

## The Transnational Experience

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January–March 2019



### *When and Where Peoples Join*

The slave ship announced the re-creation of the world beyond the eyes and ears of much of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Human cargo ships. The haunting pictures transfix our inner gaze. In his account, Willie James Jennings helps us imagine the “re-creation” that transpired in that horrendous displacement of African lives. He interprets the brutal separation, migration and resettlement of human beings and what happens when peoples join across borders. The degree of violence will differ across the diaspora, but some of the same elements recombine to create a new world.

The world Christian movement has straddled these disruptive forces of Western power, as Dwight Baker’s review of Graber’s new book reminds us. He shows how the missionary was complicit in the abuses and paradoxes of an American colonization that engulfed the Native American (p. 44). Missionary pioneers had to navigate the policies of nation-states that sought to integrate, subjugate, or eradicate indigenous peoples. You can’t tell the real story of Wycliffe Bible Translators without understanding these political dynamics in Mexico and Peru (p. 50).

Western advance appears to be one long story of assimilation: less powerful peoples surrendering and acculturating to Western civilization. Modern systems arrived and lifted local lives out of their traditional situations, whether the people wanted to leave their world or not. Today, diaspora populations are everywhere, their cultures and traditions either melting and melding into those of a host nation, or becoming more tightly held, creating new enclaves.

But there’s another alternative, a middle option, which is becoming ever more familiar: the transnational experience. Transnationals can live their lives across borders, transcend the confines of their new situation. They can stretch their connections back into the old country as well as forward into new networks. The revolution in social media allows the transnational an immediate proximity across the globe. Some see rising transnationalism as *the* strategic opportunity in our day for reaching once distant peoples with the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Our authors weave together three elements intrinsic to the transnational experience: family, faith and language. Dye and Zachariah team up again to explore the nature of the transnational *family* (p. 3). How can we minister to families who remain embedded in their now distant families and traditions, even as they acculturate to a new host culture?

Editorial *continued on p. 2*

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#### **Subscriptions**

One year (four issues) \$18.00  
Two years (eight issues) \$34.00  
Three years (twelve issues) \$48.00  
Single copies \$5.00, multiple copies \$4.00 ea.  
Payment must be enclosed with orders.

Please supply us with current address and change of address when necessary.

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**IJFM** (ISSN #2161-3354) was established in 1984 by the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, an outgrowth of the student-level meeting of Edinburgh '80.

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PRINTED in the USA

As for religious *faith*, we offer an excerpt from the new edition of John Walton's *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (p. 42) Modern transnationalism may be deeper and more layered,<sup>3</sup> but Father Abraham's experience is still relevant. Too often anthropology ignores the way faith provides resilience, the same resilience we see in this ancient migrant. Walton categorizes ancient religious experience as "State religion" and "family religion," and it's the latter that travels well. Indeed, domestic religion can adapt, assimilate, reform and survive when crossing borders.

I'm reminded of a prominent Muslim-American in our city who brags that his community is generating a unique socio-religious category, which he calls "Sushi" (when a Sunni Muslim marries a Shia Muslim). Is this innovation just another symptom of transnationalism, which constructs new categories when crossing borders? Is the religious ecology from the old country evaporating, only to now emerge as one big neo-Muslim identity?<sup>4</sup> Maybe. But Colin Bearup's look at the global diffusion of Sufism among Muslims should give pause to any premature conclusions or postmodern

presumption (p. 11). Bearup describes part of the Sufi "religion-scape" that's extending through families dedicated to their own religious denomination and its institutions. Historically, orthodox Muslims have disparaged this mystical type of Islam as heterodox, illegitimate, at the low end of the Islamic totem pole. And yet this marginalized religious expression seems to resonate with Muslims in modern day Britain. Sunny Hong reminds us that Jesus prioritized this type of out-group in his Jewish society (p. 35).

A third element, *language*, weaves itself into diaspora narratives. James Langteau and his colleagues have described the linguistic complexity in their therapeutic approach to the displaced Shan and Karen peoples in Thailand (p. 19). Their case study helps us picture the levels of discourse and identity which often determine the choice of language. In her response (p. 30), Bauer argues that what language people choose to use has consequences for the movement of the gospel. We're glad to situate this debate in Asia, where 60% of the world's displaced peoples are presently located.

Those of us in frontier missiology tend to focus on the movement of the gospel from one people to the next. Our bias can lead us to overlook the complexity of frontiers where peoples "join": "where worlds overlap and in the overlap are altered irrevocably, hybridized, and cross-pollinated."<sup>5</sup> It's on these borders that a new category is emerging, that of the transnational; we trust these articles pinpoint some vital elements in that re-creation of the world.

In Him,



Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2010), 175.

<sup>2</sup> Jared Looney, "Transnationalism: New Pathways for Mission," <http://missiojournal.com/issues/md-8-1/authors/md-8-1-looney>.

<sup>3</sup> Ted Lewellen, *The Anthropology of Globalization* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey), 152.

<sup>4</sup> See Oliver Roy's treatment of Euro-Islam in *Globalized Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 117–143.

<sup>5</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 159–161.

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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.

# “I Have People”: Transnational Families and Ministry

by T. Wayne Dye and Danielle Zachariah

A hundred and fifty years ago, when streams of Irish immigrants crossed an ocean to move to the United States, families remaining in Ireland would hold a funeral for the prospective migrant. Although the migrant might live for many years—decades even—in the United States, for all practical purposes, he or she was dead to the family. Letters were slow, sea voyages expensive and long, resulting in the death of close family ties, leaving the migrant untethered to relational bonds in the “Old Country.” The old life—complete with cultural norms and close family relationships—became little more than a cherished memory.

The presence of technology has changed this pattern dramatically. With very little effort, we can share pictures via Instagram, text via WhatsApp, and talk face-to-face via Skype—and that only names a few of the many resources available for transoceanic communication. Furthermore, airplanes have decreased the time and cost of travel so that someone can visit almost anywhere by spending a day or two, and a couple thousand dollars or less, on the trip. Compared with the months required for sea travel, airplanes have significantly increased the ease and possibility of visiting family living half-way around the world.

These technological changes have given rise to an increase in what those who study migration call “transnational families.” According to Fesenmyer (2014),

“Transnational” families are families who live apart but who create and retain a “sense of collective welfare and unity, in short ‘familyhood,’ even across national borders” (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002) . . . They mark the intersection, on the one hand, of individual and familial aspirations and needs, and on the other hand, structural opportunities and constraints.

Although much of the research has focused almost exclusively on the separation of what Americans call the “nuclear family,” transnational families often also include grandparents, adult siblings, aunts and uncles, and cousins. Since different cultural communities draw the distinctive lines of “family” and “not family” differently, our discussion of transnational families in this article will

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reflect a more fluid understanding of family by broadly using the term to refer to whomever the migrant, and migrant's community, considers tied to them by family bonds.

These bonds create a kind of haven, an emotional and financial safety net, that protects against the world. In collectivistic cultures, families operate on the principle of the Musketeers: "one for all, and all for one." The honor of one member is the honor of all, the success of one is the success of all, the shame of one is the shame of all. In societies where honor has the power to contract good marriages, obtain well-paying jobs, and influence others in the society, adding to, or at the very least, preserving the family's honor is one of the primary ways in which individuals show loyalty to the family network. Since the family forms its members' moral compasses from a young age, loyalty to the family is often the cornerstone of all morality.

### *Transnational Families: Then and Now*

Although the current form is a result of the technological changes of the past decade, transnational families are hardly new. Whether to escape war or poverty, or simply to seek a better life, families, and individuals within families, often migrate for the betterment of the whole group. With families being the "main pillar of social responsibility," members are expected to contribute to the emotional and financial well-being of the group (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 213). Especially in difficult circumstances, one's individual well-being must sometimes be sacrificed for the sake of the group.

In a study done on the emotional toll of transnational mothering on Filipina women and their children, Parreñas (2001, 361) found that

the pain of family separation creates various feelings, including helplessness, regret, and guilt for mothers and loneliness, vulnerability, and insecurity for children.

Mothers especially felt guilty since they felt unable to perform their role as nurturer due to globalization's demand for female workers to perform "low-wage service labor in more developed nations" (Parreñas 2001, 368). Unable to fulfill their obligation of emotional labor "with daily acts of caregiving," mothers often overcompensated by providing their children with monetary compensation in the form of various gifts, and a "secure middle-class lifestyle" in the Philippines (Parreñas 2001, 372, 370). Although both mothers and children would have preferred to remain together in the Philippines, the burden of financial provision required mothers to continue their overseas work. Without that steady income, parents would have



been unable to "ensure that their children eat daily meals of meat and rice, attend college, and have secure housing" (Parreñas 2001, 373).

To shorten the distance, these mothers would often write letters and call their children "at least once every two weeks" (Parreñas 2001, 374). They would also visit their homes in the Philippines every few years, if possible. As many of these women migrated before the advent of the smartphone—or even the internet—family intimacy suffered. There was a common feeling that intimacy could "only be fully achieved with great investment in time and daily interactions in the family" (Parreñas 2001, 375). Without that

capability, and in spite of all efforts to the contrary, emotional bonds between mothers and children weakened, leading to feelings of "insurmountable loss" (Parreñas 2001, 372).

### **Creation of Ordinary Co-Presence**

However, current technology provides easier ways for transnational families to maintain, and strengthen, those longed-for intimate social bonds, in addition to providing easier avenues for fulfilling familial obligations. Through some combination of instant messaging, video conferencing, inexpensive phone calls, and social networking sites (SNS), transnational families create what Nedelcu and Wyss call "ordinary co-presence." Ordinary co-presence focuses on the mundane areas and tasks of life to build and maintain familial bonds while strengthening intergenerational relations and reinforcing cultural and family norms. Nedelcu and Wyss provide an excellent example of ordinary co-presence through the account of a middle-aged Romanian dentist who had migrated to Switzerland:

I am always online: while I am cooking, the webcam is turned on so I can talk with and look at [my family] at odd moments.... With my mother, I can speak and do other things at the same time; I plug in the loudspeaker and I can iron, do the cleaning and talk to her.... I do not feel it is a waste of time. It is part of my daily routine; it is as if I were there. She tells me what she has done during the day...and it is something very positive for both of us. I feel better. If I had emigrated before the internet age, something important would be missing.... I do not feel that I have left Romania. I feel very close to them, as I live both here and there, in [my family] unity. (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 202–203)

The kind of co-presence described above is termed by the researchers "omnipresent" co-presence. This type, through use of video conferencing technologies, creates a

communication environment that enables the feeling of "being together"

as in (almost) face-to-face interaction and proximity. (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 210)

Comprehensive in scope, omnipresent, ordinary co-presence encourages both spontaneous and planned conversations on topics ranging from daily lives to recipes to politics. Technology becomes a tool for the creation of new “being together” norms based very closely on old patterns of interacting and sharing daily life.

For other migrants, though, these constant—often spontaneous—communications feel burdensome. However, the drive to maintain family ties remains strong, which gives rise to what Nedelcu and Wyss term “ritual” co-presence. In contrast with omnipresent co-presence, ritual co-presence is planned and focuses more on the fact of the communication rather than the content of the communication. As Nedelcu and Wyss (2016, 209) state,

Keeping up ties does not require an exchange of significant content; but the fact of communicating is significant per se and has a crucial emotional and relational importance.... This kind of communication constitutes the basis of a subjective feeling of co-presence and solidarity, even if the strength of family ties relies on neither the intensity of the exchanges nor the significance of their content.

In either case, though, the use of modern technology to create ordinary co-presence also creates “a sense of continuity and ongoing belonging, which seems to erase geographical and emotional boundaries” (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 212).

Some families even go beyond this ordinary co-presence. Baldassar et al. identifies something called “ambient co-presence,” which is a product of smartphones and other wireless connections. Much like ambient noise is constantly in the background, coloring a person’s interactions in a particular space—regardless of how often the noise consciously registers, ambient co-presence colors

**M**igrants have the flexibility now to straddle two or more cultures, with strong ties to both their home and host cultures.

transnational families’ interactions with the world by creating an

ongoing awareness of distant others, both in families and in communities, that is produced in spite of irregular or absent face-to-face contact. (Baldassar et al. 2016, 138)

This product of an “always on’ culture” enhances a sense of belonging; conversely, it can also lead to increased inter-family conflict (Baldassar et al. 2016, 138). Thus, it is important to note that

it is the existing quality of the relationship that shapes the impact of ICTs [technology] on family relations, rather than the opposite. (Baldassar et al. 2016, 139)

Modern technology does not fix family conflicts; it merely provides an easier method for families to “retain a sense of familyhood without relying on physical proximity” through the sharing of mundane, everyday life (Baldassar et al. 2016, 139). In this way, migrants have the flexibility now to straddle two or more cultures, with strong ties to both their home *and* host cultures.

### Long-Distance Care

Not only does modern technology provide an avenue for the easier maintenance of family unity, it also provides an avenue for fulfilling familial obligations that contribute to the honor and emotional and financial well-being of the family as a whole. Whether due to a deep love for family left behind or a feeling of social obligation, migrants send enough money home to “form the largest foreign aid force in the United States” (Olsen 2017, 42).

The money that immigrants send abroad—called remittances—dwarfs all other international spending by the government, humanitarian groups,

and missions organizations. In 2014, US migrants sent more than \$108 billion to developing countries, with Mexico topping the list. In contrast, private charities spent around \$44 billion in poor countries, and the government \$33 billion. (Oleson 2017, 42)

Although economic remittance has always been a facet of transnational families’ relationships, the amount of remittance has increased due to technology. In 2003, \$59 billion was sent to families in countries of origin; in 2017, \$600 billion was sent. Technology’s easy transfer of funds led to a 1000% increase in dollars sent home with only a 40% increase in migrants. And this number merely tracks remittances sent to and from banks; it fails to take into account the transfer of money via traveling relatives, cell phones, etc.

For some migrants, economic remittance is the reason they moved abroad. As with the Filipina mothers, their entire motivation for moving to a new country is to provide for their families in their home country. For others, technology’s easy handling of remittance is a relief for worried family members abroad. In interviews with Romanian migrants to Switzerland, Nedelcu and Wyss (2016, 212) found that sending economic remittances provided

the migrant, as well as his or her parents, some sense of security and the satisfaction of having fulfilled one’s family obligations.

As parents aged and began to experience “poor health, loss of autonomy, widowhood, social isolation and limited access to care,” migrants were able to adapt “their co-presence practices to their parents’ needs by intensifying contacts and strengthening co-presence at a distance” in addition to providing practical means of care

through hiring caretakers from a distance (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 211). This provided great relief of mind and heart to family members on both sides of the transnational divide.

However, even when economic remittance is viewed by migrants as a "strain on their livelihoods in host settings and as cause of a major setback to the realization of their initial migration," these same migrants still remit, even in spite of "economic hardships in the host society" (Kankonde 2010, 225). For some, remittances are a familial and societal obligation required of those who chose the role of the "family member going abroad." For others, sending remittances home is a way of increasing the family's status in an honor-shame society. As the apostle Paul points out in 1 Timothy 5:8,

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

It would be unthinkable to bring shame on the family, and therefore on oneself, by not providing for family in the home country.

### *Implications for Ministry*

When viewing any new phenomenon, there is a tendency to paint it as either a terrible and dangerous evil or, to use an Americanism, "the best thing since sliced bread." As with most phenomena, though, modern technology's impact on transnational families is neither. On the one hand, such close bonds provide comfort and support for those separated from ones whom they hold dear. On the other hand, the very network that provides migrants with a sense of belonging and a financial and relational safety net can create significant barriers to an individual's decision to follow Jesus. In the moral universe of the family, loyalty to the family is of paramount importance, and new religion seems to threaten old bonds.

It is with this perspective in mind that our own view needs to shift. Contrary to the past where migration weakened

family bonds, migration today sometimes binds families together more strongly. Technology provides the media for connection, and distance increases the motivation to not "take their connection for granted" (Meneses 2012, 69). The increased push towards globalization weakens the correlation of identity and culture with place while simultaneously strengthening the desire to hold onto tradition and ethnic ties (Wan 2007; Al Mayassa 2010; Meneses 2012). And more so than ethnic ties—which derive their power from "metaphorically creating a family writ large"—the blood ties of immediate and extended family often strengthen as well (Meneses 2012, 64). Just as ethnic ties fight back against the



weakening force of globalization, so too families on both sides of the transnational divide fight back against the weakening force of distance by consciously creating patterns of behavior that reinforce family connections. As Nedelcu and Wyss state (2016, 204),

Moreover, in this case a sort of "transnational moral economy of kin," which involves "putting family first" (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, 137), works as a driver of family interactions and solidarities.

No longer are migrants untethered and seeking a place to transplant themselves, thus making them open to new cultures and ideas. Migrants now remain strongly bound to family,

and thus, loyalty to the family and the honor of the group factor strongly into their decision-making paradigms.

### *Ministry with the Diaspora*

While it is more difficult for migrants to become followers of Jesus than in the past, a much more positive factor can be observed in the work of local diaspora Christians. Many are involved in ministry organized "around family ties and social networks to spread the gospel and serve the poor back in their countries of origin" (Olsen 2017, 41). Some examples include discipling new leaders via Skype and wiring funds through family networks to provide help for famine-stricken communities.

This is a powerful ministry force simply because so many new immigrants are already Christians. While the oft-spoken line "the nations are coming to us" holds true—including many from countries that are inaccessible to outsiders—many of these migrants are Christian already. According to Krabill and Norton (2015, 447), "Christians comprise nearly half . . . of the world's 214 million international migrants." Within the United States, the number is higher, with three-fourths of migrants self-identifying as Christian (Krabill and Norton 2015, 448).

Consequently, for those who feel called to work with diaspora peoples, they should shift their paradigm from ministry *to* the diaspora to ministry *with* the diaspora. Migrant Christians are already working on the ground, reaching out to neighbors and friends and building transnational churches through ongoing familial and societal ties. Partnering with migrant Christians is becoming a vital component of modern diaspora missions.

### *Respectful Dialogue*

Respectful dialogue is the cornerstone of any partnership. Thus, before beginning ministry in non-Christian diaspora communities or even before planning mission trips overseas, dialogue with members of the target



community is vital. Talk with those who know the culture and community. Encourage them to be candid, listen appropriately, and ask questions to elicit more information. They will know best the needs of their particular communities; don't decide to build houses if their community really needs wells. Or perhaps training for nurses, pastors, or videographers is going to be more useful. Ask what the community needs and wants, and then work with them to provide those services. In addition, migrants may also know which leaders need to be contacted—and how to contact those leaders—in order to facilitate the success of a project. Perhaps even better, let them lead the project whenever possible.

While it is ideal to partner first with Christian migrants who are already working with their communities, sometimes there are no Christians with whom to partner. In those cases, seek out non-believing migrants from that culture. For example, Jim, a man from the Midwest United States, felt God's call to help refugees in his area by developing an adult literacy program. Through that program, he met and befriended the Muslim leader of a minority group in East Africa. Several years later, when the 2011 famine hit, the leader shared this heartbreaking news with Jim. By God's help, local Muslim refugees, Christian volunteers, and Feed My Starving Children partnered together to send five million meals of emergency food to those most vulnerable. The Muslim leader posted a large sign on the shipments of food with a warning to would-be pirates and bandits which said, "If you fear God and the Judgment Day, don't touch this food!" By God's grace, the shipment reached its intended destination.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, if planning to engage in missions overseas, request additional help with language and culture learning. Learn how to act respectfully in that culture *before* traveling or moving.

**T***his began as a simple friendship. However, it's led to a spiderweb of connections linking people across languages, cultures, and countries.*

For example, Mia, a young woman interested in working with a minority people group in West Asia, sought to begin language learning while she continued her stateside preparation to move overseas. This desire led to her meeting and later developing a close friendship with a migrant woman from that people group. Currently, they spend time together, learn each other's languages, and assist each other in practical ways. The friendship has led to other relationships both in the United States and overseas, including one with an older migrant woman who needed someone to drive her to doctors' appointments. In addition, it happens that Mia's friend has family in a city near where she (Mia) plans to move and has introduced her to family members as a friend. When Mia moves, she will already have a new friend network in place. It is important to note that this friendship began simply as that—a friendship. However, it has led to a spiderweb of connections linking people across languages, cultures, and countries.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Pre-existing Ties*

Just as migrants know best what is needed in their communities overseas, they also have existing networks of people in both the host and home countries with whom one can partner. For example, one church, although they originally wanted to build a child sponsorship center, realized that it would be better to

run their development program though the growing network of lay women who already know their communities and will be empowered to help. (Olsen 2017, 47)

This decentralized and informal method of helping the children in the community was "designed to escape the gangs' notice" and required very

little travel to and from the country (Olsen 2017, 47). By working through pre-existing transnational ties, the church was able to develop a grassroots, ground-up approach that would have a higher likelihood of success.

#### *Daily Life and Practical Love*

Given the importance of sharing daily life as a means of strengthening family bonds, we would therefore expect a similar requirement for strengthening other relationships. After all, good partnerships are built on trust, and trust takes time and opportunities to experience, know, and test the character of the other person. As Christians, neither our partnerships nor our friendships are business deals; rather, they are human bonds, formed through love and respect, and manifested in practical care that melds both word and deed.

With ethnic groups where there are no believers, this practical outworking of the good news in our lives is even more important. Ministry to these diaspora communities must be a way of life rather than a strategy (Krabill and Norton 2015, 449). As for the church itself, Pouono (2017, 5) lists some ways to contribute:

For the church, a God-centered mission can be fully realized by tending to the marginalized of the community, offering greater support systems to those who need jobs and education, tending to the sick (mental and physical), up-skilling our leaders including ministers, providing financial advice to families, sharing resources and time, being aware of those who are considered "at risk," especially taking care of wholesome family relationships.

#### *Preserve Family Ties*

Whatever the form of ministry, Christian workers in both country of origin

and country of resettlement need to recognize the importance of family ties to all migrants, whether or not they are believers. For many people worldwide, family is the sun around which the events of life revolve. It is a stable group of people whose blood ties and daily living have built trust, friendship, and emotional support. On a more practical level, family helps its members find spouses, provides access to jobs and business contacts, and unfurls a financial safety net when in trouble. In exchange, family obligations require loyalty to the group, upright behavior that will bring honor, and shared financial support. As Gnaniah (2011, 163–164) writes,

A society has social rules, and India has rules, and those rules help. This was hard for even the great heroes of Christian mission like Carey and Ziegenbalg, whose individualistic orientation made it hard to comprehend our family orientation. Indeed, we cannot get married unless certain uncles and grandparents agree. They want to check all the family backgrounds of candidates for marriage. They weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the two young people and their families. This arranging is family-oriented and appropriate for a culture like ours. The missionary might come and say that I go to heaven alone, but I have to live here and now. *I need my family.* (emphasis added)

This need for family can hinder people from following Jesus—more so than ethnicity or even religion. For many people, it would be easier to cut off a limb than to leave the family network. Consider, for example, the differences between China and India. In China, persecution is national, and although brutal, is hardly stemming the tide of conversions; in India, persecution is familial, and that is harder to endure. In addition, in a community where conscience demands loyalty to the family network, it can feel morally wrong to follow Jesus. For example, one South Korean woman known to the authors of this article, was interested in

following Jesus, but was held back by her loyalty to her Buddhist mother.

It is true that ultimately each person must choose Jesus even over family. Jesus made this clear when he said,

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Matt. 10:37–38)

Nevertheless, the solution is not, as some have preached, the inevitable death of those family ties. Gnaniah (2011, 162) states that past missionaries to India hoped to solve the problem of caste by insulating converts



on mission compounds; instead, they unknowingly created a sixth caste that was lower than all the rest. In contrast, Gnaniah (2011, 162) shares how his father—after receiving a Bible and becoming a follower of Jesus—maintained his family network, continuing to identify with them, and as a result, “more among my caste came to know Jesus Christ.”

So how do we help new believers preserve family ties? One way is to gain approval first from the appropriate gatekeepers before asking family members to make a clear commitment to become followers of Jesus. Ask God to grant favor with a trusted leader and then approach him or her first

with the good news. This leader could be an elder in the extended family, a local mullah, or a respected national scholar. Take the time to build mutual trust and respect with the gatekeepers of the community; once their approval is won, potential listeners will no longer endure a crisis of conscience, if interested. And as family members listen, encourage them to discuss this information with each other. Give them time to think through their decisions and count the cost of their choices. Then, if they decide to follow Jesus, use culturally appropriate ways to ease the transition as much as possible. For example, for Thai believers, Mejudhon (2005, 13) advises the use of a traditional reconciliation ritual adapted to create “deeper bonding between the new converts and their social networks.” This process has three stages: “(1) confession and forgiveness, (2) the period of the probation, and (3) the baptismal service” (Mejudhon 2005, 13). Although the process may take weeks or months, Mejudhon (2005, 15–16) argues its benefit,

When the new converts take the initiative to value the interdependent orientation in Thai culture by asking for forgiveness, they show respect for Thai culture and their parents’ pain. As a result, the parents respect their decision to convert... This Christian ritual of reconciliation, Kama and Ahsikarma, fits the Thai’s concept of time and hierarchy, allowing Christians to be viewed as humble, meek, gentle and vulnerable, each of which is a religious model for Jesus’ disciples. This is an effective way to win Thai hearts. As an ancient Thai poem says: “Be soft as a silk thread and tie a tiger down.” (anonymous)

Another way to preserve ties is to be strategic in our method of delivery. In some communities, the same truth that would outrage in prose would be listened to in poetry. For others, song-dance genres are common means of communicating information. For example, Mlama (1994) writes about the repeated struggles of the

Tanzanian government to encourage community development initiatives in certain minority communities. When the community members were asked to develop effective methods of communicating information, five groups chose to use different song-dance genres (Mlama 1994).

With a diaspora community in Dallas, Texas, Elinor Beach partnered with a Vietnamese pastor to experiment with using stories as a way to share biblical truths. The pastor found this methodology to be successful both with his diaspora congregation and with his colleagues in rural Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> Although it is easy for us to default to communication genres most natural to us, it is far better to research with an insider the way truth is commonly communicated and work with him or her to then craft the communication of biblical truth in culturally appropriate ways.

Similarly, consider what aspect of biblical truth to communicate when. For Muslim communities, for example, it might be best to build a foundation of trust through shared stories of the prophets. In Buddhist communities, beginning by talking through Ecclesiastes might strike a chord. Work to build bridges that will bear the weight of harder truths.

### Conclusion: Partnering with Family Ties

As Christians, we have been given the great privilege and responsibility of sharing the good news of Jesus with those who do not yet know Him. As migration increases and technology improves, more and more people live within two cultural worlds, creating “natural pathways for the gospel” through transnational family ties (Looney 2017, 24). In advocating the utilization of these support networks, we are not suggesting anything new; migrant Christians have been doing the same for as long as they have been able. Rather, we are encouraging a partnership with this already ongoing work. **IJFM**

**F**or Muslims, build trust through sharing stories of the prophets; in Buddhist communities, talking through Ecclesiastes might strike a chord.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Anonymous. Personal communication. Name changed to protect privacy.
- <sup>2</sup> Anonymous. Personal communication. Name changed to protect privacy.
- <sup>3</sup> Beach. Personal communication.

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# Watch Out, Sufism is Back

by Colin Bearup

Sufism, once dismissed as doomed to fade away, is reviving and playing an increasing role in 21st century Islam. The resurgence is particularly visible in the West, but it's a global phenomenon changing the context in which Christian mission operates.

## *Sufism in New Soil*

"My spiritual guide is Sheikh Siddiqui," said Shabza. I was sitting at a community event in a British mosque talking to a young Muslim woman, aged about 30, smartly but conservatively dressed. She was there with fellow school teachers, half of whom, like her, were of Pakistani heritage. The others were white English. As a student of current developments among Sufis in the West, I knew exactly what she was talking about. Pir Abdul Wahab Siddiqui, a member of the Hijazi order of the Naqshbandiya, arrived in the UK in 1972 from Pakistan and built a following among the Asian settlers in Coventry.<sup>1</sup> His movement built the very first Sufi tomb on British soil and he is now buried there.

Siddiqui's plan was not simply to replicate the tomb cults of Pakistan. He was deeply aware that for Islam to really take root in the UK it would require a credibility beyond ethnic boundaries and with those who have passed through higher education. He had not only trained his four sons in Islam and Sufism, but he also put them through secular universities. While the mortal remains of other Muslim leaders had traditionally been repatriated to Pakistan, he intentionally prepared a tomb for himself in Nuneaton, England, where he was eventually buried in 1994.<sup>2</sup> His sons carry on his work today. This group therefore has the distinction of having the first Sufi tomb in the UK and the first *sajjada nashin* (saintly family) born and educated in Britain.

Siddiqui's vision was for a Muslim community in the UK led by university-educated Islamic scholars, fully instructed both in *shari'a* (Islamic law) and in Sufism. This would give them authority to address the challenges of life in Britain as authentically British Muslims. In 1982, he set up the first British

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pro-Sufi Islamic theological seminary.<sup>3</sup> Here, in contrast to many traditional institutions, the diversity of Muslim beliefs and practices would be explored. He went on to found a college that combined secular academic subjects with traditional Islamic subjects.<sup>4</sup> His vision was ultimately to found a university teaching both secular and religious subjects. The university was opened after his death.<sup>5</sup> The project continues, and the first functioning shari'a council started operations at the college in the mid-2000s.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Significance for Today and Tomorrow*

What has all this to do with us? Prominent Muslim scholar and thinker, Dr. Tariq Ramadan wrote:

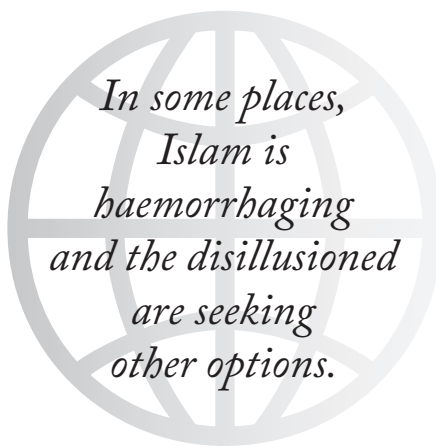
Western Muslims will play a decisive role in the evolution of Islam worldwide because of the nature and complexity of the challenges they face.<sup>7</sup>

In a day of extraordinary global communication networks and the rise of modern cities throughout the Muslim world, the pioneering developments led by Muslims in the West are likely to have greater significance all around the world.

Most Christian writers have little to say about Sufism. That magnificent tome, *Encountering the World of Islam (EWI)*, gives it only four pages and a few passing references.<sup>8</sup> "Sufism," wrote Arberry in 1950, "has run its course."<sup>9</sup> Trimmingham concluded his detailed survey of the Sufi orders through the ages by saying "the orders are declining everywhere . . . less by defection than because the young have not been joining."<sup>10</sup> Western scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries regarded Sufism as a hopelessly outdated phenomenon doomed to wither away, only temporarily sustained by the superstitious illiterate masses and the unscrupulous charlatans that exploited them. The conviction that the day of Sufism was well and truly over was not exclusive to Western observers. Major

Muslim thinkers such as Mawdudi, al-Banna and Qutb had also described much of what came under the label of Sufism as decadent, dated and doomed.<sup>11</sup> In Turkey, Ataturk saw the abolition of the Sufi orders as a necessary step to enabling Turkey to take its place in the modern world.<sup>12</sup>

For about 200 years now, anti-Sufi reformists have been a powerful voice in the Islamic world. Most Christian writings about Islam confine Sufism to a sidebar, an anomaly, to be mentioned in passing. However, Sufism still pervades the Muslim world. The most visible forms were at the populist and decadent end of the spectrum, but the sincere, scholarly, and dynamic



elements have always been present as well. Now the tide has turned. Sufi sheikhs are holding conferences attended by thousands in Western universities. International conventions around the world are bringing together Sufi leaders from many different countries. Western converts of the highest level of scholarship are translating ancient Sufi texts into English and making them accessible through English to Muslims around the world. The head of Islam's most prestigious university, Egyptian Ahmed el-Tayeb, is a Sufi.<sup>13</sup> I was recently in Turkey and asked a friend what a student-aged young man would do if he decided to get serious about Islam. The answer was, "He would join a *tariqat*"—a Sufi order.

### *Knowing Islam*

In some places, Islam is haemorrhaging and the disillusioned are seeking other options. Violent jihadists discredit the reformist/fundamentalist agenda again and again. One result we see is Muslims turning to Christ, and another is Muslims turning to atheism. Still another is the revival of a more spiritual Islam, Sufism. With all this turbulence, it might be argued that there is less need for Christians to possess a detailed knowledge of Islam. In recent years there has been a noticeable shift away from mastering Islamic thought with a view to refuting it. Much more emphasis has gone into better ways of presenting Christ and returning to basic discipleship practices. While there is much to be said for these better practices, Islam is not going away. It is adapting and a whole Sufi dimension is becoming prominent—a dimension with which Christians have historically never engaged.

It will always be the case that the more we understand where people are coming from, the better our communication will be. It is essential that we are able to gauge how our message is interpreted. Many of our workers base their understanding of Islam and Muslims on stereotypical models that are increasingly outdated. These days, with so much more Islamic activity conducted online and in English, we are able to learn a great deal about how Muslims understand the world they live in.

### *Love and Assurance*

Consider this. There is a popular Sufi song<sup>14</sup> that is going around the world. The first verse runs,

The love of Muhammad and his family/  
Is my true religion my reason to be/  
And if when I die my sins are too many/  
The love of Muhammad will rescue me.

Among the first things I was told about Islam as a new worker is that Muslims have a religion but no saviour, that there is no love in Islam and that Islam is a religion of works

such that Muslims can have no assurance. The reality is actually much more complex, and we do ourselves no favour by dismissing the words of this hymn as some kind of obscure anomaly. It actually reflects ancient traditions now made accessible to us.

Sufism has many expressions and all are concerned with the interior life in addition to the exterior. Sufis assert that Islam consists of not only *iman*, the beliefs, and *deen*, the “Pillars,” the outward religious obligations, but also *ibsaan*, the perfection of faith.<sup>15</sup> They assert it is possible to draw nearer to God through the application of disciplines and the tutelage of a master. They believe that a few attain such an exalted status that they become *awliya* (singular *wali*) usually translated saints, able to interact with the unseen world, to communicate with departed saints and with Muhammad himself. For them, Muhammad is not a mere mortal, dead and buried. Rather he existed as a created light before the rest of creation and is still present today. This makes for a living religion. While affirming that revelation has ceased, they claim that the revelation opened the door to live communication with the divine. A living Yemeni Sufi master with an international following, Sheikh Habib Umar bin Hafiz puts it this way:

Someone who does not know that Muhammad is alive is dead. When someone knows that Muhammad is alive his heart comes to life.<sup>16</sup>

His colleague Habib Ali al-Jifri declares: “The prophet is a means through which we connect to and come to know Allah.”<sup>17</sup>

Although Christian workers have generally been taught to agree with the Islamic fundamentalist view that such expressions of Islam are deviant and corrupt,<sup>18</sup> there are serious Islamic scholars who see things quite differently. In the UK, the relentless accusations made by reformist Muslims that the traditional Sufi-type Islam of South Asia is hopelessly contaminated with

**F**or them Muhammad is no mere mortal, but existed as a created light before creation and is still present today.

Hinduism and Occultism were rebutted with great effect in the mid-1990s by the emergence in the public sphere of Sheikhs Nuh Keller, Tim Winter and Hamza Yusuf. These three were all white Western converts to Islam, fluent in classical Arabic, who had been studying ancient Islamic texts in the Middle East and learning from Sufi masters in places like Morocco, Syria and Yemen. While by no means affirming every local practice found in folk Islam, they confirmed the Sufi worldview as authentic and defensible from ancient Arabic sources.<sup>19</sup> In the last twenty years, a spectrum of leaders representing different expressions of Sufism around the globe, upholding high standards of scholarship and a conservative view of shari’a, have been collaborating to raise the credibility of Sufism under the banner of “Traditional Islam.”<sup>20</sup> Far from seeing themselves as some kind of aberration, they see themselves as the truly orthodox. As Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad (birth name Tim Winter) puts it, “If all Muslims were Sufis, all people would be Muslim.”<sup>21</sup>

### *How Big a Footprint?*

How extensive is Sufism? Such a question usually expects a statistical answer, but mere numbers will not help us. Secular academic Ron Geaves helpfully describes Sufi Islam as a set of concentric circles with saints (both living and dead) at the centre; committed disciples (*mureeds*) forming a small inner circle; people who believe in a saint but have not themselves set out on the Sufi path forming a much wider circle; and, then, the general public who share this worldview but are not affiliated. This latter broad fringe of affiliates may come to the saint or tomb in times of need or, nowadays, may consult Sufi sheikhs via online platforms. This outer circle can extend

across whole societies.<sup>22</sup> There is really no clean line of demarcation between Sufi and non-Sufi. At any one time the number of recognised saints in the inner circles is very small, but the number of those committed to a Sufi understanding of the world is much greater. Furthermore, it is not possible to quantify the number of people who believe that Sufism is a valid worldview but who at the same time may hold conflicting views. Anthropologist Katherine Ewing’s interaction with highly educated secular Pakistanis is indicative. She documents how in both Pakistan and in the West, Muslims who could speak in a cool and dismissive way about Sufism in their professional context would suddenly change their demeanour when encountering the suggestion of an authentic spiritual experience.<sup>23</sup> All this is not to claim that Sufism is universally recognised as valid among Muslims; rather it is to affirm that Sufism is present in most contexts at least to some degree, and it is not possible to divide people simply into Sufi and non-Sufi.<sup>24</sup>

### *Sufism and the Secular World*

Siddiqui is not alone in seeking to integrate Sufi spirituality with secular education. The preoccupation with education and the necessity of uniting both scholarly and mystical Islam is also found in movements like Minhaj-ul-Quran International (MQI), founded by Dr. Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri. Now based in Canada, Qadri grew up in Pakistan, trained in Islamic law and became active in political life. He adopted the call to revival espoused by the reformist movements but retained a commitment to Sufi spirituality.<sup>25</sup> Initially he preferred to be known by the title of doctor or professor rather than the title *maulvi* traditionally accorded to Muslim clerics. This reflected

his zeal to embrace the modern world, especially education, in order to be relevant to the present and the future. He particularly saw the need for women to participate in education at all levels.<sup>26</sup>

The organisation he founded in Lahore in 1981, MQI, now has branches in ninety countries.<sup>27</sup> Its structure bears no relation to a traditional Sufi order. It was set up as a modern-style mass movement with committees and membership fees. Rather than being focused exclusively on the inward pursuit of godliness, it is also active in welfare projects and education. Its premises are designated as *idaaras*, administrative centres, rather than Sufi lodges or mosques, and the leaders are called directors rather than imams. From the outset, MQI had special sections for youth and women.

MQI is very modern in organisational style but at the same time it supports the traditional Sufi cosmology (with hierarchies of saints and Muhammad as the physical manifestation of a primordial creative light, etc.) and seeks to promote it using modern imagery. For example, Qadri writes:

The source of spiritual bounties, kindness, compassion, love and affection is the holy personality of the most revered and exalted Messenger of Allah. To relay these vast blessings to all believers there are great conduits of Allah's friends who make up a spiritual power distribution system which works in a very similar way to electric power supply system... The *awliya* of Allah have vitalized and strengthened this "conduit system" by their connection with our beloved Prophet.<sup>28</sup>

This one movement, described here in some detail, is not unique but rather indicative of new trends. The Turkish movement headed by Fethullah Gülen, for example, has much in common with MQI. Like MQI, it combines a focus on education and the modern world with Sufi-based Islamic values. It is said to run 1000 schools worldwide.<sup>29</sup>

### *Implications for Ministry*

Perry Pennington, writing of South Asian Muslims with a Sufi worldview,<sup>30</sup> pointed out that, in contrast to what we think of as orthodox Islam, these Muslims acknowledged their separation from God as being both real and needing to be addressed. Although their vocabulary is different to ours, their awareness that they are in need of salvation is not in doubt. Furthermore, the belief that it is God who provides a way of salvation and that it operates through holy human mediation is also explicitly taught. Having identified how South Asian Muslims perceived their need, Pennington examined the ways in which the scriptures speak to that need and



found that strands of the Gospel on which Westerners do not traditionally focus do indeed speak their language.

Sufi Islam sees God, humankind and the world differently to textbook Islam. For Sufis, our declaration that Jesus is alive and Muhammad is dead demonstrates our ignorance. They may well hear us say such things but choose not to argue. Sufism has its own style of spirituality. To put it more starkly, the manners associated with a person of spiritual credibility are different to what we might expect. In general, those steeped in Sufism avoid disputes. Western Christians have developed many strategies for those Muslims who use well organised verbal reasoning.

It may be that the reason Evangelicals have not developed the tools for communicating with Sufis is that Sufis usually avoid debate and so we fail to hear their voice.

Those with a Sufi outlook prize peace and gentleness in speech. Qadri says, "Allah likes those who are soft-spoken. Speaking in a soft tone has been termed the best donation."<sup>31</sup> They use proverbs and parables. They feel no compulsion to make every statement explicit. In mission circles of late, there has been a greater appreciation of the importance of narrative and indirect communication. We tend to attribute that style of communication to culture, and maybe rightly so, but it is also something nurtured by Sufism. To communicate effectively with Sufis, surely we need to consider the communication style that they recognise as being appropriate to spiritual people. After all, Jesus spoke in parables too.

Sufis are used to being attacked by other Muslims who quote texts at them. When Christians do it too, they take it as an indication of a lack of true knowledge. For Sufis, true knowledge comes through relationship not reasoning. Such an understanding is not absent from the New Testament (see for example Matt. 11:25–30, John 17:3, 1 Cor. 8:1–3, 1 John 1:1–3), but as Evangelicals we are accustomed to presenting the gospel as a formula, as a solution to a problem, as a transaction.

### *Speaking to Sufis*

For most expressions of Sufism, love is central. Love for the messenger is the mark of the true Muslim. Devotion to Muhammad is often so explicit and intense that Christians can only see it as idolatry and be repelled by it. We wonder how they can love the man we have read about. Part of the answer is that they have been told a very different story. However, our job is not to prove them wrong so much as to point them to something better and higher. For example, I was talking to a local Sufi leader.



“Loving the messenger,” he said, “is the most important thing.” He phrased it that way to include me, a Christian. I, too, should love “my messenger.”

“Very true,” I replied. “But is your love strong enough?”

His face fell. “No, it is never enough. He is worth so much more.”

“You are right,” I replied. “We cannot love as we should. But I have some good news. It is written in the Injil, ‘This is love. Not that we love God but that he has loved us.’ Knowing this love is the key. We love because he first loved us.”

He looked at me surprised and perhaps disturbed. “You are deep,” he said.

Before you ask, I did not go on to “and sent his Son to be the expiation of our sins.” If he had asked me a question about this love from God, that would have been the next step, but he did not. Next time I see him, I will look for the opportunity to ask if he has discovered how God has loved us. I now carry the verse I quoted around in my wallet ready to leave with someone when we have such a conversation.

I was talking to another Sufi and he said, “We love Jesus. Jesus was very, very special.”

I replied, “That’s wonderful. I am glad that you love Jesus. And you know what he promised to those who love him?” And, of course, they don’t. “He said those that love him would keep his commandments and that he and his father would come and dwell in their hearts. That is such a precious promise.”

I cite these examples simply to show how, if we have thought about it ahead of time, we can introduce the gospel in a way that resonates with Sufi thinking and does not depend on the sort of approach that repels. The aim is to draw them to the person of Jesus. That in turn leads to the amazing things God has done through him so that we might have *koinonia*, fellowship, with him (1 John 1:3).

**T**hey do the same sort of holistic discipleship that Jesus did; knowledge and life are not separated—the disciple aspires to be like his teacher.

Much rethinking has gone on over the last couple of decades about what discipleship means in cross cultural mission. One of the things about Sufism is that the basic paradigm of discipleship is already present. To grow in faith, you need a teacher who directs and instructs, who shares wisdom and models life. Although their foundational truths are very different, they do the same sort of holistic discipleship that Jesus did; knowledge and life are not separated—the disciple aspires to be like his teacher. It should be possible to tap into this underlying non-Western understanding as we seek to make disciples.

### Conclusion

It is not our business to decide which form of Islam is more authentic than the others.<sup>32</sup> Our business is to bring them to the living Christ, that they might know him, love him and serve him, ever grateful for his death for them and his living presence with them. He alone is the perfect mediator provided by God. Such concepts are not unfamiliar to them, but they do not know him. Can we learn to introduce him to them in ways they will welcome? **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ron Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain* (Cardiff Academic Press, 2000), 126.

<sup>2</sup> For more details, see “Pir Abdul Wahab Siddiqui,” *Aulia-e-hind.com*, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.aulia-e-hind.com/dargah/Intl/UK.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ron Geaves, *Sectarian Influences within Islam in Britain* (Monograph Series, Community Religions Project, University of Leeds, 1996), 123.

<sup>4</sup> Ron Geaves, “Learning the Lessons” in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 150.

<sup>5</sup> Hijaz College, About Us: History, “Shaykh Allama Muhammad Abdul Wahab

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<sup>6</sup> Sunday Mercury, “Muslim college in Midlands is running sharia law court,” BirminghamLive. Last modified October 23, 2012, <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/muslim-college-in-midlands-is-running-sharia-234317>.

<sup>7</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 225.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Swartley, *Encountering the World of Islam* (Bottom Line Media, 2014), 233–236.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, *Sufism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 134.

<sup>10</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 250.

<sup>11</sup> Jamal Malik, “Introduction,” in *Sufism in the West*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 248.

<sup>13</sup> Nadia Abou al Magd, “Mubarak Appoints a New Chief at Al-Azhar,” *The National*, March 21, 2010, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/africa/mubarak-appoints-a-new-chief-of-al-azhar-1.593727>.

<sup>14</sup> This Sufi song is performed and used around the world. A quick search on Youtube shows how widespread it is used. I first heard it in a small meeting in the UK. “Ali Elsayed” (song writer), Bandcamp, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://aliesayed.bandcamp.com/track/the-love-of-muhammad-pbuh>.

<sup>15</sup> Nuh Ha Mim Keller, “The Place of Tasawwuf in Traditional Islamic Sciences” (lecture given at Islamic Foundation, Markfield Centre, Leicester, January 1995 and Croydon Mosque 30th January 1995), <http://masud.co.uk/the-place-of-tasawwuf-in-traditional-islamic-sciences/>.

<sup>16</sup> Habib Umar bin Hafiz (@habibomar), “Someone who does not know that Muhammad is alive is dead. When someone knows that Muhammad is alive his heart comes to life.” Twitter, December 5, 2016, <https://twitter.com/worldofsufis?lang=en> 5th December 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Habib Ali al-Jifri (@alhabibali), “The prophet is a means through which we connect to and come to know Allah,” Twitter, December 8, 2016, <https://twitter.com/worldofsufis?lang=en> 8th December 2016.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, Swartley, *Encountering the World of Islam*, 138.

<sup>19</sup> Sadek Hamid, "The Rise of the Traditional Islamic Networks" in *Sufism in Britain*, eds. Ron Geaves and Theodore Gabriel (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, Christians tend to use the term "Traditional Islam" to refer to that of the text book in contrast to lived Islam. What Salafi reformists are pursuing is original Islam not traditional Islam.

<sup>21</sup> Abdal Hakim Murad (@Contentions), "If all Muslims were Sufis, all people would be Muslim." Twitter, November, 13, 2017, <https://twitter.com/worldofsufis?lang=en> 13th November 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Geaves and Gabriel, *Sufism in Britain*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psycho-analysis and Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> One is reminded of al-Ghazali (c1061–1163) a great intellectual and jurist who shocked his world by abandoning his orthodox reputation to adopt the Sufi life. Sadakat Kadri, *Heaven on Earth: A Journey through Shari'a Law from the Deserts of Ancient Arabia to the Streets of the Modern Muslim World* (London: Vintage, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Sadek Hamid, *Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 65.

<sup>26</sup> Amer Morgahi, "Reliving Classical Islam" in *Sufism in Britain*, 217.

<sup>27</sup> Standard introduction in all recent English language publications.

<sup>28</sup> Tahir ul-Qadri, *Islamic Spirituality and Modern Science* (London: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications 2015), 113.

<sup>29</sup> Ian G. Williams, "Ours is not a caravan of despair. The influence and presence of the Turkish Sunni Nurcu Movement of Hojaeffendi Fethullah Gulen in the UK" in *Sufism in Britain*, 238. Also, Yakup Korkmaz, "Biblical Approaches to the Nurcu Gulen Movement in Turkey" in *Margins of Islam*, 59.

<sup>30</sup> *IJFM* 31:4, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri (@TahirulQadir), "Allah likes those who are soft-spoken. Speaking in a soft tone has been termed the best donation," Twitter, June 23, 2017, <https://twitter.com/worldofsufis?lang=en> 23rd June 2017.

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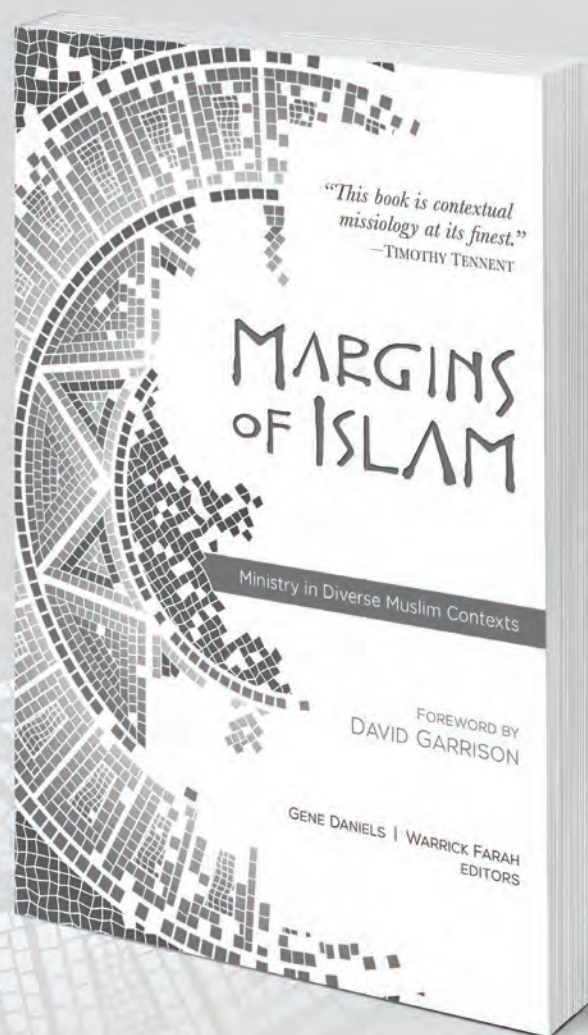
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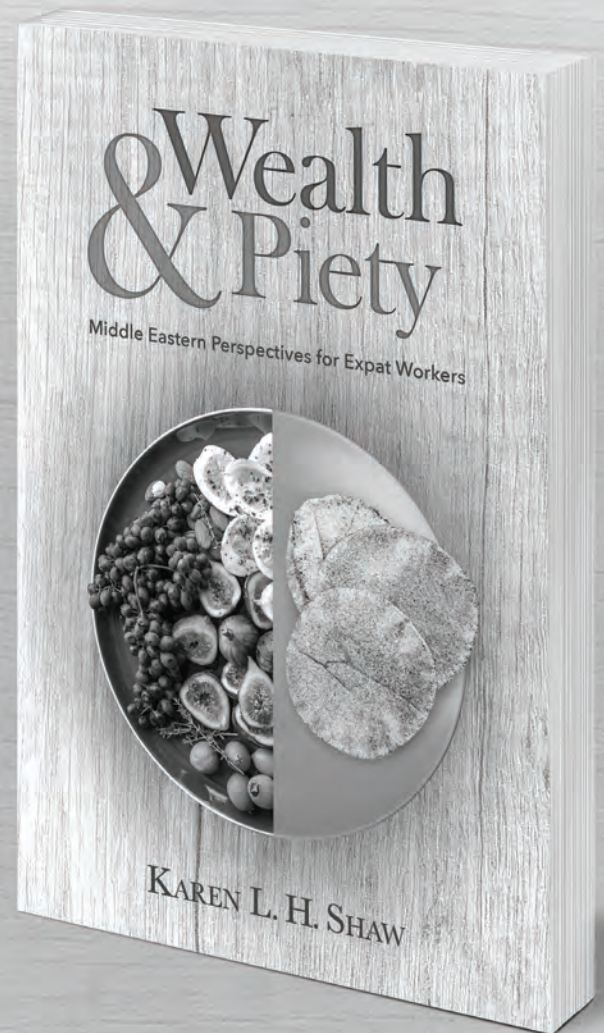
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The Transnational Experience

# Peace Missions to Karen and Shan Migrants from Myanmar in Southeast Asia

by James D. Langteau, Ho Jin Jun, Kenneth Gossett, and Dina Samora

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*James Langteau is a faculty member of the Peacebuilding program at Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand. He develops teams and leads them weekly into neighborhoods and migrant camps. Previously he was founding director of the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach. His doctoral degree in educational leadership is from Liberty University.*

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While actually preparing for the funeral of a 45-year-old Shan woman, the lifelong experiences of refugees and migrants became compelling to me as a researcher. I had asked her family if the government of Thailand should be notified, and her husband replied matter-of-factly that the government never knew she had lived and so would not be interested that she had died.<sup>1</sup> The region where she had lived is one where Myanmar has been an unremitting catalyst for creating refugees, internally displaced peoples (IDP), and migrants for many decades. And the current geopolitical challenges have not abated the crisis.

Southeast Asia is home to “one of the world’s longest-standing and largest refuges of populations who live in the shadow of states but who have not yet been fully incorporated.”<sup>2</sup> Outreaches to Shan and Karen people from Myanmar have been established to promote trauma healing, enhance assimilation, improve education, and develop stronger interpersonal ties. This article will introduce some of the historic and cultural considerations impacting these social dynamics in Northern Thailand, especially that of family. I also want to emphasize how an extended surrogate family can positively influence development because relationships are significant both for life in general and for effectively addressing specific crisis situations. Finally, in order to discuss a peace mission approach to Karen and Shan refugee ministry, I believe it is imperative to clarify some issues: terms and concepts, underlying causes, the nature of relationships, and the localized linguistic realities. All of these together shape a balanced approach within the context of Scripture. As Christians, it is this biblical worldview which frames our perceptions of the problems as well as our responses to them.

The majority of people fleeing Myanmar into Thailand are from ethnic minority people groups along the border who have endured decades of oppression. These minority people groups have been adversely impacted by the policies and abuses of the Myanmar military. According to the Thailand Migration Report

sponsored by the International Organization for Migration, many migrants come from three states in Myanmar: Shan State, Kayin State, and Mon State. "With no end in sight to the armed conflicts in these areas, many ethnic people have decided to seek asylum in Thailand."<sup>3</sup> In Northern Thailand, the majority of migrants are from Shan and Kayin States, while those from Mon State enter Central Thailand. The recent global awareness of the massacre and desperate flight of Rohingya Muslims into Bangladesh from Western Myanmar has had the unintended consequence of diminishing the international community's attention to the protracted suffering of the Shan and Karen people who have fled from northeastern Myanmar into Northern Thailand over recent decades.

Worldwide, the number of international migrants has continued to grow annually, according to the United Nations (UN). Over 60 percent of all international migrants, or 80 million people, live in Asia. The availability of data on the age and origin of migrants differs by region, and information is often incomplete.

In Asia, 12 per cent of the countries did not provide recent data on the number of international migrants, while 26 percent were lacking recent data on the age of international migrants, and 32 percent on the origin of international migrants.<sup>4</sup>

In this ambiguous and often fluid environment, a clear understanding of the extent of the problem, and what some of the best solutions might be, can be difficult to reach.

### *Interconnected Causes and Definitions of Migration*

The underlying causes of migration are increasingly interconnected, making determination of the status of individual migrants challenging. "Underdevelopment, impoverishment, poor governance, endemic conflict, and human rights abuse are closely linked." Such circumstances lead to both economically compelled migration

and politically compelled flight. Often unable to make a clear distinction, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) now refers to these migrants as "mixed flows."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in Thailand, refugees are not distinguished from other migrants.

While Thailand has ratified a number of important international human rights instruments, and incorporated these into domestic law, it is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. As such, refugees and asylum seekers are considered illegal immigrants, permitted to remain in Thailand with executive discretion.<sup>6</sup>

Displacement impacts individuals, communities, entire people groups, and neighboring countries. The challenges



facing migrants and their communities are caused by factors ranging from the emotional harm associated with forced removal from their homes and land, to the physical and psychological trauma of witnessing and experiencing violence, to compelling economic challenges. Even the government-monitored *Myanmar Times* newspaper in an article, "Shan refugees on Thailand border urged to request aid" advised the Shan people to seek aid due to limited food availability. The news article reported challenges facing Shan refugees fleeing their state in Myanmar, acknowledging

there are around 300,000 people from over 1400 Shan villages in the whole of the state who fled their

homes, between 1996 and 1998, due to clashes between government forces and the armed ethnic group Shan State Army who sought refuge in these camps.<sup>7</sup>

Many of these people still desire to return to Shan State, but are afraid because conditions have not substantially improved in Myanmar. In the duration, they have learned to communicate effectively in the Thai language, and they and their children, though marginalized, are slowly acclimating to Thai society.

Immediate safety needs compelled many internally displaced persons (IDPs) to flee their homes and many migrants to flee their nation. Migrants then must confront the daily reality of providing food, shelter, and education for their children, and re-establishing a sense of community integrity.

Young people from Burma who are living in Thailand have limited access to education after they complete secondary school in refugee camps or migrant schools.<sup>8</sup>

Migrants face hardships from limited resources, marginal legal status, and from discrimination. Fortunately, there are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which work to provide services, including English language education. These practical services have the potential to empower individuals within migrant communities and assist in integration.<sup>9</sup>

### *Engaging the Underlying Causes*

The first priority is to care for their immediate needs. But it is also crucial to address the causes of the crisis impacting migrants (and their reactions to it). This process will assist individuals in developing effective coping skills without minimizing or denying the grief. It will also reduce the extent of the repercussions of stressful events and ultimately expedite the individual's transition from victim to survivor. Crisis intervention is an attempt to deal quickly with an immediate problem.

This interaction may be thought of as “emotional first aid.”<sup>10</sup> One model for crisis intervention is called the trilogy definition. It is a process that includes helping people address the precipitating events, reflect on their perception of those events in terms of reality, and then respond with more effective coping skills.<sup>11</sup> This approach compliments another model called the ABC model. This includes developing and maintaining contact through the building of rapport, identifying the problem and distress, and encouraging the individual to examine coping strategies.<sup>12</sup> The perception of the event is the most crucial of the three aspects of the trilogy. Perception is the part that can be most easily and quickly altered without denying the pain that was incurred. People who receive help before resorting to defense mechanisms and counterproductive coping skills may avoid a more prolonged crisis and the potential for personality disorders.

When looking for the underlying causes, it's important to keep in mind that the two general types of crises are developmental and situational. Developmental crises are the type which include normal phases expected as people transition from one stage of life to another. Situational crises are uncommon and extraordinary events that a person cannot predict or control.<sup>13</sup> These events include rape, crime, death, divorce, illness, and community disasters typically experienced by migrants. This generally results in an increase in anxiety that ultimately leads to a crisis in which the individual is unable to function using normal coping skills. The counselor can help the individual through a cognitive restructuring and the development of an alternative based on a more realistic perception of the precipitating event. Changing perceptions can diminish the individual's stress level and increase functioning levels. These perceptions may then open up the possibility of offering the individual a way to develop alternative coping mechanisms.<sup>14</sup>

**W**here migrant families have been decimated by violence, the indigenous migrant community provides a surrogate family environment.

A transformational approach to conflict and crisis is significant. Helping an individual clarify and change the way they view and respond to conflict or crisis is transformational. This transformation helps people reconcile the tension between what is and what could be, or the way things are and the way things ought to be. This approach incorporates empowerment and recognition of the individual, which restores a person's sense of value while demonstrating empathy for them and their situation.<sup>15</sup> Critical incident debriefing is used by the Red Cross and other agencies in response to tragedies, and the strategies are similar to the ABC model.<sup>16</sup>

### *Transforming Relationships*

Satisfying relationships are universally crucial to a sense of well-being and self-efficacy. A surrogate family relationship can develop trust that has the capacity to deeply impact lives. Migrants usually travel and live in community with others from their people group. In cases where families have been decimated by violence, the indigenous community of migrants provides a surrogate family environment. Outsiders who genuinely engage the migrant community also develop relationships that become part of an extended surrogate family. A surrogate family of people who accept and fulfill the individual's needs is helpful. During crisis situations, perceptions are often skewed or flawed, resulting in individuals not realizing their own value or fully appreciating the value of others. Everyone who endures pain has “a story, and there was a flaw behind each story that contributed to an irreconcilable disconnect,” while the existence of families and surrogate families contributed to reconciliation and transitional healing.<sup>17</sup> Families and surrogate families are able to help the

individual bridge personal pain and flawed perceptions, and begin to heal.

The need for healing relationships is all the more evident during times of challenges such as those experienced by migrants. In many ways, those who genuinely assist migrants become de facto members of a surrogate family as they develop relationships. An effective surrogate family relationship is not one of dependence nor is it based on authoritarianism, but instead mutually respects and encourages individual and community growth. Authentic personal relationships provide the catalyst for acceptance and accountability within a community, which in turn diminishes the likelihood of anti-social behavior.<sup>18</sup> Aid to migrants may start with meeting tangible needs, but when coupled with the development of meaningful and trusted relationships, it can blossom into the foundation for acceptance of transformative ideas and emotional healing. This truth is all the more evident by comparing their previous situation when they interacted primarily with their own people groups to their situation after developing relationships with those who established peace missions to the migrant group.

Relationships are important to normal human experience—specifically to address a crisis and how a person relates to it. The desire to be accepted, needed and fulfilled is associated with relationships. Jesus came to earth to meet our deepest needs. Christ died to redeem people, bring them back to himself, and restore their relationship with God and with others that had been ruptured by sin in Eden.<sup>19</sup> People are often engulfed in a crisis because they cannot reconcile what they know to be right with the events that confront them. Fortunately, although reconciliation with the enemy

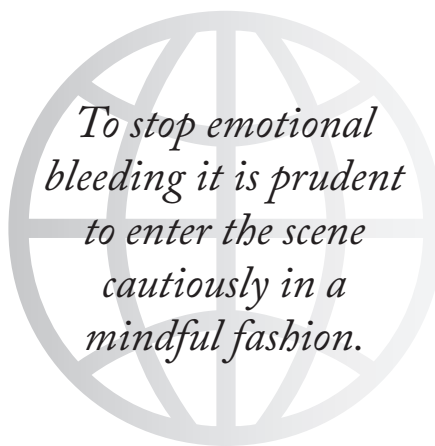
who hurt them may be very difficult if not impossible, healing from trauma and acceptance can be accomplished through Christ. For example, when Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman, he established a relationship with her—a sense of community and belonging—that was striking and not missed by her. Jesus was willing to even drink from her cup, demonstrating intimacy and acceptance of someone with whom other people from his culture would not normally associate.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, we are to base our interactions on the model demonstrated by Christ because Christians have not only been reconciled to God through Christ but have also been given a mission of reconciliation according to 2 Cor. 5:17–21.

These relationships with migrants were not superficial but resembled a surrogate family. As friendship developed, visits were made to each other's homes where dinner was eaten together, games played together, movies watched in Thai, and life was shared. Funerals were attended where people mourned together, and weddings were attended where people rejoiced together. These Shan neighborhoods are in the same community as the local Thai Church, a place where no Shan church currently exists. The new Shan Christians began to attend the Thai Church, where they have even participated on occasions in leading worship with skits and songs. The Shan migrants have been introduced to Shan Christians from an existing Shan church elsewhere in Chiang Mai, but because it is not proximate to their community, the goal was to help these new Shan Christians eventually establish their own church. In the process of transformation, the Shan became change-agents themselves.

### *A Balanced Approach*

Ministering to migrants is most effective when it is a practical application of both theoretical concepts and biblical truths. First, people must be able to see others as Christ sees them, as

eternal, valuable, and redeemable. This perspective is expressed by addressing immediate tangible needs, and then by helping them recognize the reality of life according to the truth of God's Word rather than remaining negatively impacted by a skewed perception created by the trauma event or by false hopes. In the process, the intervener must attempt to stop emotional bleeding by relieving anxiety and limiting additional disorientation. Therefore, it is prudent to enter the scene cautiously in a mindful fashion. Interveners should openly identify themselves and their purpose, be stable and supportive in order to establish structure, and never promise what cannot be delivered.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, the



effective intervener recognizes that his or her own hope is only in Christ, and as such will convey that to the person in crisis. As a result, it is expedient to work towards developing a rapport where the individual will feel safe and able to confide. By asking gentle questions that empower the individual and confer respect, the effective interviewer may eventually ease the tension.

The Apostle Paul stated:

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him

all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Col. 1:13–17, New King James Version).

God reveals the power of Christ not only to deliver and redeem, but to sustain. Christ is sovereign and the agent that holds things together. He is the creator, sustainer, and deliverer. Crisis intervention is the commitment to address life challenges for short-term management of issues and it can be a catalyst for long-term healing. To effectively help people, this intervention must be approached from a theoretical perspective that is wedded to a practical basis. In the process, the truth that is brought to bear can lead to healing and transformation.

Every life has its share of crises and each person must face challenges that confront his coping skills. Crisis intervention is designed to help people address the precipitating events, reflect on the perception of those events in terms of reality, and develop more effective coping skills in response to the event. Jesus said that in this world a person would have many troubles, but to be of good cheer because he has overcome the world (John 16:33). Christ also came to reconcile people back to God so that the relationship that was ruptured because of sin in the Garden of Eden could be restored (2 Cor. 5:18–19). Crises, challenges, overwhelming troubles: these are the harsh realities of life for the Karen and Shan people who fled to Thailand. But there is genuine, transformative hope to be found in Christ.

### *Linguistic Limitations and Considerations*

Definite advantages generally exist for communicating with people in their mother tongue, the language of their birth, which enhances the interpersonal relationship. In this particular situation, however, there were complexities



to consider. In fact, to a certain extent there was a question about what their mother tongue or heart language actually was. In such Shan communities around Chiang Mai, Thailand, the native language was in fact “bilingualism” as children were raised in the context of both languages, often code-switching, which is defined as alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. Both the Karen and Shan people in Thailand left their (monolingual) native tongue communities some years or decades ago and have increasingly spoken Thai. Thus, a combination of their mother tongue and Thai has become their “first language.”

Thai is the common local language outside the home, and consequently is the primary language used in public meetings. This was especially true among the Shan migrants living in the Chiang Mai area, more of whom could read Thai than could read Shan. This linguistic reality also reflected the close linguistic relatedness between Shan language dialects and the dialects of Northern Thai spoken around Chiang Mai. Discussions were conducted in a variety of language options to mitigate linguistic challenges. However, the Central Thai language is the common trade language used for communication with the many ethnolinguistic peoples in Chiang Mai. Central Thai, to a great extent, is the primary language of radio, television, advertisement, markets, schools, government, and churches. Central Thai has been taught in area schools to all young people since the 1930s, reflecting Thai government policy, although local people also often code-switch into the Northern Thai dialect, known as Lanna Thai or Kam Mueang, in informal circumstances.

The multi-lingual nature of this part of Thailand and Burma has long been studied by anthropologists. In the 1930s and the 1940s, the eminent anthropologist Sir Edmund Ronald Leach researched the political relations

*Leach concluded that ethnic identity and political allegiance is fluid and situational, despite contrary assertions by some within the people groups.*

and loyalties of the people groups in highland Burma. Leach challenged the common generalization asserted by some nationalists of “one language, one people, one nation”—the idea that culture and language have a one-to-one correspondence with each other.

Leach instead concluded that ethnic identity and political allegiance is fluid and situational, despite assertions to the contrary by some within the people groups. Leach identified people groups as complex and asserted that multiple identities existed within individuals, families, and clans. The idea that each people group is a separate entity is a faulty invention.

The intermingling of language groups is often too fine grained to be shown on any small scale map. To illustrate, no less than six different dialects were spoken as mother tongue within a community of 130 households.<sup>22</sup>

Leach studied just across the border from Northern Thailand, where he noted that the average Kachin or Shan was keenly aware of differences of dialect and accents but attached very different values to those differences than would the typical Westerner.<sup>23</sup> Leach wrote that fluidity in identities between Shan, Kachin, and other groups was often wrongly asserted and assigned as “permanent,” a concept that was sometimes rigidified in the modern world using citizenship laws, police, and courts. He, however, asserted that

this convenient academic doctrine does not relate to the facts on the ground. It can easily be established that most of these supposedly distinct “races” and “tribes” intermarry with one another. Moreover it is evident that substantial bodies of population have transferred themselves from one language group to another

even within the last century. Language groups are not therefore hereditarily established, nor are they stable through time. This makes nonsense of the whole linguistic-historical argument.<sup>24</sup>

Again, Leach’s conclusion reflects the fact that throughout history the first language for most people is actually multi-lingualism, or bilingualism, as it was with the members of the local church studied here and in the communities of Northern Thailand. The situation of today’s English-speaking world, Chinese speaking world, and Spanish-speaking world, where many people speak only one language, is in fact historically anomalous. In the Chiang Mai area of Southeast Asia, many people in fact code-switch.<sup>25</sup>

Linguistic realities in Northern Thailand may significantly impact one’s approach to ministry. Dr. Tony Waters, Director of the Institute for Religion, Culture and Peace at Payap University, stated that often the older Shan people in Chiang Mai are illiterate and cannot read Shan for it was never regularly taught in Burma, and any literature is limited. Waters reiterated that the Shan people living around Chiang Mai

typically have a command of the Thai language as a result of the upbringing in Thailand, and a command of the Thai written language as a result of schooling.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, not surprisingly, two Shan Christian women who accompanied the outreach volunteers into Shan neighborhoods each week would dialogue with Shan people exclusively in Thai, recognizing it is now the common language among this population. Bibles and New Testaments are provided in various languages including both Thai and the languages of

their birth. Interestingly, Thai language books are predominantly self-selected by the Shan people in the Chiang Mai area, owing in great measure to both their illiteracy in Shan language and the integration of the Shan people into Thai school curriculum.

Secondly, it was Henry Yeo, country director for the Methodist Church in Northern Thailand, who noted that congregations which operate exclusively in their own mother tongue

generally become extinct as more and more young people reject their own mother tongue and join congregations that speak the Central Thai [language].

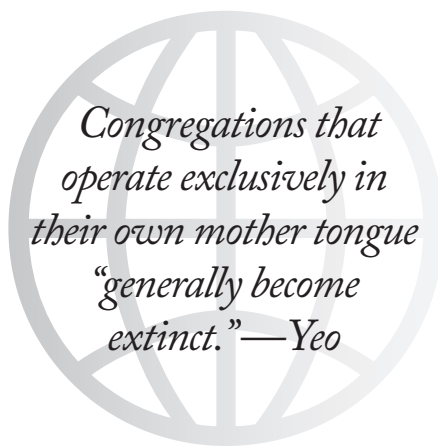
He has suggested that migrants should be encouraged to eventually form their own outreach activities and churches conducted in the common language of the community, be it Lanna Thai or Central Thai, so that they and their congregation can progress. Henry Yeo has also suggested the optimal solution was to use Central Thai as the official language of communication but form groups within the church that speak their mother tongue for small group activities. "This way, their outreach will be more broad-based and at the same time preserve their mother tongue."<sup>27</sup>

### *Challenges for the Karen Migrants*

There are nine refugee camps clustered near Mae Sot, Thailand along the Myanmar border where nearly 100,000 refugees, mostly Karen people, live after fleeing decades of conflict in Myanmar.<sup>28</sup> The first refugees arrived in 1984. Many Karen people have been born in the camps and some older migrants have been there so long they cannot remember their former lives in Myanmar. At least 3 million people have fled Myanmar over the past three decades, and more than 600,000 remain internally displaced within Myanmar. The recent landslide election victory in 2016 provides some hope for peace in Myanmar. Nevertheless, the sobering reality is that the

constitution guarantees the military remains in ultimate power, and the army has continued attacks and human rights violations with impunity in ethnic areas.<sup>29</sup>

During one visit in January 2016 to the Mae La camp, the largest of nine camps in Mae Sot, we spoke with a group of twenty-six young adults about healing and forgiveness. These Karen people were children when their families escaped Kayin State in Myanmar as the Burmese Army attacked their people group. Most of the people in this particular group were now in their late teens or early twenties, yet had vivid memories of seeing their community devastated. Amid tears, some recounted how they



witnessed fighting, burning of homes, rapes, and summary executions. Even decades later, they and their families struggle to cope with what happened, to reconcile the disparity between the way things ought to be with the injustice they experienced, and to heal from the trauma.<sup>30</sup>

Over the past three decades, thousands of villages in Kayin State were burned to the ground. The villagers lived in constant fear of the Burmese military,

terrorizing the villagers, stealing their food, forcing villagers to become porters and mine sweepers, raping ethnic women, and torturing and killing anyone suspected of having a connection with the ethnic armed opposition.<sup>31</sup>

Though some villagers endured the abuse by developing warning systems to repeatedly flee into the jungle at the approach of the military, others decided to leave Myanmar and settle in Thailand.

As a result of this flight, it is important for aid workers and missionaries to allow people to express the pain and share the experience, and thus validate their suffering and process it through the stages of grieving. The expression and validation of suffering is an initial step in healing, for any attempt or perceived attempt to either diminish or deny the trauma neglects an important step in the grieving process. We suffer with them as they share their experiences, and we grieve with them as they grieve anew. Paul wrote,

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (Rom. 12:14–16, New International Version).

Speaking for the group of Karen people at one meeting, a man asked how they could genuinely forgive the Burmese soldiers they witnessed raping and murdering their relatives. Clearly, this was not a time for simplistic answers or clichés, nor for diminishing the pain that was experienced. They were forced to bear the unbearable. That fact could not and should not be denied. Unlike Shan people, who were predominantly Buddhist or Animist, many Karen people were Christian, and references to Scripture was not only respected but expected. Applying the truth and power of Scripture greatly enhanced the process of healing and forgiveness.

These Karen people readily acknowledged the universal truth that in life all people have at some point hurt others, and all people have also been hurt by others. Each individual's case is only a matter of degree. They also readily acknowledged that our only hope for

forgiveness and redemption is by the grace and mercy offered through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. These Christians also acknowledged that though they had not done what they witnessed the Burmese Army do, they also still needed unmerited grace and mercy from God for their own sins. As they related the realization of how they went from hopeless to hopeful in Christ, they admitted a general awareness of how that placed all of us in the same category as the Burmese Army. They acknowledged the Scriptural truth, and the difficulty of embracing it.

The necessity and ability to forgive the Burmese Army, which to all present did not seem to desire forgiveness, was not a quick or one-time event. Forgiveness is a process that takes time. Yet, they began to realize the biblical truth that the refusal to forgive was in fact a form of unbelief, for we all need forgiveness which is unmerited and undeserved. Jesus said,

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Matt. 7:1-2, New International Version).

The action of forgiveness in no way minimizes the road to healing or suggests a simplified process, but it does slowly alter the perception of one's self from victim to survivor and introduces gratitude to God and to others who share the journey.

### *Shan Migrant Neighborhoods in Chiang Mai*

Shan State with the capital of Taunggyi is located in Northeast Myanmar and is home to an estimated 2.6 million people. Most Shan people in Chiang Mai, Thailand call themselves Tai Yai, meaning "Great Tai," and are primarily Buddhist/Animist. Shan State is the largest of the fourteen administrative divisions by land area within Myanmar and covers 155,800

**T***he Shan migrant workers are often undocumented, marginalized, and without access to health care, making them vulnerable to HIV.—McCay*

square kilometers (60,000 square miles), which represents nearly a quarter of the total area of Myanmar. Shan State is largely rural, and it borders China to the north, Laos to the east, and Thailand to the south.<sup>32</sup> Shan people escaping conflict or seeking economic improvement either flee across the border into Thailand by identifying themselves as asylum seekers wanting to stay in shelters, or they seek employment to support themselves and their families.

The Shan displaced persons have faced the worst plight as many of them who escaped from armed conflicts arrived in Thailand and entered into the local labour market without immediately seeking asylum.<sup>33</sup>

Many Shan migrant neighborhoods in Chiang Mai, the largest city in Northern Thailand, are marginalized within society. Few outsiders visit these communities or camps. The Shan almost exclusively work in low-paying labor jobs in construction earning about 300 Baht per 10-hour day, or the equivalent of \$1.00 USD per hour.

The Shan migrant workers are often undocumented, marginalized, and without access to health care, making them a vulnerable population to HIV.<sup>34</sup>

Organizational management of outreaches into the Shan neighborhoods included coordinating and collaborating between NGOs, missionaries, and local church leaders to effectively design an approach that enhanced the promotion of peace within camps and communities. Advanced planning promoted respect for cultural considerations and emphasized a multi-ethnic approach, resembling a snap-shot of heaven as described in Revelations 7:9. Once established, these weekly outreach meetings were sometimes transitioned to the leadership of local

Thai churches, with the goal that they would eventually be led by emerging leadership among the Shan people themselves in communities where no Shan Church had previously existed. This approach is biblical and it is culturally sensitive because it acknowledges that all people are created in God's image and that each people group is respectable; it submits to the supremacy of the Bible concerning this, respects the authority of the local church, and honors the people and cultures involved.

When initially approaching specific neighborhoods together with a local church leader, the neighborhood chief was respectfully asked permission to conduct weekly meetings. Our weekly meetings were conducted in Thai since many could not read Shan but had learned to read Thai. Meetings typically lasted two hours and included time for the following things:

- developing relationships and sharing stories and experiences together
- practicing Thai and learning English
- playing guitar and singing songs in Thai together
- biblical messages and sharing Christ
- playing games together
- eating a meal together which we bring
- meeting tangible needs such as providing shoes, medical care, chickens for breeding, etc.

These activities develop into relationships that go far beyond just the weekly meetings. We visit each other's homes, watch movies in Thai together, eat together, attend weddings and funerals, attend church services together, and develop genuine friendships.

This surrogate family approach develops relationships within the context of genuine caring and accountability.

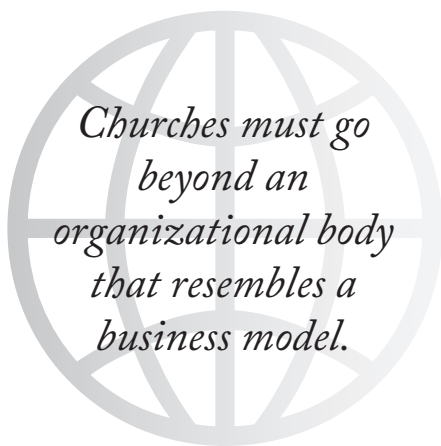
For example, one day we noticed that a young 8-year-old boy named Sengun had a deep cut on his foot and it appeared to be infected. His parents had a newborn girl, born ten days previous in their one room home. Upon questioning, his parents said the boy's injury occurred the previous week but they declined medical attention because of the financial cost. After assuring the parents that we would pay the expense, the boy and his father were taken to the hospital where the wound was treated and a 14-day regimen of antibiotics was provided.

### *The Role of the Local Church: When the Solution is the Problem*

The inability or unwillingness of the local churches to engage non-Christian locals much less migrants is a real problem. Shan migrants have learned to speak and often even write Thai, reducing the linguistic but not the social barriers to evangelism. Some local churches explained that they attempted to evangelize, but had no success. Others admitted they had not engaged their own community but were focused instead internally on their own churches. This honest self-admission of inertia by some local church leaders may explain one contributing factor to why after over 100 years, the percentage of Thai Christians still remains about 1% of the population. The assault today on a Christian worldview is all pervasive, distorting how a person sees the reality of the world. "A Christian worldview can be taught, but it is far more than just providing or passing out information."<sup>35</sup> We have seen that when we together step out of our collective comfort zones and call on God to empower us in obedience to the Great Commission, the barriers to evangelism from language, understanding the Buddhist worldview, or trauma can all be overcome by the local Thai church. The local Thai church has proven itself capable of communicating effectively in Thai, the preferred

(written) language among the Shan in Chiang Mai—preferred because the Shan are educated in Thai. The local Thai church is also intimately familiar with the Buddhist worldview and has become sensitive to the trauma experienced by the Shan people.

Complacency and inward focus is not only the case in Thailand, but the trend is evident also in the United States. American Conservative Protestant churches are often seen as more inwardly focused than outwardly focused, and are sometimes perceived as uncaring because they failed to see the value in others.<sup>36</sup> Just as many church members want to isolate themselves or mitigate risks, so likewise many missionaries and aid workers have limited



or marginalized relationships with migrants. Yet when implemented, the mentoring effort provided hope and is therefore worth the intense relationship necessary to cultivate it.

Discussions with local church leaders in Thailand revealed that when they were hesitant to visit migrants, it was often because of cultural tendencies that made it socially awkward to directly approach people they did not know, and especially those of different people groups. Yet when shown the biblical mandate, most church leaders immediately conceded the necessity to follow Scripture rather than culture. Many leaders have actually been quick to admit that they don't know how to evangelize and disciple,

and have asked for assistance in learning and applying biblical principles of evangelism into daily life.

The lack of significant evangelism has revealed the need for missionaries and indigenous Christian leaders to help local pastors to equip and prepare the church members for ministry.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Eph. 4:11-12, New International Version).

Churches must go beyond an organizational body that resembles a secular or business model, and instead embrace the biblical example of individual members engaged in outreach and discipleship, "so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Those who engaged migrants were able to share their personal stories, which helped migrants relate and feel a sense of hope. Missionaries were only able to make a connection with migrants when they lived a common life and experienced some of the same challenges within the migrant camp. When working with any hurting community, care givers needed to meet individuals "where they were at, meaning they interacted with them on a personal level. This led to building authentic relationships" where individuals "realized genuine hope because they felt the power of God's love and acceptance from people who actually cared."<sup>37</sup> Individuals acquired new behaviors through the vicarious reinforcement mentors provided.<sup>38</sup>

Jesus said,

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (Luke 10:2, New International Version)

Currently, regardless of how many people may be physically present, the number of actual workers is few. Many Christians in Thailand admitted to never sharing their faith or Scripture with

anyone, in any language, over a period of five or ten years. As with ministry to inmates in America, the strengths and weakness of the church “are interrelated and represent the presence and the absence of the same characteristics.”<sup>39</sup>

Failure is often because of the lack of spiritual maturity on the part of many church members, exemplified by indifference to or fear of [people].<sup>40</sup>

Often the church needs the same solutions as the unsaved—genuine faith that transforms individuals and compels people to new life. Until then, too many Christians remain inert and complacent.

Complacency within the local church in Thailand is not the only concern, according to Pastor Chumsaeng Reong from Chiang Mai, who was the founder and first director of Wycliffe Thailand. At the age of 67, Pastor Chumsaeng reports he has met few missionaries who were willing to engage him in deep and meaningful conversations, and few who encouraged him or his church to reach out in cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship as we are now doing together in the migrant neighborhoods.

It is true that we should reach out to our own people, but we shouldn't ignore mission to the rest of the world, especially since they come into our country as migrants now at our door step.

Pastor Chumsaeng goes on to explain,

Though our Lord gives all of us the Great Commission to disciple all nations, some of the foreign missionaries that come to Thailand seem to think it is exclusive for missionaries! This kind of attitude has possibly passed down to the majority of Thai Christians. Yet we too should participate in fulfilling our part in the Great Commission. And mission opportunities are at our door step.<sup>41</sup>

Pastor Chumsaeng is a leader now committed to equipping and preparing local churches to do ministry, thus fulfilling the scriptural reference from Ephesians 4:11–12, and realizing the potential for exponential impact in society. He

## *Few missionaries encourage the Thai church to reach out in cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship in migrant neighborhoods. —Chumsaeng*

recognizes what Joseph Allotta understood: “Discipleship must be the core and central purpose, not a secondary focus.”<sup>42</sup> This discipleship training is now foundational to this outreach.

The Apostle Paul stated in Ephesians 4:11–12 that God has called pastors and leaders to equip all church members for ministry. Clearly, there is a failure in equipped church members engaging a lost world. Until the church members are taught the foundation of salvation, know and embrace the biblical passages this is based upon, and see others as equally valuable, it will be difficult for them to effectively and confidently share the gospel with others. A recent study recognized the problem and specifically recommended that American churches emphasize teaching to equip their members to engage the lost, focusing on the biblical mandate to engage those outside the church.<sup>43</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Real challenges exist. Migrants struggle to heal from trauma, to meet the basic needs for daily life, and to integrate into new communities as they await solutions in Myanmar that could eventually allow their return. NGOs, missionaries, and local churches try to meet the need, but many migrant communities remain unvisited. Much more can be done.

By meeting weekly, addressing basic needs, and sharing in the challenges of life, meaningful relationships were developed that transcended cultural barriers. Few would argue that a marginalized and ignored population is preferable to one that is lovingly engaged, despite the challenges and limitations of cross-cultural missions. Likewise, biblically immature people (or even unbelievers) who are nonetheless culturally connected to the Karen and Shan people could only provide a false

sense of security and empty spiritual hopes. Often those who engaged the migrants cannot speak either the Karen or Shan language, yet breached the linguistic challenges by speaking in the common second language of Thai. Bibles and New Testaments were offered in various languages, but were predominantly preferred in Thai by a young migrant population which often could not read the language of their homeland but were integrating to their new environment and the Thai language.

The proof was established by the outcomes. Friendships were developed and sustained which transformed lives as migrants were welcomed into homes and churches. The goal was to empower new believers among the migrants and to share life together with them as valued members of a surrogate family. The migrants were included into a broader sense of community, to ultimately enable them to lead the weekly meetings where none had previously existed. Tangible needs were met, relationships established, and a sense of acceptance and compassion conveyed while introducing the love and healing found in Christ. In the process God was glorified, people encouraged, and the family of God which consisted of many specific cultural and ethnic people groups was honored. Furthermore, the churches within Southeast Asia could be empowered through increased participation of individuals, and consequently result in the growth of the church in a country where only about 1% are Christian. Today many Karen people now attend university in Chiang Mai as they are welcomed into community. Dozens of Shan people attend local Thai churches, and as they mature in their new faith there is anticipation of them becoming change-agents themselves and establishing their own Shan churches in communities where none have existed before. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Personal conversation with author James Langteau in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 325.

<sup>3</sup> Jerrold W. Huguet and Aphichat Chamratrithrong, eds., *Thailand Migration Report 2011* (Bangkok, Thailand: International Organization for Migration, Thailand Office, 2011), 126.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *International Migration Report 2017* (New York, NY: UN, 2017), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Huguet and Chamratrithrong, *Thailand Migration Report 2011*, 126.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Analysis of Gaps in Refugee Protection Capacity Thailand* (2006): 4, <https://www.unhcr.org/457ed0412.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Chan Thar, "Shan Refugees on Thailand Border Urged to Request Aid," *Myanmar Times* (October 26, 2017): 1, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/shan-refugees-thailand-border-urged-request-aid.html>.

<sup>8</sup> World Education Inc., *Refugee and Migrant Education on the Thailand-Burma Border* (Boston, MA: World Education Inc. & USAID, 2010), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Shelby C. Pohndorff, *English Language Education as Tool for Empowerment Among Ethnic Burmese Migrants in Chiang Mai, Thailand* (Portland, OR: Concordia University, 2015), 1.

<sup>10</sup> James Greenstone, *Elements of Crisis Intervention* (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 2002), 3.

<sup>11</sup> The trilogy definition in the field of crisis intervention commonly refers to three distinct parts of a crisis: a precipitating event; the perception of the event; the failure of the usual coping mechanism, and resulting overload.

<sup>12</sup> Kristi Kanel, *A Guide to Crisis Intervention* (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 2007), 1, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Kanel, *A Guide to Crisis Intervention*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Kanel, *A Guide to Crisis Intervention*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Allan Barsky, *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 2007), 70.

<sup>16</sup> Kanel, *A Guide to Crisis Intervention*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> James D. Langteau, *Former Mentors' Perceptions of the Faith-based Approach to Reducing Recidivism Implemented by the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach, Inc.* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2014), 65–66.

<sup>18</sup> Langteau, *Former Mentors' Perceptions*, 119.

<sup>19</sup> W. Oscar Thompson, *Concentric Circles of Concern* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1999), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, *Concentric Circles*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Greenstone, *Elements of Crisis Intervention*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Edmund R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London, England: The London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 1964), 46.

<sup>23</sup> Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, 48–49.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Somboon Panyakom was sponsored as a Compassion International child who grew up to become the Thailand Country Director for Compassion International. He has been known to switch from speaking Karen, Kam Mueang (Lanna Northern Thai), and Central Thai languages all within the same sentence. He acknowledged that while he is from the Karen people group and speaks Karen as his first language, when discussing complex issues he inevitably resorts to speaking Thai (Dr. Somboon Panyakom in a personal conversation with author James Langteau, 2019). I have watched him alternately speak in four languages (including English) on the telephone.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Tony Waters, personal conversation with author James Langteau, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. Chris Wilde, who for two years served as department head of the Linguistics Department at Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand, reviewed these inherent linguistic challenges and solutions during a meeting in December, 2018, and endorsed this outreach approach to the Shan people (Henry Yeo, personal conversation with author James Langteau, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Burma Link, *Lives on the Line: Voices for Change from the Thailand-Burma Border* (Mae Sot, Thailand: Burma Links, 2016), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Burma Link, *Lives on the Line*, 17–18.

<sup>30</sup> Personal conversations with author James Langteau, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Burma Link, *Lives on the Line*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 411–412.

<sup>33</sup> Huguet and Chamratrithrong, *Thailand Migration Report 2011*, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Megan McCay, *HIV Knowledge and Prevention Education Initiatives for Shan Migrants in Chiang Mai, Thailand* (Portland, OR: Concordia University, 2015), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Allotta, *Discipleship in Education: A Plan for Creating True Followers of Christ in Christian Schools* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2013), 115–116.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Wuthnow, "Mobilizing Civic Engagement: The Changing Impact of Religious Involvement," in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina (Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 346.

<sup>37</sup> Langteau, *Former Mentors' Perceptions*, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Patricia Miller, *Theories of Developmental Psychology* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2011), 87.

<sup>39</sup> Langteau, *Former Mentors' Perceptions*, 91.

<sup>40</sup> Langteau, *Former Mentors' Perceptions*, 131.

<sup>41</sup> Chumsaeng Reong, personal conversation with the author, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Allotta, *Discipleship in Education*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> Langteau, *Former Mentors' Perceptions*, 132.

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# Article Responses

## A Response to Langteau, Jun, Gossett, and Samora

by Marie Bauer

In my years working with the Shan people, I would often hear them say, “When I’m in Thailand I can be a Christian, but when I go back to Shan State (Myanmar) I have to be a Buddhist.” It would break my heart, for it shouldn’t be that way. Over the years I had to wonder whether we had taken the time to examine and understand the reasons Shan say this. If we knew, would be willing to adjust our strategy accordingly?

The distinguished authors of this article have done a good job of describing a very commendable model for ministry among the Shan. But I believe their approach displays some assumptions that may hide critical factors in dealing with the plight of displaced peoples. These are common assumptions, but I believe they can impair vital aspects of reaching out to the Shan effectively. It’s an approach that fails to consider the broader context of the Shan situation.

Essentially, I believe the linguistics of this therapeutic situation are crucial. In their approach it appears unnecessary to use the heart language of those you are ministering to. For instance, while the motivation to assist in the healing of trauma is compassionate, the authors seem to believe that it can take place without the facilitating therapists or the Shan believers themselves being able to communicate spiritually and effectively in the Shan language. The situation forces them to use a second language, which in this case is the culturally dominant language of Thai. It reinforces that the Shan people are the underdogs.

The authors explore how bilingualism is the mother tongue of many of the Shan they have encountered. I understand that many Shan speak both Thai and Shan, and will often-times mix Northern Thai and Shan together, since they are linguistically similar. But instead of saying that bilingualism is their mother tongue, maybe we should try to understand why they speak this mixture, and what they speak to each other when no outsiders are around. Shan people expect to speak Thai to Westerners and Thai people. They have probably never even considered that a Westerner or a Thai person could speak Shan, so out of respect, they speak Thai. Speaking Thai also elevates one’s status, which they would

be eager to do in the presence of those who are not Shan. They also want to fit into their new environment, not to draw attention to themselves, since it may invite questions about their identity or their legal right to be in the country for work.

The real issue, however, is what language they speak at home. What language do they speak when they call their family back in Shan State? Most of the time, that language will be one of the dialects of Shan. This is the heart language of the people. The grandparents and children left in Shan State do not speak Thai. If a healing relationship with Jesus is to truly be experienced, Shan people need to know that Jesus speaks their language and knows their culture, too. The use of Thai language in outreach will seclude the more recent Shan newcomers to Thailand, separating them from the Shan who’ve resided in Thailand long enough to learn Thai.

To answer my original question above, using the Thai language gives the impression that Christianity is essentially Thai and the religion of a dominant majority people. It communicates that God is Thai and in order to be Christian you have to be Thai. When you return to Shan State, one is essentially in a Buddhist world, and a change away from all that is Thai makes sense. The processing and healing of trauma, and the deep realities of faith, takes place at the heart level through the heart language.

I have witnessed great enthusiasm among Shan people when offered lessons in Shan literacy. When I learned the Shan language, many people said, “If the foreigner can learn to read and write Shan then I want to, too!” A Shan literacy class was created and now many can read the Shan Bible. As Christians, should we not be seen as those who strengthen the language and culture of those we seek to reach? Doors were opened to me that a missionary limited to the Thai language cannot really imagine.

The Shan culture and language are slowly being destroyed through migration and the systematic destruction by the Myanmar military and government. What is the role of Christians in this tragedy? A normative approach will accept that the Shan language is dying anyway, so we might as well ignore it. We need to be careful with taking the easier road. We cannot justify an approach that propagates the further irrelevance of Christianity to the Shan. We cannot neglect the importance of the Shan language, nor the study required in communicating effectively to Buddhists.

This approach also leads to questions of strategy. Throughout the article, it’s assumed that new Shan Christians will fit into the Thai church. They are introduced to Thai Christians, invited to services, and encouraged to become part of the Thai church. In my estimation, this assumption is the biggest factor keeping the majority of Shan from



*This sets up a pattern of cultural and spiritual dependency from the beginning instead of sowing seeds of indigenous gospel spreading. Let Shan people lead their own church groups from the beginning.*

Christ; and, again, a life of faith in Jesus is not easily “translated” back into Shan State. This is tragic, since there’s such an incredible opportunity to introduce Shan people to Jesus while living in Thailand, and for them to then take their faith back to their home villages and families. Instead of the Christian practitioner in Thailand reaching and discipling people in ways that are directly transferrable back into Shan State, the practitioner can easily place the burden of transferability on the new believer. That burden should not be there. This is a sure way to stop a potential movement in its tracks. In fact, it encourages persecution of Christians, because they are more likely seen as traitors, as those who’ve left their culture for another. Again, are we willing to adjust our strategy? Or do we simply tell them they have to be strong and remain a Christian wherever they are, without understanding how our approach contributes to this problem? How far are we willing to go to “become like” those we are trying to reach? How can we best equip and prepare Shan believers to share Jesus back home?

If the growth of the church among the Shan in Thailand is dependent upon Thai seminary trained pastors (or in Burma, upon Burmese seminary trained pastors), there will never be much of a Shan church. This sets up a pattern of cultural and spiritual dependency from the beginning instead of sowing seeds of organic indigenous gospel spreading. A much better approach would be to let Shan people lead their own church groups from the beginning, without a foreigner as a middle man and conduit to God.<sup>1</sup> We have to prevent any sense of hierarchy, where the Shan are at the bottom. Foreigners will be seen as patrons, no matter how you slice it.

We cannot be unaware of this social and cultural hierarchy. Thai people are the ones with power; Shan people are powerless and dependent on the mercy of Thai patrons and employers. Westerners are even higher on the hierarchy, and usually seen as patrons by both Thai and Shan people. If we ignore this, it will create an unhealthy environment where Shan people feel pushed to accept the religion of the patron, as a way of pleasing them or gaining some favor. I’m not indicating it always happens this way, but it often can create an unhealthy and superficial understanding of our situation in sharing the gospel.

We can’t think that “interveners” will be considered as equals. The Shan world is a web of intricate and complex hierarchical relationships, a dance of give and take. These relationships are most important, not absolute truths. Much of the approach in this article is based on the Western

assumption that there are absolute truths that need to be discovered and appropriated, and that this is the key to healing. This approach is not part of the Shan worldview. When the relational dynamics are understood and adjusted to, this can provide an amazing opportunity for the good news to spread.

Throughout the article, there is only one perspective shared, that of the “intervener.” I think a proper study of the situation and any strategic intervention must include the perspective of those being served. This will require a longer period of observation, one in which we can study the effects among those who have been served. From my experience, outsiders coming into a Shan camp are greeted with suspicion; but after trust is built, outsiders are a nice diversion from the difficulties the Shan face daily. The attraction factor is usually based on the hope that the visitors will help them in some way. I have no doubt that the Shan are actually helped in some way. But we need to ask self-reflective questions before we launch. What is the end result of the intervention? What do we want it to lead to ten years from now? Is it in any way building a non-reproductive model? How can we adjust the approach so that the context of the Shan is taken into account?

I believe we need to address deeper and more endemic causes to this crisis with the Shan. For instance, we need to explore why the Shan do not seek asylum when coming across the border. Some of the reasons include their reticence to enter into the Thai system, which is unjust and very complex. They have more control over their lives if they remain under the radar, and work on the black market. And once in a refugee camp, it’s hard to get out.<sup>2</sup>

We need to be alert that our understanding of causes can present contradictions. The authors indicate that “The barriers to evangelism from language, understanding the Buddhist worldview, or the ability to deal with trauma are all overcome by the local Thai Church.” This is paradoxical to a statement a few sentences earlier where they identify the barriers as the Thai church’s inertia and lack of success. I would say the cause is neither. I would say that missionaries have yet to model well and have instead passed down an inability to understand, engage, and communicate the good news in the mother tongue using Buddhist words and concepts. After saying that little evangelism happens—and that which does happen is not successful—the authors suggest that the local Thai church is effective in communicating in the Thai language and the Buddhist worldview. How is effectiveness judged here? If the little evangelism

**N**o doubt the Shan are actually helped in some way, but we need to ask self-reflective questions before we launch. What is the end result of the intervention? What do we want it to lead to ten years from now?

that happens is not successful, then how is it an example of effective communication?

I strongly disagree that weekly collaborative meetings, transferred to Thai leadership and hopefully eventually to Shan, as they describe, is biblical, culturally sensitive, and honors people. It is none of these things. In my mind, holding weekly outreach meetings is not equivalent to a surrogate family. The authors write that the visitors are seen as family, but at what level? They also suggest that Shan is spoken at home, which would indicate that Shan language is for family members and Thai language for non-family members. Don't families do daily life together, and speak their mother tongue together? Weekly planned church-style meetings in another language is not family. It's probably entertainment at best, and propagating dependency and inoculating the people against the good news at worst.

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*Marie Bauer spent a decade among the Shan people focused on church planting. She and her husband continue their research and coaching in reaching Buddhist peoples with the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more on this, please see my earlier article in *Mission Frontiers*: Marie Bauer, "New Wineskins? A Case Study on How Assumptions About the Way We Do Church Become Movement Blockers," November 1, 2014, *Mission Frontiers* Nov/Dec 2014, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/new-wineskins>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on this, see the work of Pim Koetsawang, *In Search of Sunlight: Burmese Migrant Workers in Thailand* (Orchid Press, 2001).

## A Response to Bauer

by James D. Langteau

**I**n response to Ms. Bauer's concerns, let me first address the use of language in the therapeutic process. I would simply say that the multi-lingual dynamic in this region of the world is quite unique. We try to address this complexity in our approach, and we do want to fully respect the value of indigenous language in the life of the Shan people as the article indicated.

My own Thai church is an example. We preach sermons in Central Thai and immediately afterward the congregation divides up into different small groups based on language preferences (Karen, Shan, Thai, English, etc.). This is done

for the purpose of discussing the sermon in small groups and applying it specifically to our lives. It's interesting that the groups are fluid: people move between the groups from week to week, demonstrating that they are not necessarily committed to one particular "native language" preference. In addition, we often hear code-switching during conversations within any given small group. After the small group experience at the end of the worship service, we all break for a communal lunch and fellowship together.

Oddly, this approach of incorporating small groups immediately after the worship service provides some extraordinary, diverse, and positive results.

1. It preserves and respects individual languages and promotes them.
2. It eliminates division and discriminatory barriers (and yes, discrimination is rampant though often subtle in this region) by respecting and embracing all people.
3. It celebrates ethnicities and languages, enhancing all of our lives by exposing us to differing perspectives.
4. It respects the choices of the individuals, since it allows each person to decide for themselves where and how they want to engage in the Body of Christ, rather than dictating to them or telling them what is best for them.
5. It provides a foundation for planting future churches, whether they will be modeled after this example or will choose to preach from a minority language.

Our approach to these displaced peoples is not primarily a choice between multi-lingual ministry or a more focused Shan language ministry, but between compassionate ministry in Thai or no ministry at all. We are serving in Shan neighborhoods where there is no ministry at all. Few would seriously hold back biblical ministry from desperate people until national and expatriate workers could learn the Shan language and share Christ in a carefully segregated linguistic manner—especially when the members of the people group themselves welcome a multi-lingual environment and are responding to it.

Our relationships with the Shan people should not be mischaracterized as superficial or ineffective. As the article indicated, we not only hold outreach meetings once a week, but we also meet often during the week as friends. In fact, we spend more time with our Shan friends and are actually closer to them than with our Thai or Western friends from the Church. And where lives were previously unengaged and unchanged, now we are seeing fruit.

*In our church-style meetings the language groups are fluid: people move between the groups from week to week, demonstrating that they are not necessarily committed to one particular “native language” preference.*

We are sympathetic to the cross-cultural concerns raised by Bauer, but we are more concerned about the differences *within* cultures than those *between* cultures. Surprisingly, I see far more grace and mercy shown between cultures than within cultures. The truth is that all of us are far more likely to be offended by or have conflicts with people from our own culture than with people from a different culture than ours.<sup>1</sup> The cross-cultural paradigm advocates that we avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings, but it often can be promoted to the point of not engaging others at all. We can't hold a model like the Pharisees who were more concerned with procedure and religious boundaries than they were to engage in actual ministry to others. It was a Samaritan who showed them how to express mercy in that segregated world.

The New Testament narrative describes ministry in multi-lingual environments, as in Acts 2 when Peter preached simultaneously to people from over ten linguistic backgrounds. The early church bridged ethnic groups, color, and nationality, for the Body of Christ transcends barriers. “There is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave nor free, male

nor female, for you are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28). Jesus Christ destroyed the barriers, the dividing wall of hostility, and made us one people (Eph. 2:14–15). Therefore, we do not see these people as a culturally segregated project, but as family. Our hope is, after over one hundred years of missions in this region, that this witness would finally see an increase of Christians above 1% of the population. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bradley Kirkman, Vas Taras, and Piers Steel, “Research: The Biggest Culture Gaps Are Within Countries, Not Between Them,” Harvard Business Review, May 18, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/05/research-the-biggest-culture-gaps-are-within-countries-not-between-them>.



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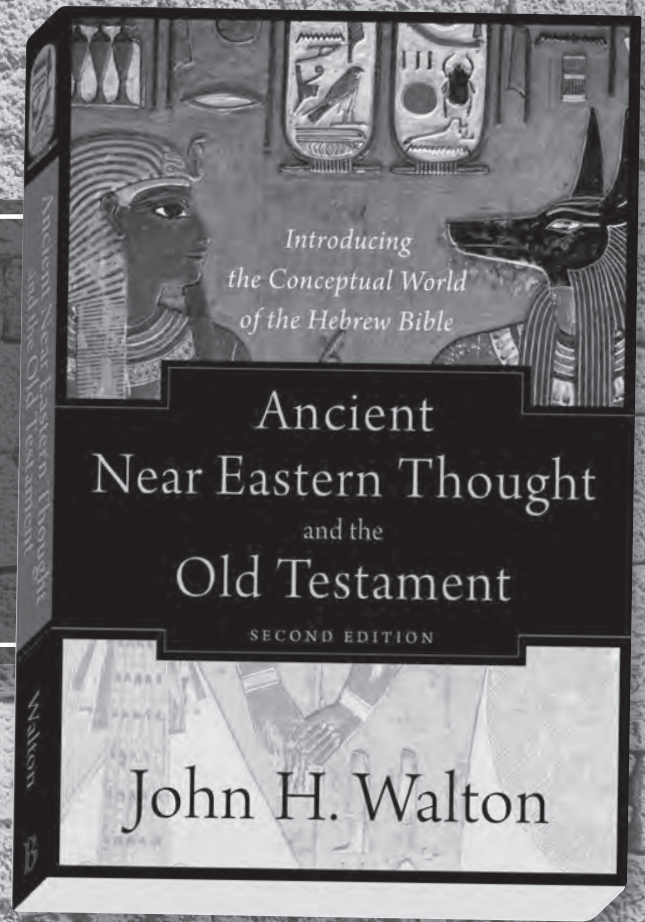
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# Jesus, the Seeker of the Out-Groups

by Sunny Hong

Nicknames can say a lot about a person. They can reflect how a person is perceived by his family or friends, but they may also identify a person's motivation and purpose. Among the many labels applied to Jesus, one was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Matt. 11:19) Not only did this appellation convey Jesus' purpose in coming to the earth—to save people from their sins (Matt. 1:21–23)—it also characterized him as one who searched for those his society considered sinners. He spent time with them in order to bless them.

In this article, I examine the vital concept of in-group and out-group in the Jewish worldview of the first century and draw implications for mission today. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus intentionally sought out people who were in an out-group to God's kingdom and invited them to become members of his in-group. Through that process, Jesus dealt with the issue of sin. God's grace in the Jewish worldview of the first century is demonstrated in the process of Jesus' making out-group members into in-group members. At the same time, Jesus challenged Jewish culture to be more biblical in demonstrating God's grace across group divisions.

## *In-Group/Out-Group in First-Century Jewish Culture*

Biblical scholarship has identified the *dyadic personality* as one of the core elements of first-century Jewish culture. Members of that society always identified themselves with a group and did not think of themselves as individuals.

Because dyadic persons perceive themselves in terms of qualities specific to their ascribed status, they tend to presume that human character is fixed and unchanging. Every family, village or city would be quite predictable, and so would the individuals who are embedded and share the qualities of a family, village, or nation. (Malina and Neyrey 1991, 75)

From the moment of birth, one is already provided with identity, status, and a job based on family background. Their family was the first in-group to which every Jew belonged. And from that family connection, first-century

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Jews proceeded to join other in-groups as they reached a certain age or encountered new circumstances. The in-group's positive interdependence and care for its members provided an identity, a sense of belonging, pride and even a sense of superiority. Therefore, members did not consider themselves as individuals apart from the in-group, but their whole being was defined by the group. Individual desires were not important, but rather the interests, needs, views, goals, and well-being of the group.

Individualism as we know it is also unusual. Persons are not oriented towards themselves as individuals, but towards the groups to which they belong. Everyone finds a place in society by being embedded in one or more groups, such as the family, which is by far the most important, and in craft association, religious cults or even military units. (Esler 1994, 29)

The individual's fate was tied to the fate of the group. His or her interpersonal relationships were defined by whether or not the other person was an in-group member. This concept of in-group made people anxious about what other people thought about them. How the individual behaved reflected on the group's reputation. If an individual achieved something great, the achievement enhanced the reputation of the group, and not necessarily that of the individual. Honor and prestige were all connected with the concept of the in-group. Therefore, it was very important to live up to the expectations of others.

The narratives of the Bible contain many examples of in-groups. When people were introduced, they were usually introduced by stating who their father and family were. Jesus was recognized as the son of Joseph (Matt. 13:55) and Matthew was recognized as the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). Indeed, the book of Matthew, which was written to a Jewish audience, starts with the genealogy of Jesus. Not only did paternity define group, but the locality was also an important factor in

identifying in-group members. Jesus was called "Jesus of Nazareth" and many of his disciples came from Nazareth. Occupation was another category denoting an in-group. Jesus was known as a carpenter, which was the occupation of Joseph, his earthly father (Mark 6:3). Paul was a tent maker and he associated with other tent makers like Priscilla and Aquila. Political or religious affiliation was another category denoting an in-group. The Pharisees drew their identity from the party to which they belonged (Matt. 13:55). Also, race or nationality was another important category for marking an in-group. People in the gospels are usually referred to as Samaritans, Gentiles, Jews, Romans, and so on,



according to the in-group/out-group distinctions at that time.

While an in-group provided for the needs of its members, it could breed an in-group favoritism that would result in out-group hatred and rejection.

In-group bias and out-group prejudice are studied interchangeably as if discrimination for in-groups and discrimination against out-groups were two sides of the same coin. (Brewer 1999, 430)

It is in the nature of in-group/out-group dynamics to seek out differences. Once members form an in-group's unique identity, then any small difference with an out-group could be the basis for misunderstanding, hatred,

and rejection. "In-group bias is still often assumed to be synonymous with in-group antipathy or rejection of the out-group" (Turner, Brown, and Tajfel 1979, 188). It was natural to be hostile toward an out-group, and people did not treat out-group members as their equals. The Jews had a different standard for the members of an out-group.

"Thou shalt not kill or steal from in-group members" is balanced by "Thou shalt kill and steal from out-group members." (Hartung 1995, 94)

They were expected to treat out-group members with either disrespect or indifference, to deceive and to take advantage of out-group members.

The distinction between in-group and out-group also provided a basis for stereotypes and ethnocentrism. Nathanael's comment about Jesus, "Can anything good come from there (i.e., Nazareth)?" (John 1:46), reveals a stereotype based on locality. Nathanael's in-group had certain notions about Nazareth, and he was reflecting this attitude in his treatment of Jesus the Nazarene. Another example of a stereotype can be found in Jesus' meeting with a Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28). The Jews had negative attitudes toward the Canaanites, treating them as an out-group. Jesus uttered what was the common Jewish sentiment toward Canaanite women: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs" (Matt. 15:26). The Jews distinguished clearly between their race, which they believed was chosen by God, and that of the Gentiles, which they believed to be inferior.

### *The Out-Groups that Jesus Sought Out*

The biblical narratives make it clear that Jesus was always looking for the out-groups in order to draw them into the in-group. His conception and identification of an out-group was very different from that of the religious leaders of his time. This section examines the different out-groups Jesus sought out, in the Gospel narratives.

## The Sick

Matthew's invitation to Jesus is recorded in three places in the Bible (Matt. 9:9–13; Mark 2:14–17; Luke 5:27–32). This invitation came after Jesus called Matthew to be his disciple. Matthew invited Jesus, as well as his fellow tax collectors and many other “sinners.” The Jews only associated with people who had a similar background, social status, or who were members of their in-group. It was natural for Matthew to be with other fellow tax collectors and sinners because they made up the group with whom he normally associated (Malina 2001, 95).

During the party, the Pharisees reproached Jesus for eating with sinners. Then Jesus replied, “It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick” (Matt. 9:12). Jesus explained the meaning of his response by quoting Hosea 6:6, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:13). Here Jesus implied that the sick were the ones who recognized the need for a doctor and admitted that they were not adequate. In reality, those who were in Jesus’ out-group, and could not be included in the in-group, were “the ones who thought they were already good enough or qualified” and did not need Jesus. For the Pharisees, their concept of the out-group consisted of sinners with whom they avoided association. And their concept of the in-group consisted of those who gave sacrifices, implying ritual observance without really understanding the meaning. Jesus used the concept of a doctor and patient to indicate that he came for the sick to be cured, the sinner to be made righteous, and marginalized and excluded people (the out-group) to be drawn into his in-group (Green 1997, 247).

The pronouncements Jesus made about the sick appeared to be contradictory to the concept of holiness. The Jewish concept of holiness is outlined in detail in Leviticus 12–15 and explains

*To be accepted into the in-group of the kingdom of God required a paradigm shift from first-century Jewish culture.*

not only dietary laws but instructions about many other areas, including uncleanness or defilement resulting from childbirth, skin diseases, and bodily discharges (Sanders 1983, 12). The whole purpose of the concept of cleanness or purity was to reflect God's holiness (Lev. 11:45). Therefore, keeping oneself clean was very important to the Jews. Once a clean person had contact with an unclean person, the clean person became defiled (Pilch 1991, 207–209). This might be one of the reasons why the religious leaders in the first century did not associate with the sick, who were clearly an out-group. The religious leaders considered the sinners to be unclean, and they could potentially become defiled from having contact with them. However, the religious leaders only kept the outward appearance of cleanness and did not understand the core concept of inward cleanness or holiness. Jesus challenged their notions by associating with the out-groups.

Jesus and his followers regularly associate with and frequently “cleanse”/“sanctify” unholiness. . . . They also disregard the purity lines drawn around holy behavior. . . . Holy times are also violated. . . . Finally, holy places and personnel are criticized and disrespected. (Elliott 1991, 222–223)

Jesus' association with the sick, the unclean, and the out-group, and his care and affirmation of them provoked the wrath of the Pharisees and the scribes. They could not comprehend the cleansing and healing power that Jesus had but only reacted according to their understanding of cleanness. If Jesus wanted to be a member of their in-group, or at least not to be in their out-group, he should not associate with the sinners, but rather with them, and he should affirm their beliefs and practices. It is obvious that the

religious leaders did not understand the main purpose of Jesus coming to the earth and were furious about the way Jesus related with the “sinners” (Walker 1978, 234).

Jesus' reputation was probably damaged by his association with Matthew and his friends. But he was not afraid of losing his reputation so that the sinners and the sick could be healed and included in God's in-group. To Jesus, every person was a sinner who needed a Savior.

[There are] two types of sinners: law-keepers and lawbreakers. . . . Law-keepers often condemn lawbreakers as “sinners.” Lawbreakers generally look at law-keepers and shout “hypocrites.” (Bailey 2008, 247)

No matter whether they were law-keepers or lawbreakers, whoever recognized their need for a Savior was included in God's in-group.

Clearly, Jesus had been proclaiming his message that God loves sinners. The Pharisees did not agree, because in their view God cared for the righteous who kept the law. (Bailey 2008, 242).

This same principle is also found in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. . . . (Luke 18:13–14)

Jesus clearly showed who the real sinner was, and what the real sin issue was that needed to be dealt with for people to be accepted into the in-group of the kingdom of God. This is a paradigm shift from the concept of the in-group/out-group in first-century Jewish culture.

### The Samaritans

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37) starts with an expert of the law asking Jesus about the definition of a neighbor, intending to justify himself. This legal expert's concept of "neighbor" must have been the in-group people of his own culture.

In-group members are shown the greatest courtesies, but those courtesies are rarely if ever, extended to nonmembers. Strangers cannot be regarded as members of the in-group. (Malina 1993, 92)

Therefore, he probably expected the answer to be "do good to in-group members, who are your neighbors, and do not care about the out-group members."

However, the answer Jesus gave was totally unexpected. In this parable, there is no mention of the race of the person who was attacked by the bandits. For ordinary Jews, it would be very important to find out if the injured person was Jewish or not, before making the decision to help him. This was due to the strong, favorable, in-group bias they had toward other Jews. The ethnicity of the injured person is not identified in this parable. A priest and a Levite passed by "on the other side of the road" from the injured man. They kept their distance from the injured man to avoid contaminating themselves, since keeping clean was very important to them. It might have been a relief for them to not know the ethnicity of the injured man, since then they could have an excuse (Baily 2008, 290–293; Esler 2000, 337–341). But a Samaritan went out of his way to help the injured man, without knowing the man's race. The Samaritan acted as an in-group member to the injured man, regardless of his race. Perhaps Jesus purposely chose a Samaritan to be the friend of the injured man, in order to challenge the attitude of the Jews toward the Samaritans, whom they treated as an out-group and second-class. For the proud Jew, if he was going to help

someone in need, that person must be a Jew, and not a Samaritan—and yet the person actually doing the helping was a despised Samaritan.

Many foreigners were brought in to settle Samaria after the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The Samaritans were descendants of intermarriage between those foreigners and the remaining Jews. The mixed-race people of Samaria were considered unclean according to Jewish standards.

Holiness is related to wholeness... hybrids and imperfect things are an abomination because they do not conform to the class to which they presumably belong. (Neyrey 1998, 166)



Therefore, the Jews had a good reason to treat the Samaritans as the out-group.

For centuries Judeans had treated the Samaritans as a despised out-group and subjected them to the processes of negative stereotyping discussed above. (Esler 2000, 329).

After Jesus finished telling the parable, he asked the expert of the law which person had been a neighbor to the injured man. The expert of the law did not say the Samaritan, but merely "the one who had mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). His answer suggested that either he did not agree with Jesus, or he was not able to change his worldview to accept a Samaritan as the hero. Then Jesus said to the expert of the law,

"Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

The expert of the law was not able to justify himself, as had been his initial intention, but was instead challenged to revise his in-group/out-group paradigm regarding the Samaritans. Jesus made the despised Samaritan a hero for treating a person of unknown race as an in-group member. This demonstrated that his in-group concept went beyond the Jewish-Samaritan ethnic issue.

The willingness of Jesus to make Samaritans members of the in-group can also be seen when he journeyed through Samaria and met a Samaritan woman at a well (John 4). In this encounter, Jesus treated not only a Samaritan as an in-group member but also a woman engaged in a sinful lifestyle. As a result of Jesus seeking her out, many from Samaria became believers (John 4:39). This was another big paradigm shift for the Jews.

### The Gentiles

The Jews were very proud of being the chosen people of God and the descendants of Abraham (Luke 3:8). They looked down on the Gentiles, considered them as an out-group and avoided contact with them. Jesus directed his attention to the Gentiles in his encounter with a Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10). The Roman centurion probably had many obstacles to his coming to Jesus: race, pride, doubt, language, and culture (Green 1997, 286–287). Nevertheless, he came to Jesus, not for his own needs, but for the needs of his servant. When the centurion demonstrated his faith in Jesus, Jesus praised him. "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (Luke 8:10). This statement was very shocking because Jesus seldom praised the faith of people. He often lamented and rebuked the lack of faith of his disciples, the people of Nazareth, and the Jews (Matt. 8:26, 16:8, 23:23; Luke 12:28). On the contrary, the faith of the Roman centurion was praised, and it stood as a big contrast to the faith of the Jews.



Jesus said that many Jews would be excluded from the kingdom of God because of their lack of faith, while the Gentiles would be included because of their faith. The inclusion of the Gentiles in God's Kingdom was prophesied in the Old Testament (Isa. 56:3, 6–8; Isa. 66:12, 19; Mal. 1:11). However, in-group pride was too strong to recognize what had been written in Scripture, and the Jews chose to hold on to their religious and cultural traditions rather than the truth of Scripture. When Jesus announced that some Gentiles would be in-group members of the Kingdom, he used the very phrase that proud Jews ascribed to themselves (Isa. 43:5):

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 8:11–12)

In the minds of the religious leaders, mixing the notions of in-group and out-group was not possible.

...“those born to the kingdom” will be replaced by Gentiles—including the Roman centurion whose faith is commended—who will sit with faithful Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven. (Stanton 1992, 384)

The Jews, blinded by their religious and cultural traditions, were furious over Jesus' claim that the Gentiles could be in the same in-group as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To them, the Gentiles would always be the out-group, and would never be part of the in-group.

In another incident, Jesus again recognized the great faith of a Gentile. A Canaanite woman came to Jesus because her daughter was suffering from demon possession (Matt. 15: 22–28). Jesus praised her because of her great faith. There are no incidents in the Gospels where Jesus praised the

*Jesus used the very phrase that proud Jews ascribed to themselves when he announced that some Gentiles would be in-group members of the Kingdom.*

faith of the Jews as he did the faith of the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman. This was another paradigm shift for those with a Jewish worldview.

### People Who Were Unable to Reciprocate

Reciprocation is another important element in Jewish culture. Jewish interpersonal relationships are based upon the ability to reciprocate. When you receive something, you pay back with other things which are equivalent to what you first received. People who could not reciprocate felt great shame. If you failed to reciprocate a multiple of times, you would lose face and honor in Jewish culture (Neyrey 1991, 372).

However, Jesus sought out people who could not reciprocate and instructed others to do so as well.

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:12–14).

Jesus taught that the purpose of giving was not to receive back but to simply give and not expect anything in return. But according to Jewish culture, if you are not able to repay, you are not considered an honorable man. In the Jewish worldview, Jesus' teaching about giving with abandon might have two results: the giver's motives (of wanting to receive back something of equal value) are exposed and laid bare; and the receiver's inability to pay back is exposed leading to compounding of shame. The Jews associated with people who had similar status and were in-group members, so that they could

reciprocate good deeds to their in-group members and everyone's honor was upheld. “Honorable persons in the world of limited good were those who knew how to preserve their inherited status” (Malina 2001, 106).

This concept of giving with abandon is demonstrated in Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–23). When the rich young ruler asked about eternal life, Jesus told him:

You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. (Luke 18:22)

What Jesus commanded the rich young ruler to do was to give away his possessions to people who could not pay him back.

A man might play the patron to clients who would then support him in return (Luke 16:1–8); or a man might distribute wealth to kin who would then be obligated in honor to respond with comparable gifts. (Moxnes 1988, 139–43)

But to give the family wealth to strangers who can extend no reciprocal gifts to the giver makes no sense in the honor culture of antiquity. (Neyrey 1998, 62)

In contrast to the notion of reciprocity, Jesus told the rich young ruler to give his possessions away to the poor who could not repay him even as clients. Jesus said this because the real target of the ruler's reciprocal generosity would not be the people he helped, but God. By so doing, he would recognize that all of his wealth came from God originally and that by giving back to the poor who are indeed God's children, the rich ruler was really giving reciprocally back to God and he would accumulate treasures in heaven (Green 1997, 656–657).

Jesus expressed the same concept in the Beatitudes.

And if you do good only to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:33–36)

This passage clearly talks about the concept of the in-group/out-group in relation to the concept of reciprocity. Jesus said that even the “sinners” know how to treat in-group members, to do good in never-ending reciprocity. Jesus commanded them to lend money to people who cannot repay so that their reward will come from heaven. He said this because God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. In this manner, Jesus was asking them to imitate God in giving things away to those who could not pay back.

Jesus himself demonstrated what he taught. He sought out human beings who could not reciprocate what he did. He gave his life for the sinners and out-groups who were not able to pay back what they had received. He wanted those in his in-group who had tasted his grace to do the same for the out-groups in their midst so that they too could become part of the in-group. This was another paradigm shift for the in-group/out-group concept.

### Enemies

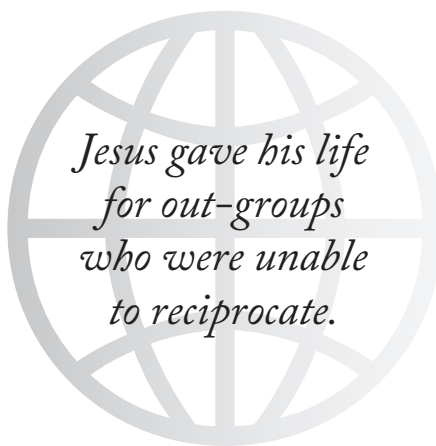
The climax of Jesus’ concept of in-group/out-group is found in his command to love one’s enemies. To the Jews, love meant treating people as in-group members. “To love means to remain practically attached to the group, to act like an in-group member” (Malina 1993, 55). To the Jews, hate

meant treating people as out-group members. The Jews had a clear understanding of enemies as those belonging to the out-group. There was no reason to accept enemies as in-group members.

Jesus asked people to love their enemies, which meant that the enemies should be considered as in-group members according to Jewish cultural understanding—most certainly a radical expectation.

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven... (Matt. 5:43–44)

This is an extraordinary command not only for people of the Jewish culture



but for any human being from any culture whatsoever. Loving one’s enemies is not a part of human nature.

In contrast to these conventions, Jesus proclaims that good deeds are to be done not for the sake of an anticipated reward, but solely on grounds of benevolence and compassion... the primary focus is on the injunction “love your enemies.” The implication of this teaching is that beneficence is to be shown *beyond* the bounds of families and friends, i.e., to “outsiders.” (Marshall 2005, 56)

This was a very foreign concept to the Jews who had a clear understanding of how to treat enemies—as out-group members.

Jesus sought out enemies to be members of his in-group. All sinners are enemies of God. Jesus gave these enemies, out-group members, the power to become in-group members through his death, and brought them redemption and forgiveness. Not only did he forgive his enemies, but he also asked his followers, people who had already become in-group members in his kingdom, to love their enemies, the out-group members. We are to love our enemies so we may be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 6:48). The imitation of God requires loving one’s enemies. Jesus said the reciprocity for your forgiveness comes not from the persons whom you forgive, but from God. “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matt. 6:14). Again, Jesus is telling us that the reciprocal response to our acts of forgiveness comes not from the people whom we forgive, but from God. This teaching of Jesus creates the biggest paradigm shift in the in-group/out-group concept.

### Conclusion

What Jesus did to save sinners in his Jewish society is illustrated well by applying the concept of in-group/out-group so prevalent in the Jewish worldview of the first century. With Jesus’ ministry, there was a paradigm shift in this concept of in-group/out-group, for he challenged the more natural in-group/natural divisions to become aligned with a more truly biblical perspective. He wanted to bring people who from a Jewish perspective belonged in their out-groups (the social outcasts and the Gentiles) into God’s in-group. These new in-group members were the ones who recognized their need for a Savior and who had turned and trusted Jesus. The definition of out-group members was radically altered by Jesus to be those who did not feel the need for a Savior. Jesus welcomed all believers as in-group members of God’s kingdom and invited them to the unlimited richness of God.

Jesus used in-group/out-group like a double-edged sword, both as a concept to explain salvation and as a challenge to social and cultural blind spots.

Missionaries in the 21st century may find themselves in cultures which have a very similar orientation towards in-groups and out-groups that Jesus faced in the first century. They are not as individualistic as those societies from which most Western missionaries are sent, but rather are very group oriented. Those contexts will require the missionary to learn about the culture in depth. He will then need to apply this in-group/out-group concept in the communication of the gospel so that the recipients will be able to understand the gospel more easily. At the same time, the missionary will need to challenge the people in that culture to change their understanding of in-group and out-group, much as Jesus did. In dealing with both the missiological issues of contextualization and any potential transformation of culture, our modern-day mission can learn from how Jesus dealt with the social barriers etched into his own world.

Finally, I like to suggest that there's another aspect to this story: joy. When one person from any number of out-groups becomes a member of the in-group of God's kingdom, God rejoices. The greatness of his joy is described in the three parables of the lost in the gospel of Luke (15:7, 10, 32). This joy is also a final response for those who have experienced becoming in-group members of God's kingdom. As Jesus commanded, we who have tasted God's grace are obligated and honored to bring more out-group members into God's in-group, so that we also can enter more fully into God's great joy. **IJFM**

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# Book Excerpts

## Abraham's Religion: A Comparative Exploration

by John H. Walton

*Editor's Note: John H. Walton (PhD, Hebrew Union College) is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. He writes and speaks extensively on reading the Old Testament in its ancient context, and he's become a go-to scholar for understanding the conceptual world of the Hebrew mind. This short excerpt is taken from the second edition of *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2018, pp. 112–114). Used by permission, [www.bakerpublishinggroup.com](http://www.bakerpublishinggroup.com). See the ad on p. 34). In his chapter on that ancient religious world, Walton distinguishes the national "cosmic" gods of the State religion from the "personal" ancestral gods of a family's religion. In this excursus, the family religion of the migrant Abraham resonates with the ancestral orientation of Africa and Asia. This new heuristic may be helpful for exploring inter-religious frontiers today.*

The information that has been presented here concerning family religion in the ancient Near East now offers us a new perspective for exploring the religious experience of Abraham.

T. Jacobsen has identified the primary development within Mesopotamian religion during the second millennium as the idea of a "personal god," which van der Toorn has shown is to be understood as the equivalent to the family god.<sup>1</sup> Typically the role of personal god was played by minor deities,<sup>2</sup> though it is not impossible that the great cosmic deities could so function. In return for obedience and worship, these deities provided for the well-being of their worshippers.

Close and personal relations—relations such as he had to the authorities in his family: father, mother, older brother and sister—the individual had only to one deity, to his personal god. The personal god was usually some minor deity in the pantheon who took a special interest in a man's family or had taken a fancy to the man himself. In a sense, and probably this is the original aspect, the personal god appears as the personification of a man's luck and success.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from the Mesopotamian texts that this deity was not worshiped exclusively, but he did dominate the personal aspect of the individual's religious practice. "To his personal god, then, before any other a man owed worship and obedience."<sup>4</sup>

While this bears little resemblance to philosophical monotheism, it may have often taken the appearance of a practical monotheism (whether monolatry or henotheism).<sup>5</sup> It is this trend more than any other that characterizes the period

during which the patriarchs emerged from Mesopotamia. The Hebrew Bible makes clear that monotheism was not part of Abraham's religious heritage. Abraham was of general Semitic stock, described in the Pentateuch as "Aramaean" (Gen. 25:20; 28:5; Deut. 26:5). Joshua 24:2 and 14 assert that the relatives of Abraham, including his father, served other gods, and the text of Genesis gives us no reason to question that assessment. Jacob has to urge his company to put away their other gods (Gen. 35:2–4), and *teraphim*, the images of the ancestral family gods,<sup>6</sup> are important in Laban's religious practices (Gen. 31). It is clear, then, that the biblical record does not attribute monotheism of any sort to the family of Abraham. In addition, we would search in vain for any passage in which Abraham or any of the patriarchs denies the existence of other gods. Nevertheless, the perspective of the biblical text is that all of the worship of Abraham that is recorded is focused on a single deity, though that deity is called by different names. The Bible, however, nowhere explicitly insists that this is the only God that Abraham ever worshiped. It can be safely inferred from the biblical data that Abraham showed a distinct preferential loyalty for a single god.

Is it possible that Abraham's perception of Yahweh/El Shaddai would have been similar to the typical Mesopotamian's perception of his personal deity? The way in which Abraham and his God interact would certainly suit the paradigm of relationship with a personal god in Mesopotamia. Yahweh provides for Abraham and protects him, while obedience and loyalty are given in return. One major difference, however, is that our clearest picture of the personal god in Mesopotamia comes from the many laments that are offered as individuals seek favors from deity or complain about his neglect of them. There is no hint of this in Abraham's approach to Yahweh. In the depiction in the text, Abraham maintains an elevated view of deity that is much more characteristic of the overall biblical view of deity than it is of the Mesopotamian perspective. On the whole, however, it is not impossible, and may even be likely, that Abraham's understanding of his relationship to Yahweh, in the beginning at least, was similar to the Mesopotamian idea of the personal god. In Mesopotamian language, Abraham would have been described as having "acquired a god."<sup>7</sup> That he was led to a new land and separated from his father's household would have effectively cut any ties with previous deities

Only in Israel did the idea of the personal god make the transition from the personal realm to the national realm. Van der Toorn adds, “Family religion was the ground from which national religion eventually sprang.”

(located in city and family) and opened the way for Yahweh to be understood as the only deity to which Abraham had any obligation. By making a break with his land, his family, and his inheritance, Abraham was also breaking all of his religious ties. In his new land Abraham would have no territorial gods; as a new people he would bring no family gods; having left his country he would have no national or city gods; and it was Yahweh who filled this void, becoming “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” “the God of the Fathers.”<sup>8</sup> But it is only in Israel, Jacobsen observes, that the idea of the personal god made the transition from the personal realm to the national realm.<sup>9</sup> Van der Toorn adds, “Family religion was the ground from which national religion eventually sprang.”<sup>10</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 78.

<sup>3</sup> T. Jacobsen, “Mesopotamia,” in H. Frankfort, H. A. Frankfort, J. A. Wilson, and T. Jacobsen, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 203; cf. T. Abusch,

“Ghost and God: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature,” in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. A. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, and G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 382.

<sup>4</sup> Jacobsen, “Mesopotamia,” 204.

<sup>5</sup> For summary discussion see N. Fox, “Concepts of God in Israel and the Question of Monotheism,” in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. G. Beckman and T. Lewis (Providence: Brown University Press, 2006), 326–45. More extensive discussion can be found in M. S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Smith, *God in Translation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Smith, *Where the Gods Are* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> T. Lewis, “Teraphim,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, 2nd Edition, edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 844–50; K. van der Toorn, “The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 203–22.

<sup>7</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 113; T. Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 155–56.

<sup>8</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 72–73.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 265.

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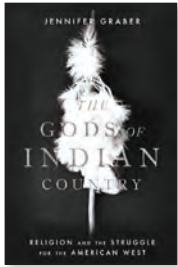
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# Book Reviews

*The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West*, by Jennifer Graber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), xxii, 288 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



Readers of Bill Svelmoe's and Boone Aldridge's recent studies of William Cameron Townsend and the rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and Summer Institute of Linguistics could be forgiven for imbibing the idea that with Townsend's appearance a new day had dawned, and a fresh wind was blowing.<sup>1</sup> Townsend came on deck, took the wheel, and all tides ran fair. With the advent of the Wycliffe Bible Translators' (WBT) and the Summer Institute of Linguistics' (SIL) dual or blended identity, Christian missions may seem to have assumed a new form. But secondary and tertiary orders actually have an extended history in Western Christianity as ways to accommodate both nonclerical and noncelibate devotees in monastic witness and service. More important, for the moment, is the way that Townsend intentionally shaped himself and led SIL members to become "missionaries of the state," making them unquestioningly subservient to and of service to the state in ways apparently not conceived of before.<sup>2</sup>

In Mexico in the 1930s, one can see Townsend doing everything in his power to ingratiate himself and SIL with the Mexican government and to make SIL of service to its program of *indigenismo*. What was true in Mexico became even more the case when SIL entered Peru in 1945. Townsend's avowed aim upon entering the latter country was to make SIL indispensable to the Peruvian government; in consequence, SIL "pragmatically aligned itself with the nation-making and state-modernization goals of Peruvian educators and Peru's military leadership."<sup>3</sup> Integration became so complete that JAARS (SIL's airplane and radio communications arm) "effectively became an adjunct of the Peruvian military in the mid-1950s,"

including "carrying military personnel and transporting prisoners to the penal colony at Sepa."<sup>4</sup> It boggles the mind to think that mission as "service to all" meant quite that.

The airplanes and radios were new—as was the pervasive enlistment of missionaries with specialized training in linguistics—but was Townsend's two-pronged vision of the missionary task—doing good and doing gospel—so very new?<sup>5</sup> More narrowly, on the side of doing good, was the practice of casting mission and missionaries as adjuncts to various governments' colonial policies, programs, and objectives really new? Was it the best approach to doing good in Christ's name?

Anyone inclined to give a positive answer to those last two questions—was it really new and was it really good—might wish first to read Jennifer Graber's recently published volume, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West*. Graber focuses on the experiences of the Kiowa during the nineteenth century and the responses they made to the successive reductions they faced across that century in access to land, food, movement, and breadth of opportunity. On the one hand, she focuses on the spiritual responses the Kiowas made as the buffalo disappeared and the Plains Indians' circumstances became more straitened. On the other hand, she deals at length with the outlook and interventions of missionaries and "friends of the Indian," often also religiously motivated, who together composed part of the changing "culturescape" with which the Kiowa had to come to terms.

Graber's account, covering the years from 1803 to 1905, largely stays north of the United States' continually changing southern border. Except for fund-raising, Cameron Townsend worked primarily south of that border in Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. But Graber's account is yet one more record establishing that when it comes to acting as agents of government and to making mission subservient to governmental programs and objectives, Townsend had an ample supply of precursors and exemplars. Many before him had sought a solution to "the Indian problem" or, something quite different, had sought to alleviate the problems Indians faced. Some of his steps may have been novel, but the path itself was well trodden.

### *The Indian Problem*

As indicated, it is important to recognize that "the Indian problem" and "the problems Indians faced" in territories controlled by the United States were far from being synonymous. They were, however, related: in both cases Euramericans called the tune and the pace. The Indian

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**T**he Indian problem” and “the problems Indians faced” in territories controlled by the United States were far from being synonymous. They were, however, related: in both cases Euramericans called the tune and the pace.

problem was, in simplest terms, a problem that existed in the white intruders’ hearts and ambitions: at the beginning the colonists and later the settlers and homesteaders wanted land. But, inconveniently, it was occupied. The Native Americans were already there, and it was a puzzle how they were to be gotten rid of or dispossessed or converted into crypto white persons, adhering to the lifeways, not of the Cherokees or Senecas or Kiowas, but of European culture. Hunting and gathering did not mesh well with farming and manufacturing; communal landholding did not consort well with possession of land in fee simple or with private and individualistic exploitation of the wealth the land held in promise.

“Solutions” to clearing the land of its occupants and thus opening it for settlement by European colonists were various. Disease held great promise. Already between the visit of Columbus in 1492 and the landing of the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock in 1620, many fishing ships and others had visited American shores. With them came European diseases to which the occupants of the Americas had no immunity; vast numbers died in epidemics that swept across the two continents.<sup>6</sup> In some areas, when settlers arrived, they found that whole regions which previously had been heavily populated were denuded of inhabitants. As settlers moved west, they carried with them measles, smallpox, tuberculosis, and other diseases deadly to Native Americans. Contagion did its work, further reducing the number of Indians.

Another, “more humane,” solution was to “purchase” tracts of land from Native American peoples and open the land for white settlement. Alternatively, the government could negotiate concessions of land or establish Indian reserves by treaty and could then, after only a brief period of time, reopen negotiations, progressively restricting Native American lands and opening more and more land to white settlement. The ratchet worked only in one direction: from Native American land occupancy and toward white settlement. Choice districts and regions were reserved for white settlers; land in areas considered to be inferior or less productive were allocated to the Indians. Once the United States was established, lands acquired by treaty from Native Peoples accrued to the benefit of the federal government; selling “ceded” Native American land to settlers and land speculators became a lucrative financial support for the federal treasury.

More direct efforts to “solve” the Indian problem consisted of attempts at extermination through direct attacks, massacres, and Indian wars. At least one state, California,

established an outright bounty on Indian heads or scalps delivered. The US government reimbursed most of California’s bounty payments.<sup>7</sup> Actions such as the removal of the Indian population from the eastern United States under President Andrew Jackson to west of the Mississippi River into what was temporarily spoken of as “Indian country” fell short of direct killing. By means of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the United States had acquired an immense amount of territory. By putting the Indians there, two things would be accomplished simultaneously. First, the physical barrier of the mighty Mississippi River would separate the contending lifeways of the Native Americans and the white settlers from each other. Second, with the Indians removed, the fertile lands east of the river would be wholly open to white settlement. With no Indians present as a restraint on white occupancy, the settlers’ Indian problem would be solved.

But, of course, westering settlers quickly saw that the lands beyond the Mississippi were fertile. They were not the desert that maps labeled them as being. The settlers crossed the river, entered the land, and looked to the federal government to grant them title to the lands they farmed and claimed as their own. They also looked to the US government and its army to make their lives safe from reprisal by those whose land they had entered and expropriated. As the Civil War ended and later as the army was withdrawn from enforcing the program of Reconstruction in the South, soldiers became available in abundance to pursue wars of suppression against the “wild” Indians of the plains, such as the Kiowa. The Indian wars included massacres and rounding up of “wild” tribes to confine them to reduced lives on reservations. Coercive constraints were placed on Indian behavior, such as suppression of the Kiowas’ Sun Dance and other Native American approaches to spiritual power.

#### *Assimilation as Alternative to Extermination*

“Friends of the Indian,” especially, embraced the goal of assimilation as a more hopeful alternative to extermination. Each part of that sentence requires parsing. First, “friends of the Indian” did not refer to persons who were personally pacific and outgoing, amiable rather than bellicose, toward Native Americans in whose neighborhoods they had settled. They were, to one degree or another, professional or semiprofessional do-gooders. Friends of the Indian created interventions with governing authorities on behalf of Native Americans and planned courses of action and adaptation for “them” or “those people” to follow. They assumed the prerogative to think, plan, envision, and act in behalf of

*If Native Americans would consent not to live, think, behave, look, or engage in religious practices like Indians, but to behave, think, speak, reside, attire themselves, and worship like white people, they might be permitted to live.*

Native Peoples: “what they need or need to do is. . .” “This” is what “they” need to do, not just to live the good life, but to continue living at all. The friends of the Indian arrogated to themselves to know what was best for “them” and to set up programs for “them” for which “they” should be grateful.

Second is to stipulate what was meant by assimilation. Roughly framed, if Native Americans would consent *not* to live, think, behave, look, act, or engage in religious practices like Indians, but to behave, think, speak, reside, attire themselves, and worship like white people, they might be permitted to live.

That goal itself was, third, hopeful in several senses. It held out to Native Americans the possibility of life instead of extermination for their children. Assimilation might be a route to a possible future. It was also hopeful in the sense of acknowledging uncertainty. How long would assimilation take? A goal distant in time, its outcome was unassured, but the alternative, resistance, was certain to bring annihilation. At the least, assimilation might allow Native Americans’ children to remain alive. It might, looking further ahead, yield beneficial results for their children or grandchildren, even if not for themselves. All was tenuous. Another way in which the goal was hopeful was that it went against the evidence: when the Indians east of the Mississippi were compelled to relocate to Indian Territory west of the river, those such as the Cherokee who had assimilated the most, had settled down in houses, and had taken up farming were also forced to walk the Trail of Tears, right along with all the others. Many died along the way, maybe as many as a quarter of them. Hopeful, indeed.

The process of assimilation was clearly going to be a lengthy one with uncertain prospects. But unlike assimilation, the terms of which could be nebulous, shifting, and the goal ever receding, the fourth term, extermination, was quite literal. Extermination was assumed by various political spokespersons as inevitable, advocated in newspapers as something to be deliberately pursued, and, as indicated earlier, was in fact pursued by armies and militias in accord with governmental policies at various levels.

### *The Kiowa across the Nineteenth Century*

Jennifer Graber, associate professor of religious studies at the University of Texas at Austin, meticulously documents the progress of the Kiowa across a landscape transfixed throughout the nineteenth century by those two competing lodestars. *The Gods of Indian Country* recounts the progressive decrease in the set of life and religious options available

to the Kiowa as the years progressed. Kiowa modes of relationship to the land and its bounty gives her volume a tripartite structure: the periods of open lands, 1803–67; closed lands, 1868–1881; and divided lands, 1882–1903. During the first period, the whole of the American Plains was open to them. They could follow the buffalo wherever they went and could set up camp anywhere that they could establish themselves in the face of other Native American tribes and coalitions. After adopting horse culture in the northern plains and acquiring the Sun Dance from the Crow near whom they lived for a period, the Kiowa migrated south and became allied to the powerful Comanche occupants of the southern plains. They went on raids into Texas and Mexico for horses to trade and continued to move their camps freely, traversing a vast territory to maintain access to the shifting buffalo herds.

During the second period, closed lands, 1868–81, the territory of the Kiowa became circumscribed. From roving across a vast expanse of the western prairies, they were restricted by “treaty” and US military force to a circumscribed reservation in what is now southwestern Oklahoma. Land “freed up” in this way—that is, freed of Native American presence—was opened to white settlement. During the reservation period of unequally enforced separation between the Native Americans and the Euramerican intruders, the Kiowa were no longer free to follow the buffalo. They became dependent upon having the dwindling herds of migrating buffalo happen to come near them. If the Kiowa raided into Texas or Mexico or New Mexico, they were pursued by US soldiers and punished by imprisonment or execution. Efforts not just to supplant, but to suppress indigenous spiritual practices, such as the Sun Dance, came into play.

With passage of the Dawes Allotment Act in 1887 came the period of divided land. The reservations began to be broken up. By then, separation of the races by restricting Native Americans to reservations was being denounced as mistaken policy. The reservation system, with land held communally or tribally, was not inducing Native Americans to become farmers—at least, not quickly enough. Besides, it left too much land under Indian control. They were still able to dream of the return of the buffalo. Reservations had shown that they were not a conduit to private ownership of land and inculcation of individualism, as much as missionaries might stress the links between Christianity and work, private ownership, and individualism. The Indians were not clamoring to change from life in shifting camps and life sustained by the buffalo, their larder on the hoof. Maybe



**S**tudents in day schools studied English, but they also continued to speak their language and learn the traditions and rhythms of Kiowa life. Boarding schools sought to break all such links.

most important, land that was not individually owned (titled in severalty) could not be bought out by white settlers. It was shielded from white settlers' avarice.

The Dawes Act changed all that. The Indians were settled on 160-acre lots that they were expected to farm, whether they wanted to or not. Progressively, other sources of food were cutoff to make them dependent on farming. Settling Kiowa families on 160 acres each meant that an extensive amount of tribal land became "surplus" and could be opened to white settlement. I might add that, behold, lands now owned individually were susceptible to sale and also to purchase by whites. The terms of the treaties had never been lived up to; now the Native Americans could be sold out and have no resources at all once the sale money was spent. They would have nothing to live on. The dispossession of the Native Americans would be complete, but all would occur "legally" and by private transaction, rather than being carried out by officially acknowledged government policy. What could be wrong with "giving" 160 acres each—how generous—to families that before had never "owned" a plot of ground that they could call their own personal, private, property? All they had had before was the use of millions of acres and access to the sufficiency if not abundance those lands supplied.

### *Motivators and Mechanisms*

Kiowa spiritual practice in the Sun Dance and succeeding prophetic and spiritual movements, including the Ghost Dance and peyote cults, focused on several elemental concerns: health, abundant buffalo herds, the encroachments of white settlement, personal power, prowess in hunting and battle, and triumph in conflict with enemies. These concerns were practical and personal. As the Kiowa descended toward crisis, prophetic movements arose that promised the withdrawal of the white invaders or health or success in raids or the return of the buffalo (which whites as one front of government Indian policy were engaged in a purposeful program of slaughtering), and they gained a following. But when the prophecies of white withdrawal, for example, or success in battle failed, their followers abandoned them.

Throughout the nineteenth century and particularly its second half, Protestant Christianity assumed the singularity of its own truth and held itself up as *the* route and mechanism for creating citizens out of indigenous peoples—and immigrants, if such were to be granted entry into the country at all (the Chinese Exclusion Act, for example, was signed into law in 1882). When openings to administer Indian affairs became available, such as with President

Grant's earlier Peace Policy, Protestant friends of the Indian scurried to fill those slots and strove strenuously to exclude Roman Catholics from the role. When the Kiowas seemed recalcitrant because they were not converting quickly enough, friends of the Indian joined the government's agents in seeking military force to suppress the Sun Dance. When the Kiowa showed reluctance to take up farming, slaughter of the remainder of the now decimated buffalo herds was presented as a kindness to the Indians who for lack of an alternative would be forced to settle down and to put their hands to the plough. This outlook was spread across the spectrum from Indian agents in government employ to friends of the Indian in formal positions of responsibility to Congress and newspapers. Missionaries were in the mix, also.

### *Boarding Schools*

Extermination of the buffalo, the Plains Indian's means of support, so that hunger would force compliance in programs of assimilation was one side of the equation. On the other side were day schools and efforts to replace the blanket Indian with shorn hair and European style clothes. But the *pièce de résistance* in the effort at inducing assimilation was the boarding school. Day schools had several drawbacks: being close by, Indian parents could come by to observe; seeing what transpired, they might remove their children. By definition, students in day schools did not live on the school grounds. They were still exposed to the community and its influences. They might study English, but they also continued to speak their language, learn the traditions and rhythms of Kiowa life, and aspire to traditional roles in community life.

Boarding schools sought to break all such links, and to that end, they were located at remote distances from tribal lands. The best known, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, opened by Captain Richard Pratt in 1879, was located in central Pennsylvania. Some Kiowa from Oklahoma became students there. Pratt's motto, "Kill the Indian in him and save the man," epitomized the approach he had developed while in charge of Fort Marion, a military prison in Florida.<sup>8</sup> A number of Indians from the southern plains, Kiowa among them, had been sentenced there, arriving in May 1875. The program Pratt devised was one of forced assimilation in hair style, dress, worship, work, language, and contacts. He maximized white contact with the Indians in the prison and farmed the Native Americans out among the white population as laborers. For example, he brought members of the community in to teach English to the inmates. He not

**W**as the task over? It was at this point that the burgeoning American empire opened new opportunities for missionaries to carry the gospel of American civilization around the world.

only required attendance at Christian religious instruction (conducting some of it himself as warden of the prison), but also took the prisoners to Euramerican church services. Anything he could do to multiply cross-cultural contacts and provide Euramerican role models, he did.

In boarding schools all communication was to be in English. Every effort was made to suppress speaking of Indian languages. Euramerican clothing was to be worn. Appearances, including hair length, were to follow Euramerican styles. The list of attempts to erase Indianness and to instill Euramerican styles and values goes on and on. As stated above, the objective was for the products of the boarding schools to behave, think, speak, reside, attire themselves, worship, and work like white people. For optimal results of de-Indianization, advocates of boarding schools recognized that the earlier a child could be removed from his or her home and from parental influence, the better the prospect of success. Such children might then aspire to become citizens, something that was denied to them as long as they resided on the reservation.

But after satisfying all requirements, assimilated Native Americans faced the final insult: they would have to wait twenty-five years to become citizens. One could easily read that as: "By then most of you can be expected to be dead." After all, the experience of the Cherokee had already shown that though part of the issue was indeed cultural, it was more than cultural. It was racist if not a matter of out and out racism. The Cherokee, the most assimilated of the Indians, were also deported; they too were forced to walk and die along the Trail of Tears. Land and modes of land tenure that might impede white acquisition of the land were the kicker.

### *The Gods of Indian Country*

I have not really provided much of a feel for what Jennifer Graber has written and the story she relates. It is better and less bitter—though bitter enough—than what I have written. Much more straightforward, Graber's account is almost that of an impartial observer or dispassionate recorder, simply presenting the facts. This was done, then that took place, and then this also occurred. A dance was planned; the army was summoned to intervene. But the whole gives a coherent account of a century of striving and reversal and ultimate defeat of a people.

Graber is bitter about steps of repression taken along the way, for example, when Indian agents and Indian advocates, so-called friends of the Indian, called in the military to

suppress Native American practices and to impose agendas of assimilation. She is bitter about steps that were taken *for* Native Peoples and supposedly in *behalf of* Native Peoples and for which it was thought they ought to be grateful, that were devised and carried out without consultation *with* Native Peoples. But she is most bitter in writing of the denouement. By the end of the nineteenth century, "emancipation" via destruction of the reservations had largely been thrust upon Native American peoples. Many had acquiesced to a degree in adopting Euramerican standards of farming and employment. Even more, probably, consented to wear Euramerican style clothing. Attendance at schools and use of English was growing. Few Native Americans still existed who did not display at least partial signs of living within the Euramerican orbit. In sum, the end of the Indian problem could be heralded as having been achieved.

What, she asks, were missionaries to do? Had they, despite their cautious framing of their task in missionary letters and periodicals—much progress has been made; so much work is yet to be done—actually left themselves with nothing yet to do? Was the task over? It was at this point, she writes, that, fortuitously, the United States turned its primary attention from internal colonization to external colonization. The Spanish-American War brought far flung territories within the purview of American churches and missionary vision in a way not heretofore experienced. The gospel of American civilization had achieved its full purpose in the lives of Native Americans. But the burgeoning American empire opened new opportunities for mission and missionaries to carry the gospel of American civilization around the world.

### *Several Observations*

Missions and missionaries are not the theme or main concern of Graber's book. They appear by necessity because they were present and because they did play a role in the lives of the Kiowa. But native agency and the steps one Native American people, the Kiowa, took in trying to cope as their world crumbled around them are the book's primary focus. Missions and missionaries were only one component in a larger scene. Forces were in motion that were far beyond any of the individual actors' control, whether Native American or Euramerican, missionary or Indian agent, soldier or friend of the Indian, however well meaning. About the best that those who were well meaning could hope to accomplish was to soften the blows. To stave off the passing of a way of life was more than could have been hoped, though some did hope and are to be honored for trying.

*People, we are told, are more open in times of personal and social upheaval to considering new religious claims, but should we strive to turn dire straits into a technique of evangelism?*

Graber's comments on the fine calibration necessary in missionary publications as appeals for support were sent out touch a sensitive nerve. She notes the need felt by missions among the Indians to balance reports of progress against spelling out challenges faced. Too much emphasis on progress already made might induce complacency; too much attention to obstacles and reversals might discourage potential supporters. Enough progress must be recounted to encourage supporters that their money is helping to underwrite an effort that is accomplishing something. Giving is not fruitless or a mere waste of money. But the picture must not be too rosy; there must still be work ahead that will justify additional gifts in support of the mission's ministry. The dilemma is not new: in 1 Corinthians 16:9, the apostle Paul wrote that a wide door for effective work had opened to him, and there were many adversaries. There are points of encouragement, but there are also opponents and challenges. Mission publicity and support raising ever since has been a quest for a fine balance and certainly is still today. When is an account and appeal the literal truth? When does it cross the line into manipulation? Is there a line? Or is it both at once? Is a report or an appeal inherently manipulative, at least to some degree? Can one seek clean hands and a pure heart through honesty, candor, absence of pressure techniques, openness, and frankness alone?

Tyrants from Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar to Stalin—as well as many in between—have recognized the demoralizing power of displacement. Uprooting people from their land and resettling them elsewhere cripples them. Dislocation entails all sorts of loss. There is the loss of local knowledge, of knowing when the rains can be expected, which plots of soil are best suited to which crops, where game can be found, how topography can be used to advantage for defense in case of attack. Displacement severs networks of family and acquaintances. The eyes and hearts of those who have been displaced ache for familiar terrain. The Trail of Tears is the best-known instance, but Native Americans underwent continual displacement, at a rapidly growing pace, at the hands of the Euramericans who were moving in. People, we are told, are more open in times of personal and social upheaval to considering new religious claims, specifically, to proclamation of the good news of God's love expressed in Jesus Christ. We certainly should extend a helping hand in times of upheaval and calamity, and God may at times use individual and social crisis to awaken hearts, but should we strive to turn dire straits into a technique of evangelism?

Paul, in speaking of us as being ambassadors of Christ, assigns us an exceedingly high role and responsibility. Ambassadors are empowered and trusted to act in the name of the potentate who appointed them. They are to act in that ruler's stead but also in line with that ruler's character and intentions. They are to act with initiative and have agency, but it is not independent agency. They have freedom of movement and scope, but it is tethered. It has bounds and specific terrain over which it ranges. Cameron Townsend, mentioned earlier, is to be credited with recognizing the reality of the obligation Christ's servants have, not simply to preach the gospel, but also to do good. Still, his seemingly unquestioning confidence that doing good could be parsed as doing the will of and furthering the purposes of the state and its incumbent officials seems naïve and even quaint—when it does not, in fact, cross over into being devious and diabolical.

Which raises the question of confession. When is it appropriate to acknowledge the sins of the past, of our mothers and fathers in the faith and the ministry and in missions? Our natural tendency is to gloss over them in silence, is it not? But when does silence pass from being incomplete truth—for our account of anything can become tedious, but it can never become complete—into becoming deliberate distortion and misrepresentation? When does the time for confession and asking for forgiveness come? Is that part of missionary practice? Should it be? What about restitution? Apart from being grossly inconvenient, is that even possible? Can wrongs done ever be set right? Or are such questions simply a symptom of the West's crushing guilt complex?

The plight of the Kiowa across the nineteenth century was not a happy one. Knowing that the duplicity and killing of Native Americans then is part of my heritage now—just as is complicity in the US-aided bombing and starving of Yemeni children today—presses upon me. My country, the system in which and through which I live, and do so rather well, is and was responsible for all this. How can such guilt be expiated? It is painful to need to acknowledge that in nineteenth-century Indian territory, missionaries, while properly part of the mix, were far from unblemished in their record. Certainly, one can be confident that some of them were working to at least ameliorate the worst blows and soothe some of the effects of what was being wrought upon the Kiowa. The crushing of the Kiowa may have been inevitable and implacable as fate, rendering them up as “civilized and Christianized” potential citizens, but I cannot for the life of me conceive why it should have been thought that they ought to have been grateful for the extirpation of the buffalo and deprivation of their land and liberty.

**W**hen is it appropriate to acknowledge the sins of the past? When does the time for confession and asking for forgiveness come? Is that part of missionary practice? Should it be? What about restitution?

### Conclusion

Jennifer Graber provides a lucid account of the fate of one Native American tribe over the course of a century. As mentioned, her focus is not on missionaries. It is on native agency and on steps the Kiowa took to access spiritual power so as to rectify their world which had clearly become out of balance and was progressively becoming more so. If the motif is native agency, it is to that extent an unremitting record of failure. One approach after another to spiritual power—Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, Peyote Cult, prophets—ends in failure. Each cycle has a shorter half-life than the one before. If the goal was to restore the world to its state prior to the arrival of the Euramericans, Christianity also was a miserable failure. No such thing happened. The best the missionaries seem to have been able to offer was the goal of turning the Kiowa into crypto-white Protestants—something that the state might eventually recognize as potential citizens.

The Kiowa were renowned and feared raiders and warriors, but they were not equipped to hold off the ever more tightly encircling battle-hardened soldiers of the US Army with their superior provisions, munitions, and logistics. In the end the Kiowa were starved into submission by the use of food—or rather the destruction and withholding of food—as a weapon of war. With avenue after avenue shut off against them, eventually the Kiowa had no option but capitulation.

Despite their best efforts, the Kiowa were caught up in the throes of a massive—and eventually overwhelming—social, political, economic, and military upheaval. Missionaries were part of the mix, but so far as can be judged from Graber's account, they were neither dominant nor the most potent factor in determining what happened to the Kiowas. The story is well written and well worth reading. For one unversed in Plains Indian history and missions among them, the conclusions to be drawn about efforts to bring the benefits of the gospel to the Plains dwellers are dismaying as well as sobering.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> William Lawrence Svelmoe, *A New Vision for Missions: William Cameron Townsend, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, and the Culture of Early Evangelical Faith Missions, 1896–1945* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2008); Boone Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935–1985* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake*, 125.

<sup>4</sup> Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake*, 136.

<sup>5</sup> Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake*, 125: "It was clear too that [Townsend] had little patience with any narrow focus on salvation at the expense of social concern. The 'Bible,' he insisted in 1945, 'tells us of a better age to come, [but] it also tells us how to better this age.'"

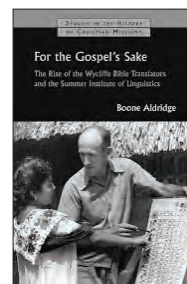
<sup>6</sup> On pre-contact Native American population size and the devastating effects of European diseases, see Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 92–96, 132–33. The literature on this issue is voluminous. For treatment at length of the topic of Native American population size, the catastrophic effect of diseases introduced by Europeans, and Euramerican assaults on Native Americans with the purpose of exterminating them, see David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> See Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2017). For the difference between the Americans' predatory approach to Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest territories and the treatment accorded to First Nations peoples on the Canadian side of the border, see Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 140.

*For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics*, by Boone Aldridge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), xvi, 272 pp.

—Reviewed by Brad Gill



The myth of the frontier. We imagine it as the freedom for grand exploration, conditions that can generate an openness to change and an easy release of long-held traditions. Modern historians will more likely demythologize such romantic notions. Their craft demands a suspicion of all that collects around heroic frontiersmen. Steeped in the ethical scruples of our post-modern age, their task is to expose the more brutal and tarnished realities of Western expanse. They reveal the truly tragic victims on those frontiers—the minorities, the powerless, the losers. We benefit greatly from these conscientious studies, for they can open up a whole new hemisphere in our historical imaginations. But what author would dare write a sympathetic historical

*It was Townsend's progressive orientation that would contest what he called "the time-honored shackles of churchianity." He would disturb both Keswick sensibilities and the institutional priorities of faith mission.*

study of a missionary pioneer into such a climate of post-modern historiography?

In his study of Cameron Townsend and Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics (WBT/SIL), Boone Aldridge has dared to do just that. He has offered a new retrospective on the entrepreneurial life and mission of this extraordinary pioneer, but he has placed it carefully within the international currents of an evolving 20<sup>th</sup> century. From Townsend's early college days in a progressive institution like Occidental College to his controversial steps into Russia during the Cold War, Aldridge has handled the arc of Townsend's organizational leadership of WBT/SIL with keen historiography. Townsend's unique skill-set as linguist, missionary, diplomat, organizational leader, and entrepreneurial promoter is tempered by this author's reference to contemporary political and evangelical developments. The myths that enshroud Townsend the man are dispelled by Aldridge, who attempts an irenic and honorable critique. He proves that demythologizing is a beneficial exercise for mission strategy.

He offers more than a biography. It's in effect an organizational history. For any mission leader on the frontiers today, who struggles to discharge his duties in fast-changing conditions, this book is a case study of innovative organizational design amidst the revolutionary dynamics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a historical case-study, it will compliment the insightful books on cross-cultural organizational leadership being published today (I recommend Douglas McConnell's recent contribution<sup>1</sup>). It's an inspiring blend of biblical mission, leadership values, and historical drama, creating a very readable study of intrepid organizational design.

Townsend's objective of translating the Bible into the indigenous languages of neglected tribes consistently challenged conventional wisdom. Aldridge develops the crucial aspects of Townsend's thinking that led him to a "dual" organizational design, that ingenious (often paradoxical) partnership of a Bible translation mission (Wycliffe) and a scientific enterprise focused on applied linguistics (SIL). Aldridge's intent is to "explain the strategies and policies of this complex and often confusing missionary organization" (p. 10). His careful historiography provides rich contextual insight into how conditions can impact organizational innovation, offering a more complete understanding of the many controversies that surrounded this particular mission agency.

Townsend's instinctive and very inductive orientation to organization would result in criticism from both an evangelical public (Chapter 5) and secular anthropology (Chapter 6). Chapter by chapter, Aldridge uses a chronology of the WBT/SIL story to isolate these criticisms. The reader senses how the issues Townsend encountered in the *zeitgeist* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provide a missiological template for mission leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The author begins with Townsend's disposition during those early years in Guatemala and Mexico and how this pioneer was shaped by the progressive-fundamentalist debate among North American Protestants (Chapter 1, "Pioneering and the Progressive Ideal"). It was this progressive orientation that would contest what Townsend called "the time-honored shackles of churchianity" (p. 8). He would disturb both Keswick sensibilities and the institutional priorities of faith-mission structures. Townsend's early intuition mixed with his dogged entrepreneurial skill to envision a "progressive missiology" that would re-engineer the salient mission template of his day. The ripple effect from the dual nature of WBT/SIL would continue to complicate the organization's evangelical status and affiliation for decades. (Chapter 5, "On the Home Front," picks up on WBT's controversial publicity tactics—like the World's Fair Pavilion in 1964 and the struggle to be accepted into the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association).

The chapters are laid out in a rough chronology that raises successive missiological issues—themes that would forge the values and principles of WBT/SIL over the next decades. In Chapters 2 and 3 ("The Linguistic Approach" and "Translating the Word"), Aldridge maps out just how the academic rigor required for Bible translation led SIL deeper and deeper into the halls of the university world. As SIL personnel began to apply linguistic theory to the unwritten languages of indigenous tribes, they became more confident in their interaction with scholars. Aldridge's extensive use of direct quotes and historic anecdotes recreates the drama that surrounded Townsend's diplomacy in Mexico, but one suspects the pace of his narrative elides much of the backstory. (One can turn to Hartch's focused treatment of SIL in Mexico for much more of that detail.<sup>2</sup>)

Aldridge identifies this professional flank of translators committed to the science of linguistics as one more

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**T**ownsend made his planes available as a “service to all,” such as flying Catholic nuns and priests to and from the jungle, or even transporting military weapons. It was all an effort to “couple faith and diplomacy.”

evangelical stream trying to overcome the unfortunate legacy of anti-intellectualism. He wraps a lot of this initial challenge around the emergence of Kenneth Pike, who joined the faculty at the University of Michigan, generated his own theory of linguistics from translation work in Mexico, and in 1942, became the president of SIL. Pike exemplifies how by applying sophisticated linguistic theory to some of the most remote primitive languages in the world, SIL’s translators generated theoretical discoveries. In a narrative that includes the innovations of Eugene Nida and John Beekman, Aldridge recreates the reciprocity of theory, critique and debate that would continually characterize the intramural life of SIL. It was a fertile hothouse climate that allowed a young Wayne Dye to test the organizational assumption that Bible translation automatically leads to “scripture use” and a movement to Christ. It was also the context which generated the linguistic theories that would support idiomatic translations of the Bible which have led to more recent movements to Christ.

Aldridge’s history recounts how this dual organization displayed the tension between our intellectual and devotional disciplines in mission (“Heart and Mind? The Struggle for Balance” p. 59ff).<sup>3</sup> Can we expect better educated missionaries to maintain their spiritual intensity? (I was reminded of one SIL chapel service I attended in 1976 where Pike ended that morning devotional by repeating over and over again the call, “God needs scholars!”) The attempt to blend Bible translation with a secular, academic, and highly theoretical discipline could cause a spiritual drift. As SIL built an alliance with the University of Oklahoma (1940s), was it an egregious lapse for SIL classes to then drop their tradition of beginning their classes in prayer? This common personal tension of spirit and mind becomes quite poignant in SIL’s institutional history.

Christian mission throughout history has had to confront the geopolitical realities of empire and nation-state, and in Chapter 4, Aldridge rolls out the philosophy of SIL in Townsend’s venture into Peru. It was here that Townsend took his earlier tactical decisions to cooperate with the government of Mexico, and extended them into a more full-service approach, one of “service to all.” It required the dual organizational model of WBT/SIL (what some considered the “two-headed monster”), but it also required “the Townsend factor,” that blend of diplomat, promoter and entrepreneur. In so doing, Townsend ignored church/state boundaries and stirred up a swarm of suspicion and reaction on the home front (Chapter 5). Despite the high cost back home, maintaining

this dual organization would pay high dividends on the field. In Peru, “international good will” became a strategy. Aldridge focuses the controversy surrounding Townsend in his desire to launch SIL’s own jungle aviation planes, complete with mechanics, which were used to ferry Bible translators in and out of tribes. He would make these planes available to service others, such as flying Catholic nuns and priests to and from the jungle, or the even more questionable decision to transport military weapons for the government. It was all an effort to “couple faith and diplomacy” and “to make SIL indispensable to the government” (pp. 136–137). By carefully parsing the Peruvian context (the religious hierarchy, government departmental policy, educational system), Aldridge helps the reader comprehend the ethical realities of a strategy of “service to all.” The author highlights Townsend’s bald use of State power in advancing his mission to indigenous peoples.<sup>4</sup>

WBT/SIL’s organizational structure may have been effective in overcoming the geopolitical resistance of nation-states, and they may have sufficiently addressed the conservative qualms of a North American sending base, but they were still to face an ideological barrage from those strange bedfellows in the academy—the anthropologists. Through the 60s and 70s, WBT/SIL had grown to more than 2500 members, and in Chapter 6 (“Staying the Course”), Aldridge describes a stream of publications that accused SIL of exploiting and oppressing indigenous peoples. Aldridge’s treatment of new intellectual currents—the New Left and an idealistic anthropology—and his blow-by-blow critique of SIL in these publications could make any modern missionary under similar conditions squirm. He covers WBT/SIL’s reaction and their attempts to de-westernize and refashion their organization along more international lines.

In just 288 pages, Aldridge has not only told the dramatic story of this pioneering organization, but his rich historiography creates an important case study for mission leaders today. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Douglas McConnell, *Cultural Insights for Christian Leaders* (Baker Academic, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935–1985* (University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Kenneth Pike’s *With Heart and Mind: A Personal Synthesis of Scholarship and Devotion* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962).

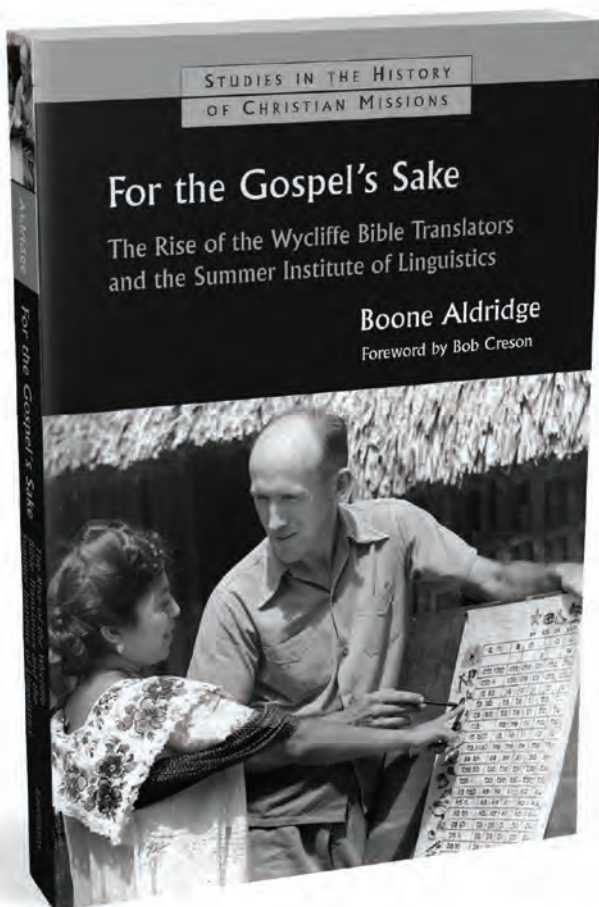
<sup>4</sup> This approach of cooperation with the national governments of Peru and Mexico has been highly criticized. See Baker’s book review on *The Gods of Indian Country*, by Jennifer Graber in this same issue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

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# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, websites, 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.*

## Demography Clues Us In: Selective Abortions Lead to Cross-border "Bride" Kidnapping

["Give Us a Baby and We'll Let You Go."](#) This recent Human Rights Watch report reveals the trafficking of Myanmar Kachin women into the Yunnan province of China and the devastation many such overlooked populations face:

The armed conflict in Kachin and northern Shan States has largely escaped international attention, despite 2018 findings by the United Nations that the Myanmar military has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity there. The atrocities against the Rohingya people in Rakhine State deservedly seized headlines, but the women and girls of Kachin and northern Shan States remain largely invisible victims. Too many of them are trapped—by the collision of war and displacement in Myanmar and the fallout from the destructive denial of women's reproductive rights in China—in lives of unspeakable abuse.

For a summary of this HRW report, read the conclusions on [ReliefWeb](#) (March 21, 2019).

We can better understand this tragedy by considering the demographic consequences from the enormous gender gap in China. Four years ago, *Scientific American* reported that as many as 62 million women were "missing" in China due to selective female abortions, female infanticide, and female baby abandonment. See ["China's New Birth Rule Can't Restore Missing Women and Fix a Population"](#) (Nov 2, 2015).

## Religious Demography's Influence on Witness and Dialogue

*Christianity Today's* April 2019 issue ran this story: ["Making Missions Count: How a Major Database Tracked Thailand's Church-Planting Revival."](#) Thai pastors were moved to action when presented with data about the many sub-provinces without a single church—a marvelous example of how clear demographics can mobilize witnesses to Christ.

A February 2019 online blog looks at changing religious demographics worldwide (Christian and Muslim statistics in particular) and comments on the Pope's historic mass in the United Arab Emirates, a Muslim country. Before a crowd of 135,000, Pope Francis addressed the faithful—13% of the UAE are Catholics from Pakistan, India, and the Philippines. See Todd Johnson's ["The Global Religious Context of 'Human Fraternity.'"](#)

## Contextualization, Syncretism, or Eradication of Christianity in China?

When the Chinese government told churches to develop a five-year plan to become more Chinese, did that mean more *culturally* Chinese or more *socialist* Chinese? Don't miss *Christianity Today's* March 2019 article entitled ["China Tells Christianity to be More Chinese."](#) Jackson Wu responds to this same question in ["Sinicized Christianity is Not Christianity,"](#) published March 20 on Patheos:

Apparently, Sinicizing Christianity means removing Bibles and limiting access to the Bible. . . . Last year, China enforced the rule that children are banned from religious meetings. . . . How can Christianity become "Sinicized" when people are limited from learning about Christianity? In reality, the Sinicization of Christianity is a cunning long-term strategy that could just as well be called the "Eradication of Christianity."

Joanne Pittman's ["Red, Black and Grey: Mapping Religion in China,"](#) reviews Dr. Fenggang Yang's *Atlas of Religion in China: Social and Geographical Context*. Yang is a professor of Sociology at Purdue University and director of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society. Note especially where the Muslims and Buddhist peoples are in mainland China. What will it take to reach them? Who is best situated to do so given current government constraints?

## Uighur Whistleblower Arrested Abroad: China Calls in Its Chpts

In a chilling new development, a noted Kazakh human rights defender (who has been chronicling the detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang province) has been placed under house arrest by the Kazakhstan government. Evidently Chinese Belt-and-Road infrastructure investment casts a long shadow. See the March 13, 2019 *New York Times* article, ["Critic Who Exposed China's Muslim Camps Arrested, Even Across the Border."](#)

## How the Internet Powers Vigilantism: A Pakistan Case Study

Are religious freedom and freedom of speech diminishing in most of the world? What roles do the internet and new technologies play in mass control, detentions, imprisonments, riots, torture and death? *Wired* magazine's ["What It's Like to Be Thrown in Jail for Posting on Facebook"](#) (March 20, 2019) details the tailwind that social media has given to Pakistan's blasphemy laws. False accusations of blasphemy are proliferating, leading to people being lynched, or having to flee overseas. Add to this China's facial recognition technology and social credit system, and twenty-first century dictatorships and Communist governments now have powerful new tools to control their populations. See Jackson Wu's compilation of links about China's social credit system in ["The Nitty Gritty of China's Social Credit System."](#) **IJFM.**



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

## Articles in IJFM 36:1

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<b>Watch Out, Sufism is Back</b> Colin Bearup (pp. 11–16)				X			X
<b>Peace Missions to Karen and Shan Migrants from Myanmar in Southeast Asia</b> James D. Langteau, Ho Jin Jun, Kenneth Gossett, and Dina Samora (pp. 19–29)					X	X	X
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<b>Abraham's Religion: A Comparative Exploration</b> Excerpt, John H. Walton (pp. 42–43)	X						X
<b>The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West</b> Book Review, Dwight P. Baker (pp. 44–50)			X				
<b>For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics</b> Book Review, Brad Gill (pp. 50–52)			X				

## Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

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August 2015 • Frontier Ventures • 34:8

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- 9 Voting Along Caste Lines
- 11 Varanasi's Jains Go All Out to Liberate Their Souls
- 12 Varanasi Has Deep Roots in Buddhism
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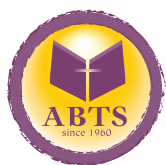
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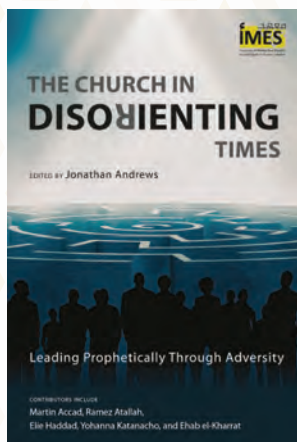


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#### A New Book from IMES - The Church in Disorienting Times: Leading Prophetically through Adversity

Based on the deliberations of Middle East Consultation 2017, edited by Jonathan Andrews, *The Church in Disorienting Times: Leading Prophetically through Adversity* includes contributions from leading thinkers and practitioners from the region: Elie Haddad, Ramez Atallah, Nehla Issac, Yohanna Katanacho, Martin Accad, Ehab el-Kharrat, and others.

The Middle East is undergoing profound change. In the midst of turbulence, trauma, tragedy, and the hopelessness felt by many, an increasing number of churches are finding imaginative ways to be active in the societies in which they belong. How can we be the salt, light, and yeast that Scripture exhorts us to be when faced with despair?

Available at Amazon.com or other book retailers.