

Grassroots Theology

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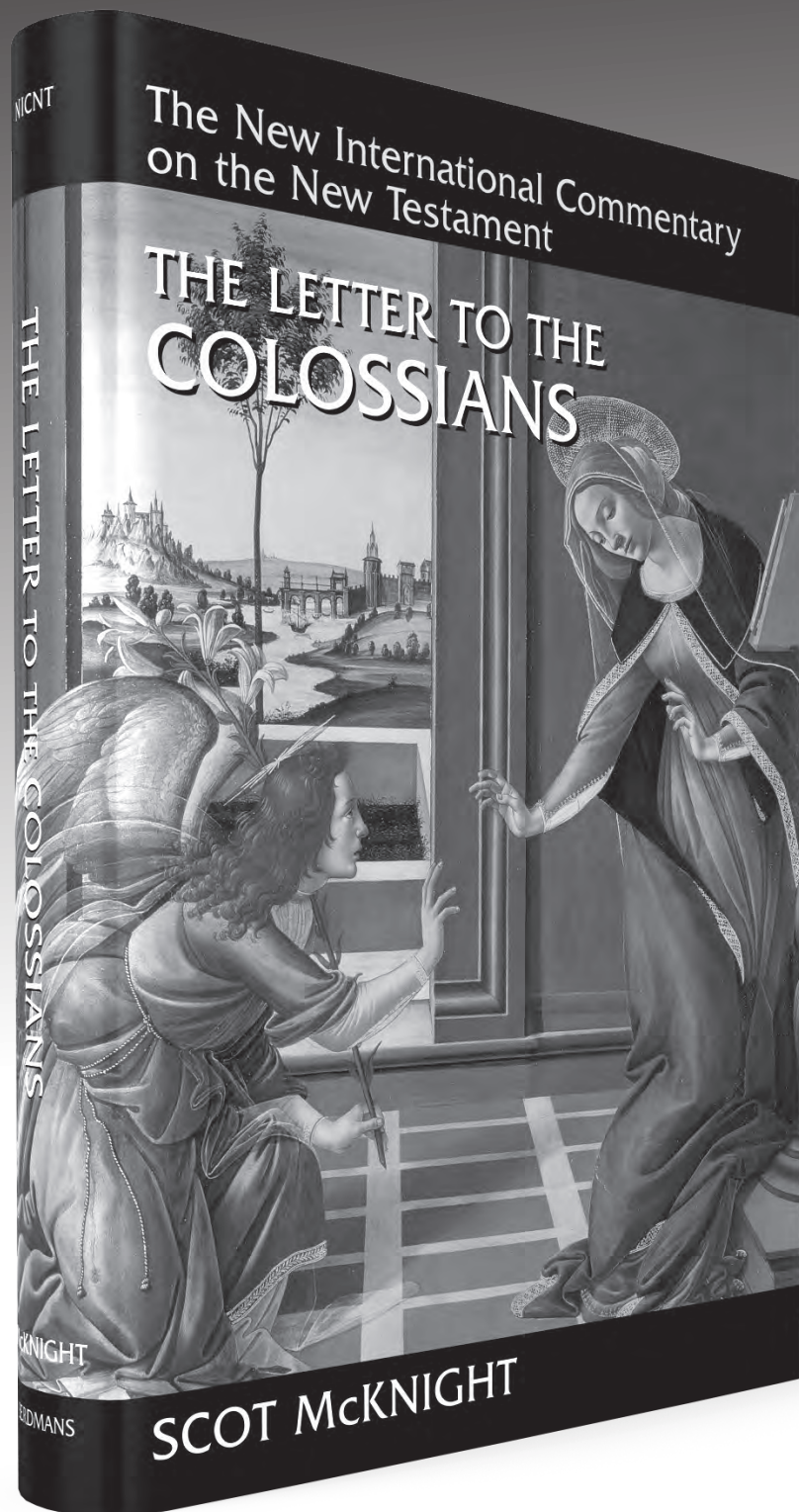
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Patrick, Muhammad, and "Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up"

In his recent call to "think the faith from the ground up,"¹ theologian Simon Chan has championed the exploration of "grassroots theology." He wants to free theology to hear the cultural themes of Asian folk religions, to integrate and adapt our historic faith to the ecclesial contexts of Asia. Chan frames the subject brilliantly and the authors in this issue of *IJFM* are scouting in that same direction.

One could say that mission forces theology to "look below." At its best, missiology will ground the theological imagination to the grassroots. This can create a wall of suspicion among theologians, however. While today fresh streams of global theology are loosening up our overly categorical Western theologies, it's our encounter with other religious worlds that still activates subconscious brake systems.

But let's consider Jesus. Did he "think the faith from the ground up?" Was he not that surprising prophetic voice who used parable and story to speak into the well-formulated theological world of the Jew? He reached down and used earthy pictures of water, bread, birth, vines, coins, pearls, and sheep gates to frame a grassroots theology. He took possession of his "folk-Judaism" and determined which cultural and religious themes might shape revelation from above.

Re-reading Chan's book reminded me of another historical comparison: Patrick of the Celtic north and Muhammad of the Arab Bedouin south. Both were situated in nomadic regions on the edge of the Roman Empire, where "barbarian" traditions and idolatrous religious practices were the norm. Despite similar contexts, these two theological agents were remarkably different. The type of Christianity that emerged in the Celtic north would "save" Western civilization,² whereas the ethnic monotheism that exploded out of the Arabian Desert would diverge and establish an Islamic civilization. A careful comparison could yield great insight into the contours of a discerning grassroots theology. The renaissance of studies in both of these historical contexts begs for it.

Centuries after a sophisticated Greek theology had emerged at the grassroots of a Greco-Roman world, Patrick dared to think the faith from the Celtic ground up. But when that Greek theology wove itself into the borderlands of Muhammad's folk-religious world, there was no Patrick to be found—no bilingual, bicultural disciple of Jesus who knew the Scriptures and who could

Editorial continued on p. 52

The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal's editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology or the society's executive committee.

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carefully navigate an Arab-Bedouin worldview. A responsible agent of mission would have seen that the Semitic mind was not inclined to the metaphysical reflection of the Greek. That's the difference between the Celtic north and the Arab south, between the impact of Patrick and that of Muhammad: the presence of a sound and sensitive apostle of grassroots theology. But I defer to historians and their more careful analysis of these two historical contexts.³

So how should we engage in grassroots theology on the frontiers of mission today? The statement of the Lausanne Theology Working Group (2010) offered a starting point for sensitive engagement with other religious worlds:

This phenomenon of following Jesus within diverse religio-cultural traditions needs careful biblical, theological and missiological evaluation. We are well aware that it is a complex phenomenon, drawing conflicting evaluative responses, and we do not seek to take a position on it here. Our point merely is that it is a challenge that affects not only those who become followers of Jesus in the context of what are commonly called "other faiths." The dangers of syncretism are worldwide, and so

are the complexities of careful, biblically faithful contextualization... We need to repent of approaches to people of other faiths that reject or denounce their existing religion as wholly evil or satanic, with no effort to understand, critique and learn, and to discern through genuine encounter, friendship and patient dialogue where there may be bridges for the gospel.⁴

Each article in this issue offers a perspective on what's involved in a theology "from below." As one who ably speaks to an emerging generation, Don Grigorenko breaks down the crucial elements in bridging theology across cultures (p. 63). Alan Howell and Andrew Montgomery highlight a feature of African folk-Islam that they believe should help frame an African Christology (p. 79). William Dyrness, our plenary speaker at the EMS/ISFM conference last year, examines the theological brake-systems in our historic encounter with different religious currents (p. 53). And, finally, Michael Kilgore helps us face how the global alignment or clash of civilizations shapes Muslim identity at the grassroots (p. 69).

Dwight Baker's comprehensive review of David Hollinger's *Protestants Abroad* (p. 90) boomerangs our focus to the grassroots of the American mission. This historical analysis will stimulate similar insight across today's international sending base.

Hope to interact with you further at this year's ISFM/EMS in Dallas (October 12–14). Registration will open June 1st at emsweb.org.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (IVPress Academic, Downers Grove, 2014).

² A reference to Thomas Cahill's *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (Random House, 1995).

³ Chapter 6 of George G. Hunter's *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Abington Press: Nashville, 2000) is a good place to begin.

⁴ "The Whole World: Statement of the Theology Working Group: Beirut 2010" in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, vol 34 no 3 (July 2010), 200–201.

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.

Can We Do Theology from Below? A Theological Framework for Indigenous Theologies

by William Dyrness

"[John] Mackay helped us to construct a new Latin American spiritual history without rejecting our cultural roots, and start a 'dialogue of love' with our culture, without departing from the biblical roots of our faith." José Míguez Bonino¹

In his influential book *A Secular Age*, Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor has described the modern social imaginary in the West. Taylor claims that whether we realize it or not, modern people in the West all live within an immanent frame. This is how he describes it:

And so we come to understand our lives as taking place within a self-sufficient immanent order; or better, constellation of orders, cosmic, social and moral. . . . This understanding of our predicament has as background a sense of our history: we have advanced to this grasp of our predicament through earlier more primitive stages of society and self-understanding. In this process, we have come of age.²

Evangelicals have often responded to this with excessive hand wringing—just another attempt to deny the transcendent world, to close it off from God's direct activity. But, to my mind, Taylor's work does something of special interest to those of us committed to seeing the gospel take root in all the nations of the world. His primary purpose is to name the assumptions of many Western people, what he calls their *social imaginary*. This to my mind is essential to Christian witness in the West, and he is worth reading for that reason alone. But he has done more than this. What I suggest is that Taylor signals a possible sea change in the Western imagination. Taylor's focus on the immanent frame suggests that we might reimagine God not as a distant judge somewhere off in the heavens, but as the radically immanent Emmanuel—God with us, that the New Testament pictures for us. Considering the long term development of theology, we might put matters this way: we may finally be moving beyond the influence of Plato and the dualisms he proposed—of mind and body, spirit and matter and so on—a move that allows us to pay attention to the immanent presence and activity of God, by the Spirit, in our own history and that of others.

Let me linger on this point a bit. I would argue that for two thousand years Western theology has labored under the influence of Plato's metaphysics—that all the world is a shadow of some other world that is more real and certainly more important than this one. God and God's truth reside in this other world. This heritage over time has come to be connected with all kinds

Editor's Note: This article was first presented at the joint annual meeting of the International Society for Frontier Missiology and the Evangelical Missiological Society, in Dallas, Texas, October 16, 2017.

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of political, cultural, and even racial assumptions that we unconsciously carry with us in our missions' activity. Whatever the positive virtues of this heritage—which are the subject for another day—this lingering shadow has kept us from paying attention to the way God works not from the top down, but from below. As John put this in the first chapter of his Gospel (John 1:14): “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us”—God, as Eugene Peterson translated this, “has moved into the neighborhood.” If this is true, it means the gospel, like yeast, is meant to permeate our situation; God became one of us, to begin the process of transforming the creation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is something that Plato could never have imagined, indeed that he would have found incomprehensible. This “God with us” continues working from below by the Holy Spirit—that other comforter Christ promised, bringing creation to the end that God has prepared for it. If something like this is true, it seems to me the fundamental theological impulse should be to start not in the abstract realm of ideas, but with what God is doing in the everyday life of people. To tease out these ideas, I offer some historical observations about our Western history in order to show the way this history has actually *impeded* the development of indigenous theology, and continues to do so.

Conflating Transcendent and Universal

As we reflect together on the possibility of doing mission and theology from below, let me describe a major result of this lingering shadow that I hope we can overcome. In some fundamental sense, the top down model that follows from our Platonic heritage, has led us to *confuse the transcendent with the universal*. Because we say God is transcendent, it follows that everything we have come to believe to be true about God and salvation is universal—that is, true for all people and all times. Following Socrates (Plato's teacher), we have come through

our process of dialectic, what we call our hermeneutics, to the truth about things—to our equivalent of Plato's knowledge of the eternal unchanging ideas. This truth, since it reflects the unchanging forms—or in our case the transcendence of God, and the final truth contained in Scripture as we understand this—is necessarily universal. It is only a very short step from this to assuming that our accepted understanding of what we mean by atonement, or how we define precisely the two (or single) natures of Christ, or *our* biblical understanding of what the church should look like, are also universal—because there is a transcendent truth about these things. Of course, there *is* a truth of these things, but none of us (and certainly no culture



on its own) has finished discovering what this is, and we won't do so until we stand before the Lord and are finally given eyes to properly see what has been before our faces all along. We are all on the way, as Paul makes clear in Eph. 4: 11–16: the many gifts of the church are given for building up of the body of Christ, until we all come to the truth (the plural verb forms are emphatic in this passage), which Paul pointedly describes as a mature, corporate personhood.

The Communal Person and the Church

This conflation of transcendent and universal—reflecting our top down metaphysic—has particular application

to two realms which I want to mention briefly: our understanding of persons and of truth. First, this confusion has often led those of us from the West (and that includes all of us educated in Western schools) to assume that *certain social and political arrangements, because they appear to us to rest on foundations that we take to be biblical, must be universal*. Even if democracy isn't working so well in our own country, it surely should be the goal of all other countries; even if the neoliberal economic model is clearly showing strains and has resulted in massive injustices, it still should be the goal of economics everywhere. Many Christians are convinced that these Western arrangements have developed under the influence of Christian teaching that is dominant there. And there is in fact some evidence for this.³ But even if this were so, it does not follow that the same biblical teaching may not lead to other equally valid forms of social and political expression.

Because this is so important to our missions strategy, let me briefly unpack this unconscious baggage. Often we commend our institutions because we believe they tend to give people their dignity. But giving people their dignity does not necessarily mean that we give each individual the freedom to “decide things for themselves.” Here is where our assumptions about persons become influential. In the West, persons have come to be regarded as autonomous individuals who make decisions for themselves, and as a result, our evangelism and church planting have often assumed this view of the person.

But this leads me to ask: how might people in communal societies think about dignity and choice? I am convinced that we need to understand more deeply how democratic ideas are reinterpreted as they spread throughout the world into these other societies. How is forging a common future understood, for example, in India today? I would like our anthropologists to help

us understand what it is like for a communal democracy to develop—that is, how do people whose identity has been forged over centuries through various cultural and religious group practices, come to understand what it means to shape their own future? When I read in section 3 of the draft bill (Freedom of Religion 2017), tabled in August, 2017, by the Jharkhand government, that,

No person shall attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion / religious faith to another by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means, nor shall any person abet any such conversion, . . .⁴

I am sure that, though this certainly includes an unfounded prejudice against Christianity, it also shows evidence of political and cultural understandings and confusions developing during the last two hundred years, and is expressive of a long tradition of communal cultural values we need to learn about. Moreover, these ideas reflect deeply held values that will not change any time soon. Here is my question: how can we find ways to understand and accommodate ideas that are so deeply expressive of communal cultural values and that, in themselves, offer no direct challenge to the gospel? How can we honor deeply held cultural values that have developed over long periods of time and that express peoples' identities? How might the gospel be understood differently in these places? Answering questions like this is essential to the project of indigenous theologizing.

Let me give another example that has resulted from the research that Darren Duerksen and I have done for our forthcoming book *Discovering Church*.⁵ As we reviewed the emergence of the modern Western church in the light of its particular history, paying attention to how it came to be from below, it became clear to us that the model of church that Western missionaries took with them overseas was almost universally a product of the

That third generation of Christ followers define themselves as those “inviting others to the way of righteousness” in their communal Muslim society.

Reformation notion of the gathered church, as this was filtered through enlightenment categories (the “individual choice thing” again). If one accepts this narrative as somehow normative (i.e., that it is a universal expression of God and Scripture’s transcendence), then the obvious form of church that God wants is a voluntary society. When we uncovered this mostly overlooked assumption, many things started making sense. Why is it that many of the historically unchurched populations represent those places where the communal notions of culture are assumed and, thus, where the whole idea of a voluntary society is either non-existent, or incomprehensible? Maybe the resistance is not to “church,” but to our Western ideas of church; maybe because of our “sweet tooth” for transcendence, we have confused “the Body of Christ” with a “voluntary society”—that is, we have conflated our “transcendent understanding” with what is universal. Maybe followers of Christ from these places will help us see new ways of embodying Christ.

Muslim Philippines: A Communal Model

This became even more striking to us when we found examples in the Southern Philippines of “inclusively diverse communities,” that is, communal societies in which identities are formed in multiple ways. Followers of Christ there—now in the third generation—have found ways to define themselves within their communal Muslim society as those “inviting others to the way of righteousness,” in ways that recall the emerging church in the book of Acts. E. Acoba points out that the ethnic identity of the Bangsamoro, in its Muslim form, makes room for an understanding of community as inclusively diverse, that is, made up of

various tribal groupings.⁶ Note this is not pluralism in the Western sense, but embraces differences within a larger solidarity, that in turn finds its final form in the *Ummah*—the larger inclusively diverse Muslim community.

This unique context poses the question: how might this embrace of difference allow for formation of particular groupings of followers of Jesus (*Isa al Masih*)? Clearly these believers have found a place in their community where they can live out their new identity as followers of Christ. Acoba has called attention to the presence of multiple sets of hermeneutical approaches and even exegetical methods in these communities, suggesting a different application of their understanding of community as inclusively diverse.

Here we see a striking parallel to the emergence of ideas of freedom in Early Modern Europe. Living in this communal, premodern culture one could not expect to find complete freedom of choice or assembly, since these ideas did not develop until much later. Still, in the various principalities that made up Early Modern European society, as Peter Wilson has shown, there were spaces for various *liberties* to emerge. Perhaps, in a similar way, such spaces today can allow believers in communal societies like in Muslim Philippines to express their newfound freedom in Christ.⁷ While not envisioning church in a manner familiar to Westerners, these believers are able to exploit the possibilities inherent in their solidarities to join together and live out communally their witness to Christ.

Clearly, it is difficult to either specify the character or the direction of this project, because it is an emergent process with an open future. But there is a clear sense to these believers that God is present in a living way as they

gather and invite others to the way of righteousness (which is how they have come to define their community). Clearly, the notion of church as a voluntary society, in which members freely choose to join or not, is an inadequate model for their emerging notion of church. But at the same time, their assumptions about community as inclusively diverse provide spaces for them to come together around a study of Scripture, as they seek guidance in their commitment to follow Jesus in the midst of their newly non-subjugated Muslimhood. Notice that God is allowed to work in and through the cultural assumptions of the people, suggesting a possible model for an indigenous theology of the church.

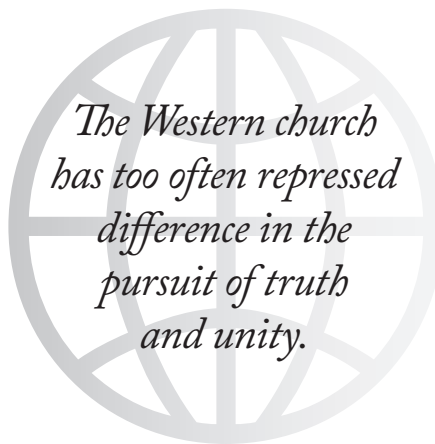
The Church and Immanent Histories

Secondly, consider our (mostly unconscious) assumption of the tenets of the Enlightenment—where the search for “true truth” takes the form of readily understood (and therefore universally valid) cognitive categories. Not only has this often obscured the biblical notion of truth as faithfulness, but it has made us insensitive to the way patterns of truth, of truth telling and of faithful living, are culturally determined—since again, our notions of truth, growing as they do out of our situated reading of Scripture, are assumed to be universal.

If God works from below, that is from within the cultural histories of a people, we might begin to explore what non-Western historians are calling “immanent histories”—like that which believers in Bangsamoro are living out. That is, freed from our false sense of security, we might be willing to listen and learn from peoples’ stories, that are existentially felt and lived, and that trace ways in which God (or the gods) have been active long before they have been exposed to any Western missionaries or Western forms of thinking. This may enable us to learn, as Paul put it when he quoted a Greek poet,

that “in him (God) we live and move and have our being”; or, as our African brothers and sisters put it, “I am because we are.” Similarly, we might profit from the way Hispanic theologians have described their identity as grounded in their concrete, embodied life together, not in abstract ideas. As Catholic theologian Roberto Goizueta put this for Hispanic people:

...it will not be sufficient to read books about Jesus Christ, or even study relevant dogmatic declarations or biblical texts—important as these might be. We must instead look first—even if not only—to the concrete, historical relationship to Jesus (often for example by actually touching his image and kissing his feet); [it



is here] that we come to know him, as it is in our concrete historical relationship with our families and friends that we come to know these.⁸

Now if we as Protestants object to this Catholic expression of faith, we may need to ask ourselves whether our Protestant way of worship has not been over-accommodated to its Reformation and Enlightenment setting. Because, what strikes me about Goizueta’s description is just how deeply it resonates with many other communal cultures that think in concrete rather than abstract terms.

Though happily there are exceptions that I will describe below, the history of the Western church has too often

repressed difference in the pursuit of truth and unity.⁹ I will begin with another example that Darren and I have uncovered in our research on the church. From the third century to the fifth (that is between Cyprian and Augustine—interestingly two North African bishops), the definition of the church gradually evolved. From Cyprian, who emphasized the character of the community and its behavior—especially the patience enjoined on that community in order to survive persecution—things changed with Augustine who defined the church by its spiritual and theological character—that it was “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” as the Nicene Creed phrased it. But in the century between these two theologians it was Cyril of Alexandria who taught that the church was constituted by a mystical unity in Christ—and this mystical unity could guarantee its righteousness.¹⁰ This seemed at the time a reasonable conclusion because it allowed church leadership to be more tolerant to the obvious imperfection of its members, who were joining in such large numbers from Roman society after the conversion of Constantine. The church’s purity was understood to reside in the risen and glorified Christ. Notice that while the earlier Bishop Cyprian defined believers by particular standards of behavior—from below as it were—the latter Cyril began to describe “church” in philosophical and spiritual categories—from above. Moreover, this soon became a consensus that was enforced by the imperial power.

In the fifth century, Augustine, the famous Bishop of Hippo, became the dominant influence on ideas about the church. All sections of the church owe a great deal to this great North African bishop, whose theological perspective continues to guide many. Under the influence of Cyril’s theology, which was shaped by the Middle Platonism of the time, Augustine came to define the church in the theological terms of Nicea and Cyril, from above—its purity was guaranteed by

its mystical unity with Christ. But the Donatists, representing the indigenous Berber community of Augustine's own North African setting, chose to follow Cyprian and defined the church as a truly righteous community. Both of these ecclesiological perspectives are surely valid ways of defining the church, but Augustine could not tolerate this difference, even among his own neighbors. Early in his life a more tolerant Augustine had written: "I am displeased that schismatics are violently coerced to communion by the force of any secular power." But late in life, in his *Retractions*, he admitted he had changed his mind, and wrote,

I had not yet learned either how much evil their impunity would dare or to what extent the application of discipline could bring about their improvement.¹¹

Bound as he was by the dichotomies of his Middle Platonism, Augustine could argue that patience and love were interior virtues that one needed to cultivate, but that meanwhile the state was justified in imposing its truth by violence. What was lost was the indigenous impulse carried by the local Berber culture, a motivation that sought actual purity and defined sin as pollution. In other words, the process of indigenous theologizing was overridden.

Medieval Reaction to Grassroots Theology

The medieval period was, if anything, even more opposed to indigenous expressions of Christianity. This of course expressed its communal boundedness and the political structures developed to support this. But it also reflected a particular theological orientation; all this was happening while the magisterial theologians of that period began to formulate their transcendent categories of theology. There is a general consensus that this rich and important theological reflection was deeply influenced by the recovered treatises of classical (Greek) philosophy—Aristotle especially but

T*he indigenous impulse of the local Berber culture was lost, a motivation that sought actual purity and defined sin as pollution.*

also Augustine's Platonism. These same influences also funded the mis-siological response to militant forms of Islam coming to their doorstep in Spain—consider that the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas Aquinas' second most important treatise, was written to prepare missionaries to confront Islam in Spain.

Meanwhile, as a means of keeping the medieval church pure (or to reform it) the church began formulating more violent means of protecting this doctrinal purity. R. I. Moore has argued that all the medieval heresies that developed were related in one way or another to the growing desire for spiritual purity and for escape from the evils of the world, and to the equally strong and increasing sense that the church was not being true to its spiritual mission—that it had failed in fundamental ways.¹² These emerging movements in many ways were replaying the struggle between the Donatists and Augustine. Moore notes that the increasing wealth of society had often corrupted the church and its leadership and the people quite naturally began to look elsewhere for religious guidance. It was, in part, the failure of the religious authorities that promoted heretical groups, or at least encouraged them in the direction of heresy.¹³

But the second claim by Moore, developed in his more recent book *The War on Heresy*,¹⁴ is more troubling. He asserts that the very process of the church's efforts to reform itself led to mechanisms of control that inevitably entailed violence. In this endeavor, the church was actually following the lead of its most famous teacher, St. Augustine. The process began in 1160 when five heretics were burned in Cologne, only the second execution in the seven centuries since the fall of the Roman

Empire. Moore claims this process culminated in the famous Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and produced a full blown "persecuting society." The canons of this council encouraged prelates to liquidate heresy in their regions—even as it required the faithful to make an annual confession. Thus, this movement toward reform was also, at the same time, a precursor of the Inquisition.

However one judges Moore's work,¹⁵ the ironies that he pinpoints are compelling. The heresies that developed, or, if Moore is right, were actually sparked, were all in the service of a piety that sought real holiness and deliverance from the trials of life on earth. But the response of the church to these movements, which can be understood at best as attempts to reform itself, only increased the systematic persecution of those seen as deviant. Does this, Moore wonders, suggest an intention to destroy the ability of local populations to display the difference of understanding and acting that their indigenous traditions had given them? In other words, is this part of the continuing preference for doing theology from above rather than from the grassroots?

These efforts at reform by violence not only failed to account for regional differences—like the Hussites in Bohemia, or the Cathars in France—they also fueled the entire sad history of the Crusades. This pursuit of a pure and unified church led to attempts not only to recover the Holy Land from its Muslim rulers, but also came to include campaigns directed against residents of Europe, who for a mixture of religious, economic or political reasons were considered pagans or heretics. Whatever deviance was perceived in these groups, these initiatives ensured that the indigenous

wisdom these groups represented was given no account. Subsequent to the disastrous fourth crusade, which virtually destroyed Constantinople as the capital of Eastern Christianity (1204), it would take almost 300 years to recover the riches of the Greek tradition of Christianity. The attacks on Islam themselves represented a certain hypocrisy, considering all the Western church had gained from the Muslim philosophers in Spain. Indeed, the Greek philosophical and scientific heritage had passed into Europe by means of the Muslim (and Jewish) philosophers in Spain. Whatever the strengths or weaknesses of this medieval Christendom, it is uncontested that it was this form of Christianity that conquistadores took with them to Latin America. As Enrique Dussel notes, such was the confidence in this Christian civilization that the crusades against the Moors and the conquest of Latin America appeared natural. “It was,” Dussel notes, “the same Latin, Hispanic Christendom which came to America.”¹⁶

Small wonder that theological reflection from the grassroots, or dialogue with other religious traditions, was not on the agenda. And, unfortunately, missionaries originally carried the Christendom model of missions with them as they sailed for Asia or Africa. As Jehu Hanciles has written:

The Western missionary enterprise was marked by the dye of Christendom in its fundamental assumptions, operational strategy and long-term objectives.¹⁷

While Hanciles surely oversimplifies a complex history, it is incontestable that, in Latin America, the missionary program was often allied with territorial expansion, pursued with the collaboration of political authorities, and was framed in terms of spreading Christian civilization around the world—taking with them this confusion of the transcendent with the universal. But this meant, as Willie James Jennings has pointed out, that they also carried with them the top down model of doing theology that

ignores the religious and cultural realities on the ground. As Jennings argues, rather than learning from other worlds where missionaries went they “translated these worlds into the old world of Europe.”¹⁸ As a result, too often the objects of mission were not encouraged to carry out what John Mackay calls a “dialogue of love” with their own traditions and history.

Of course, during all these periods there were exceptions, those who sought to listen and learn—I will describe examples below. One thinks of Bartolme de las Cases in Latin America or Matteo Ricci in China. But these were often marginalized by the mainstream Christian powers. Consider the experience of Ricci in 17th and



18th century China. The achievements of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) are well known, but what is often overlooked is the ecclesial machinations that led to the frustration of his contextual efforts. The learning of the Jesuit followers of Ricci impressed the ruling elite to such an extent that they were put in charge of the royal observatory, and even more significantly, led the Qing Emperor Kang Xi (1661–1722) to issue an edict permitting the practice of Christianity in China. Since the Europeans were quiet and did no harm, the Emperor declared,

we decide therefore that all temples dedicated to the Lord of Heaven... ought to be preserved, and it may be permitted to all who wish to worship

this God to enter these temples, offer him incense, and perform the ceremonies practiced according to ancient custom by the Christians.¹⁹

But denominational jealousy being what it is, the Dominicans and the Franciscans accused the Jesuits of heresy. Despite Kang’s support for the Jesuits, the Pope sided with the accusers in 1742 and declared the Chinese rites incompatible with Christianity. Kang’s successor returned the favor and proscribed Christianity as heterodox. Sinologist Roderick MacFarquhar comments on this episode: “Christianity thereby lost its best chance of emulating Buddhism and becoming accepted as a Chinese religion”—and, I add, Christianity has suffered over its foreignness ever since.

A Theology Grounded in People

Fortunately, from the time of Paul himself, there have been others who have insisted that theology had to begin with the people. For it is the people themselves that have the deepest sense of their own identity and its meaning. This existential feel for history José Rabasa has described as “immanent history,”²⁰ and I would argue that this immanent history is always the starting point for vibrant expressions of biblical truth—as an expression of something new in that place, and not an import from without.

In the late sixth century, St. Colomba of Iona (d. 597) became famous for his encounters with the local magicians—the cultural experts of his day. One of the ways he engaged them was to always carry with him a small “white stone” which had featured in one of his miracles. Colomba would have called this a “cretair,” which was the Old Irish word for “amulet or talisman”; but this same word, in a fascinating semantic shift, came later to mean a “Christian relic.” Ironically it was this assimilation of the facts on the ground (of these pagan faiths) that allowed Christianity to appear in its

subsequent history as an “indigenous” faith in that part of the world.

About the same time, Pope Gregory the Great discovered that a Bishop in France by the name of Serenus was destroying all the pagan sites and the symbols engraved on these. Around 600 he wrote the French Bishop:

We commend you, indeed, for your zeal against anything made with hands being an object of adoration; but we signify to you that you ought not to have broken these images. For pictorial representation is made use of in Churches for this reason; that such as are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books. Your Fraternity therefore should have both preserved the images and prohibited the people from adoration of them, to the end that both those who are ignorant of letters might have wherewith to gather a knowledge of the history, and that the people might by no means sin by adoration of a pictorial representation.²¹

In this case, Gregory’s pastoral sensitivities set the tone for the relationship with the local populations and their religious practices, encouraging a “dialogue of love” with culture that allowed Christianity to be perceived as truly indigenous. This allowed a truly indigenous theological tradition to develop that took account of local beliefs and values—who now doubts that Christianity is native to Europe? (How often we forget that Christianity was an import into Europe—it was not the native religion!)

Rereading Scripture and Indigenous Faith: An Example

Let me offer a contemporary example, the Zapatista among the Mayan people of Chiapas, as a place where a truly indigenous expression of Christianity is emerging. The rural poverty of Chiapas in southern Mexico (until 1824 a part of Guatemala), resulting from both the 16th century *encomienda* system and the subsequent *finca* system of debt peonage, helped fuel the Mexican revolution in 1910. This led to forms of communal

I am struck with how often a fresh reading of Scripture has been associated with the successful expansion of Christianity.

ownership of the land (*ejido*), and more recently to revival movements of indigenous Mayan communities. The latter was, in part, sparked by the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Cristobal—led by Bishop Samuel Ruiz—calling in 1974 for an Indigenous Congress of Mayan groups who began claiming their rights, which included the formation of the movement known as EZLN (Ejercito Zapatistas de Liberacion Nacional). The contemporary Zapatista movement owes its origin to the New Year’s Day uprising in 1994 when the EZLN took on the Mexican army in 12 days of inconclusive fighting. Since then the Zapatista movement, with a substantial number of women in leadership, has developed into a non-violent effort to collaboratively create self-sustaining and productive communities that resist both the global neoliberal consensus and the oppressive control tactics of the Mexican government. A significant part of this movement called *Las Abejas* (The Bees) is intentionally Christian in its orientation.

What is interesting to me are the multiple—religious, cultural and political—repertoires that the movement selectively marshals. Underlying the movement is the widespread commitment especially among women leadership to Catholic Christianity.²² As noted, the Catholic diocese of San Cristobal, and its revered Bishop Ruiz, already in the 1970s introduced the impulses of Vatican II and of liberation theology to the people. Significantly it was in the small Bible study groups, where many women learned to read, that the Scriptures shaped their vision of change. In the 1970s and 1980s, Bishop Ruiz organized Bible study groups in each community. The women credit their biblical study for their ambition to claim their rights. As one woman told researcher Hilary Klein: “We learned organizing by studying the *palabra de Dios*”—as they told her:

“we drew, sculpted, and sang our way to empowerment.” As the women organized against alcoholism, and for access to health care and education, Hilary Klein reports, “the women authorities were singing; the men were scratching their heads.”²³ Though these Christian women did not see any barrier to joining the EZLN cause, they did resist any form of violence as a condition of their participation. The specifically Christian component of the movement has developed into a separate organization, mentioned previously as *Las Abejas*, founded in 1992 (two years before the Uprising, and well known after the December 22, 1997, Acteal Massacre when 45 of them were killed by state police while they prayed—the majority elderly, women and children).

What can be learned from these brief reflections on our Christian mission? A careful review of the evidence suggests several benefits follow from pursuing this indigenous theological and biblical method. First, I am struck with how often such a fresh reading of Scripture has been associated with some of the most successful efforts for the expansion of Christianity. I am thinking of the proliferating insider movements, but also the growth of Pentecostalism throughout the world, which often reflect indigenous readings (and translation) of Scripture. But, equally important, these efforts lead to fresh insights into biblical truth. For it is always the immanent sensitivity and wisdom that is illumined by the reading of Scripture within that history. And in what may be the most telling virtue, I am impressed that it is where the immanent history has been honored and celebrated that Christianity is perceived as being indigenous! As Andrew Walls indicates:

New translations, by taking the word about Christ into a new area,

applying it to new situations, have the potential actually to reshape and expand the Christian faith. Instead of defining a universal “safe area” where certain lines of thought are prescribed and others proscribed or ignored (the natural outcome of a once-for-all, untranslatable authority), translatability of the Scriptures potentially starts *interactions* of the word about Christ with new areas of thought and custom.²⁴

Where such practices have not developed Christianity labors under the stigma of a foreign religion.

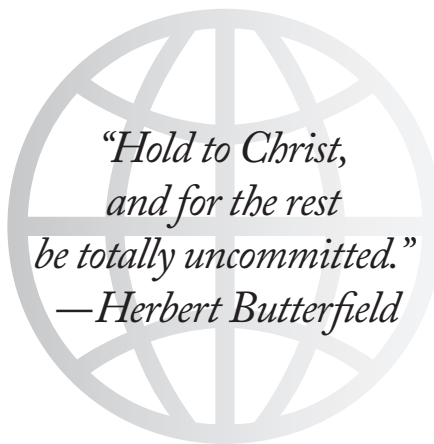
The Inescapable Syncretic Process

The response to such examples, of course, is the worry about syncretism. Though this term has a largely negative resonance for most Evangelicals, perhaps we need to distinguish good syncretism from bad. As my examples illustrate, how important, indeed inescapable, syncretic, or perhaps better, synthetic processes have been to the spread and vitality of the Christian movement. This worry often overlooks how thoroughly syncretic our own version of Christianity has become. In the conclusion of my book, *Insider Jesus*, I make the observation that the theological anthropology in Western theology cannot be understood apart from its roots in Aristotle and Plato as well as biblical exegesis. Biblical anthropology has long insisted that the Christian hope involves an integrated soul and body, not simply an immortal soul existing separately from the body. Now this is clearly a biblical idea, but as we have framed this in our theology, it is also an Aristotelian idea. In fact, A. N. Williams has argued that in its detailed elaboration in Western theology during the Middle Ages, this conception owes *more* to Aristotle than the Bible. But, she argues, this is not a case of pagan philosophy subverting Christianity (i.e., syncretism), but it is rather an example of philosophy having been “co-opted to underscore a deeply Christian view.”²⁵ So our own understanding of the body and soul is deeply syncretistic, and that is

not an entirely bad thing, even if it carries the liabilities I have pointed out.

But what might it look like if we began to read these same biblical passages about the body and the soul in Mayan categories rather than Aristotelian ones? Consider how the anthropologist John Watanabe describes the Mayan understanding of the person:

Having a soul means behaving in sensible ways, not just mechanically cleaving to established ways. Soul indeed demands mastery of cultural convention, but this need precludes neither personal opportunism nor cultural innovation as long as one has the eloquence to persuade others of one’s propriety. Although souls unequivocally situate individuals within a community, they



constitute that community more as an inclusive, continually negotiated ground of social interaction than as an exclusive nexus of essential traits or institutions.

Watanabe goes on to say,

I would suggest that greater appreciation of these ‘emergent’ qualities of Maya souls might well clarify the tenacity of Maya ethnic identity in the face of rapid, increasingly violent, social change.²⁶

Not only might this provide windows into biblical truth for the Zapatistas, but it might make a contribution to fresh global conversations on a truly communal (and therefore more biblical) understanding of the human person in community.

A “Dialogue of Love” with Culture

In conclusion, I want to return to the quote of Míguez Bonino at the top of this paper. Notice that this Latin American theologian believes that to construct a new spiritual history, his people need to carry on a “dialogue of love” (quoting John MacKay, the great Presbyterian missionary, and later President of Princeton Seminary). But this must be done, Míguez notes “without departing from the biblical roots of our faith.” Because our work is conditioned, nourished, and directed by these “biblical roots,” we need not fear a loving dialogue with all that people know and grow to love. The reason for this confidence lies not only in the power of the biblical word, but equally on the power of the Spirit that works both in the teaching and preaching of that word and in the lives and communities of people who will hear and receive it.

Often in thinking about the gospel and culture, I am reminded of the conclusion of Herbert Butterfield in his 1950 book *Christianity and History*: “Hold to Christ, and for the rest be totally uncommitted.”²⁷ This, of course, is ultimately impossible, but it does suggest something of the shape of our relative commitments. Moreover, this Christ is the physical and historical expression of the Creator God, who by the Spirit is—all around us—moving creation to the place where “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). And it is this Christ who reminded the disciples in some of his final words, how far God’s vision exceeds our own:

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:14–15) **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ José Míguez Bonino, quoted in John Sinclair, prologue to *Un esocés con alma latina* (Mexico: CUP, 1990), 15. I owe this reference to Cory Willson.

² *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 543.

³ See the important argument of Robert Woodberry that democracy, education, and liberal economics have flourished in places where Protestant missionaries (whom he calls “conversionist”) worked. “The Missionary Roots and Liberal Democracy” *American Political Science Review*, 106 (May, 2012): 244–274.

⁴ Evangelical Fellowship of India, report of August 3, 2017.

⁵ *Discovering Church* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, Forthcoming, 2018).

⁶ “Towards an Understanding of Inclusivity in Contextualizing into Philippine context,” in M. P. Maggay, ed., *The Gospel in Culture: Contextualizing Issues through Asian Eyes* (Manila: OMF Literature/ISACC, 2013), 416–450. At p. 417. For what follows see pp. 424–426.

⁷ See Peter Wilson, *Heart of Europe: A History of the Holy Roman Empire* (Harvard, 2016), 265.

⁸ *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 54n12, 168.

⁹ I have described this history in greater detail in W. Dyrness, “Listening for Fresh Voices in the History of the Church,” in *Teaching Global Theologies: Power and Praxis*, ed. Pui Lan Kwok, et al. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), from which this section is adapted.

¹⁰ On these differences see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* (New York: Harper, 1978 rev), 400–406.

¹¹ *Retractions*, 31, quoted and discussed in Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Baker, 2016), 289.

¹² R. I. Moore, *Origins of European Dissent* (New York: St. Martins, 1977), 44.

¹³ Malcomb Lambert argues for example that the Waldensians were drawn into heresy by the inadequacies of the church authorities. *Medieval Heresy* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1992), 67.

¹⁴ R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2012).

¹⁵ The review by David Collins gives some idea of the debate it has inspired.

“Collateral Damage,” *America*, November 12, 2012: 25.

¹⁶ Dussel, *The History of the Church in Latin America: An Interpretation*. (San Antonio: Latin American Cultural Center, 1974), 15.

¹⁷ Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African migration and the transformation of the West* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 96.

¹⁸ *The Christian Imagination* (Yale, 2010), 156–160.

¹⁹ Roderick MacFarquhar, “China’s Astounding Religious Revival,” *New York Review of Books*, June 8, 2017, 36. Quote which follows is from this page as well.

²⁰ José Rabasa, *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista insurgency, and the spectre of history* (University of Pittsburgh, 2010), 6–7.

²¹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2 (New York: Scribners, 1900), Vol. XII, 53, ii/xiii. (Schaff and Wace 1867).

²² For what follows see Hilary Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista women’s stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2015), 5–40.

²³ *Compañeras*, 53–54, 69. Klein notes that only gradually did women become catechists.

²⁴ Andrew Walls, “The Translation Principle in Christian History,” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 29. I owe this citation to Elizabeth Gill.

²⁵ A. N. Williams, “The Theology of the Comedy,” in *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge University Press, 2007, 2nd ed), 210.

²⁶ John Watanabe in “Elusive Essences,” in *Ethnographic Encounters in Southern Mesoamerica*, eds. V. Bricker and G. Gossen (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 273.

²⁷ Butterfield, Herbert, *Christianity and History* (New York: Scribner’s, 1950), 146.

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—Miriam Adeney, PhD, Associate Professor of Missiology, Seattle Pacific University

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Reconceiving Theology: Influencing Factors to the Formation of Theology

by Donald Grigorenko

“Imagine if Millard Erickson was born in Uzbekistan! Or, Wayne Grudem in Malaysia! Or, John Piper in Kuwait! Or, Tim Keller in Ethiopia! What would their theology look like?”¹

I stumbled on this set of questions on a web page and it generated a batch of further questions for me. Of course, these authors are regarded by many evangelicals as theological spokesmen of our American evangelical movement. So, what *would* their theology look like? Well, I don’t know. But I can say with some confidence that it would look quite different from what they have formulated in their American context. The next question is *why* would a theology crafted by an Uzbek Erickson, Malaysian Grudem, Kuwaiti Piper, or an Ethiopian Keller be different? I believe this is the question that needs careful attention. And our answer will not only account for these “contextual theologies,” but will also lay bare the nature of theology and cause us to reflect upon how we understand our own theology.

Some may say that given the same passion, interest and a good translation of the Bible, each one of these thinkers would have come up with precisely the same theology (although in a different language). I don’t think many would defend this view. So, what are some of the factors that contribute to make a Piperian Kuwaiti theology distinct? My goal in this article is to outline a few of the key factors influencing the formation of a theology. This is not an exhaustive list. I like to think of these factors as resources and we’ll touch on three of them: language, concepts, and relevant questions.

First, we look at language. Language deeply impacts what and how we communicate. But even more significant for our study, “language offers to its speakers a ready-made interpretation of the world, truly a *Weltanschauung*, a metaphysical word-picture.”² Our native languages offer a rich God-given toolbox for expressing our thoughts and, importantly, truth about God, humanity and our world. Yet the tools that we have been given are not identical. Many have learned and functioned in a second language. They have

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struggled, as I have, with an idea in one language while seeking to adequately express it in another. And the problem is not simply one of vocabulary. The language itself “shapes” the thought.

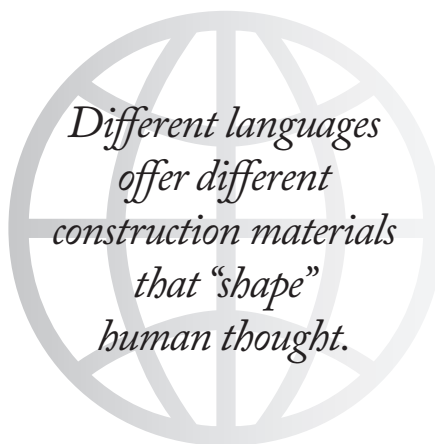
An analogy might help to clarify the importance of language as a resource in expressing concepts. When I was a child, there was a popular building toy called Tinker Toys. Tinker Toys were made of wood and came in connectable pieces including different lengths of rods and round disks with holes into which the rods could be inserted. From Tinker Toys, I constructed cars, planes, and buildings. My children grew up with Legos which are plastic interconnecting blocks of various shapes, sizes and colors. From Legos, my children constructed cars, planes and buildings. But a car assembled with Tinker Toys and one assembled with Legos are not the same. Each car has features, functions and also limitations that reflect the construction material. In the same way, different languages offer different sets of construction materials or resources that “shape” human thought and expression.

The influence of language on theological formulation can be illustrated by the early Christological controversies which addressed the relationship between the human and divine nature in Christ. Nicaea (325 AD) addressed the full divinity of Christ contra Arius. Then Constantinople (381) condemned Apollinarius and his denial of the full humanity of Christ. Then the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) finally addressed the relationship of the two natures. The conclusion of Chalcedon was that Christ had two natures and one person. On one side were the Monophysites who affirmed only one blended divine-human nature, and on the other, so the story goes, were the Nestorians who were said to separate the man Jesus from the divine Word such that the Christ dwelt in the man Jesus. More recently, this portrayal of the views of

the Syriac church and Nestorius have been called into question. Apart from the fact that the portrayal of Nestorius’ views that has endured is that of his enemies in Alexandria, the question of the linguistic resources available to the Greek and Latin church versus those available to the Syriac church are casting fresh light on these debates. Brock states that,

One of the reasons for the difference of opinion on Christology lay in the different understandings given to certain of the key terms.³

And in these councils the terminology was of utmost importance. Terms such as *physis*, *ousia* and *hypostasis* were common in the Western church discourse on Christology and had



evolved into technical terms which stretched their meaning. The Syriac church on the other hand had its own vocabulary (*keyane* or *keiane* for “nature” in Syriac and *prosopon* “person” in Greek) and the semantic ranges of the paired terms were far from a complete match.⁴ The consequence was misunderstanding on both sides of what the other was affirming, and we know the rest of the story. The winners write the history (politics and theology!). Nestorius and the church of the East were labeled as heretics and dropped from the story of the church. Recently additional writings of Nestorius have been discovered and many historians have concluded that his Christology was within the boundaries of orthodoxy.⁵

Language informs our theology and we are tempted to caricature or condemn theology that does not conform to our formulas.

Closely associated with language are the ways in which arguments are formed in different languages and their associated cultures. In 1966 Robert Kaplan published his *Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education*⁶ which continues to be referenced especially in ESL and EFL research, and teaching English for academic purposes. There he maps five patterns of discourse or argument that he contends are characteristic of different languages and cultures. Kaplan opened the door to the consideration of language and culture in the examination of rhetoric and discourse. More recently, Ulla Connor and others have carried this consideration further under the label “intercultural rhetoric.”⁷ Languages and cultures have preferred ways of expressing thoughts, ideas and arguments. These discourses shape linguistic expression and argument. I will illustrate with a story.

While living on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal, I developed a friendship with a native Nepali named Ramesh whose house was a mile from mine. Ramesh was a keen follower of Christ and desired that his fellow Nepali believers be well grounded in the teaching of the Bible. Ramesh was well equipped to help the Nepali church. He was a scholar with a PhD in New Testament Studies from Oxford University. Ramesh was teaching in a Bible college in Kathmandu and was working through Paul’s letter to the Romans. I recall an insightful conversation I had with him about his teaching experience. He expressed that he was not “connecting” with his students as they labored paragraph by paragraph through the letter. Students were not performing well. This frustration led him to change his tactics. Rather than developing the argument of a paragraph inductively word by

word, clause by clause, progressively adding the pieces together linearly as he had been taught by his English graduate work, he began each new paragraph with a lesson which put the whole paragraph together in a way that related it to life. He then progressively added the technical details of the text to support the main idea. According to Kaplan, the English mode of argument begins at the beginning and takes a direct path to building to a conclusion, piece by piece, point by point. “English writing tends to favor linear organization, while other languages often take a less direct form.”⁸ Ramesh had the insight to recognize that his students, learning in Nepali and in a South Asian culture, were accustomed to beginning with broad strokes and cycling down to the details. Kaplan argues that these “contrasting rhetorics” are learned patterns characteristic of various languages.⁹

Beyond language and discourse, genre influences theological expression. In different cultures, there are designated types of literature for different purposes in communication. There are textual cues that tip us off that we are reading a particular genre of literature. When we encounter a “once upon a time” we conclude that this is a fairy tale and read on with that expectation. If we open a technical manual for Microsoft Windows and the first sentence begins with “once upon a time,” we will look back at the cover wondering what is going on. Contemporary theology reads like normal-language prose with the addition of a wider theological vocabulary, much like this article. But this convention was not always the case. I recall my first efforts in reading Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa*. The first challenge was to understand the organization of the work. Then there was the learning curve of catching on to what Thomas was doing under each Question with “Objections,” “On the Contrary,” “I answer that,” and “Replies.” And this was a text for *beginning* theology students. It was an adventure

If we open a manual for Microsoft Windows and the first sentence begins with “once upon a time,” we wonder what’s going on.

in a different theological genre. It was like encountering a “once upon a time” where it should not have been.

Samuel Moffett provides examples of differing theological genre from the *Odes of Solomon* of the Church of the East. It is theology as poetry:

His Word is with us in all our way
The Saviour who gives life and does
not reject (us).
The Man who humbled Himself,
But was exalted because of His own
righteousness . . .
And light dawned from the Word
That was before time in Him.
The Messiah in truth is one.
And He was known before the founda-
tions of the world,
That He might give life to persons for-
ever by the truth of His name.¹⁰

The Western church preferred a theology of the Trinity expressed in precise rational discourse using technical terms. The Greek Fathers described the Trinity as a divine dance—*perichoresis*.¹¹

Second, concepts are resources in the construction of theology. The fact that theology draws on the conceptual resources at hand in a particular time and place is not at issue. How and to what extent is really the question. The question is not new. Recall Tertullian’s declaration: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” Well as it turns out, quite a lot. We do not begin the task of theological formulation with a conceptual blank slate. We have conceptions of reality and how it works already installed as a kind of conceptual operating system. We gain these conceptions largely through enculturation but we can add to or adjust these resources through study, both formal and informal. Although we are not held hostage to this slate of conceptual building materials, what we

need to do is be aware of them and use them critically. They should be a servant not a master.

Through the history of the church, philosophy provided a framework for theological expression. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria, contra Tertullian, explicitly assembled his theology on a Neo-Platonic foundation. Plato was a favored resource for many early theologians, so much so that various accounts were proposed of how Plato arrived at his thought. Was he enlightened, inspired or did he plagiarize the Jewish scriptures as Clement argued? The genealogy of Plato in theology can be traced from the second century, through Augustine and on to the formulations of the Reformers. Augustine in his *Confessions* (Book VII, Ch. 20) is explicit that by beginning with Plato, *and then* proceeding to the scriptures, he was able to solve his theological puzzles. Later Thomas Aquinas built his *Summa* on the superstructure of Aristotle, “the philosopher.” Although we can debate the appropriateness of Augustine and Aquinas resting their theology on Platonic or Aristotelian foundations as they did, the fact remains that they did, and theology today owes much of its color to those beginnings with those conceptual resources.

I have my students read African theologian Kwame Bediako.¹² In a couple of his essays, Bediako deals with Jesus as ancestor. Bediako’s objective is to express a biblical Christology using the conceptual resources found in Ghanaian culture, or more specifically, the Akan culture and language. The traditional Akan spirit world is like others of primal religion societies with a distant Supreme Being who is the creator and the sustainer of the universe. Then subordinate to the Supreme God are

lesser “gods,” and finally ancestors.¹³ The lesser gods can be capricious and are influenced through ritual in order to bestow favor and not trouble. Ancestors on the other hand are revered as good and maintain the moral order of the community by dispensing rewards and punishments. Ancestors are clan members that have gone on ahead to God. For the traditional Akan to qualify as an “ancestor” or *Nana*, one must fulfill three requirements. He must have lived among the clan, lived an exemplary life, and finally have been a person from whom the community gained benefits.¹⁴ Bediako argues,

Once the meaning of the cult of ancestors as myth is granted and its “function” is understood within the overall religious life of traditional society, it becomes clear how Jesus Christ fulfils our aspirations in relation to ancestral function too. Ancestors are considered worthy of honour for having “lived among us” and for having brought benefits to us; Jesus Christ has done infinitely more. They, [the mythical ancestors], originating from among us, had no choice but to live among us. But he, reflecting the brightness of God’s glory and the exact likeness of God’s own being (Hebrews 1:3), took our flesh and blood, shared our human nature and underwent death for us to set us free from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14–15). He who has every reason to abandon sinful humans to their just desserts is not ashamed to call us his brethren (Hebrews 2:11).¹⁵

Much like the apostle John who both adapts and adopts the concept and vocabulary of the Greek *Logos* as a resource for his description of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, so Akans both adapt and adopt the concept and vocabulary of *Nana Yesu*. Thus,

Ancestor Christologies are grounded in the claim that Jesus’ mediatory role is analogous to the mediatory role ascribed to ancestors in some indigenous religions of Africa.¹⁶

Yet Bediako makes an important observation about the language used

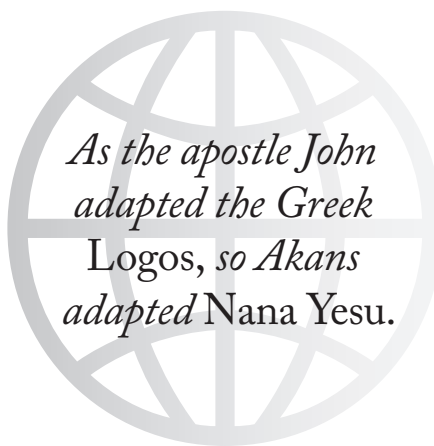
to link Jesus with the Akan concept of ancestor or *Nana*. He says,

In my experience in Ghana, hardly anyone will pray in English to “ancestor Jesus” or “Chief Jesus,” but many will pray in Akan to “*Nana Yesu*.”¹⁷

The semantic range of the English word “ancestor” and the Akan word *Nana* translated as “ancestor” only minimally overlap. Thus, linguistic and conceptual resources intersect.

Finally, relevant questions shape our theology. Church Missionary Society missionary John Taylor (d. 2001) is frequently quoted:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man



would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like?¹⁸

In every age and place where the church exists, there are questions that need to be addressed theologically. Those questions may arise from a number of sources. Heretics pose challenges that demand a response. Our culture often sets an agenda that demands a theological answer. But “questions” can be explicit and implicit. In other words, we might approach the Bible and its interpretation with implicit, nagging

questions that lead us to look for particular answers, like an appetite longing for satisfaction without consciously expressing these questions.

One area of productive discussion more recently has been the consideration of guilt, shame and fear as moral cultural orientations. In guilt-oriented cultures, priority is given to an impersonal legal code. These cultures tend to be individualistic. Shame-oriented cultures are collectivistic and give priority to the behavioral expectations of the community. Fear-oriented cultures are often dominated by folk religions with a concern for a hostile spirit world. Global Mapping International describes these orientations as cultural frameworks that function as a lens that “impact our understanding of the gospel” and how we read the Bible.¹⁹ They pose implicit questions. It is true that no culture is entirely oriented to either guilt, shame or fear. But in most cultures, one orientation is more dominant than the others.

I served in South Asia and I was intrigued to discover that, when sharing their experience of coming to faith, many believers in that context described Jesus as the answer to their fears. Many had experiences with a malevolent spirit world and even unbelievers would occasionally come to our gathering looking for relief from spirit oppression. This was a dimension of ministry for which my seminary training did not fully prepare me. What we observed was the application of a more *Christus Victor* understanding of the atonement.²⁰ In this case, one of the questions implicit in a seeker’s hearing this gospel was, “What does this message have to do with the forces of evil that threaten me?” In the West, we give little attention to 1 John 3 where we read that, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”

More has been written about the contrast between guilt/innocence and honor/shame societies. Transgression in the

former represents a loss of innocence; the latter represents a loss

of face. Guilt leaves us with a sense of moral failure, even if no one else knows about our transgression. . . . In contrast shame leaves us with a sense of humiliation, defeat, and ridicule and is intricately tied to our exposure and loss of honor or status before our peers and those in authority within our social network.²¹

Through the lenses of our Western guilt/innocence glasses we read the Bible. Themes of shame and honor are often invisible to Western guilt/innocence-oriented readers of the Bible. This is especially true with the Bible's teaching on sin. Tennent points out that the first response of the first couple upon their disobedience was to hide (Genesis 3:8). Many descriptions of sin and its consequences are in terms of shame:

In that day the Lord will shave with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates. . . . the head and the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard. (Isaiah 7:20)

Many commentators interpret this text to mean that God will bring devastation upon Israel for their disobedience, and this is true. But the point of the language is to highlight the indignity, reproach and insult Israel will experience in their judgement. *The Adam Clarke commentary* (published in 1828) notes that,

The Eastern peoples have always held the beard in the highest veneration, and have been extremely jealous of its honor. To pluck a man's beard is an instance of the greatest indignity that can be offered.²²

In the New Testament, we miss the point of some teaching without a sensitivity to shame in first century Palestine. In Luke 15 the prodigal son is not simply forgiven but shockingly shown honor despite his debauched, shameful past. He is honored with the best robe, a ring and a fattened calf. These are honoring acts. In the execution of Christ, "everything was done to maximize the shame."²³ The death of Christ was a public shaming, in which

There is no privileged set of linguistic or conceptual resources, and no privileged set of contextual questions. All theologies are "contextual."

Jesus bore our shame. And as Christ was raised and restored to honor, seated at the right hand of the father, so we too are raised with him, even though we experience the degrading shame of an unbelieving world. Indeed, we are honored with participation in Christ's triumphal procession and one day will know future honor and glory with Christ in the resurrection. The death of Christ was not "a mere execution . . . [that] atoned for guilt."²⁴ Was the cross retribution for God being dishonored by sin and rebellion? Is salvation a restoration of God's honor through Christ and our place of honor with him in the order of creation? Bruce Nichols observes,

Christian theologians have "rarely if ever stressed salvation as honoring God, exposure of sin as shame, and the need for acceptance and restoration of honor."²⁵

Indeed it is difficult to find discussions of shame in evangelical theologies and theological dictionaries.²⁶

Theology answers relevant questions—explicit or implicit. Today, questions of gender, race, and politics present challenges demanding theological reflection. In the last election, we repeatedly heard the distressed question, "How should a Christian vote?" And the question was not simply which candidate should get the vote of the thoughtful evangelical who desired to live in obedience to the Bible. But more basically, the crisis precipitated the theological question of the responsibility of the Christ follower to the political world in which he or she lives. Questions generate theology grown in a particular place and time. Andrew Walls made the observation that the apostle Paul generated a great deal of theology for the Corinthians confronted with the question of what a

believer should do when sitting down with his neighbor and being served meat that might have been offered in pagan ritual. This was a new question raised by gentiles living in a gentile society. This was not a question that Jewish believers would ask; they didn't eat with gentile pagans.

So, what is theology? Theology is a thoughtful *human reflection* on God's revelation (both special and general), which responds to *contemporary questions and challenges*, while drawing upon the *linguistic and conceptual* resources of a particular time, place, and culture. Further, there is no privileged set of linguistic or conceptual resources, and no privileged set of contextual questions. All theologies are "contextual." They are the product of a historical and cultural particularity. Consequently, as one blog puts it, we should

Label particularity lest you imply universality. . . . The NIV Study Bible or ESV Study Bible could take their cue from the African Study Bible, and rename A Western Study Bible or A Study Bible for First-World Problems. Why do Western theologians write Systematic Theology, but Asian theologians write Water Buffalo Theology? Suppose the seminary course "Systematic Theology" was relabeled "Western Theology."²⁷

This kind of reconceptualization of theology is *not* just now breaking into our world of missiology. The issues have been raised by Tienou, Netland, Dyrness, Kärkkäinen, and others for some time. Yet an understanding of the contextual nature of theology has only rarely broken into the guild of Western evangelical theology.

Theology is a humanly crafted artifact that we hold with an open hand. It is held with an open hand, not because we should easily give it up, but because

we should be open to its correction, clarification and completion. A different set of resources brought to the scriptures has the potential to bring to light what was missed, correct what was misunderstood because of the limitations of our resources, and clarify what seemed out of place. Theologies true to the message of the Bible provide an occasion for a rich theological complementarity. **IJFM**

Endnotes

- ¹ "Honoring Theology," *HonorShame* (blog), May 11, 2016, <http://honorshame.com/honoring-theology/>.
- ² Leo Spitzer, "Language—The Basis of Science, Philosophy and Poetry," *Studies in Intellectual History*, ed. George Boas et al. (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), 83.
- ³ Sebastian Brock, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy* (Burlington Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 5.
- ⁴ Brock, *Fire from Heaven*, 7.
- ⁵ Moffett comments, "For fifteen hundred years Nestorius has been branded in the West as a heretic, and for most of that time, from what the West knew about him the condemnation seemed just. His writings were burned; only fragments survived. His image as left to history was that created by his enemies. Then, dramatically, in 1889 a Syrian priest discovered an eight-hundred-year-old manuscript of a Syriac translation made about 540 of Nestorius' own account, in Greek, of his controversies and his teachings. It had remained hidden for centuries disguised under the title *The Book* (or *Bazaar*) of Heraclites, but the author was unmistakably Nestorius. Judged by his own words at last, Nestorius is revealed as not so much 'Nestorian' and more orthodox than his opponents gave him credit for. Luther, for example, after looking over all he could find of his writings decided that there was nothing really heretical in them.... At no time did he [Nestorius] deny the deity of Christ, as was charged against him.... Nor did he deny the unity of Christ's person, which was the most enduring of the charges against him." Samuel Moffett, *The History of Christianity in Asia Volume 1: Beginning to 1500* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 175–176.)
- ⁶ Robert Kaplan, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education: Language Learning," in *Language Learning*:

A Journal of Research in Language Studies, Volume 16 (1966): 1–20.

⁷ Ulla Connor, "New Directions in Contrastive Rhetoric." *TESOL Quarterly*, 36 (2002): 493–510.

⁸ Will Bankston, "Global Theology in English: Promising or Problematic?" *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), February 24, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/global-theology-in-english-promising-or-problematic>.

⁹ Kaplan's research has been taken up by Ulla Connor in her *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-Cultural Aspects of Second-Language Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). More recently she developed Kaplan's thought in *Contrastive Rhetoric: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric*, eds. Ulla Connor, E. Nagelhout & W. Rozycki (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008).

¹⁰ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia Volume 1: Beginnings to 1500*, 54.

¹¹ The term is used to describe the relationship between the three members of the Godhead. It describes the divine movement of "interpenetration, communion, and interdependence. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit move and flow and draw life from one another in a bond of perfect love." Accessed 2/22/2017, <http://arstheologica.blogspot.com/2005/12/perichoresis.html>.

¹² Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

¹³ Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel*, 22–23.

¹⁴ Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel*, 30.

¹⁵ Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel*, 30–31.

¹⁶ Stephen T. Pardue, Gene L. Green and K. K. Yeo, eds., *Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014), 49.

¹⁷ Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel*, 78.

¹⁸ John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision, Christian Presence amid African Religion* (SCM, 1963), 16.

¹⁹ <http://www.gmi.org/infographics/missiographic-Honor-Shame.jpg> Accessed 2/27/2017.

²⁰ Gustav Aulén, (trans. 1969 by A. G. Herber SSM), *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (London: SPCK, New York: Macmillan, 1931).

²¹ Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 79.

²² Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible* (1831), Accessed 4/29/2017, <http://sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/clarke/isa007.htm>.

²³ Tennent, *Theology in the Context*, 90.

²⁴ Tennent, *Theology in the Context*, 91.

²⁵ Bruce Nichols, "The Role of Shame and Guilt in a Theology of Cross-Cultural Mission," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2001): 232. Quoted by Tennent, 92.2001.

²⁶ Accessed 2/27/2017, <http://www.gmi.org/infographics/missiographic-Honor-Shame.jpg>.

²⁷ "Guilt-Innocence Cultures are WEIRD," *HonorShame* (blog), January 19, 2017, <http://honorshame.com/guilt-innocence-cultures-weird/>.

The “Clash of Civilizations” and a Cache of Connotations

by Michael Alfred Kilgore

25 years after the paradigm emerged, what have we learned about making Jesus disciples among Muslims in the midst of a world aligned according to civilizations?

Twenty-five years ago, the eminent Harvard political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington, proposed a new paradigm to help us understand how people all over the world identify themselves and then behave en masse.¹ His paradigm immediately caused a huge stir in the secular press and journals, drawing sharp critiques from international affairs experts all over the world. In 1996 Huntington wrote a book answering his critics² and followed up with more articles and interviews.

His idea has profound implications for believers who desire to clearly communicate the gospel across cultures. From my vantage point in SouthEast Asia, I believe his concept of world alignment according to civilizations has tremendous bearing on how we make Jesus disciples among Muslims. Remarkably, most missiologists have ignored Huntington’s paradigm of the 21st century world. If Huntington’s perceptions are at all accurate about how billions of people today construct their identity, very few have thought about the implications for intercultural communicators of the gospel.

In this article, I will take a fresh look at Huntington’s paradigm and the debates swirling around it. I also want to consider some of the similarities between the first century New Testament world and our 21st century world, and then identify some of the contemporary implications for clear gospel communication across civilizational lines.

Michael A. Kilgore is a practitioner-missiologist who has lived and served on the ground among Muslims in South East Asia for over 25 years, and whose focus of ministry has been encouraging proximate witness and discipling that leads to assemblies of believers. He holds an MA in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary and a DMiss from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Huntington’s Key Concepts

In 1993, the Soviet Union had recently collapsed, the Cold War had been largely won, and the world had rearranged itself, making obsolete the terms “Free World,” “Communist World,” and “Third World.” Huntington sought a new paradigm to help us see how people now self-identified and related to one another. He asked the question: “What is the best simple map of the post-Cold War world?” He then developed a general paradigm for viewing and making sense of our current world.³

For the two centuries spanning the French Revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world had largely been divided by ideologies. Huntington proposed that in the 1990s we began returning to an older paradigm where people no longer identified as much with ideology as with kinship groups, not merely with their narrowly defined ethnic groups or local kingdoms, but rather with their mega-kinship groups, their civilizations. To define what he meant, Huntington observed that although there are huge variations within civilizations,

Arabs, Chinese and Westerners... are not part of any broader cultural entity. They constitute civilizations. A civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.⁴

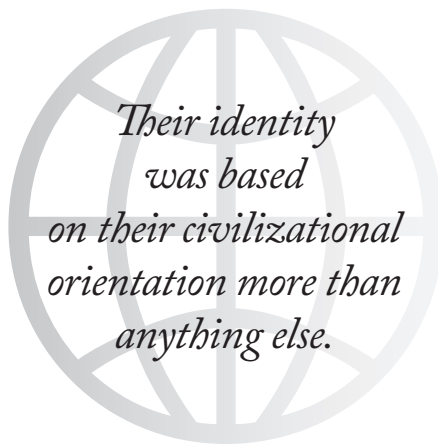
Huntington saw the world divided up into nine major civilizations (listed in alphabetical order): African, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Japanese, Latin, Orthodox (Russian-led), Sinic (Chinese-led), and Western.⁵

He suggested that where ancient civilizations meet there are fault lines along which we can expect tension. He convincingly demonstrated this in Belarus where he showed that voting patterns after the fall of the Soviet Union differed predictably across ancient civilizational lines.⁶ This was because people now formed their identity based on their civilizational orientation more than anything else. He pointed to civilizational herding, whereby people live by a double moral standard, demonstrating a knee-jerk reaction to support the actions of those from their own civilization and to condemn similar actions by outsiders.

I discovered Huntington's book late, in September 2000, when two events occurred. The first happened at Atambua, along Indonesia's border with the newly independent East Timor. Three

UN workers (a Hispanic-American, an Ethiopian and a Croat, from at least three separate civilizations, none of them Muslim) were brutally hacked to death by machete-wielding Indonesian nationalist Muslims. The second event happened in the same week. After a long time of relative peace, the Israeli military and Palestinians began clashing with deadly results mostly on the Palestinian side. Soon the *al-Aqsa Intifada* was in full swing.

The Indonesian street showed no concern at all for those brutally murdered in their own back yard, but even when the Palestinian death toll had not yet surpassed that of the UN workers, Indonesian Muslims were incensed about the violence against their *ummah*



brothers. By contrast, Africans, Latins, Orthodox people and Westerners were extremely exercised about the murder of UN workers, while brushing off news of Palestinians' suffering with sentiments akin to, "Oh, there they are going at it again!"

Huntington stressed how civilizations compete and clash with one another. His 1993 article infuriated diplomatic sensibilities with his remark that "Islam has bloody borders."⁷ Across the Muslim world, newspapers carried headlines angrily heralding that what Huntington said about Islam was not true, without, of course, giving any hint about what he had said. He later provided statistical evidence

that Muslims in the late 20th century were twice as prone to conflict as most other civilizations, and reasserted that "Islam's borders are bloody, and so are its innards."⁸

Huntington argued strongly that the West has been in decline since peaking in influence somewhere between 1914 and 1924. Many Westerners dismissed him as too pessimistic. He responded by citing demographic statistics and a wealth of data regarding the West's declining percentages of worldwide factory output, declining control of territory, and declining percentage of global military forces.⁹

But one of his observations should really worry missiologists. He sensed that non-Christians perceive "Christianity" to be closely tied to Christendom or Western Civilization, with missionaries being "the most successful protagonists of Western culture."¹⁰ To the degree that this is true, we should not be too surprised that many outside the West view missionaries as socio-political instruments of Western governments, who seek to make non-Westerners defect via proselytization across civilizational fault lines.

Similarly, Charles R. Taber's research on early Western missionaries reveals how this connotation was created as field workers over-identified themselves with their home culture's values and geo-political agendas.¹¹

Opposing Voices

Francis Fukuyama became Huntington's nemesis arguing that

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.¹²

His view has had difficulty explaining Sept. 11, 2001, the failed Arab Spring,

Russia's revived nationalism and China's burgeoning influence on other continents.

Benjamin Barber considered Huntington a pessimist, believing that the West losing manufacturing sectors does not matter in an information age where "McWorld" overwhelms Jihad (code for all traditional cultures) through its grip on media. He forecast McWorld gradually overwhelming Jihad into submission by creating a mono-cultural megalith.¹³ But Barber over-estimated the impact of surface McWorld cultural forms on non-Westerners. An Arab youth may indeed wear Nikes and Levis and spend many hours imbibing YouTube, but it would be naïve to then deduce that he or she has thereby internalized Western values to melt into a global unified culture.¹⁴

Barber did not address the bulging demographics of Islam over against the stagnant population growth rates of Westerners. Demographics says that sooner or later something's "gotta give"—and in some way it will have to be the West. Westerners would like to believe that their civilization can never seriously decline. So did the Romans as well as the Byzantine Christians. They could not imagine how "the faith" could survive, much less thrive, post-Rome or post-Constantinople.

Muslim commentators, of course, were quick to reject Huntington's larger paradigm and many Western experts heartily supported them in rejecting it. Yet, many Muslims seem to have embraced it as undeniable. In 2002 Mohammad Khatami, the president of Iran, arguably one of the most influential people in the Muslim world, adopted a "policy to curb America's threats to Iran—a partnership with other powers" which he entitled "the dialogue of civilizations."¹⁵ This led to the Dialogue of Civilizations (DOC) Research Institute which recently celebrated its fifteenth anniversary.¹⁶ Khatami portrayed himself as one stressing constructive dialogue—rather

Whether it's a clash, a dialogue, or a mere alignment, the civilizations paradigm keeps coming up in journals and popular media.

than a clash—between civilizations, but even in so doing, he was embracing the basic paradigm that *in today's world, the lines are drawn around civilizations.*

Experts disagree about whether Huntington meant to prescribe (or merely to describe) a clash between civilizations. However, whether it is termed a clash, or a mere alignment, or even a dialogue of civilizations, the civilizations paradigm keeps coming up in journals and popular media. This general framework for seeing how the inhabitants of our planet function is simply not going away.

For instance, outspoken former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad demonstrated the tension that some Muslim leaders feel over Huntington's paradigm. In a 2014 blog entitled "Stop Postulating A Clash of Civilizations," Mahathir nevertheless exclaimed:

It is not the religion of Islam that led the Muslims to commit heinous acts. It is simply anger, hate and rage over not being able to do anything to stop the Europeans or West from oppressing people who profess the same religion as themselves. And Europeans, most of whom are not practicing Christians, react in the same way when Christians are faced with any threat.

Look at the record of the Europeans, especially after they created Israel. Now, although they will not admit it, they are carrying out a crusade against Islam and the Muslims. Call it a war on terror or the clash of civilizations. But factually it is still a continuation of the crusade of the past centuries.¹⁷

Much more recently, both a Muslim and a Hindu commentator embraced the clash of civilizations paradigm to explain UN inaction on the Rohingya genocide crisis.¹⁸ In a seeming contradiction, multiple major US newspapers have repeatedly rejected the paradigm

in reference to the West and Islam while at the same time referencing it in connection with China and the West.

Many who outrightly reject the civilizations paradigm seem to do so because they don't want to endorse any civilizational clash, whether it be the attacks of 9/11, or Western government responses. But the paradigm itself never necessarily endorsed a clash; it merely described what we were seeing. Admitting this, as disturbing as it is, will do well to move us past denying certain present realities and prepare our minds for the challenges before us.

A Biblical Perspective

The most interesting aspect about the world that we now see ourselves in is its similarity with the biblical world of the first century.¹⁹ In one important way this puts us at an advantage. It becomes easier to understand the New Testament and to see how the Apostolic model applies in our situation.

The world of Jesus and the Apostles was also facing a clash of civilizations. Many Jews were displaying a high nationalistic fever. Greek civilization and then Roman civilization had come steam-rolling in like juggernauts, subjugating the Jewish way of life. Emotions ran high as teams of zealot guerillas operated in the Judean countryside. Prejudices were so high that Judean Jews found it hard to get along with the culturally-polluted Hellenistic Jews, causing dangerous tensions even among the Messiah's early followers.

Yet God, the grand Maestro of civilizations and history saw to it that this clash did not hem in the spread of his gospel. Again and again, the gospel spread to the edges of one civilizational grouping, with the Apostles seemingly

self-satisfied that it had gone as far as they could imagine it going, only to then leap over remarkable social barriers to penetrate into yet the next group. Thus it left from the Jews to the Samaritans, to an Ethiopian semi-proselyte, to a Roman “proselyte at the gate,” and finally, at Antioch, to raw Gentiles with no revealed understanding about the one true God.

Due to the clash of civilizations occurring at that time—with its resultant negative experiences between people from across the fault lines—it was inconceivable to Jewish believers that any Gentile could become a serious follower of their Messiah without first converting to Judaism. Both Jews and Romans viewed Greeks as embracing remarkably slack sexual practices.²⁰ The Jews viewed Romans as being hopelessly brutal. To be either a Greek or a Roman carried seemingly inherent connections to blatant idolatry.

When referring to the age in which Paul lived, Turkish author Fatih Cimok sounds like he is actually describing modern Muslim societies. He states that,

This was a period when politics, social and economic life, fortune and the future of people were all integrated into religion.²¹

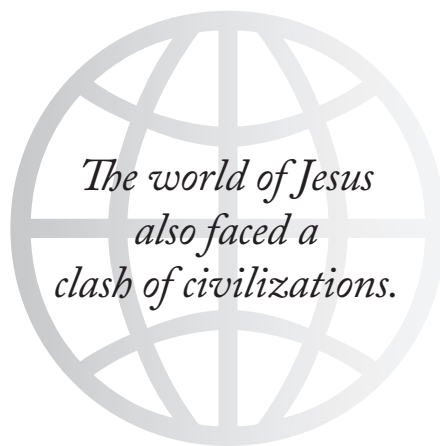
How could anyone seriously suggest that these people might really follow the Jewish Messiah while remaining in these inherently idolatrous civilizations?

It is no wonder that Paul got into so much trouble with the Jerusalem church. He could have chosen an approach that would have made his relations with Jerusalem better. He could have told audiences in Asia Minor, Macedonia & Achaia,

Trust in Jesus the Jewish Messiah, his death in your place, and his resurrection, to give you forgiveness of all your sins, to reconcile you to God and to give you citizenship in his eternal kingdom. You will be saved and will receive the Holy Spirit empowering

you to do all that Jesus taught. *Then just line up over here where we have a team of medical specialists ready to perform a minor surgical procedure on your sex organ, and we will get you started on being full fledged devotees of this Jewish Messiah.*

Paul did *not* communicate that message, because he knew that if anyone tied circumcision to the gospel, it would so muddy the waters of Gentile understanding that they’d never keep circumcision—for them a sign of civilizational defection—distinct from understanding salvation by grace through faith alone. He would not be communicating a clear gospel. Thankfully, Paul obsessed over communicating a clear gospel.



Paul became the intercultural communicator par excellence when *he placed the burden squarely upon himself to bridge the civilizational gap* and to make the gospel clear within an unevangelized civilization. He told Greeks to “stay as you were when God called you” (1 Cor. 7), and then disciplined his Pharisee background conscience to move outside his own comfort zones so that he could “become as a Greek . . . to become as one not under the law . . . to become all things to all men.” His conscience achieved this by intentionally abiding under the law of Christ. He aimed to generate a movement of Greeks who would become disciples of Jesus as Greeks, of Romans becoming disciples of Jesus as Romans, of

barbarians becoming disciples of Jesus as barbarians! He scandalized most of the Jerusalem believers,²² but he pulled it off. Within a generation, the number of Gentile background believers even outstripped the number of Jewish background believers.

Paul succeeded in his God-ordained role by facilitating movements to Christ inside Greek and Roman and even “barbarian” civilizations. When Jerusalem fell in 70 AD, the movement was not threatened precisely because the faith of the gospel had become a powerful influence beyond Jewish civilization.

Three hundred and seventy years later, as Augustine lay on his deathbed, he could hear the Vandals storming the gates of Carthage. One would not be surprised if he prayed for God to intervene and destroy their “civilization.” God had a better idea. At the extreme edge of European barbarian culture, God was nurturing a new community of believers who were passionate about his Word. From the most unlikely place imaginable, God used Irish “barbarians” to spread the Word as far as Russia and Italy,²³ establishing education and culture as they went. These Irish inadvertently laid the foundation for a new civilization, one that would be unusually influenced by basic biblical truths. Rather than obliterate barbarian culture, God had intended to penetrate it and use it as his vehicle to create something measurably better than Augustine’s Roman civilization.

God displayed his sovereign ability to orchestrate the expansion of his kingdom even as the world’s current greatest kingdom was collapsing. He thus demonstrated that he is the grand Maestro in the midst of any contest of civilizations.

Implications in the Current Contest of Civilizations

Despite wishful, optimistic commentaries, world events often provide evidence that we are facing some sort of a contest of civilizations, centered around

the global tensions between China and the West and between Islam and the West. In this situation, nothing is easier than to write off the opponents of our own respective civilizations as hopeless cases, fodder for hell fire, not worth real effort to save. Yet, if we take the incarnation, the Apostolic pattern and post-biblical history seriously at all, presenting every person complete in Christ must be our goal.²⁴

In light of the Muslim perception of Christianity, which is indistinguishable to most of the world from Western Civilization, we must be very careful about what we call people to embrace. Our messaging often connotes to them, “Believe in Christ, plus do this work, defect across civilizational fault lines, and then God will accept you and so might we.” Whenever we give such an impression, whether deliberately or inadvertently, the message they perceive from us is a works gospel—a false gospel.

Consequently, many Muslim background believers have paid a horribly high price. Sometimes they paid it not necessarily for following the gospel but for following “Western Christianity,” the only way forward that we offered them once they expressed interest in Jesus. We must consistently engage deeply with our hearers to discern how our message is coming across and to eliminate these tragic miscommunications.

The only alternative to calling Muslims to move into “Christianity” (often connoting in their minds—“the West”) is, like Paul, to call them to Christ-centered movements that somehow penetrate their society and transform it from within. Even William Carey, referring to their *civilizational* orientation, recognized the need to produce “Hindu Christians,”²⁵ at a time when British churchmen would typically respond, “How in the world would that be possible?”²⁶

Donald K. Smith, one of the best intercultural communications experts

Sometimes they paid a horribly high price, not necessarily for following the gospel, but for following “Western Christianity.”

in ministry today, started his legendary career in South Africa. The philosophy of intercultural communications that he hammered out in Sub-Saharan Africa has rightfully found a wide reception. In his classic book *Make Haste Slowly*, he masterfully elucidates why lasting change must come from within the culture:

The most far-reaching change, and the least disturbing, comes when change begins within the group, even though stimulated by outsiders. The group itself, not individuals pulled out of the group, is the place for change to occur.... The strength of the group supports change; the group is made stronger and at the same time more open to considering other changes.²⁷

The key is to create Third Culture settings that do not destroy a person’s participation in his home culture. He must have the opportunity to be involved in new patterns and solutions that he can carry inside his own group.... These bi-cultural people are very often the most effective change agents.²⁸

Smith cautions against counting on marginals—people who have moved to the periphery of their own culture—to introduce change.

As progressive as such a person appears to the outsider, he cannot be a satisfactory sponsor. He is a bridge that is broken at one end.²⁹

He summarizes our choice with striking clarity,

Two different approaches are possible when seeking to introduce change in society: 1) “Attack” the society, virtually forcing it to leave its traditions and social structures so it can become “modernized” and “christian” [sic]; 2) Learn how the society is structured, how it operates to make its own decisions and then penetrate the society and bring change from within....³⁰

But he admits that we find the better choice harder to swallow,

Even the occasional missionary has admitted, “We can never win these people until their culture is broken.” Traditional culture patterns have been seen as obstacles that must be flattened before desired change can be brought about.³¹

This same sentiment was expressed at a global conference on ministry to Muslims in 2017, when a plenary speaker quoted a prayer from a conference a century ago calling on God to “Destroy this world of Islam!” The prayer seemed to be not merely reported, but quoted approvingly.

Admittedly when we come to Islam, we face special challenges. One often hears, “Islam is a religion that includes a whole life system and is incompatible with the gospel.” Undoubtedly, there’s some significant truth in that statement that would require a book to address. But Islam is also a *mega-oikos*, the *Dar al-Islam* or household of Islam, or, in Huntington’s words, a civilization—one of those

highest cultural grouping[s] of people and the broadest level[s] of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.³²

If someone suggested that a Chinese could not follow the Lord without first becoming culturally Korean, or that Uruguayans could not possibly mature in Christ unless they first became culturally Brazilian, we would all be appalled, even though these jolts would constitute cultural changes within the same Sinic or Latin civilizations. However, many Muslims perceive us to be asking them to turn, not just from one understanding of God to another, while remaining within their civilization, but from their very civilizational orientation

to an alien one before we will accept them as serious followers of Christ.³³

When did the Apostle Paul ever insist that anyone *defect from their civilization* (e.g., Graeco-Roman to Jewish) before God or Paul would accept them?

It is fascinating that the New Testament uses the Greek noun *proselutos* or "convert" (Matt. 23:15, Acts 2:10, 6:5, 13:43) to describe Gentiles who became Jews, but never to describe a Gentile who came to faith in Christ. Even more fascinating is the matter of the noun and verb forms of "convert" in our English Bibles. Our less-than-literal English translations often render *aparche* with the noun "convert" (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15), but any literal translation would be "first fruit." Similarly, translations may render the Greek *epistrepho* as the English "to convert/a convert" (Acts 15:3), whereas it simply means "to turn." Matthew and Luke only use the Greek words for "converts" or "to convert" when describing someone entering Judaism, which *was indeed* a civilizational change, but *not* to describe someone coming to the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ.³⁴ How significant do you sense that this distinction may be?

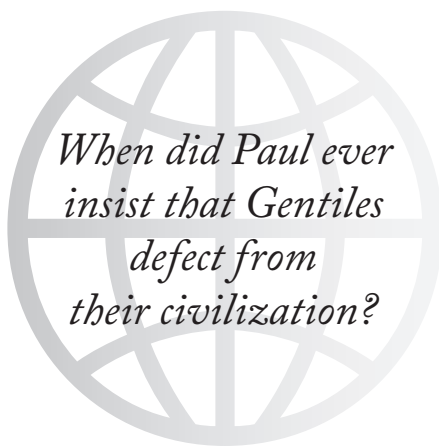
Luke's mentor Paul persuaded Gentiles to be transformed by the indwelling Holy Spirit through the guidance of God's Word and to begin influencing their civilizations, to be sure. But when did he ever insist that they defect from their civilization? Did he not call them to something even much more difficult, something demanding miraculous power, when he challenged people to find their ultimate identity in Christ while remaining as lights in the situation they were in when God called them?

Yet we hear of Christians celebrating when a devout Muslim girl takes off her head covering and starts wearing a "proper" low-cut blouse and mini-skirt. What are we communicating to the Muslim community? And do we really care whether we communicate clearly?

Certain non-Arab local Muslim cultures are so immersed into Arabic-flavored Islamic civilization that it's difficult to discern local cultural patterns that may have existed since before Islam came to their region. Here, trying to adapt to the local culture while avoiding anything perceived as Islamic becomes a hopeless endeavor.

I once heard a field worker, who had grown up in such a context, but mixing mainly in local, westernized church communities, exclaim, "I'm not wanting to ask them to leave their culture, just Islam." I asked her,

What if your request comes across sounding like someone saying, "I'm not asking you to get out of Seoul; you just have to get out of Asia!"?



In that particular context, most people saw their culture as a small subset of Islamic culture, and they were not usually thinking about theology. Getting out of "Islam" would to them mean moving a whole world away from all the culture they had ever known.

In such cases we do not merely extract change agents out of their local culture. We move them out of their entire civilization. Small wonder that it took so long before we started seeing movements among them.

Admittedly, we must not go too far, as if to naively picture a rigid dichotomy between Islam as a religion and Islam as a civilization. At the same time, we

need discernment to recognize that this civilization comprising 1.5 billion people is a seriously multi-faceted entity. There are Muslim communists, Muslim pig farmers, Muslim gay rights activists, Muslim agnostics, and even Muslim atheists, along with a dizzying variety of folk Muslims. Indeed, a gifted evangelist friend of mine met a man who said, "I'm a Muslim, but I hate religion." Huntington once indicated that regarding Islam and the West, the greater conflict was not between religions but between civilizations.³⁵ What can these statements mean unless people are actually distinguishing between religion and larger civilizational identification?

Mainstream "orthodox" Muslim leaders certainly despise fellow Muslims who display these innovative variations. But in the first century, Paul never let mockery from polytheistic Greeks dissuade him from mentoring new monotheistic Greek disciples of Jesus Christ. Rather than brushing off cultural variations as useless, spurious oddities, Paul appreciated and captured opportunities by stepping into this cultural "wobble room" to create new movements of Jesus disciples.

I have lived among Muslims for over twenty-five years. Those who confidently state that it is impossible for a committed believer to continue as a member in any Muslim community are claiming a virtual omniscience of all specific Muslim communities that I hope I would never dare claim.

An incident in my city illustrates the point. A Muslim background believer (MBB) who had been raised in a fanatic family heard about a home Bible study that was about to discontinue meeting due to pressure from Muslim neighbors. Every time they met singing praise songs to guitar music, rowdy neighbors would throw stones and bricks at the roof, terrorizing the believers inside. This MBB encouraged them to meet at least once more before giving up, and to let him lead the

study. He told them to refrain from bringing guitars and to sit on the floor rather than on chairs.

Before the Bible study started, neighbors saw a motorcycle pull up with two men dressed in the manner of Muslim *ulamas*.³⁶ The MBB stepped down from the cycle in a dignified manner carrying a holy book wrapped in beautiful cloth. After entering the house and having the attendees sit on the floor he told them, “We’re going to have a Bible study tonight, but different than what you’re used to.” He unwrapped his Arabic Bible, placed it on a *rabal* (Holy Book X-stand), and then taught the attendees to chant a New Testament passage in Arabic (which most of them did not at first understand at all). He led them in chanting the verse loudly in Arabic. Afterwards he translated the passage into their language and expounded its meaning and life application. They prayed together with palms raised to heaven before breaking up for the evening.

That night not a single stone struck the house. After the MBB left, once-antagonistic neighbors rushed over to the homeowners exclaiming,

Wow, we didn’t know you had anything like that! That sounded great! Why haven’t you ever done that before? Why didn’t you ever tell us you were into that?!

Nothing done in that gathering violated Scripture, unless you actually contend that the Arabic language is inherently evil. Our MBB friend merely distinguished the gospel from Western expressions, communicating truth in a way that made sense inside that civilizational context. As a result, one group of Muslim neighbors for the first time felt drawn to what they heard.

This does not deny that there are serious theological differences between the faith of the gospel and today’s mainstream expressions of Islam. If a Wahhabi-educated *ulama* had lived next door, he likely would have rallied

Our MBB friend distinguished the gospel from Western expressions in a way that made sense in that civilizational context.

neighbors to mistreat the believers again. But the lesson is that many, many Muslims are demonstrably open to the gospel when it is presented as a message for people in the *Dar al-Islam*. What’s our excuse for not serving them?

Jesus Followers within Islamic Civilization?

This discussion often raises the question of whether we propose that Muslims coming to Christ not be called “Christians.”

The interesting thing about this is that if 21st century evangelicals were transported back to the 40s AD, it is doubtful whether they’d have a clue as to how to find fellowship. If they sought “Christians,” few believers then would know whom they were talking about. New Testament writers used the label “Christian” only three times, and two of those usages are by hostile outsiders who disparaged the movement. Only as late as the early 60s AD/CE did Peter embrace the term in 1 Peter 4:16.

By contrast, New Testament believers used a rich vocabulary to self-identify: disciples, believers, saints, followers of the Way (this last one being particularly relevant to Muslims who pray many times a day beseeching Allah to show them the straight path).

In light of the heinous moral and political connotations attached to the word “Christian” in many Muslim lands, would it not boost our communications impact if we rediscovered the predominant New Testament vocabulary and dared to overturn the proverbial apple cart by using it with the same frequency that they did, and use the label “Christian” with the same infrequency that they did?³⁷ I believe that this will also greatly help

us communicate more clearly with unbelievers in the West, too. To many in North America and Europe, the term “Christian” now carries with it a political affiliation. What do we want to come to people’s minds when we tell them who we are? Socio-politics, or the awesome person and work of Jesus Christ?

Several different stripes of movements to Christ have emerged within Islamic societies. I have personally seen a few advocates who in my opinion went too far and compromised central biblical truth, leading me to withdraw from working with them. For instance, any teaching (by professing believers) that denies Jesus is “our God and Savior” (Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1)³⁸ may play well in the halls of mainstream Islamic theology, but is no longer faithful to biblical teaching.

I have also seen beautiful expressions being lived out by very sincere followers of Isa Al Masih who are courageous enough to challenge mainline Islamic worldview from within the society while worshipping Isa Al Masih³⁹ as *Theos*. They do not merely take the risk of hit-and-run foray witness into Muslim communities. Instead, they speak boldly for Jesus and the gospel while their hearers know exactly where they live.

Summary

We have reviewed the Huntington paradigm of a world demarcated along civilizational lines and seen that, while many understandably object to calling it a “clash,” the basic civilizational alignment paradigm is not going away, even among leading Muslim thinkers. We’ve highlighted the similarities between the 21st century and the first century in being similarly aligned. We’ve seen how Jewish believers, from

a civilization that had long benefited from God’s revelation, were surrounded and pressured by civilizations they viewed as inherently idolatrous. Furthermore, we’ve spotlighted how the Apostles communicated in such a world, not demanding civilizational defection, but rather encouraging people to become change agents from within.

A deeper understanding of ancient civilizations can help us put things in perspective. Specifically, it forces us to question whether embracing *civilizationally-Islamic followers of Jesus* today is really more problematic than accepting *first-century Greek or Roman* (or *fifth-century Irish*) believers was back then.

We all struggle to find the best way to be fully faithful to Jesus in the place in the world where God has sovereignly planted us. Certainly the dilemma experienced in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, where mature believers ended up voting in opposite ways, should lead at least my American readers to be empathetic to people who were raised within unreached civilizations and are now wrestling with how to live faithfully for Jesus Christ *there*. Specifically, what criteria are we using when we deny these Jesus followers the same creative opportunity that we assume in our callings to engage our own civilizations with the gospel?

Jesus has warned us to exercise caution. The person who judges will be judged by the same standard by which they themselves judged others. This being true, some believers appear to be in danger of losing property and position in the kingdom to others whom some of us never dreamed could ever even appear there

through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Did he not adequately warn us ahead of time, some of the “first” shall be last, and the “last” first?

The encouraging news in all of this is that the 21st century resembles the first century much more than our own fathers’ times. If we recognize it, this provides us with a great missiological advantage. We can emulate the Apostles. Rather than coming to promote our own socio-political and civilizational loyalties, we can choose to stretch ourselves to become clear communicators who correctly teach the word of truth.

Rather than contributing to humanity’s clash of civilizations, we have an exciting opportunity to communicate



a clear gospel—the same uncluttered gospel that in the hands of the Apostles turned the world upside down and conveyed the glory of Jesus Christ across intimidating fault lines right into the aorta of the world’s civilizations.

In this new millenium who will that be? **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, “A Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993): 22–49.

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, First Touchstone Editon (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

³ Samuel P. Huntington, ed., *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate* (New York: Foreign Affairs, 1996), 57.

⁴ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate*, 2–3.

⁵ Huntington, “A Clash of Civilizations?” (1993): 3; *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997), 26–27.

⁶ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate* (1996), 7–9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997), 258.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 81–91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹ Charles R. Taber. *The World is Too Much With Us: “Culture” in Modern Protestant Missions* (Macon, GA, Mercer University Press, 2000).

¹² Fukuyama, Francis, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, vol. 16 (1989): 3–18.

¹³ Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism’s Challenge to Democracy* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1995).

¹⁴ A millennial reviewer responded saying, “These two sentences are so interesting. I feel that even though I agree . . . about civilizations, the sentiment that there is this one world culture is very strong, especially in my generation. I think that the temptation is to believe that really everyone is moving towards a liberal, progressive worldview, and that the world is divided by lines of ideology still, and the main ideologies are progressive and regressive. I see some truth to this view, but I think it’s way too

Key Reflection Questions

1. In precisely which ways is the civilization of Islam today more inherently objectionable to biblical truth than were Greek or Roman civilizations?
2. How often do you hear the words “convert” (whether n. or v.) and “conversion” in modern Christians’ stories about people coming to faith in Jesus? How likely or unlikely is it that this extrabiblical use of terminology betrays a clouding of the gospel by those who desire to communicate it?
3. What do you hear when you ask unbelieving friends, “According to what you’ve heard from Christians, what is the gospel that Jesus Christ taught?”

ethnocentric for progressives to believe that their worldview is the future or 'right' one . . . They are just colonizing with ideas. It doesn't always work (Arab spring) but it is a powerful feeling at least in my generation. Young bucks coming out to the field aren't going to feel the difference of civilizations as deeply as they might feel this oneness with all of the world."

¹⁵ "Special Report: Where is Iran Headed?" Stratfor.com Worldview, July 18, 2002, 8, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/special-report-where-iran-headed> (accessed October 11, 2017).

¹⁶ "About Us, History," Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://doc-research.org/en/about-us/history/>.

¹⁷ Mahatir Mohamad, "Stop Postulating the Clash of Civilizations," *Counterpunch* (blog), September 17, 2014, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2014/09/17/stop-postulating-the-clash-of-civilizations/>.

¹⁸ Naila Farooq, "Rohingya Genocide and Clash of Civilizations," *South Asia Journal*, September 11, 2017, <http://southasiajournal.net/rohingya-genocide-and-clash-of-civilizations/>; and Ananth Krishna, "Buddhism Versus Islam: Clash Of Civilisations In South And South-East Asia?" *Swarajya Magazine*, June 1, 2017, <https://swarajyamag.com/world/buddhism-versus-islam-clash-of-civilisations-in-south-and-south-east-asia>.

¹⁹ I'm concerned that some people very dear to me may wonder if I am using the wrong "starting point" by surveying our world's current situation, and only then moving to a biblical perspective. I assure you that I firmly advocate making my theological and philosophical starting point be the Scriptures. Yet, in accordance with the biblically-recorded Apostolic model, our communications starting-point should often be the space where our audience perceives themselves to be. Thus, here I first survey recent history, and then bring your attention to how the Scriptures instruct us for times such as ours.

²⁰ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Anchor Books by Doubleday, 1995), 43–44.

²¹ Fatih Chimok, *Journeys of Paul: from Tarsus 'To the Ends of the Earth'* (Istanbul: A Turizm Yayinlari Ltd Sti), Second Printing, 2007), 97–98.

²² This may be one reason that when he was jailed and facing death threats from unbelieving Jews, there is no record of the Jerusalem believers lifting a finger to aid him.

This, in spite of the fact that we have James' word that there were many thousands of believers in Jerusalem (Acts 21:20), and the city may have only maintained a population of about 25,000–30,000 if Joachim Jeremias is correct in his estimates, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1969), 66. They must have had significant influence, yet there's no evidence that they exercised it to save Paul. Paul had to look to his biological family to look out for him.

²³ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Anchor, 2010), Kindle edition, location 2152.

²⁴ Col. 1:28–29.

²⁵ Michelle A. Vu, "Is it Possible to be a Hindu Follower of Christ?" *The Christian Post*, October 6, 2007, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/is-it-possible-to-be-a-hindu-follower-of-christ-29601/>.

²⁶ "Hindu" and "Hinduism" can mean many things. Indeed in recent times cultural commentators have stated that the term "Hinduism" is about as specific in its meaning as "Europeanism."

²⁷ Donald K. Smith, *Make Haste Slowly: Developing Effective Cross-Cultural Communciation*, 9th Printing (Portland, Oregon: Institute for International Christian Communication, 2005), 90–91.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 120–121.

³² Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate* (1996), 3.

³³ Whiteman shows us how we deeply deprive ourselves when we do this. Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualization: The Theory, The Gap, The Challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 21, Issue 1 (January 1997): 2–7.

³⁴ I believe I first discovered this distinction via a presentation by Mr. Shannon Bachelor.

³⁵ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997), 213.

³⁶ Islamic Holy Book scholars.

³⁷ Many wonder what in the world we would call our faith if not "Christianity"? "The faith of the gospel" as used in this article is biblical. Paul never felt the need to coin the term "Christianity." Rather, he referred to our belief system as "the faith of the gospel" (Phil 1:27) or merely, "the faith." Currently, this label would be harder to misinterpret. Yet, in the past two decades only once have I ever noticed any Western clergyman employing this biblical name for our faith.

³⁸ See Daniel B. Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin: Semantics and Significance*, ed., D. A. Carson, Studies in Biblical Greek, vol. 14, (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), or an earlier, briefer presentation at <http://bit.ly/WallaceOnGSharp>. Paul and Peter, committed life-long monotheists, nevertheless gained the confidence late in their lives, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to directly refer to Jesus Christ as *Theos* (God). Wallace amasses overwhelming evidence that these two passages cannot be read as affirming anything else. I advocate making many stretching adaptations in order to clearly communicate across civilizations, but we must never become false teachers. We must never deny that Jesus Christ is *Theos*.

³⁹ Arabic for Jesus the Messiah.

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Jesus as *Mwalimu*: Christology and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context

by Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery

“**M**walimu, may I ask you a question?”

Three young Muslim men had arrived at the home of our church leader where we had just finished our meal and a Bible study. Answering their questions had become the normal routine for me (Alan) during a season of study in that predominantly Muslim village. The local leaders of the mosque had put up significant resistance to the planting of a church, but these guests respectfully greeted those present and began to ask me about topics related to God, Jesus and the nature of the universe. But, on this occasion, I noticed something significant in their typical request: when I am addressed in these strongly Islamic villages I am recognized as a religious teacher—a *mwalimu*.

As a North American, I carry a more restrictive understanding of the title “teacher,” and typically assume its authority is limited to the classroom. For our Makua-Metto friends in Mozambique, the title *mwalimu* is more expansive and signifies a person of honor, whose power and influence speaks into every area of life. The majority of the Makua-Metto can be best described as folk Muslims, whose Islamic ways are neither devout nor orthodox, but whose religiosity shapes the way that they collectively think, speak,¹ and see the world. That socio-religious dynamic creates significant challenges related to ministry, evangelism and contextualization,² and their blend of animism and Islam raises some serious hurdles to the presentation of an orthodox Christology. But it also has the potential of revealing some new theological pathways, and the one I perceived that day was the role of the *mwalimu*.

The significance of a “powerful teacher” is woven into the origins of their country. If you ask their average citizen about the history of the name Mozambique, you will likely be pointed to a man named *Mussa Bin Bique* (Moses, son of Mbiki). While painfully little is known about him, the story goes that the Portuguese arrived and met this influential Islamic *mwalimu* of Arab descent, a slave trader, who held the same authority and respect as a

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traditional king (*Mwene* in Makua-Metto). It's these explorers who applied his name to the country as a whole, and while details of this story are difficult to prove, the tale is well known and referenced in Mozambican public schools. There is even a major university named in honor of this mwalimu.

Another influential, recent example of a mwalimu that many in northern Mozambique are familiar with is Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania. (The Makua-Metto people are mostly situated in Mozambique, but they also extend across the Rovuma River into southern Tanzania). Mwalimu Nyerere was given this title because, as one of my Tanzanian-born friends put it, "he taught the people how to live well together." Before entering politics, he was a school teacher and later in life he translated Scripture into Swahili verse.³

From our experience, the socio-religious role of the mwalimu can communicate a compelling Christology to the folk Muslim of Africa. Jesus, as an older, better, and more powerful mwalimu—even more powerful than Mussa Bin Bique's namesake, Moses—offers his name and his teaching to all in this country and across the world. This image complements the many voices which have already offered meaningful and effective African Christologies "from below." Schreiter, Stinton and Tennent have each identified different African Christological images: Healer/Life-Giver, Liberator, Leader/Chief/King, Mediator, Master of Initiation, Ancestor/Elder Brother.⁴ While these and other related motifs certainly have their place, treatments of this topic have rarely given more than a passing reference to the influence of Islam on African culture and its potential impact on Christology. I (Alan) have found that to introduce this image of Jesus as mwalimu has been the most effective way to frame a Christology for the folk Islamic Makua-Metto people. Their common Muslim

background makes this a familiar category and an effective launching point for exploring the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Instead of a Christology that starts with the virgin birth (which can certainly be a contentious topic), beginning with the idea of Jesus as a powerful religious teacher allows us to take advantage of some surprisingly fertile common ground. Jesus is a mwalimu who offers a yoke of teaching that leads to human flourishing.

It's especially in Matthew's Gospel that we're offered a biblical frame for this Christological approach to the Muslim peoples of Northern Mozambique. It is in this gospel that Jesus is portrayed as the new rabbi, a new Moses, and we believe it substantiates



using the terms mwalimu and teacher interchangeably as a shorthand for "powerful and honorable mentor and rabbi." The relevance of this biblical material calls for a quick review.

Jesus the Mwalimu in Matthew's Gospel: A Short Commentary

Matthew characterizes Jesus as a great and powerful teacher by using a variety of images and metaphors, but we would like to explore this picture of the Christ from four different angles.

The New Moses

Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses by highlighting the connections

between them. From their threatened infancies, to their escapes, to their time in the wilderness, to their each giving a new law on a mountain, their stories appear to mirror each other. For instance, Pharaoh sought to kill the Israelite children; Herod sought to kill the Jewish children. Moses was delivered from Pharaoh by being placed on the Nile, and Jesus was delivered from Herod by being taken into Egypt. Moses brought Israel out of bondage, and Jesus brings the entire world out of bondage. Moses fasted for forty days in the wilderness, and Jesus did the same while being tempted by Satan. After his fast, Moses gave the law on Mount Sinai, while Jesus issued the Sermon on the Mount not long after his own fast in the desert. Jesus engages and expands Moses' teaching saying:

You have heard that it was said (*by Moses*), "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." *But I tell you*, do not resist an evil person. (italics Sparks)⁵

Jesus is not merely presented as the new Moses, but as one greater than Moses.⁶

One example of this is seen by comparing the conclusion of their time on earth: while Moses ascends the mountain in Moab right before his death (Deuteronomy 34), the last event before Jesus' ascension was to climb the mountain where he offered the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20). It is here that Jesus uses the same phrase found in the LXX (Septuagint or Greek) text of Deuteronomy 11:23: πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ("panta ta ethne" meaning "all the nations" or "all the peoples.") Matthew furthers this connection between Moses and Jesus, as both send their followers (Israel in Moses' case and the disciples in Jesus' case) on a "quest among the nations" with the promise "I will be with you."⁷ Although Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land with his people, Jesus promises to always be with his disciples as they commence with his mission.⁸ Jesus, however, showcases the greater theme of love:

he commissions his people to go to all nations in love rather than violence, evangelizing rather than killing.⁹

The True Rabbi

As the new Moses, Jesus is Israel's authoritative teacher.¹⁰ In Matthew 23:8–10, Jesus encourages his disciples to call him by this title:

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

Here Jesus recognizes his superiority as teacher and interpreter of the law over the scribes and Pharisees.¹¹ Although the Pharisees claim titles such as “rabbi” and “teacher,”¹² disciples of Jesus are not to hold onto such titles, for they submit to the one true teacher, that is, Jesus.

An Easy Yoke

Another way Matthew characterizes Jesus as the great teacher is through the imagery of a yoke. Literally, a yoke is a mechanism used to bind two animals for the pulling of heavy loads. In ancient times, “yoke” was also a metaphor for economic and political oppression; forced political slavery was often referred to as “bearing the yoke.” However, in apocryphal Jewish literature, the yoke was likened to the Torah, wisdom, and commands from God.¹³ These multiple meanings shed light on Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28–30:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

While this is a beautiful invitation for his followers, it seems ironic that Jesus describes his own yoke as light, for no yoke was particularly comfortable, especially in light of the political oppression it often symbolized.¹⁴ Rather

It's in Peter's response, “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” that they see the relation of Christology and the role of the *mwalimu*.

than an oppressive yoke that was all too familiar to Jews, Jesus offers liberation from both political and economic oppression experienced by the lay Jew because of the heightened demands that the Pharisees placed upon them through the oral traditions.¹⁵ It also could seem contrary to Jesus' other statements regarding discipleship.¹⁶ Here Jesus describes his yoke as easy, not because it was less demanding than other yokes, but rather because he offers to come alongside his followers, carrying the majority of the load.¹⁷ This is directly contrasted with the Pharisees' teaching, which Jesus speaks of in Matthew 23:2–4.

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

Jesus is rhetorically mocking the Pharisees in this section, facetiously telling his disciples to do and observe whatever they say but not what they do.¹⁸ The Pharisees' yoke was crushing, which explains why they were not willing to move a single finger to help. This contrasts with Jesus, who willingly took his own yoke upon himself.¹⁹

A Powerful Mentor

Throughout Matthew, Jesus is not only characterized as the great teacher, but also one that is full of power.²⁰ The power to command allegiances and cure both bodies and spirits speaks to Jesus' identity as a teacher, giving further proof of his right to challenge the authorities.²¹ So much so that, in 8:19, “a scribe came up and said to him, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’”²² Not only

does the scribe recognize Jesus as “teacher,” affirming his authority, but wants to continue learning from Jesus.²³ Without the physical power to overcome sickness and death, it seems unlikely that a scribe would have accepted Jesus' spiritual claims of this new mentor over and against the traditional interpretation of the law.²⁴ Unfortunately, neither does merely witnessing Jesus' power to heal guarantee that people will choose to follow him. For instance, when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, some of the Pharisees began to plot to have him killed. Their fanatical allegiance to their own interpretation of the Judaic law had grave consequences: it clouded their vision, blinded them to Jesus' power and authority, and caused them to desperately cling to their own power (12:9–14).

As this brief survey indicates, Matthew portrays Jesus as teacher in a variety of ways: as the new and greater “Moses”; his usage and meaning of the word “teacher” as it relates to the Pharisees, scribes, and Jesus; the contrasting yoke that Jesus offers, which is comparatively easy and light; and finally, Jesus as the authoritative teacher, who has the power to heal as well as to hold their allegiance.

Jesus as Mwalimu among the Makua-Metto of Mozambique

The most important Christological text for this folk Islamic context is Matthew 16 and 17, where Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” It's in Peter's response to his beloved rabbi, “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” that the Makua-Metto see the relation of Christology and the role of the *mwalimu*. In the following chapter, Matthew gives us the vivid story of the transfiguration: the disciples are on a

mountain with Jesus, when suddenly Israel's two great teachers appear, Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets. Peter wants to honor the presence of all three teachers, Jesus included, but a voice from the cloud that had enveloped them instructs, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" The disciples are told to singularly listen to Jesus—his words have more authority than those of Moses and Elijah. This story shows how Jesus the Christ (Christology) is connected to his authority as powerful rabbi or teacher (*mwalimu*). It's significant for people of a Muslim background to recognize that we are not told to follow any other *mwalimu*, be it Moses or Muhammad,²⁵ but are told specifically to listen to Jesus.²⁶

How can Jesus as *mwalimu* be an effective way to contextualize Christology among the Makua-Metto of Mozambique? We need to follow these cues in the Gospel of Matthew and explore what it means in this folk Islamic context. Will Jesus as a powerful rabbi, who carries a different yoke and the power to cure and command, pave the way for a clear Christology and a more holistic practice of the Christian faith? The word *mwalimu*, a term borrowed from Swahili, is used across the tribal languages of northern Mozambique.²⁷ Among the Makua-Metto, it is normally used to reference religious teachers, but it can refer to other types of teachers and professors as well. In the context of the mosque, the common perception is that there are basically two major authority figures: the *mwalimu* serves to instruct the community and is the one who issues the call to prayer, while the imam or sheik (himself a former *mwalimu*), fills the role of elder and ultimate authority figure for the community. In this folk-Islamic context, both of these leaders are understood as capable of interpreting sacred texts as well as providing people with a blessing or administering a curse. They may write out words in Arabic to be dipped in a

cup of drinking water or fashion amulets for a price. In the Makua-Metto culture, these Islamic authority figures, who have the ability to heal, curse and teach, are considered to be some of the most powerful practitioners of magic.

While the *mwalimu*, as a leader in a mosque, is certainly respected, his power to manipulate the words of the Qur'an mean he is often also feared. The layer of magic connected to the *mwalimu*'s authority places an added weight on the people that they struggle to bear. As we explored in the previous section, though, the *Mwalimu* Jesus offers a different, lighter yoke. In Matthew 11:28–30, this yoke (*kolo-kopiko* in Makua-Metto)²⁸ is offered to those who are weary of the old systems



of instruction, those traditional ways of being. Hagner suggests that themes of discipleship, Christology and eschatology are interwoven in this particular passage, and that

nowhere is the invitation to follow Jesus more personal and tender than the encouragement for his hearers to take on his yoke.²⁹

We believe that Matthew's clearest summary of Jesus' yoke is in the Sermon on the Mount. It is Jesus' magnum opus where he shows how the way of life he offers us redefines six ethical categories (5:21–48) and three religious practices (6:1–18), as well as reforms his disciples' relationship to money, to others and to God (6:19–7:12). The Sermon on the

Mount is the yoke that Jesus' disciples are called to wear—one that he himself bore and promises to help us carry. Many in the West have mistakenly perceived the Sermon on the Mount as impossibly hard, a representation of an unattainable, unrealistic ideal. But we have found that while the Makua-Metto certainly find the Sermon on the Mount to be challenging, they perceive it as good news. By calling them to a much better, life-giving alternative, it stands in stark contrast to the different yokes offered in their world.³⁰

Jesus' yoke is his teaching—a teaching that offers a way of life that leads to flourishing. Looking back again at Matthew's Gospel, we can see that words related to "teaching" occur over two dozen times. It is especially significant to note that Jesus specifically instructs his disciples not to call each other "rabbi" (*mwalimu*) because they have only one Teacher, the Christ (23:8–10).³¹ From the mouth of Jesus, we hear a Christology that links his identity to the role of Teacher (*Mwalimu*).

The Effectiveness of Mwalimu as an African Christology

Certainly, all Christological images need to be tested since "each of these images also holds the potential to lead astray without constant vigilance and clarification."³² We have made a biblical and cultural case for the appropriateness of the image of *mwalimu*, but only with an evaluation can this image rightfully stand beside other great African Christologies. Timothy Tennent has synthesized what he believes are four Christological contributions of African theologians,³³ and these we will use to analyze the effectiveness of presenting Jesus as *mwalimu* among the predominantly folk Islamic Makua-Metto people.

1. A Theology from Below

*Instead of focusing "on the ontology of Christ and the relationship of his deity and his humanity as Western theologians have been. . . African Christology tends to be more holistic in the way it integrates the person and work of Christ."*³⁴

Presenting Jesus as *mwalimu* is certainly a vision “from below.” It takes seriously the role that Jesus played on earth as a powerful rabbi whose words have the power to cure and command. Instead of a vision of Christ “from above” that only relies on more theological explorations of Christ’s divine nature, this vision allows Gospel narratives like the Transfiguration to give shape to Christological categories. Jesus as *mwalimu* is also an expression “from below” for the Makau-Metto people because it is a role that is woven into the fabric of their culture—it is part of who they are. Tennent notes that,

if the nations of Africa are to be disciplined in obedience to the Great Commission, it is essential that the issue of African identity be directly addressed.³⁵

While Tennent is arguing for good contextualization (something which the role of *mwalimu* fits well) he is also highlighting the significance of obedience (something that the role of *mwalimu* is equipped to address as well). Jesus as *mwalimu* is integrative in that it does not offer the Makua-Metto people a Christ that only deals with a distant plane of spiritual reality, but is one that invites the Christ to speak authoritatively about the daily realities as well. The image of *mwalimu* has the potential to issue a clearer call to obedience to the way of the Christ than other African Christologies can (such as those that focus on Jesus as Healer or Ancestor).

2. Conscious Awareness of Traditional Christological Formulations

*The “overall tenor of African Christology” is not that of divergence, but is “marked by a profound respect for historic Christian confessions.”*³⁶ Tennent notes that “rather than reading African Christology as an alternative to the ecumenical confessions, a student should read these writers as looking at Christology from an additional vantage point.”³⁷

Inter-religious dialogue often stalls out when the parties involved focus on defending confessional formulations. Approaching Jesus as *mwalimu* as an

The image of mwalimu can issue a clearer call of obedience to the way of the Christ than other African Christologies.

additional vantage point for Christology allows for special considerations when presenting Christ in a culture influenced by Islam. Remaining connected to historical confessions of the past is important, but the church is not beholden to the exclusive use of Christological articulations that have misfired in Islamic interactions for centuries.³⁸ David Kerr observes that:

...inter-religious dialogue is best advanced where, as a “dialogue” of life or a “dialogue of deeds,” priority is given to ethics. This is repeatedly the stance of Muslims themselves... This suggests that an ethical approach to Christology should be the first priority in Christian-Muslim dialogue, both to understand the core of Jesus’ prophetic teaching as contained in, for example, the Sermon on the Mount, and to apply his ethical standards to issues of human life and society with which *qur’anic* ethics are also deeply concerned. This could offer an alternative approach in Christian-Muslim dialogue to the issue that has caused so much misunderstanding and controversy in the past, namely, the personhood of Jesus himself. “Whom do you say that I am?” is a question that can only be addressed in the context of the character of Jesus’ life and teaching, and their impact upon those who lived with him.³⁹

Matthew’s Gospel reminds us that those around Jesus in his day saw him as a rabbi, a role that does not set itself over against creedal affirmations, but rather engages the arena of ethics, and serves as an important on-ramp for helping people to begin to clearly see Jesus. Instead of continuing to exclusively use creedal formulations that invariably hit roadblocks set up by Islamic influence, using *mwalimu* as an alternative Christology allows dialogue to circumvent those dead-ends and leads the communicator to a place where real engagement can occur.

3. Connecting Christ to Africa’s Pre-Christian Past

*African Christology reverses any tendency to present Christ to Africa as “a foreign stranger in complete discontinuity with its own past.”*⁴⁰

As was noted earlier, presenting Jesus as *mwalimu* honors the Islamic history of the local Makua-Metto context and national context of Mozambique. One additional title, that honors the pre-Christian past and is paired well with that of *mwalimu*, but is outside the scope of this article, is recognizing Jesus as *Mwene* (the title for a traditional king in Makua-Metto). By pairing the titles of *Mwene* and *Mwalimu*, it becomes even clearer that Jesus is greater than a prophet like Moses or Muhammad. He is even greater than *Mussa Bin Bique*—the *Mwene* and *Mwalimu* that Mozambique is named after. That *mwalimu* was involved in selling Mozambicans into slavery, while *Mwalimu* Jesus, the Christ, is in the business of liberating the Makua-Metto people. This Christological presentation of Matthew’s Gospel,⁴¹ of Jesus as the true king⁴² and powerful teacher with the power to command and cure, honors the pre-Christian past in the way it connects to this part of Africa.

4. An Emphasis on the Power and Victory of Christ

*“Despite the diverse Christological images developed by African writers, a common underlying theme is an emphasis on the power and victory of Christ. All of the major African Christological images, such as Christ as Liberator, Chief, Ancestor, Healer, Master of Initiation, and so on, tend to portray Christ in terms of power as Christus Victor.”*⁴³

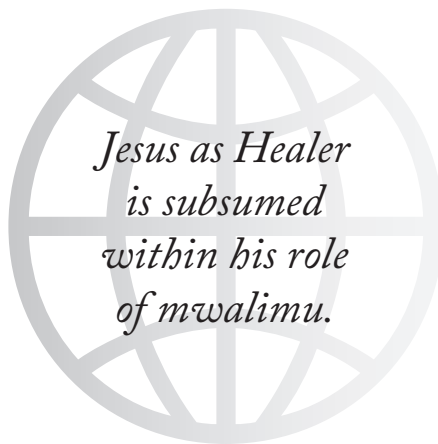
It is interesting that while none of the “powerful” African Christological images listed above include a vision of Jesus

as teacher, the holistic vision of mwalimu in Makua-Metto culture incorporates well the concept of power. As we noted before, Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus as a powerful teacher, one whose words have authority to cure and command. For example, in Matthew 13:54, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue and in amazement the people ask, "where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" That verse is important in the way it connects the concepts of wisdom and power with the blessing of people. In comparison, the Islamic mwalimus our Mozambican friends are familiar with are understood to use their power and authority for monetary profit.⁴⁴ But that abuse of the power of God is not limited solely to Islamic teachers. In Matthew 22:29, Jesus critiques the religious leaders of his day, saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." The assumption behind that comment is that Jesus, in fact, does understand the Scriptures and does understand the power of God. Jesus is using that power to heal in the proper way. In Jesus, we find a mwalimu, a powerful teacher, using his authority not for selfish gain, but instead to serve. Calling Jesus, Mwalimu, taps into the authority of this title while critiquing its abuse.

Approaching Jesus as mwalimu also reframes the perception of Jesus as healer, for it encourages more respect than that of a traditional healer who is denied the same level of honor among the Makua-Metto people. This is not unique to Mozambique. Diane Stinton noted that due to negative connotations, a significant portion of Africans interviewed in her research had a negative reaction to the idea of Jesus as Healer.⁴⁵ One problem with seeing Jesus as Healer particularly in the African context is an overcorrection—the potential misunderstanding that arises from emphasizing physical health to an unhealthy degree. Proponents of Jesus as Healer can potentially take the short step into a version of the prosperity gospel—a Christianity where Jesus supposedly takes away all suffering. It ignores that Jesus

also invites us to suffer, just like he did, on behalf of God's kingdom in the world. Suffering is a vital concept in Makua-Metto culture; the church will sidestep it to its detriment.⁴⁶

The advantage of understanding Jesus as Healer subsumed within his role of mwalimu is that it values Christ's power to cure while pairing it with his authority to command.⁴⁷ When I have discussed Christological questions with Mozambican believers, they note how no one goes to a traditional healer expecting to repent, but they expect simply to pay something to be cured. The image of Jesus as mwalimu, on the other hand, invites us to experience both physical and spiritual healing,⁴⁸



and is geared towards obedience, challenging us to repent and change. Understanding Jesus as Healer within the context of Jesus as mwalimu could lay the groundwork for a more holistic anthropology and be a better defense against drifting into what Stinton sees as a witness to Christ marred by the health-and-wealth gospel.⁴⁹

It seems clear that the image of Jesus as mwalimu harmonizes well with other African Christologies and should take its place alongside them. It's an approach that can pick up strands that have fallen aside in other presentations and weave them together into a vision of our Lord that is particularly meaningful for people of a folk Islamic heritage.

Conclusion

In their book, *Understanding Folk Religion*, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou assert that "Jesus Christ is the center of theology, for it is through him that we definitively know God."⁵⁰ It is significant that a book on folk religion sees Christology as foundational for engaging the world as it is. Our Mozambican friends understand the work of a mwalimu to be very practical and powerful—teaching people how to pray, how to respond to illness and trouble, and how to live. Mwalimu Jesus teaches us how to love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36–40) in a way that encompasses our bodies and our spirits. And Matthew's Gospel helps us understand that Jesus as mwalimu is an important piece of the Christological puzzle as it paves the way for a more holistic practice of Christianity, one that has a proper perspective on both physical and spiritual health.

An authentic African Christology must address the major questions that the culture is asking.⁵¹ One of those important questions is where common ground for Christian-Muslim engagement can be found. The vision of Jesus as mwalimu provides a useful alternative to other good African Christologies in this folk Islamic context because it honors northern Mozambique's pre-Christian identity with a rich, layered category that (to borrow language from Stinton) Jesus both "fits" and "transcends."⁵²

We can imagine Jesus asking Mozambicans the question he asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" An appropriate answer that Makua-Metto believers can offer, one that resonates with their folk Islamic context, is this: "You are the Mwene (Christ/King). You are our Mwalimu (Powerful Teacher)." This is an inculturated African Christology, one that speaks clearly to our Mozambican friends, pointing them to Jesus' authority to cure ailments and command allegiances. It points us to Jesus' final instructions to his disciples

before his ascension, to that Great Commission. He is the great and powerful mwalimu who, in contrast to Mussa Bin Bique, offers the yoke of liberation rather than the harsh yoke of slavery. Mwalimu Jesus offers his name, not to the single country of Mozambique, but calls for his name and teaching to be spread over the entire world. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ For example, in Makua-Metto, the word for “fasting from food” is *utthuka ramatani*. So, the term that even Christians use for fasting is connected to Ramadan. Another example: the Makua-Metto word for religion, *ittiini*, comes from Swahili/Arabic roots.

² For more on evangelism in this context see: Howell, “Building a Better Bridge: The Quest for Blessing in an African Folk Islamic Context,” *IJFM* 32, no. 1 (Jan–Mar 2015), 43–51.

³ For more on Nyerere’s influence and impact see Phil Noss and Peter Renju, “Mwalimu Nyerere Engages His People: Scripture Translation in Swahili Verse,” *Journal of Translation*, Vol. 3, Number 1 (2007).

⁴ Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 117. Tennent notes that, “A survey of the key publications on African Christology reveals six major images that have been proposed: Christ as Healer and Life-Giver, Christ as Liberator, Christ as Chief, Christ as Mediator, Christ as Master of Initiation, and Christ as Ancestor/Elder Brother.” The overlap among these metaphors is his reason for concentrating on Jesus as Healer and Jesus as Ancestor. For other general surveys of African Christologies, see Schreiter, Robert J., Ed. *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), and Diane Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004). Stinton outlines four models: 1. Jesus as life-giver (especially healer); 2. Jesus as mediator (especially as ancestor); 3. Jesus as loved one (family and friendship); 4. Jesus as leader (king/chief or liberator). Unfortunately, neither Schreiter nor Stinton give more than a passing reference to the influence of Islam on African culture and the potential impact of that on Christology.

⁵ Kenton L. Sparks, “Gospel as Conquest: Mosaic Typology in Matthew 28:16–20,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 68, no.4

(2006): 658–659. For a much fuller discussion on Mosaic typology and Jesus as the new Moses see Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁶ Relevant to the discussion on Hebrew typology in Matthew, Sparks also sees Matthew’s connection of Jesus with David, Joseph, Elisha, Abraham, and Isaac. See Sparks, 662.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 661.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 661. In his article, Sparks points the reader to Barbara E. Reid, “Violent Endings in Matthew’s Parables and Christian Nonviolence,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2004): 237–255 for a full argument of pacifism in Matthew.

¹⁰ Surprisingly, although a major purpose of Matthew’s gospel is presenting Jesus as the great teacher and Jesus claims the title for himself, only those opposed to Jesus actually address him as “teacher.” While some may assume that the title of teacher was too commonplace for Jesus the Messiah, perhaps their usage of it reflected their own misunderstanding of who Jesus was. Because the scribes and Pharisees viewed themselves as the authoritative teachers of the law, by referring to Jesus as “teacher,” they are wrongly equating Jesus with themselves. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28 Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1995), 768; and Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13 Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 216.

¹¹ This is further seen through the following seven woes to the scribes and Pharisees.

¹² For a discussion on the use of the words “rabbi” and “teacher” see Hayim Lapin, “Rabbi,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Volume O–Sh, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 600–602.

¹³ Charles L. Tyer, “Yoke,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Volume 6 Si–Z, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday,, 1992), 1026–1027.

¹⁴ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T&T International, 2004), 188.

¹⁵ While there is some debate, with assuming the post-70 CE date of Matthew that is agreed upon by some scholars, Matthew’s audience would have been experiencing political oppression under the Roman Empire. For a discussion on the dating of Matthew see Davies and Allison, xii; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William

B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 42–44; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, lxxiii–lxxv. For a discussion on Jewish oppression see Graeme Lang, “Oppression and Revolt in Ancient Palestine: The Evidence in Jewish Literature from the Prophets to Josephus” *Sociological Analysis* 49, no.4 (1989): 325–342.

¹⁶ In regards to difficult teachings of Jesus, I am particularly thinking of Matthew 5:48 and 16:24–25.

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 349. Jesus carried the yoke perfectly and promises to be with us, not allowing us to be crushed by the burden of his yoke. See Matthew 1:21–23 and 28:20.

¹⁸ Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 257. Talbert cites I Kings 18:27, Isaiah 6:9, Jeremiah 44:25–26, and Amos 4:4–5 as other examples of this kind of ironic mocking.

¹⁹ Additionally, another contrast is seen in the way that the Pharisees held onto powerful positions of authority, while Jesus gave up his seat in heaven in order to save humanity. Keener, 349; Philippians 2:5–8.

²⁰ In Matthew 7:28–29, after preaching the Sermon on the Mount, “the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” Unlike the common teachers of the law, who relied heavily on past traditions in their teaching, Jesus claimed a unique authority over the law. After hearing this, the crowds were amazed, for they had never heard one with such authority. His authority was proven in the following a triad of miracles (8:1–17). See Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 193.

²¹ Talbert, 95–96. In ancient times, authority rested primarily in tradition. For a discussion on premodern epistemology see Kenton L. Sparks, *God’s Words in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 26–30.

²² Hagner notes that this scribe “reflects good Jewish practice in choosing his teacher” (as opposed to the teacher choosing the student, which was not common) and that it was common practice for a student to live with their rabbi, listening and learning from them. See Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 76–77; 216.

²³ This is a rare case in Matthew’s gospel, for this scribe accepts Jesus’ teaching. Unfortunately, it is clear from Jesus’ response, however, that the scribe does not

understand what he is asking, for Jesus responds, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” For a relevant discussion on the master-disciple relationship and the distinction between “sage” and “disciple” see Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 30–32.

²⁴ This is seen in Matthew 9:1–8. First Jesus says, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” After the scribes accuse Jesus of blaspheming, Jesus says, “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” He then heals the paralytic man. After the healing, the crowds respond by glorifying God.

²⁵ While this title is respectfully used in reference to them, they are most commonly referred to by the title of *nabiu* or prophet.

²⁶ Interestingly, in Makua-Metto, there is a linguistic connection between the word for listening (*wiirwa*) and obeying (*wiirwalela*).

²⁷ The word is used in Mwani and Makonde Bible translations as well.

²⁸ Or *ncipocipo* in parts of the Chiure District. Because of minimal agricultural exposure to beasts of burden, yokes in this context are assumed to be for humans to wear for the purpose of balancing and carrying two heavy loads.

²⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 322.

³⁰ My wife, Ladye Rachel Howell, has made the Sermon on the Mount her primary text for discipling Makua-Metto women.

³¹ One way to summarize and contextualize Jesus’ instruction in these verses for this setting, is this: “You should not call each other *Mwalimu* (like Muslims in this context do), because you already have one *Mwalimu*. And you should not call each other Father (or Padre—like Catholics in this context do), because you already have one Father in heaven.”

³² Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 111.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁸ For an exploration on contextualizing Christology that addresses the issues of trinitarianism and monotheism for more orthodox Muslims (not folk Muslims, though, unfortunately), see Martin D. Parsons, *Unveiling God:*

Contextualizing Christology for Islamic Culture (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005).

³⁹ Kerr, David A. “Christology in Christian-Muslim Dialogue” in B. F. Berkey & S. A. Edwards, eds, *Christology in Dialogue* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1993), 215.

⁴⁰ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 115.

⁴¹ One example of the connection between Jesus as King and Teacher is noticeable in Matthew 22:41–46, which addresses Jesus’ identity as the Christ or *Mwene*. That section is immediately followed by Jesus’ instruction that he is the one true Teacher or *Mwalimu* (23:1–12).

⁴² For more on the implications of understanding Jesus’ leadership as *Mwene* or king in Makua-Metto culture, see Alan B. Howell, “When Having a Bad Leader is Good: Processing a Negative Experience and Applying Leadership Lessons from the Kings,” *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Practice* 8, no. 2 (Summer–Fall 2017).

⁴³ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 115. For more on how the Christus Victor atonement metaphor is useful in the Makua-Metto context see Alan B. Howell, “Through the Kaleidoscope: Animism, Contextualization and the Atonement,” *IJFM* 26, vol. 3 (Fall 2009).

⁴⁴ For more on the occult and the connections to finances among the Makua-Metto people, see Alan B. Howell, “The Occult in Mozambique: Dramatic Case Studies,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* vol. 47, no. 3 (July 2011).

⁴⁵ Stinton, 82–84.

⁴⁶ For more on the concept of suffering in Makua-Metto culture, see Alan B. Howell, “Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering,” *IJFM* 29, vol. 3 (Fall 2012).

⁴⁷ So while Stinton (pages 81, 89, 91) rightly details the varying opinions on the validity of the single category of “Jesus as Healer” from her interviews, in my own qualitative interviews regarding the category of *mwalimu* (both formal and informal) with church leaders, as well as usage in preaching, teaching and personal conversations, I have yet to find a single person (Christian or Muslim) who questions the appropriateness of Jesus as *mwalimu*.

⁴⁸ As Tennent notes, “Africans simply do not maintain a sharp demarcation between physical healing and spiritual healing, as often occurs in Western writings.” Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 118.

⁴⁹ Stinton, 42.

⁵⁰ Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 24.

⁵¹ Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 77.

⁵² Stinton, 142.

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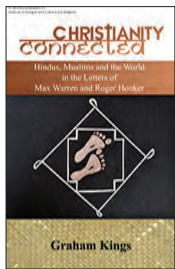
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Book Reviews

Christianity Connected: Hindus, Muslims and the World in the Letters of Max Warren and Roger Hooker, by Graham Kings (Delhi: ISPCK, 2017, pp. 432 + x; Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, The Netherlands, 2002)

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



Fifteen years after this volume first appeared as a typically overpriced European academic text, a very reasonably priced edition has finally appeared in India. The focus of the volume is on Max Warren, who as General Secretary of the CMS (Church Missionary Society of the Evangelical Anglicans) for two decades (1942-1963) was a significant

figure on the British missiological scene. This review will make note of some important points related to Warren and British missiology, but will focus on the junior partner in the epistolary dialogue that is the core of the book. Roger Hooker was Warren's son-in-law, and the letters cover the time of his service under the CMS in India from 1965 to 1978. Hooker's never well-known writings on the Christian encounter with Hinduism are ably supplemented by this text, and students of frontier mission, especially among Hindus, need to grapple with Hooker and his perspectives.

Graham Kings provides an extensive (175 pages) and insightful introduction to the letters of Warren and Hooker, giving brief biographical surveys and an introduction to their specialist studies (history for Warren, literature for Hooker), before getting to the heart of matters with sections on "a theology of mission" and "a theology of religions." Kings also annotates the 617 numbered letters of Warren and the significantly fewer unnumbered letters of Hooker (early letters of Hooker have been lost, along with some later ones as well).

The general theological perspective of Warren and Hooker is part of their dialogue in the shifting theological and missiological currents of their time. They were broadly Evangelical and struggled with what that meant, distancing themselves from the narrowness of conservative Evangelicals like John Stott and Michael Green (Warren commenting on his special dislike of J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*, p. 372; note Kings' analysis of this on p. 61, etc.) Warren was a borderline universalist yet embraced the Evangelical label; Hooker challenged Warren's universalism but distanced himself from an Evangelical label, perhaps due to the narrowness of Indian Evangelicalism (p. 52). Warren lamented

the lack of academic missiology in Britain (see his devastating critique quoted in footnote 106 on p. 110).

The uniqueness of Christ and the central importance of presenting (and representing) Christ to others is a key theme of the interaction. Warren interacted widely and shared many reflections on people and issues of his times, including Raymond Panikkar (who became a friend, though Warren admitted to often not understanding him) and John Hick, whose pluralism was deplored and at times mocked. The stimulating material on generic missiological issues discussed in this volume is worthy of an extensive review, but this review will now focus on the India (and particularly Hindu) specific content related to Hooker's engagement and perspective.

To summarize in a phrase, Hooker called for a serious engagement with Hindus and Hindu traditions, and he did not see much of that happening in mission circles. His disdain for dialogue is clear in a letter of 4 November 1972 (p. 302) referencing a group of visiting pastors who wanted a dialogue session arranged for them. Warren fully affirms Hooker, saying "I'm so sure that God has called you to do something tremendous in the field of interpretation that I don't want to see you sidetracked into the imaginary world of 'Dialogue' as that is understood at Geneva" (letter 379, 30 Dec. 1972, p. 309; cf. Hooker, "I find much contemporary inter-religious dialogue phoney," 30 May 1975, p. 354). Hooker sent Warren a letter from the Evangelical Fellowship of India, and there are problems in this direction also:

You have set yourself to understand Hindus and Muslims through the medium of the best in their tradition, hoping that in and through such understanding you may bring some of them to understand Jesus and want to become his disciples. I doubt very much if the brothers of the EFI are in the least bit interested in understanding Hinduism and Islam. What further worries me about their efforts is that they stir up a few people and then disappear. They aren't rooted in the local situation and don't pretend to know it. Varanasi is for them an abstraction—a CITY to be attacked, not a multitude of individual peoples, caught up in all the complexities of an ancient culture. As I have said I can see that they may well meet the needs of some and will reach some you, in the nature of things, will never touch. But I could not myself identify with them, beyond in friendly fashion wishing them well, and praying for them. Does this come somewhere near where you are? (letter 395, 17 Apr. 1973, p. 317)

It is perhaps misleading to pick and choose some highlights of Hooker's insights, but there are genuine insights that should be shared for those who will not read this rather daunting book. These comments should not be read as part of a formula, and certainly do not amount to a secret to success.

Writing on 4 October 1969 after attending his first Hindu *satsang* in Bareilly, U. P., Hooker commented that

All present were manifestly deeply satisfied with their religion and profoundly devoted to Ram, one could sense it in

I am quite sure that we must hold to mission, evangelism and conversion, yet these words need re-minting and re-interpreting. I am not in India to convert Hindus. I am here to witness to Christ. —Hooker

the atmosphere and see it on many of their faces. Simply to proclaim the gospel to these people would simply (sic) be an exercise in insensitive futility. (249)

On 9 October 1971 Hooker commented on linguistic challenges in communication:

My own feeling is that we must go in for dialogue for a long time before we can find the language in which to preach the Gospel to Hindus and Muslims. (278)

Responding to a request from John V. Taylor, Warren's successor as head of the CMS, to answer some questions, Hooker stated his discomfort with the situation:

... I get more and more uneasy about asking "Christian" questions about other faiths. Such questions always seem to distort the very thing one is trying to understand. Perhaps an analogy will help at this point. When one first arrives in a foreign country one automatically starts comparing it to home. One compares for example marriage customs, attitudes to time, the social structure. But the longer one is in the new country the more superficial and inadequate do such analogies become. When one has been around long enough the country can somehow speak for itself to one. (327, 23 Sept. 1973)

In the same letter to Taylor, Hooker commented on the difficult concept of "the Holy Spirit," (this reviewer is not so sure that speaking in English makes the difference Hooker suggests, as it is odd and difficult terminology in Hindu contexts):

I could in English explain to a Hindu who knew a little about Christianity, something of what we mean by the Holy Spirit and ask him directly if there was anything like this within Hinduism. In Hindi or Sanskrit however I would be totally at a loss. One simply cannot translate the phrase "Holy Spirit" into either of those languages in a way that is even remotely intelligible. (328, 23 Sept. 1973)

Hooker's engaging with Hindu contexts brought him to a new understanding of the role of sin in evangelism, and stimulated this striking comment:

The worst heresy the church has taught is that men must be made to realise they are sinners before they can accept Christ. (351, 6 April 1975)

Sharing some concerns about equating Christian devotion and Hindu *bhakti*, Hooker stated some random thoughts:

I am coming increasingly to feel that to describe bhakti as personal devotion, as opposed to impersonal monism, is a vast over-simplification. I do not think one can make an equation between personal devotion in Christianity and in Hinduism. Even in Christianity the word personal surely needs a lot of explication. Although the word takes us to the heart of what we mean by God, we surely mean that he cannot be less than

what we mean by the word person, but if he is God he is surely more. Surely the heart of what we mean by personal consists in will and purpose. This it seems to me is the great difference between the God of the bible and the gods of bhakti. Then too I am coming to see that the two virtues which bhakti commends are loving devotion of a very emotional kind—people are always swooning in Tulsi Das—and obedience e.g. to the king, to one's father, to one's guru or elder brother. None of these is about action, devotion, "stepping out" like Abraham. These are just a few random and disconnected thoughts. (356–7, 20 July 1975)

There is much to reflect on in these statements, and changes of attitude and approach to Hindus should follow from such reflection.

In his writings Hooker fails to address the problem of the Hindu who wants to embrace Christ and his discipleship. Warren raised the issue, speculating about baptism and the possibility of avoiding baptism, and how a follower of Jesus might "revolutionise Hinduism from within," but going on to comment on fear of the "absorptive capacity of Hinduism" (312, letter 388, 23 Feb. 1973). Hooker responded that such questions about baptism and joining the Christian community are "a bit unreal" in Varanasi (314, 10 March 1973), clearly because there were not people interested in following Christ.

Yet a case study appears in a later reference, and the approach is intriguing. Writing on 29 November, 1975, Hooker tells about his self-understanding and a Hindu colleague who was impacted:

I am quite sure that we must hold to mission, evangelism and conversion, yet these words need re-minting and re-interpreting. I am not in India to convert Hindus. I am here to witness to Christ—a Christ the full range of whose significance I have barely begun to grasp. It is for Hindus to make their own response to Christ. To attempt to manipulate them into making that response would of course be imperialism, but when a Hindu tells me he wants to be baptized and that he has found in Christ a love which he does not find in Hinduism, (and this is a real example), have I any right to forbid him!

...Hinduism is changing and it is part of my duty to help it to change in a Christian direction. For example, that scholar whom I quoted is probable (sic, probably), under God, doing a better job where he is than he would be if he were baptized and therefore rejected by his own community. (366, 367, 29 Nov. 1975)

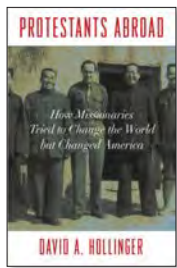
Why Hooker did not come out more clearly on this approach in his various writings is an interesting question. My presumed answer is that Hooker wanted to model a questioning approach, a wrestling with complex issues, and did not want to be seen as coming up with quick answers or simplistic conclusions. This runs throughout his letters. One

of his longer submissions printed in this volume outlines various Christian approaches to other faith traditions, and he is unhappy with all of them and with his efforts to come up with something better (pp. 319–323).

Hooker rightly lamented the lack of serious Christian engagement with Hindu traditions. Roman Catholic scholars have begun to redress this lacuna (see especially the works of Francis X. Clooney), but academic engagement is only one part of holistic engagement. Roger Hooker presents a Protestant engagement with Hindu contexts that is stimulating and evocative. That is a minor key in this book which focuses on Warren, but all who are serious about issues in the Hindu-Christian engagement need to reflect deeply on the life and work of Roger Hooker.

Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America, by David A. Hollinger (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017, pp. 408)

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



David A. Hollinger's *Protestants Abroad* is an ambitious narrative. It yields insight when viewed from multiple vantage points. But first, three vignettes.

Three Vignettes

Scene 1:

The year is 1900 and the occasion is the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, with its accompanying “Missionary Exhibit,” which consisted of an array of religious and cultural artifacts gathered from around the world.¹ The conference, held in New York City, met in Carnegie Hall as well as several local churches and stretched from April 21 through May 1.² “President William McKinley presided over the Conference’s opening ceremonies, and participants included former president Benjamin Harrison [and] New York Governor [and future president] Theodore Roosevelt.” With 2,500 official delegates, “including more than 600 foreign missionaries from fifty countries,” and a total attendance “between 160,000 and 200,000,” the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions was “the largest sustained formal religious event in the history of the United States.” It was also “the largest international missionary conference” to that date.³

From the first such conference held in Liverpool, England, in 1860, missionary expositions on both sides of the Atlantic had been growing in size and scope.⁴ The grand finale of such displays of missionary pride, the Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions, held in Columbus, Ohio, in 1919, was to far outstrip the New York conference in

attendance. It brought over a million people to Columbus, roughly 1 percent of the US population at the time.⁵

Takeaway: Coinciding with Europe’s era of high imperialism, the US missionary expositions gave full-throated expression to confident exportation of Americanism conjoined with Christian mission.

Scene 2:

The year is 1932. Missionary daughter Pearl Buck, who spent her childhood in China and herself served as a missionary there, is honored with the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Good Earth*.⁶ The book had been published the year before to wide acclaim. Six years later, in 1938, she went on to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature “for her rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces.”⁷

Also making news is *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen’s Inquiry after One Hundred Years*, published in 1932.⁸ Assembled under the hand of Harvard professor William Ernest Hocking, the book’s call for a change in the character of Christian missions raises a furor.

Moviegoers in 1932 fill theaters to watch *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, released that year and starring Barbara Stanwyck as Megan Davis. A missionary bride-to-be, Megan travels to China to wed a handsome young missionary doctor, but arrives in Shanghai just as intrigue, war, and revolt are tearing the country apart and flooding streets and roads with refugees. The scene showing the missionaries gathered in pompous, ostentatious provision, and callous comfort as they await the arrival of the wedding party—even as crowds of refugees stream past their door in terror-driven flight—has to stand as one of Hollywood’s most bitterly skewed movie depictions of missionaries.

The same year also saw the release of *Rain*, a refilming of Somerset Maugham’s short story “Rain,” this time as a “talkie” starring Joan Crawford. (The story had been filmed four years earlier as a silent movie under the title *Sadie Thompson*, starring Gloria Swanson, and was to be made into a movie again in 1953, starring Rita Hayworth and titled *Miss Sadie Thompson*.) The movie depicts an overbearing South Sea missionary who cruelly manipulates the lives of all who fall within his clutches, “native” and Westerner alike.

Takeaway: The mood in 1932 was far removed from presidents presiding over celebratory missionary fairs. Unruffled presumptions of the innocence and rightness or righteousness of missionary Americanism were no longer tenable.

Scene 3:

Much more briefly: the year is 1954 and the scene shifts to Geneva. Players preparing to give performances on the world stage are warming up. The cast consists of three persons. One is the son of an American missionary, Chester

Ronning, who was born in China and lived there until in his early teens but who had become a Canadian citizen and a diplomat. The second is John Foster Dulles, the eminent US Protestant layman who was tapped by President Eisenhower to be his secretary of state. (He was to the manor born: one of his grandfathers and an uncle had earlier been secretary of state; his brother Allen Dulles became director of the Central Intelligence Agency; his son Avery Dulles converted to Roman Catholicism and became both a noted theologian and a cardinal.) The third figure in this scene is Zhou Enlai of China, a close colleague of Mao Zedong.

David Hollinger reports,

In Geneva in 1954, Ronning, as representative of Canada, happened to be walking a few steps behind Dulles when the two encountered the Chinese representative Zhou Enlai, who put out his hand. Dulles refused to shake it. But Ronning hastily took Zhou's hand and shook it firmly, in a gesture Zhou never forgot.⁹

Takeaway: If the proverbial lack of a nail cost a kingdom, what price did the failure to shake a hand exact? At the very moment of the Protestant Establishment's apotheosis in the person of Dulles, it is rebuked by a scion of the American overseas missionary movement. What is happening?

His framing question, the one that shapes the book, is: *What impact did foreign missions have on US public life? A second question is: Which group of missionaries primarily exercised that influence?*

Shifts in Outlook

If one were to carry the scene forward and extract slices from the 1970s through the 1990s or on to today, several noteworthy shifts would become apparent.

First, though mission endeavor within liberal Protestantism in the United States is far from disappearing, numerical preponderance within the US overseas missionary community and in missionary giving crosses over from mainline, ecumenical, or liberal Protestantism to evangelically aligned mission programs.

Second, the largest missionary convocations of the period—among them Lausanne (1974), Manila (1989), and Cape Town (2010)—come out of a Billy Graham milieu, another indicator of evangelical missionary ascendancy.

Third, and pointedly, neither these missionary convocations nor those held by the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) are able to focus attention or garner public support on a scale comparable to that showered on the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions in 1900, or "The World in Boston" exposition in 1911, or the Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions in 1919.¹⁰ The number

of people who follow the conferences' deliberations and reports may be substantial, but as a proportion of the US population it is meager.

Fourth, the segment of society that is tracking missionary conferences and is attending to mission spokespersons' deliberations is not as culturally or socially central as had been true in the first third of the twentieth century. The group is smaller and more peripheral. It does not move as many of society's levers of power. The missionary gatherings at the latter end of the twentieth century are not affairs upon which a significant portion of the US populace rivets its attention or for which masses of ordinary people spend their vacation savings in order for their families to be present.

In the 1930s, controversies surrounding *Re-thinking Missions* and Pearl Buck's pronouncements captured broad attention in popular media in a way no longer to be hoped for or even imagined. If the populace at large thinks at all of controversies about the intent and activities of missionaries and mission organizations, it relegates them to the status of in-house esoterica, possibly of interest to mission specialists, but not to the world at large.

Overarching Concerns

These shifts in public temper within the United States suggest a trajectory, one that can be seen as playing itself out across the middle decades of the twentieth century and beyond. How are these shifts to be accounted for? David A. Hollinger believes that he has some clues, which he unfolds in *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America*. His framing question, the one that gives identity to and shapes the book, is: *What impact did foreign missions have on US public life?*¹¹ A second question, entailed by the first, is: *Which missionaries, as a group, primarily exercised that influence?* The volume is not a record of what missionaries accomplished, or failed to accomplish, in other lands. It is not a mission history in that sense. It is a work about the so-called missions boomerang, the changes in outlook, attitude, and policy that missionaries, by going abroad, brought about within their home country.¹² A work dealing with US intellectual history, *Protestants Abroad* seeks to render intelligible several major intellectual and social currents present in the United States.

As background, at the opening of the twentieth century, US Protestants stood as beneficiaries of a long tradition that held the United States to be a Protestant country. To

be a US citizen gave a Protestant cast to your identity; to be a Protestant made you at one with the character of the country. Roman Catholics, Jews, and others were present by sufferance, and often far from gracious sufferance at that. Within Protestantism there were multiple denominations, but also a definite, if informal, pecking order. As one ascended in social esteem, or desired to do so, one might ascend the religious elevator, shifting church membership from, say, Baptist to Methodist or from Methodist to Presbyterian or Episcopalian, etc. Boarding the denominational elevator could serve as an aspirational signal or as a means to solidify social gains in the making. Ascent through the Protestant ranks brought enhanced access to positions of prestige and power.

As the early decades of the twentieth century unfolded, US Protestantism divided itself more and more sharply into two wings, or camps, sufficient for present purposes to identify as the fundamentalist or evangelical wing and the mainline or liberal wing.¹³ By the 1940s the mainline Protestants had triumphed: not only did they control the denominational structures and seminaries, but also from their ranks came the nation's university presidents and professors, political leaders, financiers, industrial and corporate leaders. Together they formed what Hollinger calls the Protestant Establishment. The sons and daughters of this group who went abroad as missionaries and their children—sent by the mainline Protestant denominations—are the focus of Hollinger's study.

Why not attend equally to missionaries sent by the fundamentalist/evangelical/"faith mission" wing of the US church? Quite simply, they did not fit the social profile. Missionaries recruited and sent by ecumenical or mainline Protestant mission boards tended to be equipped by education, expectations, entitlement, social connections, and cultural potency in ways that "faith missionaries" ordinarily were not. Of missionaries within the evangelical wing Hollinger writes,

Rarely before the end of the twentieth century did missionary-connected Americans from [that wing] become leaders in any institutional or discursive domain beyond evangelical Protestantism itself. They simply did not become outspoken Foreign Service officers, civil rights activists, Ivy League professors, or critically acclaimed writers.¹⁴

The self-exclusionary stance adopted by the fundamentalist wing "took" soundly and solidly, not to be overcome for at least half a century.

Missionaries sent by the evangelical "faith mission" wing of the church did not fit the social profile. Those sent by ecumenical Protestant mission boards tended to be equipped by education, entitlement, and cultural potency.

Missionary Influence on the United States

So, how did missionaries change America? By embodying an international and cosmopolitan outlook, they helped to open the eyes of an insular, inward-looking, and even ignorant nation. They became early and outspoken leaders in the cause of racial justice within the United States and decried lynching. They advocated for civil rights, including speaking out against internment of Americans of Japanese descent during World War II. They opened ministries to succor internees. They placed their linguistic and cultural expertise at the service of the government and US military at a crucial juncture in the period surrounding the Second World War. Children of missionaries and former missionaries played an outsize role in, for example, the US Foreign Service. They were markedly overrepresented, to borrow words from Dean Acheson's title, "at the creation" of the new world order that World War II brought into being.¹⁵ Hollinger examines the contribution made by a number of missionaries and missionary children in each of these categories. Sherwood Moran, for example, a longtime missionary to Japan, overhauled the US Marine Corps's approach to interrogating Japanese prisoners of war, refusing to use torture and insisting that the prisoners be treated as brothers. He achieved marked success and wrote what was to become the regnant military interrogation manual.¹⁶

Still Hollinger's identification is to be viewed expansively. In writing of "missionary" impact, he has in mind missionaries who had themselves served abroad, children of those missionaries, and the wider circle of those "closely associated with missionaries, typically through missionary support organizations."¹⁷ This wider circle not only encompasses women's missionary circles and similar groups, but also parishioners and members of the public who might not be deeply involved in mission projects themselves, but who are generally supportive of missionary endeavors—and responsive to missionary appeals to act on conscience.

What the missionaries themselves, and later their children, brought was, first of all, firsthand knowledge gained through long-term, direct experience with peoples and lands overseas. Hollinger draws especially on the Far East and Middle East. The missionaries communicated what they had learned and experienced to a US populace for whom lands and peoples overseas were largely terra—and genus—incognita. They did so through articles, books, missionary itineration among churches, magic lantern and later slide shows, displays of exotic clothes and cultural artifacts,

Missionary children were versed in the languages and culture of the Orient, and sometimes knew the rising leaders personally, having attended school with them. They were vital to intelligence operations of the period.

Bible camps, conferences, and speeches—and by public advocacy for a new internationalism and a more cosmopolitan outlook within the churches, among church members, in denominational policies, and in US foreign relations and programs. Negatively, they combatted ignorance and ingrown attitudes of xenophobia and insularity (the United States has a long and inglorious history of spasms of “nativism”). Positively, they conveyed an enlarged vision of the world and a broader, more encompassing, and more fraternal outlook.

Domestically, missionaries, former missionaries, and missionary offspring—such as Edmund Davidson Soper, mission educator who was born in Japan to missionary parents—combatted racism in the United States, both within US churches and denominational structures and within US society at large. They held up the plumb line of Scripture and decried US tolerance of Jim Crow laws and lynching. They advanced the pragmatic argument that the appalling state of race relations within the United States worked against their missionary witness abroad. (Remember the assumption enshrined in the missionary fairs that missionaries had a twin mandate to represent America as well as the gospel.) They charged that racial injustice which the US populace and US churches seemingly found tolerable undercut the gospel message they were carrying overseas. The missionaries joined in championing the cause of civil rights and they worked to enlist the wider missionary-influenced community in that effort.

The second carrier of missionary influence was missionary children. Born and raised on the mission field and often attending school there, missionary children formed friendships, learned the local customs, and felt at home. They had the language and culture down cold. China and other countries in which they were raised were part of who they were and of what they carried with them when they “returned” to the United States. In the years leading up to the Second World War when the United States turned its eyes to the East, missionary children played a key role. Extremely few US citizens knew the languages, cultures, and geography of the Orient. Missionary children were versed in all three, and sometimes knew the current or rising leaders personally, having attended school with them. Along with returned and former missionaries, they were vital to US military, Foreign Service, and intelligence operations of the period. One example is William Eddy, born and raised in Lebanon, who impressed Arabia’s King Ibn Saud by his ability to “recite long passages from the Koran in three Arabic dialects.” He served as translator

for President Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud at their meeting in 1945.¹⁸ In the Far East, Office of Strategic Services (OSS) operative Rosamond Frame, a missionary daughter, “was held in awe by her co-workers for her fluency in nine Mandarin dialects.”¹⁹

A third strand of missionary influence on the mind of America came through missionary children and others with strong missionary ties who played a prominent role in fostering a more deeply informed internationalism within academia and who became assiduous advocates for the same outlook within the US State Department and related governmental agencies. Missionary sons and a wider circle of scholars with close missionary associations were prominent in founding area studies programs at a number of leading US universities. Edwin O. Reischauer, who was born in Japan and taught at Harvard University, is perhaps the best known. Some missionary children were appointed to diplomatic posts; in the 1960s Reischauer himself served for a period as ambassador to Japan. Missionary sons were prominent members of the State Department’s circle of “China Hands.” Several were purged during the “Red Scare” drummed up by Joseph McCarthy. John Paton Davies and John S. Service were among them.

Fourth, within the group that was later to be labeled Third Culture Kids, missionary children formed a distinct subset. Numerous missionary children became casualties; ill-equipped for life, they did not fare well. Hollinger cites several cases. But, he writes, “missionary children who escaped becoming ‘casualties’ were often high achievers.”²⁰ Like missionary son Henry Luce—publisher of the magazines *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*—when they succeeded, which many did, they carried the international and cosmopolitan perspectives they had acquired as children of missionary parents with them into their, putatively, more worldly careers. John Hersey is but one example of an MK (missionary kid) whose work as a journalist and novelist stands out. His novel *The Call* draws heavily on his missionary father’s life in China.²¹

The Author and the Book’s Genesis

David Hollinger is the Preston Hotchkis Professor of History Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley.²² Expressing clearly that he is not writing as a missionary “insider”—he is not a missionary himself, members of his immediate family have not served as missionaries, nor does he have a place within the wider missionary circle referred to above—he states candidly that he writes “from a secular perspective” and that he is “no longer a Protestant.”²³ In various places he refers to himself as being

post-Protestant. Not, one might think at first blush, a likely socioreligious position for the author of what obviously has been a lengthy and deeply felt engagement with a topic that to many might seem hopelessly recondite. His treatment of those with whose life project he differs fundamentally can only be called sympathetic and fair. Though he accepts the judgment that “what the missionaries did [while abroad] in the company of those foreign peoples has since been a matter of widespread embarrassment. Missionaries from the United States and Europe often did exactly what their harshest critics claimed. They supported imperialist projects, accepted the white supremacist ideology of the West, imposed narrow moral codes, and infantilized the peoples they imagined they were serving,” he concludes that “yet a substantial measure of what these people said and did resists condescension.” Along the way they became “proto-multiculturalists and proto-world-citizens” and moved their home country in those directions.²⁴

Hollinger’s reach is broad. The extent and depth of his research into the lives and literature germane to this topic is evident both in the main text of the book and in the volume’s eighty pages of endnotes, which are meaty and often contain insightful commentary.

So how did Hollinger come to take up the topic he did? He approached it through at least two doors. Liberal Protestantism in the mid-twentieth-century United States has been a professional focus for Hollinger as an intellectual historian. That provided the front door. His wider studies into the fortunes of liberal Protestantism supplied context and enriched his research for *Protestants Abroad*. The fit was superb. But why study missionaries and their influence at all? The impetus for that came through a side door. The travails and triumphs of the US Jewish minority has been another focus of Hollinger’s scholarship.²⁵ He was struck by the “Jewish demographic overrepresentation in the American worlds of finance, film, science, philanthropy, political radicalism, and other domains of modernity.”²⁶ But a particular contribution made by Jews, who had largely immigrated from Eastern Europe, was the way that they opened American provincialism to Europe. Was there another group, Hollinger wondered, that had made a similar distinctive contribution to internationalizing the American outlook? His answer, found in the Protestant missionary movement, particularly the mainline Protestant missionaries who had served in China, Japan, the Far East more broadly, and the Middle East, became the subject of *Protestants Abroad*.

The particular contribution made by Jews was the way they opened American provincialism to Europe. Was there another group, Hollinger wondered, who had helped internationalize the American outlook?

The Company It Keeps

In the past number of decades, scholarly investigation into mission history has fallen on good times. Today substantive explorations of mission history from a variety of disciplinary perspectives stream from the presses. Ranging from single focus studies to numerous variations on “missions and . . .” symposia, themes include such topics as “missions and imperialism,” “missions and colonialism,” “missions and gender/missions and women,” “missions and the Enlightenment,” and go right on. I think of the multivolume 200-year-anniversary retrospective, edited by Wilbert Shenk (Mercer Univ. Press); the series *Studies in the History of Christian Missions*, edited by Robert Frykenberg and Brian Stanley (Eerdmans); the work of Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh and the wider outflow from the North Atlantic Missiology Project; works by Dana Robert; *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home*, edited by Daniel Bays and Grant Wacker (Alabama Univ. Press); among many others. *Protestants Abroad* now occupies an eminent place within this burgeoning array.

The Person as an Instrument

Historian Grant Wacker reminds us that historians do not “simply report what they observe. They see what they are prepared to see.”²⁷ So who is David Hollinger and what equipped him as an instrument for this task?

Hollinger spent his early years in Idaho, growing up within a small Anabaptist sect. The Dunker (German Baptist Brethren) church on the ground around which the battle of Antietam raged in 1862 is one in which his grandfather, a lay minister (as was common among the group at that time), may have preached. Hollinger’s own father finished high school at age thirty-three by taking evening classes in Chicago while working at Sears forty hours weekly as a shoe salesman to support his family. His father went on to college and then seminary to obtain more substantial grounding for pastoral ministry. During his seminary years, David’s father supported the family by painting houses. Some years after moving to Idaho and then to southern California, his father left pastoral ministry and returned to painting houses, but he never left the church and continued to do pulpit supply on occasion.

By example and words Hollinger’s parents implanted an outlook that valued education and the life of the mind. Missionaries on itineration stayed in the family home. Their visits and reports carried intimations of wider horizons.

So did the Christian gospel as preached and practiced and sung among the Brethren: “In Christ there is no East or West, In Him no South or North; But one great fellowship of love, throughout the whole wide earth.” During the Second World War, his parents made sure that their young son was aware of their distress over the unjust internment of US citizens of Japanese descent. After the war the family sent aid packages to relatives in Germany.

Hollinger himself moved further than his father, both academically and religiously. As a youth he fixed his mind’s eye on becoming a college professor and teaching history. Earning a PhD in history at the University of California, Berkeley, prepared him to teach history at SUNY/Buffalo (1969–77) and the University of Michigan (1977–92), before returning to UC Berkeley in 1992.

Though *Protestants Abroad* acknowledges Hollinger’s childhood in a small Protestant denomination and the presence of missionaries in that milieu, readers of the book will gain a fuller picture of the person he is if they read his essay “Church People and Others,” in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*.²⁸ The essays in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire* as a whole serve well as a complement to *Protestants Abroad*. For one thing they provide insight into the type and range of topics and themes that have occupied his scholarly career. Second, they illuminate his methodological approach. Third, they

offer personal and biographical glimpses into his motivation. Life often gives a clue to motivation and perspective, and further motivation often supplies the impetus to examine a topic or issue or facet that, once examined, leads to insight or fields of scholarly endeavor not previously apparent.

Becoming a Historian

Beyond the “intensely Protestant atmosphere” in which he grew up and his parents’ esteem for learning, as a youth Hollinger was shaped by reading a library copy of *War Chief Joseph*, later buying at age 14 a copy of his own with money he earned mowing lawns. More lawn mowing enabled him to “buy Bruce Catton’s three-volume history of the Army of the Potomac.”²⁹ History as “engagement with the ways in which contemporary life [has] been shaped by previous events” drew him to the field.³⁰ As a teenager Hollinger also felt attracted to theology and philosophy. The point is worth noting, for it bears on the type of intellectual historian and writer he was to become. He narrates well, but the type of historical inquiry to which he committed himself was something quite different from Bruce Catton’s narratives of past events.

Intellectual history, as Hollinger writes it, is abundantly anchored to facts on the ground. At the same time, the multiplicity of those facts is placed in intimate linkage with sweeping master generalizations about the forward

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march of certain trends, movements, and causes, and tied to assumptions and conceptions of personal and social evolution or advancement. These overarching trends, in their onward course, carry the facts and realities on the ground into the embrace of new constellations, into new configurations and paradigms, and into the formation of new gestalts, if you will. As they enter new contexts, meanings shift, grow, or diminish. Rationales for behavior that once seemed essential, including possibly religious fervor, fade. Structures of plausibility shift. Watching the interactions and overall argument play out makes for engrossing reading.

Items We Could Talk About

One value of a good book is questions it raises that extend beyond itself and generate further discussion. Following is a sampling of several such questions. I limit myself to four.

The Protestant Establishment's Costly Action on Principle

In the 1940s and 1950s mainline leaders lent authoritative support to the struggle of Jews and Roman Catholics to see quotas removed that restricted their enrollment in the United States' most prestigious universities and that served to impede their entry into positions of power and influence within the country. Liberal Protestants did so, though it was obvious that opening the doors to Jews and Roman Catholics would dilute their own grip on power. In the run-up to the 1960 US election, liberal Protestant leaders are to be commended for embracing equality of opportunity and arguing against a religious test for political office—even as the National Association of Evangelicals played a rear-guard role, protesting that the election of a Roman Catholic as president would undermine the United States' identity as a Protestant nation.³¹

Hollinger sees liberal Protestantism as having achieved some of its cherished goals—growth in cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and humanitarianism—by handing those ideals off to other parties or bequeathing them through the gift of their progeny even as their offspring quietly or noisily left the mainline churches and either moved beyond Protestantism and into post-Protestantism or gravitated to full-blown secularism. On that score, the picture he paints is one, after a fashion, of gaining one's life by losing it or of falling into the ground and dying so as not to abide alone.

By the 1960s the collapse of the hegemony of the Protestant Establishment was well underway and the long decline in membership of the mainline denominations had

begun. Is it a case of the liberal Protestants having unwittingly sold the farm, or did they achieve a triumph by handing off the values they treasured to others who carried them forward under other (religious and non-religious) flags? Hollinger's discussion in *Cloven Tongues of Fire* of religious communalists versus religious dispersionists is relevant in attempting to answer this question.³²

The Elevator versus the Escalator

Hollinger is far from being alone in assuming the reality of a hierarchical ranking of Protestant denominations, a sort of religious elevator that matches social rank and privilege with denominational affiliation. But he goes further and superimposes on the image a presumptive natural flow in Protestantism from deep religious conviction and devotion to more moderate Protestant positioning to mainline and liberal Protestant affiliation—each with its appropriate reduction in religious intensity, doctrinal content, and moral strictures—to post-Protestantism to full-blown secularism and possibly on to humanistic or agnostic or atheistic stances. Rise in social status is one lubricant in this shift; education is a propellant for it. His conception connotes not just a vertical rise, an elevator, but directionality while rising, an escalator. As one rises, one moves inexorably in a single direction. The escalator ride seems to be conceived as acting not just individually but across generations. The expectable landing spot, if one gets with the program, is post-Protestantism or beyond.

Is that actually the case? Much research in the United States and the rise of the Nones provide considerable support for Hollinger's assumed picture. Is it true elsewhere than the United States? The research in Latin America reported on by Edward Cleary and Timothy Steigenga indicates that it has wider applicability.³³ What about in other countries or areas of the world?

If the escalator offers a true picture, what is to be made of that fact? Are missionaries themselves a force for secularization? If so, in what ways and to what extent? Do education and enlightenment (small "e") inevitably equal secularization? If so, to what extent is that to be embraced or eschewed?

The Conversion of the Missionary

At times Hollinger's account appears to report a bit out of breath that missionaries went abroad and—lo and behold, surprise—after five, ten, twenty, or more years, those missionaries' view of the people they lived among and sought to

Hollinger superimposes on Protestantism an escalator-like flow from deep religious conviction, to more moderate mainline affiliation, to full blown secularism. Is that true in other countries of the world?

The missionary offspring among the US Foreign Service's China Hands spoke up sharply in favor of talking with Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party—were they stooges of the Communists?

serve had changed. They no longer expressed themselves as they had upon first setting forth. Their view of the people had grown, their self-assurance and presumption had diminished, they had sloughed off some rigid certainties, and they had become more flexible, better informed, and more empathetic.

Well, indeed; one would hope so. People, even missionaries, can grow. They mature. They acquire new information that stretches old conceptions and formulations. They come to a deeper understanding of their faith. They see God's hand at work more widely and in ways they had not imagined when they first set forth. The story of the conversion of the missionary is not a new one. It is not one to be feared; it is an outcome to be hoped for. Not for nothing did missionaries in the day of lifelong or career mission commitments say that a new missionary's first term was for orientation, learning the language, and becoming familiar with the local outlook, customs, and culture. The real contribution of a missionary would begin with the second term.

Counterfactual History

The missionary offspring among the US Foreign Service's China Hands during and following World War II spoke up sharply in favor of talking with Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party—and not putting all the stock of US foreign policy unquestioningly in the basket of Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang. Were they stooges of the Communists or duped fellow travelers? Had their counsel been heeded rather than they themselves being denounced and purged during Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt, to what extent might the course of events in China have taken a different path?

At least two missionary sons among the China Hands acknowledged in their autobiographies that they may not have given enough weight to the possibility that Mao also was playing them, maybe even as much as Chiang Kai-shek was. Such questions, of course, cannot be answered. Had the China Hands been listened to instead of being cast out, in Hollinger's words, "Things might have been different, but might not."³⁴ Still from a vantage point seven decades on, it is difficult for me not to think that an opportunity worth exploring was lost. The Communists would still have taken over, but might the Chinese people have been spared some of the horrors they went through under Mao?

In Sum

Put quite simply, David Hollinger's *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* is a monumental achievement. It fills a lacuna. Broadly and

deeply informed, sweeping in scope, and filled with detail, the book remains approachable and a delight to read.

Though the author's election to migrate from religious insider to religious outsider was not his motivation for undertaking to write *Protestants Abroad*—the book is not a polemic—still his migration is germane to the book's themes and its overall thrust. That is to say that where the author came from and the formative experiences of his life aid in understanding how, as an apparent and self-proclaimed outsider, he so often manifests an insider's touch and orientation toward relevant sources. Though his religious migration does not dominate the presentation, its fruit is everywhere present. His insight is intimate; he knows the terrain, where the signposts are, and what they point to in ways that an investigator unversed in the nooks and byways of the religious territory would not. As Hollinger expresses the significance of his upbringing: "My Protestant childhood [has] much to do with my secular adulthood."³⁵

The author presents himself as standing, by personal choice, outside the religious and theological standpoint occupied by those whose lives and careers he is discussing, but he is consistently generous in recounting and interpreting their efforts and motives. I am far from having read all that Hollinger has written, but the spirit the book conveys seems to reflect well the sense I have gained of the spirit of the author. Would that we all could have the same said for our treatment of those with whom we differ on life's most fundamental issues.

So, will reading *Protestants Abroad* make you a better missionary? The volume is not a how-to manual on missionary practice. It does not aspire or pretend to be such. What it will do is exercise your mind, widen your vision of missionary practices and their consequences, inform you more deeply, and give you a broader outlook and frame of reference. It bids fair to make you a better informed and, therefore, I dare say, a better person. In that way it may also make you a more fit instrument for missional service. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ For the character and later fate of the "Missionary Exhibit" portion of the conference, see Erin Hasinoff, "Franz Boaz and the Missionary Exhibit," *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 37, no. 2 (December 2010): Art. 3, <https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1813&context=han>. See, also, Erin L. Hasinoff, *Faith in Objects: American Missionary Expositions in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

² The proceedings of the 1900 conference, including its 500 addresses, were published by the American Tract Society in two large volumes, available at <https://archive.org/details/ecumenicalmiss01unknuoft> and <https://archive.org/details/ecumenicalmissio02ecum>.

³ This information comes from the archival Finding Aid for the conference records. See http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4492656/.

⁴ For the published record of the Conference on Missions held in Liverpool, see <https://archive.org/details/conferenceonmiss00conf>.

⁵ Christopher J. Anderson, "The World Is Our Parish: Remembering the 1919 Protestant Missionary Fair," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 4 (October 2006): 196–200, and Anderson's volume, *The Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions: The 1919 World's Fair of Evangelical Americanism* (Lewis-ton: Edwin Mellen, 2012).

⁶ On the life and career of Pearl Buck, see the exemplary account by Grant Wacker, "The Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl S. Buck," in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History*, ed. Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2003), 191–205.

⁷ "Biographical masterpieces" refers to *The Exile* (the story of Pearl Buck's mother Carrie) and *Fighting Angel* (her father Absalom). Both books were published in 1936.

⁸ William Ernest Hocking, *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932).

⁹ David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017), 178–79, 347n47.

¹⁰ A 128-page guidebook to the displays at "The World in Boston" missionary fair can be downloaded at <https://archive.org/details/handbookguideofw00bost>.

¹¹ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 12.

¹² Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 1–2.

¹³ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 11.

¹⁵ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1960).

¹⁶ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 148–54.

¹⁷ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 7.

¹⁸ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 124–25.

¹⁹ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 181.

²⁰ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 18.

²¹ John Hersey, *The Call* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

²² His impressive roster of honors and publications can be downloaded from <http://history.berkeley.edu/people/david-hollinger>.

²³ David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013), 171.

²⁴ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 5, 23.

²⁵ David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996), and *Morris R. Cohen and the Scientific Ideal* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), as well as David A. Hollinger, "Communalist and Dispersionist Approaches to American Jewish History in an Increasingly Post-Jewish Era," in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 138–69.

²⁶ Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 142.

²⁷ Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014), 2.

²⁸ Hollinger, "Church People and Others," in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 170–89.

²⁹ Hollinger, "Church People and Others," 171–72. Helen Addison Howard and Dan McGrath, *War Chief Joseph* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1952), and Bruce Catton, *Mr. Lincoln's Army, Glory Road, and A Stillness at Appomattox* (New York: Doubleday, 1951–53).

³⁰ Hollinger, "Church People and Others," 172.

³¹ David A. Hollinger, "After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity," in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 24. See this complete essay, pp. 18–55, as well as "The Realist-Pacifist Summit Meeting of March 1942 and the Political Reorientation of Ecumenical Protestantism in the United States," in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 56–81.

³² See David A. Hollinger, "Communalist and Dispersionist Approaches to American Jewish History in an Increasingly Post-Jewish Era," in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 138–69.

³³ Edward L. Cleary, "Shopping Around: Questions about Latin American Conversions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, no. 2 (April 2004): 50–54, and Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga, *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2007).

³⁴ Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 174.

³⁵ Hollinger, "Church People and Others," 170.

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.

Atheist Muslim: An Oxymoron?

From the missiology blog [Circumpolar](#) authored by Warrick Farah come some reflections on a *Vox* interview entitled, [“An Atheist Muslim: What the Left and Right Get Wrong about Islam.”](#) The *Vox* conversation is between a journalist and Ali Rizvi, author of the new book [The Atheist Muslim](#). The actual interview has some observations by Rizvi that could have possible implications for other types of Muslims who might embrace the culture, heritage, and identity of Islam but not the religious tenets of the faith.

Secularization, a Pathway to Faith?

There seem to be many atheist Muslims becoming followers of Jesus, just as has happened among the Communist Chinese. In a Mission Network News (March 15, 2018) article entitled [“Secularization: An Unexpected Friend to the Gospel,”](#) Christian Aid's David Bogosian observes:

Many who become Christian don't go directly from Islam to Christianity. They go from Islam to agnosticism to atheism and then to Christianity. So, a huge number of people that are coming into the church have first been secularized.

The author of the article, Beth Stolicker, goes on to say,

This is going on all over the [Muslim] world in places like Iran, Turkey, and Libya. Basically, any place that's experienced or has been affected by radical Islam or Islamic extremists... [People are] questioning their faiths and the ideas which have served as foundations for their lives.

See also the accompanying article about [an increase in persecution of Algerian Christians](#). (Our thanks for these sources goes to [missionscatalyst.net](#).)

Religious Persecution Obscures Underlying Fears of Defilement

Persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan has risen to new levels of cruelty because of the notorious “Blasphemy Laws.” Farahnaz Ispahani, a former member of the Pakistani parliament, explains the origin of these laws and profiles the case of Catholic Pakistani mother Asia Bibi in an eye-opening CNN article (March 1, 2018) entitled, [“Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws Persecute the Weakest of the Weak.”](#) A Christian, Bibi was harvesting berries with Muslim women who were offended that she had defiled them by drinking water out of the same cup. (Many Christians in Pakistan and India were originally

Hindu Dalits.) So, instead they accused her of blaspheming the prophet and she was arrested. Ispahani, who was on the Human Rights Committee while in parliament, states:

Assertion by a Muslim witness that blasphemy was committed is sufficient for filing of charges and arrest of a suspect—even without corroborating evidence... Worse still, once blasphemy is alleged, mob violence or targeted killing becomes a possibility. According to researcher Mohammed Nafees, from 1990–2011, there [were over 50 cases](#) “wherein blasphemy suspects were either extrajudicially murdered or died in jail.” ... Lawyers who dare to represent someone accused of blasphemy have also been killed.

[Al-Jazeera](#) reported last August 2017 that Pakistan's Supreme Court is attempting revisions of the blasphemy laws. But if, as in Bibi's case, the underlying offense had to do with defilement because of caste or community, who is going to revise those laws?

For a disturbing but beautifully written novel about contemporary Pakistan that takes on hard subjects such as mob violence, caste, and Muslim hatred of Christian minorities, don't miss [The Golden Legend](#) by Nadeem Aslam. It is also suffused with a love for beauty—art, architecture, and literature. (See the [book review](#) in the *Washington Post* April 2017).

Is Social Ranking the New Face of Big Brother?

Will believers in China be ostracized on social media, unable to rent houses, receive loans, or get visas to travel because their every word, purchase, or action has been tracked? Read [“Inside China's Vast New Experiment with Social Ranking,”](#) an article in *Wired* (Dec 14, 2017):

The aim is for every Chinese citizen to be trailed by a file compiling data from public and private sources by 2020, and for those files to be searchable by fingerprints and other biometric characteristics. The State Council calls it a “credit system that covers the whole society.” For the Chinese Communist Party, social credit is an attempt at a softer, more invisible authoritarianism. The goal is to nudge people toward behaviors ranging from energy conservation to obedience to the Party.

The Noose Tightens Further for Chinese Christians

As mentioned in our last IOW in an entry entitled [“Controversial Vatican-China Agreement,”](#) discussions between the Communist government have gone forward with the Vatican acceding the authority to China to actually appoint Catholic bishops. Now the Chinese government has taken an additional step and has detained one of the most well-known Catholic bishops just before Easter services. This move clearly signals that no bishop can conduct services unless officially appointed by the Communist government. This increasingly troubling accommodation on the part of the Vatican is described in the following excellent March 30 article in the *Atlantic*: [“This Is Making A Lot of Christians in China Very Nervous.”](#) Also, as a sign of more restrictions, Bibles can no longer be listed for sale publicly on the

internet. They've been banned for years in bookstores, but this loophole has just been closed. CNN has the details in its April 5th story "[Bibles Pulled From Online Stores as China Increases Control of Religion](#)." The *New York Times* also reported this and comments on the status of a number of different religions in China: "[China Bans Online Bible Sales As It Tightens Controls on Religions](#)."

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For a weekly comprehensive list of curated articles about China from over 50 periodicals, see the *ZGBriefs* on China Source's website: <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/zgbriefs/zgbriefs-march-29-2018>. Articles cover politics, missions, culture and much more. The site also includes translations of important articles written by Chinese authors.

Still Blood Brothers?

Lebanese theologian Martin Accad has written a very perceptive response to a scathing indictment of American evangelicals' influence on US foreign policy penned by a former Lebanese ambassador to the US. See his February 15th post: "[American Evangelical Influence on US Foreign Policy and How It Impacts Us as Middle East Christians](#)." Accad is both the director of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary's Institute for Middle East and North African Studies as well as an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the Beirut seminary. Also from the IMES blog, don't miss the poignant lament for the fate of all Syrians, "[Syria Brief: Hope is Lost. Still, We Have One Chance Left. The Living Hope](#)." The *April 2018 IMES' Regional Brief* reflects theologically on what's happening in the whole area. Check this out for updates on Syria, the persecution of Algerian Christians, the violence and assault on women in South Sudan, and the uneasy political atmosphere in Egypt, among other things.

What If Half of Your Country's Population Were Refugees?

So far in 2018, an additional 700,000 Syrians have been internally displaced. This brings the total number of Syrian refugees—both internal (6.5 m.) and external (5.6 m.)—to [over half of the entire Syrian population](#) with pre-war population numbers estimated at [22 million people](#). (See the April 10th statement by MOUNTIZ on [reliefweb.int](#).) This makes Syrians the [largest refugee population](#) in the world. For an excellent report about which countries are hosting the most Syrian refugees, read the January 29, 2018 Pew Research Fact Tank, "Most Displaced Syrians are in the Middle East and About a Million are in Europe": <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/>. For a concise summary of what Syrian refugees will need in order to ever return home, read BBC's "[Syrian Refugees: the People who Want Four Things Before They Go Home](#)," April 6, 2018. Many articles and sermons have reminded us of our responsibility as followers of Jesus to the refugee, the immigrant, the

asylum-seeker. There is a great summary in the youth magazine *Relevant* called "[What the Bible Says About How to Treat Refugees](#)."

A Brutal Military Mop-Up Called "Operation Olive Branch"

Are we ready for new permutations of political and religious movements in the Muslim world? Scott Peterson, in the *Christian Science Monitor*, explores such a development in the rationale behind Turkey's military operation in Syria, ironically called "Operation Olive Branch." In an article entitled, "[Turkey's 'Holy War' in Syria Puts a More Religious Nationalism on Display](#)," Peterson writes that

never before has an operation by Turkey's military—the second-largest army in the NATO alliance, with a fiercely secular tradition—been wrapped in such overtly religious language. . . . "You do have a combination—a nexus of Islamism and Turkish nationalism—that has not existed before," says Istanbul-based Asli Aydintaşbaş, a Turkey expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "It resonates. And the moment you define it as a religious war, you have no sympathy for the people on the other side. They're the enemy. They are terrorists. They are not innocent."

For more information on the repercussions of Turkey's military assault against the Syrian Kurds, see the *Daily Mail's* March 18th article, "[What Does Turkey's Seizure of Afrin Mean for Syria's War?](#)" In a chilling article written by Turkish journalist Uzay Buluth, readers are reminded of Turkey's brutal methods of ethnic cleansing in Northern Cyprus in 1974: "[From Cyprus to Syria: Turkey's Continued Invasions](#)," (*Providence*, February 21, 2018). Will this be repeated in Syria? For an explanation of why Turkey (a US ally) is now fighting the Syrian Kurds (who are US allies in the fight against ISIS), see "[The Entirely Rational Basis for Turkey's Move Into Syria](#)" in the *Atlantic*, January 22, 2018.

American Pastor, Andrew Brunson, Goes on Trial with Life Sentence Hanging Over His Head . . . Pray for His Complete Vindication and Imminent Release

An American pastor who has been held in a Turkish prison for a year and a half on trumped-up charges of espionage was indicted on March 21st, 2018. His trial, which began April 16th with the prosecutor asking for life imprisonment, was postponed after just two days until May 7th. (See *Christianity Today's* update "[US Officials Stand with American Pastor in Terrorism Trial](#)," April 17th, 2018.) For an explanation of what's really behind this—including Turkey's demand that a Muslim cleric in exile in the US be handed over in exchange—see "[Turkey: Date Set for Trial of US Pastor Andrew Brunson](#)" in *World Watch Monitor*, March 21, 2018. **IJFM**

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The "Clash of Civilizations" and a Cache of Connotations Michael Alfred Kilgore (pp. 69–78)			X	X		X
Jesus as <i>Mwalimu</i>: Christology and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery (pp. 79–87)	X		X			X



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