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Looking Beyond 500 Years of Reformation

On this 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation we offer a rather un-Protestant theme: the household. This summer I sat listening as Mark Noll, the preeminent American religious historian, offered five seminal characteristics of our Protestant era. What I haven't seen or heard among the many insightful reflections on this great tradition is what we are seeing today in the rank and file of movements to Christ: *oikos* (the Greek term for household). As you will hear from our guest editor, John Kim (p. 5), the sensitivities of an Asian perspective on Jesus movements today raises an ecclesiological question: why is the household unit so fundamental to these movements?

Over the past five centuries of Protestantism, the voluntary principle has been fundamental to the way we now frame our biblical ecclesiology. The church is viewed as a company of the committed, whose whole way of belonging seems to reflect the more modern social imagery of individual citizens who voluntarily cohere in a contractual way. This evangelical model of ecclesial belonging has been powerful and has reached to the ends of the earth. Forged in resistance to the deficiencies of a Roman Catholicism, it has successfully integrated itself into the values, interests and institutions of Western society. At the risk of being reductionist, we might ask: is it possible this historic paradigm of a voluntary church has blinded us to other necessary elements of a Christian movement? This issue of the *IJFM* suggests that it has.

We're grateful to the Asia Society for Frontier Mission (ASFM) for focusing our theme on the fundamental place of *oikos* (household) in Jesus movements today. Many of the articles in this issue were originally presented at the October 2017 ASFM meetings in Bangkok, Thailand. Still others were presented at the 2017 ISFM/EMS meetings in Dallas. The whole tone and vision of this theme is represented in John Kim's article (p. 37). His persistent examination of these movements has pushed this important ecclesiological issue to the front burners of our missiological reflection.

I believe each of the perspectives offered in these articles substantiates a new ecclesial priority of the family. One of the participants there in Thailand turned and focused an interrogating gaze on us as Westerners. Suddenly, what had been a theoretical exercise became personal, and I had to do a quick inventory of the

Editorial continued on p. 4

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role I play in my own oikos. It was penetrating. And spiritually exhilarating as it pushed me beyond any reformation I had experienced as an evangelical. I realized that what God was doing in these emerging movements across Asia and Africa was a prophetic voice to modern churches embedded in a Western Christendom.

We must be willing as a Western church to allow a thorough assessment of how our modern ecclesologies have failed to curb the moral and institutional degradation of the family. We see it in our churches—not just in our societies. We are struggling as a Western church to stem the loss of this essential social unit of identity and belonging. By contrast, the importance and vital role of extended families and their networks is very clear in movements among Muslims and Hindus today. It is a welcome corrective, and we trust it will encourage a new ecclesiological sensibility in this new era of World Christianity.

Together, these authors represent more than a hundred years of field experience in and around these Jesus

movements, and their interaction calls for new nomenclature to emerge: “high-identity Muslim people” (p. 7); “family blessing movements” (p. 51); the “Missio (M) Framework” (p. 67); and “spiritual oikos” (p. 37)—just to mention a few. Again, we are so grateful for the fertile interface between the ISFM and the ASFM, and the way it generates insight that then can move laterally and inform other frontier contexts.

We are offering this issue **free** to all of our subscribers. We have fallen behind in recent months, and we need to get back on schedule. Your subscription money will leap over 2017 and be applied to 2018. You will receive the exact number of quarterly issues you have subscribed for—plus the free 2017 combined issue (34:1–4).

Finally, let me do what I usually forget to do: pitch for subscriptions (info on p. 3). We are free online, and get roughly 800 hits a month, half of which are from outside the USA. But it's the \$18 annual subscription for the printed edition that allows us to keep this journal as a tangible “in-your-face”

call to frontier mission. The publisher is ready to respond to that demand for printed copies, so we hope you will invite your friends and colleagues to join us in our discussions on this missiological platform.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

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

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

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

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

From the Guest Editor

by John Kim, Coordinator of the Asia Society for Frontier Mission

As an Asian field worker and coordinator serving through the Asia Society for Frontier Mission (ASFM), I want to express my appreciation for having been invited to co-edit this issue, *IJFM* 34:1–4 2017.

The ASFM was established in 2010 as a hermeneutical community focused on issues in frontier mission. This society grew out of the AFMI (Asian Frontier Mission Initiative), which equips frontier mission field workers in a kingdom of God paradigm through its training programs. From the beginning, the society's annual conferences have created a space where a rather unique constituency of workers gather to discuss crucial missiological questions together. Interaction and cooperation among God's servants of different nationalities and socio-religious traditions (those popularly known as "insiders") remain a core value.

The US-based ISFM and the ASFM share many missional values: a frontier mission spirit; missiological breakthrough as a primary goal in frontier fields; a commitment to Jesus movements within socio-religious traditions and unreached people groups (UPGs); and the critical role of hermeneutical communities of biblical reflection on frontier mission issues.

We are now observing some of the great and unsearchable things on a scale unprecedented in Christian history (Jer. 33:3). Therefore, we must fix our eyes on Jesus alone as the author and perfecter of our faith. The year 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. While many have offered astute reflections on its significance, is it possible that these excellent assessments of the Reformation may have overlooked certain critical features? An Asian society like ours must grapple with one feature in serious decline across this Protestant movement: the *oikos*-based ecclesial fellowship.

Why have *oikos* fellowships continued to decline in Western Christendom? Tragically, the God-given social unit called *oikos* (household/family) has not escaped the fragmentation so common in human life and society. All over the world, many suffer the bitter and traumatic consequences of broken families.

John Kim (PhD, Physics) serves as the director of INSIDERS and as the coordinator of ASFM (Asia Society for Frontier Mission). He can be contacted at insidersm@gmail.com.

Tragedically, the God-given social unit called *oikos* has not escaped the fragmentation so common in human life and society. All over the world, many suffer the bitter and traumatic consequences of broken families.

But any (even cursory) examination will notice a striking biblical feature of *oikos* among movements to Jesus in least-reached communities: they encounter Jesus together as members of a household. In many cases, this fact not only prevents families from fracturing, it seems to play an instrumental role in the restoration of the other families—broken *oikoi*—and in the reconciliation of their members.

Unsearchable things are even now taking place in the form of movements with *oikos* dynamics within different religious traditions. We are thus forced into self-awareness and biblical reflection at this time. We urgently need to learn from what we have observed among many UPGs. In October, the ASFM drew together many frontier mission leaders, experienced field practitioners and Jesus followers from different religious traditions, including several from Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim communities. Our purpose? To sit together and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As participants shared what they had learned about *oikos* from both their field experiences and academic research, we rejoiced to see that the Holy Spirit has been at work in fellowships in different religious communities just as happened in the *ekklesia* (churches) of the New Testament.

I believe that this special issue is a small but decisive step towards global

cooperation among networks of spiritual *oikoi*, whose members will have already experienced reconciliation with each other through Jesus Christ. God's *oikos* is spiritual and not confined to any man-made tradition, such as Western Christianity. This is a perspective I offer more fully in my article herein (p. 37). In a modern world where traditions are clashing, only the Spirit of Jesus can give true reconciliation resulting in *shalom*. In this special issue of the *IJFM*, themes and issues surrounding *oikos* will come under close examination. Hopefully we can learn from one other, and successfully adopt transformative practices in order to fulfill the historic task remaining in the extension of God's kingdom.

I deeply appreciate the spirit of cooperation that allowed the various aspects of this *oikos* theme to converge into a common vision of what we hope to fulfill in the near future. Many of the ASFM 2017 papers included in this issue of *IJFM* were also compiled and published in Korean under the title *Spiritual Oikos*. My deepest thanks to the committed authors—Westerner and Asian, alongside and insider, from many traditions—whose hard work and fruitful efforts made that book a reality.

As readers interact with this special issue and observe God's awesome promises throughout history, may they come to know how great God truly is and that those who minister before him will be "as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore" (Jer. 33:20–22). As we seek His kingdom together, may we all come to enjoy God's presence in this spiritual *oikos*.

Households in Focus

The Oikos and the Wineskins

by David Anthony

Editor's Note: This article was presented to the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

Like beautiful tapestries being woven by God, movements of the gospel are making their presence known throughout our modern world. Each year, we have the privilege of traveling back to the country where we lived and labored for fifteen years. We visit, encourage, and mentor national men and women who are our dear friends and spiritual children. We have known some of them for over thirty years. These national workers are boldly presenting Christ to high-identity Muslim people (HIMP) and consistently reporting how the kingdom of God is spreading rapidly within their regions. Within these movements are many thousands of Muslim followers of Jesus (MFJ). They have committed their lives to Christ by becoming his disciples. They are the warp and the woof of his magnificently expanding kingdom tapestry.

The kingdom's DNA for movements of the gospel is naturally inherent in the *oikos* of families, household, clans, and communities. “. . . and by you shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:2).

The national workers mentioned above have stepped away from using a traditional Christian approach when sharing the good news. They are applying a kingdom paradigm to their message and are seeing real changes taking place. This kingdom paradigm allows the *oikos* to become the source from which flow natural, powerful, and spontaneous movements of the gospel. In this article, we will look at Jesus' ministry, and the writings of Paul and James, to understand the biblical foundation for how movements start in and through *oikos*. Biblical examples of *oikos* movements will also be examined, and four modern case studies will be presented. These case studies portray movements of the gospel among high-identity Muslims which are flowing from family to family, village to village, and city to city. The *oikos* is proving to be an essential kingdom key to release the gospel rapidly into high-identity Muslim people groups.

David Anthony and his wife BeAnna have lived among Muslims for over thirty years, in eight different people groups, laying foundations for movements of the gospel. He holds a Master of Divinity and a Doctorate in Islamic Studies.

Where there is such progress, and such promise, there is also a problem. Historically, high-identity Muslim people groups have been impregnable to a Western-influenced impartation of the message of Jesus. Centuries of traditional outreach within these communities have seldom resulted in movements of the gospel. As Roland Muller states,

During the history of missions, the church has done well among some cultures, and has related poorly to others. In Muslim cultures, which are primarily shame-based, the church has struggled to communicate the gospel in an effective manner.¹

Because of this history, it is vital to understand the importance of the oikos and the impact of ethno-religious identity in relation to movements of the gospel among HIMP.

High-identity Muslim people are communities of families who for centuries have esteemed their Islamic heritage. Some HIMP embrace a lifestyle of strict dedication to Islam's religious forms, customs, and traditions. Other HIMP are much less devoted in the actual practice of Islamic rituals, but highly value their Muslim heritage. These communities range from high identity and practice to those who are high in identity but medium-to-low in practice. Both groups, those who are faithful adherents of Islamic rituals and traditions and those who have a much more relaxed commitment, hold their love for Islam in common. Regardless of their commitment levels, HIMP can be defined as those who are content, and even proud, to be Muslims. To this group of Muslims, Islamic heritage is a treasure.

Another aspect of HIMP is their strong conviction that Islam is vastly superior to Christianity. Joshua Massey says that HIMP love their Islam and believe with all their heart that Islam is the only true path to God. When they look at Christianity, they see: the highest divorce rate in the world, where

selfish ambition and materialism are at their zenith, where sexual immorality and homosexuality are accepted, and whose economic appetites have led to the colonization and exploitation of their Muslim people and national resources. They are often repulsed by "Christian culture." They are impressed by the person of Jesus and totally unimpressed by Christianity.²

The ethos within HIMP is collective; it encompasses a group mentality, whereas the Western concept of individuality is foreign, even incomprehensible. Collective societies can be defined as those

in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive



in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.³

This "family spirit" in the HIMP community is one of the most basic elements shaping their worldview. It

lies at the very heart of culture, touching, interacting with, and strongly influencing every aspect of their culture.⁴

Kingdom movements of the gospel among high-identity Muslim people can be very practically defined. They are simply the truth of the gospel flowing freely and powerfully through relational networks where Muslims, who have come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus, are now sharing

him in life-to-life and family-to-family situations. A biblical kingdom movement of this type is viral in nature, spreading naturally through the initial family network and crossing over into interconnected families. When it is fueled by prayer and the witness of passionate Muslim followers of Jesus, the movement will spread even farther, crossing over into other villages, towns and cities. The gospel, which is "the power of God for salvation," then impacts countless individuals and families, villages and communities. Husbands, who are experiencing Jesus, are becoming faithful to their wives, marriages are being restored, and children are being disciplined. Men and women are growing in new biblical principles and slowly moving out of poverty. Villages and communities that once lived in fear of death, demons, curses, and black magic are being delivered from ancient traditions of darkness and are now living in joy, hope, and peace. All of this transformation is a direct reflection of the dramatic changes in the lives of those who have encountered Jesus. After spending time in the Gospels and Acts, one should not be surprised to see that these movements to Christ are accompanied by supernatural visions, dreams, and miracles. Through Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is invading their earthly reality. He is making all things new!

Jesus Ignites Kingdom Movements through the Oikos

The Lampstand Imperative

Those who are truly experiencing Christ will reflect his character. Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He also announced that those who follow him are the light, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). This light, which transforms lives, is best communicated in the context of natural life relationships. Those who are submitted to him as Lord embody his light and are to partner with Jesus to be "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Jesus explains

this idea in his “lampstand” command by saying, “Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to the entire household. Let your light so shine” (Matt. 5:15–16).

The word “household” in Greek is *oikos*. *Oikos* simply means the natural relationships in the new follower’s life. This could be, for example, his immediate family, extended family, friends, business associates, and anyone with whom they come into contact as they live life.⁵ This is where, if at all possible, the new follower of Jesus, the light, is to remain. With Jesus, this principle is not a suggestion, for he states it in the imperative, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). New believers, who are lit by the Spirit, are to follow the command and example of Jesus and remain as light in their *oikos*.

When HIMP convert and declare themselves Christian, they often cannot fulfill the lampstand command because their conversion frequently tears apart family relationships. The family explodes with anger and the new convert is cast out of their *oikos*. The opportunity for new believers to be light is then extinguished.

Jesus does explain that when people make him Lord of their lives, a choice between him and their *oikos* may occur. He warned, “Do you think that I have come to bring peace on the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother” (Matt. 10:34). There are times when remaining as light will cause division and rejection from the believer’s *oikos*; this is a possible kingdom reality. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* expresses this same idea, saying:

Jesus said He had come at this time not . . . to bring peace to the earth . . . but a sword which divides and severs. As a result of His visit to earth, some

Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to the entire household. (Matt. 5:15)

children would be set against parents and a man’s enemies might be those within his own household. This is because some who follow Christ are hated by their family members. This may be part of the cost of discipleship, for love of family should not be greater than love for the Lord.⁶

While this is a reality, the problem is that Jesus’ statement concerning the possibility of separation is consciously or unconsciously mistaken by many workers among HIMP as a natural result of the Great Commission. Rejection from one’s *oikos* may be a result of striving to fulfill the Great Commission, but it is not the objective. The objective is to “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19–20). Jesus demonstrated intentionally living out his life within his own *oikos* and commanded his followers to endeavor to do the same, to remain as “light to the entire household” (Matt. 5:15–16).

Looking into Jesus’ parables shows both the importance and the reality of remaining in one’s *oikos*. In the parable of the wineskins Jesus states, “No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins” (Luke 5:33–38).

Mohammed Beni, a Muslim follower of Jesus, spoke of this parable in application to his own people:

Brothers, we in this meeting, who are Muslims [followers of Jesus], must understand that we are the new wine and if we are to reach our people we must create new wineskins. The old wineskins of Christianity have never held the gospel for my people. Our own families and our own villages are the new wineskins. We who are the new wine must place ourselves in these new wineskins.⁷

Ralph F. Wilson summarizes the parable of the wine and the wineskins:

Jesus insists the gospel of the Kingdom must not be hindered by man-made rules . . . It must be free to work its power unfettered. The new wine may not be as smooth to the tongue and fine as old wine. It may be a bit sharp and unrefined, but it is alive. You can’t contain it in the old structures. You must find new wineskins for it or none at all.⁸

Many Christians will not be comfortable with Jesus movements of the gospel inside Islamic contexts. These movements may seem unrefined and “hard to swallow” like new wine, but they are alive and unfettered. In these new wineskins, the Father is being glorified and is kingdom is advancing.

The second parable of Jesus that shines more light onto this difficult idea of remaining in one’s ethno-religious identity and culture is the parable of the wheat and the tares.

He presented to them, saying, “The kingdom of God may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?”

And he said to them, “An enemy has done this!”

And the slaves said to him, “Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?”

But he said, “No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the

tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.” (Matt. 13:24–30)

This parable shows the reality of the perfect kingdom in the midst of imperfection while on earth. In every culture and every place where the kingdom dwells on earth, there are both true followers and there are those who are imposters. From this parable, it can be understood that the enemy and those who are not believers are right in the middle of the kingdom’s growth. Yet Jesus says, “Allow both to grow together” (Matt. 13:30).

The New Bible Commentary states,

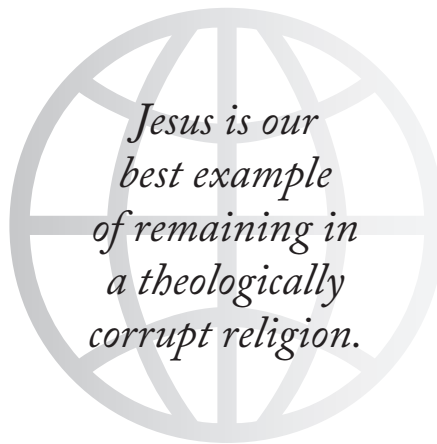
There is bound to be a mixed community, caused by the actions of the Son of man sowing good seed and the devil sowing weeds, but in the end the truth will be revealed and they will be divided into two classes, the evildoers and the righteous.⁹

Jesus interprets this parable by explaining that the field is the world. The children of the kingdom are Christ’s followers who remain in the midst of the people who belong to the kingdom of darkness. These tares are also regarded as being in the midst of God’s kingdom on earth, while yet not being a part of it. This parable expressing Jesus’ desire for his disciples to remain in their world is reiterated later in his prayer to his Father when he said, “I do not pray that thou should take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15–16). Jesus does not call his followers to leave their environment but to remain in it.

The question is often asked, “How can a Muslim follower of Jesus remain in the theologically corrupted religion of Islam?” Jesus is our best example of remaining in a religion that not only had distorted theology, but was also fraught with evil. Jesus said of the religious leaders, “So for the sake of your traditions you have made void the Word of God” (Matt. 15:6). The truth of the scriptures had been totally blurred by the time

Jesus entered the realm of Judaism. He taught in their synagogues even though he later called them “synagogues of Satan” (Rev. 3:9). The satanic activity in Judaism was evident by the number of Jewish people Jesus freed from demons. While Jesus was in Peter’s house “they brought many to him who were possessed with demons and he cast out the spirits with a word” (Matt. 8:16). In Mark 1:21–26, the demonic activity was clearly seen even in religious settings when Jesus cast out an evil spirit while he was teaching in the synagogue.

There is much controversy concerning high-identity Muslim people who have become Muslim followers of Jesus and yet remain in their Muslim culture. This is understandable since



Muslim culture contains occult practices, corruption, and a distorted theology. Jesus expressed that there was much that had become fundamentally evil in the Jewish system as well. Yet Jesus remained as light, and he commanded his followers to do the same. Nathan Roberts is a long-term veteran worker who pioneered a growing Jesus movement among a people who were high-identity Muslims. He stated:

Every culture has been corrupted, including the Jewish culture and even our Christian culture. Jesus and many others didn’t seem to think the Jewish customs were a great thing. In fact much of the New Testament brings out the uselessness of Judaism without Christ. Jewish believers would have

constantly sat under legalistic teaching in the synagogues that slapped the gospel in the face, carrying out endless religious customs that were empty in themselves without Christ.¹⁰

Many of the people of the movement Roberts helped to spark have stayed within Muslim mosques or are Muslim seminary leaders who remain faithful to their mosque activities. The key for these HIMP is consistent discipleship in the areas of character, ministry, and depth in biblical understanding. As Milton Coke, another pioneer in the field of igniting movements among HIMP, stated, “Any movement that is not deep in the Bible will be in the ditch shortly.”¹¹

Among modern Christians, Jews for Jesus or Messianic Jews are accepted by evangelicals as credible Jesus followers. These modern-day Jews do not identify themselves as Christians and most of them still participate in Jewish cultural and religious activities. They remain in the Jewish system as a light to their lost people. Yet for Muslims who follow Jesus to remain in their culture is often viewed by the Western church as impossible because Islam is perceived as intrinsically evil. As Jeff Burns stated,

Any system that does not have the presence of the Holy Spirit will be essentially evil. Even systems that do have the Holy Spirit will have the presence of the evil one.¹²

This insight reflects the truth of the parable of the wheat and the tares.

In the Islamic system, there is a deep respect for Jesus and he is incorporated into their religious beliefs. In the Qur’an, he is called God’s Word who is held in honor, and he is called Messiah,

Christ Jesus the son of Mary was a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which he bestowed on Mary. (An-Nissa 4:171). Behold! The angel said: “Oh Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, his name will be Christ [Messiah] Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter.” (Al Imran 3:55)¹³

By contrast in Judaism, Jesus is ignored and disregarded and dishonored. He does not play an active role in their religion. Although the historical figure of Jesus was known to be Jewish, he is not incorporated into the Jewish religious worldview.

T. B. Pranaitis explains from the Talmud the Jewish position concerning Jesus:

The Talmud teaches that Jesus Christ was illegitimate and was conceived during menstruation; that he had the soul of Esau; that he was a fool, a conjurer, a seducer; that he was crucified, buried in hell and set up as an idol ever since by his followers.¹⁴

Theologically, concerning Jesus, the Islamic system is much more Jesus-friendly than the Jewish system.

The Jewish system and the Islamic system are both theologically flawed. Both cultures have demonic activity and the influence of evil is rampant. In both systems, the wheat and the tares are represented. Yet, the example lived out by Jesus was to remain in his ethno-religious identity within its corrupted system, and he asked his followers to do the same.

Jesus' Kingdom Approach among the Gentiles

Jesus spent most of his time among the Jews. All the men he chose as his apostles were Jewish, yet he also sparked movements of the gospel among the Gentiles. Jesus ministered to the centurion in Capernaum (Matt. 8), the Canaanite woman (Mark 7), the demoniac of Gerasene (Mark 5), and returned again to this area where he healed many Gentiles (Mark 7:31–37). Jesus also ministered to a Roman centurion (Matt. 8, Luke 7). He fed 4000 Gentiles (Mark 8:1–4 and Matt. 15:32–39). It is important to note that in all these instances, Jesus never spoke of religion. Jesus acknowledged that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), but he did not entice those who believed in him from

In all these instances, Jesus never spoke of religion. He focused on himself as the gospel and the entrance into the kingdom of God.

the Samaritans or the Gentiles to leave their ethno-religious identities and follow Judaism. He focused on himself as the gospel and the entrance into the kingdom of God.

The demoniac was an example of Jesus' desire to keep the new believer in his birth-environment. The demoniac was from the area of Gerasenes, a region which was noted for numerous pagan practices. After the demoniac was healed, he “begged him [Jesus] that he might be with him” (Mark 5:18). Had Jesus desired, this would have been a time to establish in the scriptures a biblical example of extraction. Rather, Jesus commands the demoniac to, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). Jesus tells the man to go home to his people and be light to them. He demonstrates, in this pagan environment, his lampstand method. What Jesus asked his disciples to do, in their Jewish oikos, he told the demoniac to do among his Gentile oikos.

The fruit of commissioning this new believer is seen later when Jesus returned to the Decapolis region, the home area of the demoniac, and healed a deaf man. The very same Gentile people who had begged Jesus to “depart from their neighborhood” (Mark 5:17), had heard and seen firsthand the testimony of the demonic. Now they responded in a manner totally opposite to their previous encounter with Jesus. They concluded, “He has done all things well” (Mark 7:37). The foundational man for this movement was the demoniac whom Jesus sent back to live among his people.

Jesus' Kingdom Approach among the Samaritans

The lampstand pattern is seen again when Jesus ministered to the

Samaritan woman. The Samaritan religion was a mongrel religion. They were

a half-caste people who owed their origin to the mingling of the remnant left behind when Samaria fell in 722 BC. Their worship in consequence became contaminated by idolatry.¹⁵

The name “Samaritan” became a curse word to identify a despised people as well as to discredit and dishonor them. This was expressed by the Jewish leaders when they called Jesus a Samaritan who had a demon (John 8:48).

The Samaritan people cast off most of the Jewish scriptures and intertwined their bastard beliefs with pagan rituals.

In the New Testament, this name (Samaritan) is the appellation of a race of people who sprung originally from an intermixture of the ten tribes with Gentile nations. Most of them were half converted from their native hedonism. Moreover, they rejected all the sacred books of the Jews except the Pentateuch.¹⁶

The Samaritans were idolatrous, hedonistic, and after having thrown aside a majority of the Jewish scriptures, they created their own distorted theology.

Jesus applied his lampstand principle in this depraved culture by sending the Samaritan woman back to her people where she invited them to come and meet the Messiah. The result was, “Many of the Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony” (John 4:39). The short time Jesus spent with the Samaritans prepared them for the coming of Philip years later when multitudes believed. This is explained in Acts 8 when Philip “went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said” (Acts 8:5–6). This movement started at the well with the Samaritan woman and Jesus. Jesus'

strategy for this expansion of the gospel was for the Samaritan woman to remain in her environment though it was deeply pagan and theologically flawed.

Henry H. Halley implies that Jesus' lampstand methodology was the reason for the gospel movement among the Samaritans in Acts 8. Halley states, "This visit of Jesus laid the groundwork for the hearty reception of the gospel by the Samaritans a few years later" (Acts 8:4-8).¹⁷

Jesus applied the lampstand principle in his own corrupted Jewish environment. He also sparked movements of the gospel among the demoniac's and the Samaritan woman's people. All of these were fallen cultures where demonic activity was pervasive. Jesus remained in his Jewish culture, the demoniac remained in his, and the Samaritan woman in hers. This strategy of Jesus launched three movements of the gospel.

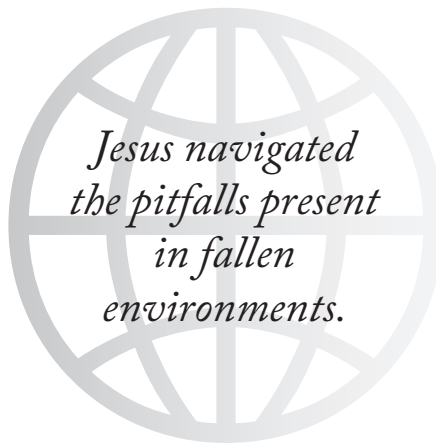
These examples have application for high-identity Muslim peoples. In all three cases, it was Jesus' desire for the light of the gospel to be available and to shine into the respective oikos. The cultures of these people who identify so strongly with Islam, are like every culture, imperfect and fallen. Yet if movements of the gospel are to be established among these honor-driven people, the example of Jesus must be followed. To remove or extract high-identity Muslims from their people is to rupture the wineskins of the oikos, preventing them from embracing the gospel. When this happens, the new follower's oikos is not given a chance to taste the reality of Jesus. In fact, they will always view the new wine as poison, for one of their own drank it and is now dead to them!

Jesus Demonstrates Using, Modifying or Discarding

Jesus remained in his fallen corrupted environment for the sake of his people. He exemplified the lampstand pattern by leaving the demoniac and the Samaritan woman in their oikos. But how should the people with the light live in

their oikos? How can the new believer navigate through all the corruption, pagan practices, and beliefs of the fallen environment? What activities, if any, should the new follower of Jesus continue in? What should he discard?

Jesus demonstrates the biblical model for navigating the pitfalls present in fallen environments. He remained in his Jewish environment, emptied himself, and became a bond-servant (Phil. 2:4-8). As a slave, Jesus *used* some of the Jewish activities, traditional practices, and ideologies; he *modified* and expanded some ideologies into new meanings; and at other times he totally *discarded* some of them. Jesus' principles of using, changing, or throwing away have insightful applications



for HIMP who determine to remain among their people.

Jesus Demonstrates Using

Although Jesus often harshly criticized the synagogues, he also used them and participated in some of their activities. Jesus told some of the synagogue leaders that their "father was the devil" (John 8:44), that they were "sons of hell" (Matt. 23:15), and that they were "serpents" and a fellowship of "vipers" (Matt. 23:33). He also said that the Jewish places of worship were synagogues of Satan (Rev. 2:9, 3:9). In another example, Jesus called the main temple synagogue "a den of robbers" (Luke 19:46). With the prevalent demonic influence and corruption in

the synagogue, it would seem that Jesus would have avoided any contact or participation in it. Yet he stated, "I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple; I have said nothing secretly" (John 18:20). All places of worship whether Christian or Jewish are, to varying degrees, imperfect in kingdom theology since those who participate therein "have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Jesus was not afraid of the fallen demonic environment in the synagogues. Other verses also show his consistent use of the synagogue, "And he went on from there and entered their synagogue" (Matt. 12:9). "On another Sabbath, when he entered the synagogue and taught..." (Luke 6:6). "Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath" (Luke 13:10-12). "This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum" (John 6:59). In spite of the faulty theology taught by those who "made void the Word of God" (Mark 7:13), Jesus used the synagogue as an important platform for reaching his people.

Many of the Jewish followers of Jesus (JFJ) also used the synagogue as part of their daily routines, among them Peter, John, Paul and James. "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at the ninth hour... And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 3:1, 5:2). These Jews who followed Jesus continued to worship in the synagogue as had their Messiah. Concerning worship in any given place, Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "But the hour is coming; and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). Jesus must have deemed it possible to worship the Father in spirit and truth in the theologically-polluted synagogues. In fact, it was one of the bridges he used to bring truth to his people. He also must have deemed it acceptable to worship using the Jewish

methods of prayer, because in Matthew 26:39, Jesus is viewed using this form. His followers continued daily in these forms as is told in the Book of Acts, chapters 2 and 5.

Jesus Demonstrates Modifying

Jesus changed or transformed some of the applications of the Jewish laws. In Numbers 5:1-5, it is commanded that a person with leprosy is considered unclean and should be placed outside the main living area of the Israelites. The rabbis took this command to the extreme by teaching that the source of disease was the person's own sin. They even specified exact distances one must stand away from the leper.

Rabbinism loved to trace disease to moral causes... Eleven sins were mentioned which brought leprosy... No less than six feet must be kept from a leper; or if a wind came from that direction, a hundred feet were scarcely sufficient... (and) even his entrance defiled a habitation."¹⁸

Jesus changed the Pharisees' tradition and not only drew near to a leper, but even touched him, "And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will [heal you]; be clean'" (Luke 5:13).

Immediately after Jesus rejected and transformed some of the restrictions for lepers, he then used and affirmed others. Leviticus 13:49-50 explained that in any case of leprosy the person must be examined by a priest. After Jesus healed the leper, he sent him to the priest saying, "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded for proof to the people" (Luke 5:14). Jesus, using the Jewish law, asked him to keep this Mosaic ritual. The Lord did not wish to have the law broken. Rather, Jesus used this law to help the leper. For by presenting himself to the priest as healed, he would fulfill the law and be welcomed back into society. This example portrays how Jesus used the leprosy laws. It also shows that he was willing to change laws that kept people as outsiders, but used them

Jesus modified the Pharisees' rabbinical tradition and not only drew near to a leper, but even touched him.

when it meant the restoration of a person to their community and back into their oikos.

Another example of modifying and changing a Jewish practice is found in John 8:1-11. In Deuteronomy 22:22, it says that any person caught in adultery must be put to death. The Jewish leaders brought to Jesus a woman who had committed this sin and said, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say about her?" (John 8:1-11). Jesus changed the application of the law and released her with a warning, "Go, and do not sin again" (John 8:11).

One Sabbath Jesus' disciples picked grain, rubbed it in their hands and then ate it. According to the traditions, this was labor and was forbidden. But Jesus defended his disciples in front of the Pharisees using David's example, that there are times when it is acceptable to change what is unlawful by tradition (Luke 6:1-4).

Jesus Demonstrates Rejecting

The Jewish leaders' hypocrisy had become codified into customs and traditions. As an example, the temple in Jerusalem had a divinely-given place for Gentiles to come and seek God. Yet, it had become an established custom every Monday to fill the Gentiles' area with market booths to sell cattle, sheep, and many different products. "The enormous profits from the market booths inside the temple area went to enrich the family of the high priests."¹⁹ By turning over the tables, Jesus boldly and violently throws out this tradition, which had become a hindrance to the kingdom.

Jewish hypocrisy can also be seen through the custom of fasting and worshipping in public in order to be

seen as holy. Jesus rejects this and says, "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by man" (Matt. 6:16-18).

The Pharisees would not be seen with those they deemed sinners. "The very term 'Pharisee' or 'separate one' implied the exclusion of sinners."²⁰ Pharisees considered tax collectors prime examples of sinners, but Jesus rejected this idea by choosing a tax collector as one of his twelve key men (Matt. 9:9, 10:3). Levi-Matthew was not only a tax collector, but he was considered the worst kind, a customs official, who extracted taxes from ships. Matthew certainly would have been known by the fishermen and the ship owners like Peter, Andrew, James and John. Yet Jesus compelled the ship tax collector to be with him, rather than repelling him like the Pharisees.²¹

Another example of Jesus rejecting an established Jewish tradition is found in Luke 11:37-39. Here the Pharisees are washing their hands according to the customary ceremony before eating. They taught that if this were not done, then everything that was eaten afterward would be unclean. "Indeed a rabbi who had held this command in contempt was actually buried in excommunication."²² Jesus speaks harshly against this tradition, "Woe to you Pharisees, you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness, you fools!" (Luke 11:39-40). As Edersheim states, "Jesus is dealing a blow to traditionalism, it was to be rejected as incompatible with the Word of God."²³ Jesus lived as light among his people and he masterfully chose

what should be used for the sake of the kingdom, what might be changed or transformed, and what must be rejected and discarded.

There was much tension as Jesus remained among his people. However, his examples reveal biblical applications for high-identity Muslim peoples who are determined to remain among their own people as a light.

Paul Declares How Kingdom Movements Should Be Actualized through the Oikos

“Let them remain.” 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

To remain in one’s God-given environment is Paul’s “rule in all the churches” (1 Cor. 7:17). This rule encourages the new followers of Christ to stay in their culture and maintain their natural network of relationships.

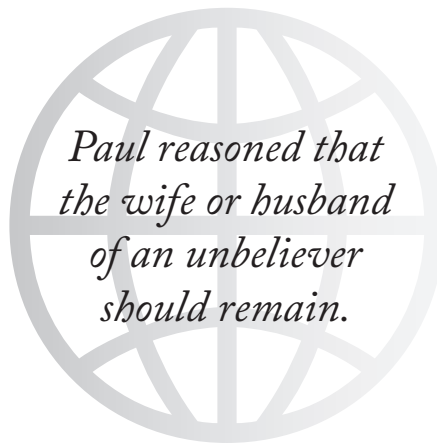
The first example Paul uses in this segment is the marriage environment. He states that if at all possible the husband or wife of an unbeliever should remain with his or her spouse, for “the wife should not leave her husband” (1 Cor. 7:10). The believing husband should also remain with his wife and the husband should not send his wife away (1 Cor. 7:12). Paul reasoned that, in remaining, the wife may bring her husband into the kingdom. “For how do you know, oh wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, oh husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Cor. 7:16). Clearly, the objective of remaining in the marriage is, if possible, to lead one’s unbelieving spouse to Christ.

New belief in Christ does not necessitate ripping apart the new followers’ natural network of relationships, for one does not know whether the new believer will save some by remaining. Paul’s rule of remaining in one’s environment sets the stage for its application in a much broader sense. *The Interpreters Bible* agrees with a broader application,

Having established that conversion to Christ does not involve the rupture of

the marriage relationship, Paul now extends it to other aspects of life. The Christian [new believer] is to take his stand and make his witness just where he is.²⁴

Paul’s rule, for the sake of sustaining relationships, also includes remaining in one’s religious identity. “Was any man at the time of his calling already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised” (1 Cor. 7:18). The new Jewish follower of Jesus (the circumcised) is to remain in his Jewish identity “at the time of his calling.” When was he called? He was called when he believed in Christ and entered into the kingdom. Paul states clearly that the new believer is to continue to remain in his religious identity (in this case as a Jew). Likewise, Gentiles should not seek to become Jews. “Has anyone been called



in uncircumcision? Let him not become circumcised” (1 Cor. 7:18). The Gentile was also to follow Paul’s rule and remain in his uncircumcised identity.

Whether the new believer is Jewish or from a Gentile religion, obedience to God in one’s natural surroundings is what matters. To remain in one’s ethno-religious identity was essential for the flow of the gospel, but the specific religious title was not considered important to Paul. He said, “Circumcision [being of the Jewish religion] is nothing, and uncircumcision [being of a Gentile religion] is nothing. What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). In Galatians Paul says, “For in Christ

Jesus neither circumcision [being a Jew] nor uncircumcision [non-Jewish religions] means anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Later Paul reiterates, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). What is important is living out one’s faith in love and obedience to God. What matters is the new creation living as light among his people. High-identity Muslim people remaining in their God-given religious identity allows this to happen.

This principle—that new believers should remain, if possible, in their environment (including in their religious identity)—is crucial for winning their oikos. In 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, Paul exhorts the new creation to remain in the environment in which he was called. Paul states, “Only let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches” (1 Cor. 7:17). Again repeated in verse 20, “Every one of you should remain in the state in which he was called” (1 Cor. 7:20). Once again Paul makes his plea, “So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God” (1 Cor. 7:24).

By staying in their natural context, new believers function as ambassadors for Christ. This is why Paul speaks of the new believer as God’s ambassador. God is using their situation to make his appeal through them in order that those around them can “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). R. Deal also speaks to this,

The new believer’s appearance does not change but his heart does, which will change his aura not his skin. He will become a light among his *oikos*.²⁵

In other words, the new followers of Christ become new creations in their old environment.

This raises an important question. If Paul set a rule that the new followers of Jesus should strive to remain, why

did he command them to “come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17)? Paul defines his meaning in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11,

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with any immoral people; I did not mean the immoral people of this world, or with covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person or covetous or an idolater... not even to eat with such a one.

Paul had no aspirations to take new believers away from their lost friends. Instead he desired that they would be protected from the contaminating influence of those who called themselves Christ followers, but who lived in disobedience. Certainly, Paul knew Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, “I do not ask Thee [God] to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world” (John 17:15–16). Both Paul and Jesus desired that Christ followers would be in the world, but not of it.

The Corinthian culture and religion was fraught with idolatry and potential pitfalls for the new-believer, yet Paul desired the believers to remain as engaged as possible for the purpose of a positive witness. However, Paul places some very strong restrictions on their behavior, so that in the midst of being light, their faith would not be tainted. Paul makes absolute statements against idolatry in any form (1 Cor. 10:14). He also makes it clear that engaging in temple prostitution was not acceptable (1 Cor. 6:15–17). He does affirm some degree of freedom is possible in “eating meat sacrificed to idols” with some significant cautions concerning the weaker brother (1 Cor. 8:9). Paul seems to make a nearly absolute statement about not joining unbelievers in the temple feast, because it probably included the use of temple prostitutes (1 Cor. 8:10, 11). In Paul’s mind, the risks

In striving to stay engaged without compromise, each situation must be evaluated and each person held accountable by his kingdom community.

of attending such an activity would outweigh any possible benefits.

Regardless of time or culture, those followers of Jesus who remain among their lost family and friends will always face tensions in relation to how they should live. The Corinthian environment was different from the Jewish one, and modern-day Islamic environments has their own respective differences. In striving to stay engaged in one’s culture without compromising one’s faith, each situation must be evaluated and each person held accountable by his kingdom community. This community consists of the people of God who are under the authority of the Word of God and are led by the Spirit of God.

James Demonstrates Kingdom Movements Activated through the Oikos

When he returned from his mission among the Gentiles, Paul related to James and the other Jewish followers of Jesus, “one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry” (Acts 21:18). James and some of the other Jewish believers rejoiced with Paul adding, “You see brother [Paul], how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and they are zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). What does it mean that these Jewish followers of Jesus were zealous for the Law? *The New Testament Explanatory and Practical* implies that being zealous for the Law meant James’ movement still observed the Law of Moses which included circumcision, sacrifices, distinctions of meats, days and festivals. The commentary goes on to explain that James and his followers had been trained since youth to observe these rituals, which had been given by God. After

their faith in Christ, they continued to fervently follow the Law of Moses and their Jewish traditions.²⁶ This may seem unnecessary and even contrary to New Testament theology. Certainly, James comprehended the ramifications of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus had appeared to James personally after he rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:7). Jesus had also taught James and the other disciples during the forty days before his ascension (Acts 1:3–4). William Barclay states that James, “was a rigorous observer of the law” and “the Pillar and crown of orthodoxy.”²⁷ According to Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington, James was indeed the biological brother of Jesus and “was a towering figure in the early church.”²⁸ It is said that even the famous historian Josephus believed “after Jesus himself, James was the most important person associated with the Jesus movement.”²⁹

James’ credibility was prominent because he was the younger brother of Jesus the Messiah. When Jesus preached in Nazareth, the local people were trying to figure out what Jesus was all about. “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not these his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?” (Matt. 13:55–56). The *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states that the James spoken of in these verses is indeed the biological brother of Jesus.³⁰ James grew up watching his older brother Jesus live out the fact that he came “not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it” (Matt. 5:17). From this vantage point, James gained a firsthand empirical understanding of remaining in one’s birth culture and identity. This intimate contact with the risen Messiah was more than enough for James to grasp that all people of all times had now been released from the law.

However, following the example of Jesus, James remained in his cultural and ethno-religious identity. Because of the life lessons he learned while observing Jesus, James was able to be the example to thousands of Jews who had embraced Christ. These thousands followed James' example and remained ardently obedient to the Law of Moses. Like Jesus, they fulfilled the law in the truest sense. Ben Witherington wrote,

James and his disciples did not see themselves as Christians. They saw themselves as Jews who followed Jesus the Messiah. It needs to be kept squarely in view that these people did not view themselves as founding a new religion.³¹

Like Jesus, James was not promoting a new religion. Instead, James remained as a light among his people, and for the sake of the harvest continued to be steadfastly zealous for the Law. James personally applied Jesus' teaching, "Men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but place it on a lampstand in order to give light to all the household" (Matt. 5:14). For the sake of his people, James stayed like his people. He chose to keep himself and his followers under the law in order to become a lampstand that gave light to the nation of Israel.

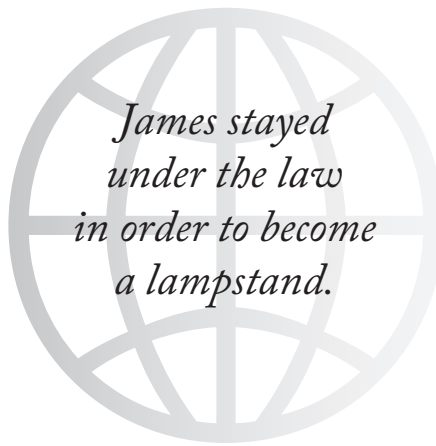
In his book *Church without Walls, Moving beyond Traditional Boundaries*, Jim Peterson calls James "the ultimate free man." Peterson reflects on the Jewish followers of Jesus in Acts 21,

Even at that juncture, the Jewish believers remained adamant about the importance of the Mosaic Law. They were people who, because of their deeply ingrained religious and cultural traditions, could never get beyond the idea that circumcision and the Mosaic Law were essential for godliness. James chose to exercise his freedom by serving a people who were extremely limited in their own freedom, for the sake of the great harvest their fellow Jews represented.³²

Jesus remained James' perfect example. For while Jesus was totally free in the image of God, he emptied himself and

took on the image of a slave and became like those he was called to reach (Phil. 2:6–8). James, along with Paul, followed Jesus' example as they became slaves and emptied themselves. They did this in culturally appropriate, contextual, and varied ways. The lives of these men and their extremely different approaches among two dissimilar cultures, allowed the beauty, creativity, and freedom of Jesus movements to be seen as they began to appear among the Jews and the Gentiles.

Some have assumed that James' movement faded quickly after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Even if this were true, then the case study of James and this kingdom movement would still have great validity for



HIMP, since thousands of Jews came to Christ over a number of decades and continued spreading the gospel.

Yet Rodney Stark, professor of comparative religions at the University of Washington, discusses in his book *The Rise of Christianity*, that he strongly disagrees with the notion of a sudden disappearance of Jewish believers. He states,

But it is generally assumed that this pattern (Jewish believers in Christ) ended abruptly in the wake of the revolt of 66–74, although some writers will accept a substantial role for the Jewish conversion into the second century.³³

Stark's own opinion is contrary to traditional history, in that he believes that Jewish Christianity played a

central role until much later in the rise of Christianity. Not only was it the Jews in the diaspora who provided the initial basis for church growth during the first and second centuries, but the Jews continued as a significant source of Christian converts until at least the fourth century. Jewish Christianity was still significant into the fifth century.³⁴ Stark's statement shows the longevity of James' ministry and its impact on the early Christian movement. How James laid sustainable foundations among a high-identity, law-based culture has left significant kingdom principles for movements among high-identity Muslim peoples.

Case Studies of Ethno-religious Identity and Oikos

The Village Movement

During our first year on the field, I began to study the Gospels four or five times a week with Ismail. He, his family, and his village were staunchly Muslim. Through those Bible studies and some miracles from Jesus, Ismail began to discover the living Christ. Ismail often came to our home which was about fifteen miles from his village. He came not only to study, but to spend time with my family and me. Early one morning he came to our home and shared about one of his encounters with Christ. Ismail described,

I have come to love Jesus the Messiah; he has given me many miracles. Last week I was very sick. I think it was typhoid. The pain was terrible and usually it takes at least two weeks to be cured. I prayed, like we had read, in Jesus' name to be healed. Instantly I fell into a deep sleep and this morning I was totally fine.

In the process of experiencing the presence of Jesus, Ismail began to be burdened for his family.

I have been very concerned about my family, how can I tell them about Jesus? How can they also experience the miracles of Jesus? If I change my religious name to Christian, my family

will not allow me to visit them again. Even if they allow me to come to visit, they will forbid me to speak of Christianity. I know of a few Muslims from my tribe who changed their names from a Muslim name to a Christian name and have declared themselves as Christians. I tell you the truth, David; they are like a fruit seed placed on top of a big rock. They cannot do what Jesus tells us to do, to go and help others believe, because they cannot grow roots into their own culture. What do you think? Can I have Jesus and stay a Muslim?

Ismail was not asking a theological question. Through miracles, Ismail had encountered Christ, and after many hours of studying the Gospels, he had come to believe that Jesus was his Lord and Messiah who had died on the cross for his wrong doings. He also had come to view the Bible as incorrupt, inspired of God, and having authority over his life. However, Ismail was asking a cultural question. To change one's religious identity would be viewed as a rejection of his family, culture, and country. Ismail's perplexing question led to many hours searching the scriptures. As Ismail studied, he found the very words of Jesus answered his question. "Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bowl, but they put it on a lampstand in order that it may give light to the whole household" (Matt. 5:15). Jesus clearly states that the new believer is to remain as light for his family and not to flee. Jesus also said, "In this way let your light so shine" (Matt. 5:15). The "Jesus way" was to remain in one's family as a witness on display for all to observe. After studying many verses and chapters from the Bible, Ismail felt God led him to remain in his ethno-religious identity as a Muslim. He began to share his faith with his family, not as a convert to Christianity, but as a Muslim who now followed Jesus the Messiah. He shared first with his mother and grandmother the good news of Jesus. Both asked one question, "Have you become a Christian?"

Those who changed their Muslim name to a Christian name are like a fruit seed placed on top of a big rock.

He answered that he had not changed his religion, but now saw Jesus as his Master and Messiah. Then he began to share some of the miracles Jesus had done for him. That day, both his mother and grandmother professed faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That night as Ismail's mother prepared to go to bed, a man "shining so brightly" appeared in the doorway and she realized it was Jesus! The mother talked to everyone about the shining man that had appeared. As the news spread through the family and the village, anger and suspicion grew. Had these three become apostate? Had they become Christians?

While visiting my house, Ismail shared his joy that his mother and grandmother had begun to follow Jesus the Messiah, but he also spoke of the increasing suspicion from his family and village. Then he explained that the night before, the Messiah had appeared to him in a very clear and vivid dream. In the dream, many Muslims in a vast field were bowing down to Jesus. Jesus was like a giant and very strong and he only looked down at him. Ismail said that when he looked up into the face of the Messiah he saw love in his eyes and then he felt a great peace. Jesus just said to him, "Don't worry, don't worry." Two days later a letter came from his four brothers in his village summoning him to return for a discussion. The dream had confirmed to Ismail that he should indeed return to his village and face his brothers. He was strengthened with the comforting words of Jesus, "Don't worry."

As he entered the village, his brothers and the other leaders stood at the front door of his father's house with their arms crossed, looking very angry. They took Ismail in, sat him down, locked the door, and surrounded him.

They started their questioning with, "Have you become a Christian?"

Ismail asked for a Qur'an and read from 5:111 which explains that the followers of Jesus are Muslim (submitted to God). He explained that he was now a Muslim who followed Jesus and that this verse allowed him to do this. They began to question him as to whom he thought Jesus was. Again from the Qur'an, Ismail explained that Jesus is God's Word. Jesus is sinless, born of a virgin, and he is the most exalted in this world and the world to come. They asked why he was reading the Bible. Ismail read the Qur'an 4:136, which proclaims those who did not believe the previous books (the Bible, both Old and New Testament) are not true believers and in fact have gone far astray from God. Over the three hour interrogation, Ismail defended his new belief in Jesus. His brothers and the other men released him; some of them confused but convinced that Ismail was still a Muslim, albeit a strange one. The youngest brother, Asgar, was still suspicious. When Ismail would return to the village twice a month to do Bible study with his mother and grandmother, Asgar would sit outside the window and secretly spy on them. During this time, two more of Ismail's family members began to follow Christ. They also began to have answers to prayer and see miracles. During his times of "spying," Asgar heard over and over the stories of Jesus. He saw that Ismail and his small group of followers of Jesus had changed. They were so joyful, they no longer had a fear of demons, and they kept talking about answers to prayer. Finally, after many times of sitting outside the window, Asgar knocked on the door and asked if he could also join the group. Within a few weeks, the "spy" had become a follower of Jesus.

In this first ministry, the village movement, the new Muslim followers of Jesus had begun to understand the importance of remaining in one's cultural and ethno-religious identity. This allowed space and freedom for small groups of people to gather and study the Bible and begin to believe. The faith of these new believers, transformed by their encounters with Jesus, was contagious and many of their wives began to follow Jesus.

As one wife stated,

My husband was always dating. This is because our men can have extra wives. But when he started to follow Jesus the Messiah, he changed. One time he came to me and said that he read in the Bible that "the two shall become one," not the three or four shall become one. My husband is a very different man since he became a follower of Jesus. He likes me more and he pays more attention to our children and he is not dating anymore. This is why I also follow Jesus and so do my children. My parents want to believe also.

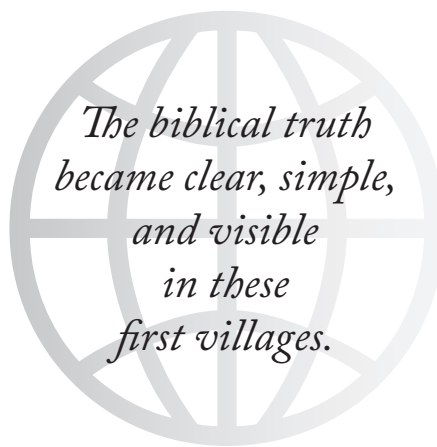
Another wife shared that her husband was always gambling and losing his wages, so there was never enough food for the family. But after he joined the Bible study group and believed in Jesus as Messiah, he stopped gambling and drinking, and now "there is so much more peace in our home and more food!"

The persons who have experienced Christ are attractive to the lost, for as Paul states, "We are a fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved" (2 Cor. 2:15). This fragrance is the love, joy, peace, and power that a true kingdom individual displays in his life. Abu Ahmed, one of the first believers in the Village Movement, was a well-known witch doctor before becoming a follower of Jesus. He explained his first encounter with a transformed life:

I had never met a Muslim like this man. He was full of peace and he had no fear of death or of evil spirits.

My whole village feared death, hell, curses, ghosts and spirits. This man [Humza] even prayed for my son who was not eating or drinking and was very sick. I was sure he was going to die and all my magic wasn't helping. Humza prayed for my little son in the name of the one in the Qur'an who is called the great healer, Isa [Jesus]. By the next morning my son was healed and healthy again. Humza began to teach me about Jesus from a wonderful book [New Testament] I had never seen before. Now I have found peace and have no fear of death. Many of my family and friends now have found this same peace.³⁵

Transformed people are contagious and are the foundational building blocks for movements of the gospel.



The supernatural love and joy expressed in the new believer becomes irresistible to those in their family and their natural networks. The new Muslim followers of Jesus continued to study Jesus, his ministry, and his teaching of the kingdom, seeking to understand how he planted the seeds of movement into the nations. The biblical truth became clear, simple, and visible in these first villages. As more and more of the Muslim followers of Jesus (MFJ) experienced the living Christ, their faith became more and more contagious, spreading to other families. With Jesus living in them and transforming them, they began to see many of their families, cousins, friends

and others drawn to the Messiah and the movement began!

Because of families coming to Christ, areas of other villages began to believe in Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Meetings between village leaders began to consistently happen, studying the Bible, praying and experiencing the miracles and healings of Jesus. A network of MFJ leaders emerged along with a solidifying of their new identity. I attended one of these two-day meetings along with about eighty national followers of Jesus. The time consisted of in-depth Bible study, researching the kingdom and identity and its application to the many high-identity Muslim people who were coming to Christ in that area. One of the sections of scripture researched was the parable of the wine skins. During one of the sharing times, Mohamed Beni, a Muslim follower of Christ, a respected leader and teacher, stood up and explained how the parable of the wineskins was important for gospel movements among his people. As is the custom in Islam, Mohamed Beni opened with, "Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh" (may the peace of God be upon all of you). He then continued:

Respected brothers, as you know I am from a very devout Muslim area and when I first believed in Christ I did not understand this idea of remaining in my family as light and salt. I was told by my Christian friends I must confess I had become a Christian to my family for if I did not, I was denying Christ. When I boldly announced I had converted to Christianity, I had to flee for my life. My relationship with my family was destroyed.

Then I heard about groups of Muslims who had remained in their Islamic identity and I went to find them. After a few weeks of studying the Bible with these followers of Jesus, I returned to my village. There I announced that I had made a mistake, that I was not a Christian, but had become a Muslim who was more devoted and surrendered to God. They were so delighted

and accepted me back immediately. That very day I shared my new faith in Jesus, his death on the cross, and his resurrection first using the Qur'an. They all listened intently and are now very open to a new perspective about the Messiah.

This parable of the wineskins is about my life. I am the new wine who tried to place myself into the old wineskins. The old wineskins are Christianity. When I did this I tore my family apart and like this parable, my opportunity to tell my family and village about Jesus was spilled out and lost, I thought, forever.

Brothers, we in this meeting, who are Muslims, must understand that we are the new wine and if we are to reach our people we must create new wineskins. The old wineskins of Christianity have never held the gospel for my people. Our own families and our own villages are the new wineskins. We who are the new wine must place ourselves in these new wineskins.³⁶

The Village Movement grew in numbers and boldness and many of them met nightly to study the Bible. In one of these studies, a group of the leaders and I had just finished the Book of Matthew and were discussing Matthew 28:19–20. One of the Muslim followers of Jesus explained that this verse implored them to go into other areas besides their own and make disciples. The group began discussing enthusiastically about some of them moving to the Mountain people. Others in the group talked of the slums of the inner city in another district. Still others talked about the vast numbers of peoples from the plains who had never experienced Jesus the Messiah. In the next few years, selected nationals were mentored, trained in spiritual and ministry formation, and sent to these three new areas.

Inner City

The first national team was birthed from the Village ministry and sent to the people living in the inner city slums. This people group was

At first it was just a small crack, and at year thirteen the dam broke. Talking to the Slum people about Jesus is now easy.

considered staunchly Muslim and solidly opposed to the Bible and Christian evangelism. In a report from the national team leader who had been sent by the Village Movement:

The first ten years were excruciatingly difficult. We shared the gospel hundreds of times. We developed educational programs and a fish farm and other social development programs. Our platform to be among the inner city slum people was credible, but only a few began to believe in Jesus the Messiah. Our goal was to talk to everyone we could about Jesus and to pray for the sick in Jesus' name. These people were always angry and suspicious, even though we explained we were not trying to get them to change religions. We often told them we only wanted them to understand the life benefits of experiencing Jesus the Messiah and the importance of the Bible to help them move out of poverty. Around year eleven, there seemed to be a shift in the spiritual atmosphere. We do not know exactly what was happening, but the iron wall of the Slum people began to crack and they began to listen to our stories of Jesus. Part of this dramatic change in the spiritual atmosphere came from some amazing healings that they had seen done in the name of Jesus. At that time, through our network of national workers, we were hearing of many hundreds of Muslims in other difficult people groups in our country coming to Jesus. Miracles, visions, and dreams were also happening in those other areas. The Holy Spirit was moving, not just among the Slum people, but across the country in other areas that in the past had seemed impossible. We just don't know what happened, but something cracked. At first it was just a small crack, then a larger one. At about year thirteen, the dam broke and, I can only say, talking to the Slum people about Jesus is now easy. Yes, in the last seven to eight years, thousands

have confessed faith in Jesus, over 1200 have been baptized, and many are in Bible study two and three times a week. We now have sixty-eight key leaders who each oversee their own ministries. Much of our work seems done as these sixty-eight men have taken ownership of this movement.

When asked if any of the thousands had changed their religious identity to a Christian identity, the national leader reported:

We always give them freedom to choose their own identity. However, we study the Bible to help them see that they can remain culturally and in name a Muslim. Then we always ask this question, "If you change your identity to Christian, can you reach your family?" The answer is almost always, no. But about 10% have decided to take on the identity of the name Christian. About half of these people who changed religions have been thrown out of their families. The other half have been allowed to stay in their families, but honestly they are not effective in bringing others in their villages to Jesus.

The Mountain People

A few years later, the Village ministry sent their next team to the Mountain people. The Mountain people were also staunchly Islamic, higher in their practice of Islamic rituals and much more educated than the Slum people. Building on the foundations and lessons of the Village and Slum people movements, the long trek to movement found momentum a bit faster, but the journey was still arduous and filled with persecution. As one of the early national pioneers of the Mountain movement shared,

Since I became a Muslim who follows Jesus the Savior, many of my friends have come to follow him also. In fact, thirteen other Muslim mosque leaders

have decided to follow Jesus and to believe the Bible and many of their religion students have believed. But there have been many problems and insults since I began to tell others about Jesus. When I first started, someone put poison in my coffee. I almost died, but Allah spared me. Also I have been thrown in prison many times.³⁷

Over a period of two years, the Mountain people movement became prolific in their multiplication. The last six to eight years have been especially fruitful. In the coming year, this group will be sending eight new teams of Muslim followers of Jesus into eight new areas in their country from their own people. Each team is made up of four to seven people. Here again, in the Mountain movement, the oikos is respected as essential. One national leader said,

Oikos is the heart of all our new movements. If the oikos is weak, movements are slow to happen. This is why we focus on discipleship, Bible study, prayer and scripture memory. Each new leader in our movement must memorize at least 200 verses from the Bible. Also, some of us are each memorizing a book from the New Testament.

The Mountain movement has now grown to many thousands of adult Muslim followers of Jesus. Most of these are active in discipleship groups two to three times a week. Last year alone, in this ministry there were over 2400 confessions of faith, well over 1000 baptisms, and 214 new discipleship groups were formed.

When I asked the leaders about identity, it was clear that very few of the new followers of Jesus changed their religious identity. Sheik Om stated,

There is a natural tendency in our movement to remain who God made us. We were born Muslims. And now we are born again Muslims who follow and obey Jesus as the Word of God. God did not make a mistake, but privileged us to be born into this culture and religion to bring the Messiah to our people.

The gospel has been carried by these Muslim followers of Jesus to the Mountain people. Therefore, it is natural for the new believers to follow the example of those who first told them about the Messiah and to remain in their ethno-religious identity.

The Plains People Movement

Once again from the first Village people ministry, about two years after the team was sent to the Mountain people, a new national team was sent to the Plains people. This team consisted of over twenty-five nationals. They broke off into five groups and moved into five different Plains towns. They moved in as small business owners who hired local Muslims as employees. Each of the five



teams also developed a social program to serve their new community. They established these programs in partnership with the local Muslim leaders who researched a major need of each respective area. In two areas, where the government educational programs were very poor, the towns' people said they needed after-school programs to help tutor their children. They had dreams of seeing their children graduating from high school and even going on to college. These things had never happened in these two villages. After-school reading, writing, and math programs were developed. Each team member took turns leading these programs with other town leaders. Two other teams, again in partnership with the local leaders, decided the most

important project would be helping young mothers raise healthy babies and children. The mortality rate for newborn children up to two years old was very high. Wellness baby workshops were developed to train mothers in nutrition, basic health, hygiene, and teeth care. A milk and vitamin distribution center was also founded. Another team decided along with the Muslim town leaders that the community's need was for a library and for tutoring in literacy.

Each team, as they prepared to move into their new area, presented themselves as followers of Jesus who came to bless their new community through the kingdom principles of the Messiah. Each team explained they would not Christianize, but desired to bless their new community by applying the principles of the Messiah found in the New Testament. These five teams decided to not speak of Jesus until trust was gained and until the leaders of the towns asked them about Jesus. The teams lived like Jesus among their respective Muslim areas. Trust was solidly established as they served unconditionally and these five teams became beloved members of their communities. After a few years, some of the leading Muslim leaders began to ask questions about their faith.

As one of the team members recounted:

We began where they were. We used their own book, the Qur'an, as a bridge to the Bible and Jesus. We shared from Surah 4:136, "Unless you study all the holy books you have gone far astray...."

They themselves asked if they could study the Bible with us, so we began in the New Testament reading in Matthew. We would study almost every day in the evening and more joined us, so we had to break up into a number of different study groups. Slowly many men and women began to believe in Jesus and their children began to believe also. After about another five or six years of this, there were over 150 of these studies going in the Bible. News

of our new faith must have spread to the capital city, because one day some Muslim leaders from that city came to us and commanded us to leave. They said we were pagans to study any book but the Qur'an. And they commanded all the many hundreds of followers of Jesus who had been baptized to stop studying the Bible. There was a large, heated meeting in the mosque for hours between the outside Muslim leaders and the Muslim leaders who follow Jesus. Finally, it was amazing as our dear Muslim friends defended us. They told the outsiders that we had taught them Jesus principles that had changed all of their lives. Their children were much better educated, some had graduated from high school and a few had gone on to college. Their babies were staying alive and growing healthy. Their marriages were so much better and financially they were doing much better. They stated to the angry outsiders, "Jesus has made us new, and we are what the New Testament calls 'new creations.'" Then they told the leaders to get out of their towns and never come back!

Twenty years ago, it was unheard of for a Muslim to call Jesus his Lord and Messiah and to study the Bible. As one Plains MFJ stated,

It used to be said, why would any Muslim follow Jesus? Anyone who would do this is a pagan. Now we say why would anyone not follow Jesus? Those Muslims who do not follow Jesus are pagan.

The Plains People movement started twenty years ago. As with the Mountain and Inner City movements, there are now many thousands involved, and every year God is adding to their numbers those who believe. Last year alone, this movement saw over 680 confessions of faith in Jesus, 350 baptisms, and 140 new discipleship groups birthed.

When asked about religious identity, one of the main leaders told me that identity is simply not a question anymore:

All of the people coming to Christ in our movement are being led to Jesus through their parents, family, and

The men and women who came twenty years ago told us they would not Christianize us. They promised.

friends who are Muslim. The men and women who first came to us over twenty years ago told us they would not Christianize us. They promised. We finally believed them and now we are Muslims who love and obey Jesus. Indeed, they never Christianized us but they did 'Christ-ize' us.

From these case studies, it is clear that the high-identity Muslim peoples in these movements are naturally inclined to keep their ethno-religious identity as Muslims. They live among their people as new creations in their old environment. They are salt and light in their families and communities. By remaining in their God-given surroundings, they are bringing their oikos into transformative encounters with the living Word of God, Jesus. Many years of traditional methods of outreach among these very same case study groups had not produced natural movements of the gospel. As stated by Harley Talman:

But what happens to Muslims after they come to faith in Christ? Muslims who embrace the gospel are encouraged, even compelled, to "become like" the national Christians in their community or foreign missionaries. They become "converts" not only in matters of Christian faith but also in culture, lifestyle, religious identity, and practice. Their becoming "Christians" and joining the Christian community has resulted in persecution and expulsion from their Muslim community—not necessarily for following Christ, but for bringing shame upon their family, rejecting their culture, and betraying their community.³⁸

The four case studies of the Village, Mountain, Slum and Plains people demonstrate that becoming a follower of Jesus does not need to result in being rejected by one's family or rupturing the oikos. This results in the spilling of the new wine. Rather, the new wine is finding new wine skins

in their own families, communities, towns, and country. They have become new creations in the old environment and new wine in new skins.

Conclusion

Kingdom movements of the gospel among high-identity Muslim peoples were the overarching theme of this article. One major barrier to this endeavor is the traditional approach of extracting new Muslim believers from their birth environment. Within traditional missions, the message has often been one that compels the Muslim to convert to Christianity. This has meant taking on a Christian identity and rejecting one's ethno-religious identity. Charles Kraft speaks to this problem saying,

The mistake of trying to convert people to our form of Christianity has, for many, radically changed the message of Christ into what is primarily a cultural, rather than a spiritual message. What they heard is that He, not simply we, requires conversion from their cultural religion to our cultural religion (called Christianity, whether or not it is biblical).³⁹

The traditional message of changing one's allegiance to Christianity from Islam is asking the Muslim to lose his or her birth identity and birthright. For high-identity Muslim people, becoming a Christian most often results in being rejected by the entire extended family, thus extinguishing their influence as a light to their people.

This is a matter of enormous consequence, for the high-identity person to alter his or her ethno-religious identity and to "become a Christian" is to commit high treason. One becomes a traitor and often an outcast. Therefore, this article through biblical case studies and modern day case studies, has offered an alternative approach.

The biblical case study of Jesus demonstrates remaining in one's oikos, even though that oikos is deeply influenced by the kingdom of darkness. Paul's admission about the corruption of his own Jewish culture is evidence of this. Paul confessed, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Rom. 2:24). Jesus did not come to bring a new religion into the world; he came to bring himself into the world. Jesus did not speak of Christianity, but he often spoke of the kingdom. He did not invite anyone into Christianity or to follow Christianity, he invited them into the kingdom to follow him. Jesus himself was not a Christian. He was a Jew. He was born a Jew, lived as a Jew, and he died a Jew.

Jesus demonstrated the importance of remaining in one's own oikos when he healed the demoniac who begged Jesus to go with him. Jesus did not invite the demoniac into a different religion. Rather, he sent him back to his own people, which resulted in a movement of the gospel. The Samaritan woman's religion was fraught with animism and distorted theology and her life was far from exemplary. Yet Jesus did not invite her into his own Jewish religion. He left her in her oikos and a Samaritan movement began.

Paul, in I Corinthians 7, states his "Rule in all the Churches" which clearly explains that if possible, the new believer is to remain in the birth environment wherein he began to follow Christ. Paul reiterates this in Galatians 6:15, "For neither circumcision [being a Jew] counts for anything, nor uncircumcision [being a non-Jew] but a new creation." Paul's rule was for the new believer to strive to live as a new creation in the old environment. In the next verse, Paul implies the life benefits to follow this "rule." "Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule..." (Gal. 6:16).

James the brother of Jesus, grew up watching the Word incarnate live as

light to his own oikos. Jesus lived and fulfilled the law: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). James followed the example of his big brother. He led his Jewish people to remain "zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20). In the decades to come, this allowed many thousands to believe and has left valuable principles for high-identity Muslim peoples.

The four modern movement case studies presented in this chapter among peoples, all of whom were high-identity Muslims, reveal that many thousands of Muslims have determined, for the sake of the gospel, to remain in their imperfect Islamic context "to give



light to their whole household" (Matt. 5:17). In their new passionate love for Christ, they have resolved to continue to live within their culture and within their religious identity. Following the examples of Jesus and James, they are remaining in their environment and kingdom movements are being birthed among HIMP.

Past traditional efforts among Muslims who were high-identity have seldom resulted in movements of the gospel. However, the four case studies presented show that many thousands of HIMP are living life immersed in their birth oikos. These new creations, in their old environment, are personally encountering the living Christ,

their lives are contagious and many are being drawn to the light of Christ.

Ralph Winter, in his article "New Wine in Old Wine Skins," states,

If properly pursued, there could be 100 million Muslims who are followers of Christ in the next 10 years. If not properly pursued, that is absolutely a pipe dream at the rate we are going. If we insist upon all Greeks becoming Jews, or all Muslims becoming "Christians" we are simply smoking a pipe filled with marijuana. The fact of the matter is that Evangelicals are no more likely to convert millions of Roman Catholics or Orthodox or Muslims or Hindus or anybody else if we insist on them adopting the Evangelical Western "Christian" cultural tradition with all of its different strengths and appalling weaknesses...⁴⁰

"Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule..." **IJFM**

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by David S. Lim

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Many of us have a burden and passion to reach the world for Christ, but we need a biblical and theological clarity that matches that passion. What is God's mission (*missio dei*) for His church (*ekklesia*) among the various peoples and cultures of the world? I believe that very strategic answers can be found to that question by looking at the components which comprise the biblical concept of "kingdom of God." More specifically, I want us to look at the forms of community this kingdom can undergird, with special focus on House (*Oikos*) Church Networks (HCN) and especially their place in what are called Insider Movements (IM).

I begin by stating some basic theological premises, to establish that our kingdom theology is anchored in a shared orthodoxy.

- First, all things that God created (e.g., nature) are good and should be received with thanksgiving (Gen. 1–2; Ps. 24; 104; 1 Tim. 4:4).
- Second, by God's grace, and because humans were created by God in His own image (Gen. 1:26–28), all things that humans have made (e.g., culture) are also good (Ps. 8). Humans were given the creation (or cultural) mandate (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:1); this is why human work and production is good (Eph. 2:10; Col. 3:23; 2 Thess. 3:6–13).
- Third, human culture is marred, because humans disobeyed (i.e., sinned against) the Creator (Gen. 3). This resulted rather immediately in devastating forms of sin including deception, covetousness, and murder. In 1 John 2:16, the scriptures summarize the roots of worldliness which lead to sin as "the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life." There are other lists in the New Testament of the works of the flesh, but I see four main forms of sin: idolatry/materialism (also called greed in Col. 3:5); individualism/pride; immorality; and injustice).
- Lastly, humans and cultures have been redeemed in Christ, and thus may be sanctified by faith. That faith is expressed by prayer to God in Jesus' name and obedience to His word (1 Tim. 4:4–5) through love and good works (Heb. 10:24; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). And to buoy our hearts, and stimulate

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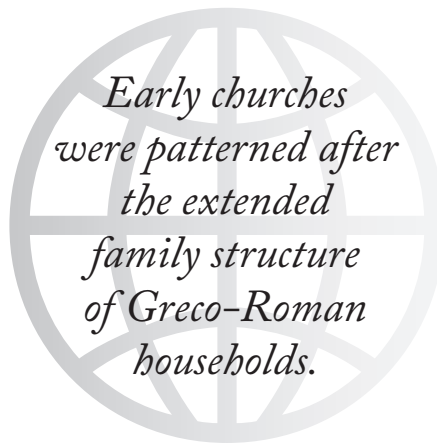
our faith, we are given an assurance by the Lord Jesus Christ that the church will prevail against the gates of hell. (Matt. 16:18–19; 24:14; Rom. 8:18–25; Col. 1:15–29; Rev. 21:24–27, cf. Gen. 12:1–3).

Biblical Vision: Kingdomization in House (Oikos) Church Networks

God desires His followers to make disciples of all peoples; He wants all of them to inherit eternal life—and to enjoy life, even now, abundantly, as they obey Him, their creator and king, through faith in His son, Jesus Christ. I prefer to call this “kingdomization” (or “societal transformation”), by which I mean that individuals, families (*oikos*), communities, and institutions among the nations will be disciplined into the norms and values of God’s kingdom. Kingdomization is realized best through house church networks (HCN) that are growing in righteousness and justice, marked by selfless love (*agape*). Righteousness refers to the right and moral relationships characterized by love between people—relationships which promote goodness and discourage evil. Justice (which is love in the public sphere) denotes right relationships where every person and community is given the authority, the democratic space, and the skills to participate actively in determining their destiny for the common good to the glory of God.

These Christ-following individuals and communities live in harmony and cooperation. They are empowered by servant leaders who serve as facilitators in the holistic development of their personal and communal lives. In this manner, they share their blessings with partners in other communities, establishing peace (*shalom*) among all the nations of the world. Isaiah 65:17–25 (popularly called the “Isaiah 65 vision”) envisions a “new heavens and new earth” on earth, where death, marriage, and child-bearing still prevail. The first three verses describe the

New Jerusalem as a “city of joy” where life is celebrated and God is delighted. Verse 20 sees people living long lives, presumably with healthy lifestyles and good governance (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1–2), implying that the leaders are also godly and righteous. Verses 21–22 show a society where social justice prevails, where each one’s labor is rewarded accordingly, following the prophetic ideal of “each man sitting under his own vine and fig tree” with no fears (Mic. 4:4) and with the Mosaic laws of gleaning and the year of Jubilee in force (so none will be poor, Deut. 15:1–11; Lev. 25). The next verse depicts prosperity passed on from one generation to the next, and finally, the last verse describes harmony among animals, humans, and



the whole creation. And verse 24 hints at a mature form of faith in the generous God whose blessings do not need to be earned or pleaded for, religiously or otherwise.

Kingdom Realization: Church (Ekklesia) in Every Household (Oikos)

The biblical vision of the kingdom of God is that His people (the church or *ekklesia*) will be structured as HCNs composed of “churches” (plural: *ekklesiai*) that meet in “houses” (plural: *oikoi*). The phrase *ekklesia kat’ oikon* (“the church in the house”) is found in four places in the Pauline epistles, referring to the households of Prisca (Priscilla)

and Aquila in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19) and in Rome (Rom. 16:5), of Philemon in Colossae (Philem. 2), and of Nympha in Laodicea (Col. 4:15).

The intimate linkage of these *ekklesiai* with existing households is also seen in 1 Corinthians 1:16, where Paul claimed that he baptized the *oikos* of Stephanas, and later in the same letter he commended the same household as the “first fruits of Achaia,” who have “devoted themselves to the service of the saints” (16:15–16). The letters also refer to other groups, not necessarily founded by the members of the Pauline circle, which were identified by the *oikos* to which their members belong (e.g., Rom. 16:10–11, 14–15). The conversion of a person “with (all) his or her *oikos*” is also mentioned several times in Acts, e.g., Lydia’s (16:15), the Philippian jailer’s (16:31–34), and Crispus’ (18:8). (Interestingly, in the New Testament, *ekklesia* is always singular when it refers to house-fellowships up to *polis* (city) level, but becomes plural when it denotes regional level beyond a *polis*, like in Gal. 1:2; 1 Cor. 16:1, 19).

The Social Pattern

The phrase *ekklesia kat’ oikon* designates not only the place where the *ekklesia* met, for *en oiku* (in a house) would have been the more natural expression (cf. 1 Cor. 11:34; 14:35). Rather, it was most probably used to distinguish these particular household-based groups from *hole he ekklesia* (the whole church), which seemed to have assembled occasionally, especially for liturgical purposes (1 Cor. 14:23–40; Rom. 16:23; cf. 1 Cor. 11:20), or from the still larger configurations of the Christian movement for which Paul used the same term *ekklesia* (Meeks 1983, 75).

The early churches were patterned after the extended family structure of Greco-Roman households. As in most societies, the Greco-Roman culture used the home as the basis of social life and the prime center of religious practice. There was no place for isolated

individuals; everyone belonged to a household unit. In Roman times, although the *oikos* was subordinated to the republic, it remained a basic political unit: laws were enacted to preserve the authority of the head of the family. Augustus exploited the paternalism inherent in the household system to secure his authority, thus becoming the family head of the empire. Consequently, the empire became a macrocosm of what the *oikos* was in microcosm; it was viewed as a complex network of households which all loyally interlocked into one grand order under the authority and protection of the emperor (cf. Malherbe 1973, 69).

In New Testament times, the *oikos* was defined primarily not by kinship, but by the relationship of dependence and subordination. It was a community composed of immediate family members, freedmen-clients, hired laborers, tenants, slaves, and sometimes even friends and business associates (Meeks 1983, 29–31, 75–77). They were bound together under the authority of the senior male (or also female at least in the Greek mainland, (Lightfoot 1879, 56); interestingly, Prisca's name usually appears ahead of her husband Aquila) of each unit. Each *oikos* head ruled over all members and their decisions, including religious ones, were binding upon all of them (e.g., Matt. 18:23–34; 24:49; 25:25). We can therefore understand the norm of household conversions in the early church.

To be part of an *oikos* was to belong to a larger network of relations of two general kinds. In the most intimate strand was a vertical but not quite unilinear chain of interlinked, hierarchical roles, from the slaves to the household head. There were also the bonds between friends, clients, and patrons, as well as a number of analogous but less formal relations of protection and subordination. Between one *oikos* and others there were links of kinship and friendship, which also often entailed obligations and expectations. These

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connections were seldom formal. Both along and between these lines, there were often strong ties of emotional attachment and voluntary loyalty (Theissen 1982, 83–87; Judge 1960, 31–34).

For people with means, their houses had second-floors called upper rooms (e.g., Mark 14:15; Acts 1:13, 9:37, 39; 20:8), which were mainly used as guest rooms (cf. John 20:19, 26) and were also accessible by stairs from outside the building. Generally, the ground floor was used for storage and quarters for slaves, retainers, and servants, while the family lived on the elevated and partitioned portion. These houses seemed large enough to hold a maximum of about forty or fifty people (Murphy-O'Connor 1983, 155–158).

Household Religion

Since the *oikos* was made up of such diverse members in terms of social status, it needed strong bonds to keep its constituents united. Economic interests served in part as the cement for friends, clientele, and slaves; the latter also faced legal sanctions if they tried to break away. But, overall, there was the force of religion. The solidarity of the *oikos* was expressed in the adoption of a common religion, chosen by the household head, which served not only to integrate the members but also to mark off their boundaries from others who worshiped other gods. This unity was more enforceable in smaller *oikoi* than in larger ones. It also seems that it became more common in imperial times for different members to go their own religious ways (cf. 1 Cor. 7:12–16; Meeks 1983, 30–31).

This *oikos*-based religion existed primarily as the worship of small statues of household deities who were expected to protect the members from sickness and calamity, as

well as to insure economic prosperity. This household religion also took the form of astrology, hero-cults, and the veneration of ancestors. Little temples and shrines were constructed in many private residences (Aguirre 1965, 154). Nevertheless, there also seemed to exist a prevalent longing for universalism which extended also to religion. Tolerant syncretism and religious pluralism prevailed in the first and second century of the Roman Empire. During this period, the imperial order was open and easily assimilated all religions, including Judaism and Christianity (cf. Judge 1960, 73–75).

This was true also in Jewish culture. The *oikos* (Hebrew: *beth*) was traditionally the socioeconomic, educational, and religious unit of the Jews. It was the entire realm of life for women. Since every male was expected to marry, Jewish societies assumed that no one should be without a family. Among the father's duties were to provide for his family, to obtain spouses for his children, and to teach his sons the Torah. In the earlier periods, religious activities, especially presiding over the Passover meal, were carried out by every Israelite household head. But with the development and consolidation of Israelite religion, it became customary for priests to be employed, especially in the larger and more important sanctuaries, and, after the exile, exclusively in the temple.

In New Testament times, the Pharisees taught that religion, particularly the purity laws, ought to be observed outside the temple, even in the *oikos*. Pious Jews had to wash before coming to the table: "the table in the home of every Jew was seen to be like the table of the Lord in the Jerusalem Temple," (as a literal interpretation of Ex. 19:5–6), and "the table of every Jew

possessed the same order of sanctity as the table of the cult" (Neusner 1975, 29–31). This may have prepared the early Jesus-followers to practice the priesthood of every believer in "breaking bread" in every oikos!

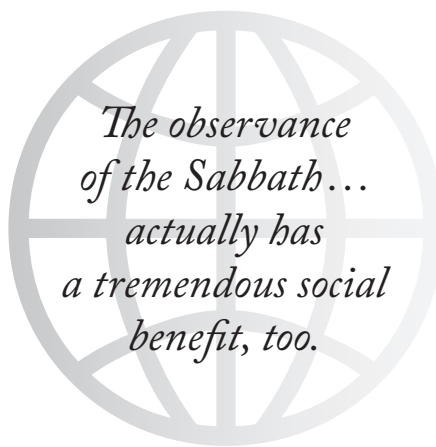
The church in the oikos was thus the basic unit of the early church, and its nucleus had been an existing household. As I mentioned earlier, each oikos was much broader than the nuclear family and included not only immediate relatives, but also friends, business partners, clients, hired workers, tenants, and slaves. But the house-church was not simply the oikos gathered for worship; it was not coterminous with the household. It seems that other preexisting relations, such as those with common trades, were also included, and new converts were certainly added to the existing house-churches. Moreover, there were groups which were formed in households headed by non-Christians, like the four referred to in Romans 16:10, 11, 14, and 15, not to mention Caesar's household (Theissen 1982, 82–87). Conversely, not everyone in the oikos necessarily became a Christian when its head did, as in the case of Onesimus.

As God's kingdom permeates and overpowers the sinful world to restore all things unto himself in and through faith in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15–23, etc.), it expands from house to house in all residences and workplaces, for where (King) Jesus is, there is heaven (the kingdom of God realized on earth). The incarnation shows that His missional pattern is an infiltration/subversion approach—starting from one household (of peace), and spreading from oikos to oikos. Consequently, any persecutor who wants to destroy the church has to do it from house to house, too (Acts 9).

The Oikos Mandate

By locating and focusing His kingdom and His people (ekklesia) in global networks of households (the oikoi),

God not only ensures definitive success for His redemptive plan, but also restores His original plan for a fallen creation through faith in Him who makes all things new. He empowers them to be His "new creatures" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17–19) who will fulfill His creation mandates: to reproduce from one generation to another and to have dominion over every living thing, to work for their sustenance and flourishing (Gen. 1:26–28). This also fulfills God's covenants with Abraham that through him every oikos on earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3, cf. Gal. 3:14, 29), and with the children of Israel that they will be a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6, cf. 1 Peter 2:9–10; Rev. 5:10).



1. Reproduction

This first creation mandate is to be fruitful and multiply, to perpetuate human life through marriage and child-rearing. This can be seen in four of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20), which highlight the importance of the oikos as God's basic unit for the preservation and multiplication of the human race. The first four commandments on how to love God require only simple religiosity—uniquely different from the sophisticated practices of other tribes and nations. Love for Yahweh has four basic practices: confession of faith in Yahweh as Creator and Redeemer; no idols or graven images; no words or actions that dishonor God; and the keeping of the Sabbath rest every seventh day.

The fourth commandment which establishes the observance of the Sabbath as a holy or rest day, although commanded by God to honor His rest on the seventh day after creating the universe the prior six days, actually has a tremendous social benefit, too. It especially impacts the household (oikos) including slaves and guests. They have weekly free time together to eat (or fast), pray, reflect on God's word, play together, and rest together! Surely this is a rhythm of life just as important as daily sleep. During the rest of the week, fathers (and today also many mothers) have to go to work, and hence have little time to be with their children during their pre-teenage years. Observance of the Sabbath therefore serves to help prevent many social ills that otherwise could be caused by juvenile delinquents who might grow up to become undisciplined and even criminal adults!

Among the other six commandments that teach us how to love our neighbors, three of them also benefit the oikos directly. The fifth commandment explicitly demands that children honor and respect their parents, thereby instilling in them a sense of duty and responsibility toward authority figures. This surely goes a long way to helping preserve order in society. The practice of filial piety is greatly needed in post-modern societies where parental authority and discipline have been disregarded. The oikos in HCNs is indeed God's pattern for inter-generational survival and the flourishing of humankind on earth.

And in the seventh and tenth commandments, God preserves marriage and family life, forbids adultery, and especially the coveting of a neighbor's wife, servants, or possessions. As the West enters a post-Christian stage, the sanctity of marriage and relevance of family structure (oikos) have been threatened and greatly weakened. Social ethics are proving necessary for a just relationship between males and

females, as well as for a safe and secure haven for children to grow up in. Without this moral standard, the sexual promiscuity of both men and women (including those in the LGBTQ community) caused by uncontrolled erotic desires have wrought social havoc, and even wars, in various communities in the world up until this day.

2. Production

The second mandate is to have dominion over creation. As each person seeks to survive and thrive in society, they must each find a vocation or calling that serves the common good. Adam and Eve, the first couple God created, were the seed of an *oikos*, and He placed them in a flourishing garden or land that He had prepared beforehand. Together they were to preserve and develop this earth (Gen. 2:15). Even after the fall, when work became hard labor (Gen. 3:17–19), their work would sustain their life and *oikos*, but would also help build a sustainable community as they used their skills and talents to create and innovate from one generation to the next.

This is economics (*oikonomia*), which means “the management of a household.” If our *oikoi* are managed biblically, then we will not be subject to the consumerism, market manipulations, and financial meltdowns orchestrated by the god Mammon. Instead, the economy will be “kingdomized,” which means that there will be honesty, transparency, moral integrity, and equitable distribution of resources to all in need. Like the Macedonians, even those experiencing severe afflictions and in deep poverty themselves will voluntarily overflow with generosity for others in great need (1 Cor. 8:2). HCNs should take the lead in re-engineering the global economy and assure abundant life for all—starting with every *oikos*-church. Just one encounter with Jesus resulted in the total transformation of Zacchaeus, a wealthy but corrupt man. After that encounter, Zacchaeus gave away half of all of his

Believers in house church networks are becoming entrepreneurs through biblical principles of wealth management and job creation.

wealth and chose to make a four-fold restitution of money to those whom he had cheated. How our world would change if all Christian fellowships (*ekklesia*) and households (*oikos*) began to live like the early followers of Jesus in Acts 2:42–47. House-churches are the key for changing the economics of the world (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34; Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 3:3–5).

Today, just one percent of the world’s families own more than fifty percent of the wealth of the nations while the rest of us all work for those elites. This is because they know how to make money work for them. Even though we as believers are called to be the head and not the tail and to lend to the nations (Deut. 28:12–13), Christians remain the tail because the church does not teach sound biblical stewardship principles other than its teachings on tithing. God owns everything in this world, and we are called to be His wealth managers so that there is equitable provision for all. Millions in and around churches all over the world are ravaged by poverty and its devastating consequences. It is not the governments, multinationals, or billionaires who will change the financial profile of the world. They are the problem, not the solution.

Through biblical principles of wealth management, job creation, and social entrepreneurship promoted in today’s HCNs, new believers are turning into entrepreneurs. This economic transformation is giving them abundant life and also making them rulers over their polis (city) (Luke 19:11–27). “The earth is mine and all the silver and gold is mine” (Hag. 2:8) and “all the cattle on the thousand hills are mine” (Ps. 50:10). “The heavens and the highest heavens belong to the Lord but the earth he has given to

us” (Ps. 115:16). Subduing the earth includes the stewardship of its wealth.

I believe house-churches will become economic powerhouses fueling spiritual, social, political, environmental, and economic transformation. Multiplication of disciples in HCNs includes financial and economic multiplication. Many of us are already leading in building the third (other than capitalism and socialism) alternative economic order called the Solidarity Economy, which equips and empowers the poor for social entrepreneurship and fair trade, so each *oikos* can have its own land (Lev. 25) and its own “vine and fig tree” (Mic. 4:4). Then their children will not be born into poverty (Isa. 65:23) but will enjoy peace (*shalom*) under good governance (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

3. Simple religiosity

What kind of spirituality is required of the men and women who will fulfill these two creation mandates in and through the *oikoi*? The answer must be: people who come to faith in Christ and who mature spiritually to the point of trusting solely in God and Him alone; and people whose faith begins by adapting to the majority religion (or non-religion) in their community. Ultimately, this faith of theirs develops into a simple but profound religiosity, with each person living a “love God and love everyone” lifestyle that embodies the Great Commandment for God’s glory in obedience to His will (Matt. 22:36–40; Rom. 12:1–2; 1 Cor. 10:31). They are characterized by their commitment to justice and kindness as evidenced in their community services locally and globally. And they eschew hypocritical religious services which really don’t please God (Isa. 58:1–12; Mic. 6:6–8; Amos 5:21–24; James 2:14–26; 1 John 3:16–18, etc.). They

walk humbly with their God with confidence and gratitude for having everything good (for God is always near and loves them forever). They have a Christ-like, disciple-making lifestyle of “love and good works” (Eph. 2:10; 4:24; Col. 1:28–29; 2 Tim. 3:16–17)—as salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13–16; Phil. 2:14–16), without having to “act religious” or do meaningless religious rituals (John 4:21–24; Heb. 10:24–25; Luke 10:25–37; Matt. 6:1–18; 25:31–46).

This New Testament practice of simply setting up HCNs is not very different from that of the Old Testament commands for Israel, which show God's design for simple religiosity in each extended family resulting in a reached, disciplined, and transformed people:

1. There were no local shrines or temples in each village and town in Israel.
2. There were no weekly Sabbath worship services. Synagogues as multi-purpose community centers came later in 200 BCE, for serving and teaching the Diaspora Jews (Lim 1987a).
3. There were no weekly or monthly collection of tithes and offerings. These were gathered only three times a year (Deut. 16:16). 1 Cor. 16:1–4 shows weekly collection in the early churches were mainly for immediate local needs, especially of widows and orphans (cf. Acts 6:1; James 1:27).
4. There were no full-time clergy. The Levitical priests were provided not just with cities, but also with pasture lands (Josh. 21). They were not exempt from being stewards of God's resources, thus they were shepherds and cowboys to produce livestock products for their neighbors, nation, and the nations (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6–13). This was how the priests and Levites naturally learned to be expert butchers for animal sacrifices in the Temple.

5. The Old Testament Jews were required to celebrate communally as a people in the national temple only three times a year (note: God's original design was a portable and transportable tabernacle) for what were called the three Jewish pilgrimage festivals (Deut. 16:16, para.):

- a. *Pesach* or Passover which celebrates the exodus from Egypt. This may be celebrated today as Easter or Holy Week.
- b. *Shavu'ot* or the Feast of First-fruits, as the week ending with the day of Pentecost. This Jewish festival



could also be celebrated as a “church anniversary” of HCNs in each polis.

- c. *Sukkot* or the Feast of Booths which celebrates the harvest but also remembers the forty years of living in temporary shelters when the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. Either Christmas or a harvest festival such as Thanksgiving could be substituted for Sukkot.
6. The actual teaching and obedience of the way of God's righteousness was done simply and naturally in the homes (*oikoi*) (Deut. 6:4–9).

When the Israelites were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and into exile in Babylon, their simple faith was passed on to their children. They had been admonished to flourish where God had transplanted them (Jer. 29:7–11). They practiced their faith in their homes—just as parents were responsible to pass on their faith to their children in their homeland (Deut. 6:4–9). When they returned from the exile, the second temple did not have to be as resplendent and marvelous as the first one.

Thus, God's kingdom is not “church-less spirituality,” nor “religion-less spirituality,” but simple religiosity. Its vision is to reproduce simple groups of Christ-followers without elaborate religiosity. It is simply to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God” (Mic. 6:6–8, cf. Isa. 58:1–12; Amos 5:21–24). For those who would like to read more, the *Mission Frontiers*, 34:2 (2012) issue shows how the family is God's prime mission strategy for world evangelization. Also see the Appendix at the end of this article for a sample of how one HCN in Switzerland conceptualizes its kingdom vision.

Kingdom Mission: Disciple Multiplication through Insider Movements

To achieve this kingdom vision, God designed a simple plan for world transformation through the propagation of movements by HCNs. These are usually called insider movements (IM) or disciple multiplication movements (DMM), by which all communities and nations would be transformed into followers of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The best (most biblical, strategic, and effective) ministry should incarnate faith through a movement inside the existing socio-religio-cultural structures, one that avoids creating new structures. That movement should multiply disciples from *oikos* to *oikos*, without creating another organized religious

system parallel or counter to that of the religion or ideology which dominates their contexts.

The ekklesia—made up of all Jesus-followers, each one of whom is a temple of the Holy Spirit—should seek to work together in kingdom mission, even when it's a partnership or venture as small as two by two. By His grace, they seek to realize His reign on earth until He returns to establish His eternal kingdom (Rev. 12:10–11; 15:3–4; 21:1–5, 22–27). These Christ-followers should aim to disciple all peoples in all societies to follow His will as people of His shalom in a kingdom of light. This should be done through holistic and transformational ministries, which include both evangelism and sociopolitical action, along with signs and wonders (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 4:18–19; Rom. 15:18–20; 1 Peter 2:9–10) that result in family and community conversions to Christ. Such was the missionary method of Jesus Christ and the apostles, often called disciple-making, as they modeled servant leadership, which persuades and equips people to voluntarily live according to God's will (Mark 10:42–45; Eph. 4:11–13; 1 Peter 5:1–3).

The IM Model of Jesus

Jesus birthed HCNs by training and sending His original twelve disciples to catalyze IMs wherever they went. He sent them out with authority (empowerment) among the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6) to find persons of peace (heads of oikoi) who were discipled to multiply Jesus-followers in their community (Luke 10:6, cf. vv. 1–21). Besides using His own oikos in Nazareth, He ministered from the oikoi of Peter's mother-in-law in Capernaum; of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in Bethany; Zaccheus in Jericho; Mary the mother of John Mark in Jerusalem, etc. In Jerusalem, even Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were His disciples, and perhaps through them, Gamaliel, all of whom were entrenched in the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish sociopolitical structure of his time.

They did not create a clergy class, nor construct a religious building, but an indigenous DMM of house churches.

In order to disciple Samaria, He reached out to an immoral Samaritan woman who had come to Jacob's well to draw water, and upon her conversion, empowered her to gossip about Him to the city elders (John 4). After two days of teaching these new leaders, He left them, never to return, nor did He leave any of His Jewish disciples with them to pastor these new converts. Instead, Jesus discipled and empowered the Sycharian believers to multiply themselves, and to set up contextualized HCNs among their compatriots in other Samaritan villages and cities.

In order to make disciples among Gentiles, Jesus' person of peace in Decapolis (a metropolis of ten cities) was a teenage demoniac (Mark 5). After casting out the demons into the pigs (note that the town folks begged Jesus to depart from them immediately because their hog industry was in jeopardy), the teenager asked to be His thirteenth apostle. Jesus told him "No," and instead told him to return to his friends and gossip about what had happened to him (no need for any evangelism training class). When Jesus returned to Decapolis (Mark 7:31–8:13), He taught the 4,000 heads of households (oikos), and similarly left them never to return. Nor did He leave any Jewish disciples to pastor these new converts here either. This was how Jesus planned His international kingdomization movement—through DMMs by insiders.

The IM Model of the Early Church

This was also how the apostles replicated HCNs that were contextually sensitive and multiplying, that then moved across the Roman Empire and beyond by the power and corrective guidance of the Holy Spirit. The insider movement among the Jews started

in Jerusalem in the form of disciple-making from house to house (oikos) without having to separate from early Judaism's formal structure of synagogues, the temple, and their religious practices (Acts 2:41–47; 4:32–37).

It spread naturally southward to Africa through an Ethiopian convert who was a proselyte of Judaism (Acts 8), and as some traditions indicate, eastward as far as the Indian Empire by Thomas, northward as far as Armenia and perhaps to Moscow by Andrew, and westward as far as Algeria by Matthew and Bartholomew, all who may have just followed the trade routes of the Jewish diaspora. As for Paul, within seven years of three missionary journeys, he could testify that he had no more regions to disciple "from Jerusalem to Illyricum" (Rom. 15:18–20), and while in Ephesus for two years, the word of God spread to the whole Asia Minor (today's Turkey), both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:1–10).

Within a few years of such movements, they had literally turned the Roman Empire upside down (Acts 7:6 KJV). They did not create a clergy class, nor construct or even rent a religious building, nor hold regular religious services except to break bread weekly in their homes. It was the teaching and practice of the apostle Paul (perhaps the best model of a cross-cultural missionary) not to plant a growing local church, but an indigenous DMM in house churches that were formed by converts who did not have to be extracted and dislocated from their families and communities (1 Cor. 7:17–24). With consistent contextualization ("becoming all things to all men," 1 Cor. 9:19–23) by outsiders or expatriates, he just needed to disciple a person of peace and his oikos, from city to city. Almost every new

Jesus-follower can be equipped and empowered to be a person of peace—if they are not extracted from their family and community.

IM Models Today

To disciple means to equip Christ-believers with just three spiritual habits and skills: (a) communing with God through prayerful meditation (*lectio divina*) to turn His word (*logos*) into a word (*rhema*) to be obeyed; (b) making disciples through leading a house church (ekklesia in oikos) with fellow believers in biblical reflection and sharing (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26), whereby each one learns how to do personal devotions (cf. Acts 17:11); and (c) doing friendship evangelism to share what they have learned of God and His will with their networks of non-believing relatives and friends, usually one or two persons at a time.

These reproducing believers can be produced through mentoring (or better, discipling) by disciple-makers (servant leaders) who seek to equip *all* believers (cf. Eph. 4:11–13) right in their house-church meetings, usually in their residences and workplaces, for a season. Thus, today we can find like-minded partners in the various lay-led movements, like campus evangelism (especially Navigators), marketplace ministry, business-as-mission, and tentmaker movements globally, as well as mission agencies (mainly Western, mostly in the International Orality Network) that do church planting movements (CPM) that avoid conventional church planting and church growth that practice extraction evangelism.

Conclusion: Contextually Sensitive and Multiplying HCNs

It seems clear that the most prominent biblical pattern for realizing God's kingdom is through movements of HCNs that are both inside (contextualized) and multiplying. It is a pattern in which every new convert to Christ can be disciplined to evangelize and disciple the nations. The Great Commission is

given to *all* believers. This is the priesthood of every believer in actual practice (1 Peter 2:9–10; cf. Ex. 19:5–6). Each believer can and should be disciplined to become a disciple-maker and to catalyze movements wherever he lives and works. It is possible to plant and program the right DNA into new converts, so that they will grow and develop into reproducing followers of Christ and transformational agents of God's kingdom. They will form networks of house-churches for the rest of their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As those with the burden and passion to reach all peoples with the gospel, let our mission be to foster HCNs with simple religiosity—that express a contextualized, holistic and transformational quality that



is truly replicable: self-governing (with their own leaders), self-supporting (their own resources), self-propagating (their own witness), and self-theologizing (their theological and ethical sensitivities). In so doing, we will be developing churches that will be copied by future generations of good quality Christ-followers.

We should avoid transplanting denominational structures (mimicking the ideals of Christendom) which are often de-contextualized (foreign-looking, if not actually foreign). This foreign imposition has almost always produced marginalized Christians who are separated from their communities. They are despised and rejected by their family and friends, not because of the gospel,

but because of their insistence on extra-biblical forms and traditions which emerge from extraction evangelism.

So, even if it seems proximate and convenient, let us *not* encourage our new converts or disciples to attend an international fellowship or denominational church, except on special occasions. We should just focus on movements—contextually making disciples and multiplying simple churches—for where two or three believers are gathered prayerfully, there is the church (Matt. 18:19–20). We should encourage our disciples to just gossip Jesus and form small disciple-making groups (ekklesiai in oikoi) among their friends and kin in their neighborhoods and workplaces—and allow each to become a movement that results in a HCN. They are simply to do this spiritual “network marketing” of the gospel from city to city—till the whole world knows and obeys Jesus.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, let's catalyze movements in Asia and beyond, partnering in our conviction that the harvest is indeed plentiful (Matt. 9:37–38), that our King Jesus is indeed building His ekklesia, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (16:18–19). Let's finish the Great Commission together in our generation, expecting each oikos to be blessed in house church networks that send disciple-makers to bless the nations through insider movements—in each of their unique cultures. **IJFM**

Appendix: The Menorah Vision

Concerning the kingdom of God and particularly church movements, God gave me a vision about the menorah (Ex. 25:31–40). Years ago, my friends and I received a vision that was a forerunner to this one. This became a basic apostolic vision and a building plan for house church movements in eastern Switzerland. With the menorah vision, the first forerunner vision was simplified and clarified.

I saw the golden lampstand with its seven branches. A flame was burning on each branch. In my spirit, I heard the words: "Each flame will glorify my name. Each flame will generate churches."

The middle stem speaks of family and generations. God promised Abraham that He would bless every clan in the world (Greek: oikos, everybody who belongs to a house, houses as communities) through him (Genesis 12:1–3). This promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God wants to build His church in every biological family (family church). This was the hub of the early church. Whole families were to be saved (Ex. 13:3; Josh. 24:15; John 4:53; Acts 10; Acts 16:31–34; 1 Tim. 5:7–8). They should worship, love, and serve the Lord together. Jesus knows about the deficiencies and separations in families (Matt. 10:35). Still, He wants the central flame to burn in every family through countless generations (Ex. 20:5–6).

Each family has a different spiritual legacy which they and their descendants can impart. This results in a family calling. Not every family member will live in the same calling. Maybe only some of the children will walk in it. A family choosing for a certain work of God becomes more evident if the calling is carried out over several generations. In the life of Abraham, we see a family legacy. In Isaac, the family calling appears, and in Jacob and his sons the choosing of the family becomes obvious. This choosing is seen in intellectual, social, economic, artistic, mental, or spiritual achievements. Well-known family names stand for specific achievements.

The menorah has three arms on the right and three arms on the left side. They are connected to each other; the flames on the right side point to local people and ministries. And the flames on the left point to mobile people and ministries.

The flame at the right side of the middle stem stands for the man or woman of

E*ach family has a different spiritual legacy which they and their descendants can impart. This results in a family calling.*

peace. They live in our neighborhood or in the same area—people of peace who are known for doing good deeds in the neighborhood (Matt. 10:11–13; Luke 10:5–12). Our heavenly father leads us to find them (2 Sam. 6:10; Ruth 2:1–3; Est. 2:7–9; Luke 19:1–10; Acts 16:13–15). In the course of time, they get to know Jesus Christ and they open up their homes. Depending on their calling, their houses become places of personal evangelism, prayer houses, healing houses, music scene hangouts, sports clubs, schools, etc. Sooner or later, organic churches evolve in some houses. This doesn't mean that every house of peace will be a house church, though. The dynamic of such houses often leads to neighbors who become door-openers to your own calling.

The flame at the left side of the middle stem stands for our workplace. This should be the place where we live out our calling. That's how the kingdom of God functions! This flame and the flame of our local neighborhood are joined through the semi-circle formed through the branches. Often we find the local man or woman of peace through our jobs. Through practicing our professions, we can lead people to Jesus and disciple them. New churches evolve. The Apostle Paul got to know Aquila and Priscilla through his profession as tentmaker (Acts 18:1–3). Soon after that, a local house church formed in the house of that couple. After this experience, they joined Paul as team members in his mobile team.

The flame at the right side is the man of peace who symbolizes the spiritual family (house-church). It's assembled by God himself. It goes beyond the own family members and is formed of several married and single people. It is headed by spiritual fathers and mothers (deacons,

house-parents). They are accountable to Jesus, just as the other lamps of the menorah. A church should not exist by itself, but should multiply and be linked to other houses or traditional churches in the neighborhood.

The semicircle leads us to the left side. This flame stands for mobile apostolic teams. What do these teams do? They take action in social fields and regions. They do the work of pioneers. These teams make contact with new people. New churches develop. They concentrate on training and releasing future leaders, who again on their part train others (2 Tim. 2:2). At the same time, they observe if these leaders are fit for local or for mobile functions and duties, and train them according to their callings (workplace, gifting, etc.).

The local house churches join a network. *The network is led by elders. This is symbolized by the external right arm of the menorah.* The elders should have a spiritual stewardship over the city and give protection to God's people (Acts 11:27–30). In the pioneer stage, the apostles appoint them (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Later on, the elders appoint the next generation (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–4). Often they exercise their gifts in ministries as described in Ephesians 4:11. God wants to empower the local churches and also build new local churches through them.

On the opposite side of the semicircle, the external left arm is symbolic of the men and women who serve as part of a mobile five-fold ministry. God calls and sends them as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. They help grow the body of Christ into maturity. They serve in teams, and, together with the local elders, they bear the spiritual responsibility for the region (Acts 15). They give spiritual protection to God's people.

The basic principle of the Menorah-Vision is this: the supporting pillar is the family. The external lamps are associated with this middle stem. The farther out the flames are from the middle, the greater their spiritual responsibility. The ones active on the left side carry the responsibility of "a sent one" (Acts 13). The ones active on the right side are responsible for "gathering in" (Acts 28:23–31).

God predetermines leadership profiles. He knows which flames should be burning in which stages of our life. If we follow Jesus, we are all called to disciple others (Matt. 28:16–20), and so we are all leaders (of course exceptions are possible). We are a common royal priesthood. That is God's conception (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Usually people have mandates with several emphases. We need to recognize which flame needs oil (the Holy Spirit) right now. Each of the seven flames has to do with leadership.

If we have Christ in our hearts, our desire should be that all of the flames are burning worldwide. We are asked to have oil for our flames, to support everything else, but not to be involved in everything. The fact that all lamps burn at the same level shows the equivalence of all positions (Gal. 3:27–29).

The original menorah was made of one piece—one talent of pure gold. This speaks of heavenly abundance and unity. The base on which the shaft rests also has a prophetic meaning: *the base stands for the one God*. In the Old Covenant, the twelve ancestors were built on it. In the New Covenant, there are twelve apostles. Prophets were aside them (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 18:20; 21:12–14). That's how the completion of the body of Christ comes to pass. In the kingdom of God, everything has its order. The lamps, the buds, the blossoms, the cups, the wick trimmers, and the trays also have prophetic meanings, but that would go beyond the scope of this article.

This vision of the menorah is for the purpose of facilitating the growth of movements in the kingdom of God. It helps us see where particular ministry focus already exists and where there is a lack. It unveils how individuals are positioned and how movements are arrayed before God.

Source: Marco Gmuer and friends (2012) www.inderweidverlag.ch.

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Households in Focus

Spiritual Oikos: A Kingdom Perspective on Ecclesial Identity

by John Kim

Editor's Note: In this article the author has combined two presentations, one delivered at the International Society for Frontier Missiology, Dallas, TX, USA, in October 2016, and the second at the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

Paradigm shifts can radically change our personal journeys in mission. I want to share my own, as a humble proposal for how we might come to view the kingdom of God in the world today. Mine is not really a remarkable story, but it involves remarkable people from a different socio-religious context. And it's their experience of ekklesia (church) amidst emerging Jesus movements that has prompted my own paradigm shift. That change of perspective is crucial for understanding the reality of the kingdom on the frontiers of mission today, but it requires I begin with my own story.

A Journey from the Secular World into God's Kingdom: A Paradigm Shift

I was born into a Christian family and grew up in Korea where I finished my PhD in Physics. It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I met Jesus personally and confessed Him as my Savior. During that time, I was exposed to the powerful Word of God, and it explained how I myself should have the image of God within me. But I became aware of the absence of God's image in my life. When I examined myself, I found myself in a hopeless and sinful condition. During an overnight prayer session, Jesus came to me and ministered to me in my broken state. Since then, my life has become a pilgrimage, seeking after his kingdom on this planet.

After my conversion experience, my daily life became literally church-centered. This was a major reorientation for me, for my life no longer revolved around the secular world and its practices. I became very church-centered as I lived out my faith on a day-to-day basis. Because of this big gap between my church-centered life and the life I used to live, I began to think about becoming an ordained pastor so I could serve and be more relevant to the church.

After finishing my master's degree, I worked as a researcher at a scientific institute. During this time, I attended a seminar and came across the term "tentmaker" or "professional worker." These were exceptional missionaries who worked in professional jobs with a certain expertise while seeking

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to serve God’s kingdom. This role seemed to fill the gap between my professional job and a desire to be a full-time minister to church communities. At the same time, awareness about the great commission and world mission was also growing in me. This was when my life changed from being centered around the church only to being centered around God’s kingdom around the world.

Three main words kept hovering over my head with this growing awareness of world missions. They were *Indonesia* (the biggest country in the world in terms of Muslim population), *professional worker*, and *Muslim*. Finally, in 1994, I was sent by a local church as a professional worker but also as an official missionary. This was the first time in the history of Korean churches that a local church adopted a UPG, an Unreached People Group. Since then, I have been involved in this world mission effort, focusing on spreading the gospel to Muslim areas.

While I was serving as a professional Christian worker, I went through a paradigm shift in understanding missions. I became aware of differences in lifestyle between local Christians and Muslims. I had been sent to serve among Muslims, but my life only revolved around my involvement with the activities of the local Christian community. This church situation was not much different than in Korea: The more I was involved with Christian community, the rarer the chance to build relationships with local Muslims. Local Christians struggled with the same issue. Those two religiously affiliated people groups, Christians and Muslims, were living in cultural proximity but in almost totally different worlds. I had to go back to the Bible for guidance on this; and I shared these issues with fellow workers in similar fields.

During this state of struggle, two terms particularly enlightened me: the incarnation of Jesus (the Word among

us) and contextualization. It was then God led me to take a totally different kind of journey, one I had never experienced in Christian circles. As a result, we witnessed group conversions among many Muslims villages—just as is evidenced in the Book of Acts. The workers also sensed the strong work of the Holy Spirit.¹ These new believers did not join the local church communities; they decided to live a Jesus-centered life within their own Muslim communities. They were not recognized as “Christians” but rather became known as “strange Muslims.” They decided to remain inside their inherited communities (as “insiders”) and became witnesses among them. They are faithful to Jesus and the Word of God, and maintain their religious identities as Muslims.

This was a part of the paradigmatic shift for me. In Korea, there is no inherited Christianity as a status. In other words, Koreans are not born into any a religious identity. However, Muslims are born as Muslims, more like a Korean is born as a Korean, no matter where they are born. When this point sank in, I realized for the first time that in God’s kingdom, his citizens are those people whose lives are directed by Jesus

and who are living Jesus-centered lives. I was not offering another bounded religion to the Muslim but an identity centered on Jesus.² This is the kingdom paradigm as I came to understand it.

The Kingdom Paradigm in World Mission

I am still on my journey to know more fully the kingdom of God. I recall one of my insider friends witnessed about Jesus to an imam who was surrounded by many curious Muslims at a big local mosque. He said he lived his life as a citizen in the kingdom of God where Jesus rules as the king; and he experienced Jesus in his everyday life. I noticed that in witnessing about Jesus, he preferred to speak of “experiencing” Jesus rather than speaking of “believing in” Jesus. According to this insider, believing in Jesus is often regarded merely as a matter of knowledge in his Muslim context. After listening to him, surprisingly, the imam asked him to perform *azan*³ (a call to prayer) in the name of *Isa Al Masih* (Jesus the Messiah) as it was the time of evening prayer!

When I look back on the journey I’ve taken after my conversion, I can clearly see a shift between two paradigms. It’s a

Table 1. Key Areas of Conflict in Mission Paradigms

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Christendom Perspective</i>	<i>Kingdom Perspective</i>
Missional Goal	Planting/transplanting churches	Implanting/sowing the gospel
Methodology & Identity	Extracting to make Christians in Christendom	Staying within their contexts as followers of Jesus
Working Epistemology	Christian positivism with cultural absolutism	Pragmatism with culturally relativistic appropriateness
Religion & Culture	Two separable entities There is Christian culture of the Christian religion	Inseparable complexity There is biblically-appropriate culture in the kingdom of God
Church	Should be planted, mostly in the form of individuals gathering in an artificial place or structure	Pre-existing networks shared by groups of people become churches
Mission Practice	Christianization	Contextualization

transformation of life I call *from Christendom to the kingdom of God*. I have written of this comparison in a previous article.⁴ The tensions between these two paradigms are reflected in table 1.

Testimonies of the Kingdom

By sharing some case studies of those who have turned to Christ, I want to illustrate how the identity we have in the kingdom of God can be distinguished from all other identities on earth, including religious ones. My own life journey has already been given as an example previously. All the cases I share in this article are directly or indirectly connected with my own field experience.⁵

1. Som's case

Som comes from one of the most pious Muslim people groups in Southeast Asia. Religious identity is not an option, it's inherited, and people cannot choose their faith. But, quite interestingly, he was actually born as a Christian. His mother's lineage is connected to a local sultan's family on his mother's land. A long time ago, the sultan met Jesus miraculously and his extended family moved to a town where they settled and started to live a new communal life on land provided by a local major Christian denomination. His extended family with this strange and unique background has been living as Christians now over some generations. Som grew up as a nominal Christian, and he was not active in church activities at all until he met Jesus during a crisis in his life.

After enjoying a successful university graduation, he experienced a powerful transformative vision. In the vision, he saw a bleeding man on a cross and heard a voice saying,

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.⁶

It was the very same image and the very same words that he recalled seeing on a piece of trash when he was

The suffering was different this time... He was no longer an ordinary Muslim: he glorified Isa (Jesus) too excessively.

six. This vision was given to him at the very moment when, in deep desperation, he was attempting suicide. He was trying to shake off the shame he felt due to a secret immoral act. In that crisis, he met Jesus through the same image he had remembered from kindergarten; but, now, it was revived by the real voice of God. He immediately repented of his sin and felt living water purify his heart. He threw a bucket of water over his body which he had made dirty by having intentionally cursed himself. Since this miraculous encounter with Jesus, he has experienced a total life change.

Since he had been a nominal Christian (which is exceptional for the 99.9% of his people group who are Muslims), he committed to live his new life for Jesus. He officially registered as a member of a local evangelical church. He got involved in Christian NGO services and became a passionate evangelist. However, the more passionate and earnest his way of doing evangelism became, the more serious the challenges and suffering which resulted. But he thought those sufferings were not worthy to be compared with the glory of God. He was stoned and even put in jail many times because of his daily evangelizing activities. On the one hand, he thought all kinds of trials and suffering were normative for followers of Jesus, but on the other hand, he was curious why his people didn't want to accept the good news that had been so real for him.

Whilst in his puzzled state, he met a close Christian friend who was very much interested in worship styles among the Syrian Orthodox. His friend suggested some reasons for Som's suffering that were not just theological, and encouraged him to consider a new congregational form

much like the Syrian Orthodox, whose worship style was almost the same as that of Muslims. At this point, he gave up trying to extract his people from their culture and then enculturate them into local church structures. He started to realize that the issue was not his sincerity toward gospel evangelism, or even the gospel as good news. The issue was that his people saw him as a betrayer who had thrown away his own heritage and had joined the Western Christian crusaders. Realizing this and coming to understand that God called his people to be effective witnesses within their own communities, he decided to go further back in his heritage and identify with his own Muslim ethnic heritage.

However, even much greater sufferings awaited him when he and his family began to live within Muslim communities as followers of Isa (Jesus). But the suffering was different this time. It was no longer because of his ethno-religious identity, but because of his kingdom identity found in Isa Al Masih. He was no longer an ordinary Muslim: he glorified Isa (Jesus) too excessively. Because he praised Isa too much as a Muslim, he was taken to court and given a three-year sentence.

Through his new gospel evangelization activities carried out as a Muslim, twenty-five Muslim adults in a village turned to the Lord. They had listened for four hours to his message from the Torah (the books of Moses), to the Injil (the New Testament), and then raised their hands to accept Isa as their Savior and Lord. After being released after 2.5 years of his sentence in prison, his passionate evangelism still continues. (His wife's ancestors are Yemeni, known to have come from Muhammad's lineage. His grandmother-in-law, who passed away some years ago,

was a very committed Muslim. She and her extended family members all accepted Isa as their Savior and all of them experienced miraculous peace in their lives.)

I know many other cases like Som's, but let me try and summarize some unique features of his case:

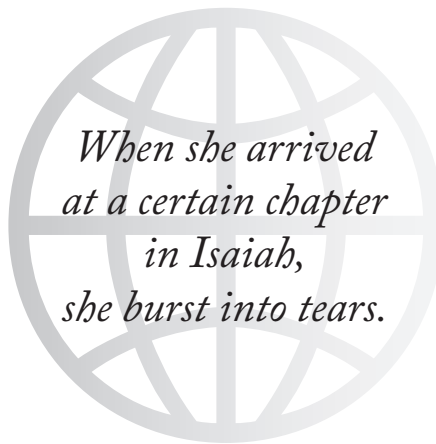
- Even though ethnically Som belongs to a pious Muslim people group, he was reborn as a Christian. There was a conversion in his life from this world to Jesus and he began to practice a Jesus-centered life by registering as a Christian and by belonging to a local church. At this stage, he seemed to equate his new identity in Jesus with being an officially registered Christian who was actively involved in Christian (church or NGO) activities.
- He was engaged in passionate gospel evangelization. He began experiencing sufferings, but he later realized they were mostly caused by the general sense of antagonism toward Western Christianity that had been formed in Muslims' hearts since a young age. He realized that his people's religious identity as Muslims could not be separated from their ethnicity and at that point he decided to stay within the Muslim community. In fact, he became a Muslim officially and legally.
- When he decided to stay within his people's community, he found he could lead many people to Jesus. Furthermore, this decision allowed him to structure a creative mission effort through heads of households among his people.

2. Latina's Case

Latina was born as a Muslim into a very pious Muslim family. Her father was a respected leader in a Muslim community. She was smart, memorized many Quranic verses, and got used to following everyday Muslim practices. She was cheerful and open-minded in character. She didn't mind having friendships with foreigners.

Due to her openness towards a more globalized world, she took advantage of Western education opportunities. She had the drive and ambition for success. She was smart and received all A's in her academic studies. She was the top student of all the public universities on her main island.

During her university life, she became friends with some foreign Christians. They dialogued many times about the issues of truth and genuine faith. One of the foreign Christians was a young woman named Stephanie who had come from America and who shared a genuine faith in Jesus. Latina was quite impressed by Stephanie's faith. Latina also met an Asian man, Joe, who was a Christian from overseas



doing doctoral study at her university. One day, Joe gave her a Bible. She was very scared when she received this forbidden book for the first time. However, as she respected the man who had given it to her, she kept the book and left it on her desk for several months. She had been taught one thing about the Bible in her Muslim community—that it was a dangerous book. Thus, even possessing a Bible was quite a sensitive issue.

Eventually, one day, with great curiosity, she opened the book and read some random pages. One afternoon as she was talking with Stephanie, they began to share opinions regarding the kind of thoughts atheists might have. And,

naturally, they started to share their own faith in God. Latina mentioned the book that she had received and had tried to read. Surprised, Stephanie also started to share her own life's journey, and how God had worked in such a special way in her life. Latina was very impressed and promised to continue this conversation. One day, when they met again at a fast food restaurant, Stephanie brought a Bible that had been translated with Muslim-friendly terms.⁷ She found the name *Isa Almasih* (Jesus the Messiah) instead of *Yesus Kristus* (Jesus Christ) in the Bible. Because this Bible looked good for Muslims to read, she read through the whole book in a month.

After reading the Injil (New Testament), she wanted to read the Old Testament too. She discovered great similarities in the contents of Genesis and Al Qur'an. She read the Old Testament quickly, and when she arrived at a certain chapter in Isaiah, she burst into tears. She had a strong unexplainable feeling. Instantly, she realized it was Isa (Jesus) who had come to meet her. At that very moment, the Bible verse, "I love those who love me, and those who seek me will find me,"⁸ reverberated in her mind.

Latina was meeting Jesus as she eagerly read the Bible and she decided to follow Jesus. She realized that the Old Testament was full of stories about the Messiah who would come to save His people. It was an astonishing new discovery that became a new foundation in her life.

She felt very sorry when she found out that her own people did not have the Bible translated into their mother tongue, so she decided to commit herself to Bible translation for Muslims.

She got married to a foreign Asian man and choose to maintain her Muslim identity. They agreed that they were both citizens in the kingdom of God, but they had different heritages, different ethno-religious identities on

this earth. They presently are doing studies and research for future work in Bible translation for Muslims.

What can we learn from Latina's case?

- We can see here how a natural Muslim can meet Jesus through the power of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Because of her genuine desire to be a witness for Jesus to her own people, she decided not to change her religious identity. She was able to overcome the religious identity issue through faith in Jesus, which was instead to become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.
- Sharing the good news by genuine friendship and fellowship can overcome the prejudice that has formed between Muslims and Christians.

3. Naya's Case

Naya is a typical example of someone from a folk-Islamic background. Even though he had been practicing folk Islam as a witchdoctor, he had a religious identity as a Muslim. He continually sought spiritual power in order to help people by healing them or by resolving any of their troubles. However, at the same time, he diligently tried to improve his family's financial situation by engaging in any kind of money-making business, because his healing ministry was not enough to support his family's needs. (Surprisingly, one of his businesses was the hunting of wild pigs.)

One day, he heard a very strange rumor that a group of people in a village in the mountainous area where he was hunting, had received new faith in Jesus (Isa). What really surprised him was that many people who had suffered from serious diseases had been healed when they received prayers in the name of Isa Al Masih. It was proof of the effectual faith of their baptism. The rumor interested him, so he wanted to check and see if it were true. Interestingly, the name of Isa Al Masih was

The name of Isa Al-Masih was not unfamiliar to Naya, but was a legacy from his father. He used it as a kind of charm for healing.

not unfamiliar to Naya. It was not because he knew of Isa in Al Qur'an as a Muslim; but the name Isa Al Masih was a legacy from his father, which was used as a kind of charm for healing. Many other names of the prophets were also included in the same spell.

Naya wanted spiritual power, so with great curiosity he decided to attend a meeting in the village planned by the new believers of Isa. There was a communal baptism ceremony which was also planned by the Muslim believers themselves. No expatriate workers were involved in the event. After carefully listening to the good news of Isa Al Masih, he decided to join the baptismal ceremony and he committed himself to become a follower of Isa.

He immediately returned to his own area and witnessed about the Isa Al Masih he had met to his family. He baptized eleven members of his extended family the following year. He got a Bible and spent much time reading and meditating. He started *oikos* fellowships and held prayer meetings among the family members. He continued to attend local mosque activities but he was focused on the home-based fellowships. He has never stopped talking about the Injil (the good news) to his neighbors.

People in his village persecuted him in various ways; they criticized him as having become a Christian. However, he claimed his identity was that of a pious Muslim and one who had never attended any churches his whole life. Many villagers observed his daily life. And just as Naya claimed, there was no evidence of him having become a Christian believer except his talking about Isa Al Masih. Some villagers began to share their experiences of healing when Naya prayed for them in the name of Isa. In time, he was

accepted as a professional man who could interpret the Injil and who healed people suffering from diseases by praying in Isa's name. People began to recognize him as "the Injil Expert" (or "Injil technician").

Naya's case demonstrates some different aspects from the previous ones:

- In terms of his religious identity, he has never left his Muslim identity but has kept it as his legal and official one.
- When he put his faith in Isa (Jesus), the villagers accused him of having become a Christian and even persecuted him in various ways. However, to Naya, Christianity was just one of the legal and official identities which he had never adopted. He didn't accept the term Christian as his new proper identity, but he applied a spiritual meaning to his new faith in Isa. Even though there were troubles in his own community due to his new faith in Isa, he remained within his own community. In the end, villagers recognized him as a Muslim but also as someone who had expertise in the Injil. (This naming of Naya as "Injil-Expert" recalls the way the name "Christian" was given by non-believers in Antioch.)⁹
- By remaining in his community, he was able to lead many people in his community to Jesus. All of his extended family members were subsequently baptized by him.

4. Mir-Ibn-Mohammad's Case

This final case study is already in print and I refer the reader to this story online, and for that reason, I will not repeat all the details here.¹⁰ I include this case because it is really astonishing. Even though this man was a Muslim by birth, when he believed in Jesus, he changed his religious identity to that of a Christian at the very beginning.

However, after hearing God’s command, he decided to go back to his tribe as a Muslim, and eventually he became the chief leader of his tribe. A great Jesus movement numbering in the thousands arose from his deep conviction and strong commitment to Jesus. He ruled the tribe according to biblical principles, and he ruled as one commanded to love even his enemies. He was almost killed by other Muslims who hated his way of ruling the tribe. His story also gives us some tips for understanding this perspective of a kingdom paradigm:

- This man was born as a Muslim and brought up in an Islamic educational system. But, when he met Jesus, he decided to live his new life in Jesus by changing his religious identity. He appears to have equated the new spiritual identity he had gained through faith in Jesus with the religious identity of being a Christian. He began his new life in Jesus by adopting Christianity.

- There was a strong calling from God to go back and be a minister to his own tribe. In responding to the calling from God, he decided to return to his own tribe as a “Muslim follower of Jesus.” In the end, he was asked to become the top leader of his tribe, the tribal chief.
- Returning to his own tribe as a Muslim wasn’t a big struggle for him due to his strong calling to be a witness among his people. This strong sense of calling from God led him to accept the role of tribal chief. His walk with God was so vivid that the average Muslim couldn’t accept his way of leading the people. He was much too dependent on biblical truths. However, eventually, his strong commitment to following the commands of Jesus resulted in a huge Jesus movement in the thousands.

A Comparison of the Testimonies

I have introduced these case studies to illustrate how people may come to faith from different socio-religious

backgrounds. As I mentioned earlier, the cosmic event that happened in my own life was my miraculous conversion from this secular world to God through Jesus and as a result, I am now living out my life as a kingdom citizen under the king’s reign and as a witness to Jesus in this world. Being a kingdom citizen is my real identity and there is nothing in the world that can separate me from that reality. My new identity, however, doesn’t belong to this world, and I continue to live in this world with a dual identity: both the socio-religious one I was born with, and the even more real spiritual identity as a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven.

I’ve come to understand that it’s all about incarnating the gospel, for we are sent just as Jesus was sent by Father God into this world.¹¹ Verses from John 17 speak to this duality of identity:

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world. (v. 11)

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. (v. 16)

Table 2. Comparison of Identity in the Case Studies

	In the world (they exist in the world)	Not of the world (they are not of the world)	Into the world (they were sent into the world)	Only Jesus: the king
Author	A Korean born in a Christian family. A science teacher and missionary.	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus among Muslims.	Kingdom citizen
Som	Born as a Christian but from an ethnically Muslim background. After his conversion to Jesus, became a legal Muslim to be a witness about Jesus to his own ethnically Muslim people group.	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus among his own people group.	Kingdom citizen
Latina	Born as a Muslim and brought up in a Muslim community. Became a follower of Jesus while remaining a Muslim even when married to an Asian Christian.	Accepted Jesus as her Savior and committed her life to Him as her Lord.	Witness about Jesus in Muslim communities through Bible translation work.	Kingdom citizen
Mir	Born as a Muslim but after his conversion to Jesus, he became a legal “Christian.” To be a witness to his tribe, he restored his original Muslim identity.	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus to lead his tribe to Jesus.	Kingdom citizen
Naya	Born a Muslim and remained a Muslim even after committing himself to follow Jesus. Given the name “Injil Expert.”	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus to lead all his extended family members to Jesus.	Kingdom citizen

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (v. 18)

Jesus knows we still live in the world even though we have already been invited to be people who don't belong to this world. All of these who have been introduced in these testimonies have a common spiritual identity that they share with me, even though they maintain a different socio-religious identity when belonging to this world. Our common identity is the kingdom identity found in Jesus as the king. A chart may bring some clarity to these identities. See table 2:

Oikos: A Picture of Kingdom Identity

My experience with these believers who turned to Christ began to shape how I understood the expansion of the kingdom of God. In both Som's experience and in Naya's, I saw the strategic emergence of oikos-based fellowships. This household structure was often more vital to the movement than a gathering of believers for fellowship and communal worship in specific places. In Som's case, there emerged a coordinating mission structure of local leaders, each who had their own oikos fellowship. Their purpose was to obey and put into practice what Jesus commanded. Activities like self-initiated Bible studies, leadership training, and community development projects are generated by these coordinated oikos structures.

This concept of oikos as a structural and familial reality challenges our image of the church as a local Christian structure/building where believers congregate. So many of my fellow Korean missionaries tend to start their field ministries by planting and organizing church structures (with decisions regarding land, buildings, number of the members, denominational affiliation, Sunday traditions, etc.). The structure of the movement I was seeing clarified that these matters should be the initiative of the indigenous believers, not the decisions of expatriates (whose

Peter's awareness of the way oikos is woven into ekklesia can help us understand how the kingdom of God is at work.

decisions can often consume huge resources). If we release these matters to the local believers themselves—matters of worship style and ways of meeting—then a people with a kingdom identity will emerge who then will be our partners in seeking the coming of his kingdom all around the globe.

More recently, my own oikos perspective has been biblically shaped by the apostle Peter, both in sections from the book of Matthew and from Peter's first epistle. I'm impressed by the fact that Peter heard directly from Jesus, and that he experienced Jesus' understanding and orientation towards ekklesia. When we address the subject of ecclesiology, it's usually Paul's perspective that immediately comes to mind. The terminology of ekklesia is all throughout Paul's epistles; but, by contrast, we see no use of the term by Peter, but rather we see a picture of ekklesia that is valid and vital for today. It's Peter's awareness of the way oikos is woven into ekklesia that can help us understand how the kingdom of God is at work in the contexts of people like Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya.

This drove me to the study of oikos and ekklesia in the scriptures. For instance, I had yet to perceive the way oikos and the kingdom were woven into Matthew 19. There Jesus communicated with various classes of Jewish culture using this dynamic reality of oikos: the marital husband-wife relationship intended by God (vv. 3–12); the acceptance of children (vv. 13–15); the properties possessed by a household (vv. 16–28); and, then, in vv. 23–30, Jesus incorporates the oikos dynamic into his teaching on the kingdom of God.

And everyone who has left *houses* or *brothers* or *sisters* or *father* or *mother* or *children* or *fields* for my sake

will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. (v. 29)

I began to see that oikos as a social unit was in line with God's providence when He planned the expansion of his kingdom. In other words, the oikos is not only part of the natural order God assigned to mankind even before the fall, but it should be our orientation even to this day. Reflected in my experience with Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya was God's plan that oikos be a fundamental social unit until the ultimate fulfillment of God's kingdom.

But it was 1 Peter that helped me recognize the relationship of oikos, ekklesia, and the kingdom of God. It was to Peter, when he confessed to Jesus, "You are Christ, the Son of the Living God," that Jesus said,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church (*ekklesia*), and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matt. 16:17–18)

I believe Peter's fellowship with Christ would give him a special sense for ekklesia. And in the first chapter of Peter's letter, Peter addresses the ecclesial identity of believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. In his own reflective way he uses extensive terminology to clarify aspects of their character, their internal being-in-Christ. See table 3.

A Spiritual Oikos

Established in this identity, Peter encouraged them to keep growing: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Pet 2:2).

And how then do they grow? It is here that Peter is inspired to use a unique

Table 3. Ecclesial Identity of Believers in 1 Peter 1.

1 Peter	Contents	Names and Concepts
1:1	<i>strangers</i> in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,	The strangers
1:2	<i>who have been chosen</i> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.	The chosen people
1:3, 23	In his great mercy he has given us <i>new birth</i> into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (3). For you have been <i>born again</i> (23).	People who are born again
1:4	New birth into an <i>inheritance</i>	People who have inherited
1:5	<i>who through faith are shielded</i> by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.	People who are shielded by God
1:7	your faith . . . may be proved genuine and may result in <i>praise, glory and honor</i> when Jesus Christ is revealed.	People who will be glorified in the end
1:8	Though you have not seen him, <i>you love him</i> ; and even though you do not see him now, <i>you believe in him</i>	People who love and believe in Jesus
1:9	you are receiving the goal of your faith, <i>the salvation</i> of your souls.	People who are (will be) saved
1:14	As <i>obedient children</i> , do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.	Obedient children
1:15	But just as he who called you is holy, so <i>be holy in all you do</i>	Holy people
1:18	<i>you were redeemed</i> from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,	People who are redeemed
1:21	Through him you <i>believe in God</i>	People who believe in God through Jesus
1:22	Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have <i>sincere love for your brothers, love one another</i> deeply, from the heart.	People who love one another

image, one that endorses what I see happening in new movements among other socio-religious communities. In 2:4–7 Peter says that they are *being built into a spiritual house*, one in which Jesus is the living capstone, and they the living stones.

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house [*oikos pneumatikos*] for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (v. 5)

Here Peter also suggests that this spiritual oikos is a holy priesthood. This is crucial for how we understand the identity of followers of Jesus like Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya. Peter is giving us new language in which to envision the ekklesia. It is very apparent from Peter’s picture that the spiritual oikos is not a physical place (a church) where

the followers of Jesus are invited for a worship service. They are primarily understood to be a holy priesthood, a *spiritual oikos*, whose identity Peter describes with rich biblical imagery:

you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet 2:9)

Peter elaborates on their identity in Christ, to whom they belong, and then in the second half of the verse he moves to the purpose of their being in the world. They are *to declare the praises of him*. This is indeed the mission.

He gives a further explanation of this spiritual house, these living stones, when he states that Jesus *called them*

out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Ekklesia, that spiritual house, includes those who are “called out” (*ek/keleo*). Though Peter doesn’t use the term ekklesia directly, he captures the concept clearly and distinctly as he understood it from Jesus.¹² Peter had an awareness of ekklesia that stretched back to his interaction with Jesus, and here he offers us a way to picture the scattered movements of believers we see today in other socio-religious contexts. The households of Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya are being called into a spiritual oikos with new identity and purpose.

Peter’s use of spiritual oikos creates a new awareness of oikos as a God-given social structure in movements to Christ today. It must be God’s providential plan in fulfilling his will on earth. Oikos

is everywhere, but it is also in crisis. A modern world makes many indifferent to family, and an individualistic way of life erodes oikos. People are suffering from the bitterness and trauma of broken families. These natural households need to become the spiritual oikos, as those called out of darkness into the ekklesia. It is here that the life of God can flow, mend, and restore the broken oikos. It is our role as a priesthood, as living stones, to declare his praises to a world desperately needing a spiritual oikos.

Again, I am reminded of how great was Peter's astonishment when he said,

I *now* realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. (Acts 10:34-35)

Peter witnessed the Holy Spirit at work in the oikos of Cornelius. That oikos, in such a different socio-religious tradition than Peter's, became a spiritual one. Do we now realize that God has no favoritism but accepts men from every nation in other socio-religious traditions? This is indeed what God tells us today: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).¹³ If we can abide in this Spirit of Jesus, then the great commission will be fulfilled through the global cooperation of the spiritual oikos that exists all over the world. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ For more details on this movement, please refer to a couple papers of mine published elsewhere: in Greenlee (2006, 2013) and my article, John Kim, "The Anatoc Story, Continued: the Role of Group Dynamics in Insider Movements," *IJFM* 27:2 (2010), 97.

² Hiebert explains the missiologically difference between a bounded-set and a centered-set in dealing with the great commission by addressing whether it is the matter of Christianity as a religion or one of discipleship towards Jesus. This is also related to a membership or identity issue (Hiebert 1994). Rick Brown used this concept in explaining what he calls biblical Muslims (Brown 2007, 69).

³ *Azan* is an Arabic word, meaning "to listen," a rhythmical Islamic prayer call.

⁴ Kim, "The Anatoc Story," 97.

⁵ John Kim, *Jesus Coming Into Muslim Communities*. Seoul: Insiders Book Publisher (2015, in Korean), Chapter 16.

⁶ Isaiah 1:18.

⁷ "Muslim-friendly" means that a Muslim term is used in Bible translation when references to biblical figures and ideas have a corresponding term in the Muslim's cultural and religious world.

⁸ Proverbs 8:17.

⁹ Acts 11:28.

¹⁰ See "http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/a-muslim-tribal-chief-is-bringing-jesus-to-his-people."

¹¹ John 17:18.

¹² Neither does Peter mention the term ekklesia when he refers to another spiritual oikos in his greeting in 5:13: "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark." Again, he doesn't use the term ekklesia; however, "she who is in Babylon" was his way of alluding to the spiritual oikos in Rome.

¹³ Now we see what God promised, "I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore" (Jer. 33:22).

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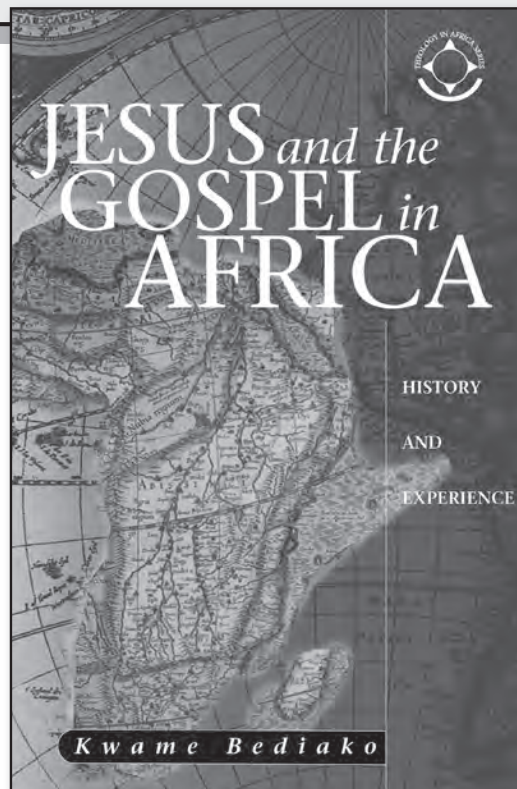
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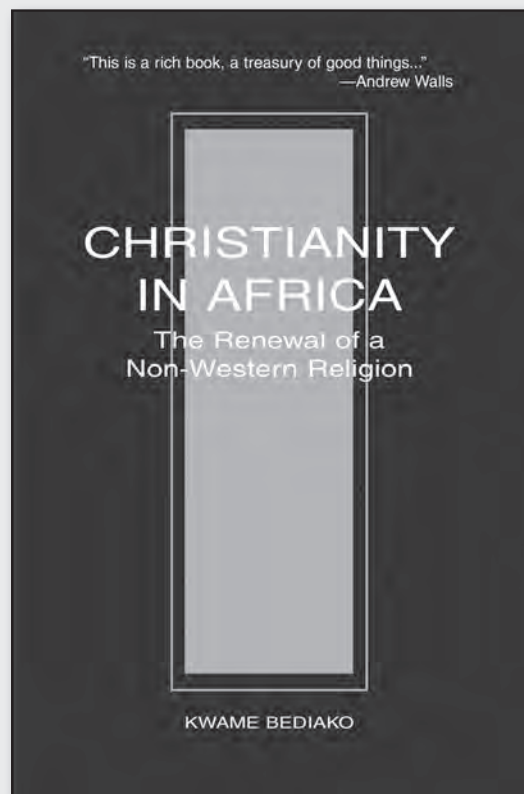
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Kwame Bediako (1945-2008), a native of Ghana, was trained as a patrologist and historian. He served as rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission, and Culture in Akropong, and was a pioneer in the exploration and advancement of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

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The Household of God: Paul's Missiology and the Nature of the Church

by Kevin Higgins

Editor's Note: This article was presented to the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

When I began this paper on the topic of οἶκος (Greek, house or household) and its applications for mission, I assumed my focus would be upon οἶκος (oikos) as a social structure and the implications of that for church planting. As I prepared, I decided to focus on Paul's letter to the Ephesians as my main source.¹

The more I read and meditated on that great text, the more depth and mystery and complexity I discovered beyond the sociological meaning of the term οἶκος, for Paul uses a number of terms with the same root: οἶκος, οἰκεῖος, οἰκονομία, οἰκοδομή, and οἰκοδομέω. So, I have expanded my study of οἶκος to include these related terms and concepts in Ephesians.

However, I also made note of a number of insights into Paul's missiological method in this letter. In some ways, knowing the larger context of Paul's way of doing missiology may serve to help us better understand the place of the church in his thinking and vision. Therefore, before I focus my reflections on οἶκος, I want to outline the missiological method I see in Paul.

One result of this study of οἶκος is that it has actually forced me to reconsider some of the terms we use in mission, and specifically how we describe the sort of movements we want to see God initiate in this day and age. I'll make some suggestions in my conclusion.

Ephesians and Paul's Missiology

There are a number of things in Ephesians that shed light on Paul's way of doing missiology. I will mention five.

Doxology: passing on truth by praying and worshipping

Paul's method of teaching what we might call doctrine is very different than we might expect. The first three chapters of the letter to the Ephesians are sources of some of the deepest and richest truths in scripture: grace, God's eternal purposes, the role of Jesus in God's plans, the work of the Spirit, redemption, the nature of the church, and more, all painted in vibrant color.

Kevin Higgins has served in the Muslim world in two countries of South Asia, helping to develop work in emerging movements to Jesus that now extend to more than a dozen language groups. While serving alongside local leadership, he served as International Director of Global Teams from 2000 to 2017, and today continues to coordinate their ministries in the Asia region. He also oversees their involvement in Bible translation, the subject of his doctoral study (PhD, Fuller School of Intercultural Studies). In 2017 he became President of the William Carey International University. Kevin and his wife, Susan, have three grown daughters, Rachel, Sarah, and Emma.

But notice how Paul does this: he says he is praising and blessing God (1:3; 3:14, 20) and that he prays for certain things (and then proceeds to immediately pray for them in 1:16ff.).

It is very difficult to tell when the praising and praying ends and the teaching begins. It is all woven together. It's as if Paul is teaching doctrine as he prays and worships—he's praying and worshipping as he teaches.

Context: teaching in the thought and vocabulary of the audience

Paul's vocabulary is unique. Even a brief comparison between the letters of Galatians and Ephesians, or indeed, Ephesians and almost any other letter of Paul, reveals a very different style of writing and use of terms. Over the years the main argument against Pauline authorship has to do with this difference in vocabulary and literary style.

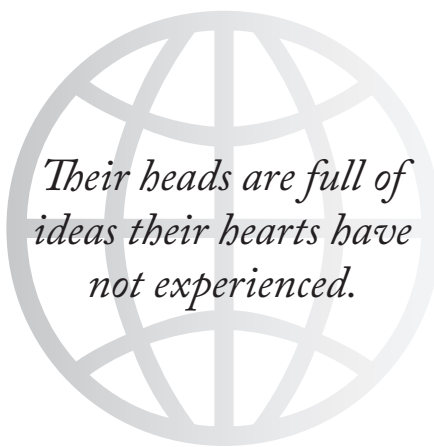
In general, scholars who write our commentaries are not engaged in cross-cultural work, and they often fail to grasp one of the most basic lessons we see here in Ephesians: that communication has to change to fit an audience. Paul's shifts in thought and style are due to his experience as a skilled and articulate cross-cultural apostle.

Holistic: believing, doing and being are all one thing

There is a pattern in Paul's letters that we find very clearly exhibited in Ephesians. The normal outline of Paul's letters is an opening section that might be called teaching or doctrine, and then a second major portion that might be termed application. So the first three chapters of Ephesians are more focused on big truths of the gospel, and then chapter 4 opens with a "therefore" and a call to live lives worthy of all that Paul has just described. This same pattern is clear in Colossians as well (compare 3:1ff.), and the same pattern shows up in Galatians and Romans, though in different proportions (there's not such a clear half and half pattern; see Romans 12:1ff.).

The implications of this for holistic approaches to understanding the nature of "truth" are crucial. The generations after the New Testament show a gradual process of separating theology from life and application, so that by the time of the creeds we see mere statements of conceptual truths. Most of the later Confessions developed in the reformation period are the same (though even more detailed and elaborate than the creeds).

One result of this has been the multiplication of Christians whose heads are full of ideas that their hearts have not experienced. This affects our approach to mission and discipleship. Recent focus on obedience-based disciple making methods are perhaps a counter-balance



to this but seem in danger of going to the opposite extreme. Paul integrated deep spiritual truths and the practical implications for life.

Scripture: most often Paul makes indirect reference to scripture, and seems more focused on working out the implication of who Jesus is, what God has done in and through Jesus, and what that means for the people who follow Jesus.

Ephesians is full of biblical themes, but notice they are generally referred to in indirect ways: creation, fall, evil, Adam, Abraham, Israel's history, law, blessing, temple, and (perhaps) the conquest of the land (applied to "spiritual warfare"). What I find fascinating is that if a reader knows those

stories and those references, the text is powerful and rich. *However, even if the reader does not know the original stories the truths still make sense.*

Two implications from this stand out. First, it is a brilliant way to communicate, and provides an example of how we can balance two different approaches, one which is explicit with all the biblical background so that the gospel makes sense within its scriptural themes; and the other which focuses almost fully on simply making it clear to a new audience. Paul somehow manages to do something quite profound in combining these objectives.

Second, what this highlights is that for Paul the truth to be passed on, the truth to be contextualized, the truth to be taught and lived, is the truth that is in Jesus. Paul is an expository teacher. Normally an expository teacher works through biblical passages line by line "exposing" their meaning. But Paul is an expository teacher of all that God has done in Christ.

I am still thinking through all the implications this may have for my own understanding and ministry. On the one hand, we need to be focused on scripture, we need to be biblically rooted and digging deeply into the richness of the scriptures as we seek to know and follow Jesus, and to help others to do so. On the other hand, those same scriptures do not actually teach us that process.

Paul's letters all present the holy life as a Jesus centered life, and his teaching seems to be the application of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, explained over and over to different groups of believers in different contexts dealing with different issues. It is certainly the case that the scriptures are crucial: I would not have discovered this insight about how Paul uses scripture apart from my study of the scriptures! But it is also possible to focus on teaching scripture in such a way that the result is disciples who know the Bible but not Jesus.

Motivation: in Paul the motive is that God's people would be "filled up with all the fullness of God" and that the church would be his fullness

I would be interested to know how Paul would think about the focus in frontier mission on "finishing the task" and on church planting and disciple making movements. I would imagine there would be much he would affirm. He himself was focused on going where he was not building on the work of others so I think he would encourage the focus on engaging unreached peoples. He planted churches everywhere he went and I think he would find much to praise in the emphasis in mission on CPM and DMM efforts.

But I can also imagine him quoting from Isaiah 49 and declaring that, as good as all this is, it is "too small a thing." For Paul, as he describes his aims in Ephesians, the aim of all he did, and, indeed, the aim of God in his redeeming work, was "fullness." In Colossians Paul speaks of God's fullness in Christ, but here in Ephesians Paul describes God's purposes in the believers themselves: that they be filled up with all of God's fullness (3:19), and that the church be "the fullness of him who fills all things" (1:23).

Perhaps one way we might imagine Paul's reaction to the current focus on church planting among the least reached would be to affirm what we are doing, that we are doing well, but that some of us are missing the deeper purpose of it all: the restoration of humanity, a renewed Adam (4:24) and indeed all of creation (Romans 8:19–23).

All of these five dimensions above set the overall context of Paul as a missiologist; yet, it's the last point in particular, of Paul's view of the fullness of Christ among believers, that serves as a bridge to the next focus of this article: Paul's view of church.

The Household of God

As I mentioned above, I will be focusing on Paul's use of the term οἶκος, and

Notice that there is an overlap in Paul's use of language in regards to οἶκος, and that the relational and physical weave together.

his use of related terms, in describing some aspects of his view of the church. This section is largely an expanded word study, and I will define each term one at a time, and then make some concluding comments. I will include some ideas on how this family language in Ephesians ties into the nature of the church as God's household.

Οἶκος and Οἰκεῖος

The most basic meaning for οἶκος is "house," a place for habitation, and so literally a place to dwell. It can refer to specific houses, and also to a king's house (Matthew 11:8). It is used for God's house (a place for prayer, worship, etc.) and thus, the temple (Luke 11:51).

In addition to these more physical ways of designating the term οἶκος it refers by extension to the family line of an ancestor. Scripture can speak of "the house of David" as indicating his descendants, not just his living family, and not merely the building he slept in.

Οἶκος also has that more restrictive usage and can refer to those living within a physical structure, house, and so can mean simply *family* (Luke 10:5).

Finally, the term is also used of a community of believers as a spiritual house for God's indwelling (1 Peter 2:5).

The term οἰκεῖος refers to those belonging to or standing in relation to a household, that is, members of a family, or relatives (1 Timothy 5:8; and in the New Testament period this would have included slaves as well). This is the opposite of πάροικος: a stranger, or alongside, in the sense of not being part of the family. So, in Ephesians 2:19, Gentiles are no longer πάροικοι (strangers), but οἰκεῖοι (members of the family).

Generally, we are likely to use this sense of belonging when referring to the church as God's family, or perhaps

less intimately as "God's people." This is certainly correct as far as it goes, but in the context of Ephesians it is perhaps too narrow.

One theme in the letter is that the Gentiles are now included in the inheritance (1:14 and 3:6), and that as adopted children (1:5) the Jews and the Gentiles are now one family with access to the same father (2:11–18, and also 3:14; 4:6). In this family, Jesus is "the beloved" (1:6), the rightful heir, and by implication the older brother to us all (so in Colossians, explicitly, the first born, 1:15).

Thus, while it is true to say we are God's family, it is also important to note that this includes all the connotations of the original context as well: family, yes, and also lineage, people, descendants. In other words, the church as God's household implies something much more than just a metaphor of belonging to a specific group of people in a specific place and time. It is more universal, more "catholic" in the original sense of that term, and has application forwards and backwards in time, and sideways through space: it includes all of the people in Christ before and after us, and wherever in the world they may be.

Before we dismiss any non-relational meaning for οἶκος we should also note that the connotations of a physical building are not ever fully absent from Paul's thinking. The section 2:19–22 is the clearest statement of church as God's family, οἶκος: "you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens, . . . of the household of God." At the same time, the metaphor is tied directly to physical structures, as the Gentiles are "built on the foundation" of the apostles, and growing into a "holy temple."

Thus, rather than seeing the relational-family dimension of οἶκος as excluding

the physical building dimensions, it is important to notice that there is an overlap in Paul's use of language, and that the relational and physical weave together. This bridges our discussion to the other words in Ephesians which share οἶκος in their roots.

Οἰκοδομή and Οἰκοδομέω

These are noun and verb forms of the same conceptual idea: building. Both terms are used literally (to build or make something) and metaphorically (similar to personal development, for example). So, οἰκοδομή can mean an actual building or structure (Matthew 24:1), and the resurrected body in the future can be described as something built or made (2 Corinthians 5:1). But it can also be used figuratively for the act of encouragement, and also, for the church as a "place" where God dwells (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Οἰκοδομέω in a similar way can be used literally: constructing houses, temples, tombs, etc. (so, Luke 6:48) as well as for those who do the building (Matthew 21:42). But again, there is a figurative use as well, including the establishment of a community known as the house of God (1 Peter 2:5). Or it can be used for the process of spiritual growth and development of the spiritual community and each member within the community (1 Corinthians 14:4). Encouraging to do what is right is also a way that οἰκοδομέω is used (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

In Ephesians 2:19ff. the Gentiles are being built (a participle from οἰκοδομέω) on a foundation. On that foundation is a structure (from οἰκοδομή), and the Gentiles are being built into that same structure (again, from οἰκοδομέω).

In other words, Paul sees the church as the household of God, and by this he means family, and also something being built, a temple, a place where God dwells, and a house where a father lives with a household. These are all metaphorical images for the nature of

the church as people of God and the overlapping connotations can not be separated neatly.

In other words, it is certainly true that Paul is not describing the church as an organization, or a building (literally). But it is overly simplistic to only emphasize the nature of the church as relationally or sociologically a household.

I want to comment further on this, because many advocates of what have become known as insider movements have emphasized οἶκος as a social structure, even the fundamental social structure, "into" which churches can be planted. I am one of those who hold this view, and I am not retracting it here. But it is clear from this brief



look into Ephesians that there is much more to the story, a deeper mystery to the nature of the church as the οἶκος of God. These emphases are not mutually exclusive, and indeed need to be kept together.

Another term with οἶκος in the root needs to be looked at before closing.

Οἰκονομία

Οἰκονομία, literally something like "house law or rule," relates to the task of a steward in overseeing or administering a household, something akin to management (Luke 16:2). Paul makes use of the term to refer to God's own arrangements for mankind's redemption, God's plan, arrangement, and

purpose (Ephesians 1:10 and 3:9). He also uses it for his own apostolic role in God's redemptive work, like a trusteeship (Colossians 1:25).

As such, in the context of all we have just explored, οἰκονομία might be understood as describing the overall establishment and development of this new reality that is the people of God, the house or family of God, the "line" of God, the new order and *nation* of God. That is, while Ephesians uses very different terms, the underlying truth seems very much in keeping with what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God.

Concluding Thoughts

I wrote earlier that I thought this paper would lead me to discussions of the family as a social structure for church planting. But this study pushed me more deeply into the mystery (Paul's term) of the gospel. The gospel certainly refers to our salvation (Ephesians 2:8–10), but for Paul the mystery of the gospel refers ultimately to the church as the expression of a new humanity.

So, while Catholic and high church Anglican theologies of the church run the risk of *institutionalizing* the "body of Christ," and protestant teaching about the church risks *intellectualizing* the concept (turning it into mere metaphor), Paul's letter to the Ephesians presents an *incarnational* understanding, a deep and mysterious spiritual reality.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul is describing how the promised blessing of Abraham for all the families (οἰκοί) of the earth now brings the Gentiles into the one οἶκος (as family) in and through and with Jesus, the beloved heir. We catch this indirectly in 1:3 where he says God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing..." One result of this blessing in Paul's vision is that we all will grow into the fullness of Christ (4:13), and this growth into Christ is described as the development into "a building" (again, from

οἰκοδομῇ 4:16). The process of such building and developing, what makes it all happen, is love (4:16). Paul takes all this back before Abraham to creation and describes the whole process of God's work in and through Christ as making us into a "new man," the new Adam (2:15).

But Paul goes deeper. This new reality, the church, the household of God, is also the dwelling of God (an echo of David and Solomon), God's temple (Paul here shifting his use of οἶκος, to a building, not a family).

In short, Paul is summing up the entire Old Testament within a few chapters. And then he pushes beyond anything that the Old Testament may have envisioned. Ephesians portrays a future in which all things will be summed up or brought under the headship of Jesus, the same Jesus given as head of all things to the church, and the church which is the fullness of the one who fills everything. That church is already raised with Jesus and is seated already with him in the heavenly places.

And all of this leads me back to what I hinted at in my opening comments. How does all this consideration of οἶκος impact how we talk about "movements" and how we focus on our mission task? To cut to the point, might we need to reconsider just how we speak today of church planting movements, disciple making movements, or insider movements? Does the emphasis in Paul on household and family, and on the full outworking of God's original intention to bless humanity from Adam to Abraham and to all peoples, require us to reconsider what terms we use?

Perhaps we need to consider language more relevant to the biblical language and the biblical promises. I'd like to suggest "family blessing movements." Don't we need to see that our task is not so much "mission" as it is "blessing?" Perhaps we need to see ourselves not so much as missionaries but as

"blessionaries?" Or, letting this roll out, perhaps our discipline is really not missiology, but "blessiology?" I offer these latter with somewhat of a "wink." But, the "family blessing movement" suggestion is offered as a serious contender for new terminology that can capture the overall purpose of God through both Old and New Testaments.

So, the apparently simple term "οἶκος of God" has taken us into a reality that is bigger, wider, deeper, and more mysterious than most of the discussions among mission leaders concerning church planting, movements, and what constitutes a "church." May our experience of οἶκος come to match our growing understanding of what it means for God's purposes today. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Some scholars note that the letter may not have been intended only for Ephesus, based on evidence in various manuscripts of the letter. Some of the copies do not include mention of a location at all, and there is a distinct lack of evidence of any personal relationship between Paul and the readers, which would be odd given how much time Paul spent in the city. It seems likely that the letter was intended for a wider usage, perhaps to be carried and read in a number of cities. But I maintain the tradition of referring to it as "Ephesians."

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Family, the Fifth Commandment, and Culture

by H. L. Richard

Editor's Note: This article was the basis for a workshop by the author at the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

The traditional model of Christian work among Hindus almost always leads to severe family tensions. Anyone familiar with stories of Hindus who have turned to Christ will be familiar with this reality. Historically, the family problems that follow from conversion have been used by Hindu apologists as a point against Christianity. This is seen recently in a statement by Sumir Kalra that “converts are often asked to repudiate their community and family.”¹

This article has been written in response to the problem of the disruption of Hindu families related to discipleship to Jesus. The focus will be the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother. First, a case study from 2005 will be presented, with names of people and cities hidden or changed. The analysis of a proper understanding of the fifth commandment will be applied to the type of situations presented in the case study. Some careful analysis related to the concept of culture will be necessary before coming to any conclusions.

H. L. Richard is an independent researcher focused on the Hindu-Christian encounter. He has published numerous books and articles including studies of key figures like Narayan Vaman Tilak (Following Jesus in the Hindu Context: The Intriguing Implications of N. V. Tilak's Life and Thought, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998), Kalagara Subba Rao (Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ: K. Subba Rao's Eclectic Praxis of Hindu Discipleship to Jesus, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005), and R. C. Das (R. C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity, Delhi: ISPCK for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1995).

A Case Study

An urban middle class family with three grown daughters was disrupted when the three daughters all converted to Christianity. A friend of mine got involved with the family through the recommendation of another follower of Jesus from a Hindu family.

Prema is a dentist, her elder sister is a doctor and her younger sister is an architect. My friend had to listen to the parents vent against Christianity and against their children before he could try to help. The parents were disturbed to the point that Prema's mother said she felt like killing Christians (evangelists). She said she would happily go to jail due to the way they try to convert people, creating so many problems in families. Prema's father said,

I hate even to see my daughters. I spent my life for them, but in return what did I get? They are not even married yet and when I see others of my age with their grandchildren, I feel like madness is coming on. That is why I moved to this new city and settled here.

“Jesus, Jesus and nothing but Jesus for everything,” said Prema’s mother.

They say Jesus is the only god and they can accept no other gods. I have no objection or problem for my daughters to worship Jesus, but why do they go to the church and become “converts” and only obey their pastors?

When the parents pressed my friend about Jesus and faith he expressed his faith in Jesus without conversion to Christianity and his following Jesus within Hindu cultural patterns and forms. When asked about his view on idol worship, a positive response was given (it is good to remember God in some way, rather than yield to total secularization), at the same time pointing out that he no longer practices this. All this intrigued the parents. But this also only further confused the family situation. Prema pointed out that what her parents were saying was not really true; the three sisters had been literally persecuted and once even thrown out of the house to spend a whole night sitting on a staircase outside the house. My friend agreed that in such situations parents will always exaggerate. But it needs to be recognized that it is Christian activities and not faith in Christ that hurt them.

The parents agreed to host a contextual worship service focused on Christ, but in the end it was not feasible to move ahead with this. Prema wanted her parents to hear the gospel, but what good news could they hear when they had experienced Christianity as deeply disruptive? Prema said,

I am neither for nor against a contextual worship service with my parents. I know that you, too, are going to worship Jesus only using Indian forms and symbols, and I am not against it. However, my parents, after a long struggle had accepted me as I am and had no problem with me going to church. But when you shared that you do not go to church but still only worship Jesus, from that day on they again created problems and are not

happy with me going to church. I have nothing against you. You have your conviction about not going to the church, but I have my conviction.

My friend replied that this is why he was asking her to make the decision about his meeting with her parents. His focus was on the parents, and he suggested that this should be her focus also. It is not wrong to go to church for fellowship and to hear the word of God and pray. But in India, when a person goes to a mosque no one thinks that he is going there to worship Allah, but rather that he goes there because he is a Muslim. It is the same with church. Prema’s parents after a long struggle allowed her to go



to church because they knew that as a young woman she had her own rights to do certain things. Since she had become a Christian, they had to tolerate it. But when they saw a different alternative for worshipping the same Jesus, they began again to object to the church pattern.

In the end, these young women chose to stay in the church and force their parents to make adjustments to that reality. My friend walked away, convinced that it is not right to interfere in such family matters. The daughters never contacted him again so there is no update available for this story from over a decade ago.

Interpreting the Fifth Commandment

The fifth commandment to honor one’s father and mother (Ex. 20:12, Deut. 5:16) seems quite simple on the surface. Yet, particularly in the context of religious conversion, it presents some challenges. The New Testament adamantly affirms the validity and importance of the fifth commandment, particularly the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:2 where he refers to this as “the first commandment with a promise,” a promise of blessing from God for those who keep it.

Jesus also affirms this command, both in the controversy with the Pharisees in Matthew 15:4 and in relating to the rich young ruler (Luke 18:20). But the great interpretative challenge lies in reconciling this with Jesus’ very strong words about “hating” one’s parents (Luke 14:26, see also Luke 12:51–53). The harmonizing of these passages is not the point of this paper, so for now it will just be said that the standard interpretation is that Jesus is speaking in hyperbolic terms that are not to be taken literally, as is the case with his command that everyone must forsake everything that they possess (Luke 14:33).

This article approaches the command to honor one’s father and mother from a different perspective, a perspective that explores the depth and breadth of the meaning and application of the command.

Interpreting Old Testament Commands

Jesus himself set a standard for the proper way to interpret Old Testament (OT) commands. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes six examples of OT laws, famously introducing them with the phrase “you have heard that in the past it was said” (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). I will not attempt a detailed analysis of these statements, but this is an odd introductory phrase, especially compared to the standard

way of referring to OT statements as “it is written” (over fifty times in the NT; note especially where Jesus uses this in Matt. 4:4, 6, 7, 10).

The obvious conclusion to draw from this change of terminology is that Jesus in Matthew 5 (as opposed to Matt. 4) was not dealing with the OT commands at face value as such, but rather with their *interpretation*. This perspective is further affirmed by noticing that in the last of the six, Matthew 5:43, Jesus only partially quotes an OT passage and then adds on a phrase that is never in the OT: “hate your enemy.”

This perspective (which is nothing radical, rather the standard understanding) means that Jesus has given us six examples of how to interpret OT commands. Principles that can be discerned from his pattern of interpretation need to be applied to any interpretation of the command to honor fathers and mothers (which is not one of the commands or interpretations explained in the Sermon on the Mount).²

Expansive Meanings of Old Testament Commands

An analysis of the interpretations Jesus put on the six commands that he chose to discuss indicates that he broadened the standard understanding of the command. He made application to internal motivations and not just outward actions, and he recognized that positive duties were being inculcated even when only negative prohibitions were stated. This was the fundamental problem with the standard interpretation of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. They had reduced the commands of God to manageable proportions that supported their self-righteousness. Jesus, by giving God’s understanding of his laws, shows how they had distorted the meaning God intended.

Each of the six commands that Jesus references was given a broader meaning or application than the words

They had reduced the commands of God to manageable proportions that supported their self-righteousness.

specifically mention. The command against murder was broadened to also cover anger; the command against breaking oaths was applied to all speech; the command to love your neighbor was broadened to praying for those who persecute you. The command to honor father and mother also, then, in God’s purpose and understanding, has broader meanings than just the immediate reference to parents. This is the main point of this paper, to be addressed below.

Besides this general broader meaning, for a number of these commands Jesus clearly shifted the focus from outward behavior to internal attitudes. This is not clear in all of the six commands Jesus discussed, particularly since the command to love neighbors is already about an internal attitude (the same can be argued regarding the command to honor parents). But the command about adultery is definitely shifted from a focus on external behavior to include the internal attitude. This is also clear when anger is included along with murder. It is interesting that in one of the other incidents where Jesus refers to honoring parents he appeals to Isaiah’s words about honoring with the lips while the heart is wrong (Matt. 15:3–9). The corrupt and legalistic human heart is able to twist even commands to love and honor into outward self-righteous behavior that is not matched by a sincere heart.

The third principle we see is that Jesus understands commands against wrong behavior to also suggest the need for positive behavior. The eye for an eye command is interpreted to mean that one should go an extra mile when one is asked to go just one mile. The command about not breaking oaths is applied to simply speaking the truth in all situations; there is no need for more

than a simple, truthful “yes” or “no.” Most strikingly, the command against murder is turned into a positive and powerful exhortation to seek reconciliation even when it is someone else holding a grudge against you. So, even when you are not at fault in a strained relationship, you are to take initiative for reconciliation or you are not following God’s command not to murder.

So, in taking up the proper understanding and interpretation of the fifth commandment to honor one’s parents it must be recognized that in God’s understanding more than merely parents are involved in the command, more than merely external behavior is intended, and positive actions are to be identified that demonstrate the depth of understanding of the priority of this command in God’s purposes.

The Fuller Meaning of the Fifth Commandment

This principle of seeking to discern the fuller meaning of the commands of God is not a new idea. The principle can be clearly seen in the history of biblical interpretation, even related to the interpretation of the command to honor parents. The catechisms that were central to teaching and discipleship at the time of the Reformation illustrate this principle of developing the broader meaning of the fifth commandment.

Martin Luther’s Larger Catechism of 1529 in paragraph 150 says,

Thus we have two kinds of fathers presented in this commandment, fathers in blood and fathers in office, or those to whom belongs the care of the family, and those to whom belongs the care of the country. Besides these there are yet spiritual fathers . . . those only are called spiritual fathers who govern and guide us by the Word of God.³

So Luther applied the command beyond physical parents to include governmental authorities and spiritual leaders.

John Calvin's Genevan Catechism of 1545 in Question 194 similarly stated that "Though father and mother only are expressed, we must understand all who are over us...."⁴

The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 followed on the same line:

104. Q. What does God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honour, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all those in authority over me, submit myself with due obedience to their good instruction and discipline, and also have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings, since it is God's will to govern us by their hand.⁵

Lastly, the Westminster Larger Catechism of 1647 has eleven questions and answers related to the fifth commandment, three of which are given here:

Q. 124. Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?

A. By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts; and especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority whether in family, church, or commonwealth.

Q. 127. What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors?

A. The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections; fidelity to, defense, and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places; bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government.

Q. 128. What are the sins of inferiors against their superiors?

A. The sins of inferiors against their superiors are, all neglect of the duties required toward them; envying at, contempt of, and rebellion against, their persons and places, in their lawful counsels, commands, and corrections; cursing, mocking, and all such refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonor to them and their government.⁶

Noteworthy in these statements from the Westminster Catechism is that it follows the earlier Reformation catechisms in moving beyond parental authority to authority in the state and to spiritual authority. It is also clear that internal attitudes are covered in the command (under question 127, "all due reverence in heart"). Nonetheless, in



good Protestant fashion, the catechism makes clear that there are limits on these authorities (under question 127, note the term "lawful" in "willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels").

Hindu Context Reflections

Shifting from a Reformation context to contexts related to Hindu families and society, there are other distinctives which need to be highlighted. It seems odd that the Reformation catechisms did not expand on other familial authorities besides father and mother, although that is implied at times. In Indian contexts, it is clear that biological mother and father are only part of the respect due to family; grandparents,

eldest brother, and father's eldest brother should all be named as others to whom honor is clearly due. But that can and should be generalized into respect for the extended family and its traditions.

Culture and Family

Family is where a child is nurtured into the ways of a culture. Family is also a shock absorber for all the crises and conflicts that develop during this process. Family is almost inseparable from culture; cultural attitudes determine many aspects of the role and function of families, while families pass on the values and attitudes of a culture. Recognizing this reality suggests that honoring parents and family is almost inseparable from honoring culture and one's cultural heritage.

The Concept of Culture

Culture in its modern meaning is still a rather recent idea. Charles Taber points this out in his study of culture in modern Protestant missions:

The experience of immersion and participation in a culture is universal and ubiquitous: all human beings live in culture as fish live in water. It is a quite different matter, however, to have an explicit and self-conscious concept of culture. Such a concept, in fact, is as recent as the nineteenth century. In the absence of a formal concept, people tend to take their own culture for granted and not to reflect critically on it. (1991, 1)

Harvie Conn went further, identifying the understanding of cultures as a plural and holistic reality to the work of Franz Boas (1858–1942, professor of anthropology at Columbia University from 1896 until his death).

Boas shifted attention from the general idea of "culture" to the reality that every society possesses its own culture. Each culture is an integrated way of life, not merely an aggregate of separate elements. (1984, 97)⁷

Recognizing that it was only in the twentieth century that this modern

understanding of culture was embraced brings understanding about the lack of theologizing about this concept in the history of Christian thought. The Reformers could not have expanded the meaning of the fifth commandment to include honoring cultural traditions since the very concept of “cultural traditions” had not yet been born.

The Bible on Culture

Since culture is a modern concept, it clearly is not mentioned in the Bible. Two fundamental biblical truths underlie any valid theologizing about culture. First is that men and women are made in the image of God, thus are creative like their Creator.⁸ To be human is to create culture, and human cultures reflect the image of God. But the second fundamental truth is the reality of the Fall and human sinfulness. Nothing that is human in this world is untouched by sin, and that includes all cultures and every aspect of all cultures.⁹

The challenge of biblical thinking about culture lies in holding both of these truths simultaneously, which means always being appreciative of culture but at the same time never being naïve about evil. This, however, is not distinctly different from the similar tension that exists in relation to honoring parents and honoring spiritual leaders. We are never to be naïve about the reality of sin still present in spiritual leaders and in family elders; but we are to honor them in spite of their weaknesses and failings.

A proper interpretation of the fifth commandment applies its mandate and promise beyond biological parents to include the heritage being passed on by those parents in the form of cultural norms and patterns and attitudes. Honoring one’s cultural heritage does not mean blindly following every aspect of a culture; it does not imply that nothing will be done towards cultural transformation (cultures are, after all, always changing). But it rules out

contempt of, and rebellion against... [and] cursing, mocking, and all such

In India respect for elders is shown by touching, even prostrating at, the feet of the elder. Many Christians teach against this as idolatry.

refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonor

to that cultural heritage (quotations from the Westminster Larger Catechism question 128 above).

Cultural Rebels?

It is tragic that mission history has at times produced rebels against local cultures. The case study that opens this paper is a clear example of this. No doubt the daughters in this case study were trying to honor their parents, but they did not recognize that abandoning the culture and community in which they had been raised made it impossible to do so. Often in India respect for elders is shown by touching (in some cases even prostrating at) the feet of the elder. Many Christians actively teach against this as a form of idolatry, but there is no reasonable basis for such an extreme interpretation of an acceptable cultural behavior. Similar objections are raised to death memorial ceremonies. It is through such cultural ceremonies that honor is shown; honoring parents while not honoring their cultural heritage is not possible!

Missiological understanding has progressed greatly over the past few centuries. Contextualization is now a widely accepted concept, that local cultural contexts are not to be violated in favor of the home culture of the cross-cultural worker. Yet there are still serious shortcomings in much cross-cultural practice, as illustrated in the case study which opens this paper. There is a natural tendency for someone who is touched by Christ to mimic the attitudes and behaviors of their mentors, and that often leads to unrecognized shifts in cultural behavior and attitudes.

Converted Out of a Culture?

“Conversion” is a loaded term that carries many connotations, some of which are decidedly unsavory among non-Christians.¹⁰ In practice, conversion often involves unnecessary changes of culture, and a proper understanding of the command to honor father and mother must impact this situation. No one should ever be converted out of a culture, rather they should be turned (the basic biblical meaning of “conversion”) more deeply into their culture.¹¹ A striking biblical example of honoring an unworthy father will help clarify this.

A Biblical Example (Noah)

No one includes the story of Noah’s drunkenness among their favorite Bible stories, yet God saw fit to place it in scripture for our edification. In Gen. 9:21, Noah is drunk and naked, and his youngest son, Ham, saw this and informed his two older brothers. The text gives little detail about Ham, causing commentators over the centuries to exaggerate the wrongfulness of his behavior. But the focus is on the appropriate behavior of the two brothers who carefully cover their father’s nakedness (Gen. 9:23).

Noah’s behavior is not condemned, but is clearly wrong. The passage is in the Bible because of Noah’s prophetic blessing and curse placed on his descendants related to this incident. Yet it also provides a striking example of what it means to honor father and mother. This honoring, in biblical understanding, clearly extends even to a wayward father and his wayward actions.

Many years ago a friend of mine who is from a Hindu family but follows Christ stated, at least somewhat facetiously, that it is very easy to be

popular in the church among Christians. One needs only to talk against Hindus and Hinduism. Traditional testimonies often highlight the darkness of Hinduism (or Islam, Buddhism, etc.) in an attempt to honor Christ. But a genuine honoring of Christ counterintuitively must refuse such speech and actions. Christ affirms the fifth commandment and exemplifies interpreting that command in a broad rather than narrow manner. To honor Christ one must refuse to mock one's cultural heritage; one must even take extraordinary steps to cover over the sin and shame in their heritage, as Noah's sons covered him. Of course, Noah's sons were not to participate in the wayward actions of their father, and neither should followers of Christ adopt everything of the attitudes and actions of their cultures; but even in disagreeing, there is to be a genuine honoring from the heart.

Conclusion

While missiological thought has progressed and appreciation for the multitudes of cultures in the world has developed, there still needs to be a warmer and stronger embrace of the varied cultures of new disciples of Christ. This becomes increasingly in need of emphasis as globalization influences the spread of Western pop culture. J. H. Bavinck pointed out that the basic approach to culture should be *possessio*, the taking possession for Christ of all the world's cultures.¹²

A proper understanding of the fifth commandment shows that a cynical view of local cultures leads to a violation of the core ethical standards defined by God. Honoring one's father and mother involves the honoring of culture; teaching (by precept or example) others to dishonor their cultural heritage undermines the fundamental purpose of God for societies and families.

How different the case study that opens this paper could have been! Daughters taught to honor their parents and

culture could have been a powerful influence for good in the family and wider society. But a cynical attitude to traditional culture and the embracing of Western Christian patterns of life and thought brought disruption to the family and shame to the name of Christ and the cause of the gospel. Christians follow the pattern of Ham and happily expose what they perceive to be the weaknesses of other cultural heritages; the way of Ham's brothers reflects the way of Christ. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ "US Religious Freedom Commission Report: A Case Built To Peddle Hinduphobia," accessed March 11, 2017, <https://swarajyamag.com/ideas/us-religious-freedom-commission-report-a-case-built-to-peddle-hinduphobia>. This is not a fair paper, and this is not an entirely fair accusation. But Christians are certainly not free from fault in this matter of regular family tensions, and a proper understanding of the fifth commandment certainly does not exonerate Christian practices in this area.

² Why Jesus chose the particular six commands he chose is an interesting topic beyond the scope of this paper. One might persuasively argue that Jesus would have presented far more than six such illustrations, which would shift the argument to why Matthew chose to include these six in his record of the teaching of Jesus.

³ From "The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church," accessed March 11, 2017, <http://bookof-concord.org/lc-3-tencommandments.php>. Note that Luther's comments are on the fourth commandment as he followed the traditional Roman Catholic division of the commandments.

⁴ From "Catechism of the Church of Geneva" by John Calvin, accessed March 11, 2017, http://reformed.org/documents/calvin/geneva_catachism/geneva_catachism.html.

⁵ "Heidelberg Catechism," accessed March 11, 2017, <https://students.wts.edu/resources/creeds/heidelberg.html>.

⁶ "Larger Catechism with Scripture Proofs," 265-269, accessed Mar. 11, 2017, <http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Larger-Catechismwith-ScriptureProofs2.pdf>.

⁷ The earlier concept of "culture" as a singular reality is still occasionally in use; it is an elitist concept of "high culture," or

"the habits of the social elite; disciplined tastes expressed in the arts, literature and entertainment" (Conn 2000, 252).

⁸ This statement is not meant to suggest that creativity sufficiently defines the image of God; the image of God is a richly suggestive phrase that is never defined in scripture.

⁹ Nothing is more basic to culture and cultural differences than the differences in languages across the world. That language differences are recognized even beyond this world (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) suggests that cultural distinctions will not be erased even in the world to come (consider the implications of Rev. 21:24-26 also).

¹⁰ In India the core understanding of conversion relates to leaving the sociological community of one's birth and joining a different "people group." Conversions to and from Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam all take place, and spirituality is not perceived to have anything to do with the process, and often indeed does not have anything to do with it.

¹¹ There may be a few extreme cases, such as cannibalistic tribes, where the central cultural stand of a group must be rejected, but this paper is not dealing with such cases.

¹² I have briefly outlined this position and some needed qualifications in Richard 2011.

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Households in Focus

Mandali (Fellowship): Bharati on *Bhakta* Expressions of Ekklesia

by J. Paul Pennington

Editor's Note: This article was originally presented at ISFM 2017, Dallas, TX, September 2017.

Many Christians wonder what fellowship and community looks like for Yesu bhaktas—incarnational believers in the Hindu world. Are they mostly individualistic believers who are isolated in the way they follow Jesus? Dayanand Bharati (author of *Living Water and Indian Bowl*) has lived as a Hindu follower of Jesus for thirty years and his writings on fellowship and community are well known through his books and blog. In this article, he has graciously permitted me to represent (however inadequately) some of his key reflections on the need for mutual encouragement and instruction among the network of Yesu bhaktas whom he serves in India and around the world.

When I talk with Christians about incarnational believers (people who follow Jesus while remaining within their own socio-religious community, sometimes labeled “insider believers”) the conversation regularly takes the following turns:

- “Those are those ‘Churchless Christians’ (see Hoefer 2001) aren’t they? I don’t think that’s right.”¹
- “How can they be followers of Jesus and not belong to a church?”
- “I don’t think it’s appropriate for people to be private, individualized believers. They need a fellowship or community.”
- “What do they do for public worship?”

Paul Pennington, Cultural Coach and Consultant, Journey Services, spent 13 years as a missionary kid in Zimbabwe, another 5 years there as a missionary, and 17 years as Professor of Urban/ Intercultural Studies at Cincinnati Christian University. Paul left university teaching four years ago to partner with Indian colleagues to research and advocate alternative ways of following Jesus in the Indian context. He is author of Christian Barriers to Jesus: Conversations and Questions from the Indian Context (2017). Contact him at paul@journeyservices.org.

These responses, and similar ones, reflect some possible misperceptions about how the Yesu bhaktas view their walk with the Lord and their relationship with other *bhaktas* (devotees, followers) and other believers. This issue of the joint life and worship of bhaktas has been a major concern among Christians.² In fact, Christians often express surprise when I tell them about the gatherings and mutual life shared by the bhaktas. They seem to assume that incarnational believers (“insiders”) are by nature prone to isolation.

The theme of this year’s EMS and ISFM³ conference was “Engaging Theology, Theologians, Theological Education in (or from) Majority World Contexts.” In the spirit of that theme, I asked a well-known Yesu bhakta,

Dayanand Bharati, if I might present his perspectives on the *mukti*⁴ *mandali*⁵ (salvation fellowship), as they call their society or community⁶ of believers.

Bharati has served Yesu bhaktas across India for much of 30 years. His writings are known to Christians in India and the West, especially his book *Living Water and Indian Bowl* (William Carey Library, 2004).

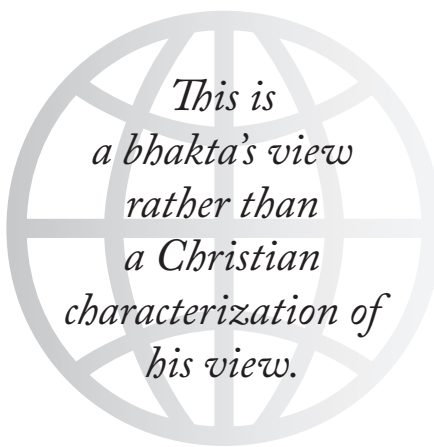
Rather than limiting our theological reflection to Christian theologians in the majority world, I thought it would be helpful to hear the voice of a man who walks with followers of Jesus within their Hindu socio-religious community. Dayanand Bharati graciously agreed to let me compile some of his writings—to share his voice about ekklesia, fellowship, and community among the bhaktas. He has reviewed and either verified or clarified my presentations of his perspectives on these issues.

This paper, then, presents a direct statement of a bhakta's view of fellowship, rather than Christian characterizations and even misrepresentations of his views. Admittedly, this presentation is mediated through the English language, but Bharati wrote them in English himself. I am also responsible for the thematic organization and writing. Bharati, however, has always been very honest in pointing out where I have misunderstood or misrepresented his views. I have been and continue to be deeply grateful for his forthright clarifications.

You must also know that over the last four years Bharati has become a dear friend and I respect him highly as my brother in Christ. So, what I present is not simply an academic research paper written from a dispassionate distance. I am trying to faithfully represent the views and ideas of a friend whom I respect and treasure deeply. I don't always agree with everything he says, but he would say that about his own writings, much less mine. I do appreciate

the way he continually pushes me to reflect on my own culture-bound ways of reading Scripture and helps me look at God's word through other lenses. So I present this paper in the hopes that you will hear his heart and see the issues of fellowship and community through fresh eyes.

My reflections on these fellowship issues also reflect reports by bhakta friends who are involved in the regular gatherings. Occasionally I have been able to participate in *satsangs* with bhaktas in India. Too much Western presence, though, can compromise their relationships with their Hindu family and community, so these times are intentionally rare, both by my choice and theirs.



In reviewing this paper, H. L. Richard noted that there are bhaktas who have followed Jesus in more individual ways. Hoefler's book *Churchless Christianity* provides multiple examples. Both of them have also noted a phenomenon that Bharati specifically mentioned—bhaktas who attended church gatherings and sat at the back for the worship and preaching, but quickly left at the end of the service. Such believers find their social interaction primarily with their family and community at large, not the church group. These challenges require careful examination and creative pastoral responses by believers (Christians and bhaktas alike). But they lie beyond the scope of this paper.

The fact remains that a number of bhaktas do share in regular, mutual fellowship. So I thought it would help believers to get an inside perspective on what fellowship means among this significant group of followers of Jesus.

Fellowship is Essential

Some Christians charge that bhaktas (or incarnational believers in general) practice an individualized spirituality. Yet Bharati said long ago in *Living Water and Indian Bowl*, "A congregational or body life expression of faith in Christ is essential for truly biblical discipleship" (Bharati 2004, 55).

In a more recent blog post entitled "Unity in the Spirit," Bharati articulated some basic essentials as he understood them:

In our movement as Hindu bhaktas, the essence is that Muktinath is the Lord and Savior, Muktiveda is the Word of God, Mandali [i.e., the fellowship] is the one through which God carries out His will and purpose for the world. (Bharati 2016a)

Some bhaktas asked Bharati to further explore the significance of the *mandali* (fellowship). So in a follow up blog post, "On Fellowship," he wrote,

One crucial thing that is so important for every convert or Hindu bhakta of the Lord is the avenue and opportunity to learn to grow in her faith/bhakti in the Lord. (Bharati 2016b)

How does that happen? Bharati elaborated:

As I often say, *we don't have a private bhakti or a private God, though we do have a personal relationship with Him. Our faith/bhakti is not a one-man-operated corporation.*⁷ Either we sail together or sink together. For this, fellowship, learning, and teaching are important apart from worshipping together and also individually. (ibid., 2016b; emphasis mine)

These believers are so concerned about their mutual life that they even have a regular e-satsang for

believers who cannot attend physical gatherings. They seek to ensure that all the bhaktas have regular opportunity for worship and instruction. Bharati added at this point,

We also have a Skype discussion, which often gets disturbed. Yet we try to keep it going to have a systematic study of the Mukhtiveda. Interestingly, we use this forum most of the time only to learn from the Mukhtiveda, not for common discussion or any other study other than Mukhtiveda. However, sometimes we will bring some references from Hindu scriptures. (Bharati 2017a)

So contrary to common Christian representations, Bharati assumes that followers of Jesus need a “congregational or body life,” are part of a mandali (fellowship), and that faith in Jesus is not a “one-man operated corporation.” Bharati has affirmed the need for believers to gather together so that they can encourage and sharpen one another.⁸

Foundational Concerns about Unity

Bharati is also deeply concerned about the unity and fellowship of believers. But his early experience with church hierarchy and structure has led him to be deeply troubled by unity based on church organizations and institutions. These often embody cultural assumptions, attitudes, and expressions for the way of Jesus that are foreign to India.

In his blog post on “Unity in Spirit” Bharati comes back repeatedly to a central concern (Bharati 2016a):

- “Thankfully this movement of Hindu bhaktas is neither an organization nor is there organic unity.”
- “So each bhakta is an entity in this movement—thank God we are not organized as a denomination or even with any organic identity.”
- In his summary he reiterates, “Try to understand the fact that our unity is only in Spirit and not organic and never organizational.”

Bharati’s language is problematic to church people who want to see an organization and structure to the church.

Concerns about Organizational Unity

This language is problematic to church people who want to see an organization and structure to the church. For churches steeped in some form of monarchical leadership (monarchical bishop or monarchical pastor), this sentiment is particularly disconcerting. Some churches, in fact, see the clergy and hierarchy as “the church.” The lay people simply attend and view what “the church” presents to them.

Bharati’s unease about “organization,” I would suggest, parallels what drove Huss or Zinzendorf to emphasize “brethren,” or Tyndale to use “congregation.” They desired to emphasize the equal gifting of all believers (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12) and the priesthood of all believers—the responsibility of all believers to speak, teach, minister, and serve (Eph. 4:11–12).

How do I know that? Bharati, in the same article, says as much:

So in this movement we all have unity in Spirit but not uniformity or organic unity. But we keep in touch with each other as we all strive to live our life with mutual learning and teaching based on some common minimum principles.... That is why we don’t have any permanent leader or head to look unto for all our need. (Bharati 2016a)

I also know from bhakta testimonies what happens when the mandali gathers for regular retreats during the year. Sometimes Bharati sits at the front and leads a satsang or discussion. At other times, though, he is just a part of the circle, and encourages the bhaktas to wrestle with and discuss the Scripture for themselves. He may insinuate a comment or question at times where appropriate, but he does not drive or direct the discussion to pursue his agenda. He wants the believers to own

their faith and their understanding and application of Scripture.

This was confirmed in his elaboration of this point,

In our satsangs, sometimes I used to lead only the worship part with some small sharing that is relevant to that worship. After that we will have a teaching session in which we all will share, after someone started the initial topic or verses from Mukhtiveda. So we generally have two parts—one worship which I or someone would lead; the next major part is teaching in which all will participate. (Bharati 2017a)

The West’s propensity for structure, organization, and external conformity, is itself partially a product of its culture. If Jesus or Paul stepped into many churches today, I suspect they would be far less at home in that organizational system and likely more comfortable with the bhaktas’ less formal, at times anti-formal, fellowship (mandali).

Again, Bharati provided some interesting elaboration from what I initially presented in the previous paragraph:

I too recognize the initial need of some kind of structure or form to link with each other. But when the structure becomes the centre of focus and not people, then all kinds of problems come one by one. What we started in spirit will end up in flesh.... Similarly, a mandali will collapse when its Mukhtivedic-based values get lost. But it can continue even without any structure or create a new one which will serve its purpose, like what we have: email forum, Skype discussion, Whatsapp group, etc. (Bharati 2017a)

So organizationally, they make sure believers have opportunities to gather regularly for fellowship and worship. For those who cannot physically meet, they use electronic means to provide weekly

Scripture study and weekly worship opportunities with other bhaktas. More mature bhaktas make a point of traveling each year and visiting personally with more isolated bhaktas both in India and in other parts of the world. Such efforts to maintain fellowship and unity entail a level of organization, but are not hierarchically structured and managed.

Concerns about Organic Unity

While presenting this material, several participants asked for clarification about Bharati's view of "organic unity." In a follow-up electronic conversation, Bharati explained,

According to my understanding "organic" means having a kind of blood relationship which we cannot choose, or we cannot throw away. So the Hindu bhaktas have no blood relationship with each other but have unity in spirit. (Bharati 2017b)

He later sent a Whatsapp message with a further nuance to his use of "organic":

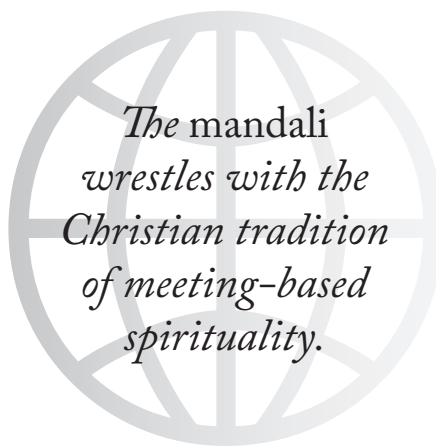
For me a sense of belonging is also organic. For example, I feel that I am an Indian. This comes naturally. Suppose if I migrate to another country and even become a citizen. I still would feel that I am an Indian, now become a non-residential Indian. So it is not only blood relationship, but the sense of belonging. Though I belong to the bhakta mandali, yet it is more unity in spirit, but not an organic or organizational one. (Bharati 2017c)

From his perspective, "organic" includes two somewhat related elements: blood or genetic relationships which one cannot choose, and one's sense of belonging or heritage, which someone might retain even when changing nationality (or faith).

So when Bharati says, "We do not have organic unity," he is asserting that following Jesus does not deny one's blood relationships or a believer's heritage (sense of belonging) prior to meeting Jesus. The Spirit unites people across such "organic" realities, but does not supplant or eliminate them.

Some Western listeners or readers have expressed confusion because of Bharati's rejection of "organic." They use "organic" (as in organic church) for expressions of fellowship that grows naturally within a specific context, that are not highly structured or formal. To them, Bharati's concern about "organic unity" seems unnatural and counter-intuitive.

This confusion, however, highlights a critical issue when we explore these issues with believers in other contexts. They may use terms in ways that are natural to them, but that do not follow standard Christian usage. Just because certain Christians use terms in certain ways does not mean that all believers are obligated to use their terminology with their definitions or understandings.



Incarnational situations require freedom in articulating appropriate theology and praxis for their context. We must seek to understand their perspective and concerns, rather than simply imposing our understanding and perspective on them.

In their desire for fellowship and unity, then, bhaktas seek to display spiritual unity and meet one another's needs. Yet they are concerned about creating rigid structures and schedules in the name of "unity" that end up reflecting man-made conformity. They want to remain flexible to the needs of the mandali (fellowship) rather than constraining it to one form and structure. They are also intentional about not

unnecessarily rejecting believers' blood relationships or heritage in the name of spiritual unity.

De-emphasizing Meeting-based Spirituality

In addition, Bharati and the mandali also wrestle with a common Christian tradition of meeting-based spirituality. His discussions around the relationship of one's spiritual life to religious gatherings move in two directions.

When Christians maintain that Hindus in general do not know corporate worship, he rightly challenges this assertion. Several years ago, he wrote,

The too common comparison of the Christian church as a community with Hinduism as a highly individualistic religion is an entirely false antithesis. Hinduism is far from void of community expressions of faith and life. (Bharati 2004, 56)

There is a corporate aspect of Hindu worship, although their events or gatherings may not be as frequent nor are they emphasized in the same way church services are for Christians.

At a deeper level, though, Yesu bhaktas are troubled by the concept that one's relationship with the Lord and one's spiritual maturity is primarily determined by attending meetings. In a personal conversation Bharati once said to me, "I never understood how Christians can limit worship to one or two hours a week" (Bharati 2015).

He articulated a similar concern in his blog reflection "On Fellowship":

Though I don't want to criticise the church, yet according to my understanding, no convert can get the real fellowship that she needs to survive as a human being within the four walls of a church that gathers once in a week plus a cottage prayer meeting. In such a scenario, she has to spend six days and 20 hours in the outside world. That fellowship alone helps her grow in her faith/bhakti properly rather than having a wrong notion about

fellowship gatherings once a week inside any building. (Bharati 2016b)

Bharati emphasizes the fact that bhakti is supposed to involve love, devotion, and worship in all of one's life all the time. So if someone claims to be a bhakta of *Mukthinath* (Jesus), they should live a life of worship, not just attend a weekly gathering. This leads to some different emphases in the way bhaktas view personal and corporate expressions of faith.

Individual versus Corporate Expressions of Faith

Bharati, in private conversations, and in his writing, has expressed his personal preference to be alone and simply meditate on the Lord and Scripture. The history of Christianity has itself seen believers who avoided crowds and meetings and sought to relate to the Lord in more personal and private ways. Some people are more gregarious and others more private and reserved.

It should not surprise us, or cause undue judgment, then, if bhaktas display a similar variation in need for corporate affirmation and expression of their faith. Vows of silence, of chastity, of worldly avoidance, are not unknown in Christian circles.

To some extent, Dayanand Bharati's views on gatherings, meetings, and fellowships are a reflection of his own tendency toward being a *sannyasi* (one who renounces the world for spiritual matters). His aversion to excessive meetings and overly-structured organization grows partly out of his own spiritual life. He spends much time with the Lord, writes new songs frequently, and meditates on the Lord and Scripture.⁹

One wants to ask how much Jesus' spiritual vitality depended on his attendance at weekly synagogue services, or how much Paul's spiritual vitality derived from his attendance at synagogue. In their speaking, writing, and practice, we get the distinct impression that their private communion with the Lord was far more significant for their

Ideas reflected in mandali actually convey more of the people-centric ideas of ekklesia than common ideas associated with "church."

spiritual power, than their occasional attendance at religious gatherings.

When we look behind the unfamiliar terminology Bharati sometimes uses, we actually find concerns that have been raised even in Christian circles. The solutions to these challenges that he and the bhaktas have arrived at may not always be comfortable to Christians. That should not warrant blanket rejection and condemnation.

Principles of the Mukti Mandali

Bharati's own articulation of the governing principles of the mukti mandali¹⁰ (salvation fellowship) helps us to see some of the bhaktas' concerns and values:

Once, we were asked to give a statement of our principle at a conference. We wrote: Mukthinath-centered families within every community (Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, even among the Christians).

Added to this, I shared these as my principles:

- We will remain as Hindu bhaktas of the Lord—never severing our relationship with our family, particularly in the name of our bhakti.
- We have no official membership in any denominational church—but we will have friendship and fellowship with them or with any other people in this world.
- No full-time workers—each bhakta should stand on her own feet and be a witness to others. We are not against this practice among the Christians supported by their church or mission. (Bharati 2016a)

Their vision, in other words, is:

- Christ-centered families
- Living incarnationally as disciples of Jesus in and with their socio-religious community

- No "church membership" but friendship and fellowship with all believers
- No professional, "full-time" workers, but each believer is a responsible witness for Jesus

He Doesn't Call It a Church

Some Christians I know will look past the above statements about fellowship and unity. They will instead fixate on Bharati's use of "mandali." Using a "Hindu" word for a fellowship of believers may trouble them. They want to see the word "church" to ensure that fellowship and public worship are being done in proper fashion and order.

Look up mandali in a Hindi dictionary, though, and you find a wide range of meanings that correlate more closely to "ekklesia" than "church" does: congregation, circle (of people), band, company (Hinkhoj.com 2017). Google Translate (2017) includes the following meanings: team, guild, association, network.

The idea of a circle or association of people who share a common life or purpose lies at the heart of the New Testament concept of ekklesia. The ideas reflected in mandali actually convey more of the people-centric ideas of ekklesia than common ideas associated with "church" (i.e., denomination, institution, organization, program, building). At this point, Bharati specifically responded,

Yes you are right and thanks for giving this new insight for me. In the church people are expected to accommodate to the demands of that [human-made] structure. Whereas in a mandali, which is people centered and oriented, we try to understand and address the issues of individual bhakta's needs. (Bharati 2017a)

So the fact that Bharati and his fellow bhaktas call their fellowship a mandali does not invalidate the very real

fellowship and mutual life they share together in their relationship with Muktinath (Jesus).

Similarly, when they refer to worship or fellowship gatherings as *satsangs*, this sounds unfamiliar and uncomfortable to some Christians. I would remind them, though, that some Indian translations of Scripture use *satsang*, *sangam* (gathering), or *sabha* (assembly) for *ekklesia*. The language Bharati uses at times, though unfamiliar to Christians with traditional views of church, is not necessarily unfaithful to Jesus or Scripture.

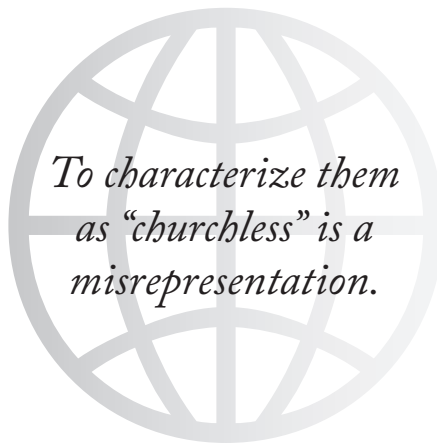
Bharati's Indian terminology for the body of Christ and the fellowship of believers represents necessary shifts in language and expression when the new wine of Jesus is put into new wineskins for new contexts and cultures. Bharati and the global *mandali*¹¹ he serves are not being unfaithful to Jesus, but are doing what Jesus said should happen in new situations.

In making these changes, Bharati has articulated concerns about the traditional, institutional church. It is important that we clarify his view of the church in the face of common misrepresentations by some Christians.

A pastor I know once did a cursory, snap reading of Bharati's blog posts and rather prematurely concluded, "He is an enemy of the church." Without bothering to understand Bharati's heart or his broader writing, he cherry-picked one statement and drew sweeping, prejudiced conclusions from it.

Bharati, with his desire for more culturally appropriate expressions of fellowship or witness, is no more an enemy of the church than Huss or Luther was for advocating vernacular expressions for worship instead of Latin; or congregationalists were for seeking more people-centered forms of congregational life instead of hierarchical, institutional church structures.

Bharati is motivated in this realm by the same feeling that led William Tyndale to translate *ekklesia* as "congregation" rather than "church." We should not forget that Thomas More and the English church had Tyndale kidnapped, tortured, and eventually strangled and burned for that "damnable heresy" (Daniell 1994). Bharati's impetus to foster a more people-focused, culturally appropriate expression of fellowship should not be rejected out of hand simply because he does not follow more traditional, institutional forms of "church," forms often modeled more on Western cultural patterns and assumptions, than on biblical teaching.



Conclusion

In conclusion, then, let me try to summarize Bharati's key points about fellowship and community among the *Yesu bhaktas* in the *mukti mandali*.

- Fellowship and mutual encouragement and teaching are essential. Faith or *bhakti* is not a "one-man operated corporation," and they actively foster joint learning, teaching, and worship.
- Bharati seeks to emphasize unity in the Spirit without forming an artificial "unity" based on forms and structures. This arises from his resistance to hierarchical, sometimes colonial-style control in some churches. The more committed

Christians are to the external organizational structures of their "church," the more uncomfortable they will be with Bharati's emphasis on spiritual unity, not external uniformity.

- Bharati and the *bhaktas* he serves place a strong emphasis on informal fellowship and "non-organization." They are troubled by many cultural and hierarchical forms within the institutional church. This concern is not without parallels within church history and should not be rejected outright.
- They do not and will not call their fellowship or gatherings a "church," seeking to avoid several negative connotations of that word. They are not, however, opposed to fellowship just because they avoid that word. When people characterize them as "churchless," this is a misrepresentation. They have community and body life, they just don't call it church.
- Some of Bharati's views on fellowship are influenced by his own personality that tends more towards what we would consider the life of a secluded monk, more towards withdrawal and individual devotional practice than public, shared activities.
- Many of the concerns Bharati raises are actually concerns shared by Christians in the body of Christ, when we look past the unfamiliar terminology.

Christians have much to learn, actually, from those who follow and worship Jesus in unfamiliar ways. Bharati's perspectives have helped me to reexamine my own traditions and allegiances based on what the Word of God says, not just what church custom and practice dictate. In fact, his concerns about institutional church are becoming increasingly voiced in the Christian West, not just by international believers in the East. If we have the humility to listen and learn, Bharati and the *mukti mandali* could help the church find answers to challenges it faces both in the West and globally. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Bharati responded here, “I told Dr. Hoefler that rather than calling us ‘Church-less Christians’ better call us ‘Christianity less church.’” Since the Yesu bhaktas also avoid the label Christian or Christianity, though, they would prefer something like “disciples less church and Christianity” or “believers less church and Christianity.” But even this can sound problematic to Christian ears, since it brings to their minds isolated believers without a fellowship of any kind. Bharati, as this paper will clearly demonstrate, does not believe in an individualist faith in Jesus without mutual accountability, encouragement, and teaching. To truly capture his sentiment here, I would suggest their stance is more like “disciples of Yesu (*Muktinath*) with non-church forms of fellowship” (Bharati 2017a).

² He commented at this point: “I appreciate their concern. And I am very thankful to them. Even I am under an obligation to be thankful to them as I belong to the body of the Lord. At the same time, I often feel that this concern is coming out with a ‘negative and condescending attitude’ sometimes with some kind of superiority complex on their part rather than with real sympathy. Then, naturally, we never pay any attention to that kind of concern” (Bharati 2017a).

³ Joint conference of Evangelical Missiological Society and International Society of Frontier Missiology held September 15–17, 2017 at GIAL in Dallas.

⁴ *Mukti* is an important term for the Yesu bhaktas. It is often translated “salvation,” but has a richer sense than just removal of sins as Christians often think of with that word. They translate the name of Jesus (“God saves”) as *Muktinath* (Lord of salvation), or use as a title, *Muktidata* (salvation giver)—ideas that Jews would have recognized in the Aramaic original Yeshua. Some bhaktas call the Bible the *Muktiveda* (Salvation Scripture), a term coined by Bharati instead of the Western “Bible” which is not in the Bible.

⁵ *Mandali* literally means “circle.” But it is used also for a social “circle,” in similar fashion to English usage for a “circle of friends” or “one’s social circle.” Mandali is a great Indian translation for the people-centered ekklesia of the New Testament.

⁶ I am deeply aware that “community” can be a code word in India for caste communities, religious communities, and other social groupings that can imply separateness and division. Communalism (separating people by their community) is a deeply harmful

aspect of some parts of Indian society. The word community, though, is one of the best renderings for ekklesia. When a Greek community of citizens gathered to conduct city business (ekklisia), they did so out of shared commitment to the best interests of the community, the people of the city.

⁷ I have quoted Bharati’s original wording (it got edited before posting to “one-man operation”). His preferred phrase still means that we don’t go it alone in our faith. But it also emphasizes an added sense that one person does not drive the faith of the group, as in too many churches, where a monarchical leader of some kind is seen as the director or operator of the faith of others.

⁸ Bharati commented: “I often insist that the touch of human flesh is very important. So physical gatherings are very important as eye-to-eye contact, a smile, a hello, a *Namaste*, etc., will communicate more than what we listen to while in teaching. I often said that true fellowship and learning happens not in our teaching/learning sessions but in between the breaks, when we have tea time, lunch and dinner time, evening walks, night-time outside fire fellowship. So I always insist on the need of physical gathering as much as possible. But I oppose any gathering out of compulsion or mere routine because of habits” (Bharati 2017a).

⁹ Bharati confirmed this, “I agree with you. My desire for a life of recluse is also a fact behind my views on many of my writings—which sometimes are explicit and other times implicit” (Bharati 2017a).

¹⁰ I have intentionally made mukti mandali lowercase. The bhaktas seek to maintain as low an organizational and structural form as possible. They are not particularly interested in a name that would isolate and denominate them against others. The lowercase, to me, represents their desire to have this be who they are in essence (a fellowship of freed and saved people), while not making it a distinctive name and organizational feature that separates them from others.

¹¹ The mukti mandali is not limited to India. Their Skype calls, WhatsApp group, and e-satsangs include bhaktas across India (north and south), Singapore, UK, and in different parts of the US.

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“This study is what is most needed today in the debate over what are called insider movements . . . It certainly moves the discussion forward.”

—J. Dudley Woodberry

dean emeritus and senior professor of Islamic studies, Fuller Theological Seminary

MUSLIM INSIDER CHRIST FOLLOWERS

Their Theological and Missional Frames

Jan Hendrick Prenger

ARE MUSLIM INSIDER CHRIST FOLLOWERS real believers? Are they Muslims or Christians? Does that matter? The topic of insider movements is controversial within the church. The debate rages on, opinions differ widely, and convictions often are defended aggressively. The set of voices sorely missing from this hot debate has been that of the insiders themselves. This book finally breaks that silence.

Henk Prenger researched the views of 26 Muslim insider Christ followers who are leaders in their movements. You will be surprised by their insights. Prenger presents their views on 21 theology-proper topics such as God, man, the gospel, sin, Satan, the cross, heaven and hell, the Bible, and our mandate. He plotted these views in a theological/missional framework with four paradigms: Fundamental, Ecumenical, Integral, and Global. This M-Framework is a powerful catalyst for honest conversations about theological paradigms that inform how we approach insider movements and the kingdom of God on earth.

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Households in Focus

Muslim Insider Christ Followers: General Observations on Movements

by Jan Hendrik Prenger

Editor's Note: This article has been excerpted from Chapter 5 of Jan Hendrik Prenger's Muslim Insider Christ Followers: Their Theological and Missional Frames, (William Carey Library, 2017). Used by permission. Missionbooks.org. At ISFM 2017 (September 15–17), Prenger synthesized an analysis of his extensive interviews with 26 leaders from a cross-section of movements across Asia and parts of Africa. During three sessions, Prenger walked us through his Missio-M-Framework, a continuum distilling the theological views of these insiders. Extensive, often candid, quotes and vivid case studies—all taken from his interviews—illustrated each “frame.” The following excerpt is only “indirectly relevant” (Prenger’s words) to his focus on theological profiles. Directly relevant to our theme are Prenger’s observations on certain structural realities of these movements and the way a more natural kind of ecclesial life emerges. His research seems to confirm the fundamental role of household-based (oikos) fellowships. In an era that makes hearing directly from insiders exceedingly difficult, the methodology used in this long overdue study yields great detail, while protecting the identities of these leaders. Anyone engaged in ministry to Muslims today should read this landmark research in its entirety. We hope others can and will build on what Prenger has done.

This study is narrowly focused with regard to topic but wide in respect to region. I did not study one movement in detail but several movements, and then exclusively focused on *theology proper*. These general observations on insider movements (IM) are in themselves not the focus of my research, but they are of interest because they allow for some comparison of different movements and set the stage for further study of my research topic. I limited myself to only documenting general observations that were indirectly relevant to my main research question.

The 26 interviewed IM leaders came from the seven regions depicted in figure 1, p. 68. Some of the 26 IM leaders are fairly closely associated with each other in the same region, whereas others are from distinctly different areas within a given region. This reality creates 15 IM groupings, as shown in figure 2, p. 69. Even within these 15 groupings, each IM leader represents a unique movement in which he is involved, which means that this research looked at 26 different insider movements, all at different stages and of different sizes. Figure 3, p. 70, shows where the five alongsiders link within the seven overall regions.

Each of these IM leaders has personal testimonies and many stories to tell, and each of these IMs has a history and a distinct beginning. My research is not to investigate the *why* of IM, as I take it as a given that these movements exist,

Jan Hendrik (Henk) Prenger, DMiss, is a missiologist and administrator currently working as a consultant in international development. He started out flying fighter jets and working in the manned space program before attending seminary, joining Wycliffe Bible Translators, and serving with SIL International in the greater Middle East/West Asia area for 15 years, giving leadership to mission in Muslim contexts. Henk and his wife, Paige, have three grown children and reside in Alexandria, Virginia.

but to the extent that the personal stories told by the interviewees relate to their theological and missional motivations and convictions, I share here a mere sample of their many stories. The main catalyst for IMs was, for many, the desire to share Isa al Masih with their own communities and to bless those communities. Mitch shared his amazing testimony with me one evening, telling me how he, as a Muslim teenager, was seeking some answers from his imam on the identity of the Qur'an as the Word of Allah and on Isa being called the Word of Allah as well. Over the years this led to him talking with Christian missionaries, putting his faith in Christ, being baptized, and needing to leave his family and community. He got involved in church ministries as a respected teacher and lived on a church compound. He had a burden to reach Muslims with the gospel, but over time his idiom and vocabulary had christianized, and Muslims rejected him outright. One day a missionary sent a group of young men to Mitch for him to check their faith. They had come to the missionary to be baptized. The missionary told Mitch that he would be ready to baptize them if Mitch approved. Mitch recalled this time.

I found that they believe the same things that I do. They are believers. They are not Christians [as public identity] because we had not baptized them yet, but they believe. At the end of our week together I told them that my advice to them was not to become Christians. I told them what happened to me, why I am sitting there and who I am, and how the Muslim villages and people are rejecting me because of what I did. They see me as a betrayer. They say that I brought shame to the whole *ummah*, the whole community. So I said, "Go back home and don't try to become a Christian, but remain in your faith quietly, pray to Jesus, worship him, and tell him your problems. If you openly pronounce that you are Christian, you are going to get killed or rejected by your family, and you will end up here on the compound. This is maybe thirty acres of land. How many people can come and live here? If we want our whole country, then this compound is not ours. Remain there. Your parents will notice the change in your life. If there is no change, your faith is not active. But there will be change and they will ask you what happened. Then you can share and tell them what happened. At the same time, if you are burning

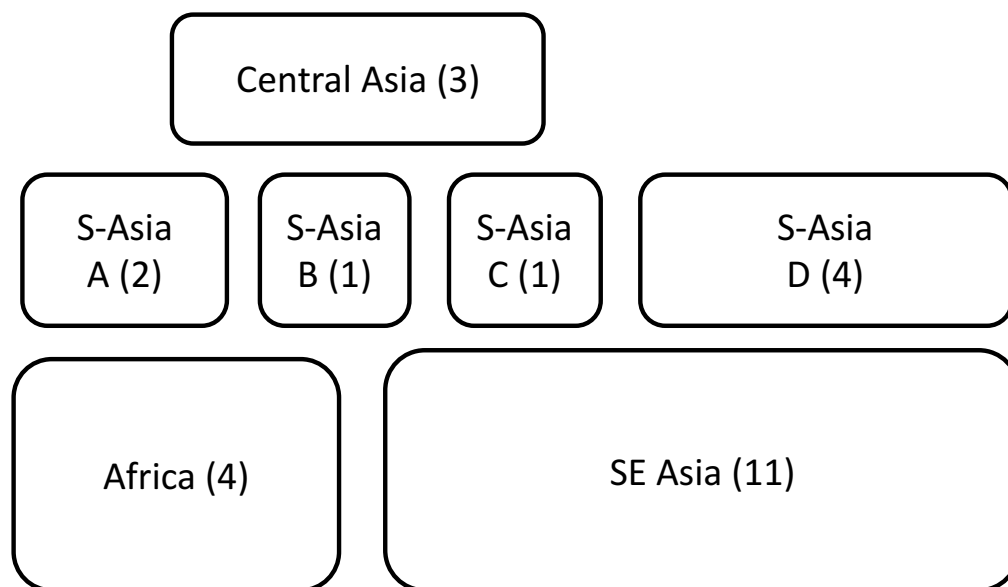
inside to tell someone, go to a very close friend who will not betray you and tell him." Everybody was happy. We prayed and they left.

The missionary was upset and told Mitch that he had probably lost his last chance to bring Muslims to faith. A month later these young men came back to Mitch together with sixteen older men who were heads of families. The young men told Mitch that they had followed his advice, praying every day and sharing with trusted family members, and now these sixteen men had accepted Isa and had come to be taught. This went on, month after month for several years, as groups of Muslim men came to be taught. Mitch shared with me,

The missionaries were noticing all these things and said, "Maybe we should not include these people in the church, because the church will not be able to accept this. By now they are already bigger in number than the church itself."

This small local church did, however, support the training of these groups of Muslim followers of Jesus. Mitch reflected and said, "This way it continued for several years, and this has become a

Figure 1. The 26 IM leaders came from seven regions.



movement now. It started on its own. It was not intentional.”

Each IM leader I interviewed had a story to tell. Table 1, p. 71, shares a portion of five more stories that indicate how IMs come from the missional conviction of followers of Jesus to make a difference in their own communities.

I close this brief look at the *why* of IM with an observation from Paxton. He finds IM completely natural and nothing new, as he recalled how the first Jewish believers had to find a way to talk about Jesus and the only language available to them was the Old Testament and rabbinical theology, which is what they used to express their faith.

So it was an insider movement. It always has been an insider movement. This insider movement is actually a movement of those people who take their religion very seriously, and who want to express their faith in a way they express any other experience in their lives, in their own language and within their context.

Structure and Growth

SE Asia

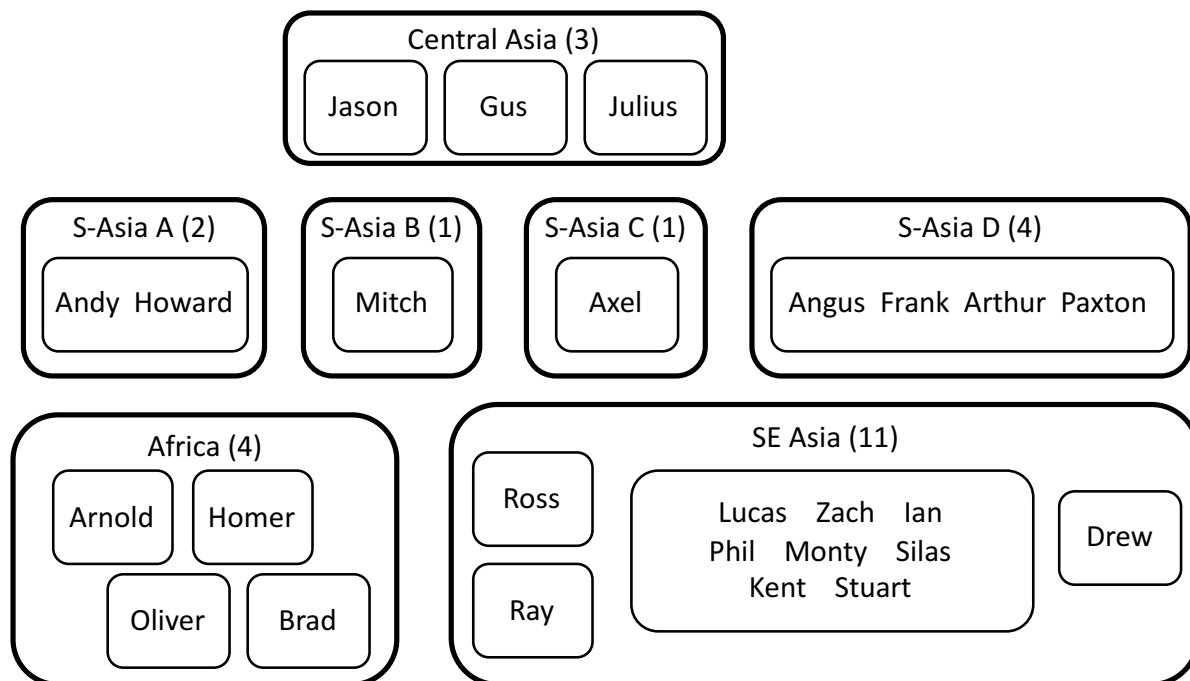
The main structure for the IMs in SE Asia is the *jamaat*, or fellowship. Alongsider Josh commented on the high level of commitment he has noticed members having to attend weekly jamaat meetings. These gatherings are modeled after a type of meeting generally held in homes, where they read or chant Holy Scripture in segregated groups between men and women. The jamaat gatherings are also social in nature. They eat something together and pray for each other. Alongsider Tyler mentioned that most of the jamaats he is familiar with are fairly small in size, with anywhere between four and six members. “This creates a bit more safety for people that are used to being beaten down,” he said. IM leaders from SE Asia confirmed the use of the jamaat structure in their movements. These groups meet in homes or more public places. For example, Ray regularly meets with a group of students at the university where he is studying for his PhD.

The jamaat structure does not replace the existing macro structure but fits within it. Normal mosque life continues as a macrocultural community structure. Monty said that they do not want to change the existing macro structure because it would trigger disorder.

We want to build a believer community inside the mosque. We want to build a Bible college within the Islamic boarding house.

Monty’s personal ministry is within an Islamic boarding school. He said that their jamaats in this school were relatively hidden in the first five years of meeting and learning together, but after that the students and leaders in these jamaats were ready to be more open about the fact that they were studying the Gospels and Jesus. This school is now known in the community for doing so, and the jamaat members have their answers ready to questions about why they study the Injil and Isa, from a qur’anic viewpoint. As Muslims they can explain these studies and continue their jamaat movement. The

Figure 2. The 26 IM leaders came from 15 groupings.



macro structure forms the setting for ministry. Monty mentioned, “Insider movements are moving so quickly because there are no walls as obstacles keeping it from happening.” They are using the former ways to make new changes. He did admit that sometimes these old structures need some modification if part of them is in conflict with the Word of God.

IMs have multiple so-called generations, which are clusters of spiritual offspring. A first-generation insider is someone who was led to faith in Christ by an outsider. A second-generation insider is someone who came to faith through a first-generation insider, etc. The jamaats within a movement are associated with a certain generation. You have second-generation jamaats, third-generation jamaats, and so forth. Each jamaat has a formal or informal leader, which means that there is a structure of IM

leaders within an IM that is used as a venue for communication and training. In SE Asia there is a quarterly multi-day meeting of the top 20 leaders in the various movements in the region. Much of this time is spent in Bible study. There is also a biannual gathering of multiple leaders from various national organizations who are involved in contextual Muslim work, to share best practices and to encourage one another. The formats of these top-level leadership meetings are duplicated among the leaders down into the lower-level generations. As such, the connections between the leaders in an IM are part of the IM structure.

A leader of a jamaat emerges naturally within a group setting, but there is always consensus building. Phil said,

It could be a younger person. It is a consensus discussion. It will take some time, but there always is one person who is chosen to be the most senior.

A group of leaders within a certain area follows the same process to choose leaders among themselves. Monty shared that they are planning to send out 500 leaders within the next five years, to start movements in unreached areas. He explained the reason for the five-year time frame. “The idea of five years is that there have to be children and grandchildren leaders behind them, prior to them being sent.” He was referring to IM generations.

Growth in the IMs in SE Asia happens through social networks. These are existing networks of contacts within the existing macro structure. Phil recalled his change in approach towards natural networks.

At the beginning when I started doing evangelism I worked from a map, and my thoughts and plans were mostly based on areas I wanted to go. As time went by, and especially after I started meeting with others

Figure 3. Five alongsiders in seven regions

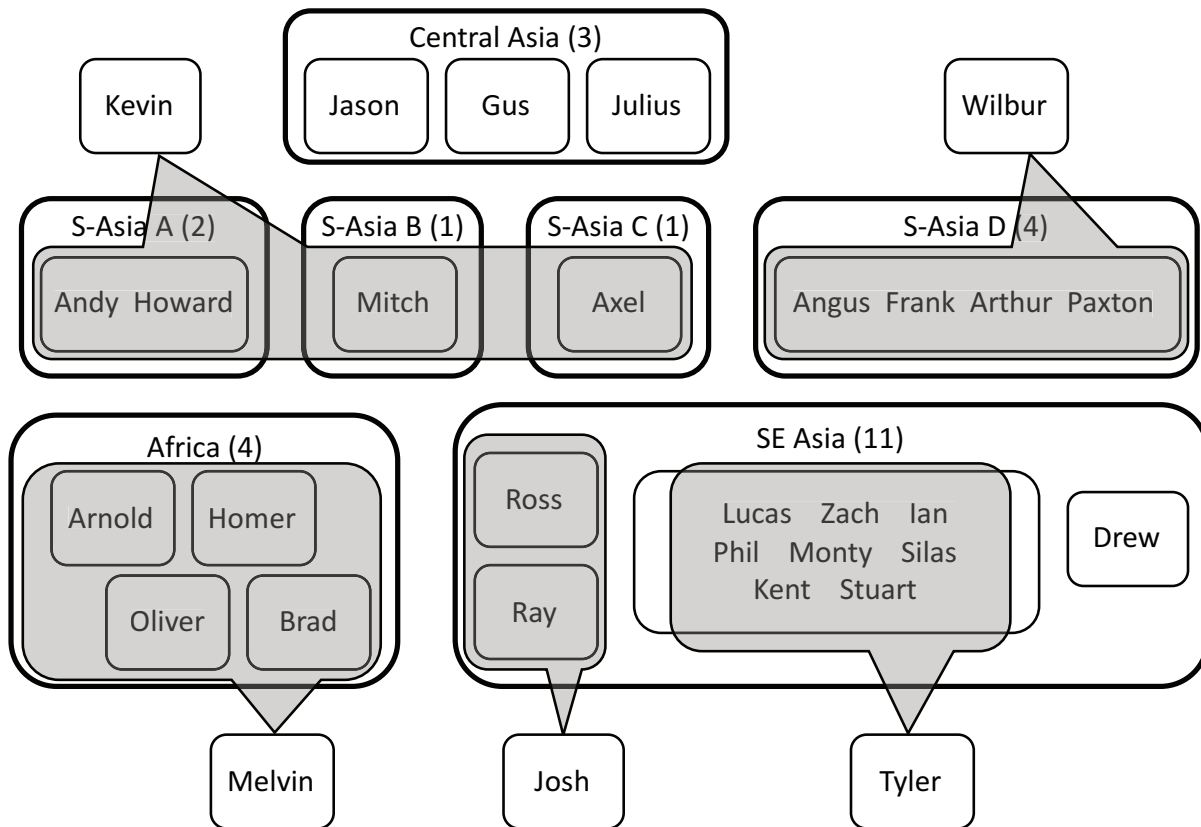


Table 1. Why insider movements?

IM Leader	Direct Quote
S-Asia-C\Axel	I was thinking and thinking, I had been praying for a long time for my family. I can go there. If I say that I'm a Muslim, nothing is wrong. I can go and reach my people. It was like a vision for me. I want to be an insider. I don't want to be an outsider. I will put myself in the place of my family and friends, to come to them. If at that time some Christian will come, I will hide him. Who will talk to my friends and family?
C-Asia\Julius	Just two years ago, after getting married, I made a decision to return to live among my family, which I had left six years ago, to live close to them and my extended family. I came to a clear condition that I needed to share the gospel with my people. I started from the beginning to share the gospel with my family and friends. I would call this a calling that I believe I received from God. As I did this, I naturally started to learn some of the principles about insider movements. I considered Islamic culture and the way my people think.
Africa\Arnold	It took me 10 years to finally catch that vision and to understand what it really means to remain in one's context, to be able to reach out to others. From then on, I began to reach out to my own people. I went back to my people. They accepted me back, but they saw many changes in me that made them say, "He has something to offer." Once a believer takes a Christian identity, I know that this will not help. Perhaps it will help the church, but it will not help the community and society as a whole.
SE Asia\Drew	When I got baptized in 2006 I did not consider myself a Christian. I simply considered myself to be a Muslim who had accepted Jesus. I had a desire to bring Jesus to my Muslim friends, and I had never heard about insider movements. After I got baptized and got home from church, I did the regular <i>salat</i> , as my expression of thankfulness to God. My mother [a Christian] was very angry with me. "What are you doing that for? God will be very confused with you!" This is what my mother said, and I still remember it until now. I told her that I had accepted Jesus, but that I was still a Muslim, and that I wanted to bring Jesus to my Muslim friends. Yes, there are some Muslims who convert to Christianity and who hate Mohammed, but for me, I want to serve my friends and I want to respect their beliefs, and a central figure of Islam is Mohammed. I don't find that this goes against the teachings of Jesus.
SE Asia\Ray	As a Muslim it is easy for me to share the gospel, because when I talk about Isa as a Muslim with other Muslims they know that I am not trying to convert them. That is not a problem. It is a very different story when a Christian talks to a Muslim about Jesus. He would say, "Be careful, you cannot convert me." When I initially discussed this idea with my wife she told me that I could do it, but that she could not, since she is from a Christian background. Over time she saw and understood what was happening in the ministry, and she decided to become a Muslim convert to Islam. I did not force her, but she personally understood that this was needed for the kingdom of God.

with the same passion some seven years ago, there is more of a principle of following the Spirit. What are the natural flows of relationships of a person? He has friends over there, so that is how faith spreads. This is more a natural style away from the command-center approach. It is much

cheaper and more efficient to follow whatever God opens.

Lucas mentioned that within his movement they encourage individuals who come to faith in Jesus to stay in their own context so that they can invite others from that same context and

background to form a community or jamaat. Silas also stressed using a network of personal contacts that already exists and infusing the gospel into that network rather than trying to create a new network around the gospel that is not natural.

Several of the IM leaders in SE Asia mentioned that growth indeed happens through existing social networks, but that the *engine* behind the growth is a transformed life. People observe changed lives. Silas mentioned that growth is a heart thing and not based on thoughts but actions. “Faith spreads from community to community in a very similar way, from the heart,” he said. Stuart also stressed the need for followers of Isa al Masih to be involved in social action in the community, for the sake of the community and the growth of the movement.

South and Central Asia

The IMs in S-Asia region A are structured around small fellowships or jamaats, but alongside Kevin mentioned that there are all kinds of variety in terms of how often a group meets, where they meet, and what they do when people meet.

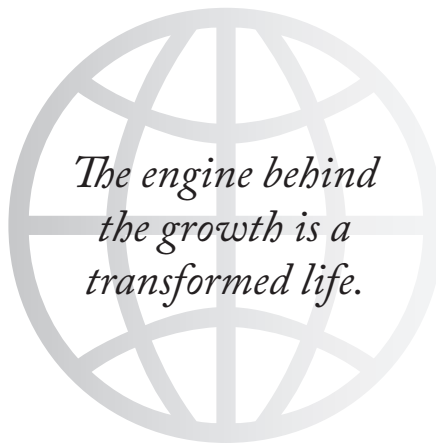
There’s much more variety in it than what people are probably looking for or hoping for in the West, when we talk about movements.

Kevin also shared that Howard likes structure and is intentionally organizing the movement into jamaat clusters with leaders for each jamaat and cluster. Leadership training events played a big role in seeing a movement start, and these events are still the fundamental core structure, according to Kevin. There could be anywhere between 10 to 70 people at any given event. Howard and Andy also designed a four-year leadership training program in which they function as the teachers. The program has a cycle of one-week training followed by forty days back into the community. This discipleship program includes the study of much of the New Testament, parts of the Old Testament, and topics such as spiritual warfare, building bridges between Muslim and Christian worldviews, comparative studies between the Qur’an and the Bible, Christ through the prophets, and church planting.

The jamaat members select their own leaders, with some involvement by Andy or Howard. Andy said,

We pray for someone who looks like a leader according to 1 Timothy and Philippians, and then we try to encourage him and ask others to pray for him, if he can be their leader.

The growth of the movements in S-Asia region A happens via existing relationships. Howard shared, “Friend to friend, brother to brother. This is how it goes, like a river; it keeps going that way, tribe to tribe.” He also said that by now he does not know the exact size of the movement anymore. The movement expands over into other language communities based on the cultural rules of intermarrying,



which are natural bridges that assist the spread of the gospel.

In S-Asia region B there is a fair bit of interest in *organizing the work* by the main alongside, according to Kevin, even though the start of the movement was very unintentional per Mitch’s testimony. The leaders of the overall movement in the region have organized it around geographical districts, intentionally establishing jamaats in districts that still need fellowships and following up and establishing local leadership in districts where jamaats have been established.

Axel is involved in some jamaats in region C, but the movement he is connected with is still in its infancy. He reaches out to friends and family

members in the mosque communities in this region. His background as imam helps to give him credibility and makes him uniquely suited to introducing the gospel from the inside of a Muslim’s frame of mind.

Frank shared that in S-Asia region D the jamaats typically meet on Friday afternoons. A usual place would be the special guest sitting room in a house, where it is very cultural for male guests to gather. These meetings are not closed, and groups come together along general exposure lines in families and neighborhoods. These jamaats may recite the Tawrat, Zabur, and Injil in the Arabic version, but they study and interpret the text in the vernacular language. The structure of this movement is built around these semi-open jamaat meetings as well as around fully public and open events. The insiders hold open events in the courtyards of a mosque or other public places. These events could be a one-on-one conversation or a larger gathering of maybe 100 people. The topic of these open events is evangelistic and apocalyptic, proclaiming that the return of Christ is imminent. Alongside Wilbur explained that these are the entry-level broad appeal events, encouraging people to attach themselves to Isa and to repent and believe in him. The Qur’an has an equal place at the table in these fully open events that engage with the broadest section of society.

Angus and Frank are involved in the selection of jamaat leaders. They look for someone who is well respected, married, and a good husband and father. “The two of us, in consultation with the group in question, we’ll talk and pray and decide,” Frank said. Interestingly, they also look for leaders who are literate. Jamaat leaders have a teaching role. Angus commented,

These are people who can read and write, and we give them the responsibility to teach their children and people in the neighborhood. We have several books.

In Central Asia, Julius, Gus, and Jason are all three in very different settings, but each one is involved in the very beginnings of an IM. Julius has moved back into his own community as an insider and is meeting contacts one-on-one at this time. They study the Qur'an and the earlier books together, and he is already planning on bringing these contacts together in jamaats when they are stronger in their faith.

Gus mentioned that in his setting the movement is still small but that it is growing through relationships. "Nothing happens without relationships," he said. In describing the general jamaat system, Gus interestingly mentioned freedom and made a reference to communism. "A leader gives much freedom to people. We function more like a Soviet society: no bosses."

Jason is on staff with a fairly large local traditional church. He tries to introduce more contextualized ministries and new initiatives but encounters much resistance from the church elders. For now he is trying to stay connected to this church and make some changes from within. Jason organizes insider home groups following local cultural norms, using the local language, and being sensitive to everyone's Muslim background.

Africa

In the Africa region Arnold, Oliver, Homer, and Brad represent four different IMs. Arnold forms groups or jamaats, but he first meets with people whom he would like to place in a group on an individual basis to talk and study with them, "lest they cause some disturbance in a group," Arnold said. "There are some people that have really advanced and have come to understand that Isa al Masih is not just a prophet." Arnold groups these people together. He also shared that when they connect with a new family, one of the leaders of the movement approaches the head of the family first to see if there is openness and support on his part. Arnold avoids open gather-

The structure of this movement is built around these semi-open jamaat meetings as well as around fully public and open events.

ings with a group of people. "In groups everyone wants to ask questions, and then they will be stronger than you and they unite against you," he said.

Arnold referred to himself as an overseer within the IM for a certain territory, and within that area he appoints the leaders for each jamaat. He is controlling the structure and direction of growth of the movement quite directly in his personal realm of influence, but this overall movement has grown to over 1,000 insiders, which means that much growth is happening without his direct involvement. He added,

Once someone gets to understand this he gets so excited, and because he's remaining in context, he is not afraid of anything. This makes a kind of network, and it goes very fast and smoothly, without much opposition. This is how it grows.

Oliver is connected to a large movement across a wide region in Africa, but in his own setting the movement is still in its infancy. He had several visions of Isa several years ago when he was a teenager, and he is still very much part of his Muslim community and people. Melvin explained that in this large movement the structure of the groupings is the *oikos*, or household. The leader of a jamaat is the head of the household. He explained that the patron-client system is the way movements form and grow, from households to tribes. "Those with the most patronage become bigger and bigger leaders within the movement."

Homer is a leader in a large movement. He is still very much involved at the grassroots as well and loves to meet with people one-on-one, "until they are ready to consider that the Bible is not corrupted," Homer said. He starts with the Qur'an and shows them how it confirms and points to these other

books. "You don't reveal that you have a Bible in the initial meeting," he noted. When they get deeper and deeper into the Scriptures, "then they come into the light from the darkness, and then I can introduce him to other believers," Homer shared. Within this movement the jamaats are grouped along the mosque structure, which forms natural communities. Homer said that a jamaat leader is chosen democratically by the group members. He was clearly excited during the interview when he explained how the movement is growing. He gave an example of an insider with whom they had lost contact for a while since he had moved closer to where his extended family was living. When Homer met up again with this man, he learned that the latter had been sharing with his family members and that 40 people now are ready for baptism. Homer mentioned other examples of people moving within their wider language tribe but across country borders and spreading the movement that way.

It is spreading just as you see with the trees. When the wind comes the seeds spread, and wherever they fall they start germinating. This work is growing that way.

Brad's situation is somewhat unique in that he is the national leader for his church denomination for the ministry of IMs. He employs several so-called change agents who guide the local outreach ministries. Brad shared how they are encouraging believers to reach out to others, and to study the Scriptures with someone initially one-on-one before putting this person in contact with a jamaat or cell group. They are keeping these groups as small as possible to avoid exposure. Most jamaats have five to ten people, according to Brad. He explained:

When a new person reaches a certain level of understanding and interest,

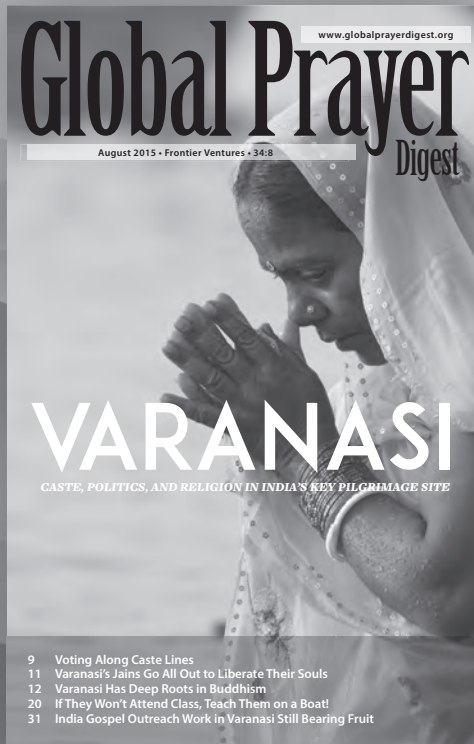
one of the change agents will do more in-depth Bible studies with him.

One change agent may service anywhere between one to three jamaats. In areas where the movement is growing in numbers they establish a committee led by someone who volunteers for that role. The local change agent is part of this committee as well, and the committee leader reports plans and progress to Brad.

Observations

Small local fellowships, or jamaats, are the building blocks of all IMs represented by the 26 interviewed IM leaders. These groups form naturally within family, tribal, and mosque communities. The movements grow via existing relationships, as people share with friends, colleagues, and family members. The movements move from one area to another when believers move around.

Leaders in a movement either appoint new leaders or guide a community process of selecting new leaders as new jamaats form. In some cases the jamaat leader role falls naturally to the community leader, such as in a family or tribe, if this person has become a believer. The generations of believers within an IM seem to create levels of isolation and protection in that most believers only know other believers from their own jamaat, and the jamaat leader only knows his leader one generation up from his own. This creates a very flexible IM structure and also makes the network between IM leaders a vital part of an IM's support and learning structure. IMs use leadership training programs rather than hierarchical leadership structures to enable and empower all believers and jamaat leaders within the movement. **IJFM**



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Households in Focus

Bringing the Kingdom of God to the Japanese Business World: A Reproducing Social Cycle

by Mitsuo Fukuda

Editor's Note: This article was presented to the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

One section of the business world in Japan has been experiencing the kingdom of God in a fresh and profound way. People within the Japanese foreign exchange margin trading sector have begun to circulate among three types of communities, and a once difficult field of ministry is beginning a reap a fresh movement to Christ.

If you study this urban movement to Christ you will discover an inter-dynamic between three types of social groups, each which collects around a distinct purpose. There's the Life Group, comprised mostly of non-Christians, that acts as an accountability group for practicing certain trading principles, and then two other groups, which are made up of active Christians. In this article I want to introduce this movement and explain the dynamic relationship between these groups.

I actually see this same group inter-dynamic reflected in the early church's experience of *oikos* (household, family, community). Those Jews within the temple community who responded to the gospel outreach of an *apostolic oikos* would then be nurtured and trained in a *disciple-making oikos*. That community would then form another apostolic *oikos* which was sent back to minister to the non-believers among the Jews. I want to suggest that in the New Testament we see a certain flow, a circularity between different groups (*oikoi*), that is strategic to this new movement among the business community of Japan.

Genesis of a Movement

Perhaps a brief chronological history is in order. Initially God told Mr. K, a former Japanese missionary to a Communist country, that if one did business according to the Upward-Outward-Inward principles: by being obedient to God (upward), seeking to bless others (outward) and demonstrating self-restraint (inward), he would be profitable in the foreign exchange sector. He calls these the Upward-Outward-Inward (UOI) principles of Foreign Exchange (FX) trading. In addition to starting a business to teach the Upward-Outward-Inward principles, he also started up accountability

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groups for non-Christians called Life Groups, to help those involved in the foreign exchange market (including managers, accountants, doctors, lawyers, investors, housewives, and retirees, rather than full-time traders) to put those principles into practice.

On the one hand, Life Groups exist to meet the felt needs of non-Christians, in terms of being a source of mutual support so that those putting the Upward-Outward-Inward principles into operation can make a steady profit. At the same time, they also meet a higher need, providing opportunities to meet Christ, and preparing their hearts to turn to Christ later. Members *develop an ordered lifestyle* as practice for developing a relationship with God (upward), *discover their altruistic mission* as practice for serving others (outward), and *support one another* as practice for supporting the Christian community (inward).

Life Groups are also a space where a Christian leader is able to exert a positive personal influence on the non-Christian members, and these non-Christian members of the group very naturally come to faith. Those who do are immediately brought into a second accountability group to help them grow, called a UOI Oikos; but, after conversion, they have remained in their Life Groups, and then become members of a third group, an apostolic community of Life Group Leaders (the LGL oikos). It is through this third group that they continue to influence the non-Christian members with the example of their lives. Furthermore, several of the members of the Life Group Leaders oikos have worked together to establish Life Groups across the country. The kingdom of God is coming in one sector of the Japanese business world and disciples are being multiplied as they rotate between evangelism, training and mission, represented by their circulation between the supportive Life Groups, the UOI Oikos and the LGL Oikos.

Three Groups in the Early Church

The social unit of oikos (relationships making up a family) refers not just to the nuclear family of blood kin, but also includes slaves. By comparison, in our modern urban settings there is increasing separation between home and work as more people travel from suburban homes to city-center workplaces. It creates a contrast to the days of Jesus and the early church, when there was considerably more integration between work and home within the oikos.

In Luke 19:9, when Jesus declared to Zacchaeus “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham,” the word for



“house” is oikos. Similarly, in Luke 10:5, when the disciples who were sent out were commanded to say “peace to this house,” this again is the word oikos. When Jesus went to the Jewish temple, his object was not to worship but to testify to the kingdom of God. The temple was his mission field. Jesus blessed the established family relationships and used them as a basis for kingdom expansion.

Similarly, for the disciples of the early church, oikos was the foundation for worship, evangelism, service, and fellowship. Those who had accepted Christ

continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with

glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47)

When they went to the temple in Jerusalem during those early days of the apostolic era, they went not to worship but to share the gospel, in teams of two people. Before the persecution arose, the temple was a place where it was easy for them to gather. One might think they were just going to socially catch-up with one another, but I believe it was primarily a place for the winning and harvesting of souls. It is noteworthy that we do not have a single record of their teacher, Jesus, during his public life offering worship or sacrifice at the temple. On the other hand, he said to the Samaritan woman “you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:21), teaching her that the question was not where one should worship but that one should worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Did the disciples of Jesus—a Jew who did not worship at the temple—offer sacrifices at the temple? There is a passage in Acts 21:24, where James the brother of Jesus advised Paul to pay the expenses of some men who had taken a vow so they could have their heads shaved and join in with their purification rites, but we can see this as being an expedient way to allow Paul to deflect the charge of being a heretic. We cannot be sure, as we have no records of Jesus’ direct disciples attending Jewish rites, but it is difficult to believe that the only reason for meeting daily in the temple was to take part in Jewish worship. It would not be unnatural to believe that they met together and held their own worship services at the Temple.

Moreover, for the early church, the pattern of worship took place primarily within the oikos, as they “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God.” When the leader of the household

broke bread, they would remember Christ's sacrifice, and when they passed around the cup, they confirmed the reality of the New Covenant. As they broke bread and drank wine, they resolved afresh to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

During this apostolic period, we see the existence of three separate groups: Jews and God-fearing Gentiles worshipping at the temple, and two other groups, each which was a form of Christian *oikos*. Of the latter, the first one was the fellowship happening in the believers' houses, and we will call this a *disciple-making oikos*. Their fellowship over the breaking of bread had three relational elements: upward, outward, and inward. The upward relationship with God commemorates Christ's deeds and confirms their mission of proclaiming his death until he returns. Next, the outward relationship with the world: hearing the testimony of those who have been in missions and praying for their needs helps facilitate the strategic, natural, and loving progress of God's mission. Finally, that inward relationship: the members making up the body of Christ together confess their sins to one another, share the determination to follow the Lord, and pray in solidarity together. As they share in one loaf together, they experience the fact that "though we are many, we are one body" (1 Cor. 10:17), remembering the solidarity of the body of Christ and the mission he gave them.

The joy of knowing God would naturally travel by word of mouth around the multiple networks of personal relationships of those who meet in the disciple-making *oikos*, and they would exert a personal influence upon the non-Christian world through the practical expressions of their love. We see this particularly through the fact that the community of faith "enjoyed the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:47).

The second *oikos* of this believing community was formed as they intentionally went out to evangelize in the

temple. We will call this the *apostolic oikos*. This was a more purposive and agile *oikos*, whose members would go each day to the temple and intentionally evangelize, through words and deeds, those who were waiting on the Lord, telling them that the Lord and Savior had been risen from the dead. I believe they were fundamentally sent out in teams of two (Acts 3:1); indeed, that was the regular, usual, practice as we see in Matthew 10 and Luke 10 when Jesus sent out the disciples. When the twelve were sent out, and when the 70 (or 72) were sent out, they went in teams of two. There are cases where people such as Philip (Acts 8:5) and Peter (Acts 10:21) went out individually, but one can see a principle of either pairs or small groups of 3–7 people. These teams which were sent out into mission would not simply break bread together in houses, but also belonged to another in a type of *oikos*. They would *be filled with the Holy Spirit* (upwards), *share the gospel with those in the temple* (outwards), and *work in teams of two*, supporting each

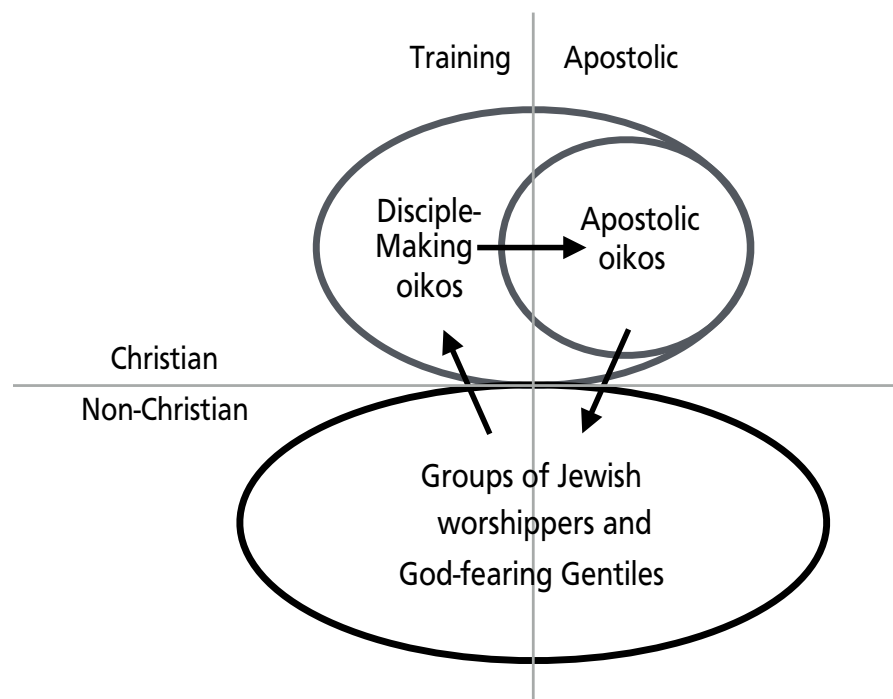
other (inwards). Examples are Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and Mark.

I want us to notice in this early church a cycling of believers through different social forms of *oikos*. Those who were evangelized by an apostolic *oikos* and had come to faith within the "group of Jewish worshippers and god-fearing Gentiles" would break bread and fellowship in the disciple-making *oikos*, and then be sent back out for outreach as a fresh new apostolic *oikos*. The circulation of people between these three groups forms a gradual cycle of evangelism, training, and mission, through which people became followers of Christ from inside a non-Christian setting. When persecution came, this circulation was reproduced all over the world, leading to the development of world mission (see fig. 1).

Three Characteristics of FX Trading

Within the Japanese foreign exchange trading community, we see a set of three groups similar to those in the

Figure 1. Circulation Between Three Groups in the Early Church



early church—and similar also in their patterns of circulation and development in evangelism, training, and mission. In particular, missionary business people are developing and multiplying this structure across Japan. The starting point for this multiplication was the discovery of foreign exchange (FX) trading principles by Mr. K, a missionary-turned-FX-consultant.

In 2002, K was sent from Japan as a missionary to a Communist country, but he became discouraged as the mission did not progress in accordance with his expectations. He taught at a local seminary and disciplined local workers, but was generally unable to do direct evangelism. After a while, he realized that despite being a missionary, most of his fellowship was with other Christians. On top of this, in 2004, due to sudden changes in the local currency, the financial support from his agency no longer covered his living expenses. To deal with this, he opened a real estate business. His mission agency had a policy of missionaries living only on donations, and so K navigated a difficult readjustment of expectations with his mission agency leaders. At the same time, his business was expanding.

At this point, he experienced something new. His relationships with local people, whose hearts had seemed closed when he was living off donations, became considerably deeper through doing business together. Once a trust relationship had been established, it became easy to share the gospel. For example, even though his business partners or clients might not come to faith in Jesus, he won the respect of non-Christians through the integrity and uprightness of his operations as a Christian businessman. The reason K started a business was to have the financial basis required to continue as a missionary, but as he actually entered the business world he began to realize that living out Christian principles in business could itself be a form of mission.

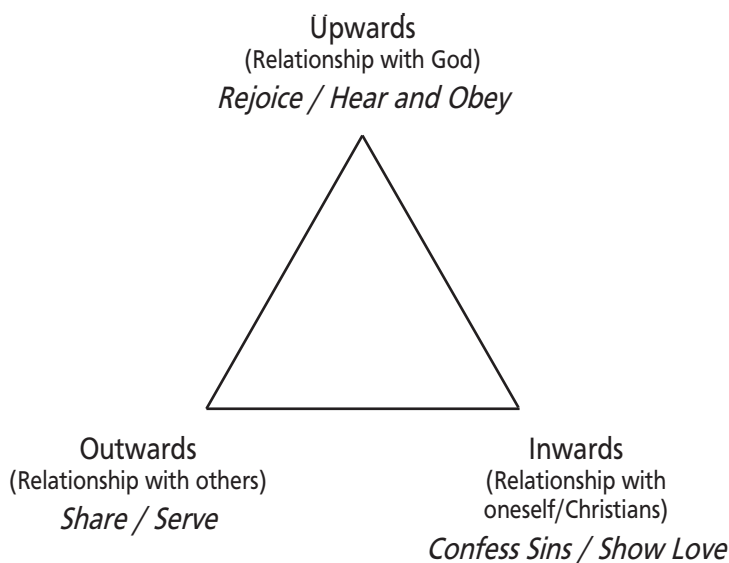
In 2009, while supporting some house church pioneers, he was visited by one of the workers who was himself in business. Not merely was this worker earning his own living, but through the profits of his business, he was able to support many other workers and poor people. He had also seen people come to faith through contact with Christians in the business world, and had then seen them trained up and sent out into the mission field. This man took K through a discipleship training course called Upward, Outward, Inward Training¹ and also taught this to the local workers. Again, “Upward” refers to the relationship with God, “Outward” to the relationship with the world, and “Inward” to one’s relationship with one’s inner life and an inner circle of other Christians (see fig. 2). It is a compact discipleship course aimed at sending newly converted people back into the harvest field. It consciously promotes daily practices in the three relationships of upward (rejoicing in God’s grace, seeking His direction), outward (sharing the gospel, serving the unreached), and inward (repentance and character building, showing love to brothers and sisters in the faith). After K received the training, he immediately put it into practice.

Without relying on clergy, programs, or buildings, and as he began to listen to God and follow His direction for his daily life, a miracle occurred. He saw signs and wonders, and family and friends began to be saved through their networks of personal connections, leading to the establishment of a number of house churches.²

As well as the UOI Training, the worker gave K another piece of important information. He recommended that K move from real estate to foreign exchange, introducing him to an investment e-mail newsletter produced by a Christian friend. As he learned about foreign exchange, K immediately understood that foreign exchange trading, unlike real estate, had three characteristics which corresponded to the upward, outward and inward relationships.

The first characteristic was upwards, in the sense that it re-oriented their purpose in life. K learned that a concentrated, principled session of trading could create the ability for people to go on to accomplish God’s mission for their lives. If traders would follow the principles of (1) limiting daily trading to at most 30 minutes, (2) limiting leverage to a factor of three, and (3) looking for patterns in the charts through objective eyes and

Figure 2. *The Three Relationships and Six Actions of UOI Training*



not with the eyes of greed, then they would be able to make the same amount of profit in a short period of time as a professional dealer. Staring at a chart all day was essentially worshipping an idol on the computer screen. They must not sacrifice themselves for a trade. Foreign exchange should instead be seen a means for each person to financially support the mission in life that God has given them. The purpose of life is not to make money but to serve others, and one must never mistake the means with the purpose. In foreign exchange, one can achieve one's goals as well as being involved in trading. By setting apart a little time each day for trading, it became very possible to make the financial resources required for one's life goal.

The second characteristic of foreign exchange trading was their outward relationships with the world. Through appropriate foreign exchange trades, traders could learn a way of managing their money that would help them understand how to steward the resources given to them by others. In fact, foreign exchange can actually teach all of us how to live in terms of what we focus on and what we choose to restrict; this is the educational aspect of foreign exchange.

FX trading is not understood as gambling. In James 4:13–14, we are told:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

By contrast, foreign exchange is not this kind of one shot, win-or-lose gamble. It has more in common with farming. A farmer might suffer a crop failure due to poor weather, but we do not consider farmers to be gamblers. Similarly, someone might suffer a loss in foreign exchange but he should be able to overcome or overturn such a loss by faithful application of the small

One's success or failure is determined by one's ability to concentrate on an appropriate goal and not chasing after temporary achievements.

gains made through following the UOI principle of self-restraint. Cutting one's losses is a matter of recognizing a mistake and changing course. In life too, one's success or failure is determined by one's ability to concentrate on an appropriate goal and make rapid course corrections, rather than chasing after temporary pleasures, impulses, adventures, and achievements. Money is something entrusted by God to humans in order to bless others. How we use our money determines how we live.

Foreign exchange has two sets of indicators: fundamentals and technicals. When the fundamentals and the technicals line up in a pattern, this is called a stable pattern. If one only trades when this pattern is established, and does not miss it, even someone without specialist training can make a profit. In real estate and stock trading, a certain amount of money is required in order to continue making a profit, and in reality, only the rich can continue to get richer; the vast majority of people end up losing money, and it is a structure where only those with wisdom and resources (or the resources to be able to buy wisdom) are able to sustain a profit. However, in foreign exchange, by following the principle of only trading into a stable pattern, one can make medium- to long-term gains with even a little capital. So those familiar with foreign exchange are able to learn principles about money management. They begin to get a feel for what should be invested in. Life is, in a sense, an investment. We see this in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Anyone can learn the principles of money management through foreign exchange if they have this awareness. Those who have learned money management can even teach those whom God has entrusted with great resources

how to show the glory of God and bless others through the use of capital.

The third characteristic of foreign exchange trading was inward: the aspect of self-control required over their desires and impulses. FX traders can trade safely as long as they are aware of the price they expect as indicated by their own ability. Without knowing the expected value, it is difficult to continue to objectively evaluate their own trades. To begin with, dealers need to develop the skill of working out the expected value by trial and error. A vague judgement, such as "I'm generally just about ahead but I take a few losses sometimes," does not lead to understanding what measures are effective. Moreover, if traders can get into the habit of passing up every trade outside of a stable pattern, modestly reflecting on their trading history, avoiding the thrill of the chase, and being aware of the weakness of human beings, they will be able to safely make a profit.

In other types of trade, such as real estate and stocks, even professionals can have unexpected losses. How many people, during the outbreak of the Global Financial Crisis, could say that they continued to make a profit? It's like saying "I can see" when you are just as blind as everyone else. (John 9:40–41.) "Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). But in the case of foreign exchange trading, those who follow the UOI principles may post a temporary loss occasionally, but very few would continue to post a loss over the course of a one-year span. The UOI principles expounded by Mr K. place a check on the desires of those who are driven by profit, and allow people to use their energy and time for something truly meaningful.

Let us summarize the UOI principles in foreign exchange trading:

Upward: Follow a higher standard.

1. Restrict trading to thirty minutes per day.
2. Keep leverage to a factor of three (within 3x).
3. Look at the chart patterns with objective eyes, not the eyes of greed.

Outward: Trade rightly to bless others.

4. Remember money is a means to bless others.
5. Only trade in a stable pattern.
6. Gracefully cut your losses.

Inward: Work towards self-control.

7. Know the expected value and evaluate each trade objectively.
8. Be aware of your weaknesses, and pass up everything apart from a stable pattern.

When K understood these principles, they were like a shaft of light from heaven to him; it was like scales falling from his eyes. He returned to Japan in 2012, and the next year he began teaching UOI Principles to foreign exchange traders. As he helped those who wanted to put these principles into operation, more and more they wanted to be faithful to their mission (upward), use their money intentionally for the benefit of others (outward) and develop their own self-control (inward). K began to distribute an e-mail newsletter, and became involved in research and individual consulting. And he then began to form Life Groups so that those using his principles could mutually encourage one another.

The Formation, Purpose and Significance of the Life Group

The formation of the Life Group
As we have stated above, people seek to live in three types of relationship. The upward relationship with God consists of rejoicing in His grace, being led by Him each day and doing what He leads. The outward relationship with the world consists of sharing

the gospel and lovingly serving those around us. The inward relationship with ourselves and with a circle of Christians involves checking ourselves to see if there is any sin in us, and showing love to the family of faith.

We hold accountability groups which meet together each week to ask how those upward-outward-inward relationships are going in life, groups we call *Upward, Outward, Inward Oikos (UOI Oikos)*. We find these groups to be an appropriate way, in the business of Japanese urban life, to intentionally practice loving God, loving each other and loving ourselves in the same way as was demonstrated by Jesus communities in the first century. After a time of checking how things are going,



members of a UOI Oikos will study the Bible together and put together an action plan for how they will put what they have learned into practice. The following week, the group will share how the plan went. If people have responded to the gospel and followed God, then we testify and give the glory to him. If we did not follow God that week, then we confess this to one another. Almost all of those who came to faith through their relationship with Mr. K were introduced into a UOI Oikos after their conversion, helping them to deepen their upward-outward-inward relationships and grow as well-balanced disciples of Christ. These UOI Oikos groups are places where those who have come to faith

can encourage one another to talk with God, to influence the world for the kingdom of God and to become transformed into the likeness of Christ.

There's a story behind how Mr. K created a similar accountability group for non-Christian FX traders, which he called the Life Group. It began with a meeting between Mr. K and Mr. S, an FX trader living in Okinawa, after Mr. K had returned from his missionary activity in 2012. Mr. S shared his frustrations with the instability of his trading and the inability to make a sustained profit. Mr. K decided to make a special UOI group for foreign exchange trade just to help out Mr. S. Both K and S were Christian and were both familiar with UOI groups, and so they began to meet every week over social networking to honestly assess their trades and develop and share action steps in an accountability relationship. Every week for around 10–15 minutes, they would ask each other two questions: "Do your trades this week reflect the action plan you decided upon last week?" and "What plan will you have for the next week?" This simple exchange of two questions was the structure of the first Life Group.

This fellowship was a great encouragement to Mr S, and he began to make more steady trades and steady gains. This interactive Life Group, a simple dialogue over action plans, spread through Mr K and Mr S's personal oikos, and in March 2014 it had seven members. At this point, the Life Group concept was publicly introduced in an e-mail newsletter (that had been started by a Christian investor with a subscription of a couple of thousand members.) This led to Mr K and his friends holding explanation seminars in Osaka, Tokyo, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Nagoya, Okinawa, Sendai and Sapporo to recruit new members, and at one seminar thirty people immediately joined the group. In August of the same year, Mr. K began to produce his own e-mail newsletter for the

FX community, and subscribers of that newsletter also joined Life Groups. Those members who seemed to have a gift of leadership became local leaders, regardless of whether they were Christian or not. These local leaders independently operated their area Life Groups, with delegated responsibility.

Currently there are Life Groups in operation in twelve areas of Japan, including Shizuoka, Kagoshima, Okayama and Matsuyama. There are around thirty local leaders, with national directors overseeing them. Mr. S is one of the three national directors, along with Mr. K. Mr. S is gifted in evangelism, and runs meet-ups in each location in which unsaved local leaders or Life Group members are led to faith. Out of 200 members, around forty have come to a decision for Christ. Currently all local leaders and subleaders are Christian.

When they come to faith, they are brought into UOI groups, but they also continue in the Life Groups, and testify to other non-Christian members of the life group through their personal influence and the changes Christ has brought about in their lives. At the beginning of 2014, there was a pattern whereby Mr. K, Mr. S and the other initial members would tour the country, recruiting Life Group members and then people would be led to faith at dinners or parties after the seminar, but now the local leaders themselves are leading foreign exchange seminars for their Life Group members and telling the non-Christian members about the greatness of God.

The Goal of the Life Group

Life Groups have three goals. They include the three UOI relational aspects in their groups.

First, they act according to the law God has written on their hearts. There is the upward relationship, which in this case means achieving a new, purposeful lifestyle ordered around God's law. The non-Christian Life Group

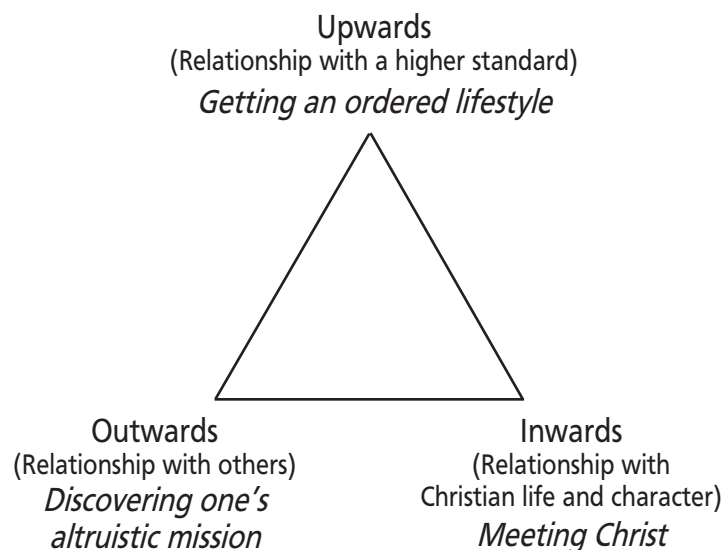
members are not directly connected with God, but they are encouraged to follow the demands of the law written on their hearts (See Romans 2:15). Their new lifestyle encourages them to follow a higher order, in terms of only trading for 30 minutes a day. If they keep fast to this principle of trading, even thirty minutes a day is enough for a high probability of profit. In the Life Groups each member returns to these principles, and within the group is asked three questions: "Did you follow the action plan you decided at last week's group?" "Did you deviate from the UOI principles?" "What is the action plan that you want to achieve before we meet at the next Life Group?" By creating an accountability structure where people feel that "your victory is my victory," they can encourage one another to follow the principles. Non-Christians are not directly taught by God at this stage, but by keeping themselves obedient to a higher law, they are preparing themselves to follow the purposes of God.

Second, they become aware of their altruistic mission to improve the world. For Life Group members, there are the outward relationships, which involves finding their mission in the

world. They have a high probability of making a profit by following the UOI principles, but money is not the sole purpose of life; rather it is a means by which they can each find meaningful ways to serve society. Trading simply to make a profit is against the UOI principles. To make a profit that leads to social contribution, members must never make risky trades for the sake of greed, but only make orders during a stable pattern and quickly cut their losses. Trades made for the benefit of others paradoxically bring a returned profit as a by-product. Life Group members think about how they can repair their existing relationships and what they can do for the benefit of others, for the happiness of their friends or for the society around them. By finding their altruistic mission, they can put this into practice. The non-Christian members are powerfully influenced by the Christian traders as they see them gaining a profit for the benefit of others.

Third, they meet God through the love and support of Christians. Their inward relationships, or fellowship with other Life Group members who happen to be Christians, give the non-Christian members the opportunity to meet with

Figure 3. The Goal of the Life Group



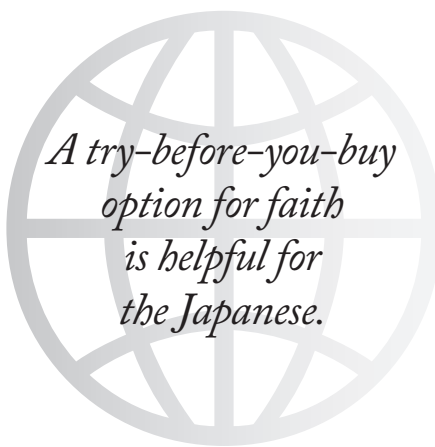
God. Their motivation to do so grows through the example of the lifestyle and character of the Christian leaders. As of March 2016, the Life Group leaders are all Christians, many of whom were led to faith by Mr. K or the initial group of Christian leaders. Life Group goals take great determination: it is not easy to be aware of one's own weaknesses and to trade according to a set of principles which include honest self-evaluation and intentionally setting expected value. When the non-Christian members of the Life Group experience the love of Christ through the warmth and fellowship of the Christian members, they become interested in this Christ in whom they trust, and they begin to want to meet him themselves. The personal magnetism of the Christians then becomes a way of connecting the non-Christian members with Christ (see fig. 3).

The Significance of the Life Group: The Halfway House

Because Life Groups are mostly made up of non-Christian members, and because Japan is a strongly group-oriented society, Life Groups function as a form of a halfway house. Baby orangutans in the Indonesian forests who have been looked after by conservationists and who have acquired the skills needed for life in the forest, are placed in a facility before going back into the wild, somewhere between the wire fence of the clinic and the wild of the forest. This allows the babies to practice the skills they have learned in an environment similar to the wild but where they are protected from predators. In the same way, Life Groups are a partial way for the non-Christian members to practice what it would be like to be Christian. As stated above, Life group members act according to the law God has written on their hearts (upwards), become aware of their altruistic mission to improve the world (outwards) and meet God through the love and support of Christians (inwards). As they come to faith, they remain in their Life Group,

but also are placed into a second group called a UOI oikos. Later they begin to function as Life Group leaders in their original Life Groups.

Having a kind of try-before-you buy option for faith is very helpful in allowing Japanese people to draw closer to God. Making a personal decision for Christ in the Western individualistic understanding is incredibly difficult for the Japanese. For example, when ordering food in other countries, one needs to make a choice from a wide variety of options on the menu, but the Japanese are not able to do this. Even if the shop or waitress provides them with information, they will not be able to choose. When ordering food in a Japanese restaurant, comparatively few options



are available. There is often a fixed “set plate” option, which allows the customer to skip the process of choosing salad, soup and sides; the customer just chooses the set plate, and the shop does the work of deciding what would be best for the customer. In fact, high-class sushi restaurants have no menu at all—the chef decides what food to serve in what order. Trusting the chef means that the customer gets the most appropriate food at the best time. It would be thought ridiculous for customers to order for themselves at this kind of restaurant.

I found it personally embarrassing when I studied in America, that when I shared my situation and feelings with

American friends, I would be asked very directly, “So what do you want to do?” In a high-context culture³ such as Japan, it is embarrassing to want something which is different from others. There are even cases where, in the middle of explaining something, one might be told “I get you,” and the explanation would then progress in a different direction. The usual pattern of communication involves observing the feelings of others and looking for points of connection. It is incredibly difficult—and somewhat frustrating—to decide everything by oneself, lay out those decisions, and then negotiate them with others. This is not to designate which culture is better, but a suggestion about which approaches to mission in Japan might be a good fit for the culture.

If one tries to evangelize without being aware of this tendency in Japanese society, one may resonate with a handful of Westernized Japanese people, but not with the majority. Western missionaries often act like Western waiters, setting out information and waiting for the Japanese person to make an order (i.e. make a decision), but the average Japanese person finds it very scary to enter an unknown world by themselves. It is particularly difficult to be the first ones to raise their hands for Christ in a country with a small Christian population where maybe there are no other Christians in their families, friends or local communities. Japanese people are simply not used to making an evaluation, then a decision, then taking responsibility for it individually. This is why, after many years, many missionaries find themselves with Japanese friends but no converts.

In this situation, the half-way house provided by the Life Group is a necessary step along the way. For non-Christian traders, the Life Group has a low barrier of entry. Some people who had dipped their toes into FX trading without much success got to know the UOI Principles through Mr. K's e-mail newsletter, and

from there naturally joined a mutual accountability group, since it was appropriate to their felt needs. Dealing with their felt needs allowed them to discover their deeper needs. When they joined the Life Group, they learned a lifestyle of correct and noble character (upwards), steadily working to achieve their vision for the world (outwards), self-control with consideration (inwards). Those non-believers who become Life Group members have something attractive about them. The Japanese have a concept of heaven (upwards), and feel a desire to live out their “heavenly mission” and work in their “heavenly field.” As people see their felt needs being met, in terms of gaining a profit, they begin to deal with their latent, deeper needs, such as needing to make a useful contribution to society (upwards), having a satisfying task to perform (outwards), and accomplishing something together with friends (inwards).

Circulation between Three Groups

Just as the disciples of the early church went into the temple to reach out to those waiting on the Lord, the Life Group Leaders (LGL Oikos) reach out to the non-Christian members of the Life Groups. However, we do not necessarily see the gospel preached boldly accompanied by signs, wonders, and a public persecution. Since the Christian leaders are seen by the non-Christians as models in terms of living out the UOI Principles of the Life Group, people are being led to faith without a particularly high-handed approach to evangelism. Rather, the LGL Oikos is perceived as those with a noble and altruistic concern, carrying out their mission and their trading in a steady and effective way, loving and encouraging one another, all of which clearly shows the non-believers that they are one body connected to Christ.

The Japanese Christian population is around 1%, and there are relatively few Christians who are secular leaders. But in the Life Groups, headed by Mr. K,

the leaders are all Christian, and their lifestyle, attitude and actions as Christians are evident to the non-Christian members of the groups. This breaks up the image of Christians as rarified “holy, poor and pure” monks, but allows them to be seen as attractive leaders who love one another and are exerting an influence on the world through their daily conversations with God. In many cases, people are led to faith right away during the after-seminar parties. People very naturally want to live in a way that follows the example set by leaders whom they respect and honor.

Many of the members of the LGL Oikos belonged to a Life Group when they were non-Christians, but when they came to faith they also joined a UOI Oikos and grew as Christians. It was completely natural for them to stay in their current Life Group to testify to non-believers, just as had been done to them. Those workers trained up in the UOI Oikos are sent back into the Life Group as part of the LGL Oikos. There, more people come to faith in Life Groups, get trained through the UOI Oikos, are sent out from the LGL Oikos, and the cycle of evangelism, training and mission continues.

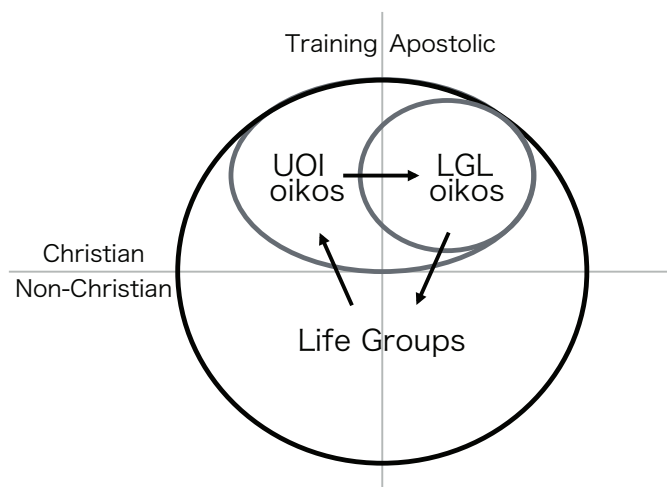
The difference between the three groups in the early church era and the Japanese foreign exchange world is that the two

Christian groups (the UOI Oikos and the LGL Oikos) are fundamentally insider movements within the non-Christian accountability groups. But the commonality between these two movements to Christ separated by two thousand years is that the apostolic cross-cultural ministry oikos is fundamentally part of a permanent local disciple-making oikos.⁴ Figure 4 shows the boundaries of the LGL Oikos within the disciple-making sphere.

The actual flow is as follows: (1) subscribers to the e-mail newsletter supply the life groups with non-Christians who need help with foreign exchange trades; (2) the life groups supply the UOI Oikos with new Christians; (3) the UOI Oikos supply the LGL Oikos with disciplined believers, and (4) the LGL Oikos then supplies the Life Groups with leadership of influential Christian character. As people circulate between the Life Group, the UOI Oikos, the LGL Oikos and then back to the Life Group, many foreign exchange traders are becoming connected to Christ and discovering a new life.

Further, this cycle gives new vitality to the Life Groups; people who hear by word of mouth or through Mr K’s e-mail newsletter are interested in what is going on and want to hear

Figure 4. Circulation Between Three Groups in the Foreign Exchange Community



more. As new subscribers are added to the mailing list, both the business and the provision of non-Christians to the Life Groups are increased.

The Extension of Life Groups

Another function of the Life Group Leaders Oikos is the pioneering of new Life Groups in other areas, as leaders co-operate together to reproduce the cycle. A UOI Oikos is comprised of two or three Christians, and so as someone comes to faith, they either become the third member of a pair, or start a new group with the person who led them to faith.⁵ In other words, UOI Oikos multiply by cell division, but the Life Group Leaders Oikos multiplies by being transplanted to a new area, and through this transplanting, new Life Groups are formed and the division of UOI Oikos begins.

Due to this coordinated planting into new areas, there are now Life Groups active in twelve cities. By the process of

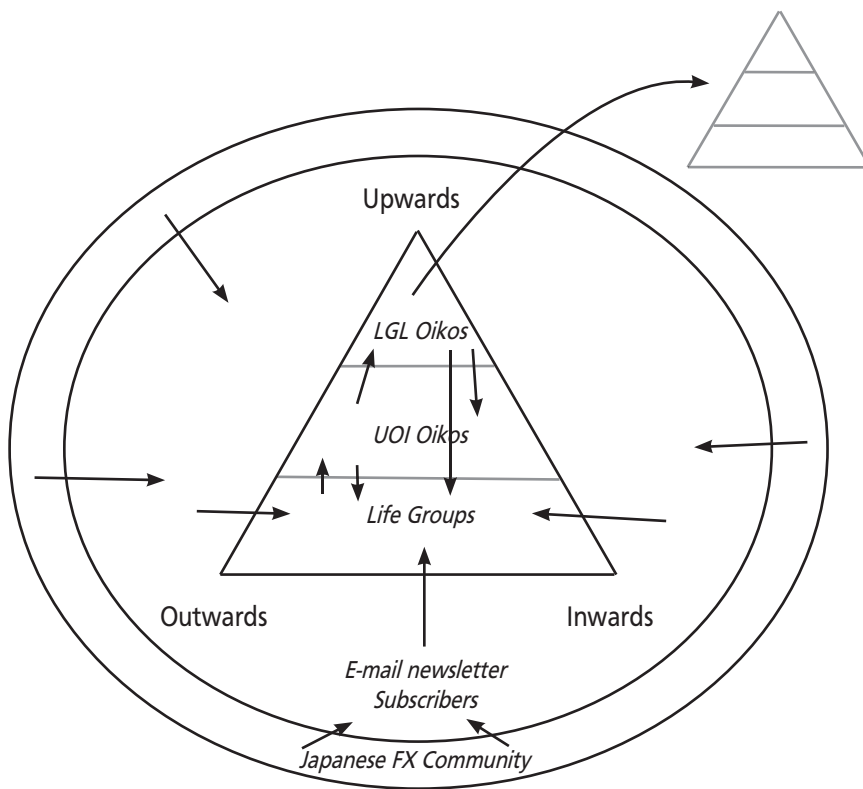
circulation between Life Groups, UOI Oikos and LGL Oikos, the gospel is impacting people outside of the traditional churches; indeed, for people who could not be reached by the traditional churches, this structure is one proving to be effective in bringing the kingdom of God to the Japanese foreign exchange trading community⁶ (see fig. 5).

Future Developments

Starting from the initial business model of teaching people the UOI Principles he received from God, Mr K and his team have established Life Groups all over Japan. There is an inter-dynamic of oikos in this movement of the kingdom of God amongst the Japanese FX community. We can see an oikos reality in the circulation of people between Life Groups, LGL Oikos and UOI Oikos. Beginning with a Life Group of seven people in March 2014, within three years they have experienced rapid growth, and as of March 2017, there are 200

people involved. Mr K aims to see 1000 members in Life Groups over five years' time. By then, if the current growth is maintained, we can expect to see 200 active disciples in this sector of business. This cycle, this concept of a flow between the three groups, is also something that can be used in other sectors of the business world. Mr K is already looking for opportunities to expand into Taiwan and Singapore, as well as making plans to transplant the same framework into the Communist country where he used to live. Notice he will no longer need to find a mission agency to send him out. Expanding the business goes hand in hand with expanding the kingdom of God, and this oikos reality is developing into a financially independent movement. As the Life Groups send out people who have integrated the Upward-Outward-Inward relationships into their lives, others begin to copy their example, new disciple-making *oikoi* and apostolic *oikoi* are being birthed, and the kingdom of God is permeating the country and the region. **IJFM**

Figure 5. The Process of Circulation through Life Groups and their Multiplication



Endnotes

¹ Mitsuo Fukuda, *Upward, Outward, Inward*, (Gloucester: Wide Margin Books, 2010).

² Mitsuo Fukuda, "Leaders in Asia with the Ability to 'Feel,'" in *Asian Missions Advance* 50 (2016): 18–23.

³ I am referring here to the comparative sociology of Edward Hall who distinguishes between "high context" and "low context" cultures. See Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, New York: Anchor Books, 1977.

⁴ The main function of the LGL Oikos is for apostolic mission, where more mature apostolic workers can train up the younger apostles.

⁵ Neil Cole, "Cultivating A Life For God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups," <<https://www.cmaresources.org/files/Cultivating-Neil-Cole-chap8.pdf>> 1999.

⁶ Not all Christian Life Group members are placed into the Life Group Leaders Oikos, but even without being part of the Leaders Oikos they spread the fragrance of Christ within the Life Groups. The arrow in figure 5 pointing from the UOI Oikos to the Life Group shows their influence as Christians

Mission Narratives That Prevent Buddhists from Finding Christ within Their Oikos

by Jens Bernhard

Editor's Note: This article was presented to the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

Why Tackle Mission Narratives?

The purpose of this brief paper is to illuminate the counterproductive impact of some mission narratives among Buddhists. I want to address how they function, how they prevent the good news from being understood, and to make some suggestions about how they might be changed. Specifically, I want to show how these narratives are diametrically opposed to the early church's concept of *oikos* (household, family). *Oikos* starts with the extended family in mind, yet so often today the gospel is presented as a decision an individual has to make between Christianity and their extended family and community. To be regarded as a follower of Christ, a Buddhist has to join the religion of Christianity. She does so against her family, her community, her *oikos*, and quite contrary to numerous examples in the New Testament.¹ So, I want to take a very complicated topic and reduce it to a simple set of axioms so that we can see just how our narratives are opposed to the Buddhist *oikos*.

My assumption is that new missionaries and people interested in mission base most of their actions on a few underlying narratives. It is these narratives that determine their strategy, the people they work with, and how they filter missiological papers. Very often the underlying power of those narratives does not get much attention, while their correctness and usefulness is widely assumed, and almost never questioned. Some of these narratives are, without a doubt, wonderful ("show God's love wherever you can"); others *seem* to be useful and doctrinally correct, but a deeper analysis would show that they are very dysfunctional. In fact, they prevent outright a Buddhist from considering Christ as an option.

This is not to say that those in mission work don't try to tackle these embedded narratives. After the first few years on the mission field, many in mission work will critically reflect on their work and try hard to improve. They go to conferences and learn what they can—some even making time to read

After living and working in Asia for ten years, Jens Bernhard has pursued the question of how Buddhists can follow Christ in an Asian context without any cultural baggage.

missiological papers and books. Yet often there is this nagging sense that a lot of missiological research is not very applicable to a specific situation; and, even if it is, it does not spell out specific action steps that might be considered useful. While missiological research can be tremendously helpful, most often the real action is influenced by underlying mission narratives. It's usually because these narratives are straightforward, logical, perceived as doctrinally correct, and perpetuated by the vast majority of mission-interested evangelicals.

Some Important Narratives and How They Form a Cohesive Unit

It is not possible to tackle all of the narratives that may have built the foundational worldview of an evangelical missionary, so I have selected a few that have had a negative impact on bringing Buddhists to Christ, and that have disregarded the fundamental place of oikos in the Buddhist world.

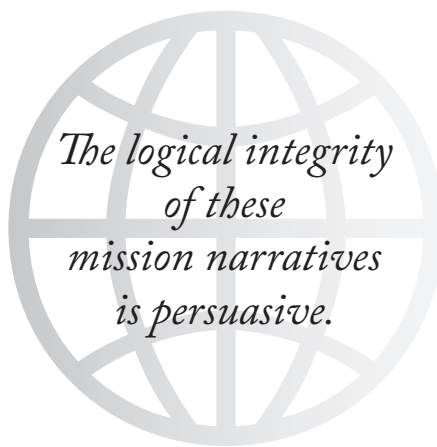
1. "Buddhism is a false religion (because it is incoherent, God-opposing and life-denying²) and therefore..."
2. "Buddhists must become 'Christians' and join a Christian church if they truly want to follow Christ."
3. "It is always better to work together with local Christians; they know the culture and the language better than any outsider can hope to learn in a reasonable amount of time" and therefore...
4. "Because local believers don't bother to learn Buddhist beliefs, and because some individual Buddhists do come to Christ anyway, it is a waste of time to study Buddhism or what Buddhists really believe."

While studying Buddhism may remain quite an anathema, missionaries increasingly want to avoid presenting an overly Western gospel, so new and more sensitive narratives are starting to gain some traction:

5. "Just communicate the gospel in love. God's word will make sense in and of itself" and therefore...
6. "Just give them the Bible in their language, or at least the New Testament. The church will explain it and the Holy Spirit will bring it to life."
7. "Let's contextualize to their local culture, as Jesus is not against their culture per se. If we do not reject their culture, we can demonstrate that it is possible to be Thai (or Burmese or...) and also Christian."

The logical integrity of these narratives is persuasive. That logic is embedded in a thought-style that goes like this:

If there were any truth in Buddhism, Buddhists would be at least interested



in Christ as the truth³ that would guide them in the right direction. But Buddhist doctrines seem to oppose biblical truth at every turn, and because it is fruitless to point that out to Buddhists, the best thing is to erase any talk about Buddhist traditions and concentrate on the love and power of Christ. If even local Christians do not deem it necessary to engage with Buddhists about their beliefs, outsiders should not appear overly smart by trying to know more about Buddhism than the Buddhists themselves. If knowing Buddhism had been helpful, evangelical scholars would have found that out over the last 150 years as they ventured into the Buddhist scriptures, the Tipitaka, in the classical Buddhist language of Pali.⁴ It might be that it is possible for

Muslims to follow Christ and maintain a Muslim identity (because they at least are still in the Abrahamic tradition); or it might even be possible for Hindus to choose Yeshu as their only God; but it is not possible for Buddhists, because Buddha rejected the notion of one supreme Godhead. Hence, Buddhists cannot remain within their Buddhist world if they want to follow Christ.

The task of outsiders is, therefore, perceived as helping the local Christians in their efforts. The narrative continues:

If the scriptures were to be available in local languages and if pastors were to be able to explain them properly so that Buddhists could understand what Christianity is all about, they would believe in Jesus and join the church. As long as the church is not Western, but rather Thai or Burmese, etc., all will be fine. Contextualization can be really helpful.

What's Wrong with These Narratives?

These narratives are internally cohesive, widely accepted, and unfortunately, do not result in much fruit. And where there is any fruit, it is more often an assault on the oikos (household), with individual converts extracted and grafted into a foreign religious world. Yet, this reality simply reinforces the correctness of this narrative in the minds of Christians. Buddhists must be so blinded that they cannot really see the truth nor the goodness of God being made visible in the form of the church. This myth simply perpetuates itself.

The problem, as I see it, is that these narratives do not have their roots in the Bible (but in tradition) and prevent Buddhists from considering Christ within their oikos. This raises a couple of questions.

First, is God not able to reveal truth to non-Christians? It's apparent that he was able to communicate certain truths to the Stoics.⁵ Their turning to Christ is remarkable, especially in comparison to the Jews, the majority

of whom did not recognize Christ as the Messiah even though they had had more specific revelation from God than any other people group on earth. And it's interesting to note in the biblical account just how often the apostle Paul communicated the good news of Christ on the basis of some Stoic beliefs.⁶ He basically uses certain Stoic beliefs because those beliefs are true and he builds on that truth. All truth comes from God and God reveals his truth to whomever, and however, he wants to. So, if Paul was able to find and communicate truths within Stoic philosophy, why would we not look within Buddhist traditions? If truth comes ultimately from God, why are we open to God speaking in a familiar way to Stoics but not to Buddhists?⁷ By rejecting Buddhism categorically as a false religion, are we either accidentally or willfully rejecting those parts of Buddhist traditions or worldview that might just be God's work of preparation for the good news of Christ? Is it the role of missionaries to unilaterally disregard this work of God?

Secondly, must Buddhists become Christians? Do they have to join the existing Christian community or do they simply have to follow Christ? If the goal is to make them Christian, then the Christian tradition has become more important than Christ himself. Is Christ not bigger than human traditions? Is it the task of missionaries to propagate the Christian religion over Christ? If Christ is not the obstacle for a Buddhist, then whatever the obstacle actually is, shouldn't that obstacle be removed? Otherwise, Christians and missionaries are not being faithful to Christ. Might not the real obstacle be that we are presenting Christ in such a way that if a Buddhist wants to follow Christ he can only imagine doing so if he were to convert to a foreign religion—Christianity?

What we see nowadays is that local believers in a Buddhist context do not

Are we accidentally or willfully rejecting those parts of Buddhist traditions or worldview that might just be God's work of preparation?

want to engage with Buddhists about their Buddhist beliefs, partly because they don't know much about Buddhist beliefs; but, it's also partly because of the example missionaries have presented them. Buddhist converts were extracted from their own oikos and enculturated into Christianity and now they simply follow the example given them by missionaries. And where missionaries, like Daniel Gogerly in Sri Lanka, did engage with Buddhists and their tradition, they did so in a more polemic, colonialist style, and only with the intention of showing them how wrong they were to believe what Buddha had taught them.⁸

We can see this in Daniel John Gogerly's work from 1885:

We are therefore compelled to assert that Buddhism is not the true religion: for he who was mistaken in three instances may have been mistaken in three hundred... and it necessarily follows that Buddhism is not the true religion and ought to be rejected.⁹

Even nowadays, the same line of thinking is common among evangelicals. In *The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus talks with Buddha*, Ravi Zacharias states in his introduction in 2010:

Jesus and Buddha cannot both be right. The lotus is the symbol of Buddhism; the cross, the symbol of the Christian faith. Behind the two symbols stand two diametrically opposed beliefs.¹⁰

It's possible that this approach created so much hurt and pushback that generations of missionaries "threw out the baby with the bathwater." They no longer engage with Buddhists at all. By this lack of engagement, they affirm the dogma, "Buddhism is not the true religion." How was creating religious antagonism beneficial? Again, the apostle Paul, in Athens on Mars Hill speaking of an unknown God, in a

society far more idolatrous than Buddhist societies, sought out what God had prepared in their own literature, poetry, and religious belief system.¹¹ Yet, today's missionaries too often think that practicing the opposite is advantageous for mission among Buddhists.

Terms of Translation

With respect to local Christians, do they really know better how to engage with Buddhists or are they struggling at least as much as the ignorant outsider? If Gogerly learned Pali in order to refute Buddhists, why don't local or outside believers learn Pali in order to search more positively for God's points of revelation within the Tipitaka?¹²

This lack of engagement is reflected in Bible translation. The underlying evangelical narrative of translation is based, first of all, on dispensing with all Buddhist words and concepts.¹³ The narrative encourages the invention and use of new terms and concepts that are so patently wrong that they are immediately unbiblical. A shallow, misguided understanding of Buddhism, embedded in the narrative, leads to distorted meanings.

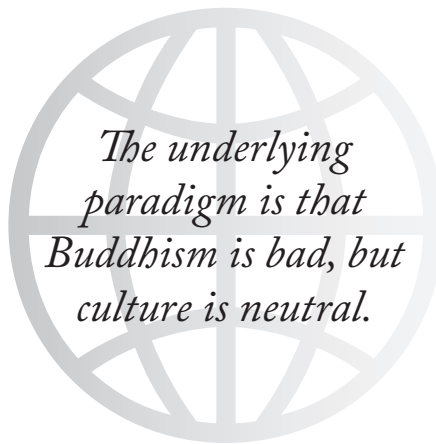
One example would be the correspondence of the concept of a "karmic heaven" with that of the kingdom of God, the implication being that God is conditioned by karma. Suffice it to say, if God were karmic, he would be (at the very least) under the condition of "dissatisfactoriness" (*dukkha*) and subject to death in the Buddhist mind. Because such an idea does not portray the God of the Bible, it would be recommended to stay as far away as possible from terms that suggest that God could be karmic—even if it is only to give Buddhists a more accurate picture of the biblical idea of God.

If Buddhists, who do not know Christ already, reject this faulty translation of a karmic god, how more likely would they embrace the truth of Christ if it finally were to be communicated properly? Right now, the Buddhist understanding of God is closer to Satan than it is biblical.¹⁴ Cleaning up some fundamental misunderstanding should not be an impossible task, but with the underlying narrative being “Buddhism is a false religion,” hardly anyone seems to be bothered to do so. The distorted understanding Buddhists get when reading something like John 3:16 (Thai translation), which casts God in the most unfavorable (and unbiblical!) light possible, should expose the dysfunction of this overarching narrative.¹⁵ Practically speaking, how then can the Bible speak for itself? This may sound extreme, but I am not aware of even a single New Testament translation into a heart language that leaves the Buddhists who read it on their own with a correct understanding of this pivotal evangelical proposition. Why then would self-theologizing even work? And if Buddhist-context self-theologizing has been rendered impossible by incorrect Bible translations, it consequently becomes impossible to avoid Western involvement and to cast off the shadows of a dominant colonial past.

All this leaves new missionaries in the quicksand of misunderstanding. Since they are unfamiliar with the depth of Buddhist philosophy, they reduce the good news to “God is love” and “Jesus loves you.” Therefore, their narrative becomes “I simply have to love my Buddhist neighbor and he will find Christ and experience the love of the Christian community.” Their expectation is that new believers will start to follow Christ and become Christians. Yet, even this love-approach is still based on the idea that, in the end, the Christian religion is superior and Christ can only be found within Christianity. Buddhists want to find Christ, but not the Christ that can

only be embraced when the Christian religion is embraced first, but the Christ whom they experience, starting with a Buddhist perspective. This Christ is biblical, but not Christian; he is biblical and Buddhist.¹⁶

Again, Christianity and the love of Christ-followers is perceived as polarized against the natural oikos (household) of the Buddhist communities. How can Christians avoid Buddhists getting the idea that while Christians talk about love and act lovingly, it is all to deceive¹⁷ Buddhists and drive a wedge between them and their families and communities? Why not instead foster a narrative that values and strengthens their oikos? Can we not show some fundamental respect



for the way their religious civilization has helped to maintain the identity of the oikos?

Underlying Our Contextualization

One of the most recently developed mission narratives deserves some extended attention:

Let’s contextualize the church to their local culture, as Jesus is not against their culture per se. If we do not reject their culture, we can demonstrate that it is possible to be Thai (or Burmese or ...) and Christian.

This narrative seems at first to finally get rid of all colonialism and Western dominance. It does not need to ridicule

Buddhist traditions as it safely ignores anything religiously Buddhist. It tries to completely separate religion from culture. It proclaims that there is good culture and good traditions, especially if some elements are reinterpreted—like the use of incense symbolizing prayers to God. The idea is,

If you become a Christian, you can still act like your Buddhist family and friends (to a certain degree that is¹⁸) because we are not against your Thai or Burmese or ... culture. Jesus loves your culture. So, you can now worship Christ from within your culture. You can be a good Thai citizen and a Christian. Just be Thai in all your Christian expressions.

The intention behind this narrative is to directly refute the notion that being Thai means being Buddhist.¹⁹ The underlying paradigm is that Buddhism is bad, but culture is neutral. To its credit, the narrative does not impose Western culture any more, for Christianity can be adaptable; it can find expressions in any culture of the world (because culture is neutral). Although this perspective does not intend to establish Christianity as a religion at home within any culture and nation, it certainly appears to be the goal. The evangelical narrative contains the hope that everyone finds Christ as his or her savior, but it’s possible only by transplanting the Christian religious tradition. This ignores what Paul meant when he said, “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles, too? Yes, of Gentiles, too” (Rom. 3:29). He was able to take the Jewish rabbi known as Jesus out of the Jewish religion and give him to everybody, regardless of his religion. No religion of Christianity appears within the first two hundred years after Christ; and, if Greeks, Romans, Stoics and others did not have to convert to another religion, why are Buddhists required to convert to another religion today?

On top of this, there is another apparent problem with this practice of contextualization: when Christians

take elements of Buddhist traditions and use them in their services, Buddhists regard this as theft. They see the exchange, the superficial correspondence. There is considerable anti-Christian sentiment among Buddhists when Catholics call their churches a *wat* (temple). Therefore, the idea cannot simply be to take Buddhist concepts like *nirvana*, *dukkha*, etc. and reinterpret them as Christian concepts, or take Buddhist ceremonies and label them Christian by using them with just slight adaptation. Yet, if followers of Christ cannot use Buddhist concepts, they are stuck with the problems mentioned above—a God stuck in a karmic heaven and a Jesus being under the power of karma, which presents anything but a savior in Buddhist eyes. But what if a Buddhist can freely use his Buddhist concepts, in the same way as Stoics used their Stoic concepts and started following Christ? That would require a change of narrative.

What Can Be Done Better?

Instead of extracting Buddhists from their oikos, it is time to demonstrate how Jesus can manifest himself within an existing oikos without any religious conversion (displacement). We are seeing today that Hindus and Muslims can follow Christ, each within their religious tradition, but Buddhists cannot? In the spirit of Paul, who insisted that no one had to become a Jew to follow Christ, the same Christ has to be extracted from a traditional Christian religion and be given freely to all people regardless of their religious, ethnic, community or national context.²⁰

Let's apply the "oikos litmus test" to our narratives: Are whole families following Christ? If not, then most likely individuals have been separated from their families and a foreign religious community has taken on the role of a substitute oikos. If Christ is not manifested within an already existing household, then we can legitimately suspect that people have been converted to the Christian religion first

When Christians take elements of Buddhist traditions and use them in their services, Buddhists regard this as theft.

and foremost and not singularly to Christ. This could unfortunately signal that Christ is being misrepresented. Is Christ proclaimed or is Christianity proclaimed? If Buddhists are not allowed to follow Christ as Buddhists outside the Christian hegemony, Christianity can become the obstacle to the good news.

The narrative that will move us forward out of all these intertwined problems is one that encourages us to sit down and learn about Buddhist traditions, to dig deeply into Buddhist philosophy, and understand the underlying ideas with an open heart and mind. But the foundational axiom must be that God has revealed truth to Buddha somehow. On that truth, it is possible to build truth revealed by Christ. The temptation of comparing religions must be withstood as it leads to wrong results which are not helpful at all. No one would get away with a Jewish/Christian comparison that constantly juxtaposed the prophet Isaiah with Jesus in order to show that Isaiah is inferior to Jesus and therefore that Jews cannot follow Christ. Yet, that is precisely what is being done to Buddhists. Isaiah had tremendous revelation about Christ even though he did not have the full knowledge of God. Both Isaiah and Buddha²¹ lived hundreds of years before Christ, and, to be fair, no one living before Jesus could have known and understood that Jesus' death and resurrection would render death powerless.²² No narrative should be expected to compare Buddha to Christ. The question is one of preparation, not of comparison to prove superiority.²³

When a Buddhist who legitimately owns his Buddhist concepts applies them to the truth revealed through Christ, he will find many ways in

which the Buddha has prepared the way for Christ. But this will be the Christ of Buddhists, not of Christians.²⁴ The crucial question, of course, is whether Christ followers will see this as a legitimate way to engage with Buddhists. Or will they simply maintain a narrative that uses a Bible translated for Christians and leaves Buddhists to figure everything out for themselves? What are the chances that even the best learned Buddhist scholars can make sense of Christ when our best educated Christian scholars present Jesus as being under karma?

The Buddhist scholar who comes to mind and who has made significant progress in this regard is Buddhadasa Bhikku.²⁵ He had to read between the lines and navigate many Christian misinterpretations in order to retrieve some truth from the New Testament translations. But who worked constructively together with him? Hardly anyone. Even without help, his insights can be regarded as the most progressive understanding of biblical truth from a Buddhist perspective; but, in a few areas of interpretation he still fell short of capturing the essence of Christ. If thirty years ago Christ followers had understood both biblical truth and as much about the Buddhist *dhamma* as Bhikku himself, they could have dialogued with him and a lot of obstacles would have been removed from his path. This is simply to illustrate that Buddhists will not develop a full and accurate understanding of God and Christ if theological scholars shy away from engaging with Buddhist scholars.

Changing the Narrative

My critique of this common evangelical narrative among Buddhists indicates the absolute necessity of scholarly engagement from the outset. The

essence and complexity of topics for constructing a new bridge are far too complicated for non-scholars to grasp. Missionaries are eager to point out that the average Buddhist can't recall the Five Precepts or the Four Noble Truths—that Buddhist doctrines are completely irrelevant for a Christian witness that would save Buddhists. I would say they are correct if the goal behind their narrative is to convert Buddhists to Christianity; but if our narrative has the intention of portraying God and Christ faithfully and accurately to Buddhists, then we must engage with the conceptual world of the Buddhist. This alternate narrative will encourage us to find a way for high-identity Buddhists to remain in their oikos while embracing their new identity in Christ.

I believe that answers exist for the questions I have raised, yet these have not been discussed in academic publications. There is a constructive way forward, but first and foremost it requires we expose these counterproductive mission narratives. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ No one joined the Christian religion because there was no Christian religion at that time.

² Which it isn't. It is not helpful to misunderstand the essence of Buddhism in its various traditions and then attack the straw man in order to show the superiority of Christianity.

³ Christ is the truth = the *dhamma*. This is important, hence the wording. It's not the truth "of" Christ that hides them, which is why I avoided the word "that."

⁴ See R. F. Young and G. P. V. Soma-ratna, *Vain Debates: The Buddhist-Christian Controversies in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, 83ff (Vienna: Institut für Indologie, 1996).

⁵ The Stoic worldview and philosophy was very influential in ancient Greece.

⁶ All of the following Bible verses are consistent with Stoic beliefs: 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12; Acts 17:24–29; Acts 17:24; Acts 17:25; Acts 17:26–28a; Acts 17:28b; Acts 17:29; Gal. 5:23b; 1 Cor. 9:24a; Rom. 7:22–23; Phil. 3:19; Rom. 8:5; 2 Cor 4:4; Phil. 1:21; 2 Tim. 4:6; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Cor. 9:16; Acts 14:15; 2 Cor. 7:2;

Rom. 12:4; Eph. 1:22–23; 1 Cor. 12:14–17; 1 Cor. 12:25. See biblethingsinbibleways.wordpress.com, accessed July 14, 2017.

⁷ Paul builds on the Greeks' understanding of their philosophers while nowadays it is popular to ignore the philosophical writings of Buddha and Buddhists.

⁸ For further references, please see Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ed., *Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia*, (EOS, Editions of Sankt Ottilien, 2017). This book gives an excellent overview on what happened in Asia among Buddhists.

⁹ Daniel John Gogerly, *The Kristiyani Prajnapt*, (1885), public domain reprint.

¹⁰ What one Buddhist scholar wrote about the book can be read here: http://unknowingmind.pbworks.com/f/Dissent_Lotus_and_Cross_Final.pdf.

¹¹ Acts 17:16–34.

¹² Accessed July 18, 2017, <http://www.tipitaka.org>, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripitaka>.

¹³ Terms like *nibbana*, *metta*, *anatta*, *dukkha*, etc., are examples, and highlighted in the article by Chris Bauer, "The Fingerprints of God in Buddhism: Could a New Approach to the Way We Look at Buddhism be a Key to Breakthrough?" *Mission Frontiers* Nov/Dec (2014), <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-fingerprints-of-god-in-buddhism-article>.

¹⁴ Why that is and how this kind of understanding developed can easily be figured out once a few Pali terms are understood.

¹⁵ Accessed July 18, 2017, <https://projectthailand.net/2011/01/04/john-316-from-a-thai-buddhist-worldview-total-opposite/>.

¹⁶ What this specifically can look like depends on the context, but for a general idea, see Bauer, "The Fingerprints of God."

¹⁷ This is felt like a deception by Buddhists. See *Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia*, ed. Schmidt-Leukel, Kenneth Flaming in his article "Buddhist-Christian Relations in Thailand An Overview" cited Sobhon Ganabhorn 1984, in *A Plot to Undermine Buddhism. Bangkok: Siva Phorn*, p. 12. The accusation was the Catholic Church is "distorting and subverting Buddhism" and claiming a "plot, in which Buddhist teachings have been distorted and according to the plan to absorb it into Catholicism."

¹⁸ To what degree is obviously determined by the Christians in charge.

¹⁹ This idea is not limited to Thais but is applicable to Sri Lankans, Laotians, Burmese, Shan, Khmer, Vietnamese etc.

²⁰ Rom. 3:29 "Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles, too? Yes, of the Gentiles, too." (NIV)

²¹ In the same way as Isaiah was preparatory for the Jews for Christ, so in the same way is Buddha preparatory for the Buddhists for Christ.

²² The prophets wrote about it, obviously, but neither was it common knowledge nor a common expectation and it was likely not even conceptualized by Jesus' contemporaries.

²³ The question of superiority is a tricky one. First, Buddhists feel that Buddha and Buddhism are as superior as Christians feel Christ and Christianity are superior. Second, what is at stake is a classification which, according to Perry Schmidt-Leukel, goes like this: "The religious claims of teaching a path of salvation are either all false (naturalism) or they are not all false. If they are not all false, then only one of them is true (exclusivism) or more than one is true. If more than one is true, then there is either one singular maximum of that truth (inclusivism) or there is no singular maximum, so that at least some are equally true" in *Religious Pluralism & Interreligious Theology*, p. 4 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017). While this seems completely water-tight, it is not because it assumes a comparability beyond time and (God-given) revelation. Taking this into account, it is possible to arrive at a statement that goes beyond Schmidt-Leukel's classification: Given the revelation God gave to Buddha, Buddha spoke into his context words of (God's) truth that framed the discussion (of the ultimate essence of atman) in a way that can be understood as preparatory for Christ. But this (biblical) truth of Christ is understood by a Buddhist in light of the truth God revealed to Buddha, not in light of the truth God revealed to the Jews.

²⁴ It is the same Christ. It is Christ who is the way to nirvana, he is the *dhamma*, the Noble Eightfold Path. It is for this freedom that Christ has set the Buddhist free. Free from karma, free from delusion, anger and greed. And obviously, this "Buddhist" Christ is also found in the scriptures of the NT. To find him, the NT has to be read with Buddhist eyes.

²⁵ Accessed July 18, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhadasa>.

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Households in Focus

A Christology for Frontier Mission: A Missiological Study of Colossians

by Brad Gill

Editor's Note: This article was presented to the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

I would like to reaffirm our strategic cooperation in frontier mission by examining a rather uncommon portion of scripture for missiological reflection. Cooperation emerges from the objects we love, those purposes and goals we share, and I believe that in the epistle to the Colossians the Apostle Paul offers us a christological vision that grounds our mission in a common love.¹

Colossians as a Missiological Statement

Recently I was plowing through a new book by John Flett entitled *Apostolicity: The Ecumenical Question in World Christian Perspective*.² The author explained how the growing pluriformity of world Christianity should reorient our understanding of the apostolic continuity of the church. I don't usually read books on ecumenical unity, but this one had come in the mail (since I'm an editor) and something in the review had caught my eye: that the rationale for ecumenical unity over the past century had placed limits on cross-cultural engagement and the appropriation of the gospel. Those words have missiological implication.

At one point towards the end of his book, in his chapter on Jesus Christ as the ground of our apostolic mission, he refers the reader to Colossians.

If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4, NASB)

This particular portion of Colossians had never occurred to me as a basis for mission, and if it were not for the previous 320 pages of Flett's book, those few verses would not have made any new impression on me. But it became the genesis of my personal study of Colossians for some weeks, and I now see it contains a fundamental orientation for the extension of God's kingdom into sensitive inter-religious frontiers. So, I would like to offer this article as a short missiological reading of Colossians, one that respects both sound exegesis and a realistic grasp of the religious challenges we face in our modern world.

Brad Gill is Senior Editor of the International Journal of Frontier Missiology. After assisting in the founding years of the U. S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, now Frontier Ventures, he served in North Africa for 13 years. He is currently President of the International Society for Frontier Missiology.

The Colossian Predicament

Let me refresh your memory on this epistle. The entire letter has a typical Pauline flow from initial theological statements to more practical guidance for the local believers, with a particular passage in 3:1–11 acting as a hinge passage between Paul's theology and Paul's pastoral injunctions.

In chapter 1, Paul introduces an apologetic that includes one of the highest christological statements in all of scripture.

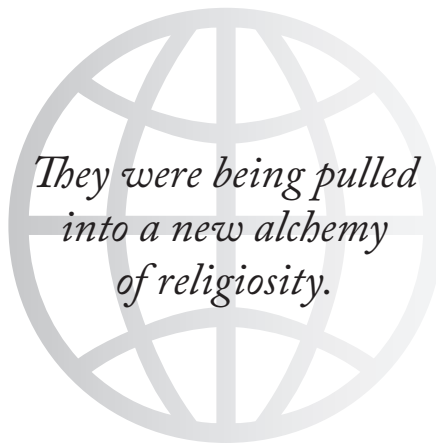
And He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church, and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Col 1:15–20a)

Paul establishes both the supremacy and the fullness of Christ in response to news that has arrived with Epaphras. It's apparent that certain alternative religious notions are growing in Colossae and their propagation is "deluding" (2:4), "capturing" (2:8), and "defrauding" (2:18) the believers there. A cultural and religious blend of philosophy, tradition and *stochia*—those "elemental principles or spirits of the world"—have diminished the place of Christ (2:8, 20), and Paul is concerned for the discipline and stability of their faith (2:5).

As you, therefore, have received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. (Col 2: 6,7)

Colossae was a fairly typical cosmopolitan city, with a Hellenistic blend

of philosophy and religious elements that Paul had confronted on other occasions, such as the invitation to address a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on that hill in Athens (Acts 17). Philosophical speculation and skepticism had created a religious vacuum in the Greek world, one not too different from our own modern pluralistic age. Oriental religions of all sorts were rolling in and generating new religious sects. Temples were on every corner, and idolatry was normative. Paul's concern was that this young Colossian fellowship of disciples would be susceptible to false religious orientations which could easily attach to their old and familiar worldview. Something false but resonant with



their cultural ethos had a certain plausibility—"the appearance of wisdom"—and they were being pulled towards a new alchemy of religiosity, one with severe body rituals (2:23).

These *stochia*, these "ABC's of worldview," were culturally specific to that Hellenistic context, but every cultural world has them. It can be argued that our modern Western world and its economic globalization represents a more materialistic set of *stochia*. Our biblical hermeneutic should at the very least suggest to us that any and every fellowship of believers is vulnerable to the more familiar *stochia* of its own socio-religious world. Examples spring to mind: the way in which a mature

German church fell under the spell of a Nazi ideology, or the way in which 18th and 19th century American churches in the South built a seemingly biblical rationale for chattel slavery. Paul is addressing believers in Colossae, but their context highlights a religious vulnerability common to us all.

The Relevance to Inter-Religious Contexts

I was in China this year for the wedding of my second daughter, and in preparation for that trip, I read widely on developments in China. One author, Ian Johnson in his book *The Souls of China*, surveyed what he calls "The Return of Religion After Mao."³ Maybe those of you with ministries in Asia have witnessed firsthand this rise of religious interest. I had been trying to follow the growth of the Christian movement in China, but this was my first introduction to the way Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian dogma and rituals were attracting a new generation. On one occasion, I watched young people streaming into the Lama Temple, the Yellow Hat Tibetan Buddhist temple in Beijing. The theory that religion is being inundated and swallowed up by the flood of secularist ideology seemed completely inaccurate as I stood there watching hundreds of Chinese young people earnestly participating in Buddhist rituals. On the borders of churches across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, are populations where religious hunger is intensifying. Due to the modern diaspora of peoples, we find new religious communities on our doorsteps. The global religious landscape is changing and requiring a fresh application of our biblical hermeneutic.

So, I want to examine this Colossian predicament through a lens more relevant to frontier ministry. As you know, there are new incarnational movements emerging within other religious worlds (e.g., Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist). Like that young

group of believers in Colossae, these movements must contend with the “elemental principles” of their own traditional socio-religious worlds. And herein lies the genesis of the suspicion of these movements today. There is a skepticism and a fear among certain churchmen and missiologists that these new believers, who remain situated in their old socio-religious worlds, will be unable to withstand the pull of their original religious worldviews. They must get free of them. They must extract themselves out of that socio-religious world and “convert” to another. It appears dubious that a fellowship of believers can remain in an old and familiar socio-religious world and follow Jesus as true disciples. Can they survive and maintain a vibrant faith? Won’t they be as susceptible as those believers in Colossae to false religious trends in their society? Don’t they need a clear apostolic “outsider” like Paul to secure them in their faith? Paul responds by applying his christological teaching to this missiological predicament.

Grounded in the Risen Christ

In the first four verses of chapter three, Paul offers these Colossian believers a further supplement to the grand christological vision in this epistle. He wants Christ as “the Head” (2:19) to lead them amidst the judgment and pressure of their socio-religious world (2:16).

If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4)

I was reminded of an experience some years ago when my son was a Boy Scout and his troop was learning orienteering. Each of the boys had his compass on our hike into the mountains, each trying to determine north, south, east and west. One of the

Paul’s primary orientation here is “above,” to that which is “beyond.” He wanted to ground this young church in the risen Christ.

fathers pulled out what was one of the initial handheld GPS sets being sold in the commercial sector. I had never seen one. As we stood there overlooking the Los Angeles valley, he was looking at his instrument, and he said, “My car is parked 12.3 miles in that direction.” Wow! That was a new kind of orientation for me!

In the same way, Paul was offering a new christological compass to a young movement of believers that was experiencing a kind of religious vertigo. He wanted them to know where they stood, and that meant getting a clear theological orientation. First, embedded in these verses is a sense of what is behind them and what is before them. We do need to appreciate our past and our future. In the previous chapters Paul has reminded them that they’ve been “buried with Him in baptism” and “raised up with Him in faith,” (2:12)—and, effectually, they should have “died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world” (2:20). Now in 3:3 he again says, “you have died with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” A death and resurrection is behind them, but in front of them is a coming revelation that should orient their faith: “*When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory*” (3:4). In contrast to the a-historical quality of other religious worlds, Paul is establishing that temporal sense of orientation: history is important. The believer has experienced a divine transaction, a death, and a resurrection, and yet he looks forward to a full revelation of that glory in Christ.

Yet, in these verses, Paul’s primary orientation here is “above,” to that which is “beyond.” He wanted to ground this young church in the risen Christ. His life is their life (3:4), and that life is

hidden with Christ in God (3:3). “*Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth*” (3:2). It’s a transcendent orientation, a direction that a secular age finds irrelevant, but across the world there are both old and new stirrings of religious life that actually share this same transcendent orientation. That seemed to be the case in Colossae. The inter-religious mix of philosophy, tradition and stochia could confuse and delude. So, Paul prioritized a certain vital reciprocity for these believers—it was between themselves and the risen Christ. They were to be grounded outside of themselves. That was to be their primary orientation.

Missiological Implications

Understanding Paul’s christological orientation is missiologically crucial for us especially as we encounter inter-religious frontiers today. First, note that *resurrection* is not *extraction*. We are raised with Christ, and our life is hidden with him, but there is no sense in which Paul is telling these believers to separate from their “place-world.”⁴ Yes, there is a kind of spiritual disembedding⁵ from their socio-religious world, for their citizenship is in heaven. There is a new groundedness to their identity, and it is above, where Christ is seated. But there is no immediate implication of being displaced, only of being reoriented to the risen Christ. This heretical religiosity had placed Christ somewhere in the ladder of spiritual beings, somewhat analogous to the way Christ is situated today as “just one of” the prophets, avatars, or spiritual beings; but Paul’s Christology, as exclusive as it is, does not expect a total disembedding of the believer from his socio-religious context.

Secondly, Paul is grounding the authority of his own apostleship in the risen Christ. All of his injunctions for

sorting out potentially deceptive or injurious religious matters (chapter 2) were given a primary reference point in the risen Christ. Any inter-religious encounter tends to generate a “situational logic” that is competitive,⁶ and in chapter 2 Paul has certainly addressed those false religious tendencies in Colossae that violate the gospel. But he doesn’t get caught in a reflexive logic that compares religious traditions. His orientation is not to impose a religious paradigm that prescribes a new set of institutions and rituals in which they as believers need to be enculturated into; it’s more a matter of orientation than imposition.

It’s a dynamic orientation that provides Paul the space to emphasize fresh themes that speak to this particular christological crisis. He brings a new emphasis on Christ being the “head” of the church, and as such, over all rule and authority (1:16,18; 2:19). His resurrection and seat “at the right hand of God” establishes his supremacy over all the elemental principles that bind mankind and diminish the rule of Christ.

Paul further develops a unique theme in Colossians on the “fullness” (*pleroma*) of Christ, and how that fullness is available to believers.

For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. (1:19)

For in Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete (full). (2:9)

This supremacy and fullness of the risen Christ speaks to the spiritual need that drives this false religiosity, to Christ’s ability to free one from the karma-like stranglehold of other spiritual beings. This primary orientation and groundedness in the resurrected Christ allows for a generative and creative relevance (what Dyrness has labeled a “hermeneutical space”)⁷ in any encounter between a Christ and other religious worlds.

Conformed to the Image of Christ

I believe Paul is answering one of the underlying questions in the minds of those skeptical of any Christward movements which continue to identify with their former socio-religious worlds, and that question is, “Has there been a *real* and *genuine* death and resurrection in their lives?” In the next verses (vv. 5–10) Paul gets specific with clear imperatives about what the phrase “be put to death” should mean in lives that are hidden in Christ: no more immorality and impurity (v. 5), no more anger and slander (v. 8), and no more lying (v. 9), to suggest just a few. The term used here for “putting to death” (*nekrosate*) had a long history of



religious meanings that were foreign to what Paul intended. Translation often demands we fill terms with new meaning, and that’s exactly what Paul is doing. This “putting to death” was not to be a self-inflicted bodily pain, or a gaining control of the body through abstinence, or a flagellation as practiced by ascetics.⁸ This type of mortification and abstinence had become culturally and religiously plausible to believers in Colossae (2:23). But Paul meant something very different, something more akin to devotion, more like a “taking up your cross and following Christ.” Again, our incorporation into the risen Christ means there is a genuine dying, but in Christ there is also a transforming power to assist our

growth in devotion. It will enable us to also “put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (3:12).

The missiological priority of this transformative reality in the lives of believers must not escape us. In what have often been confrontational encounters with other religious worlds, our priority has typically been dogmatic, propositional formulations, but this personal death and transformation must be recognized as the greater apologetic.

I recall the life of a Muslim head of a household, let’s call him Sam, who had turned to Christ after a long journey of spiritual prompting and mission witness. On a few occasions, I was able to witness his leadership in a small gathering of believers that began to join with him, those from his family and friends across the city. What was so interesting was that the structure of that fellowship was still typically Arab and patriarchal. In that world, power always flows from someone powerful at the center (whether domestic, political, or religious). Sam was the senior member and he ran that meeting. That believing network was ego-centric, focused in and around one man’s decisions. Now, my colleagues in town were nervous about this form of leadership. It didn’t have the “elder-ship” they felt was required in a church structure. He was acting more like a “bishop.” That was true, but what was so apparent to all of us who knew Sam was the personal transformation of the power he exercised. The humility and gentleness of Sam’s manner, his capacity to foster interaction, and to defer to the council of others, was obvious. There had been a death and resurrection in this man. Jesus was modifying and transforming his will, his whole attitude. There had been a radical shifting of the center of his personality from self to Christ. Death to selfishness had taken place, and it pervaded the spirit of that small fellowship. Freedom, joy, and many of the

gifts of the Spirit were present in that fellowship—all because of the authentic transformation of power in Sam’s leadership. This genuine experience of Christ’s death and resurrection is fundamental to our missiological discernment in socio-religious contexts like Colossae or in my case, North Africa. It will speak louder than any religious rhetoric or philosophical formulation.

Paul stretches the personal transformation he expects to see in believers to universal proportions in the next verses. He intimately links two commands together: “putting to death of the old man” with a second, positive theological picture of “putting on the new man”:

... since you laid aside the old man with its evil practices, and put on the new (self) who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. (3:9, 10)

This picture has tremendous missiological importance for inter-religious encounter, not only because of what Paul says, but because of what he does not say. The picture here (of a new man being renewed) is a collective one, and the term “man” or “humanity” is preferred here to the term “self” (which carries more of an individual connotation).⁹ This new humanity (or fellowship of believers) is being progressively transformed into the image (*eikon*) “of the One who created him.” This is a reference to the original creation of Adam “in God’s own likeness,” but commentators understand Paul to be referring to Christ, the new man, the image of God (see 1:15). It is the *image of Christ* that renews our knowledge by the actualization of a new humanity that is conformed to his image.

Image versus Culture

Paul understands that we are being conformed to an image, not a culture. This is an important distinction in inter-religious contexts. Paul draws a picture of a new humanity being conformed by their knowledge of the image of Christ, and it is not the

Paul understands that we are being conformed to an image, not a culture. This is an important distinction in inter-religious contexts.

cultivation of an ecclesial culture with all its external forms: liturgies, teaching, polity, architecture, music, etc. It’s the image of Christ to whom we conform rather than some prior historic church culture. It’s an image that causes us to “put to death” certain things, and to “put on” other things. It’s primarily the transformation of life. No doubt the experience and forms of a historic church can operate as a splendid resource, but the Spirit of Christ must be allowed to impact each socio-religious context with the image of Christ. That image, that new man, is actualized in the particular history of a unique people and they join the history of Jesus Christ—they become the people of God.

This vision is not anti-structure. Just like I witnessed in Sam’s life, the formative structure of his fellowship was naturally Arab, very patriarchal, but there had been a death and resurrection, a transformation, and the life of Christ had affected the indigenous structure that emerged. There’s a natural, self-organizing nature to the gospel as it works out the image of a new humanity. I believe Paul has given us an important plumb-line with this use of image, one that opens up cultural possibilities when it comes to the structure of the church in new frontier regions.

This distinction of image or culture can be determinative in religious situations where conversion is so easily understood as leaving one socio-religious world and joining or assimilating to another. So many religious communities today are intensifying their boundaries with the symbols of their faith, especially in antithesis to “Christian” (read Western) religious culture. It is a missiological imperative that we rediscover Paul’s picture of the image of Christ as a new humanity being actualized in modern inter-religious settings.

A Compelling Ecumenical Vision

This formation of the image of Christ in our lives is given an ecumenical perspective in v. 11, where Paul says,

... a renewal in which there is no Jew or Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, for Christ is all and in all. (Col 3:11)

As Paul looked across the Roman Empire, or what he considered the *oikoumene* (“inhabited world”) of his day, he wanted to elaborate his christological vision with this short affirmation: *Christ is all, and in all*. In one sentence, Paul summarized both his theological and social anthropology for that first century world, and, specifically, how Christ had overcome the common divisions of mankind: Jew, Greek, and barbarian (racial/ethnic/cultural); circumcision and non-circumcision (religious); slave and freeman (economic, social).

Commentators indicate that this little statement, *Christ is all and in all*, is most likely a way to simply say, “Christ is all that matters.”¹⁰ But notice it has two parts: the first (“Christ is all”) may refer again to Paul’s emphasis throughout this epistle on the “fullness” (*plerouma*) of deity found in Christ (1:19; 2:9), and how this totality in Christ is so crucial when believers begin to succumb to any cultural or religious influence that would diminish Christ; but, secondly, the “and in all” indicates the destiny of all believers to enter this wealth, this completeness, this fullness found in him. This is *the indwelling Christ*, the very Spirit of Christ, crossing every conceivable division or barrier and dwelling in us with his life. This is Paul’s ecumenical vision: as an apostle he wants to cooperate with this incarnate Christ as he fills believers from every social, cultural and religious segment of global societies.

This ecumenical vision of Paul has now been stretched across twenty centuries and includes peoples and societies Paul could not have imagined. There are a lot of studies on the present plurality of world Christianity, but the global ethnology of God's people was conveyed twenty centuries ago in Paul's apostolic vision. The image of Christ, reflected in that new man, would even be actualized in the life of the "Scythian," transforming fellowships of believers in that savage society situated around the Black Sea on the far frontier of the Roman empire. Paul believed that Christ would indwell them just as he had the Jew and the Greek.

Paul's vision of a "new Adam" does not deny difference, but simply that an orientation to the risen Christ allows us to transcend these divisions without necessarily compromising human identities. He's not affirming some kind of cultural homogeneity, nor an ecclesial homogeneity. To affirm oneness is not to affirm sameness. The oneness is a spiritual unity that is grounded in the risen Christ and his being. We know that elsewhere Paul recognized cultural distinctions—for "the Jews demanded signs, and the Greek demands wisdom." These pervasive social, cultural and religious divisions were to be spiritually transcended in Christ who is all and in all.

Cooperating with the Indwelling Christ

We would do well to reflect on the implications of Paul's statement, "Christ in all." We may need to admit that the present vision of global Christianity¹¹ can minimize the significance of Christ's indwelling in receptor populations in frontier settings.¹²

Paul's vision assumes a *unity* in the body of Christ (3:11), and anticipates a certain *continuity* through history until that day when he is revealed (3:4). The English term used today to refer to this historical continuity is the word *apostolicity*—"a faithfulness to origins

expressed in the continuity of mission." Western Christianity has understood its apostolic continuity through an interpretive lens on the New Testament; but herein lies a problem, according to John Flett (whose work I referred to in my introduction). Our understanding of unity through a faithfulness to New Testament origins "sets the parameters of Christian identity." Flett speaks to the way a global church has ignored the present pluriformity of world Christianity in constructing true Christian identity. He suggests that an underlying perspective on apostolicity will always favor historical continuity, and in doing so it places an evaluative measure and structural limits on any new community of faith that wishes to be received as a



member of Christ's body. Flett believes this unrecognized emphasis on apostolic continuity will continue to limit how we understand cross-cultural mission and the appropriation of the gospel in frontier contexts.¹³

Flett has pointed out this hermeneutical bias in the Western church, and I believe many in frontier situations today have felt this *interpretive glare*. It lodges a heavy and precipitous accusation of syncretism. Flett is brilliant in his description of an ecclesiology that prioritizes its historical continuity, that reduces its imagination to a single trajectory in church history, with all its associated institutional methods or forms (read architecture,

ritual, liturgy, teaching, and theology). Paul knew this interpretive lens was happening with Jewish believers as they encountered the Gentile response to Christ, and again, on the part of the sophisticated Greek believers when they related to the barbarians. We face this same phenomenon when we speak of a Western *Christendom*. A received orthodoxy can prevail, an orthodoxy that governs according to its historical *church culture*.¹⁴ It grounds one in a

single historical narrative that follows the contours of a supposed center of Christian power and the controls of form and interpretation managed by such.¹⁵

When apostolicity is defined by naming the range of practices and institutions that belong to an apostolic tradition, it places limits on the way the gospel can be legitimately appropriated in new contexts.

This concern for limits, this illegitimate constriction on Christ's presence and working, is where Flett's observations of world Christianity converge with our concerns for releasing ministry in new frontier mission contexts. There a wonderful convergence happening between these lessons of world Christianity and the challenges of frontier mission.¹⁶ We're rediscovering *how to be grounded differently*, not in one particular church tradition, but in the risen Christ. Flett says it so eloquently and succinctly:

The church finds this identity in the history of Jesus Christ. This is the possibility of historical continuity, for it is the continuity of the resurrected Jesus Christ and his abundance through which every history is redeemed.¹⁷

This is the continuity of an indwelling Christ who enters the particular history of each people and incorporates those histories into the history of Jesus Christ. This a perspective for the final frontiers. It's a christological orientation that grounds every young ecclesial movement beyond itself. They're not to be primarily oriented towards an historic church, but to the supremacy

and fullness of the risen Christ (chapter 1). It is this grounding that will buttress them against the ideological pull of their socio-religious world (chapter 2). This important text in chapter 3:1–11 calls the apostolic worker and the indigenous local fellowship to ask three primary questions:

1. Are we grounded in the risen Christ?
2. Are we being conformed to the image of Christ?
3. Are we cooperating with the indwelling Christ?

These are the questions around which we can cooperate as widely divergent ministries on the frontiers. And I believe these questions can free us to explore together the vital forms Christ is affirming and establishing in difficult socio-religious contexts.

Ekklesia and Socio-Religious Reality

Throughout this study my assumption is that Paul faced a religious predicament in Colossae that shaped his entire epistle. Although somewhat akin to Jesus' situation when encountering a Samaritan population (John 4), or Paul's situation when facing Greek philosophers (Acts 17), Paul's apologetic here is more ecclesiological. He is helping the ekklesia in Colossae deal with their pluralistic religious context, which first of all, required a good Christology (chapter 1–3). But, then, in 3:12–4:1, Paul begins to clarify his priorities for a believing fellowship in this type of religious tension. Paul knows that these Colossians are still in a process where they must figure out their identity in Christ amidst the reality of their socio-religious world. Any sense of ekklesia will emerge out of that process.

Again, let me emphasize, that I believe modern religious conditions require that we find places in scripture like Colossians that can help emerging movements foster an appropriate ekklesia. Time does not permit us to

P*aul's sensibility here is to focus intentionally and entirely on a redeemed associational life that is a very clear embodiment of the risen Christ.*

examine these conditions any further, whether it be the social impact of globalization, the crisis and opportunity of modern diaspora, or the deep fear of displacement that results from the unfortunate legacy of Western civilization (read Christendom). This global kaleidoscope of change leads to religious struggle and reaction that then affects the interpretive exercise of any young and emerging ekklesia. Each of you may be able to confirm this from your own contexts.

The Redemptive Transformation of Relations

In 3:12 and following, Paul translates his Christology into ecclesiology—and it's an ecclesiology that is vital, essential and appropriate for Christward movements that remain in their own socio-religious worlds. He begins with their identity as “chosen of God, holy and beloved.” (v. 12) These are deep and rich Old Testament terms that identify this Colossian fellowship with God's covenantal community throughout history.¹⁸ Again, they have a clear compass on their past legacy, and the spiritual resources available to them in that spiritual lineage.

But, then, Paul prioritizes the ecclesial experience for situations that have heightened inter-religious encounters; that is, to “put on” Christ—to be clothed in Christ. He first describes *the redemptive transformation of relations*¹⁹ that should take place among these chosen ones: a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, singing, and teaching. These should characterize relationships in this redeemed association (vv. 12–17). This is the risen Christ, the image of the new man, that should be embodied among Colossian believers.

What's interesting is that these verses don't seem to reference or prioritize a congregational form. Ralph Martin suggests in his commentary on v. 17, where Paul says, “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,” that the believer is “placing the *totality* of his life under Christ's Lordship.”

The reference should not be confined simply to acts of worship performed in a church service but embraces the whole of life. However, there is a sense in which every phase of life is an act of worship and all our activities, even the most mundane and routine, can be offered up as part of the “living sacrifice” we are called upon to make (Rom. 12:1).²⁰

I should note that in v. 15 Paul does make reference to the “body,” yet this is a reference to a broader Oneness, and quite a minimal statement when compared to the sister letter to the Ephesians. There the “body of Christ” is given a fuller description of gifts and organic reality (Eph. 4); but, here in these verses of chapter three, Paul does not take the opportunity to expand on this organic metaphor. Neither does he recommend an institutional structure of leadership as he does in his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus. While I may be faulted for arguing from silence, Paul's sensibility here is to focus intentionally and entirely on a redeemed associational life that is a very clear embodiment of the risen Christ. It does not require an articulation in all its institutional form. We can assume that some formal structure is already in place; but, I would make the case that Paul believes this redemptive transformation of relations actually takes place first and foremost in grassroots ekklesia. He is calling them to actualize the new man, the image of Christ, in their relations, and in doing so to express a corporate Christology,

the embodied Christ, in the socio-religious reality of Colossae.

“Hermeneutical Space” and Ekklesia

We do have a certain tendency as Christians in the West when it comes to understanding the term “body.” We don’t think of this as a broader reality of redeemed and transformed relationships. Instead, it immediately suggests a formal incorporation into a bounded religious membership with an historic Christian legacy—we might call it a “congregation.” And this ecclesial structure emerged in the socio-religious context of the Roman world. But, again, let’s look at the text: the incorporation, the baptism that Paul is emphasizing in this epistle, is an incorporation above, into the risen Christ.²¹ His body, the embodiment of Christ, is here primarily expressed in the redemptive transformation of relationships. It’s a fellowship centered on Christ, expressing his resurrected life, and not primarily a reference to some kind of bounded organizational life. There is certainly a sense of collective identity (note 4:12–16), but its primary expression is a life of redeemed relationships.

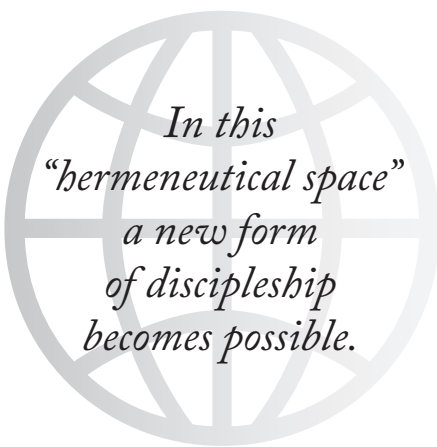
Again, contextually we need to appreciate Paul’s inter-religious sensibility here. I believe he’s offering a way to realize “church” that transcends socio-religious tension. The religious conflict in Colossae was what Paul was focused on missiologically, and that mission purpose shaped the essential aspects of ekklesia. Rather than focusing on the body in its more corporate and formal structure, he chose to emphasize Christ as the “head” of the church and supreme over all authority and power:

He is also head of the body, the church. (1:18)

The head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. (2:19)

Ekklesia and the Hindu Context

This kind of ecclesial experience of “associational life centered on the supremacy of Christ” was addressed a couple of weeks ago at the ISFM meetings by Paul Pennington, who has had recent interaction with Dyanand Bharati, an indigenous leader among Jesus-centered families in Hindu India. Some may know this wonderful brother as the author of *Living Water and Indian Bowl*. Paul interviewed Bharati on the matter of ekklesia and fellowship, since his kind of loose non-institutional association can be understood as a “churchless” Christianity.²² Building off of Bharati’s original work on this leavening of Christ in India,²³ this paper dispels the notion that Bharati is promoting



a more private and individualized life among believers in Jesus. A fellowship of redemptive association is encouraged and expected. Yes, there can be an emphasis on more individualized devotion (*bhakti*) among followers of Yesu, but Bharati reinforces the priority of the redemptive transformation of relations which we see Paul encouraging in Colossae.

Bharati is quite explicit in resisting a congregational experience which he calls “meeting-based spirituality.” What he sees happening in congregational life in the more traditional churches of India is not the ecclesial life he wants to press for in their association.

I, too, recognize the initial need of some kind of structure or form to link with

each other. But when structure becomes the center of focus and not people, then all kinds of problems come one by one. What we started in spirit will end up in flesh. This is inevitable in any man-made structure, as structure needs rule and regulations for smooth functioning.²⁴

Bharati and others are working out ekklesia in what Bill Dyrness has called a “hermeneutical space.” These spaces are where believers attend

...to the emergent interaction between the qualities of the gospel and the (religious) communities’ inherited dispositions, allows a new, generative space to come into view... In this new hermeneutical space a new form of Christian (I would prefer “Christward”) discipleship becomes possible, and along the way new insight into both the work of Christ and the value of Hindu and Sikh practices emerges.²⁵

Like Paul they are placing a premium on personal devotion that leads to a total transformation of life and relationships. But they need some space to determine just what its structure will be.

Ekklesia and Korea

Pennington makes the interesting comment that “the West’s propensity for structure, organization and external conformity is itself partially a product of its culture.” The long history of the congregational form as a necessary bounded expression of voluntary Christian association is so embedded in our civic American culture that we are unable to treat it objectively. Mark Noll, the distinguished evangelical historian, has hypothesized that a certain set of conditions in 19th century America led to a certain type of church structure—a voluntary organizational “template”—and where those same conditions are present in today’s non-Western (majority world) contexts, the structure of the church mimics that American template.²⁶ Noll spends a whole chapter addressing the similarity of conditions in which American and Korean church movements developed.²⁷

John Kim, in a masterful effort to re-examine the original incarnational dynamics of the Korean movement to Christ, unconsciously confirms Noll's thesis when he says

...dependency on the West has become very common in almost all forms of Korean Christianity including theology, doctrinal faith confessions, worship forms, Christian lifestyles, and even gospel songs and hymns. Many Korean Christians are now merely recipients and consumers of those Western forms of Christianity in a passive way.²⁸

But now, Kim recognizes that this Korean church is confronting newer conditions in the 21st century. Simultaneously, he and a cohort of Korean scholars are taking a look at their history in an effort to find a fresh and original way to re-contextualize their church for what currently appears to be a more hardened population. Kim, like Bharati, wants to open up what Dyrness calls a hermeneutical space, to allow a "new generative space" where a "new form of Christian discipleship becomes possible" in reaching the remaining secular-Buddhist population. Kim discovers, like Noll, a broader range of ecclesial dynamics in the late nineteenth century genesis of the Korean church. Those hidden components are missed in the more conventional explanations that emphasize John Nevius' Three-Self Method. But unlike Noll, Kim finds a structural distinctive in that early movement among Buddhists that he believes could reinvigorate mission today. In what appears more like Bharati's leavening movement in India, Kim observes "oikos movements," i.e., home-based Jesus movements led by Korean laity, who had that cultural-insider quality. Noll's American template seems to apply more to the Korean churches of the post-war period in the 20th century, but Kim's analysis of the earliest period of Korean church history brings us back to the origins of a movement, and this emphasis on oikos resonates with what we see here in Colossians. In Col. 4:15, Paul says, "Greet Nympha and the

Paul's ecclesiological apologetic for an inter-religious context contains a sensibility that focuses on oikos as the strategic institution.

church (ekklesia) that is in her house (*oikon*)." The oikos appears to be the default institution where grassroots Jesus movements experience the redemptive transformation of relations.

Oikos at the Grassroots of Movements

In 3:18–4:1, Paul focuses on this primary social institution: oikos (Grk., household, family, home). Rather than the congregation, Paul gives more immediate priority to God's action in the family. The redemptive transformation in ecclesial life should both affirm and re-contextualize family relations, and a new *redemptive reciprocity* is to be witnessed between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between slave and master. Obligations were not just for children, wives and slaves, but for masters, husbands and parents as well. But that's the subject of a different article. Suffice it to say, Paul's christological and ecclesiological apologetic for an inter-religious context like Colossae contains a sensibility that focuses on oikos as the strategic institution. And it appears to be at the frontline of God's kingdom across religious frontiers today.

I will add just one point of emphasis from Asia. Simon Chan, a systematic theologian from Singapore, in his new book *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up*,²⁹ notes how the household codes in Pauline epistles resonate with Confucian principles of family relations. He suggests that family/home/oikos should be the key organizing principle in Asian theology, and that it should guide witness and mission to the remaining unreached of Asia. He sees oikos as the primal reality that should frame a grassroots theology that would even include a new Asian appreciation of the Trinity, and a new appreciation for how the honoring of

ancestors can relate to our historic creedal understanding of "the communion of saints." Chan is calling all theologians to a radical accountability, and appealing for a new "hermeneutical space" in the emergence of ekklesia in Asia.

I offer you this missiological reading of Colossians in the hope that it will initiate a broader "group hermeneutic" between Majority World and Western world ministers of the gospel. I believe our ability to biblically interpret together is fundamental to our cooperation in reaching into sensitive socio-religious contexts. And here, in Colossians, it is Christ—his resurrection, his image and his indwelling—who is our theological and missiological compass among frontier peoples. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ I refer here to Oliver O'Donovan's insightful reflections in his first chapter of *Common Objects of Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), which were the publication of his 2001 Stab Lectures.

² John Flett, *Apostolicity: The Ecumenical Question in World Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

³ Ian Johnson, *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017).

⁴ The idea of "place-world" is borrowed from Willie James Jennings in his book, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, where he uses the terminology to describe the consequences of displacement, or a person's loss of rootedness in a particular land, (New Haven: Yale University, 2010), 24–59.

⁵ This idea of disembedding is taken from Anthony Giddens in *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 17–20. He uses this term in his treatment of modernization and "the lifting-out of social relations from local contexts." I am suggesting that the trust of expert systems which can disembed us socially from our local ties is analogous to the way our trust in

Jesus Christ can spiritually disembed us from local ties. Conversion should be recognized as a spiritual disembedding, a lifting out of either an individual or group from one's immediate relations by an identification with Christ and his body.

⁶ The idea of "situational logic" is treated extensively by Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), and offers an insightful analysis of the structural and social implications of inter-religious contexts which display the same level of contradiction we see here in Colossians.

⁷ William Dyrness, in *Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), introduces the term "hermeneutical space" as essentially the latitude necessary for a process of discernment in inter-religious encounter.

⁸ C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge University Press, 1958), 114.

⁹ Moule, 119.

¹⁰ Moule, 121.

¹¹ Flett cites Lamin Sanneh who makes the distinction between "global Christianity" and "world Christianity," the former being a concern "for the faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe." *Apostolicity*, 140.

¹² Scott Sunquist gives his perspective on the indwelling Spirit of God as the person of the Trinity who initially works on the religious frontier. *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 259–268.

¹³ Flett, *Apostolicity*, 15–16.

¹⁴ Flett treats extensively this prevalent idea that "the church is a culture" in his chapter 3, "Culture as the Nature of Apostolic Continuity," in *Apostolicity*, 103–137.

¹⁵ Flett, 320.

¹⁶ I want to commend the works of two Africans, Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako, and two African mission historians, Harold Turner and Andrew Walls, whose insights into Christward movements in Africa are so compelling for us who are on new frontiers today. They re-examine older frontiers from the past two centuries and advocate voices which were initially devalued and ignored. They eloquently call us to hear and respect the indwelling Christ who was speaking to these African populations. Their observations from an emerging world Christianity can buttress our ventures into difficult and uncharted religious territory.

¹⁷ Flett, *Apostolicity*, 328.

¹⁸ Moule, *Colossians and Philemon*, 122, and Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 109–110.

¹⁹ I have lifted this phrase from Alistair McFadyen's excellent work, *A Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 113–150.

²⁰ Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, 117.

²¹ Moule suggests a "daring leap" in Paul's conception of "body" in writing Colossians: "What is important is the daring conception of the Body of Christ as his limbs. Whatever may have been the pre-Christian uses of the term 'body' and 'limbs' as metaphors for a collective whole with integrated parts, here is something new and different: Christians are not 'the body of Christians,' nor merely limbs of one another (though they are that), but the body and limbs of Christ." *Colossians and Philemon*, 6.

²² Paul Pennington, "Mandali and Satsang: Dyanand Bharati on Expressions of Ekklesia, Fellowship and Community," an unpublished paper presented at ISFM 2017, September 16, 2017, Dallas, TX, USA.

²³ Dyanand Bharati, *Living Water and Indian Bowl* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2004).

²⁴ Pennington, "Mandali and Satsang," 5.

²⁵ Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 90.

²⁶ For a review of Mark Noll's perspective see chapter seven of his book, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 109–125. He suggests conditions of individual self-fashioning; comfortable employment of commerce; voluntary associations; personal appropriation of sacred writings; a more plastic, utilitarian attitude to identity; a readiness to mingle ethnic groups; innovation over tradition.

²⁷ Noll, Chapter 9, "What Korean Believers Can Learn from American Evangelical History," *American Experience*, 151–168.

²⁸ John Kim, "A Reflection on Insider Movements in Korean Church History," *IJFM* 33:4, (Winter 2016): 171.

²⁹ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 76–81, 188–197.

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Households in Focus

Majority World Theological Development: A Role for the University?

by Kevin Higgins

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My recent appointment to the presidency of a university has forced me to synthesize my experience in majority world theological education. It just happened that the theme of this EMS conference gave me the opportunity to frame my thoughts in this paper. And in doing so I want to take a more autobiographical approach. I make no pretense that this is a scholarly, peer-reviewed effort. I would prefer to be personal and professional rather than academic, and allow you to understand how I have been influenced by various movements, thinkers or trends.

I have my share of higher education experiences, including holding an MDiv and a PhD, and teaching and designing MA level courses. However, I approach the topic of this paper essentially as a field-focused person, one who has been privileged to serve alongside emerging movements in mission: alongside leaders of new movements to Jesus among Muslims in South Asia, and alongside leaders of new sending movements from churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In those roles, my feet have been firmly planted in the world of non-formal training and education, but also in the long-term process of serving those who seek to develop crucial contextual theological formation within Muslim and other contexts. Along the way, my own thinking about universities, education, and theology has undergone a set of paradigm changes. I am beginning to learn that, in some ways, these changes in my thinking mirror some of the paradigm shifts in theological education.

This article is really aimed at describing those shifts, and how that shapes what I see for the future of the university that I now serve, William Carey International University (WCIU). I do so in the hope that this journey will contribute in some way to the larger conversation about education, theological formation, mission, and the place of universities.

The title of this paper and my introduction to this point may beg the question, “What do I mean by ‘majority world theological development,’ and by the concept of ‘university?’” Let me begin with a brief outline of my assumptions.

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First, what is a university? I assume that calling something a university implies an institution of some sort with four main elements: a way of delivering education, the content of that education, the recipients of the education, and the certification or authorization that is required to operate. All four elements, as we will see, have been understood and packaged in different ways.

And second, what is theological development? I will give more of my own view later, but for now, I am content to describe what I take to be the main paradigm, at least historically. I have the overwhelming impression that “theological education” and “theological development” have largely been making sure that the right theology was taught and absorbed by the recipients. Theological education was about “learning theology.” Underlying that aim seems to be a deeper assumption about theology—namely, that it is a thing or set of ideas that can be formulated and passed along as the right set of ideas.

Now for more detailed discussion, I will first give some brief historical observations. My intention is to provide perspective on what I see as the main elements in any effective majority world theological education.

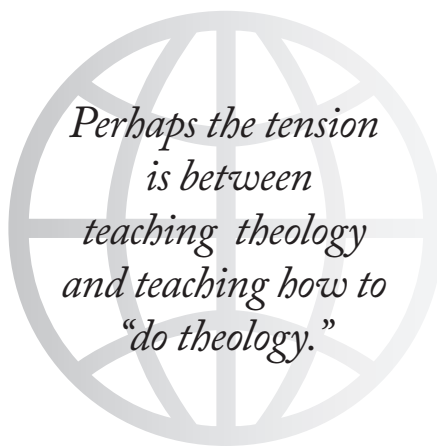
University, Part One: Delivery, Content, Recipients, and Certification

The Western university evolved from cathedral and monastic schools *for the clergy* in the late 11th century BCE. The university was originally a form established to serve the function of the education of church clergy, and theology was seen as the queen and capstone of the sciences. Of course, the assumption was that such schools would not tinker with the theological formulations of the church but merely pass them on.

The rise of humanism created a level of tension within the university model. On the one hand, it was the

assumptions underlying humanism which helped the reformers rediscover and re-articulate what they were convinced was the original gospel, and the original meaning of the biblical faith. On the other hand, these same seeds germinated into very different fruit, resulting in the so-called Enlightenment and an age of reason. Suffice it to say, that along the way, there was increasing expectation for the autonomy of the university, that it be separate from religious authority. Nevertheless, until the 19th century, theology and religion played significant roles in university curricula.

The role of religion was to decrease in the 19th century, and by the end of that century, the German university model



would spread around the world. It was influenced largely by Friedrich Schleiermacher’s ideas on the importance of freedom, the use of seminars as a teaching method, and the formation of experimental laboratories in universities. Such methodologies did not fit readily with the accepted assumptions relative to *theological* education.

Perhaps this tension could be simplified (even oversimplified): I would suggest it’s the difference between teaching (or learning) theology and teaching how to “do theology.”

Due at least in part to Schleiermacher, major changes for the university relative to the church and theological education emerged. First, some

universities continued to offer courses of theological study, but relegated these to separate schools attached to the larger university (e.g., Harvard, originally formed in 1636 to train people for ministry). The second was the growth of the seminary as a distinct “university” of higher learning with theological study as its primary focus, and often serving particular denominational movements. Third, other denominations largely abandoned the concern for “higher” education altogether and focused on Bible schools.

The unfortunate, overall, long-term result of each of these educational forms was the same: a separation of theological thinking and study and education from other fields of study. However, regardless of which approach was employed, the typical “form” of the university which we have been tracing assumes the centrality of a campus to which students travel and where they reside (or near which they reside), and at which faculty teach. The model assumes libraries, curricula, and certification/accreditation.

I loved that model. I enjoyed and still enjoy the feel of books and the sight of shelves lined with volumes crying out to be handled and read and pondered. Books are my friends. I feel warmed just by being in their presence. To this day, the feel of page and binding does far more to kindle my inner lamp than any actual Kindle version!

I also enjoyed the interaction with professors and students. Truth be told, I even liked the inherent (but oft denied) competitiveness of the environment. As such I learned to think, but in a context in which I gained particular affirmation by thinking in ways that inspired the approval of my professors. Gaining approval is not always conducive to fresh exploration.

During seminary, I learned to thrive in that world.¹ I missed it when I left to serve in a burnt-out steel town, and attempted to start a congregation from

among the quasi-homeless. It took me several years to relearn what had seemed so natural about ministry and discipleship prior to seminary.

Of course, there have been various attempts at developing forms and structures other than the centralized brick and mortar model based on universities. After four years in the urban church ministry environment, my wife and I and our daughters moved to South Asia. I came across the Theological Education by Extension movement (TEE) for the first time there in 1991.

Ralph Winter, one of the founding fathers of the TEE movement, developed TEE primarily as a new form aimed at addressing the issues of accessibility: language (local), location, cost, and the level of the material.

While TEE was certainly a new development, it did have its precursors. The University of London may have been the first *university* to offer distance learning *degrees*, beginning in 1858. The institution was non-denominational and, given the intense religious rivalries at the time, there was an outcry against the “godless” university. Thus, the paradigm of a distance learning university was specifically formed with a religious and theological concern as one of its prime motivations, namely to preserve the right theology.

The London model was about getting the right content. At first glance, TEE had the same objective. However, Winter’s TEE model did more than develop shifts in the form.

Winter also focused on the right kind of *student*: those actually engaged in ministry; who were proven, seasoned, already leaders; who had full-time jobs and families to support; and were thus generally unable to uproot and attend a centralized school, one formed on the university model, far from their ministry field. Such centralized schools tended instead to attract younger, inexperienced, and, as yet, unproven students.²

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I encountered TEE a second time, in a different South Asian country, in the context of serving alongside a movement to Christ among Muslims. Another partner to that work had urged the movement leadership to consider using TEE as a model for the theological training of their rapidly growing number of leaders. The material was already in use within more traditional churches, and was in the church version of the vernacular language. So, the suggestion was made to adapt the current TEE material by adapting the vocabulary to be more Muslim friendly.

Everything thus far in my background and training seemed to suggest that this extension model made sense. My experience in seminary had prepared me to love study and deeper learning. I also assumed that healthy movements of discipleship would require leaders trained in some way akin to the training I had been given. My experiences in urban ministry and among Muslims in South Asia had allowed me to see that there was something that needed to be changed, and suggested that TEE as a model, and an adapted TEE as a contextual version of that model, could serve as a better form than the bricks and mortar paradigm I had experienced.

Above, I suggested that the TEE model initially addressed only the *delivery mechanism*, the “form” of theological education, in order to render it more accessible. And, later, I noted that Winter focused on the *right type of students*. But, finally, I was wrestling with the *content*, although, so far, only at a very surface level (i.e., translation and adaptation of some vocabulary).

My journey had brought me to mention “delivery” models (centralized and distance), content (the presumed

“right” theological formulations in most cases), and recipients (what type of student). TEE suggested changes in all but content. But, in most cases, it did not address the fourth main feature of the university paradigm: certification and accreditation. And, in fact, much more needs to be said about both the content of the curricula and the issue of certification.

University, Part Two: A Focus on Content and Certification

Winter’s educational aptitude for TEE eventually took another shape, what I would call a university version, in the establishment of William Carey International University. WCIU was birthed as a distance university delivering *accredited* degrees of higher learning to students who would remain in their contexts of ministry and service.³ WCIU, then, was formed to address three of the elements I have been tracing: delivery (distance), recipient (engaged in ministry, proven), and certification (accredited degrees, formal education). What of content?

Winter and his colleagues developed a curriculum around a historical “spine” to which “rib bones” of archaeological, anthropological, biblical, theological, political and religious perspectives could be attached. This “World Christian Foundations” core forms the basis for WCIU’s MA program. This way of approaching the material was in a very real sense also a way to reintegrate the academic disciplines that had been disintegrated into distinct fields of study with the development of the university over time.⁴

Meanwhile, in South Asia, I was growing increasingly uneasy with the TEE model. I sensed that something more profound than translation and contextual adjustment was needed.

To use a metaphor that some of my Asian colleagues coined, the content themselves, even after adaptation, just “smelled strange.”

I began to search for something else. About that time, around the year 2000 or 2001, I was introduced to the work of BILD (Biblical Institute of Leadership Development) and the CBTE movement (Church Based Theological Education).⁵

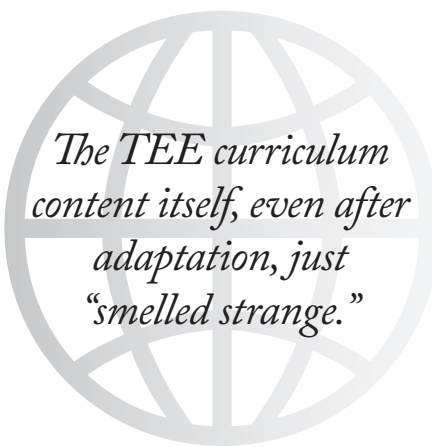
At first glance, many have assumed that CBTE was just another version of TEE. And CBTE does share some of the facets of the TEE methodology relative to training that could be de-centralized. CBTE aims to return theological education to “the church,” and tends to eschew the central seminary model not only for reasons of inaccessibility, but also for a structural lack of accountability to the church.

However, at its core, the CBTE paradigm is re-forming the content and the understanding of certification in ways that the TEE model did not do.

CBTE addresses the question of theological development, and the content of theological formation, in a direct way. One of the main *courses*, but also one of the main *outcomes* for CBTE, is the development of “biblical theology in culture.” While formed by the Western theological development and creedal formulations (a clear emphasis in the materials on the first 300 years of the church shapes the paradigm), CBTE sought to return the theological process to the ongoing hermeneutic of the church community in its own context, addressing its own needs, and developing its own movement, rooted in “the way of Christ and the Apostles.”⁶ As such, in many ways the courses and content were (in my words and experience) like a “Trojan horse,” which used a form of theological education to unleash a whole different way of thinking and theologizing, by encouraging the development of a biblical theology in culture.⁷

CBTE also aimed at re-formation of the certification process, focusing on *church certification* for their own leadership. This was woven into the CBTE process, rather than the typical *seminary or university accreditation* model. I was fully convinced this was needed. I still am.

However, in seeking to actually develop a CBTE based theological education and formation model in Asia among Muslims, I became aware that many of the Asian leadership felt that somehow, no matter how much I explained the weaknesses of the received accreditation model and the advantages of the church certification model we were developing, it just felt



“second class” to my Asian colleagues. One went so far as to say,

Kevin, you went to seminary, but you tell us we don’t need that here. It feels like you are saying we are not good enough.

My actual meaning was the exact opposite!

I learned the hard lesson. The largely Western, and more specifically American, model of accreditation weighed large in the desires and hopes of the majority world. An accredited degree, even a bad one, somehow felt “real.” A different type of certification, even when a much better education and process, felt second class.⁸

Theological Formation: Back to Delivery, Content, Recipients, and Certification

All of the narrative above, shared as an abbreviated form of my own journey, finally matured and coalesced into some basic instincts about theology, education, and how to go about it. The combination of my experiences in a Muslim context, seeking to equip leaders of movements to Christ, my reflections on language and culture, my encounters with seminaries and TEE and CBTE, and attempts to solve the issues of certification, all combine to drive what I am beginning to envision for the future. That vision is now shaped by my current role with WCIU. I should also say, it is shaped by WCIU’s history and reasons for existence, and by my vision for how that will both continue and change in the future.

Delivery: Blended (Distance and “Centers”)

Although WCIU is clearly in the blood lines of the distance education movement, we are not strictly speaking about an online university. Our MA students certainly use the internet, and our technology platform supports this, but over the last year or more our academic leadership implemented a delivery model that incorporated cohorts, and thus an element of “class” or community.

As such, WCIU’s current model is a hybrid: distance, but with live interaction; a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning.

As we continue to press into improvement, another concern we have is to assure that the element of mentor/apprentice in the learning process is not lost.

There are a number of educational reasons for this focus on cohorts (communities) and mentors. But I would suggest that an at least equally important factor is that there is a spiritual

dimension to the process of theological formation. And the spiritual life is almost never one that is cultivated to full health when isolated or apart from “life to life” experience with others.

It should include those who journey together, and those who may have journeyed ahead of us and know some of the trickier parts to navigate.

Delivery: “Micro-breweries”

The micro-brewery “movement” is but one expression of a trend in the world: locally sourced, low footprint, fair trade, etc. One way forward for WCIU’s delivery methodology is to encourage “micro-universities” which do not seek to build buildings or gather libraries or any of the traditional forms of the centralized institution, but which do foster a community of learning along the lines of the old guild model of apprentices and masters.

The faculty (“masters” with the degrees and field experience), the materials studied, the languages, the topics of research, and the financial models, all would include educational equivalents of low footprint, fair trade, and local sourcing.

This is a way to press the cohort model further, and to build cohorts as often as possible around some degree of closer geographic proximity, not to a campus, but to fellow students and a network of associated mentors. In some cases, these “micro-universities” may end up being created by enterprising students who apply and are tasked with finding fellows for their cohorts, and even with proposing potential faculty (which then would be screened by WCIU).

However, in some cases, WCIU may proceed by developing an international network of associated universities, with WCIU adding value through advising and adding to curriculum development, equipping faculty, and adding WCIU’s “brand” to a local institution (in accord with agreed criteria). Such a network would also open avenues for

The delivery system of a “micro-university” would be like a micro-brewery: locally sourced, low footprint, fair trade.

a mutual, global learning environment within the network and between its associated schools.

Delivery: “Amazon Distribution Center”

A number of business models depend on efficient, regional, distribution hubs. Amazon is but one. In many ways, Amazon is a retail version of a distance university, but without the cohorts. Amazon’s effectiveness depends upon its distribution centers, perhaps even more than its web technology for receiving orders.

For the “micro-university” and “network of associated schools” to provide real value and deliver effectively, the university as distribution center is a crucial element in the structure. Operationally and academically, such hubs need to provide effective IT and bandwidth, educational support to improve faculty skills and methods, curricula expertise, adept translation resources following “best practices,” financial models that are fair for faculty and student and balanced with sources from tuitions, global scholarship sources and other “friends” of the university, and well managed endowments.

Important as some of these developments may be, they are not radical innovations. And they address only the delivery of education. Far more critical is the question of what a university like WCIU should deliver.

Content: Beyond Translation and the Need for New Theological Encyclopedias

In the discussion about TEE and CBTE I made the observation that contextualization of theological education was prone to end with translation and minor adaption, but did not really mold “content.”

Western theological formation and education has tended to approach its task as one of ensuring that the “right” results were achieved by schools, as measured by the assurance that the students could articulate their theological positions in accordance with a received tradition. I say “a” tradition because the particular expression of that has varied by denominational and theological heritage: Reformed, Arminian, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Roman, Eastern, etc.

I want to hasten to state that I am not suggesting that these received traditions are wrong. I stand firmly in their stream as a convinced believer. What I do suggest, however, with equal conviction, is that these are all contextual expressions of biblical truths. They have been lived and tested from within long historical roots, and they reflect the original contexts of their birth, as well as their subsequent histories. As one example, a glance at Anglicanism’s 39 Articles will suffice to show how certain articles are rooted in the debates of the English Reformation.

I would venture that the same is true even for the classic creeds. How much detail is given in these christological formulations, yet how little they elucidate a theology of the Spirit, is a clear demonstration of the contextual issues in which the framers of the creeds operated. And rightly so.

In Asia, as I have mentioned, I have had the chance to work alongside leaders of emerging movements in Muslim contexts. Naturally, we began with deeper and deeper explorations of Scripture, and we worked to the place where the leaders were eager to know how various Christian teachings had emerged, what they were, and how and why there were different Christian churches.

So, I mustered the materials for us, and we began to work through the ways that the “faith” was passed along within the apostolic era, then in the era of the creeds, and then the later Protestant confessions.⁹ I had to translate as we went, as nothing we were studying was available in their languages. I did add some materials that the local Christian communities had translated. Most of that had also originated in the west.

As we worked through this historic examination of theology, creeds, and confessions of faith, it became clear to me and to them that as important and crucial as all these stages were, there were multiple examples in which the largely Western theological traditions we studied as we made our journey were answering questions that were not those of our context, and of course, never addressing some of the crucial questions which were very real.

The fact was that we were trying to do theological education with an incomplete “encyclopedia.” We had access to the theological encyclopedia of the Protestant west, some of it translated in one of the major local languages. But for theological education to really develop, I came to conclude that we needed two major changes.

First, we needed to add to the encyclopedia from a wider orb of local sources: Islamic theological thought in the region, Sufi spirituality, local folk traditions and songs, etc. It goes without saying, of course, that none of that would be in English or in any of the so-called theological languages.

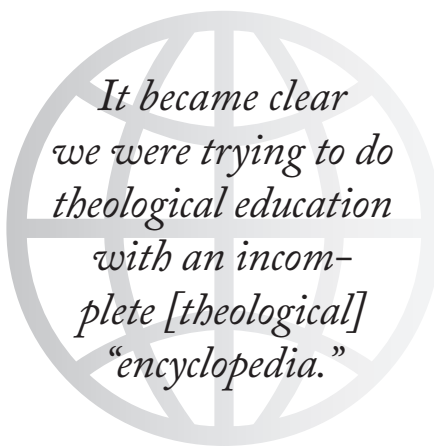
Second, we needed to adjust our thinking about the end result of such education. Instead of thinking how we could emerge with our leaders able to give assent to the formulations of faith as contextualized in the Western traditions, we needed to aim at the emergence of *authentically biblical theologies in culture*.¹⁰ And that required *delivery of a process*, not delivery of the end re-

sult of a process undertaken elsewhere, in another context with different questions and needs.

Of course, these new encyclopedias can only be developed from within the “micro-universities” I have described, and not from the “distribution center.” However, the latter can and must be shaped to help serve the former. Before proceeding, I feel a need to address another aspect of the content of theological education.

Content: Reintegration of Theology

I briefly alluded to the disintegration of theology as a discipline, as a casualty of the rise of the university model.



Theology not only was dethroned as “queen” of the sciences, but also all of the disciplines became increasingly studied in isolation. Theology, and theological students, had less and less connection with political science, economics, biology, medicine, law, history, literature, the arts, etc. A similar disintegration took place within theology itself as disciplines such as biblical studies, systematics, church history, and pastoral theology were taught in varying degrees of separation.

The CBTE movement attempted a reintegration of the theological disciplines, developing courses and curricula that wove the various fields of learning together as much as possible.

In the CBTE process, that integration occurs around particular courses built around themes as the “spine.” Ralph Winter’s earliest innovations within WCIU’s curriculum were more aggressive, built around a chronological spine, as he included more disciplines as “ribs” than the BILD curricula.

In Winter’s later years, what I have called the integration of theology took another turn as he began to focus more and more on what came to be called “kingdom missiology.” This approach holds at its heart the conviction that God’s mission is for all creation, that therefore every aspect of restoring a lost and rebellious planet is the proper concern of missiology, and that every aspect of creation has been assaulted by a vicious enemy, and hence mission in all its dimensions is also spiritual warfare.

In the last decade, shaped in large part by this framework, WCIU has continued to build its programs around the historical approach and missiological center of its founding focus.¹¹ But WCIU has also increasingly positioned its missiological core as a philosophy of international development, and as such, positioned its degrees as degrees in international development, built on the vision that all theology is missiology, that missiology addresses every aspect of God’s mission, that God’s mission addresses every aspect of God’s creation, and thus, that missiology is the fullest expression of development, and development is only complete if it is also missiology.¹²

This entire approach has been encapsulated within the first of the five competencies which WCIU aims to pass on to our students:

The ability to apply insights gained from the understanding and integration of biblical, cultural, historical, and applied research in addressing the social challenges they face as part of an agency, organization, or institution working in a particular social context.

While not couched in overtly missiological terms, that summarizes an

aim to foster the ability within our students to think and work missiologically, and theologically, in holistic ways. To summarize thus far, I am suggesting a blended model for the delivery of distance education. And I am suggesting a model which aims to develop and employ new encyclopedias of theology, which recovers a fully integrated approach to theology as missiology, and missiology as development, in large part by educating men and women to “do theology” rather than simply “learn theology.” This, of course, assumes there are recipients of this content.

Recipients: Leaders of Emerging Movements (Mission and Pioneer)

Since I am focusing on WCIU as a means by which I want to speak to the wider vision of theological education and majority world, I will limit myself in this section to interacting with Ralph Winter.

We have already seen that the TEE movement focused largely on church pastors in majority world contexts, the proven and actual leaders, as opposed to “students.” This emphasis on the needs of local leaders, especially in church movements, remained crucial for Winter over time. As he stated it in 2003, more than 20 years after founding WCIU:

There are about two million functional pastors who can't formally qualify for ordination, or who are mostly not ordained simply because they cannot practically penetrate the formal mechanism of theological education even if it might be theoretically accessible to them.¹³

Meeting the needs of those (potential) students was a primary motivation. And Winter's main critique of seminaries and Bible schools and universities was that they failed to do so:

... many of them are more concerned to keep their enrollment up than they

This type of “biblical theology in culture” will be critical... and the curricula that can best serve that process does not yet exist.

are to find and educate—by whatever means necessary—the actual, real, mature, gifted leaders in their associated church movements. It is not a question of whether we think of humble Bible schools or well-endowed seminaries, the key question is whether or not they are offering access to the real leaders of their movement.¹⁴

At the same time, Winter was also focused on another type of student, the cross-cultural missionary.

...if we don't train the missionary in the field we slow down the frontier missions movement. This is of critical importance as we race toward the end of this century.¹⁵

Indigenous leaders of church movements in the majority world and cross-cultural workers formed the main audience for WCIU originally. With the subsequent insight about missiology and development, the vocabulary used by WCIU to describe its main intended recipients also shifted from pastors and missionaries, to “men and women working at the roots of human problems.”

This was more than semantics. I wish to make two comments.

First, the shift in no way implies a move away from a focus on serving the “right students” as defined by those who were actively engaged in their fields of service. That has not changed.

Second, the shift implies a way of speaking that incorporates the fullness of the theology-as-missiology-as-development matrix described above. As such, the intended student body of WCIU of course continues to include the real leaders of churches and church movements, the cross-cultural missionary regardless of their home sending country and culture, and thus the majority world.

But WCIU also understands its intended student to include students working within various relief and development agencies, small business development, translation and communication, leadership development, the sciences and health, and so on.

Those additional focal points are the basis of a number of envisioned concentrations and degree programs we aim to launch, but they should in no way be seen as a dilution of the focus of WCIU. Quite the contrary, it is in fact the sharpened focus on the nature of missiology, and the extent of God's missional calling, which shapes these changes as we initiate them in the future.¹⁶

However, there are two major challenges to this approach, and to serving these intended students well. One is a religious challenge, the other, a linguistic one.

The religious challenge (if I may use that term) relates to the fact that a number of the students needing the type of approach to theological education described above, both in terms of delivery and content, are those currently leading so-called insider movements (and more importantly perhaps, those they are training to lead in the future). The type of “biblical theology in culture” described above will be critical, the new encyclopedias needed will have to partially come from their contexts to be effective, and the curricula that can best serve that process does not yet exist.

In addition, the linguistic challenge looms massive. At present, WCIU is primarily offered in English, and requires a level of proficiency that the “real leaders” we seek to serve simply cannot manage. We have made great strides in Korean and Chinese. But the fact remains, that if our delivery assumes

English, then our content will have to be in English, and thus the students will be restricted only to those who can manage English. That would spell death to the vision of new encyclopedias and new biblical theologies in culture.

Thus, as we look to the students of our future, our vision includes at least a dozen of the major languages of the world. That means not just translation and languages of instruction, as should be clear by now.

However, this surfaces another challenge: certification.

Certification: The Contextual Trojan Horse—and New Models

The CBTE model advocated a return to a model of certification that located the “certification” process itself within the “church,” and initially at least, was less concerned about matters of accreditation associated with typical universities. To be very honest, in an ideal world, I would have been in full agreement.

In fact, in many arenas, especially in the tech world, there is a major shift going on relative to certification. My oldest daughter works at an online university which makes no pretense that it is accredited. It does not even use the classic terminology for its degrees (BA, MA, etc.), preferring instead to grant “nano degrees” in highly specialized niche areas of expertise. Students are flocking to it. Companies are as well, to hire the graduates. What matters to both the students, and the companies hiring them, is not an accredited degree but an ability to do something real in the marketplace.

There is evidence that these types of competency-based certification are growing, and that more and more leaders in education are calling for change and questioning the current models. One of my colleagues at WCIU put it this way:

...“training to competence” is more important than offering courses leading to a “degree” and the prestige and social status which that can generate.

In other words, those competing most effectively in the markets will be those who have demonstrated competence in specific or specialized fields, regardless of where they got their training. Training institutions whose graduates demonstrate competence will be the winners of the future.¹⁷

I couldn’t agree more. But the mention of prestige and social status is worth noting. Let us consider for a moment the primary target audience of a university like WCIU, and its mention in the title of this paper: the majority world. The hunger for education is largely a hunger that is growing for Western education, and some version of official accreditation as a sign of the quality and status gained by it.



Even the main initiator of CBTE, the BILD organization, has had to make room for partnership with universities to be able to attain some form of outside certification and accreditation. And WCIU is renewing its accreditation as I write.

Why? Primarily because it is demanded “in the market.”

This is why my section heading refers to accreditation as a “contextual Trojan horse.” I mean by this the idea that in order to smuggle innovations into curricula, develop new encyclopedias, and create new delivery methodologies in a way that will in fact attract the students we actually wish to serve (and who will help to develop those new

encyclopedias), we need to contextualize our institution within the expected form: an accredited university. And, perhaps at some stage, even a further form is possible, as a university able to grant its “seal of approval” to a whole network of schools internationally.¹⁸

Conclusion: A Role for the University?

I have covered the main points as I see them, but now hope to conclude by wrapping them more tightly and clearly together. There have been two main themes: theological development in the majority world, and the role universities might take in that process.

I have suggested that the university model has essentially four major functional components: delivery, content, recipients, and certification. I have explored centralized versus distance models for delivery. The ideas considered here are hardly revolutionary.

I have also tried to articulate that there is a need for a dramatic overhaul relative to the content, or curricula, and its aims. Here I believe that my advocacy for education focused on “doing theology” instead of learning it, for new theological encyclopedias, and for biblical theologies in culture, will prove more challenging to some of my readers.

I have discussed taking Ralph Winter’s ideas about the “right students” a bit further than he did. In addition to leaders of church movements and cross-cultural missionaries, I added leaders of so-called insider movements, and those they would in turn seek to equip.

And I have suggested an approach to certification that would treat accreditation as a contextual factor. I might even use the term “a necessary evil,” though that might be too strong. The fact remains that many of those we would most hope to serve will come to us seeking a type of accreditation that many of us are alternatively coming to see as either altogether unnecessary, or deliverable in more creative ways.

All of that combines to provide a description of what I mean by theological development in the majority world. It also suggests a subversive role via the university, as a Trojan horse which can sneak a whole new way of doing theology inside the city gates. I have a hunch that once inside, the entire model of theological education as we know it might be re-formed from the inside out. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ I attended Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry (now simply Trinity School for Ministry) in Ambridge, PA, from 1982 through 1986, including a year away from school in Uganda. It was and is a wonderful place, full of godly people.

² Dr. Winter's ideas about the content of education would emerge later.

³ Thus, William Carey International University was birthed. Some of Winter's earliest descriptions speak of the content being that of a seminary, "seminary in a suitcase," for busy people "on the go"; such language was largely abandoned over time and the purposes have been articulated differently as time passed and his thinking progressed. See below, and also www.wciu.edu for more current descriptions.

⁴ Space does not allow a full discussion of this, but in summary: as distinct fields of learning grew within the university model over time, history, theology, biblical studies, sciences, etc., were more and more taught in isolation from other disciplines. The WCIU core curriculum seeks to reintegrate the various disciplines around a historical framework.

⁵ I owe a great debt to Jeff Reed and his team at BILD. While my own thinking and approach has led me in different directions, I gained a great deal, and the training and formation process we put in place within Asia and in a church planting context in the USA were shaped profoundly by BILD. See www.bild.org for more about BILD.

⁶ Having said that, it must be added that CBTE also assumes that such a hermeneutical cycle will result in particular forms of church and expressions of faith, rooted in what Paul calls his "tradition."

⁷ As I began to implement CBTE in Asia, I was particularly impressed by the emphasis on developing local theology. What I found, however, in most CBTE movements using the BILD process in various countries, was a tendency to merely

translate and use the courses. In effect, this rendered CBTE just another (improved perhaps) TEE version.

⁸ I believe BILD faced these same issues and I understand they have developed partnerships to address the accreditation issues.

⁹ I found several of the courses in the BILD Leadership Series extremely helpful for the comparison of apostolic and later approaches in those early centuries. In particular, the course "Essentials of Sound Doctrine," demonstrates the manner in which Paul's epistles kept "doctrine" and "life" closely woven together in passing on the faith, whereas (later) by the time of the creeds, the emphasis had shifted almost fully to having the right concepts.

¹⁰ I have adapted this phrase from a major BILD course, "Towards a Theology in Culture," where I was also first introduced to the concept of theological encyclopedias.

¹¹ To illustrate the missiological core in Winter's vision for WCIU, I cite these words, "The Institute of International Studies, (Training Division of the U.S. Center for World Mission) has developed a completely field-based MA program with a missiological orientation. It is designed by mission scholars and is intended for serious Christians who seek to declare the glory of God among the nations."

¹² These are my own expressions, though it is likely obvious that I am "channeling" the thinking of Karl Barth and Ralph Winter in my own mix here.

¹³ Winter, Ralph D., "The Largest Stumbling Block to Leadership Development in the Local Church," *IJFM*, 20:3, Fall 2003, 88.

¹⁴ Winter, 92.

¹⁵ In an article from *Mission Frontiers* Nov-Dec 1992, on the theme of building the mission bridge, accessed September 2017, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/building-the-mission-bridge>.

¹⁶ This description I am offering does not overlook the fact that in WCIU's history, there has not always been this sort of holistic approach to missiology and theology and development, or to the students we seek to serve. For example, here is a description of the type of student WCIU assumed would be interested: those serious about the cause of missions; those headed toward the mission field who want to start training here and finish there; those called to mission mobilization; those already serving on the mission field; those in leadership in national churches who want basic biblical, theological and missiological training without coming to the United States.

¹⁷ Jonathan Lewis, in an email correspondence, August 2017. Jonathan is WCIU's Chief Academic Officer.

¹⁸ As early as 1836, there were attempts at models for addressing accreditation in distance forms. The University of London developed a compromise solution, for example, in which the sole authority to conduct the examinations leading to degrees would be given to a new officially recognized entity called the University of London, which would act as examining body for the University of London colleges, originally University College London and King's College London, and award their students University of London degrees.

Book Reviews

Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition,
by Michael W. Stroope (Downers Grove, IL: IVP
Academic, 2017, pp. 477)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This is a challenging book that questions the continuance of mission work as we have known, practiced, and discussed for the past two centuries. Radical changes swirl around the mission enterprise and this book calls for a radical response, not a knee-jerk response that is situationally based, but a fresh understanding of mission, how it developed historically, and why a new perspective is needed. This review will be extensive, consonant with the importance of the book.

The first chapter, the Introduction, is on “The Enigma of Mission.” This statement is a wake-up call for the rest of the book:

The oldest and most common use of mission is as a political or diplomatic term. The national and political interests of one country or territory are represented to another country or territory through its diplomatic mission. (2)

Stroope goes on to summarize seven meanings for the term “mission.”

M1: Mission as general, common task or representation or personal assignment. (Elizabeth has made it her mission to make sure all the children in the area are able to attend school.)

M2: Mission as specified aim or goal of a corporate entity. (The mission of our company is to provide products of superior quality and value that improve the lives of consumers all over the world.)

M3: Mission as specific and personal life purpose or calling. (My mission in life is to raise three children and provide hospitality for those who enter my home.)

M4: Mission as evangelism and church planting. (Mission means proclamation of the gospel to those who have never heard.)

M5: Mission as the ministry of the church in all its forms. (The ministries of the church contribute to the accomplishment of its overall mission.)

M6: Mission as structures or entities related to the expansion of Christianity. (Mission San Juan Capistrano was established in 1776 by Spanish Catholics of the Franciscan Order.)

M7: Mission as the activity of God in the world, often with little to no reference to the church. (God’s mission is much larger and often different from the work of the church.) (10–11).

Stroope also discusses the attempts to make singular and plural uses of the term carry distinctive meanings, but suggests that these have failed, and have only added to the confusion of meaning.

A core statement for the book is that

Mission, birthed and developed in the modern age, is itself inadequate language for the church in the current age. Rather than rehabilitating or redeeming mission, we have to move beyond its rhetoric, its practice, and its view of the world. The task is one of *transcending* mission. (26; italics in original)

This rather extreme suggestion is supported in many convincing ways. One is to point out how little “mission” has been used in biblical and Christian history:

Mission has to be read into the biblical and historical narratives anachronistically in order to create continuity between mission past and mission present. The more demanding task today calls for us to do more than justify, revise, promote, and bolster mission. Rather, the pioneering task is to acknowledge the habits of language and thought that developed around mission beginning in the sixteenth century and to foster new rhetorical expressions for the church’s encounter with the world. (27–28)

A potential misreading of the book is to focus on the terminology of mission; Stroope is constantly pointing much deeper than merely terminology:

The overall intent of this study is an appraisal of the long and enigmatic course of mission rhetoric. My concern is not merely to dismiss mission language, nor to damage the church’s witness and service to the world. Nor do I believe it is possible or even wise to abandon mission language altogether. Rather, the aim is to identify the source and severity of the mission problem and offer language that I feel more appropriately expresses the church’s being and activity for the time in which we live. (29)

Section One of the book is four chapters on “Justifying Mission.” Stroope suggests that two types or groups of people defend mission language: partisans and apologists.

Partisans are activists for mission... They proclaim *mission* and *missionary* as biblical without qualifying statements or accompanying evidence. Their argument is usually based on an uncritical, and at times naïve, reading of these terms into Scripture. Partisans leave the impression that Jesus and Paul speak of *mission* and *missionary* and thus both words are in the Bible to be literally seen and understood. (35–36).

Apologists... recognize the obvious absence of mission in Scripture and seek to establish justification for the term. (37)

Chapter two is on “Reading Scripture as Mission.” There is an interesting discussion on the Old Testament and mission, pointing out that some see no mission for OT Israel, others read mission into everything in the OT, and some make a theological category for mission even though there is no cross-cultural sending in the OT. Stroope concludes that in OT study, “Mission, as a rhetorical device,

In the end, the Crusades and their era are a different reality from modern mission, but the roots of modern mission lie in the Crusades—particularly the terminology of the Crusades carried over into the missionary movement.

improperly controls interpretation and communicates more than the Old Testament text intends” (81).

The situation with the New Testament is not much better. Two statements from Stroope make this point:

Characterizations of the early church as a *missionary church* with a *missionary spirit* are problematic for several reasons. First, with such characterizations, the assumption is that these communities were more than churches: they were *missionary churches*. (102, italics in original)

Lauding the early church through missionary language may present an inspiring picture of early believers, but it does not aid us in understanding the dynamics of the faith and witness in their context and at their time. The language of *mission* and *missionary* prejudices our reading of the text so that a clear understanding of motives and intentions is impeded by a retrospective burnishing of Christian history. (103)

Chapter three is “Presenting Mission as History.” Here Stroope shows that reading the expansion of the early church as missionary work and mission expansion is reading into the historical record:

Modern interpreters, in spite of the absence of mission among these early individuals and historians, feel compelled to insert such conceptual language into the historical record. The imprecise vocabulary of mission and its anachronistic rendering of history are the products of something other than a plain reading. Rather, mission is either generalized to express any kind of common purpose or task, or it is historicized in order to promote modern mission endeavors. (142)

This same trend appears in the next chapter, which is in a new section of the book. This second section is comprised of four chapters headed “Innovating Mission.” Of most interest here is the relationship of mission terminology to the Crusades. First, note the core fact that “Much like the preceding centuries in Christian history, the language of *mission* was simply nonexistent before and during the Crusades” (220). Modern interpretations, however, are not bound by this:

And yet, modern interpreters of the medieval era and the Crusades find reason to liberally insert *mission* and *missionary* into the narrative of the Crusades. Once again, because of the elasticity of mission language, interpreters find reason to appropriate modern terminology to explain medieval activities and to identify their actors. However, in the appropriation, they ascribe nineteenth-century assumptions and aims to eleventh-century events and individuals. (221)

Some interpret the Crusades as a missionary project. Others suggest that mission was something done by individuals who focused on evangelism while other Crusaders had other

motives. In the end, the Crusades and their era are a different reality from modern mission, but the roots of modern mission lie in the Crusades—particularly the terminology of the Crusades carried over into the missionary movement.

Finally, in the sixteenth century, the term mission is introduced into church history: “Mission, in its modern meaning and use, made its appearance in the sixteenth century. Ignatius de Loyola (1491–1556) took existing language and repurposed it” (238).

From Ignatius’s introduction of mission into the speech of the Society [of Jesus], a major shift began that eventually reformed the way the church talked about and framed its encounter with the world. In Ignatius’s innovation, the era of mission began and the modern missionary movement has its roots. The genesis of this shift was a gathering of friends in a chapel and their common vow. (239)

Section Three on “Revising Mission” has only two chapters. The first (“Protestant Reception”) looks at the development of “mission” among Protestants.

Oblique references to mission in Zinzendorf’s writings and the Moravians’ early foundational documents became full-blown expressions of mission and missionary in the second generation of Moravians. (314)

The second chapter is on “missionary problems” and starts with a focus on “the modern missionary movement.” That phrase is traced to the last decade of the nineteenth century when Baptists were celebrating their mission centennial and coined the phrase. This now-standard phrase is brought under close scrutiny.

As a whole, *the modern mission movement* functions as rhetorical device—slogan or motto—of a tradition. More than a historical period or ideological category, the modern mission movement identifies means and intent as Christians relate to the world. The modern mission movement functions like any other identity, motto, or slogan, as “an instrument of continuity and of change, of tradition and of revolution,” [Richard McKeon, *Rhetoric: Essays in Invention and Discovery*, 1987, p. 2] and thus it is a reminder of the recent past and a call for a response. In this way, the modern mission movement structures reality, and maintains and advances specific perceptions and values for individuals and the church. While significance can be found in each of the three words (modern, mission, movement), taken together they offer a distinct concept that frames identity and cause. (318–319)

Mission, as expressed at Edinburgh [1910], held vestiges of Urban’s summons [to the Crusades] and Ignatius’s vow. Its notion of conquest, occupation, and triumph were from previous eras, dressed in modern garb but motivated by similar aims. Mission was the link between the two eras, and through this

Stroope goes on to evaluate mission “partisans,” who, like those who were at Edinburgh 1910, promote triumphalist slogans and seek more and more mission funds and action.

language Christendom assumptions of one era are conveyed to the other. In this manner, Ignatius’s rhetorical innovation found full expression and reached its logical conclusion at the Edinburgh Mission Conference. (338)

Stroope goes on to evaluate mission “partisans,” who, like those who were at Edinburgh 1910, promote triumphalist slogans and seek more and more mission funds and action, and mission “revisionists,” like the Laymen’s Inquiry whose 1932 study of *Re-thinking Missions* began what has become “a perpetual revising of mission” (343). Yet even the revisionists maintain mission language, however radical their suggested changes might be. But the remarkable changes in the world in recent generations suggest that it is time for new paradigms (and terminology) to emerge:

What Ignatius innovated and Protestants made into a modern tradition is ebbing in its usefulness and vitality—but more importantly, contemporary Christians have begun to recognize the conceptual dissonance with mission language and its tradition. A number of factors should signal that rather than redoubling efforts to defend mission, or to promote the latest revision of mission, or to anticipate what mission should be in light of the newest trend or the next conference, it is time to recover ancient language that will enable a more vibrant and appropriate encounter between the church and world. (347–8)

Stroope outlines and briefly discusses seven current realities that point towards a new paradigm. First, Christendom is waning. Second, the colonial legacy of mission is not easy to overcome. Third, culturally and religiously plural societies kill the geographical assumptions involved in mission. Fourth, as modernity declines, so will mission. Fifth, multiple Christianities challenge the basic concept of mission. Sixth, the terminology of the modern mission movement is already dying out. Finally, the desire for empathy and mutual exchange with non-Christians creates space for language other than mission (348–352). So Stroope summarizes that

When we defend and promote mission, we may find that we are championing the wrong cause... we may find ourselves hindering the right cause... The necessity of transcending the rhetoric of the modern missionary movement is critical, given its past associations and its present implications... Transcending mission is more than a shift in rhetoric; it is witness to our continual conversion to the gospel story. (353)

So, if we transcend mission and adopt new terminology and attitudes, just what will that look like? Stroope has a few suggestions to start us again on the right path.

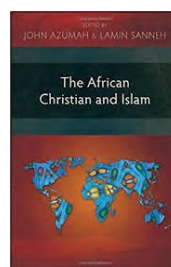
As language enters vocabulary, integrates with thought, and becomes the content of communication, it changes the way

one sees God, it shapes identity, and it determines actions. *Kingdom* language prompts those who follow Christ to live as *pilgrims* who give *witness* to the coming reign of God. They are not called *missionaries*, and their life purpose is not named as *mission*... Kingdom language frees the modern believer from ordinary expectations and expands the range of possibilities. Kingdom language is the better choice of language, because it is rooted in revelation, includes all types of believers, prioritizes formation of life, expands possibilities, underscores the place of the church, liberates from Christendom assumptions, and points to the Spirit’s work. (376; bold italic emphasis added)

Kingdom, pilgrimage and witness are key terms Stroope wants to make central in our vocabulary, replacing mission, missionary, and even missiology. Other terms like service and humility immediately come to mind. As the long development to our current phrase of “modern missionary movement” has been traced, it seems likely that there will be a long period of fermentation before any new construct becomes the accepted terminology for a new era. Evangelical “mission” societies have quite systematically and rather thoroughly removed “mission” from their names; it seems it is also time to remove mission from our terminology and, the much more difficult process, from our thought and life. The exciting prospect of representing Christ and his kingdom in the post-mission era should revitalize and redirect our witness as pilgrims among the peoples of the world. To this end, Stroope is not critiquing the past era so much as issuing a clarion call for new initiatives for the glory of God. May many embrace his perspective and begin the reboot.

The African Christian and Islam, by John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh eds. (Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs, 2013, pp. 484)

—Reviewed by Gene Daniels



Africa has a long, rich history of Christian-Muslim interaction, stretching back to when king Negus of Aksum (modern Ethiopia) famously received some of Muhammad’s followers who were fleeing persecution. Not only that, but for the past century or so, the continent of Africa has been the primary fault line of Christian-Muslim interaction in the world. Yet when was the last time you read about African Christian approaches to Muslims?

While leaders of world mission were strategizing in Europe, a great revival was being started by an indigenous African leader who is barely a footnote for most of us.

For some of us it has simply been for lack of access. I, for one, have wanted to learn more about African Christian thought on Islam for some time, but the difficulty of locating sources always stood in the way. That is why I leapt for joy when I found out about a relatively new book, *The African Christian and Islam*. The volume is the proceedings from the conference of the same name which occurred in Accra, Ghana, in July of 2010. This marvelous book was edited by two of my favorite African missiologists, John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh.

Both of these men are from a Muslim background and are first-rate scholars. Therefore, I was not surprised that some of the keenest insights come from chapters contributed by the editors themselves. For example, in a chapter on the history of God's work in Africa, Sanneh draws a fascinating line between events in Africa and Europe:

In 1910 when Harris [William Wade Harris, the West African prophet] started his mission, there was a famous meeting of mission and church leaders . . . generally referred to as Edinburgh 1910. No one at that conference gave Christianity a chance in Africa, certainly not at the hands of Africans themselves. The mood was one of paternalistic distrust at Edinburgh . . . (19).

Thus, while those we remember as the leaders of world mission were planning and strategizing in Europe, a great revival or movement to Christ was being started by an indigenous African leader who is barely a footnote for most of us. Could it be the West has always overlooked and underestimated the work of God in and through African indigenous agency?

Azumah weighs in on a chapter on Christian-Muslim encounter in Africa. When he writes about the post-9/11 mission environment, he explains how Africa has been barraged with Western apologists who promote a confrontational approach towards Islam and are "literally sowing seeds of fear and suspicion in African Christians towards Muslims" (59). He goes on to say that while Africans can learn about Islam from the West, it has to be a two-way street. In particular, the West can learn from the African Church about dealing with Muslims in "terms and realities of shared experience in society" (60).

This idea of shared community was touched on by several of the contributing authors. It was not so much by explicit statements as it was a palatable tone throughout the volume. In various ways, they reminded the reader that African Christians often live as members of the same society with Muslims. For the most part, they write of them as friends, neighbors, even family members—not as objects of evangelistic efforts. This perspective is a valuable

corrective to us in the West, whether we are encountering Muslim diaspora in our hometowns, or moving into theirs. Either way, we need to see ourselves as members of a shared society. And this is certainly one of those areas where we in the individualistic West should sit at Christian Africa's feet.

Another theme which surfaced several times was a reminder that Africa and Christianity have a long history. Even beyond the familiar Bible stories of Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt with the Christ child, and Simon of Cyrene (Libya) carrying the cross (Lk 23:26), there are deep roots to the Church in African soil. For instance, John Onaiyekan, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, reminds us of the lasting impact of ancient African theologians such as Cyprian (modern Tunisia) and Augustine (modern Algeria), and the many desert saints (in Egypt) who were the forerunners of the later monastic movements in Europe. Perhaps we might better connect with the insights in the volume if we would reread some of the Patristic fathers through the lens of their African-ness?

Not all the African figures we should learn from are shrouded in the ancient past. Elom Dovlo, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ghana, explores the ministry of the man Andrew Walls credits with the first sustained missionary engagement with African Islam in modern times, that is Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Among other things, this chapter explores key attitudes which shaped his ministry to Muslims.

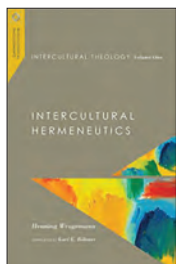
For example, he examines how Crowther relied on the "use of the Bible in conversations with Muslims because he believed that the average Christian knew his Bible better than the average Muslim knew the Qur'an" (92), thus modeling an effective mission strategy. Dovlo also points out that the Bishop's methods, which were steeped in the concept of mutual respect, "grew out of a culture of tolerance and cooperation" which was part of traditional Yorba religious culture (93).

Why should this book be must reading, at the top of your pile? Africa is home to the world's fastest growing Christian and Muslim populations. Yet it seems that we in the West are often so enamored with our own ideas that we neglect the ideas generated in this massive evangelistic encounter between these two great missionary faiths. Thankfully John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh have given us a wonderful window into what God is doing in and through his church on that continent. Now it is up to us to avail ourselves of the opportunity.

A very high view of Scripture can get in the way of appreciating what others consider meaningful. We often spend too much time exegeting the biblical text and not enough time exegeting the local context.

Intercultural Theology, Vol. 1: *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, Missiological Engagement Series, by Henning Wrogemann, translated by Karl E. Böhmer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2016, pp. 431 + xxii)

—Reviewed by Larry W. Caldwell



I was excited when I first heard about Henning Wrogemann's *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, the first volume of his three-volume set addressing the important topic of *Intercultural Theology* (originally published in German in 2012). While I had never heard of this German missiologist prior to this publication, my scholarly interest for the past thirty years or so has been in the areas of both intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics. Thus, I was thrilled when I first opened the book—what new insights would I glean from Wrogemann? Unfortunately, I was soon disappointed, not because Wrogemann fails to deal with the topics at hand. He approaches the subject matter from new and interesting perspectives, but he essentially plows no new ground in this book.

As a result, this review is somewhat bittersweet. The good news is that Wrogemann's work takes issues like "intercultural theology" and "intercultural hermeneutics" beyond the confines of missiology and injects them into the academic mainstream for scholars of the Bible and theology. As a pedigreed German missiologist—he holds the chair of mission studies, comparative religion, and ecumenics at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel in Germany, and the chair of the German Society of Missiology—his writings will be given much attention. In this regard it is a good work and will be read by many of our colleagues in the greater academy. As a result, we should all be grateful to Wrogemann (and InterVarsity Press!), since it is a rare thing indeed when a missiologist is taken seriously by Bible scholars and theologians.

While I will not take the space here to thoroughly address the contents and major themes of Wrogemann's work, I do commend the excellent job Terry Muck has done in this regard in his recent review.¹ Instead, in what follows, I will address first, some strengths of the book for frontier missiology and frontier missions, and second, what I see as "incomplete understandings" in Wrogemann's approach to both intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics. I will also footnote some complimentary sources for those who want to pursue Wrogemann's call for intercultural hermeneutics.

Strengths for Frontier Missiology and Frontier Missions

First, and foremost, Wrogemann rightly reminds us that all theologies, and thus all hermeneutics, are local; they are shaped by the local people themselves. Throughout Part 2 of the book ("Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Concept of Culture") He draws upon theories of cultural semiotics and discourse theory to this zenith:

This leads us to redefine what an intercultural hermeneutics is: from a cultural-semiotic perspective, it is the attempt to decode other, foreign cultures using the medium of their own conceptions and terminology, i.e., to identify that meaning, those referential connections, and that relevance that things have for people from the culture in question. This attempt must, however, be augmented by the discourse-theoretical perspective, since it is necessary critically to analyze the pan-cultural desire to portray certain cultural configurations as self-evident. I consider such a new intercultural hermeneutics to surpass older approaches to hermeneutics, which tended to be oriented more toward understanding texts or more toward appreciating what others consider to be meaningful, etc. (154–155)

The first part of Wrogemann's quote—"using the medium of their own conceptions and terminology"—is an important reminder for those of us who work with least reached peoples. We must seek for local hermeneutical methods that work for the local people and, correspondingly, help the local people use their own hermeneutics as they approach the biblical text and as they develop their own local theologies (more on this below). A typical Western approach to either hermeneutics or theology most likely will not work in their local context. The second part of his quote—"surpass older approaches to hermeneutics, which tended to be oriented more toward understanding texts"—points directly to a weakness in the methodology of many who work among the least reached. How so? The very high view of Scripture that many missionaries have can sometimes get in the way of "appreciating what others consider to be meaningful." We oftentimes spend too much time exegeting the biblical text and too little time exegeting the local context. As we better learn the local people's "medium of their own conceptions and terminology" the better we will be able to trust both the Holy Spirit, and the local community of believers, to work out what the Bible is saying to them.²

Second, Wrogemann redefines "intercultural theology" as a new technical term that uses a rediscovered, older technical term, namely "mission studies." In fact, he prefers the combined term "intercultural theology/mission studies" since

it emphasizes the interculturality of theology. From a global perspective, theology is pursued everywhere. This means that the subject is just as concerned with contributing to an

Wrogemann's theories support the legitimacy of local faith communities to explore those elements of their local culture that make their theology, interpretations, and faith valid for their people.

adequate understanding of theological traditions from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, for example, as it is with reflecting on this exchange itself and on how it is determined by its own context. (23)

So why is this important for those who do frontier missiology? Precisely because, once again, Wrogemann emphasizes not only theology but also the local culture (with the word “studies”) because, as he says:

it concerns the expansion of Christian religious configurations, on the one hand, and the plans, efforts, and forms of expansion within the local context (in both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, on the other). (24)

As a result, as frontier missiologists do theology among a least reached people group the emphasis should not just be on the developing of a local theology, but also on understanding the local theological traditions that will give great insights into the best way that theology should be done in the specific local context. All too often, we fail to take adequate time to truly know and understand the local culture in our well-intentioned desire to make disciples and plant local fellowship groups of Jesus followers. Wrogemann, in a sense, is giving us permission to take the time necessary to truly have “an adequate understanding of theological traditions.”

Third, we need each other. Wrogemann reminds us that each people group's theology, interpretations, and expressions of faith are valid. A main theme of the book is what he calls “intercultural ecumenism”:

not just . . . a narrow conception of ecumenism limited by a Eurocentric perspective or by the perspective of denominational studies. It is concerned with all of the many forms of expression of the Christian faith instead of merely concentrating on doctrinal and written theology. It aims at a comprehension that is as holistic as it is critical . . . (26)

Wrogemann's understanding of intercultural ecumenism gives frontier missiologists the freedom to experiment with theologies, interpretations, and expressions of faith that will work among a particular least reached group. Though he does not refer to recent questions facing frontier missiology—like debates over insider movements, the use of “Allah” and familial terms in translation—Wrogemann's theories support the legitimacy of local faith communities to explore, albeit holistically and critically, those elements of their local culture that make their theology, interpretations, and expressions of faith valid for their own people. Those Western theologians and missiologists of a more restrictive viewpoint on such controversial issues might do well to pay attention to what Wrogemann is saying in this regard.

Finally, this book is a reminder that we can learn much from professional “armchair” missiologists like Wrogemann. Though he has never had significant cross-cultural “front line” service, he makes up for this lack through incorporating a plethora of majority world examples in his writing as he attempts to explain intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics in their worldwide contexts. Chapter 5 on Islam in Africa, and chapter 6 on Hinduism and Christianity in India, will be especially helpful for anyone working among the least reached in those contexts.

An Incomplete Understanding of Intercultural Theology

While there are many strengths in this volume, there are regrettably some weaknesses as well. The bad news, or at least the sad news, is that Wrogemann—though “one of the leading missiologists and scholars of religion in Europe,” and one who “has written the most comprehensive textbook on the subject of Christianity and culture today” (from the dust jacket)—pays scant attention to non-European missiologists and ignores their comprehensive textbooks on this same subject. In fact, in one brief footnote, he dismisses the works of Nida, Kraft, Hiebert, Hesslegrave, Rommen and Sannah as promoters of “translation models” that “are especially popular in the United States” and which “will not be pursued any further in this book.” (328, fn. 43) And why not? Wrogemann's reaction against including North American missiologists is strange given that the overall purpose of the book is to be a “comprehensive textbook” on intercultural theology and intercultural hermeneutics. In fairness, he does devote several pages to TEDS's missiologist Tite Tiénou's “prescription theology” in chapter 13 on “The Contextual Theologies of African Evangelical Theologians” (208–214). But this is the extent of any substantial North American (albeit African) contribution. This failure may be excused since Wrogemann, by his own admission (xxi), is writing primarily for the European context (particularly German) and thus the preponderance of sources from European and, especially, German scholars.

This omission, though perhaps understandable, is unfortunate. Wrogemann correctly defines intercultural theology as “the analysis and description of contextual expressions of Christianity” (24) and skillfully develops this definition—from his German/European bias—throughout the remainder of the book. Sadly, he fails to recognize and interact with North American missiologists who have been promoting such an analysis since at least 1979 with the publication of Charles H. Kraft's *Christianity in Context*³ (his detailed development of ethnotheology is reflected in the book's

*I*t was my observation that, while good ethnotheologies were arising in the non-Western world, the basic hermeneutical methods undergirding those ethnotheologies were still Western.

very subtitle: *A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*). Neither does he regard Paul G. Hiebert's *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*,⁴ published in 1985, which devotes entire chapters to "Critical Contextualization" (chapter 7) and "The Fourth Self" (chapter 8, dealing with the need for local "self-theologizing").⁵ As a result, though Wrogemann constructively adds to the discussion of intercultural theology, he does not "introduce the concepts of culture and context" (as, once again, the dust jacket proclaims). These concepts have already been introduced by an earlier generation of missiologists, and to neglect them in an otherwise comprehensive study of this nature is disappointing.

An Incomplete Understanding of Intercultural Hermeneutics

And what about intercultural hermeneutics? As is true for intercultural theology, so too with intercultural hermeneutics: Wrogemann does not shed much new light on the subject but merely adds his bit to a thirty-year-old discussion—at least among North American missiologists. Wrogemann generally shapes intercultural hermeneutics within the overall framework of his understandings of intercultural theology. More specifically, when he combines cultural semiotics and discourse theory and applies it to intercultural hermeneutics (see the quote above from 154–155), Wrogemann is merely stating in a different way what Robert J. Schreiter was arguing for way back in 1985 (also using semiotic theory!) in his *Constructing Local Theologies*.⁶ Wrogemann would have done well to build on this earlier work of Schreiter.

Furthermore, as early as 1979, Kraft was talking about "ethnotheological hermeneutics."⁷ For Kraft

[a]ny model of hermeneutics that ignores the influence of the interpreter's culture on that person's attempts to understand the Scriptures is seriously deficient. Many who seek to employ [foreign hermeneutical methods like the grammatico-historical] are severely hampered by a failure to grasp the full significance of the culture-boundedness of themselves and of their methodology.⁸

As a PhD student of Kraft in the 1980s, I believed that his ideas of ethnotheology—as good as they were—actually did not go far enough, or deep enough, into a local culture. It was my observation that, while good ethnotheologies were arising in the non-Western world, the basic hermeneutical methods undergirding those ethnotheologies were still Western, since they were based predominately on the historical-critical and/or grammatical-historical approaches to hermeneutics. Subsequently, I helped develop the concept

of "ethnohermeneutics,"⁹ arguing that both Western missionaries and local non-Western theologians needed to look for and use interpretation methodologies *already present in that specific culture*. It was this kind of attempt to interpret the Bible in their culture that provides the foundation from which they subsequently can develop their own unique ethnotheology.¹⁰ I argued for exegeting the biblical text in culturally appropriate ways while also exegeting the culture and how the culture understands such texts.¹¹

Recently we are hearing many new voices that argue for culturally appropriate hermeneutical methods, and these appeals are not just from the Western world. This is intercultural hermeneutics on an ecumenically grand scale, something that is promoted by Wrogemann, but not always followed through on.¹²

Concluding Thoughts

Though these above "incomplete understandings" are noteworthy, the fact remains that Henning Wrogemann's *Intercultural Theology*, Vol. 1: *Intercultural Hermeneutics* is a significant contribution to missiology. Although I think that the book is too cumbersome (read: too complicated and too German) for use as a textbook for a class on contextualization; nevertheless, it merits our attention, if for no other reason than for the attention it will receive by our colleagues in the academy.

As mentioned at the outset, Wrogemann's work was originally published in German in 2012. It is the first volume in a projected three volume set by Wrogemann, and part of the larger "Missiological Engagements Series" edited by Scott Sunquist, Amos Yong and John Franke. Let us hope that the forthcoming two volumes, as well as the entire Engagements series, will take more seriously the contributions of North American missiologists, especially those scholars whose work has influenced frontier missiologists and theologians who work among the least reached peoples.

Endnotes

¹ Terry C. Muck, "Intercultural Hermeneutics. Vol. 1 of *Intercultural Theology*," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 41 no. 3 (2017): 194–202. Available online at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2396939317698779>.

² For help in how to do this with local peoples, you can refer to my *Doing Bible Interpretation. Making the Bible Come Alive for Yourself and Your People* (Sioux Falls, SD: Lazy Oaks, 2016).

³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture. A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

“**H**induism is actually a comprehensive way of life within which the gospel may be translated, rather than a religion that people need to reject in order to confess Christ.” (Shultz)

⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985).

⁵ Many others were involved in helping to develop “contextual expressions of Christianity.” See, for example: Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1963, 1970, 1988); Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985); David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization. Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989); and Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992, 2002).

⁶ Schreiter addresses such aspects especially in his chapters on “What Is Local Theology?” (chapter 1); “Mapping a Local Theology” (chapter 2); “The Study of Culture” (chapter 3); “Theology and Its Context” (chapter 4); and “Popular Religion and Official Religion” (chapter 6).

⁷ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 129–146.

⁸ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 143.

⁹ Larry W. Caldwell, “Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 1 no. 2 (1987): 314–333.

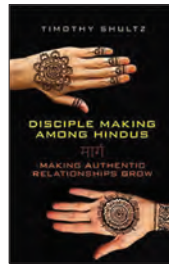
¹⁰ Larry W. Caldwell, “Cross-Cultural Bible Interpretation: A View from the Field,” *Phronesis* 3 no. 1 (1996):15.

¹¹ See Larry W. Caldwell, “Interpreting the Bible With the Poor,” in *Social Engagement: The Challenge of the Social in Missiological Education* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits, 2013): 165–190.

¹² See, for example, R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconstructions. An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003); Hans de Wit, et al, eds., *Through the Eyes of Another. Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004); D. N. Premnath, ed., *Border Crossings. Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007); Nāsili Vaka’uta, *Reading Ezra 9–10 Tu’a-Wise. Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) and his use of “contextual hermeneutics.” The following have been published since the 2012 German publication of Wrogemann’s book; however, they are important to mention for the purposes of this review: Shawn B. Redford, *Missiological Hermeneutics. Biblical Interpretation for the Global Church*. American Missiological Society Monograph Series 11 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012); Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elaine M. Wainwright, eds., *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*. Semeia Series 75 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); and, from a nonreligious perspective, Ming Xie, ed., *The Agon of Interpretations. Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). This last work, edited by Ming Xie, is perhaps the most international collection of works by scholars on the subject of intercultural hermeneutics to date.

Disciple Making among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow, by Timothy Shultz (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016, pp. 154)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This book is short, direct, and written in simple English, yet it carries a challenge that few will digest in just one reading. It calls for a total change of paradigm in evangelism and discipleship when engaging Hindus with the message of Jesus. The content is anything but complex, yet its application will be revolutionary.

The author shares from his own deep engagement with Hindus. As he says in his introduction, “everything I have written here I continue to experience as a journey of discovery that stretches me” (xiv). He rarely cites another author, but writes with deep emotional involvement, on failures and pain, as he reflects on his own experiences. This gives the book an authenticity that is often lacking in more theoretical writing.

The first chapter, “Learning Curve,” lays out an abundance of background information that must be understood for effective communication with Hindus. Of course, an understanding of Hinduism is vital, and in introducing a very helpful discussion Shultz suggests that “Hinduism is actually a comprehensive way of life within which the gospel may be translated, rather than a religion that people need to reject in order to confess Christ” (7). The rich concept of dharma is briefly introduced as a key concept, but along with his perceptive exhortation,

As Christ’s disciples we must be extremely careful not to be too prescriptive in how we come alongside Hindu people as they assess how the gospel changes their dharma—as it most certainly will do. (13)

The Hindu family comes into focus as part of this introductory learning curve. The iconic status and central function of family (as opposed to the family’s place in Western individualism) are helpfully discussed. This leads into a discussion of caste, again very helpfully done with a focus on practical concerns and modern realities. A final introductory topic is about Indian Christianity. Shultz points out that

The Indian church has come to believe that Hindu civilization and global Christianity are ultimately incompatible, and in many ways Christian experience in India, particularly since Independence, seems to prove that assumption. (20)

It takes time to figure out why Hindus are not interested in our “good news” . . . when one begins to adjust to this, there is inevitable distancing from Christians who insist on traditional patterns.

But Schultz’s perspective is all about presenting an alternative paradigm to this belief.

The second chapter on “Obstacles and Approaches” looks at four obstacles and three approaches before closing with a case study. Before starting on the obstacles, there is an important discussion of the challenges of Hindu ministry. The vast differences from traditional Christian ministry mean that people will “face a disorienting learning curve” (23). It takes time to figure out why Hindus are not interested in our “good news,” and that when one begins to understand and adjust to this, there is an inevitable distancing from other Christians who expect and insist on traditional patterns.

The first obstacle is that of foreign religion. Hindus are so deeply convinced that Christianity is not for them that they can be quite shocked to learn that Jesus is indeed for all people. Hindu identity is a closely related second obstacle. This goes back to the understanding of “Hinduism” as a “comprehensive way of life.” A Hindu “converting to Christianity” must change that comprehensive way of life, thus reinforcing in his or her mind that Christianity is a foreign religion. But Hindu identity can and must be affirmed in Christ; as Schultz says,

Until Christians understand how to apply the message of Galatians to a Hindu context and stop thrusting Hindus into an identity crisis, millions of Hindus will continue to resist any call to faith in Christ. (31)

Indian Christian identity is the third obstacle, which relates to the caste system and the low caste roots of most Indian Christians. On the fourth obstacle, spiritual blindness, Schultz is bold on the point that Satan is the only enemy, and a number of his common wiles among Hindus are helpfully explained.

The first approach (still following the content of Chapter Two) is contextualization and is more focused on theory. The second approach is contextual skills and is intensely practical: properly learning Hindu names and food culture; practicing the courtesies of Hindu cultures; understanding family structures and Hindu worship, deities, festivals, and philosophy; and, lastly, learning language. This is an excellent practical section to guide people starting out in befriending Hindus. The third approach is “building a witness,” again, very practical and of great importance. Schultz stresses that “an effective witness is something that must be built over time” (40). Quick verbal proclamation is “woefully inappropriate” (40) because of the cultural gap and massive misunderstandings that Hindus have about Jesus

as part of the foreign religion of Christianity. But the core paradigm shift for Hindu ministry is clearly stated:

The paradigm-breaking truth is that Hindus themselves actually build a positive response to the gospel that is centered on practice rather than knowledge (41).

This becomes a key to the rest of the book and is central to the very moving case study that closes the second chapter.

The following four chapters spell out the approach to Hindus that Schultz developed over his decades of interaction with Hindus. The first and central point (Chapter Three) is relationships: a true, vital and natural relationship with a Hindu must be the foundation for sharing the good news of Christ. The focus on natural relationships suggests that this approach is not for full-time gospel workers as much as it is for dedicated Christians in normal jobs and for tent-makers. There is much excellent practical advice in this section, including how relationships develop and (in many cases) do not develop. Schultz suggests that “Relationships in Hindu culture are covenantal in nature” (57), and this is a very helpful perspective. There is no reason to be reticent about Christ, although there is much reason to avoid “evangelism.” The reason natural relationships can lead to fruitful sharing of Christ is because

Open and sincere spirituality without any trace of coercion is a very desirable perception—one that we as believers actually want the Hindu family to have of us, because many Hindus respect people of faith who are genuinely conscious of God. (61)

Chapter Four begins by addressing verbal gospel witness that is based on genuine relationships to Hindus but moves the reader into a discussion of how both Hindus and their believing friends can have genuine experiential encounters with Christ. Schultz considers “the apologetics of Jesus” to be experiential rather than rationalistic, citing and explaining John 14 (in the first section, “The Apologetics of Jesus,” 64). Schultz refers back to his discussion on dharma, and introduces the new concepts of *anubhav* and *bhakti* (experience and devotion) as keys to how Hindus will recognize Christ as good news. When Hindus encounter Christ in prayer and worship, by seeing answers to prayer, and experiencing his peace, the barriers related to foreign religion will begin to break down. This is rich and rewarding reading, needing re-readings and deep meditation to internalize this ministry paradigm.

The fifth chapter goes on to talk about clarifying these experiences. Hindus who experience blessing in the name of Jesus are ready to hear good news about who Jesus is. Schultz suggests three scripture passages for presenting Jesus to Hindus: Matthew 27–28, for the story of his death and

Shultz is not trying to sugar coat reality: “You will have moments in your life when you are certain nothing is right.” But this is not to discourage but to forewarn.

resurrection; Romans 8:31–34 on his current status as Lord; and Philippians 2:5–11 that ties the story and current reality together. There are too many practical and insightful points in this exposition to even allow for a summary here. The end goal is full surrender to Christ as Lord, although this often is the result of a considerable process, as Shultz points out:

Hindus sometimes seem to surrender to Jesus in a series of stages. The stages have to do with a growing trust or faith in Jesus as their exclusive Lord. They begin by praying to Jesus among their original deities. Then they will pray to Jesus as their chief deity. At the next stage Jesus becomes their *Ishta Devata*, their chosen and exclusive Lord, and finally they acknowledge him as the supreme Lord of everybody in the world. (91)

Chapter Six is on “Intentional Discipleship” and considers a number of important perspectives on both the meaning of discipleship and particularities related to Hindu discipleship to Jesus. The central concept here is that the Christian does not understand Hindu realities and can only learn them from the person he or she is relating to.

... the disciple who initiates ministry is a cultural outsider, and they actually need help from the people they are trying to introduce to the gospel to be able to communicate effectively. (97)

Christians are in a collaborative ministry with Hindus from the very beginning as they share areas of need and growth and help each other explain the gospel and grow in Christ. Thus Hindus actually help their mentor evangelize and disciple them! (97)

In this scenario the Hindus help their mentor interpret the biblical teaching and apply it to their lives wisely and practically, and the mentor lets them do so, because they trust the work of the Holy Spirit and humbly accept that the Hindus are fully capable of understanding how to live out biblical teaching in their own lives. (97)

The centrality of family is again in focus here, and discipleship means learning how to follow Jesus within a Hindu family.

If discipleship to Jesus means that the Hindu believer must break covenant with his or her family, Hindus will continue to view Christianity—and by extension, Christ himself—as a real threat to the Hindu community. Sadly, this reality is all too common, and it is the exact opposite of good news for the world. (100)

In light of this family reality, Shultz spends some time on those Bible passages that seem to suggest that a break from family will (or should) often happen when someone follows Christ. The crucial issue of marriage is also addressed before turning to three broad points on discipleship in Hindu contexts. The first is that one cannot really teach Hindus, but rather should fill the role of a coach, recognizing that all decisions and actions are for Hindus to work out within

their family context. A second point is that discipleship is a meaningful part of *bhakti* (devotion) and *seva* (service). Finally, the principle of translation, conveying biblical meaning into another cultural context, is discussed along with notes about syncretism. All of this is then related to the meaning of church, baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

A brief closing chapter comes back to the challenge of the cultural difference between Hindu and Christian worlds. Shultz suggests that the Christian engaged deeply with Hindus will often end up with a compartmentalized life, relating to both communities separately in a complex manner. But perhaps some should leave the Christian world to integrate their life within the Hindu world; and others may at some point move in the opposite direction. Shultz is not trying to sugar coat reality; he rather suggests that “You will have moments—or extended periods—in your life when you are certain that nothing is right” (124). But this is not to discourage, but to forewarn. Clearly it is a great, transformative privilege to engage Hindus in the way Shultz outlines.

An appendix takes this very practical approach to ministry and makes it even more practical: how to first meet Hindus, how to develop relationships, how to evaluate what is happening as relationships with Hindus develop. This is repetitive with some of the earlier content, but reinforces the broad paradigm that has been presented while providing action steps that any disciple of Jesus can begin to implement. A glossary of Indian terms is also included.

This is a landmark book in the history of Christian engagement with Hindus. The daunting challenge of representing Jesus among Hindus is not made easy, but it is made conceivable and the way to move forward is made clear. This book needs wide circulation among concerned Christians who live among Hindus, and networks of such Christians need to develop for mutual learning and encouragement. Nothing this reviewer has read over the past thirty years provides as much hope for the future as this simple volume. Where, now, we might ask, are those who will take up the challenge of living this kind of life among Hindus? **IJFM**

In Others' Words

Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase. Finally, please note that this January–December 2017 issue is partly composed of material created later in 2017. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience caused by such anachronisms.

Central Asian Spring?

With the death of its president last year and the landslide election of a new reform-minded leader, many analysts are cautiously predicting the beginnings of an economic boom in Central Asia's reclusive Uzbekistan. A Nov 28 *Voice of America News* article ("[Uzbekistan Is Opening the Door . . . a Crack](#)") sees great potential in a country rich in oil, gas, and cotton. The encouraging signs? New start-ups are pouring in. Currency reforms have been instituted. Exit visa restrictions have been lifted. Professional medical and academic people are no longer being sent to harvest cotton. Just last month, Uzbekistan hosted an international high-level conference on security and development. Over 500 people attended, including European Union officials tasked with Central Asia issues. Details on many regions of the world are available to subscribers to Justin Long's *The Weekly Round Up*: <http://www.justinlong.org/>.

Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar

This Dec 2, 2017 *New York Times* article "['No Such Thing as Rohingya': Myanmar Erases a History](#)," gives the backdrop for the tragedy engulfing the Muslim Rohingya in Buddhist Myanmar. Brutal genocidal tactics have been used to drive more than 650,000 Rohingya out of Myanmar. For US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, this constitutes [ethnic cleansing](#). Religious violence began to spiral out of control in 2012 with the alleged rape of a Buddhist woman by a Muslim man. See the full story in *The Atlantic's* "[The Misunderstood Roots of Burma's Rohingya Crisis](#)."

The Balfour Declaration Turns 100

Nov 2, 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, the document that conveyed vague promises by Britain about the possible future of a Zionist state. See the October 26th article in *The Economist's* "[The Balfour Declaration still offers lessons to Israel and the Palestinians](#)."

For a link to the declaration itself, click on http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp. For the repercussions one hundred years later, see the *New York Times* article "[Balfour Declaration of Support for Jewish Homeland Still Divisive at 100](#)." Ruth Wisse, professor of Yiddish and Comparative Literature at Harvard, offers a personal retrospective from a Jewish point of view in this *Wall Street Journal* article "[When Britain Renewed the Promise to the Jews](#)." But for a poignant essay addressed to Christians by an Arab Christian himself, read "[It Is the Centenary, But No One Is Celebrating](#)" by Elias Ghazal, Institute of Middle East Studies at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon.

If Uttar Pradesh Were a Country

Filled with helpful graphs and charts, Quartz Media's startling article "[If Uttar Pradesh Were a Country](#)" examines India's most populous province (200 million people, of whom nearly 19% are Muslim.) Last March, the pro-Hindutva party BJP swept the elections in Uttar Pradesh. After winning 3/4 of the constituencies, the BJP immediately appointed a right-wing Hindu Chief Minister. For more details about the role of religious hate speech in these elections, see "[UP Elections: Hatred Won, Development Didn't](#)" in *Forward Press*. This rise in religious intolerance in India against Muslims and Christians has been noticed by its Muslim neighbor, Pakistan, in the *Daily Times* article "[The True Face of India's Secularism](#)." (Is the pot calling the kettle black?) For a report on the rise of worldwide religious intolerance, scan the *Huffington Post's* article entitled "[Religious Intolerance Surges Worldwide, US Studies Confirm](#)" and the Pew Forum's report pointing out the reversal of what had been a downward trend: <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/11/global-restrictions-on-religion-rise-modestly-in-2015-reversing-downward-trend/>.

A Crown Prince's Aggressive Foreign Policy: Reckless or Reforming?

The Saudi crown prince has had a busy November 2017: the Lebanese prime minister was forced to publicly resign November 4, 2017, [an action he rescinded](#) three weeks later; over [200 leading Saudi politicians and businessmen were arrested](#) the same day; and over 1700 private bank accounts frozen. Four days later began a blockade of Yemen that [threatens to bring massive starvation to over seven million people](#). What's the youngest Saudi crown prince up to? *The Economist* has devoted a lengthy piece to this prince in "[The Rise of Muhammad Bin Salman](#)." *Business Insider* (Nov 16)

explores the urgent economic crisis facing the Kingdom with the 2015 plunge in oil prices in its article [“The fragile balance between Saudi Arabia’s ruling class and its people is ‘unsustainable.’”](#) A *New York Times* article speculates that the king is suffering from dementia in [“The Upstart Saudi Prince Who’s Throwing Caution to the Winds.”](#) One US official said the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was at its most fragile in over 50 years, but ironically, *Foreign Policy* reports that Saudis are overwhelmingly supporting this 32-year-old “reformer” who is taking on Iran. See the *FP* article [“Saudis are hoping Mohammed bin Salman will drain the swamp.”](#)

Former President Saleh Confirmed Murdered by Iran-Backed Rebels

The former president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, has been confirmed dead at the hands of the Houthi rebels when his home in Sana was bombed December 4, 2017 ([“Yemen’s Ex-President Killed as Mayhem Convulses Capital” *New York Times* Dec 4, 2017](#)). This comes just days after Saleh had signaled a critical change in his position, indicating a willingness to work with the Saudis again.

Are African Migrants Who Are Denied Access to European Countries Being Sold as Slaves?

A huge uproar developed when CNN published a video showing a slave auction of African migrants in Libya. See the Nov 20, 2017 article in the *New York Times*, [“UN Chief ‘Horrorified’ at Reports of Slave Auction in Libya.”](#) In a Nov 28 press release, [“High Commissioner for Refugees Calls Slavery, Other Abuses in Libya an ‘Abomination,’”](#) Filippo Grandi said,

more than 116,000 people had crossed the sea from North Africa to Italy in 2017, many of them refugees. The international community’s inability to prevent and resolve conflict was at the root of their flight, he explained, adding that they were exposed to appalling harm, including torture, rape, sexual exploitation, slavery and other forms of forced labour. More than 17,000 refugees and migrants were currently detained in Libya, and many more were held by traffickers under the protection of well known militias.

Check out *The Daily Beast’s* hard-hitting expose, [“When the Way Out of Boko Haram is an Ancient Slave Route.”](#)

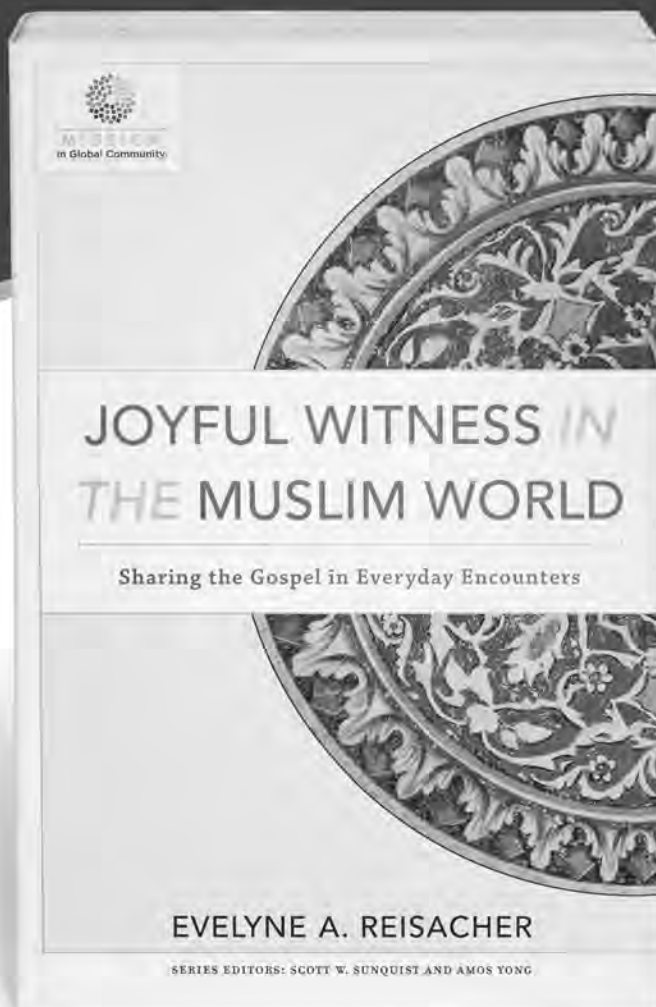
Two Books of Note

Don’t miss Darrell Whiteman’s review of [*Living in the Family of Jesus: Critical Contextualization in Melanesia and Beyond* \(*International Bulletin of Mission Research* Oct–Dec 2017.\)](#) Melanesia, Whiteman points out, is a great place to

test contextualization theories because “with less than nine million people, [Melanesia] is home to the world’s greatest linguistic and cultural diversity.” He goes on to mention that “one of the goals of *Living in the Family of Jesus* is to document concrete expressions of contextualization based on the metaphor of family, which is foundational to Melanesian societies.” As Jesus movements among Muslim peoples rise in number—many of them contextualized in extended family networks—it behooves us to learn from older (non-Muslim) movements elsewhere. Why did they occur? Did some totally disappear? If so, why? Whiteman recommends this book for Bible schools and seminaries in other parts of the world “who also face the need to connect the whole gospel to the deepest part of peoples’ worldviews.”

Rory MacKenzie’s new (Dec 2016) introductory textbook on Buddhism entitled [*God, Self, and Salvation in Buddhist Contexts*](#) also merits consideration. Kang San Tan, executive director of Asia CMS, calls it “the best Christian treatment on Buddhist worldviews to date.” Tan describes MacKenzie as “that rare person who combines profound faith in Christ and practical field experience with years of love and personal friendship with Buddhists.” From the Amazon blurb: “Informed by Karl Reichelt’s contextualized approach, the book advocates friendship with Buddhists but at the same time maintaining missionary encounter.” See also [Jens Bernhard’s article](#) (this issue) for a perspective on the problems that arise from different mission narratives among Buddhists. **IJFM**

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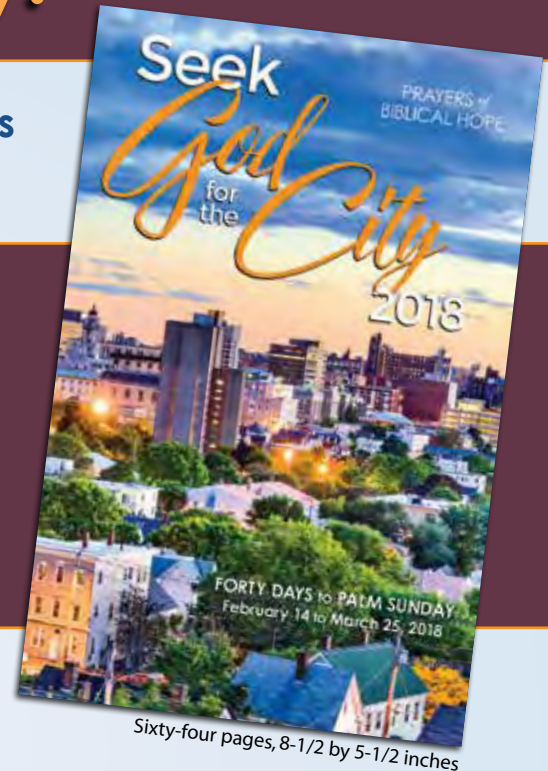
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