-empirical realities of this world. These three levels emerge out of the intersection of this world (earth, universe) with other worlds (heaven, hell), of the seen (empirical) with the unseen (trans-empirical).

In the Chinese belief system the three main worldview concerns are the cosmos, the pantheon of invisible living beings, and humans. Chinese believe the universe is permeated with the cosmic breath or life force called *Qi*, usually described in a bipolar manner as *Yin* and *Yang*. Everything that exists results from the interplay of these two forces. Humans are but a feeble part of this cosmos and as such must live in harmony with these cosmic realities.

Infinite numbers of gods, deities, spirits, and ancestors make up the vast pantheon of Chinese religion. Tan (1996) identifies many of the non-human beings who are part of the belief system of Chinese Filipinos. She also diagrams how Chinese Filipinos accommodate the Filipino belief system within their own. (Compare Figure 1 below with Figure 2 [Uayan 2005] on p. 3.)

Tan has applied Hiebert's division of organic (beings) and mechanical (forces or techniques) in charting folk Chinese belief systems. Lest we become too

Figure 1. Folk Chinese Belief Systems

Figure 1. Folk Chinese Belief Systems
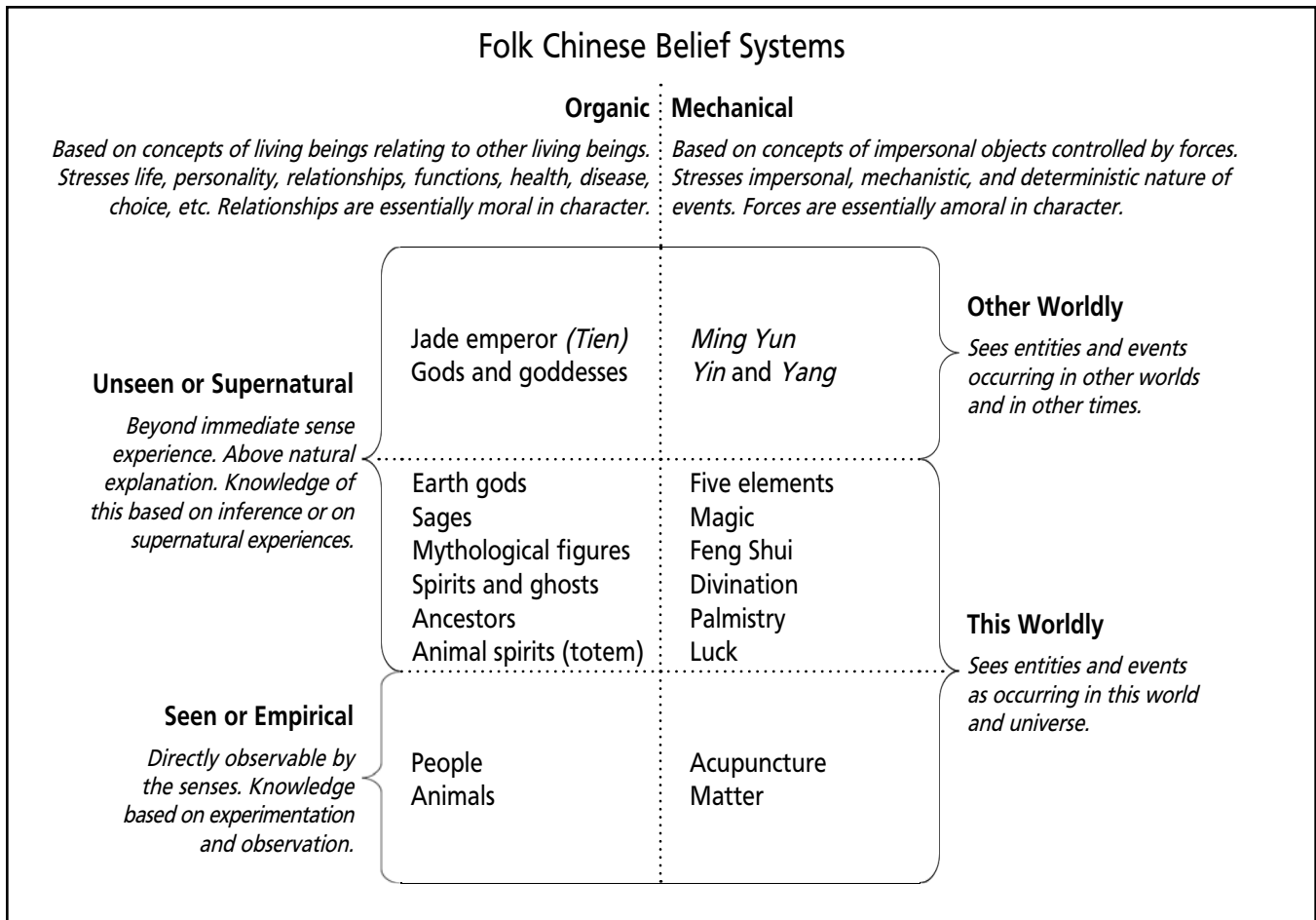
rigid or categorical, Hiebert points out that "boundaries between the categories are often fuzzy" and cautions us that the "organic and mechanical analogies form a horizontal continuum with many shades between the poles" (1999:50).

Take note that the ancestors consistently belong to the middle level and thus are separate from the upper level. The dead ancestors exist and have to be accorded their due. They can provide help, but they can also create problems: if the living experience bad luck or worse, it may be because they have neglected to honor their ancestors. Where do they reside? In heaven or hell? In the Yellow Springs? In the earth? In the air? In the rivers? It depends on their status and on the believer. There is no single answer. They can be anywhere. But gods they are not (Chamberlain 1987:47).

It is obvious that syncretism is a common characteristic of Chinese religion. While syncretism is at work in all religions, the extent to which Chinese religions have been "religions of harmony" has allowed more latitude for the phenomenon than have the more exclusivist and mono-theistic religions (e.g., Christianity and Islam). Chinese religion is itself a model of syncretism, intermingling elements of ancient Chinese religious traditions (such as divination and ancestor venera-tion) with those of "Greater Traditions" (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) into a complex mosaic.

A careful study of the Chinese worldview clearly shows that ancestors are distinct from gods. Ancestral practices are a form of veneration, but they are best viewed as filial piety and not idolatry. This is similar to the way that Roman Catholics understand the "veneration" of Mary and the saints. For those who struggle to accept this view, please reference recent missiological works on how to reach folk religionists. (e.g., van Rheenen 1996; Hiebert et al 1999; and Yip 1999).

Figure 2. Folk Chinese-Filipino Belief Systems

Folk Chinese-Filipino Belief Systems

Organic
Based on concepts of living beings relating to other living beings. Stresses life, personality, relationships, functions, health, disease, choice, etc. Relationships are essentially moral in character.

Mechanical
Based on concepts of impersonal objects controlled by forces. Stresses impersonal, mechanistic, and deterministic nature of events. Forces are essentially amoral in character.

Unseen or Supernatural
Beyond immediate sense experience. Above natural explanation. Knowledge of this based on inference or on supernatural experiences.

God the Father, Jesus, *Tien Chu,* Gods and goddesses (Buddhist/Taoist gods), Kuan Yin/Ma-Tzu, Virgin Mary Angels, Satan, devils

Ming Yun/ Fate and fortune *Yin* and *Yang*

Other Worldly
Sees entities and events occurring in other worlds and in other times.

Earth gods, duwendes (Buddhist/Taoist) Sages/Saints, Mythological figures *(kapre, agta)* Spirits and ghosts Ancestors Animal spirits (totem)

Priests/pastors/faith healers/feng shui masters Five elements, feng shui Magic, Divination Palmistry/horoscope Good luck charms/*anting-anting, tawas, kulam*

This Worldly
Sees entities and events as occurring in this world and universe.

Seen or Empirical
Directly observable by the senses. Knowledge based on experimentation and observation.

People Animals and plants

Chinese medicine/doctors *Manananggal, mangkukulam* Matter

2. Cultural, not Religious

Second, ancestral veneration is cultural, not religious, basically rooted in *filial piety*. In Chinese thought, *xiào* (filial piety) is one of the most important virtues to be cultivated; it's a love and respect for one's parents and ancestors. The Confucian classic *Book of Filial Piety (Xiao Jing)*, written around 470 BCE, has historically been the authoritative source on xiào. The book, a conversation between Confucius and his student Zeng Shen (Zengzi), is about how to set up a good society using the principle of filial piety, and thus for over 2,000 years has been one of the basic texts in the Chinese Imperial Civil Service Exams.

Filial piety means to be good to one's parents, to take care of one's parents, and to engage in good conduct both inside and outside home so as to bring honor and a good name to one's parents and ancestors. It means to perform the duties of one's job well so as to obtain the material means to support one's parents. It also means to carry out sacrifices to the ancestors. Furthermore, it means to not be rebellious, to show love, respect and support, to display courtesy, to ensure there are male heirs, and to uphold fraternity among brothers. Lastly, filial piety means to wisely advise one's parents (including dissuading them from moral unrighteousness), to display sorrow for their sickness and death, and to carry out sacrifices after their death.

Ancestor veneration is so important because filial piety is considered the foremost virtue in Chinese culture, and it is the main concern of a large number of traditional stories. One of the most famous collections of such stories is *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars (Ershi)*. These stories recount how children exercised their filial piety in the past. While China has always had a diversity of beliefs, filial piety has been common to almost all of them; respect for the ancestors is the only moral virtue common to almost all Chinese. These traditions were sometimes enforced by law; during parts of the Han Dynasty, for example, those who neglected ancestor veneration were subject to corporal punishment.

For Confucius, xiào (filial piety) was not merely blind loyalty to one's parents. More important than the norms of xiào were the norms of *rén* (benevolence) and *yì* (righteousness). For both Confucius and Mencius, xiào was a display of rén which was ideally applied in one's dealings with all elders, thus making it the norm for intergenerational relations. But in practice, xiào has become reserved for one's own parents and grandparents, and has been elevated above the notions of rén (benevolence) and yì (righteousness). Hence family-centeredness is prominent in ancestral practices.

Respect for the ancestors is the only moral virtue common to almost all Chinese.

3. Continuity, Less Discontinuity

The third theological tenet for a biblical contextualization of ancestor veneration is to give more emphasis to continuity rather than discontinuity with the people's cultural and religious background (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17–24). This is the best way to develop indigenous (Chinese) theologies and to catalyze more effective movements to Christ. In relation to ancestor veneration, this positive stance towards accommodating as much of the indigenous culture as possible might enable a better understanding of our biblical affirmation of the "communion of saints," as advocated and developed also in Simon Chan's recent book *Grassroots Asian Theology* (2014).

As referred to above, Chinese and oriental cultures (including their primal and folk expressions) have a deep sense of interconnectedness that extends to maintaining relationships with the ancestral dead. They perceive the dead to be separated from human society merely by a curtain of invisibility. In these communalistic cultures the concepts of being surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) and "the communion of saints" (essential to the Apostles' Creed) make perfect sense. The Christian faith is continuous with the faith of ancestral heroes, and God is as much *the* god of our ancestors as He was the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." To those in similar cultures, this formulaic title of God's self-disclosure to the Hebrew ancestors and the lengthy biblical genealogies are very relevant texts, for they emphasize the continuity of God's presence both across the generations and across the divide that separates the living from the dead.

Unfortunately, much of Protestantism has emphasized the cultural discontinuities that must be acknowledged as proof of genuine conversion. While some aspects in the Christian faith will necessarily disrupt traditional culture (discontinuity), most of our faith affirms the "folk" sense that we are not alone. This particular aspect of primitive revelation found in all folk religions, that we are part of a great community that stretches back through many generations, reflects the biblical idea of a "cloud of witnesses." It resonates with the biblical "family of God" imagery, which then develops into the "heavenly church assembly of living spirits" (Heb. 12:23) and eventually into the creedal concept of the "communion of saints."

For instance, in native Filipino funerary rites, art objects and other artifacts express this deep reverence for the dead and the continuing importance of the dead for the living. The rituals connected to *Todos los Santos*, and the extended time of mourning signified by *pasiyam* (prayers such as a novena every day for the first nine days after the burial for the

departed), *padasal* (prayers for the dead 40 days after the burial), *babang-luksa* (first year death anniversary) and other such commemorative markers, speak of a people whose relational sense is unbroken by death, and who believe in the continuing claims of the dead upon the living. Many upland community festivals are meant for ancestral heroes, like Kabigat and Balitok among the Ikalahan. In these communities, the *caniao* (a dance ceremony) is, at its base, not so much a religious as a social rite, a way of affirming ties with the ancestral spirits who are invited to participate in the drinking, feasting and dancing. It is also a way of identifying who belongs to the community. The caniao is a sign and seal of the people's sense of identity together as a community (Maggay 2005:47).

This sense of connectedness explains the anxiety of Protestant converts among these tribes; they want their dead also to wear the burial blanket that identifies them with their clan. The practice serves as a locus of identity—of who they are and what they shall be in the afterlife. Without a burial blanket, one wanders about like an outcast, not able to belong anywhere. Their animism is not preoccupied with the worship of spiritual life forces, but with maintaining harmonious ties with ancestors, *anitos* (spirits) and all other spirit beings.

People from folk cultures understand this better than those belonging to highly individualistic cultures. Western worldviews assume people are all atomized individuals who live entirely in the present, without any notion that humans have some connection to an invisible society of those who have gone before. I would suggest that followers of Christ from folk cultures need to compose new songs to praise the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to record their genealogies in their own indigenous art forms; not to do so might invite wholescale (unorthodox) syncretism. We cannot afford to repeat the "heresy" of the Judaizers who expected Gentile converts to simply adopt Jewish forms and religious requirements.

*T**he practice serves as a locus of identity; without a burial blanket, one wanders about like an outcast, not able to belong anywhere.*

We must expect a greater continuity with their own traditional forms, rather than the typical discontinuities of an alienating Protestantism.

Missiological Principles

These three theological presuppositions surrounding ancestor veneration lead to three *missiological* principles in forming Christ-centered communities: cultural integration, community conversion, and socio-religious transformation.

1. Cultural Integration

This main principle is oriented towards adopting the existing socio-religious culture as much as possible within biblical guidelines (1 Cor. 7:18–19). Its goals are to integrate the Christian faith with the ethnic and cultural identity of the people and to have strong indigenous church leadership from the beginning—a leadership with four important characteristics: self-governing, self-propagating, self-supporting and self-theologizing. Failure to follow these indigenous principles has resulted in the "transplanting of foreign churches," and not the planting of indigenous churches. Such "cultural dislocations" invite real syncretism and Christo-paganism.

Contextualization follows the wisdom of the divine incarnation. Jesus (with ceremonial washing), John the Baptist (with the use of baptism) and Paul (with use of the altar to the unknown god, Acts 17) all risked being misunderstood in their use of local forms; they chose to meet people at the point of their cultural and religious understandings, and then built a bridge of communication, taking them from the known to the unknown. This is the principle of "becoming all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:19–23). The alternative is either one of creating new forms that would most likely feel foreign (and which would most

likely be rejected) or leave a vacuum, an "empty house" that would invite in seven demons worse than the first! Of course, the content and meaning of all religious forms, rituals and festivities—even secular ones like Valentine's Day or Memorial/ Heroes' Days—have to constantly be explained and re-interpreted, lest they lose their meaning and relevance. The need for a biblical reinterpretation of ancestor veneration is what will allow for a proper cultural integration.

Chinese folk religion, which permeates Chinese society, is inseparable from Chinese culture. Except in the case of the professional religious elite who live apart in monasteries, religion in China is so woven into the broad fabric of family and social life that there has not been a special word for a category of religion until modern times. To a great extent, the basic ideas of ancestral veneration coincide with beliefs and values that pervade Chinese culture as a whole. Suggesting the model of an "Asiatic mode of religion," Chan and Hunter stress that "religion is part of culture and the cycles of daily life" (1994:54). This implies that Chinese socio-religious practices and beliefs are, according to Western categories, actually more "cultural" than "religious."

Can biblical Christianity become the fulfillment of Chinese religion? Can Christians use the traditional forms of ancestral veneration so as to infuse and enrich them with biblical meaning? And might they even show that Christians who accept ancestral veneration in obedience to the Fifth Commandment—honoring one's parents—actually care about their ancestors even more than folk Buddhists do? For this to happen, it's essential that

> Conversion should not "deculturize" a convert... The convert may try to adopt the evangelist's culture;

instead the attempt should be firmly but gently resisted. (Willowbank Report 1978:78)

There is often no need to substitute new rites or practices in exchange for old ones. There are already rituals and festivals within cultures that are in and of themselves purely cultural and amoral (the Reformers' *adiaphora*). These should be welcomed and adopted by Christians, because they are familiar and give a sense of solidarity and security for the people. The goal is to develop local theologies and local expressions of Christianity which are culturally appropriate and wholesome; any other way would mean a perpetuation of arrogant cultural and theological imperialism. We must seek to use the existing cultural forms and expressions except when they distinctly clash with the message of the Gospel.

Many Protestants have no effective "theology of culture" beyond a rejectionist position, so they do not consider the useful function of indigenous ways. They don't realize that most of their very own socio-religious expressions have been "baptized" into Christian usage by their previously pagan ancestors. They deny and reject for others what their faith-ancestors have done for them. Instead, I would suggest they follow Bavinck's view of *possessio,* to take possession of "heathen forms of life" and to render them new; in the case of ancestral veneration, retaining and enlisting its practices in the service of Jesus Christ is "perfectly proper" (1960:178). Tippett observes

> In the process of incorporating converts into their new fellowship group or congregation, indigenous forms, rites, festivals, and so forth, which can be given a new Christian value content, have greater likelihood of finding permanent acceptance than foreign forms and rituals. (1985:185)

Ricci, the Catholic Jesuit, successfully did this in 15th century China, thereby avoiding the creation of a

socio-religious vacuum. It's estimated his strategy resulted in 300,000 converts, which could have led to an even greater movement had his approach not been stopped by the pope. Although Roman Catholicism exonerated Ricci's position in 1939, it has experienced limited growth due to religious forms that remain too Latin (Western).

2. Communal Conversion

Second, contextualization should aim at families coming to Christ, and through them, to extend out as a movement among their people. Unlike the prevalent "extraction evangelism" of many Christian missions, this approach calls for movements in which believers are encouraged to stay *inside* their family

Many Protestants have no effective "theology of culture" beyond a rejectionist position.
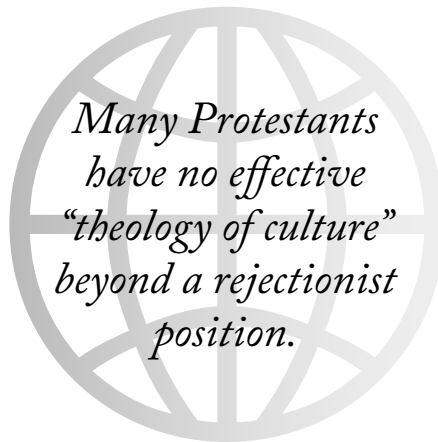
and communities, so that they might share their faith with them (cf. Lim 2010). The focus must be on reaching the adults, preferably the leaders of households, clans, communities and even whole peoples. Sadly, Protestant missions have often focused on the marginalized and the young, who have then experienced severe stress and persecution as a price for the church's rejectionist stance. Not being major decision-makers, these young believers are considered rebels and traitors when they refuse to follow family traditions. There is much wisdom in the early church's practice of prioritizing ministry to heads of households, responsible adults who upon turning to Christ (and immediate baptism!) may influence and include

their whole families. This will insure a solid beachhead for evangelization, and also avoid any unnecessary trauma and persecution of young converts.

Moreover, to achieve communal conversions, community involvement is necessary. The prerequisite for a church-planting movement (CPM) is that the worker earns his right to be accepted and heard by the community. In the past, successful missions have been accomplished through works of mercy, like health care and education. At present, many forms of community development work have been used. In fact, any professional skill will do! This is the advantage of the expatriate: his community service cannot help but be visible—hence access to leaders is almost unavoidable. However, this access must be combined with a sensitive focus on befriending and ministering to leaders. It must also include urging these new leaders to actually take leadership (that is, making decisions) in order to build the Christian community. Without indigenous leadership from the beginning, there will be a very minimal possibility of having a communal turning to Christ that moves across an entire people.

Because of the highly integrated character of ancestral rites within Chinese culture, changes cannot be imposed from the outside. The expatriate must delegate leadership to the more culturally sensitive new believers who then can decide which old forms to maintain, modify or discard. These local leaders should be encouraged to use old forms and re-invest them with new meaning and value. Such changes must be done as early as possible:

> When good functional substitutes have been proposed and accepted at the time of the primary religious change (conversion)…these have stood the test of time and proved effective. (Tippett 1985:185)

Historically "people movements" that build on communal conversion only happen when the groups are truly

indigenous, and self-governing and self-theologizing are established from the outset.

3. Socio-religious Transformation

All this is not to say that the primal or folk worldview and practices should not be modified. In fact, they will and must be transformed "from glory to glory." Yet in the process, the theologies, liturgies and praxis that evolves will surely contribute in an orthodox way to the enrichment of the glorious unity-in-diversity of the Christian faith.

Historically, Christianity has been able to turn pagan and secular traditions into Christian ones, so there should be no lack of confidence that the Christian movement can take on the whole Chinese religious worldview and practices, too! The Chinese Christ-centered communities can be spiritually transformed "from the inside out" as they give relevant witness in their society by their development of distinctly Chinese forms of worship, catechesis and festivals.

Fortunately, we have one significant model of this transformation in Hong Kong: *Tao Fong Shan* ("The Mount Where the Wind of *Tao* [or *logos*] Blows"). Its buildings use Chinese temple architecture and its Christian community has sought to live out and demonstrate the most sensitive and contextual integration of the Christian faith and Chinese culture, including ancestral veneration. It was founded by the Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Karl Reichelt (1877–1952) who arrived in China in 1903. He found that a poor relationship existed between Christians (especially Western missionaries) and the general population, and he made a first-hand study of the life and practices of the founders and the principles of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in China.

Reichelt set up a Christian "monastery" in Nanjing in 1922, where visiting monks and serious "seekers" (averaging a thousand a year) could

*T*heir secularized worldview is a form of syncretism that denies the existence and power of beings which operate in the "excluded middle."

come for meditation and discussion. He transferred to Hong Kong in 1927, where he introduced "the universal, the cosmic, the all-embracing Savior Jesus Christ" to all those who visited this "monastery." Converts were baptized, but instead of letting them join the existing churches, he encouraged these "Friends of the Tao" to spread out and evangelize in the temples and monasteries. Reichert wrote,

> Although not joining the external church, such enter the yearly increasing number of unknown and unregistered Christ-followers. (cf. Kung 1993)

Although it had a plan to multiply into a movement, it had a complex structure which made it difficult to replicate.

Reichelt's approach was "from above," and focused on the socio-religious elite. I would prefer a strategy for transformation from the "bottom up" through church-planting and disciple making movements (CPM/DMM) that are now growing among secularized and/or folk Buddhists in China, Japan, Cambodia and Myanmar. On the matter of ancestor veneration practices, these movements combine a focus on family conversion and family-to-family evangelism, but most important is that inquirers and new believers are discipled in a less religious manner, with less concern about religious practices. Rather, they are encouraged to grow "unto Christ" by being more generous (more caring towards and sharing with their neighbors), which is the agape law of Christ (Gal. 6:1–2, cf. Mic. 6:6–8; Amos 5:21–24). This is the transformation vital for ancestor-venerating cultures. It means freedom from fear of ancestors, nature spirits, fate and/or gods, which is the source of so much superstition.

Such is the contextualization approach to the evangelization and transformation of peoples and nations. It is not

"syncretism," because it focuses on the content and meaning of Christ and his finished work on the cross, and it also emphasizes that the forms must be culture-sensitive. Those who accuse this socio-religious approach of syncretism can be counter-charged with their own syncretism. Their secularized Enlightenment worldview which enshrines modern scientific rationalism is a form of syncretism that denies the existence and power of beings which operate in what Hiebert calls the "excluded middle." A missiological approach that aims at socio-religious transformation from the inside out is the best way for syncretism(s) to be identified and corrected.

Part III: Practical Steps in the Formation of Contextualized Christ-Centered Communities in Ancestor-Venerating Contexts

Having now introduced both historical and biblical perspectives (see my previous article in *IJFM* 32:3), the third and final step is to offer two practical applications with respect to the formation of contextualized Christ-centered communities in ancestor-venerating contexts. They apply to the development of both theology (worldview) and spirituality (lifestyle).

Contextual Theology

The formation and development of theology must be relational and culture-sensitive—a simple matter of friends inviting others to join them in a spiritual journey, rather than salesmen forcefully trying to close a deal (cf. Richardson 2006). Since there is a wide variety of ancestral beliefs and practices among the Chinese, it is necessary that the evangelist-theologian must first study the socio-religious background of the non-believers in each particular context. The pattern should be to listen carefully,

and to accept their views (including religious ones) non-judgmentally, with "gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15), even if they might be dead wrong. Corrections can come later in discipleship, if necessary, as they prayerfully reflect—both individually and corporately—on the Scriptures with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12–15).

There should be only a single stumbling-block: "Christ and him crucified" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–2:5). The Christ-believer can learn the balance of biblical teaching later and, moreover, can unlearn aspects of his own unbiblical worldview later on in the discipling process. Salvation is through his simple faith in Jesus, so he can come to Jesus "just as he is," in his own context, with no requirement for immediate worldview change. Otherwise, who of us can claim to be saved, since all our worldviews are yet to be completely biblical (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8)? Most of us expect too much from new believers. We expect them to embrace more than belief in Jesus, but also that they immediately begin to follow our own religious beliefs and values (actually, those from a particular socio-religious denomination).

Andrew Walls (1997) has suggested just how the process of theological contextualization proceeded historically. He identifies three stages in this process, illustrating it with an analysis of the transformation of Hellenistic thought in the early centuries of the church, a process which extended for more than three generations. During the first stage the Hellenistic church experienced the "missionary stage," typified and led by Paul as he began to adapt Jewish vocabulary and forms to Hellenistic categories and vocabulary. Paul abandoned the proselyte model of dealing with Gentile converts, and as a missionary, expected that any theologizing would need to select Greek terminology, symbols and rituals in any effective communication of God's truth.

> He undertook substantial symbol theft from the Gentile world. Thus he can boldly seize the Hellenistic idea of

pleroma, the totality of emanations between the transcendent God and the material universe, and identify it with Christ (Col. 1:19). The thought of Christ as the *pleroma* of emanations lifts the understanding of his cosmic function into a realm far beyond what the old categories of messiah-ship could ever convey. (1997:149)

The Greek *pleroma* corresponds to that middle region of the Chinese worldview, and in like fashion for the missionary, there is the potential that the symbols of ancestor veneration societies might be deployed in a way that "lifts" our understanding of Jesus' cosmic function.

The second stage in the contextualization process is the "convert stage." Walls suggests that the main feature

Most of us expect too much from new believers.

of this stage is that of identity, and that Justin Martyr is its most prominent representative. This apologist was convinced that Christ could inhabit his Hellenistic world and transform it, and he sought to

> maintain his Christian identity within the Hellenistic intellectual identity, which he could not abandon because it had shaped his life and his mind. (1997:149)

Sadly, most indigenous Christians throughout the world struggle daily with the question of their identities. They are told over and over that the route to success is only by adopting the dominant modern culture and that their own native cultures and mother-tongue languages are dead ends. Even more

sadly, the churches of Christendom reinforce this cultural oppression by not valuing and promoting the local vernaculars. Non-vernacular-speaking church workers and expatriate missionaries must be convinced—and must labor to convince indigenous Christians—that Christ truly seeks to inhabit and transform their cultures and worldviews from within.

As Walls (1997:150) notes,

> Conversion…means to *turn what is already there in a new direction.* It is not a matter of substituting something new for something old—that is proselytizing, a method that the early church could have adopted but deliberately chose to jettison. Nor is conversion a matter of adding something new to something old, as a supplement or in synthesis. Rather, Christian conversion involves re-directing what is already there, turning it in the direction of Christ.

To fulfill Revelation 7:9, the gospel must be communicated in ways that recognize and embrace the fact that conversion to Christianity does not require indigenous peoples to change their cultural identity or language. Rather, Christ seeks to be "at home" in their culture and language so that Christianity comes to have the flavor of the people's heart and familiar speech.

The third and final stage in this process is what Walls calls the "refiguration stage," typified in those earlier centuries by the patristic theologian, Origen. This stage can only be achieved by a generation that follows after the convert stage, that has grown up in the Christian faith and that is reconciled to its pre-Christian inheritance—and yet is not afraid of it either. To flesh out this refiguration stage and its interaction with the heathen culture, Walls references the comparison Origen made to the manner in which the Israelites used the gold and spoils from heathen Egypt to construct their most holy religious objects.

> The work of Christians, he concludes, is to take the materials of the heathen world and fashion from them objects

for the worship and glorification of God… And that is what Origen and all his successors did; the classical Christian theology that we associate with the early centuries—its doctrines, creeds, and confessions—was made from the materials of the Greek intellectual world and by means of its methods. The corpus of Neoplatonic thought was spoiled from the pagan world as thoroughly as ever the Israelites could have spoiled Egyptian gold, and from it was hammered out the doctrine of the Trinity. (1997:149)

The burning question for many Christians in non-Western cultures is whether the Jesus preached to them by Western missionaries can ever be "at home" in their native culture. Will they have to surrender their identity and culture to follow another culture's "native Jesus"? In other words, does the conversion demanded by the gospel include the changing of their socio-religious identities? Must they live in a split-level Christianity? Or will vernacular translations of Jesus and the Scriptures open the door for Christ to enter fully into their cultures? To develop dynamic and relevant Christianity, the alternatives to contextualization have produced poor results in terms of developing a dynamic and relevant Christianity. Walls (1997:152) perceptively notes,

> Christian faith must go on being translated, must continuously enter into vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades.

This third stage is the theological crucible for Chinese Christians who confront our ancestor veneration. Like Origen in the Hellenistic world, we must find a biblical way forward that welds biblical truths with the values and rites of our socio-religious culture. Moreover, since most Christians are known to be rejectionist towards "ancestor worship," we must try to avoid being categorized as or associated with mainstream "rejectionist" Christianity. Being categorized as a more accommodating Roman Catholicism might be the best way forward. If we are suspected or

The ethos of these rites was originally and primarily ethical, and requires us to respect a certain spirituality in these Christ–centered communities.

accused of being part of a rejectionist religious community, we must apologize for such attitudes in the past and present. This is a very important act of humility that is often needed to open up an opportunity for us to share the gospel with those who venerate ancestors.

Contextual Spirituality

Believers should also demonstrate this theological paradigm shift in their spirituality. Above all, they must show that they remember their ancestors and honor them from the bottom of their hearts, and even exceed the honor given ancestors by non-believers (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8). We must suppress any urge to criticize these rituals of remembrance as non-Christian practices and, alternatively, allow for an indigenous yet Christian spiritual process to continue developing.

As I pointed out in my comments on filial piety above, it is historically quite clear that any spirituality surrounding ancestor veneration is primarily moral in nature. Before Buddhism came to China with its doctrines of heaven, hell, reincarnation and transmigration of souls, there was hardly any concern for elaborate burial practices (like burning paper money, or pleading for blessings and protection from ancestors). The classical Chinese emphasis on filial piety is much simpler and is generally concerned with displaying proper morals:

> Filial piety is the root of all virtues and the stem out of which grows all moral teaching. It starts with the service of parents, proceeds to the service of the Ruler, and culminates with the establishment of the character. (*Xiao Jing,* ch. 1)

And from one essay of Ou Yang Shieu, a noted scholar and statesman in the Sung Dynasty:

> It is more important to provide respectfully and affectionately for the needs of the parents when they are

alive, rather than worship them by burning paper money and spreading a feast before ancestral tablets which are more superstitious practices. (Chang 1975:838–839)

So, we can see that the ethos of these ancestor rites was originally and primarily ethical, and I believe it requires us to respect the way in which a certain spirituality will emerge among Christ-centered communities in these contexts.

First, it requires that we allow and encourage young believers to follow their family traditions, including bowing down, offering incense (cf. Mal. 1:11), eating food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8, 10) and making tablets or scrolls, just like Paul did not object to the Corinthian practice of "baptizing the dead" (1 Cor. 15:29). Out of love, they must never cause their families, clans and communities to stumble over practices that are merely cultural (1 Cor. 10:32–33, cf. 8:9–13.)

In Korea, Yonggi Cho, the senior pastor of the famous Yoido Full Gospel Church, got into big trouble with the Presbyterian churches there because he taught that a believer could bow down during "ancestral worship." He remarked,

> We Koreans serve our living parents by bowing down. Why is it alright (sic) to bow down to living parents and not to dead parents? Dead parents are still the parents, thus it is not sinful to bow down to dead parents during ancestral worship. (www.goni.kimc.net/sacrifice.htm)

I believe his stance must be emulated.

Secondly, once people have received Christ (and have preferably been baptized with their families), they must be discipled in private and in small groups. All efforts must focus on winning their extended families to the same faith as soon as possible. If they

(especially family heads) regard their ancestors as gods/deities, and hence worthy of their worship, they will surely realize very soon that repentance requires leaving such idolatry. If they fail to realize this, a gentle dialogue or probe into the foundational meanings of their new-found faith in "Jesus is Lord" will lead them to burn their idols and paraphernalia. If they (especially family heads) continue to view their ancestors as human spirits who hover among the living, who are capable of providing or withholding protection, who threaten them with bad luck unless offered food, then these new believers may be helped to discover functional substitutes. Better yet, they can be encouraged to gradually drop the practices bit by bit, without calling attention to their conversion in the community.

Thirdly, we must accept that the forms of an emerging Christ-centered spirituality will most probably differ from mainstream westernized Christianity. There is no divine or universal form of Christianity which is suitable for all believers at all times. This is how indigenous theology will evolve, too. However, this is not to affirm an uncritical, "to each his own" theologizing. Caught in the tension between scripture, church tradition and one's culture, each believer must choose the way to follow Christ and obey God's word in his own context. We must believe that the Holy Spirit will use the word of God to illumine and direct each believer to become God's "priest, prophet and king" in Christ, especially in the Bible reflection or sharing time with his disciplers or small groups. Christians will encounter a plurality of options rather than one single choice in ancestral veneration, as they reflect on biblical principles, cultural values and family practices. It is not the church or the pastor, but the believers themselves who will make the decisions. Some errors in discernment may occur, but the believing community around them should help keep them in check.

Fourthly, their spirituality must also be holistic and strategic. This is especially true since our objective is to disciple and transform entire peoples into Christlikeness without dislocating them from their socio-cultural heritage. We want these new communities of Christ-followers to be in a position to disciple adults, even community and socio-religious leaders, so they can lead in the theologizing, the education and the worldview transformation of the rest of the populace. We must try to befriend Buddhist and Taoist monks and nuns. Christians should participate in the activities of the *Qing Ming* and *Chong Yang* festivals. When we join in socio-religious and other affairs, we show our willingness to cooperate with people of good will to establish

These new believers may be helped to discover functional substitutes.
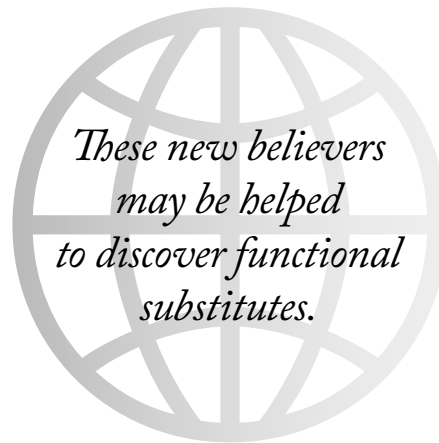
shalom/peace and thereby earn the right to form Christ-centered communities among them and with them.

This spirituality is based on our relationship with God and reflected in our relationship with our fellow man. It is not measured by adherence to religious practices which vary from culture to culture. God delights in creativity and diversity. We must avoid being judgmental or legalistic (Rom. 14:1–15:7); we must allow freedom of conscience; and we must encourage each fellowship of believers to find how to express their religious faith in light of the Scriptures.

After all, the best way to honor ancestors is to sincerely love our neighbors

today, through our social activities on their behalf or our "good works." This is what Christian spirituality is: to glorify God by shining his light into the world through our good works (Mt. 5:16). This is the summary of the Torah in the Great Commandment (Mt. 22:37–39) and in the Golden Rule (Mt. 7:12)—to do to others what you would want to be done to you—which is the positive (and higher) version of Confucius' dictum, "Don't do to others what you don't want to be done to you." This is perfected in Jesus' New Commandment which raises the standard to the highest level: to love one another as he loved us (Jn. 13:34–35), which is, self-sacrificially!

We should therefore use our time, energy, resources, and skills to do community services whether from our homes, offices, or public property. If needed and capable, we can build community ministry centers, and also turn our existing church buildings into such. There is really no need to build more religious buildings for conducting more religious services, for any meeting can turn into a church (Christ-centered worship and liturgy) when it includes prayer, Bible reflection and sharing (cf. Mt. 18:19–20; 1 Tim. 4:4–5).

Conclusion

This contextualization of the gospel in ancestral venerating communities affirms a biblical faithfulness and theological relevance that will transform Chinese and similar cultures from within, and allows for more effective movements to Christ where ancestor veneration has inhibited the gospel. With the rise of new religious movements across the globalized world of the 21st century, this sensitive approach may be the most relevant and effective mission strategy for peoples of Buddhist and primal worldviews.

In my assessment, it is dubious whether rejectionist denominations and churches will adopt this mission paradigm

officially. Their leadership and laity have already been perceived by their compatriots as isolated, un-filial, and even unpatriotic sub-cultural minorities. This perception is actually quite accurate, for they have westernized and modernized and have completely rejected the folk Buddhist worldview and practices. Most of them are so bound to their church traditions that they are hardly open to even questioning the macro-issue of the socio-cultural barriers between their Christianity and the wider community. They may even take pride in a rejectionist religious heritage that has welcomed the persecution and martyrdom of their forebears. Many even have an eschatology that only a minority (the elect) will be saved anyway. Moreover, to make a change in their position would require much spiritual maturity and humility, for it infers that the more accommodating Roman Catholics and liberals have been right all along, and it may also require some form of public apology towards their respective non-Christian neighbors. These conditions make effective evangelism very difficult and Christ-centered movements as well as Christ-centered communities and people movements virtually impossible.

What is needed most urgently today are new church-planting movements in these ancestor-venerating contexts. A new contextually-sensitive faith in Christ will be effective in breaking this traditional stronghold that has kept multitudes of folk Buddhists and folk religionists from Christ. New brands of Christianity in ancestor-venerating contexts have actually begun, but we still need to see more multiplication of Christ-centered communities through insider movements and house church networks. The integrity and reputation of biblical Christianity in this postmodern and multi-cultural world is at stake. Moreover, the eternal destiny of more than 1.5 billion ancestor-venerating people is at stake, too. Without this crucial shift in perspective, we insure that they will reject Christ because of a Christianity that is perceived to be

Churches may even take pride in a rejectionist religious heritage that has welcomed the persecution and martyrdom of their forebears.

dishonoring toward parents, elders and ancestors. Indeed, this shift of perspective might cause some to hesitate, but for the sake of the gospel and by God's mercies, we must at the very least prayerfully support those who are presently attempting to shift their paradigm in evangelizing societies which venerate ancestors. **IJFM**

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Linking Missiology

Jesus in African Culture:
A Ghanaian Perspective on Ancestors

by Kwame Bediako

Kwame Bediako (1945-2008), a native of Ghana, was trained as a patrologist and historian, with doctorates in both French literature and theology. He served as rector of the Akrofi–Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission, and Culture in Akropong, Ghana, and was a pioneer in the exploration and advancement of African Christianity. His book Theology and Identity *(Regnum Books: Oxford, 1992) used the models of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria to encourage African Christians to deploy their own cultural heritage in forming a genuine Christian identity.*

Jesus and the Ancestors in Akan Worldview

Accepting Jesus as "our Saviour" always involves making him at home in our spiritual universe and in terms of our religious needs and longings. So an understanding of Christ in relation to spirit-power in the African context is not necessarily less accurate than any other perception of Jesus. The question is whether such an understanding faithfully reflects biblical revelation and is rooted in true Christian experience. Biblical teaching clearly shows that Jesus is who he is (Saviour) because of what he has done and can do (save), and also that he was able to do what he did on the Cross because of who he is (God the Son) (Colossians 2:15ff). Since "salvation" in the traditional African world involves a certain view of the realm of spirit-power and its effects upon the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence, our reflection about Christ must speak to the questions posed by such a worldview. The needs of the African world require a view of Christ that meets those needs. And so who Jesus is in the African spiritual universe must not be separated from what he does and can do in that world. The way in which Jesus relates to the importance and function of the "spirit fathers" or ancestors is crucial.

The Akan spirit world on which human existence is believed to depend, consists primarily of God, the Supreme Spirit Being *(Onyame),* Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Subordinate to God, with delegated authority from God, are the "gods" *(abosom)* sometimes referred to as children of God *(Nyame mma),* and the ancestors or "spirit fathers" *(Nsamanfo).* The relative positions of the "gods" and the ancestors may be summed up as follows:

> While God's power surpasses all others, the ancestors would appear to tilt the scale in their favour if their power could be weighed against that of the lesser gods. After all are the deities not often referred to as "the innumerable gods of our ancestors," the spokesmen of the human spirits? (Sarpong 1974, 43)

John Pobee has also underlined the importance of the ancestors in the religious worldview of the Akan as the essential focus of piety:

> Whereas the gods may be treated with contempt if they fail to deliver the goods expected of them, the ancestors, like the Supreme Being, are always held in reverence or even worshipped. (Pobee 1979, 48)

> By virtue of being the part of the clan gone ahead to the house of God, they are believed to be powerful in the sense that they maintain the course of life here and now and influence it for good or ill. They…provide the sanctions for the moral life of the nation and accordingly punish, exonerate or reward the living as the case may be. (Pobee 1979, 46)

Ancestors are essentially clan or lineage ancestors. So they have to do with the community or society in which their progeny relate to one another and not with a system of religion as such. In this way, the "religious" functions and duties that relate to ancestors become binding on all members of the particular group who share common ancestors. Since the ancestors have such an important part to play in the well-being (or otherwise) of individuals and communities, the crucial question about our relationship to Jesus is, as John Pobee rightly puts it: "Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation?"

Up to now, our churches have tended to avoid the question and have presented the Gospel as though it was concerned with an entirely different compartment of life, unrelated to traditional religious piety. As a result, many people are uncertain about how the Jesus of the Church's preaching saves them from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional worldview. This shows how important it is to relate Christian understanding and experience to the realm of the ancestors. If this is not done, many African Christians will continue to be men and women "living at two levels," half African and half

European, but never belonging properly to either. We need to meet God in the Lord Jesus Christ speaking immediately to us in our particular circumstances, in a way that assures us that we can be authentic Africans and true Christians.

John Pobee suggests that we "look on Jesus as the Great and Greatest Ancestor," since

> in Akan society the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the sanctions for the good life, and the ancestors hold that authority as ministers of the Supreme Being. (Pobee 1979, 94)

However, he approaches the issue largely through Akan wisdom sayings and proverbs, and so does not deal sufficiently with the religious nature of the question

Jesus Christ is not a stranger to our heritage.

and underestimates the potential for conflict. For if we claim as the Greatest Ancestor one who, at the superficial level, "does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation," the Akan non-Christian might well feel that the very grounds of his identity and personality are taken away from him. It is with such fears and dangers, as well as the meanings and intentions behind the old allegiances, that a fresh understanding of Christ has to deal.

The Universality of Jesus Christ and Our Adoptive Past

We need to read the Scriptures with Akan traditional piety well in view, in order to arrive at an understanding of Christ that deals with the perceived

reality of the ancestors. We need also to make the biblical assumption that Jesus Christ is not a stranger to our heritage, starting from the universality of Jesus Christ rather than from his particularity as a Jew, and affirming that the Incarnation was the incarnation of the Saviour of all people, of all nations and of all times. Yet by insisting on the primacy of Jesus' universality, we do not reduce his incarnation and its particularity to a mere accident of history. We hold on to his incarnation as a Jew because by faith in him, we too share in the divine promises given to the patriarchs and through the history of ancient Israel (Ephesians 2:11–22). Salvation, though "from the Jews" (John 4:22) is not thereby Jewish. To make Jesus little more than a typical Jew is to distort the truth. His statement in John 3:43–44 that a Jew could have for a father, not Abraham at all, but the devil, was outrageous from a Jewish point of view. What counts is one's response to Jesus Christ. In these verses we find one of the clearest statements in Scripture that our true human identity as men and women made in the image of God, is not to be understood primarily in terms of racial, cultural, national or lineage categories, but in Jesus Christ himself. The true children of Abraham are those who put their faith in Jesus Christ in the same way that Abraham trusted God (Romans 4:11–12). Consequently, we have not merely our natural past; through our faith in Jesus, we have also an "adoptive" past, the past of God, reaching into biblical history itself, aptly described as the "Abrahamic link" (Walls 1978, 13).

In the same way, Jesus Christ, himself the image of the Father, by becoming one like us, has shared our *human* heritage. It is within this *human* heritage that he finds us and speaks to us in terms of its questions and puzzles. He challenges us to turn to him and participate in the new humanity for which he has come, died, been raised and glorified.

The Good News as Our Story

Once this basic, universal relevance of Jesus Christ is granted, it is no longer a question of trying to accommodate the Gospel in our culture; the Gospel becomes our story. Our Lord has been from the beginning the Word of God for us as for all people everywhere. He has been the source of our life and illuminator of our path in life, though, like all people everywhere, we also failed to understand him aright. But now he has made himself known, becoming one of us, one like us. By acknowledging him for who he is and by giving him our allegiance, we become what we are truly intended to be, by his gift, the children of God. Our response to him is crucial since becoming children of God does not stem from, nor is it limited by, the accidents of birth, race, culture, lineage or even "religious" tradition. It comes to us by grace through faith.

This way of reading the early verses of John's Gospel that echo the early verses of Genesis 1, from the standpoint of faith in Jesus Christ as *our* story, helps us to appreciate the close association of our creation and our redemption, both achieved in and through Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15ff). We are to understand our creation as the original revelation of God to us and covenant with us. It was in the creation of the universe and especially of man that God first revealed his Kingship to our ancestors and called them to freely obey him. Working from this insight, we, from African primal tradition, are given a biblical basis for discovering more about God within the framework of the high doctrine of God as Creator and Sustainer, that is deeply rooted in our heritage. More significantly, we are enabled to discover ourselves in Adam (Acts 17:26) and come out of the isolation which the closed system of clan, lineage, and family imposes, so that we can rediscover universal horizons.

However, "as in Adam all die . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:22), Adam sinned and lost his place in the garden. Where the biblical account speaks of the expulsion of man (Genesis 3), African myths of origins talk of the withdrawal of God, so that he is continually in people's thoughts, yet is absent from daily living in any practical sense. The experience of ambiguity that comes from regarding lesser deities and ancestral spirits as both beneficent and malevolent, can only be resolved in a genuine incarnation of the Saviour from the realm beyond. But trinitarian doctrine is preserved, for the God who has become so deeply and actively involved in our condition is the Son (John 1:18) whom to see is to "see" the Father (John 14:15ff; Acts 2:38ff), and this is made possible through the Holy Spirit (John 14:23).

Jesus as "Ancestor" and Sole Mediator

Thus the gulf between the intense awareness of the existence of God and yet also of his "remoteness" in African Traditional Religion is bridged in Christ alone because "there has been a death which sets people free from the wrongs they did while the first covenant was in force" (Hebrews 9:15). How does this death relate to our story and particularly to our natural "spirit-fathers"? Some suggest that ours is a "shame culture" and not a "guilt culture," on the grounds that public acceptance determines morality, and consequently a "sense of sin" is said to be absent (Welbourn 1968; Taylor 1963, 166–69). However, in our tradition, the essence of sin is in its being an antisocial act. This makes sin basically injury to the interests of another person and damage to the collective life of the group (Pobee 1979, 102ff; Busia 1954, 207).

Such a view of morality does not resolve the problem of the assurance of moral transformation that the human conscience needs. For the real problem of our sinfulness is the soiled conscience and against this, purificatory

> *Our Saviour is our Elder Brother who has shared in our African experience in every respect, except our sin and alienation from God.*

rites and sacrificial offerings to achieve social harmony are ineffectual. Yet the view of sin as antisocial is also biblically valid: sin is indeed sin against another person and the community's interest. But human beings are the creation of God, created in God's image, so social sin is also sin against God. The blood of Abel cried to God against Cain (Genesis 4). The Gospel underscores the valid insight about the social nature of sin, but brings the need for expiation into a wider context. Sin is more than antisocial act; the sinner sins ultimately against a personal God with a will and purpose in human history.

Seen from this angle, the insights about Jesus Christ in the epistle to the Hebrews are perhaps the most crucial of all. Our Saviour has not just become one like us; he has died for us. It is a death with eternal sacrificial significance. It deals with our moral failures and infringements of social relationships. It heals our wounded and soiled consciences and overcomes once and for all and at their roots, all that in our heritage and somewhat melancholy history, brings us grief, guilt, shame and bitterness. Our Saviour is our Elder Brother who has shared in our *African* experience in every respect, except our sin and alienation from God, an alienation with which our myths of origins make us only too familiar. Being our true Elder Brother now in the presence of his Father and our Father, he displaces the mediatorial function of our natural "spirit-fathers." For these themselves need saving, having originated from among us. It is known from African missionary history that one of the first actions of new converts was to pray for their ancestors who had passed on before the Gospel was proclaimed. This is an important testimony to the depth of their understanding of Jesus as sole Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ, "the Second Adam" from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47) becomes for

us the only mediator between God and ourselves (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). He is the "mediator of a better covenant" (Hebrews 8:6), relating our human destiny directly to God. He is truly our high priest who meets our needs to the full.

From the understanding held about the spirit-world, the resurrection and ascension of our Lord also assume great importance. He has now returned to the realm of spirit and therefore of power. From the standpoint of Akan traditional beliefs, Jesus has gone to the realm of the ancestor spirits and the "gods." We already know that power and resources for living come from there, but the terrors and misfortunes which could threaten and destroy life come from there also. But if Jesus has gone to the realm of the "spirits and the gods," so to speak, he has gone there as Lord over them in the same way that he is Lord over us. He is Lord over the living and the dead, and over the "living-dead," as ancestors are also called. He is supreme over all gods and authorities in the realm of spirit, summing up in himself all their powers and cancelling any terrorising influence they might be assumed to have upon us.

The guarantee that Jesus is Lord also in the realm of spirits is that he has sent us his own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to dwell with us and be our protector, as well as Revealer of Truth and Sanctifier. In John 16:7ff, our Lord's insistence on going away to the Father includes this idea of his Lordship in the realm of spirits, as he himself enters the region of spirit. It also includes the idea of the protection and guidance that the coming Holy Spirit will provide for his followers in the world. The Holy Spirit is sent to convict the world of its sin in rejecting Jesus, and to demonstrate, to the shame of unbelievers, the true righteousness which is in Jesus and available only in him. He is also sent to reveal the spiritual significance of God's judgement upon the devil who deceives the world about its sin and blinds people to the perfect righteousness in Christ. Our Lord therefore, entering the region

of spirit, sends the Holy Spirit to his followers to give them understanding of the realities in the realm of spirits. The close association of the defeat and overthrow of the devil ("ruler of this world") with the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (John 12:31) is significant, and the thought of the "keeping" and protection of his followers from "the evil one" forms an important part of Jesus' prayer recorded in John 17, aptly described as his "high priestly" prayer.

The Epistle to the Hebrews as Our Epistle!

Turning to the epistle to the Hebrews, it has often been assumed that the problem of theology in New Testament

Jesus is Lord over the living and the dead, and over the "living-dead."
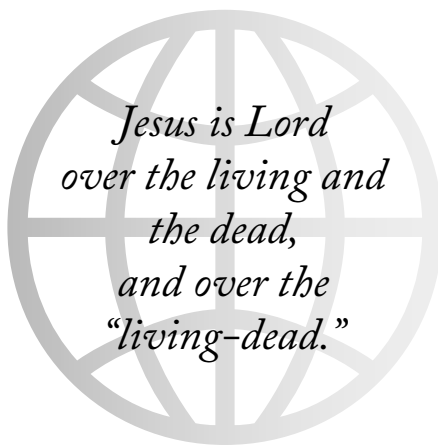
times was how to relate the Gospel to Gentile cultures and traditions. The meaning of Christ for Jewish religious tradition was thought to be relatively simple. The epistle to the Hebrews however corrects that error. The writer is aware that some Hebrews might be tempted to turn from the proclamation of the great salvation in Christ.

The clue to the epistle's teaching lies in its presentation of Christ. Hebrews is the one book in the New Testament in which Jesus Christ is understood and presented as High Priest. And yet, "If he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all . . ." Though our Saviour obviously does and did fulfil a High Priestly function in his redemptive work for us, the

problem arises when one has to justify that insight on the basis of Old Testament prophecies and anticipations. The fact is, "he was born a member of the tribe of Judah; and Moses did not mention this tribe when he spoke of priests" (Hebrews 7:14). The view of Christ in Hebrews involves making room in the tradition of priestly mediation for one who, at the purely human level, was an outsider to it. Just as an Akan might ask, "Why should [he] relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation?", so a similar question must have occurred to some Hebrews in time past and the epistle was written to answer that question.

The writer's approach is to work *from* the achievement of Jesus in the meaning of his death and resurrection, *into* the biblical tradition of sacrifice and high priestly mediation. In the process, the universality of the Lord from heaven as the Saviour of *all* people everywhere, forms the basis of the call to Hebrew people to take him seriously as *their* Messiah. Even more striking, the writer shows that the High Priesthood of Jesus is not after the order of Aaron, the first Hebrew High Priest, but after that of the enigmatic non-Hebrew, and greater priest-king, Melchizedek (Hebrews 7 and 8). Therefore, the priesthood, mediation and hence the salvation that Jesus Christ brings to all people everywhere belong to an entirely different category from what people may claim for their clan, family, tribal and national priests and mediators. The quality of the achievement and ministry of Jesus Christ for and on behalf of all people, together with who he is, reveal his absolute supremacy. As One who is fully divine, he nonetheless took on human nature in order to offer himself in death as sacrifice for human sin. Jesus Christ is unique not because he stands apart from us but because no one has identified so profoundly with the human predicament as he has, in order to transform it. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is rooted in his radical and direct significance for every human person,

every human context and every human culture. The value for us of the presentation of Jesus in Hebrews stems from its relevance to a society like ours with its deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation and ancestral function. In relation to each of these features of our religious heritage, Hebrews shows Jesus to be the answer to the spiritual longings and aspirations that our people have sought to meet through our traditions.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice as a way of ensuring a harmonious relationship between the human community and the realm of divine and mystical power, is a regular event in Ghanaian society. It is easy to assume that the mere performance of sacrifice is sufficient, yet the real problem is whether sacrifice achieves its purpose. Hebrews gives us the fundamental insight that since it is human sin and wrong-doing that sacrifice seeks to purge and atone for, no animal or sub-human victim can stand in for human beings. Nor can a sinful human being stand in for fellow sinners. The action of Jesus Christ, himself divine and sinless, in taking on human nature so as to willingly lay down his life for all humanity, fulfils perfectly the end that all sacrifices seek to achieve (Hebrews 9:12). No number of animal or other victims offered at any number of shrines can equal the one, perfect sacrifice made by Jesus Christ of himself for all time and for all peoples everywhere. To reject the worth of the achievement of Jesus Christ on the grounds of race, ethnicity, and cultural tradition, is to act against better knowledge, distort religious truth, and walk into a blind alley, in the words of Hebrews, to court "the fearful prospect of judgement and the fierce fire which will destroy those who oppose God" (10:27).

Priestly Mediation

If the quality of Jesus' self-offering in death sets his sacrifice above all and achieves perfect atonement, so his priestly mediation surpasses all others. Jesus had no human hereditary claim to

The value of Jesus in Hebrews stems from its relevance to our deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation, and ancestral function.

priesthood (Hebrews 7:14; 8:4), so the way is open for appreciating his priestly ministry for what it truly is. His taking of human nature enabled him to share the human predicament and so qualified him to act for humanity. His divine origin ensures that he is able to mediate between the human community and the divine realm in a way no human priest can. As himself God-man, Jesus bridges the gulf between the Holy God and sinful humanity, achieving for humanity the harmonious fellowship with God that all human priestly mediations only approximate.

Yet his priestly ministry takes place not in an earthly temple or shrine, but in the realm where it really matters, where all issues are decided, in the divine presence (Hebrews 9:24). But his priestly mediation has done more than act "on our behalf." It actually ends priestly mediation by bringing into the divine presence all who by faith associate themselves with him. The meeting of the perfect sacrifice with the perfect priestly mediation in the one person, Jesus Christ, means that having identified with humanity in order to taste death on behalf of humanity (Hebrews 2:14–15), he has opened the way for all who identify with him to be with him in the divine presence (Hebrews 10:19–20). This unique achievement renders all other priestly mediations obsolete and reveals their ineffectiveness. To disregard the surpassing worth of the priestly mediation of Jesus Christ for all people everywhere and to choose ethnic priesthoods in the name of cultural heritage, is to fail to recognise the true meaning and end of all priestly mediation, to abdicate from belonging within the one community of humanity, to clutch at the shadow and miss the substance. The thrust of Hebrews is that such error is not only unredeemable, it is also utterly unnecessary.

Ancestral Function

Of the three features of our traditional heritage we are considering, ancestral function seems to be the one to which Jesus Christ least easily answers. Ancestors are lineage or family ancestors and so are by nature ours. So the cult of ancestors may be said to be beyond the reach of Christian argument. If the cult of ancestors is valid, here is solid ground on which traditional religion can take a firm stand. It is precisely here that the problem lies. In what does the validity of the cult of ancestors consist? Since not all become ancestors but only those who lived exemplary lives and from whom the community derived some benefit, are not ancestors in effect a projection into the transcendent realm of the social values and spiritual expectations of the living community? Since traditional society views existence as an integrated whole, linking the living and the departed in a common life, such a projection is understandable. Yet the essential point is that ancestors have no existence independent of the community that produces them. The cult of ancestors provides the basis for locating in the transcendent realm the source of authority and power in the community and gives to leadership itself a sacred quality.

Strictly speaking, the cult of ancestors, from the intellectual point of view, belongs to the category of myth, ancestors being the product of the myth-making imagination of the community. To characterise the cult of ancestors as "myth" is not to say that the cult is unworthy of serious attention. The term stresses the functional value of the cult of ancestors. For myth is sacred, enshrining and expressing the most valued elements of a community's self-understanding. The cult of ancestors as myth points to the role of the cult in ensuring social harmony, by strengthening the ties that knit together all sections and generations

of the community, the present with the past and those as yet unborn. On each occasion of heightened feeling in the community—birth, outdooring of infants, initiation into adulthood, marriage, death, the installation of a king and celebration of harvests—the cult of ancestors forms an essential part of the ritual ceremonies that secure the conditions upon which the life and continuity of the community are believed to depend.

It is also important to realise that since ancestors do not originate from the transcendent realm, it is the myth-making imagination of the community itself that sacralises them, conferring upon them the sacred authority that they exercise through those in the community, like kings, who also expect to become ancestors. The potency of the cult of ancestors is not the potency of ancestors themselves; the potency of the cult is the potency of myth.

Once the meaning of the cult of ancestors as myth is granted and its "function" is understood within the overall religious life of traditional society, it becomes clear how Jesus Christ fulfils our aspirations in relation to ancestral function too. Ancestors are considered worthy of honour for having "lived among us" and for having brought benefits to us; Jesus Christ has done infinitely more. They, originating from among us, had no choice but to live among us. But he, reflecting the brightness of God's glory and the exact likeness of God's own being (Hebrews 1:3), took our flesh and blood, shared our human nature and underwent death for us to set us free from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14–15). He who has every reason to abandon sinful humans to their just deserts is not ashamed to call us his brethren (Hebrews 2:11). Our natural ancestors had no barriers to cross to live among us and share our experience. His incarnation implies that he has achieved a far more profound identification with us in our humanity than the mere ethnic solidarity of lineage ancestors can ever do. Jesus Christ surpasses our natural ancestors also by virtue of

who he is in himself. Ancestors, even described as "ancestral spirits," remain essentially human spirits; whatever benefit they may be said to bestow is effectively contained by the fact of their being human. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, took on human nature without loss to his divine nature. Belonging in the eternal realm as Son of the Father (Hebrews 1:1, 48; 9:14), he has taken human nature into himself (Hebrews 10:19) and so, as God-man, he ensures an infinitely more effective ministry to human beings (Hebrews 7:25) than can be said of merely human ancestral spirits.

The writer of Hebrews, confronted by the reality of the eternal nature of Jesus Christ, falls back on the enigmatic Melchizedek of Genesis 14:17–20 for

> *The potency of the ancestor cult is the potency of myth.*
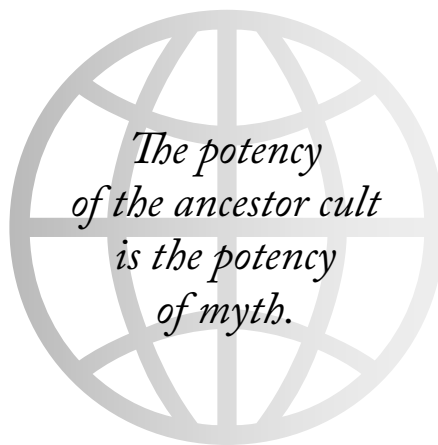
analogy; without father or mother, without beginning or end, he (Melchizedek) is like the Son of God (Jesus Christ). The likeness is only in thought. For Jesus has actually demonstrated, through his resurrection from the dead, the possession of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16). This can never be said of ancestors. The persistence of the cult of ancestors is owed, not to their demonstrable power to act, but to the power of the myth that sustains them in the corporate mind of the community. The presumption that ancestors actually function for the benefit of the community can be seen as part of the same myth-making imagination that projects departed human beings into the transcendent realm. While not denying that spiritual forces

do operate in the traditional realm, we can maintain that ancestral spirits, as human spirits that have not demonstrated any power over death, the final enemy, cannot be presumed to act in the way tradition ascribes to them.

Since ancestral function as traditionally understood is now shown to have no basis in fact, the way is open for appreciating more fully how Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors. By his unique achievement in perfect atonement through his own self-sacrifice, and by effective eternal mediation and intercession as God-man in the divine presence, he has secured eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12) for all who acknowledge who he is for them and what he has done for them, who abandon the blind alleys of merely human traditions and rituals, and instead, entrust themselves to him. As mediator of a new and better covenant between God and humanity (Hebrews 8:6; 12:24), Jesus brings the redeemed into the experience of a new identity in which he links their human destinies directly and consciously with the eternal, gracious will and purpose of a loving and caring God (Hebrews 12:22–24). No longer are human horizons bounded by lineage, clan, tribe or nation. For the redeemed now belong within the community of the living God, in the joyful company of the faithful of all ages and climes. They are united through their union with Christ, in a fellowship infinitely richer than the mere social bonds of lineage, clan, tribe or nation that exclude the stranger as a virtual enemy.

Reading and Hearing the Word of God in Our Own Language

Once we discover that there is no valid alternative to Jesus Christ, the question is no longer: why should we relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to our clan, family, tribe and nation? But, how may we understand more

fully this Jesus Christ who relates to us most meaningfully and most profoundly in our clan, family, tribe and nation? A helpful way of growing in understanding is to read and listen to the Word of God in our own languages.

In matters of religion, no language speaks to the heart, mind and innermost feelings as does our mother-tongue. The achievement of Christianity with regard to this all-important place of language in religion is truly unique. For Christianity is, among all religions, the most culturally translatable, hence the most truly universal, being able to be at home in every cultural context without injury to its essential character. For a Scriptural religion rooting religious authority in a particular collection of sacred writings, this achievement is remarkable. Its explanation must lie with Christianity's refusal of a "sacred" language. With the exception of the dominant role of Latin in the European phase of Christianity and in some sectors of Roman Catholicism, Christianity has developed as a "vernacular" faith. The significance of this has been most marked in Africa, where the early possession of the Scriptures in mother-tongue meant that African peoples had access to the original sources of Christian teaching, on the authority of which they could, if need be, establish their own churches. Each of us with the Bible in our mother-tongue can truly claim to hear God speaking to us in our own language.

The importance of this fact is theological. The Christian belief that the Bible in the vernacular remains in every respect the Word of God, has its basis in what took place on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, through the first Christian witnesses, spoke at one and the same time to people "who had come from every country in the world" (Acts 2:5 GNB), each in his own language, causing them to "hear the great things that God has done" in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1–12). Hearing the Word of God in our own language is not to be sneered at and left to "illiterates"; it

*I*f Akan speakers read their Bibles only in English, they may not realize the traditional Odwira purificatory ritual is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

is essential if we seriously seek growth in our understanding of Jesus Christ. A final illustration from the epistle to the Hebrews clarifies the point:

> When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (RSV). After achieving forgiveness for the sins of mankind, he sat down in heaven at the right hand side of God, the Supreme Power (GNB). (Hebrews 1:3b)

If Akan speakers read their Bibles only in the English versions and neglect the Word of God in their own language, it is conceivable that they would dutifully participate in every annual *Odwira* Festival without ever realising that the traditional purificatory rituals of Odwira, repeated year after year, have in fact been fulfilled and transcended by the one, perfect Odwira that Jesus Christ has performed once for all (Hebrews 1:3 in Twi: *ode n'ankasa ne ho dwiraa yen bone no)*. Jesus has thus secured eternal redemption for all who cease from their own works of purification and trust in him and his perfect Odwira; that it is Jesus Christ *in himself*, (the Twi here—*ode n'ankasa ne ho*—being more expressive than the English versions), who has become our Odwira. The Odwira to end all odwiras has taken place through the death of Jesus Christ. **IJFM**

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"Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?": A Response to Harley Talman

by Ayman Ibrahim

Editor's Note: Talman's "Is Muhammad Also among the Prophets?" appeared in IJFM 31:4.

In his ambitious article, Harley Talman argues that the vast majority of Christians have perceived Muhammad in a wrong way for the past thirteen centuries by depicting him as a false prophet. He calls on Christians to "allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet in the biblical sense." He believes that there is "theological, missiological, and historical" support for Muhammad's prophethood. At a minimum, we should congratulate Talman for trying new and creative avenues of thought. Unfortunately, in my judgment, this particular path ultimately proves to be a dead end. I fundamentally disagree with his major argument. To allow for the possibility of "true prophethood" for Muhammad, from a Christian point of view, one must intentionally ignore or avoid specific biblical references and must also stretch some historical evidence a bit too far. In what follows, I will provide five critical observations to demonstrate briefly that Talman fails to interact with crystal clear, relevant, biblical passages, mishandles and overemphasizes marginally relevant historical cases, and relies heavily and *selectively* on secondary studies without acknowledging the counter arguments offered against them. I will show how the core of his argument cannot be accepted even by Muslims, which, in a sense, violates the primary aim of the author in "seeking constructive dialogue with Muslims" based on his affirmation of Muhammad's prophethood.

First, in his attempt to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category, Talman fails to examine 1 John 4:1–3,

> Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

This passage is echoed in 1 John 2:22–23 with respect to the sonship of Jesus to God the Father, and in 2 John 1:7, linking the Antichrist with the deception of denying that Jesus is the Christ who came in the flesh. These New Testament passages are crucial to identifying a true prophet. The test here is not concerned with the moral behavior of the one who claims to be a prophet, but rather

with his theological claims about the coming of Christ in flesh. Relying on its immediate context, one may ask: Did Muhammad really confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, i.e. that he was God-incarnate? The answer is no. For Muhammad, Jesus was merely a prophet, nothing more.

Before we even consider the claims of any other Muslim source, what about the Qur'ān? It is nearly universally acknowledged by all scholars that the Qur'ān is the earliest Muslim source, and is considered to be Islam's scripture, the purportedly "revealed" message received and proclaimed by Muhammad. From a Qur'ānic vantage point, Jesus never existed before his birth. He was not God, nor the Son of God, nor God-incarnate. He was only a prophet sent by Allah like many other prophets. Thus, based on the three NT passages cited above, Muhammad fails to pass the test of prophethood—from *this* biblical standpoint, he is to be identified with false prophets, and can hardly be identified as a true prophet of God, that is, the only God, at last and definitively revealed to us in Christ, the Son, the Word of God.

Second, Talman, in his determination to deny that Muhammad was perceived as a false prophet in the earliest Muslim period, is willing to make claims that seem to be actually contradicted by what evidence we do possess. He states: "It is significant that during the first century [of Islam] Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet." This is not only inaccurate, but clearly wrong. One of the earliest references to Muhammad by Christians identifying him as "false prophet" is dated 634 AD—only two years after his death. *(Doctrina Jacobi* V. 16, 209, cited in Hoyland 1997, 57). However, this is not to suggest that this claim was the only perception concerning Muhammad, neither to argue for its truthfulness, nor to deny its biased attitude. It is simply to demonstrate that Talman's broad assertion is fundamentally inaccurate and cannot support his argument. In the first century of Islam, Muhammad was depicted in Christian sources in various ways: a conquest initiator, trader, king, monotheist revivalist, lawgiver, and false prophet (Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings," 276–295). Non-Muslims did attempt to make sense of the growing power of the invading Arabs coming from the desert who were conquering the superpowers of that era. Muhammad, in one of the depictions, contrary to Talman's argument, was clearly viewed as a false prophet leading "the vengeful and God-hating" Arabs. (As per Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (d. *ca.* 639) in Hoyland 1997, 72–73).

Third, in various parts of his article, Talman equates and conflates "speaking of Muhammad with due respect" and "identifying him as a prophet." These are two entirely different matters. We can, and actually should, speak of Muhammad with due respect, but that does not suggest that we have to affirm a prophethood that violates biblical passages. Consider Talman's use of the example of Patriarch Timothy I to support the argument for the legitimacy

*T*he fact that an eighth-century ecclesiastical leader may, or may not, have entertained the possibility that Muhammad was a prophet hardly constitutes clear direction for our theological estimation of the Muslim prophet.

of Muhammad's prophethood. The author simply uses this example as an affirmative one without providing any historical context or background for the Patriarch's assertion. In 782, almost 155 years after Muhammad's death, at a period of the highest power of the Abbasid Caliphate, Patriarch Timothy conducted his debate with the Muslim Caliph al-Mahdi. The Patriarch did speak of Muhammad with respect, but never stated that Muhammad was a true prophet, or even "a prophet in the biblical sense" as Talman's article argues. In fact, Talman himself is uncertain of his own reliance on Timothy's assertion and states: "It can be argued that Timothy cautiously affirmed Muhammad as a prophet. . . ." This disclaimer demonstrates how fragile his argument actually is, and how very weak are his historical lines of evidence. Talman stretched the story a bit too far by taking Timothy's words about Muhammad (as having "walked in the way of the prophets") to mean that Timothy thought of Muhammad as a true prophet.

But, what about the historical context? Nothing is offered by the author. He provides this story to support his argument for Muhammad's prophethood, although the context and stated lines of the debate suggest only a respectful manner on the part of the Patriarch in speaking of Muhammad. Moreover, what may we expect from a Patriarch speaking about Muhammad in the presence of a Muslim caliph? If this story actually took place, then Timothy did the correct thing by speaking of Muhammad respectfully. Undoubtedly, Timothy was also mindful of his people living in the Caliphate of al-Mahdi. Furthermore, assuming hypothetically that Timothy had actually affirmed Muhammad's prophethood, what would that indicate for Christians today? The fact that an eighth-century ecclesiastical leader may, or may not, have entertained the possibility that Muhammad was a prophet, in and of itself hardly constitutes obvious and clear direction for our theological estimation of the Muslim prophet. To question the grounds on which Talman singles out Timothy's views, as well as how he interprets Timothy's statements, is not to belittle Timothy's stature. Nonetheless, it would be equally possible to take other ancient Eastern Christian elites as examples, arguing that the far less favorable views (of Muhammad) of Patriarch Sophronius (d. 638), John of Damascus (d. 749), and al-Kindi (fl. 9th century) are actually more instructive for the church.

Fourth, Talman's article is laced with speculative terms such as "possibility" and "some kind," repeating them over and over. This engenders little confidence in his overall argument, especially when one considers his *selective* use of

secondary studies while ignoring the counter arguments. One of the scholarly arguments favored by Talman is that "Muhammad began his mission as [the leader of] an ecumenical movement of monotheist 'Believers' that included numbers of Jews and Christians." However, this argument has been strongly criticized by various scholars as radically fanciful. (See the reviews of Fred Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers* by Gerald Hawting, Robert Hoyland, Patricia Crone, and Jack Tannous). Talman simply does not inform us about the counter claims, most likely because they pose difficulties for his claims. He adopts a theory, accepts it, affirms it, and uses it to support his position. But this hopeful "ecumenical movement" is notable for its absence in some of the earliest sources. We have a Syriac document, the *Maronite Chronicle,* dating from the 660s, almost three decades after Muhammad's death, which "refers to Mu'āwiya's issuing of gold and silver coins that broke from the widely used [Christian] Byzantine coin type, no longer including the traditional depiction of the cross" (Penn 2015, 55). This suggests that Muslims, as early as 660, refused to use Christian elements on their coinage, which refutes a notion of "an ecumenical movement," and rebuts the core argument of Talman regarding a true prophet leading a monotheistic ecumenical movement. Even the "earliest" Islamic text, the Qur'ān, is not clearly supportive of this "ecumenical theory," as it contains polemic verses against Christians and their various doctrines such as the trinity, incarnation, and crucifixion. While Talman seems to favor the debatable notion that Muhammad and the Qur'ān reacted to some fringe heretical Christian groups and not to mainstream Christianity (187), this argument is convincingly dismissed by many scholars, such as Sidney Griffith and Gabriel Reynolds. (See Griffith 2008, 7–9; Reynolds, "On the Presentation of Christianity," 2014, 42–54).

Fifth, the model of Muhammad's prophethood offered by Talman can hardly be accepted even by faithful Muslims. Consider these claims by Talman: "[Muhammad's] message brought nothing significantly new; rather it was a confirmation of the message of the biblical Scriptures in an Arabic language," and "[Muhammad's] utterances do not supersede biblical authority," let alone his statement: "As Christians, we do not regard the Qur'ān to be utterly infallible and authoritative." These claims are problematic and can never be accepted by any Muslim.

Therefore, is Muhammad a prophet? Yes, indeed, he is a prophet for Muslims, but not for Christians. With these five abovementioned observations, it appears that Talman

makes a radical claim, relies on several *selected* secondary sources that agree with it, offers little in the way of evidence from primary sources to support it, and then calls Christians to go against clear New Testament teaching to support Muhammad's true prophethood. When evidence offered by secondary studies supports his claim it is emphasized; when primary sources contradict him it is downplayed. Talman's approach to Islam is hardly the only thoughtful Christian option. There are a variety of possible, nuanced Christian approaches to Muhammad which, even if they do not satisfy, let alone replicate, a Muslim view of their prophet, are theologically honest, historically attested, and missiologically measured. Out of love for Muslim friends, Christians need to speak of Muhammad with due respect, but they cannot go against clear biblical descriptions of prophethood to grant him titles he does not merit.

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My Response to Ayman Ibrahim

by Harley Talman

I thank the esteemed Ayman Ibrahim for expending the time and effort to respond to this complex and important issue. As he affirmed, it was rather "ambitious" to attempt to undertake it. Not surprisingly, there were some issues or aspects that I did not address in sufficient detail. Dr. Ibrahim's knowledge and expertise in this domain are clearly evident, and enabled him to raise questions and challenges that many others could not. I will endeavor to respond to his comments following the five points in his outline.

Point One
First of all, Ibrahim alleges that I *"attempt to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category."* Unfortunately, for those who do not clearly recall the argument of my article, this statement may misconstrue my position—given that the major thrust of my article was to call for moving the discussion beyond such binary thinking about prophethood. I am not arguing that Muhammad is a "true prophet" as traditionally conceived (on par with biblical prophets in the canon of scripture), but as one who could have a prophetic function or prophetic role of some other order.

As for applying the "test" of 1 John 4:1–3, I would first caution against assuming that Ibrahim's interpretation of its significance and its applicability to Muhammad are so straightforward. This is because several aspects are debated by biblical scholars.

1. Some (e.g., Keener[1]) believe this confession is a test for docetists who denied the full humanity of Christ whom they assert only *appeared* to be human. A good translation would be, "If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God" (New Living Translation). Raymond Brown holds that the issue was not a denial of "the incarnation or the physical reality of Jesus' humanity," but a high Christology that could have been "relativizing the importance of Jesus' earthly life" to his messiahship.[2] I am sure that Ibrahim would agree that Muhammad and the Qur'an do not deny Jesus' full humanity.

2. Others (e.g., Stott, Hiebert[3]) see it as rejecting the Cerinthian heresy which asserted that the "Christ Spirit" only came upon Jesus at his baptism and departed prior to his death. The Qur'an says Jesus was Christ from his birth (Surah 3:45).

3. A case can be made for 1 John 4:1-3 referring again to the denial that "Jesus is the Christ" that appears in 2:22, the affirmation of this truth in 5:1, and the parallel in John 9:22. The test may be a variation of that same denial. Muhammad could hardly be guilty of denying this, for the Qur'an repeatedly refers to Jesus as the *al-Masih* (the Messiah/Christ).

4. Many, like Ibrahim, view the test as a confession of the incarnation. If this is the correct meaning, the negative judgment of Muhammad put forward by Ibrahim is based on a particular interpretation of the Qur'an. While we can say that Islamic theology eventually developed arguments against the incarnation, this does not necessarily reflect the view of the historical Muhammad; for the Qur'an can be read as affirming the incarnation of the word.

A key passage is Surah 3:45: "The angels declared, 'Mary, God announces to you good news of a word from him *(kalimatin minhu)* whose name is Christ Jesus, son of Mary . . .'" What I find remarkable in this verse is the attaching of the masculine pronominal suffix to "name" *(ismuhu)* instead of the feminine suffix *(ha),* since the pronoun would be expected to match the grammatical gender of its feminine antecedent, "word" *(kalima).* This grammatical feature could conceivably be a theological parallel to the Christian Arabic translation of John 1 (Van Dyck-Bustani) which uses the masculine case verb with the feminine case *kalima,* seeking to convey the personality of the pre-incarnate Word.

However, if the masculine pronominal suffix in "his word" *(ismuhu)* is taken as pointing forward to the proper noun "Jesus," it is very significant that the word from God has a specific name ("Christ Jesus, son of Mary").

Elsewhere (4:171) the Qur'an declares that Jesus is "his word *(kalimatuhu)* which he cast down/spoke to Mary." This construct in Arabic grammar clearly indicates that

*T*imothy was not kowtowing to a powerful sovereign. He and al–Mahdi were friends and were engaging in honest dialogue. But as patriarch he had to be careful in his choice of words.

Jesus is *"the* word of God"—even if most Muslims try to make it mean *a* word. Moreover, 4:171 implies that the word existed before God cast it down to Mary, supporting the idea of incarnation.

Such high views of 'Isa as the word of God are not exclusively Christian readings of the Qur'an. Muhammad Sarwar translates this verse:

> "Behold," the angels told Mary, "God has given you the glad news of the coming birth of a son whom He calls His Word, whose name will be Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, who will be a man of honor in this life and the life to come, and who will be one of the ones nearest to God."

Al-Tabari's early commentary on the Qur'an cites Ibn Abbas's observation, "God calls this son which is in thy womb his word."[4] Jesus is not merely created by the word of God, but he is that word. Thus, it is possible to read the Qur'an in ways that harmonize with the incarnation of the word.

In this light, let me also comment on Ibrahim's assertion that for Muhammad, *"Jesus was merely a prophet, nothing more."* While this may hold true for later developments in Islamic tradition and apologetics, many Muslim theologians acknowledge the need for and the legitimacy of recovering original Qur'anic meanings.[5] For example, a modern Muslim authority suggests that Surah 4:157 is not a denial of the death of Jesus, but that "the Qur'an was speaking about the Word of God who was sent to earth and who returned to God. Thus, the denial of Jesus' killing is a denial of the power of men to destroy the Divine Word."[6] To regard Jesus as the Divine Word indicates he is more than a mere human. I refer again to Parrinder's summary of Muhammad's exalted teaching about Jesus Christ. As for the denial that Jesus is the "son of God," the Qur'an rejects the unbiblical notion of God sexually procreating with a human consort. For a more detailed response to Ibrahim's view of the Qur'an's teaching, see the discussions of its Christology in the endnote.[7]

Point Two

Ibrahim rejects my assertion that *"during the first century [of Islam] Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet."* At first glance, his citation from *Doctrina Jacobi* would appear to refute my statement. But my assertion conveys the conclusion of C. Jonn Block's analysis which I encourage readers to consult. However, I will here respond to the two specific reports which Ibrahim contests.

First, the comment about the Arab prophet in *Doctrina Jacobi* is not actually an evaluation of the Arab prophet.

Essentially a footnote at the end of a 100 page tract, it is a mere cursory rejection of expedience. Block concludes:

> In terms of Christian-Muslim relations, it can be considered little more than the opportunistic dismissal of the prophet of the Saracens in order to bolster the position of Jesus in a tract intended to convert Jews to Christianity…[8]

> The prophet of the Saracens here is interpreted in the context of the Jewish messianic concept. The Jews heard rumors about an Arab prophet and are interpreting the military success of his followers as potential evidence that the unknown prophet is the Jewish Messiah. The Christian author of the tract dispels the rumor, and instead propagates the messiahship of Jesus to its Jewish audience. The tract is highly informative on Jewish-Christian relations, and is a very early mention of the prophet of the Saracens, but carries little, if any useful information on Christian-Muslim relations as the author himself has little if any direct experience with the Arabs.[9]

Ibrahim also cites Sophronius as refuting my assertion. However, in his strong reaction to the conquest of Jerusalem, Sophronius says nothing about Muhammad, the Qur'an, Muslims or Islam, but only that they were Saracens who were "godless" and brutal. As Spencer observes, Sophronius "shows no awareness that the Arabians had a prophet at all or were even Muslims."[10] Similarly, without doubt, Muslims inside the walls of Jerusalem, when the attacking Crusaders turned it into a blood bath, would have uttered similar expressions about the Christian invaders. But, in so doing, they would not be giving any indications of their views about Jesus Christ. Block concludes that Eastern Christians distinguished between Muhammad's teaching and wicked acts of his followers.[11]

Point Three

Ibrahim's third main point argues that I overstated the significance of Patriarch Timothy—whom he believes merely showed respect for Muhammad, but did not grant him prophetic significance. If we look at the broader context (which he asserts that I failed to do), we find that Timothy is doing more than this. By stating that Muhammad "walked in the way of the prophets" Timothy was not kowtowing to a powerful sovereign. He and al-Mahdi were friends and were engaging in honest dialogue. But as patriarch of the largest church of his time, he had to be careful in his choice of words, lest Christians who had less favorable views of the caliph misunderstand his words and accuse him of conversion to Islam.[12] Later in the dialogue, Timothy goes on to cite the Qur'an:

> I also heard that it is written in the Qur'an that Christ is the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and not a servant. If Christ

*W*hat scholars find less persuasive is that this Islamic "Believers movement" would have included those who self–identified as Jews and Christians and the validity of the term "ecumenical" to describe them.

is the Word of God and Spirit of God as the Qur'an testifies, He is not a servant, but a Lord, because the Word and Spirit of God are Lords. It is by this method, O our God-loving King, based on the law of nature and on *divinely inspired words* and not on pure human argumentation, word and thought, that I both in the present and in the first conversation have demonstrated the Lordship and Sonship of Christ and the divine trinity (emphasis mine).[13]

Block observes,

It is not at all disguised here that in Timothy's appeal to Q4:171 as the foundation of a Qur'anic trinitarian theology, he has likewise rendered the words to which he appeals as "divinely inspired." Timothy is not simply employing the Qur'an as a debating tool [but] believes the Qur'an and Muhammad to be "voices of his trinitarian God."[14]

Therefore, is not Timothy attributing, at least in some measure, a prophetic function to Muhammad?

As far as John of Damascus (d. 749) and al-Kindi being "more instructive for the church," I think that they have been. John of Damascus marked the turning point for the church in following the polemical approach as the dominant model for Muslim-Christian relations. But this is unfortunate as more conciliatory approaches like Timothy's also existed. However, as I stated, Timothy I is not unique among Christian leaders and theologians who grant a prophetic role to Muhammad (e.g., Herman Bavinck, Johan Bavinck, Martin Accad, Bill Musk, Charles Ledit, Timothy Tennent, Anton Wessels, H. Montgomery Watt, Guilio Basetti-Sani, Hans Kung, and Kenneth Cragg).

Point Four
In regard to Ibrahim's rejection of a proposed ecumenical movement that first included Jews and Christians, I am grateful for his informing me about the critical reviews of Donner's book, for I was not aware of them. Nonetheless, what is important to the main thesis of my article is not what is the major focus of these criticisms, but what is consistent with Hawting's conclusion:

Many scholars today would accept elements of Donner's thesis. That what became Islam only gradually took on a distinct identity, and that the reign of 'Abd al-Malik provides the first clear evidence of the assertion of that identity, are propositions that would receive significant support. That neither the new Arab rulers nor their non-Arab subjects at first called the religion of the Arabs "Islam" can also be supported by the evidence.[15]

I, like Hawting, doubt the "religious and moral valuation . . . that Muslim sources give to events." What Hawting and

others find "less persuasive" is that this "Believers movement" would have included those who self-identified as Jews or Christians and the validity of the term "ecumenical" to describe them.[16] But what is meant by "ecumenical"? Was their primary self-identity that of a non-confessional monotheist community? In light of the critical reviews Ibrahim refers to, I would agree that this is debated. Although it cannot be *proven*, given the limited archaeological evidence, Donner's proposal is at least *consistent with* that evidence. Elsewhere Donner builds his case for such an inclusive community's self-identity based on a study of the Qur'an.[17] However, what is important to my argument and what seems unassailable is that Jews and Christians participated in the conquests (cf. the testimonies of John of Sedreh and John of Phenek). Therefore, the movement had to have been inclusive, even if the nature and prominence of religious motivations is debated.

Secondly, Ibrahim quotes Michael Penn on the *Maronite Chronicle* regarding removal of Christian elements on the coinage as rebutting the possibility of a monotheistic ecumenical movement. However, if we read Penn more carefully, he states,

Alternatively, it may be an anachronism based on the author's knowledge of 'Abd al-Malik's famous coin reform in the 690s. As a result, it remains uncertain whether the *Maronite Chronicle* was written in the mid-seventh century or simply comes from a later author well informed about the 660s.[18]

And even if we accept the early date as correct, would we not expect the eventual elimination of symbols unique to one particular faith tradition, if a movement was truly "ecumenical"? Moreover, as I noted, coins continued to display Christian symbols for up to a century.[19]

Finally on this point, I do agree with Ibrahim that the issue of whether certain qur'anic verses are critical of mainstream Christianity, or heretical groups, is debated. However, I would encourage engagement with studies such as Block's that give support to my position. Moreover, the Qur'an's commitment to the sole deity of God—a commitment shared by biblical Christianity—should be a determinative consideration in interpreting those texts that address various Christian entities (e.g. Surah 4:171[20]). This is especially so, given the multitude of verses stating that Qur'an's purpose is to confirm, not contradict, the teaching of the biblical scriptures.

Point Five
Lastly, Ibrahim faults my proposals for not being helpful in "seeking constructive dialogue with Muslims." I will agree that the possibilities explored differ greatly from

typical Islamic views of Muhammad's prophethood. But surely my proposal would find greater favor with Muslims than the common Christian contention that he was a false prophet—even when said "with respect." Would not a Christian who says, "I respect Muhammad as having a prophetic role, function or mission, even though I do not consider him a prophet the way that you do," find more favor with Muslims than one who says, "I respect Muhammad, even though he is a false prophet"?

I would add here that it is not necessary for us to conclusively determine the nature of this prophetic role, if we apply Gamaliel's wisdom to this question. Even though he was not convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, Gamaliel was prepared to allow that God had created the Jesus movement.[21]

However, as Martin Accad has observed in his response to my article, my examination of this issue in the interests of dialogue is aimed primarily at Christians—as it directly affects our attitude, and our view of Muhammad directly affects our view of Islam. And as Accad declares:

> Your *view* of Islam will affect your *attitude* to Muslims. Your *attitude* will, in turn, influence your *approach* to Christian-Muslim interaction, and that *approach* will affect the ultimate *outcome* of your presence as a witness among Muslims."[22]

In closing, I appreciate Ibrahim's interacting with my article and raising questions and objections that surely reflect the concerns of others. He has helped me refine my thinking and has shown the need for further discussion of some issues. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 743.

[2] Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John,* The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 505.

[3] John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 154; D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 182.

[4] *Tafsir al-Tabari* 3:45, cited in Rodney Cardoza, "New Paths in Muslim-Christian Dialog: Understanding Islam from the Light of Earliest Jewish Christianity," *The Muslim World* 103, no. 4 (October 2013), 448–463.

[5] Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century,* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 143.

[6] The view of Mahmoud Ayyub as expressed by Abdullah Saeed, 140.

[7] Guilio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977); C. Jonn Block, *Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends* (New York: Routledge, 2014) and "Historical Solutions to Some Problem Texts in Qur'anic Exegesis," a paper presented to Bridging the Divide, June 2013 http://btdnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Historical-Solutions-to-Problem-Texts-C-Jonn-Block.pdf; Rodney Cardoza, "New Paths";

Joseph Cumming, "Muslim Theologian Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari's Doctrine of God and Possible Christian Parallels," "Did Jesus Die on the Cross?," "The Word of God in Islam and Christianity," and "The Meaning of the Expression 'Son of God.'" http://faith.yale.edu/reconciliation-project/resources; Mark Harlan, "A Model for Theologizing in Arab Muslim Contexts" Evangelical Missiological Society Dissertation Series, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012), chapter 9.

[8] Block, 123.

[9] Block, 124.

[10] Robert Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist? An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2012), 28.

[11] Block, 126.

[12] See the numerous references to Timothy with Caliph Mahdi in C. Jonn Block, *Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 72–73, 93, 126–132.

[13] N. A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632–900 A.D.): Translations with Commentary* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 239, cited in Block, 93.

[14] Block, 93.

[15] Gerald Hawting, *Journal of Religion* 91, no. 2 \(April 2011): 284–85.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003): 9–53.

[18] Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam,* (Oakland: University of California Press), 56–57.

[19] Harley Talman, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" *IJFM* 31:4 (Oct–Dec 2014), 172, fn. 31.

[20] Here the Qur'an warns against exceeding the bounds in religion/theology. We are reminded not to say "three" gods, for He is one God. And we are exhorted to not confuse the Creator with creation by regarding Jesus' sonship as physical/biological.

[21] Theologian Kurt Anders Richardson recommended applying the Gamaliel test to this issue (personal communication, August, 2015).

[22] Martin Accad, "Christian Attitudes Toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach," in Evelyne A. Reisacher, ed., *Toward Respectful Understanding and Witness among Muslims: Essays in Honor of J. Dudley Woodberry* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 29–47.

Harley Talman has worked with Muslims for 30 years, including two decades in the Arab world and Africa, during which he was involved in church planting, theological education, and humanitarian aid. Talman holds a ThM from Dallas Seminary and a PhD from Fuller. He presently teaches Islamic studies.

Book Reviews

Paul and the Gift, by John M. G. Barclay (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015, pp. 656 including notes)

—*Reviewed by Brad Gill, Editor,* IJFM
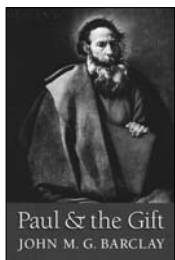
This 2015 book is about grace— God's grace—and in particular its centrality to the mission of the Apostle Paul. While it's tempting to think we've plumbed the depths of this subject, John Barclay will convince you otherwise. *Paul and the Gift* promises to be a turning point in biblical scholarship but should win a special place in missiology as well.

"Paul talked about grace in a missionary context";[1] Barclay's statement in a recent interview piqued my interest. But he really gripped my attention when he pointed out the critical shift that occurred during the Reformation, a shift that changed how the language of grace was used in its first century context. Grace became "less about converting people and more a point of dispute within the church itself." This observation reflects Barclay's respect for social context. In his book, Barclay clarifies just how the Reformers turned a first century missionary theology inward, focusing it toward the motives and self-understanding of Christians. For these later theologians, he says, the original context of Paul's Gentile mission "became a matter of merely historical interest" (570). My missiological reflexes reacted to these comments and I knew I had to buy Barclay's book.

One might expect from Durham University's Lightfoot Professor of Divinity a rather dense, scholarly tome, one that might spark little interest outside of its theological orbit. Instead, Barclay's book has already begun to gain substantial recognition within the rank and file of missiology. Far from being simple intellectual fodder for heavier biblical exegesis or abstract theological debate, Barclay's surprisingly elegant prose can strum the devotional strings of any heart tuned to the grace of God. On page after page, he provides rich and elaborate language to describe the ways in which grace touches our lives, often forcing the reader to stop mid-argument to ponder the way he reshapes our Christian assumptions. Admittedly, Barclay's treatment is quite technical and very comprehensive. *IJFM* readers wishing to gain a quick overview how it all fits within Pauline studies are referred to Scott McKnight's excellent review (see IOW, p. 214).[2]

As for my review here, I have in mind missiological readers who wish to understand Barclay's contribution on grace in mission contexts today. I believe this is one of those volumes that will require missiologists to deliberate just how biblical scholarship anchors our perspectives on mission. Sadly, at some 600 pages and a steep price (even Kindle is $60), the starving missiologist might have to wait for a used edition or find the closest library. Nevertheless, I hope to provide a short abstract on the way Barclay's study might mature contemporary missiology.

For the past four decades (while mission agencies have been championing the frontiers of mission), biblical scholarship has been wrestling with a controversial "new perspective on Paul." Barclay has entered the fray with a new synthesis, lacing together insights from this new perspective with an older perspective—one from the Reformation, which is about to celebrate its 500th anniversary. In short, this new perspective on Paul arose from a fresh contextual study of the Judaism of Paul's day (Second Temple Judaism). It generally concluded that the Apostle Paul's grasp of grace was not unique in rabbinical thought. This new perspective opposed the older conviction of biblical (and evangelical) scholarship that set Paul's understanding of grace against the Jewish understanding of Law (grace vs. works). Enter Barclay. While Barclay agrees that a study of the Judaism of Paul's day certainly indicates a wider and deeper appreciation of grace (his study in Part II), he also challenges the way this new perspective has unilaterally jumped to conclusions and "unwittingly created a spurious uniformity within Judaism" (564). Barclay weaves a more intricate understanding of how a rabbinical Paul understood grace (post-Damascus road), and he does it in a masterful exegesis of Galatians and Romans (his study in Part III).

In Part I, Barclay begins his study of Paul's understanding of grace from three vantage points—anthropological, linguistic and historical—each of which the missiologist can especially appreciate. The *anthropological* perspective is seldom given priority in these types of biblical studies. In his chapter "The Anthropology and History of Gift," Barclay places Paul's understanding of grace ("the gift") in the broad cultural study of gift-exchange.

> Since both Paul and his contemporaries used the normal vocabulary of gift, favor and benefaction in speaking of (what we call) "grace," we have located their discourse on this topic within the social domain that anthropologists label "gift." This conceptual frame has provided no templates, but it has alerted us to features of ancient gift-giving that modern Western eyes are apt to miss or to misconstrue. It also has afforded some analytical distance from the special connotations that have become attached to the term "grace." (562)

This is a remarkable beginning to any work of biblical scholarship, indicating the author's belief in the influence of cultural conditions on even the great apostle. Barclay expects that

*B*arclay's linguistic perspective distinguishes him from the "new perspective" on Paul which claimed that grace was understood everywhere in "Judaism." Yes, it was everywhere, but it was not everywhere understood the same.

Paul will construct the language of grace from the language, intentions, and meanings of reciprocal gift exchange in human society. But Barclay is no determinist, and he will prove in the arc of this study that Paul's understanding of grace overturns and shocks the normative ways of understanding gift-exchange in the first century. Unlike the new perspective on Paul, Barclay will isolate Paul as a radical minister of grace who counters both the Roman and Jewish expectations of grace.

Barclay's *linguistic* perspective distinguishes his scholarship from a new perspective on Paul that claimed that grace was understood everywhere in "Judaism." Yes, Barclay agrees that grace was everywhere, but it was not everywhere understood the same. He makes it clear how Jews and Christians can "discuss this common concept, using identical vocabulary with very different connotation" (563). In the chapter "The Perfections of Grace/Gift" Barclay introduces grace as a polyvalent symbol, a term that has multiple ways to perfect its meaning. He introduces six dimensions, meanings or aspects of grace: superabundance, singularity, priority, incongruity, efficacy and non-circularity.

> Each of these perfections configure gift in some maximal form, but none are necessary features of the concept, and crucially, none requires or even implies another. They are distinguishable perfections and do not constitute a "package deal." (563)

Each aspect becomes clearer to the reader as Barclay reviews and illustrates the use of these facets of grace throughout history. Suffice it to say that Barclay will demonstrate how Paul's understanding of grace (the Christ-Gift) will perfect one particular aspect, the *incongruity* of grace, in a manner that will surprise, aggravate and reverse the typical understandings of God's grace in the first century.

Here Barclay has done something remarkable for missiology. His comprehensive treatment of Paul's understanding of the meanings of grace is a thorough case study that can inform our study of all terms of polyvalent meaning in cross-cultural communication. His linguistic (and biblical) vantage point can be applied laterally to other mission contexts (one immediately thinks of more recent controversies on the nature and use of filial terms in translations into languages of Muslim people[3]).

In his "Interpreting Paul on Grace," Barclay takes the reader on a 110-page *historical* review of how key theological figures have perfected the meaning of grace in Paul. "Interpreting Paul on Grace" includes a treatment of Marcion, Augustine, Pelagius, Luther, Calvin, Barth, Bultmann, Kasemann, and Sanders (the New Perspective on Paul). His extensive treatment of Luther and Calvin clarifies the brilliant re-contextualization of grace

that transpired in the sixteenth century, and just how these Reformers each parsed the language of grace a bit differently from one another. However, Barclay makes it clear that the way Luther and Calvin spun Paul's understanding and application of the Christ-Event failed to fully appreciate Paul's primary usage in the first century. Barclay's appreciation for grace-in-context is what encourages missiologists to imagine how Paul's understanding of grace should impact those frontier settings that still remain today.

While biblical scholars may consider Barclay's thorough treatment of the new perspective as his seminal contribution ("Divine Gift in Second Temple Judaism," Part II, 139 pages), I refrain from any assessment here. I only wish to emphasize that this scholarship provides the backdrop for Barclay's excellent esposition of Galatians and Romans (Part III). Again, Barclay's ability to "disaggregate" the polyvalent meaning of grace allows him to delineate just how Paul's understanding of grace in Galatians and Romans sets the apostle apart from Second Temple Judaism. Barclay's linguistic precision prevents the broad brush of a New Perspective from glossing over Paul's distinctive understanding of grace.

So, while the reader must be patient and wait until Part III for his treatment of Galatians and Romans, all of Barclay's preliminary perspectives allow the reader to ascertain Paul's meaning of grace with fresh sensitivity to culture, linguistics and historical context. Again, there is a rich panoply of missiological vocabulary across this part of Barclay's study, but maybe the most important is captured in the title of his exposition of Galatians 1–2: "The Christ-Gift and the Recalibration of Norms." I don't think I have ever heard the role of the gospel described in those terms: "recalibration" and "norms." But Barclay will rehearse again and again, in multiple ways, the significance of this phrasing for Paul's pioneering context.

> Paul's notion of the incongruous Christ-gift was originally part of his missionary theology, developed for and from the Gentile mission at the pioneering stage of community formation. Since God's incongruous grace dissolves former criteria of worth, it forms the basis for innovative groups of converts, by loosening their ties to pre-constituted norms and uniting them in their common faith in Christ. The starting point is the framing of the Christ-event as gift. (566)

The key word here is "norms." Barclay understands that Paul perceived how the gospel would impact the normative criteria of worth (values) in a missionary context. He uses an arsenal of verbs to describe the impact of the Christ-event on any normative system of society: dissolve, scramble, violate, subvert, shatter, destroy, alter, subordinate, or loosen.

W*hat shocks Paul about the Galatian believers is that by adopting the socially-ratified standards of value embodied in the Torah they were confining the gift within pre-established systems of worth. (Barclay)*

But it's in the exposition of Galatians that Barclay pinpoints how the grace of God in the Christ-event impacts indigenous understanding of worth.

> Paul understands the single event of Christ to bring into question every pre-existent classification of worth. In figuring believers as "dead to the world" and as expressions of a "new creation" (Gal. 6:14–15), he articulates the birth of dissonant communities that are capable of disregarding distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female (Gal. 3:28). Such social identities continue to exist, but they are declared insignificant as markers of worth in a community that is beholden to Christ and operates "at a diagonal" to the normal taxonomies of value (Gal. 1:10–11) (567).

Barclay wants to establish that in a missionary context the Christ-gift is the new Archimedean point "at odds with the normative conventions that govern human systems of value" (355). The normative understanding of gift-giving, stated simply, was for Romans or Jews to calibrate their gifts towards those who were worth receiving a gift. Gifts were generous—but selective—according to the suitability, the worth, or the appropriateness of the receptor. It was expected that there should be a certain *congruity* of value between the giver and the recipient of the gift. The Jew understood that God would only give his gifts (grace) to worthy beneficiaries. He expected that his status as a Jew, and his adherence to the Law, gave him preference for receiving God's grace.

This was what we understand the Galatians were falling into, i.e., that a certain normative system (Torah) would give them preference for God's grace. Barclay interprets Paul as one who recalibrates this normative understanding of worth, for the Christ-event establishes a shocking *non-congruity (incongruity)* in God's grace. Paul's message to the Gentiles, his preaching of the Christ-gift, was that grace is conditioned neither by ethnicity nor Torah practice, and the insistence of circumcision for Gentiles represented a surrender to a normative system of worth that nullified the Christ-gift. The missionary Paul was primarily concerned to perfect the nature of this Christ-gift.

> The Christ-gift was not a Torah-event: it was not enacted, distributed, or experienced within the criteria of value established by the Torah. The initial and continuing gift of Christ's Spirit to Gentiles who do not practice the Torah is the phenomenological evidence that the Christ-event is not located within the framework of "living Jewishly." (2:14)

Barclay has done missiology a favor by recasting Paul's purpose in the language of worth, value and norms. Too often the pioneer mission context is viewed as a simple dialectic of dogma (worldview) and ritual (customs), but Barclay's anthropological venture emphasizes the values that have systematized in and around a particular mission context. Paul bore witness to an event that had broken the normal criteria of worth and would embed new standards of worth in the lives of those new believers.

Barclay is concerned that this unique perspective is lost in the re-contextualization of grace in sixteenth century Europe, and he uses his exegesis of Galatians to re-establish Paul's primary intentions.

> … What shocks him (Paul) about the Galatian believers is not that they are trusting in their own good works, as a subjective fault in self-understanding, which puts the self in the place of the sufficient work of Christ (Luther), but that, by adopting the socially ratified standards of value embodied in the Torah, they are confining the gift within pre-established systems of worth…to repackage this gift as given in alignment with Torah practice would be to transform it into a gift of "Judaism." (1:13, 14) For Paul, the cross cannot be thus contained without being nullified. (391)

In his final treatment of Romans, Barclay exposits how Paul continues to theologically embellish this concern that the incongruous Christ-gift nullifies "pre-established systems of worth." And that concern sets Paul apart from the subjective interpretation of grace that transpired during the Reformation. Missiologists will be grateful for the way Barclay's volume brings this missionary distinction to Paul, but they might also beckon Barclay to proceed further. They might want to probe how Paul understood the practical fallout from such a radical discontinuity of norms. Barclay can give the impression at times that norms (from the "Christ-gift") totally *replace* indigenous norms, that one system is substituted for another. On other occasions Barclay's language can suggest that it's simply a *transformation* of norms that takes place in each context. Missiologists would do well to invite Barclay into their enclaves and discuss these ambiguities. Together they might frame a "missiology of grace" for today's frontier context.

Endnotes

[1] "What's So Dangerous About Grace?" Interview of John Barclay by Wesley Hill in *Christianity Today,* December 31, 2015 http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/january-february/whats-so-dangerous-about-grace.html.

[2] "The Unexamined Grace," a review of Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* by Scot McKnight in *Books and Culture,* January-February 2016. http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2016/janfeb/unexamined-grace.html.

[3] See the Independent Bible Translation Review of WEA http://www.worldevangelicals.org/translation-review/.

Christians in South Indian Villages, 1959–2009: Decline and Revival in Telangana, Studies in the History of Christian Missions, by John B. Carmen and Chilkuri Vasantha Rao (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014, pp. 242 + xxiv)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard
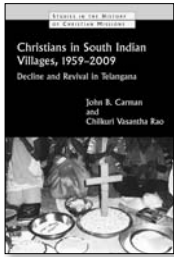
This is a follow-up study fifty years after an analysis of church life in rural Andhra Pradesh resulted in the book *Village Christians and Hindu Culture* (Luke and Carmen 2009/1968). As a stand-alone study there is much of value in this book; as a comparative study of the present and a half century ago it provides an invaluable look at transformations in Indian church life.[1]

The first study focused on the Church of South India (CSI), which was by far the dominant church in the area. That is one of the changes fifty years later—the sprouting of many independent Christian congregations and the decline of the CSI.

> The first significant development, then, is the decline of the older congregations. The second development, equally significant and perhaps more surprising, is very different. Since 1985, many new independent churches have been started, some in villages with an older CSI congregation and some in villages where there were previously no Christians. While almost all members of the CSI congregations belong to the two Dalit castes, the Malas and the Madigas, more than half of the newer churches have a majority of members belonging to the "higher" non-Dalit castes. (7)

The caste issue will be addressed later in this review. It should be noted that in the context of this discussion, urban CSI churches are growing, both in number and in financial commitments. The major factor in both the decline of the old and the growth of new congregations seems to be leadership.

The core of rural CSI life was once unordained "evangelists."

> The first study took place at a time when the former two-tier system of pastoral care was still working, though with some difficulties. The evangelists were unordained teacher-pastors living in houses whose veranda and courtyard served as the place for teaching children, leading night prayers, and conducting the Sunday evening service.... Now, there is no longer a lower tier of unordained pastor-teachers. (83)

Perhaps it is a positive development that mission-controlled evangelists and Bible women no longer exist, since into that vacuum has come the independent Christian evangelist. CSI pastors are urbanized due to the focus on proper training for the ministry; urbanized pastors do not fit well in rural India, where untrained evangelists feel at home (28, 90). The new independent churches are often self-supporting as well. An obvious negative side to this picture is the poor teaching present in many of these churches. (An appendix gives eight sample sermons from both CSI and independent churches, some of which are inept at best.)

The great point of commonality between the two studies is the centrality of healing in bringing people to Christ. It is particularly black magic from which healing is now sought.

> One feature to which we give more attention is black magic or witchcraft, which seems to have increased in the past fifty years. Healing from the effects of such sorcery is a major reason given by those who have decided to become Christians. (10)

> Neither more widespread education nor the ending of epidemics has lessened the belief in magical powers that seem to many villagers stronger than traditional remedies or modern medicine, stronger even than the local goddesses. (191)

> Certainly, fear of magicians and of jealous neighbours who pay the magicians to cast a spell is so widespread as to affect the quality of normal village life. Neither counter-magic nor modern medicine seems to be effective against this black magic; only Jesus can break the magician's spell. (212)

Modernity is certainly impacting Indian village life, and generational change is noted in this study. Literacy is now common in the new generation, and there is also a shift towards more standardized Telugu language rather than the local colloquial (79). There is a change also in viewpoints regarding untouchability.

> Even in these villages, moreover, it is widely recognized that Dalits, whether Hindu or Christian, should no longer be treated as serfs of the wealthy landowners or as despised village servants. (180)

Woven throughout this study are discussions related to contextualization. A rather straightforward positive example is the embracing of the concept of *bhakti* (devotion).

> Devotion, or *bhakti,* in its Hindu forms has seemed to some Christians to be akin to their own love of God, especially to their loving relationship with Jesus. For other Christians, *bhakti* is simply an Indian word that they use to express their love of God. It is also possible to regard both this word and many of its devotional forms as part of the legacy that Indian Christians have received and naturally incorporate into their own religious life. (70)

Contextualization issues raise many controversies, and often it is underlying assumptions that determine how one views various ideas and practices. The root of controversies in India is well defined.

> In India, where the dominant culture is "Hindu," Christians are divided, along with other Indians, as to whether that Hindu culture, either as a whole or in some of its variations, is a religion

*C*hristians are divided as to whether Hindu culture, either as a whole or in some of its variations, is a religion competing with their faith or a national culture to which all Indians belong and owe a patriotic allegiance. (Carmen and Rao)

competing with their faith or a national culture to which all Indians belong and to which they owe a patriotic allegiance. Many village Christians do not see these different views of Hindu culture as exclusive alternatives, but as extremes between which they must negotiate in practical ways. (190)

This type of question underlies the distinctly Indian controversies related to "conversion."

Christians have long used the term "conversion" to refer both to the transformation of mind and heart *(metanoia),* which ideally is expected of every Christian, and to the movement of individuals and groups into the Christian community and, by extension, into any religious community. In the latter sense, the term was politicized in India during British colonial rule, especially when Christians were put into a separate category for provincial elections. (171)

The earlier study found the difference between "Hindu" and "Christian" communities greater than the more recent study.

The Christians as a whole are distinguished from the entire village not so much by their customs or attitudes, as by the fact that they form a distinct religious community, with a distinctive time and manner of worship and with their own religious leaders… (Luke and Carmen [1968] 2009, 201)

The study currently under review says that these rural Christians "have . . . not formed communities as distinctive and separate as those of many urban Christians in India" (86). In fact there is an intriguing pattern of interreligious marriage among these rural Christians.

When it comes to marriage alliances, these newer Christians, like the members of the older congregations, seek a family in their own caste, but they try to find other ways to represent and to realize their unity in Christ. (116)

In rural intermarriages the bride is integrated into the bridegroom's family, but there is concern that in too many cases Christian pastoral care is weak and "many of the women from Hindu families are never fully integrated into the in-law Christian families and therefore do not always raise their children as Christians" (7).

This all leads to a much more integrated society where "many Christians continue to observe some Hindu practices, especially those connected with lifecycle rituals" (78). The emergence of multi-caste churches is noteworthy in this regard. The study reveals that "the largest church brings together members from 7 castes, and the 2 other churches have 9 castes represented" (100). "The newer congregations are made up of individuals and families from different castes who affirm their separate caste identities" (177).

Whether this pattern of "Christian" identity can endure is a question raised in the book itself.

For Christians, conversion has meant a spiritual transformation, but they have differed among themselves as to what changes in behavior should be expected of Christians and to what extent they should still participate in the traditional caste system. (188)

It is in the complexities of existential life that genuine contextualization either develops or is stifled. An interesting side note in this study is a case of accidental contextualization related to baptism:

…general Christian usage in India has followed the western European precedent of simply transliterating the Greek word, thus in Telugu, *baptismamu.* By mispronouncing this word, some of these village Christians actually invented a more meaningful term, for they said *baptirthamu,* which picks up the Hindu term *tirtha,* in its meaning of "sacred bath." (158)

Always and everywhere the challenges are similar; what does it mean *practically* to be in the world but not of the world? These rural Christians in central India are, perhaps unconsciously, pressured by Christian history and also by a rapidly changing society. New church patterns have emerged, but both old and new are still rather tenuous. The local responses outlined in this book certainly do not provide a blueprint for other disciples of Jesus, but recognizing trends and struggles from this context stimulates ideas that can prove fruitful in other fields. To that end, this book is highly recommended, and it is essential reading for understanding current issues in Indian church and mission. **IJFM**

Endnotes
[1] The new study provides adequate summarization from the original to make insightful comparisons; but the original study remains very worth reading and contains many insights not noted in this new study.

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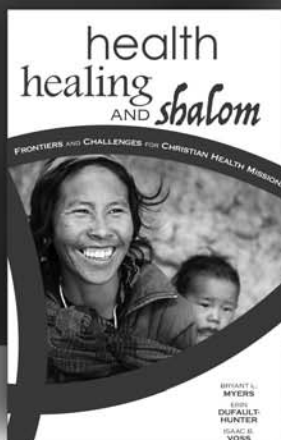
Health, Healing, and Shalom:
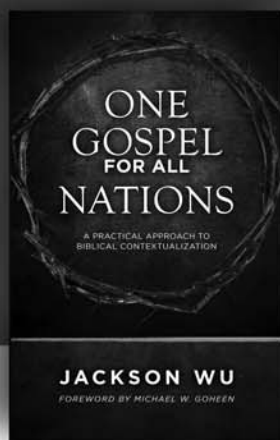### Frontiers and Challenges for Christian Health Missions

Bryant Myers, Editor | Erin Dufault-Hunter, Editor | Isaac Voss, Editor

Ever since Jesus's proclamation in word and deed as the Great Physician, his followers in mission have assumed that salvation and health are intertwined. Yet for every age, Christians need to examine how they can best announce the gospel message of God's healing in word and deed in their own context. In our era, we are often simultaneously grateful for modern medicine and frustrated by its inability to care for the whole person in effective, affordable ways.

In this edited volume, authors with an interest in health missions from a wide variety of experiences and disciplines examine health and healing through the theological lens of shalom. The meaning of this word, often simply translated "peace," encompasses a much more complex understanding of human well-being—right relationships with one another, with God, and with creation.

One Gospel for All Nations
A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization

Jackson Wu, Author

The Bible tells us what to believe—the gospel. Did you know it also shows how to contextualize the gospel? In *One Gospel for All Nations*, Jackson Wu does more than talk about principles. He gets practical. When the biblical writers explain the gospel, they consistently use a pattern that is both firm and flexible. Wu builds on this insight to demonstrate a model of contextualization that starts with interpretation and can be applied in any culture. In the process, he explains practically why we must not choose between the Bible and culture. Wu highlights various implications for both missionaries and theologians. Contextualization should be practical, not pragmatic; theological, not theoretical.

Holding the Rope
Short-term Missions, Long-term Impact

Clint Archer, Author

Holding the Rope gives an insightful look into the preparation, philosophy, and application of short-term cross-cultural ministry. Archer addresses the issues with candor, humor, and most importantly, grace. He provides viable solutions to common problems, and encourages churches, pastors, and volunteers to adopt a biblical and practical approach for engaging in short-term missions. "Holding the rope" is more than a catchphrase. It articulates an entire philosophy of ministry. Christian missions is too daunting an enterprise to attempt alone, but the synergy of combined efforts can accomplish untold advancement for the kingdom of God. This book is a tool for those serving the servants, a guide and celebration of those who hold the ropes.

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 October–December 2015 issue is partly composed of material created early in 2016. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience caused by such anachronisms.*

By 2050, 80% of Christians in the World Will Be Asian, African, or Latin American

Don't miss the eight-page annual demographic report from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) published in the January issue of *IBMR*. Two surprising projections leap out at us: the number of Global South Christians in 2050 will be 80% of the world's total, up from 20% in 1900); and two quite disparate estimates for Christians in 2050: 2.9 billion (Pew) vs 3.4 billion (CSGC).

Are the World's Muslims Growing Faster Than the World's Christians?

The Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project (April 2015) estimates that by 2050 global Christian and Muslim populations will be nearly the same size (2.9 billion vs 2.7 billion) with the percentage of Christians not having changed at all from 2010 (31.4%). However, the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary projects that by mid-century, Christians will number 3.4 billion. This much higher number would also increase the percentage of Christians in the world to 35.9%. Why the divergence?

> The Center taps into knowledge from contacts in every country of the world, who inform us on what is happening in non-traditional forms of Christianity such as house churches and insider movements (where individuals convert to Christianity in secret and/or remain identified with their past religion). Some of the most significant growth of Christianity in the world today, and into the future, is indeed in non-traditional expressions and does not easily get picked up in demographic measures such as censuses, surveys, and polls. This is particularly the case in China and India. Pew does not model religious switching in either China or India, claiming a lack of reliable data. On-the-ground contacts in both of these countries consistently report that Christianity is growing due to conversions, and many of these Christians are organized in "underground" or secret communities. As a result, the Center's Christian percentages in China and India in 2050 (15.8% and 6.9%, respectively) are higher than those of Pew (5.4% and 2.2%). The Center projects Christians in China and India to number a combined 330 million in 2050, compared to Pew's figure of 108 million.

Bible-Based Anasheed Videos Now Available

Sheikh Salah Yammout (who is one of the leading poets of the Muslim world) agreed to chant some beautiful Anasheeds (Islamic-style religious songs) that are direct quotations from the Bible. Available both on DVD videos and CD (music only), here is a sample of one of the clips from I John 1:5-10: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPXRVw-2Zyc. To order go to CreateSpace.com (https://www.createspace/850005963.).

An Intersection of Theology and Missiology

Paul and the Gift by John Barclay. Hailed as a tour de force by many theologians, this seminal work will greatly benefit missionaries and missiologists as well. See the IJFM review in this issue as well as both reviews in *Books and Culture*—one by Wesley Hill and the other by Scott McKnight http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2016/janfeb/unexamined-grace.html.

Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus Within Diverse Religious Communities edited by Talman and Travis. This book is finally available on Kindle. Take a look at the Circumpolar missiological blog where Warrick Farah reposts two very different reviews of the book along with his comments (see http://muslimministry.blogspot.com/).

Online Resources

In case you missed the great roundup of *refugee relocation resources* for local churches in the US, check out the March Cover Story in *CT:* "Hope on the Refugee Highway": http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/march/hope-on-refugee-highway-christians-iraq-greece-syria-isis.html.

Looking for off-the-wall mission podcasts? Check out "Muslims, Christians and the Zombie Apocalypse," a new resource recommended by *Mission Catalyst*. Recent podcasts include "The Psychological Profile of a Muslim Terrorist" and "Sufism: The Hunger for God in Islam" with Dave Cashin. A free weekly email put out by Pioneers, *Mission Catalyst*, has links to great resources and articles. Distinguished by its vibrant pictures and up-to-date reports from the field, this periodical is interspersed with news, resources (including podcasts, books, and booklets) and upcoming events.

Each week Justin Long sends out a free email resource called "Weekly Round Up", which is chock-full of resources, data, and points of interest culled from a large selection of internet sources. Topics include: Resources, Forecasts, Current Events/Trending, Studies/ Statistics/Graphs, Mission Industry News/Missional Thinking, Lifehacking/Tactics, Startup Thinking/Strategic Concepts, UPG Profiles, and Futuristics/Tech. Click on www.justinlong.org to subscribe. **IJFM**

# IJFM & Perspectives
On the World Christian Movement

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.

Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

Articles in IJFM 32:4	Lesson 5: Unleashing the Gospel (B)	Lesson 6: The Expansion of the World Christian Movement (H)	Lesson 7: Eras of Mission History (H)	Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)	Lesson 11: Building Bridges of Love (C)	Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)
Letting Africa Speak: Exploring the Analogy of African-Intiated Churches and Insider Movements Gene Daniels and Stan Nussbaum (pp. 165–72)			X	X		X
Cultivating Reticence: The Supportive Role of the Alongsider in Hindu Ministry H. L. Richard (pp. 173–80)				X	X	X
Contextualizing Ancestor Veneration: A Theological Survey and Practical Steps for Implementation David S. Lim (pp. 183–94)				X	X	X
Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective on Ancestors Kwame Bediako (pp. 195–201)	X		X	X		X
"Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?": A Response to Harley Talman Ayman Ibrahim **My Response to Ayman Ibrahim** Harley Talman (pp. 202–7)		X		X		X
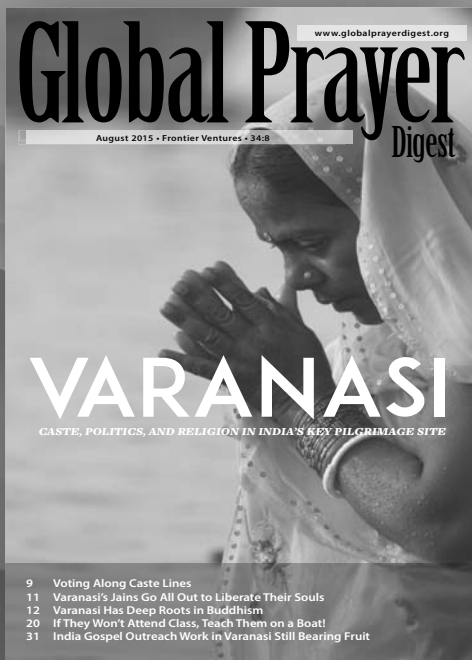
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These are days of resurgent religious identity and tumultuous migrations. A new generation is arising passionately committed to worship, intercession, and justice. More than ever, local churches—especially Global South local churches—will be keen players in the reaching of these complex frontiers. The ISFM sessions will examine the essential missiological concepts required for local church participation in breakthroughs on today's remaining frontiers.

Full conference details coming, see www.emsweb.org.