

IJFM

Int'l Journal of Frontier Missiology

The Journal
of the International Society for
Frontier Missiology

Deep Structures

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July–September 2019

Tents, Pyramids, and the Way We Think

I hadn't felt the stark cultural contrast of a more rural Muslim society until I saw the skyline of Dearborn (Detroit). The tall Ford Motor Company headquarters shoots up as a solitary monument to the Western multinational corporation. It stands amidst small storefront Arab businesses that lace the surrounding avenues. I was familiar with those small entrepreneurial efforts from my time in North Africa, but I never could feel how much my own culture stood in sharp relief.

Fouad Khuri, an Arab sociologist, called these two distinct commercial styles "Tents and Pyramids."¹ Ford is a pyramidal structure, where hierarchy exists, and a graded power flows by delegation throughout a large corporate system. The mental design of the tent structure "is much like a Bedouin encampment composed of tents scattered haphazardly on a flat desert surface with no viable hierarchy."²

These two metaphors helped me grasp the hold of deep structures within a culture. Two of my mentors introduced me to the way these mental models organize our social world. Paul Hiebert called them "blueprints of reality"—a mental map that orders our knowledge and experience.³ Chuck Kraft used the picture of a river to explain how these models run silent and deep⁴—there are the surface behaviors, institutions, and expressions of a corporate culture, and then there is the deeper part of the river where our values shape social configurations that then inform our actions. But it was Khuri who helped me picture the way deeper structures determine whether we build a company that requires a skyscraper or rather maneuver in the competitive fraternity of a marketplace.

Each article in this issue addresses the importance of these structures. The first challenge is to discover them. Colin Bearup's third installment on Sufism describes the way Sunni Muslims are being revitalized and then gravitating towards a more Sufi (mystical) orientation (p. 137). You'll notice that they naturally collect around a *murshid* (spiritual guide) and his *tariqa* (a spiritual way, or brotherhood). This socio-religious configuration has been evident over the centuries in many Islamic movements across Africa and Asia. Bearup sees the same today in the Muslim diaspora.

Howell and Montgomery explore the implications of patron-client relations in Muslim Mozambique (p. 129). They're aware that this same construct was embedded in the social context of the early church, and that it still manifests in

Editorial *continued on p. 110*

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a wide swath of unreached peoples today. Their sense is that the meaningfulness of the role of the "patron" actually provides a fresh opportunity to present trinitarian theology in that Muslim African context.

Khuri claims that these mental structures like patron-client are ideological constants—that "they can be transferred from one sphere to another." They're expressed in the way we play games, in how we rule, in our families and associations, even in our "joining a congregation for worship."⁵ Interesting. This sociologist claims these deep structures will shape the way we do church. Richard and Evelyn Hibbert address this relationship of structure and church with their own question: What's the appropriate structure that ensures the vitality and durability of rapidly multiplying ecclesial movements? They themselves have been involved with a movement to Christ, and their concern is for a biblically viable structure. Might a movement's durability be determined by the use of its own deep structures—those cultural configurations from human tradition that may appear temporal and expendable?

Our association and this journal have addressed the deep structure of rapidly multiplying movements to Christ. The emerging evidence of an *oikos* (household) structure⁶ across these movements is both a social configuration and a biblically valued institution. These deep cultural structures may not be so expendable, nor should they be. Shouldn't we expect a creative synthesis of the cultural and the biblical in these movements? The Hibberts raise this important consideration.

This year ISFM 2019 will also examine the deep structures of frontier missiology. My article on "Reimagining Frontier Mission" is a preamble to the different presentations (p. 111). I believe the health of our missiological imagination has to do with our ability to address the models which shape how we do mission. The presenters will examine our mission terminology and the deeper configurations it reflects.

You may have noticed that a penetrating analysis of our missiology comes at the hand of our book reviewers. Dwight Baker and H. L. Richard consistently prod us with their trenchant observations

in our new section, "Books and Missiology," formerly "Book Reviews." Baker's review of Katherine Long's *God in the Rainforest* (p. 146) offers a personal and iconoclastic reflection on a famous martyrdom in the 20th century. As usual, this mission historian exposes the deep proclivities of Western mission. It's not always pretty, and certainly not comfortable. But how else will we discover the deep structures of mission today?

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ Fouad Khuri, *Tents and Pyramids* (Saqi Books, 1990).

² Khuri, *Tents and Pyramids*, 11.

³ Paul Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (Trinity Press International, 1999), 76–78.

⁴ Charles H. Kraft, "Culture, World-view and Contextualization," in *Perspective on the World Christian Movement*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (William Carey Publishers, 2009), 401.

⁵ Khuri, *Tents and Pyramids*, 12.

⁶ *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 34, no. 1–4, http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/34_1-4_PDFs/IJFM_34_1-4-EntireIssue.pdf.

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.

Reimagining Frontier Mission

by Brad Gill

Frontier missiology dare not lose its imagination. It may not appear to be at risk, but it's so easily surrendered. Imagination can disappear in various places: in our revered academic halls, where intellectual constraints stifle the full human capacity to be creative; in the exhaustion from serving on an unreceptive and unyielding frontier; in the subtle "group think" of one's own mission organization; or in our defensiveness when facing unpredictable religious worlds. The creative "leap" of imagination may have been lost.

We've been reimagining frontier mission for some years now. Conditions require it. The flows of globalization, migration and urbanization are accelerating and disrupting traditional notions of mission. Agencies, networks, associations and graduate schools of mission are busily sorting and sifting these new conditions in their effort to adjust strategies. Even with reports of phenomenal movements to Christ and the transferable concepts we draw from them, there's a common conviction these new conditions are pressing us to reimagine these frontiers.

The scale and complexity seem to defy analysis. Our global mapping of unreached peoples attempts to reduce that complexity, but a growing multiplicity of factors overwhelms the demography. The reduction of the Christian movement to a map remains a strategic guidance system for a global sending church, spotlighting previously overlooked cultural basins. But "the map is not the territory,"¹ as they say. The very categories we use for mapping may unintentionally restrict our perception, causing us to disregard other very significant social processes. The map may blunt our imagination.

Some Assumptions about the Way We Think

I'd like to briefly lay out some assumptions I hold on how we might continue to reimagine our missiology. I'm no philosopher or specialist in this domain, and the subject and its literature are vast. But I've been able to identify three basic orientations I have in approaching the subject.

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Imagination

This is the mental capacity we use to process our knowledge, perceptions and emotions.² Friedrich among others identifies two dimensions of the imagination—the analytical and the synthetic—that reflect the way we think missiologically. I want to emphasize the latter, how *the imagination is a highly synthetic way we process symbols and creatively use language*. While we affirm the role of logic, reason, and analysis, the imagination is broader than what is usually understood by the terms “thought” and “mind.”³

Thinking with Models

Lying deep in our thinking are models—whether social, religious, economic or cultural—through which we filter how we understand the world and how it operates. We absorb them as we’re enculturated into life. Various scholars might call them “structures,” “paradigms,” “constructs,” “imaginaries,” or “metaphors.” All these terms suggest configurations that filter and determine how we perceive reality and how we act towards the world. As paradigms, they can adapt with changing conditions, but more likely they’re subconscious, taken for granted and difficult to identify.⁴ In any effort to reimagine, we must confront our models and the way they configure our mission orientation.

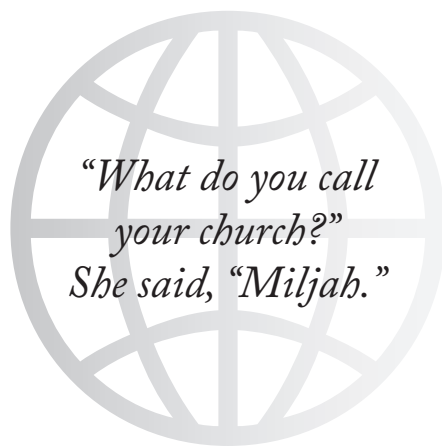
Language is the Incarnation of Thought

We’re indebted to the poet Wordsworth for this profound statement about language.⁵ If true, could it be that our mission terminology embodies our missiological thinking rather than simply reflecting it? My assumption is that our language is the pathway to our missiological models and how we structure mission. Our mission language may encapsulate our highest purposes, but it can be taken for granted and blur over time. And, most importantly, our terms can lock us into models that fail to address conditions currently impacting the flow

of the gospel. I find that the words of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein capture this reality.

A picture held us captive. And we couldn’t get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language only seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.⁶

The language of frontier missiology can *repeat inexorably* what we think to be tried-and-true models. We speak of the vital role of “barriers” and “frontiers,” “movements” and “breakthroughs,” “mandate” and “mission,” “UPGs,” “reached,” and “unreached.” These terms and concepts, derived so clearly from biblical narrative and interpretation, shape the images and models which then orient our sense of mission.⁷ Indeed,



this fulfills a very high purpose. But one might wonder just how much our terms in and of themselves lock us into a mission-mindedness that requires further re-examination.

When we find ourselves in another cultural domain (which is the typical experience of this association), our settled notions are disrupted and we’re forced to re-envision. This disruption can also happen under our feet, as new conditions in our home culture make our seemingly timeless models less functional. But intentionally learning another language, translating life into another world, interrupts deeper constructs. Our default⁸ models of life are suddenly and repeatedly tested by alternative paradigms.

Unpacking our own cross-cultural experiences might help us understand how language is the avenue to our models and our ability to reimagine.

I want to offer an initial template for our discussion. Let me begin with an experience I had a few years ago. I was attending a conference in a Middle Eastern setting that was still feeling the residual effects of war. We were organized into small discussion groups, as I recall, and on one occasion we were interacting on the nature of the church. A big city American pastor had come for the afternoon and was sitting with us. He took the opportunity to launch into a long soliloquy on appropriate ecclesiological parameters. Sitting next to me was a middle-aged woman, a local believer from a Muslim background, who had commented earlier about her small church in a densely populated Muslim city. I turned to her and asked, “What do you call your church?” She said, “Miljah.” “What does that mean in English?” She thought for a bit, and then said, “Shelter.”

This simple, but profound, experience has stuck with me. Reflecting on that short interaction with this sister in Christ has helped me unpack four aspects to our ability to reimagine missiologically.

Reimagining Will Introduce New Scriptural Imagination

The experience with this sister alerted me to *the breadth of scriptural imagination*. This fellowship of believers reached back into the Old Testament Psalms to secure an identity for themselves—“a shelter of the Most High,” a “shelter under His wings,” a “refuge”⁹—and they juxtaposed their experience with a particular picture from scripture. They reached back over all the New Testament catalogue of images for the church¹⁰ and found an image that resonated with their ecclesial life. Three observations about this biblical reimagining on their part.

First, the use of the term *miljah* demonstrates what Richard Hayes calls “the *capacity* to see the world through the lenses given in Scripture.” He describes it as a

hermeneutical circle that goes on between the reading of the text and the reading of the world in which we live. It changes the way we see the world and the way we see scripture.¹¹

Second, it was their *metaphorical* imagination that selected *miljah* as a fresh analogy for the church. Basic to “the rule of metaphor”¹² is the juxtaposition of two images—often just two terms—and the stretching of meaning. Metaphor opens up an imaginative space. Through resemblance, correlation, or substitution, an image like *miljah* adds another aspect to a prism of meaning. There’s an evocative power in metaphor that can challenge our paradigms and help us reimagine.

Third, the selection of *miljah* is what we might call “foregrounding.”¹³ In his treatment of New Testament images of the church, Minear asks why biblical scholars speak of “major” and “minor” images for the church.¹⁴ Did culture or context have an influence on the selection and emphasis of terms? It is interesting what we see when we consider this foregrounding among New Testament authors. We notice that John’s epistles do not use the “body” analogy of Paul in describing the people of God. He foregrounds Jesus’ picture of a vine, a vinedresser and its branches as the corporate image of our union with God. Furthermore, we see it in the preferences for certain titles for Jesus Christ. The term “Christ” (Messiah) is foregrounded by the Jews while the title “Son” and “Lord” seem to gain prominence as the church moves into a Greco-Roman world.¹⁵ Our Middle Eastern sister and her fellowship were demonstrating the same contextual foregrounding, and in doing so they rebirthed an Old Testament image of shelter for their ecclesial identity.

There’s an evocative power in metaphor that can challenge our paradigms and help us reimagine. Metaphor opens up an imaginative space.

Over the last four decades frontier missiology has witnessed the foregrounding of new terminology. The language of “kingdom,” “oikos” and “blessing” has emerged as fresh biblical ways to reimagine frontier mission. This is vital to missiology: the capacity of new believers to juxtapose biblical metaphor with their present realities on different frontiers. As in the instance of *miljah* above, each new threshold, each new frontier, promises a rebirth of biblical images that can help us reimagine mission.¹⁶

Reimagining Must Listen to the Fresh Reception of the Gospel

These images are reborn in the minds and hearts of those who have appropriated the gospel. *Miljah* was an indigenous reimagining.

The fresh burgeoning of World Christianity is refocusing our missionary-mindedness on the determinative role of those who embrace the gospel. Studies of gospel transmission across old frontiers bear this out. It’s the venerable Walls, the irenic Sanneh and prophetic Bediako who turned our minds towards these indigenous processes in Africa.¹⁷ Their careful historiography applauds the missionary for translating the scriptures into the vernacular languages. However, it was the fresh imagination of indigenous African minds grounded in the newly translated scriptures that caught fire and propelled the gospel across that continent. Those who charge the Western mission enterprise with merely a “colonization of consciousness” fail to study the receptive processes that were set in motion as a powerful gospel was reimagined in young movements to Christ.¹⁸ Sanneh was the great champion of the “principle of indigenous reconstruction” that repeatedly

expresses “the vernacular character of Christianity.”¹⁹ His study of “the indigenous resistance to the advance of a cultural homogeneity” provides a substantial rationale for how we might expect God’s kingdom to extend through vernacular imagination.²⁰

I witnessed this indigenous energy in our sister as she spoke of her *miljah*. I was aware of some of the contextual realities that may have steered the way they shaped their ecclesial identity.²¹ Daily they faced the residual effects of a war-torn city and deep inter-religious divides. The divisions of their urban society were not primarily linguistic, but barriers of socio-religious affiliation sealed by a legacy of bloodshed. I was not privy to all inter-religious dynamics, but one got the impression that *miljah* was their attempt to transcend this inter-religious conflict with a fresh “collective-we” in Christ.²² God had given his people a shelter in the storm.

Their sprawling metropolis was very representative of the various types of religious tension across our globe. The salience of religious identities and symbolic systems has fostered a new focus on religious worlds in our frontier missiology. The language of the frontiers—of “barriers”—has begun to gravitate from the “ethno-linguistic” to the “socio-religious.”²³ We map unreached peoples and cultures, but we think in terms of large religious blocs—Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist—that transcend particular ethnicities.

The more popular idea of hybridity, a characteristic feature of globalization, will often fail as a descriptor in the religious domain. Inter-religious relations often appear to be a more “counteractive” phenomenon. Each of the major religious worlds feels punctured by modern civilization, and they’re

punching back. They are increasingly defensive of their own corporeal expression of religious identity. Each major religious world similarly witnesses a “struggle for the real” within its younger generation,²⁴ as each tries to reconcile the distortions and compromises with secular humanism.²⁵ We’re witnessing a surprising reassertion of religious identity through the power of the state (e.g., the current rise of the Hindutva in India or the violent state policy against the Muslim Rohingya in Buddhist Myanmar).

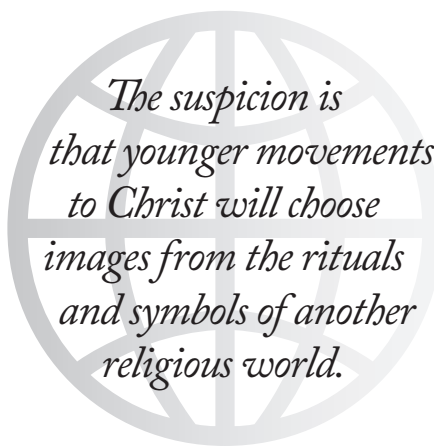
It’s the *religious-mindedness* generated in the interface of these religious frontiers that creates pervasive distrust. It affects how we listen. It can virtually silence our ability to hear the indigenous reimagining that comes with newfound faith. As our sister shared about her *miljah*, I couldn’t help but notice the big city American pastor’s apparent disinterest in the *vital* ecclesiological reimagining taking place. There’s a subtle but very real hardening of religious ideology that the anthropologist Geertz calls religious-mindedness. Our religious self-protection has arisen as our faith defends itself against the onslaughts of modern pluralism.²⁶ For the purposes of reimagining, there’s an unfortunate ideologizing that forces one into a *singular focus* on the inter-religious contradictions. This modern situation can narrow us to a logic that restricts our ability to hear.

The prevalence of this religious ideologizing across a shrinking globe makes it imperative that we formulate a meta-theory of inter-religious relations.²⁷ This is well and good for misology. But we should notice that this can create an elite level of interface with world religions. One enters and is locked in the long legacy of “sacred misinterpretation,”²⁸ of textual comparisons and counteractive traditions. Even those Asian theologians who serve among their vast religious world can carry the sophisticated constructs

of a Western theological elite. What’s important to realize is that we lose the ability to listen to the grassroots of ecclesial experience.²⁹

Seldom do we find views of the grassroots themselves being taken seriously; rather, what we see is how the theologian views the grassroots and how they might fit into the theologians’ grand scheme of things.³⁰

For our purposes of reimagining, we must ask whether this elite ideological tendency prevents us from hearing the fresh imagination of a “collective-we” who follow Christ on these testy borderlands. Will they fail to absorb a term quietly suggested like *miljah*? Might we ignore a new ecclesial experience that challenges established



beliefs?³¹ And could their instinctive choice of terms for a Christ-ward identity have any bearing on how we might reimagine mission?

The suspicion, of course, is that these younger movements to Christ will choose images from the rituals and symbols of another religious world. We reckon that the raw and unseasoned thinking of these situated believers is only confused, syncretistic, contaminated. But their reimagining is a process of *faith appropriating the fullness of Christ*, and of Christ taking possession of their entire lives. The capacity to correlate scripture with all the metaphors of a different socio-religious world comes early and powerfully as people encounter Christ.

It’s in this wild and open terrain where faith is initially discovered and the metaphors of faith are birthed that there’s a real potential for reimagining the frontier.

Reimagining Dares To Explore Primal Religious Experience

It reminds me of one occasion a number of years ago when I took a small group of students to the local mosque. I noticed on entering the mosque that there were about a hundred portraits of people on the back wall, so when we were invited into the imam’s office I took the opportunity to ask him about the photos. He said, “They are pictures of family members of those in our congregation who have been killed by Saddam Hussain.” I tried to process this reality as quickly as I could, and asked, “I don’t know an American pastor who has ever had to deal with this level of pain in his church. How do you do it?” He quickly answered, “What’s that third prong of the three prongs of an electrical cord?” “The ground,” said a student. “Yes,” he said, “I find I need to be grounded in God.”

This image immediately impressed me as “Christian,” as something I should own in my religious world. Initially I was surprised and ambivalent about its origin in this imam’s Muslim world. But, on second thought, it impressed me how easily that picture of a three-pronged electric cord traveled between what are often considered incommensurable religious worlds.

When we encounter another religious construct, whether in our own socio-religious world or in another, our Scriptures suggest that pictures often become the inspired vehicle for communicating truth. When the Old Testament prophets addressed a prevalent religious syncretism among God’s people, it was the verbal pictures of a vineyard, a prostitute, and a lampstand that carried truth to be heard. Or when Jesus faced the religious-mindedness of a Judaism with certain false notions

about the kingdom of heaven, he chose parables to penetrate that religious construct. And even in the final apocalyptic visions of John's Revelation we see a further rebirth of Old Testament images.³² God used surreal pictures to address the church's compromise with a pagan Roman world.

The apostle Paul respected the use of verbal pictures, particularly in translating the gospel into new socio-religious contexts. He needed new terms when he, a Jew, had to frame the gospel for the Gentiles. We could say a reimagining needed to take place across the frontier between these worlds, one that would require a certain foregrounding of terms. The term Christ (Messiah) would never have the force among the Gentiles that it had for the Jew. New Testament scholar, Dom Gregory Dix, suggests that from the outset of the Jewish-Christian mission the new term was to be "the Son of God." He points out that Paul

is a Jewish Christian and he is writing to the Greeks about "the Gospel," whose essential elements have to remain identical for Jew and Gentile. The only way of securing this without the most elaborate analysis is a *picture*.³³

All these titles and images are rebirthed out of the Old Testament, but they are selected and foregrounded according to the receptor. These pictures are relevant to *their* world. They correspond to *their* reality. They ring with other primal pictures in *their own* culture. It's that analogy with their own primal experience that causes certain images and metaphors to be foregrounded. It calls to mind another story.

A number of years ago, one of my colleagues, Jon Bogart, discovered the metaphorical potency of a certain image among North African Muslims. He was quite the conversationalist with taxicab drivers and waiters, and he had learned the evocative power of the *sabua*, a rite-of-passage at seven days for the naming of every new baby. A sheep was slaughtered and eaten by the family and array of invited friends.

Taxicab Driver: "No, you see, there has to be the spilling of the blood of the sheep, and then and only then am I accepted into the family."

But when the throat of the sheep was slit by the father, he ceremoniously uttered the name of the new child. Jon would always ask those with him, "Do you remember your sabua?" They would always say "yes," even though they were just a week old, for family members had reminded them throughout the years of that event. A conversation in the taxicab would proceed something like this:

Jon: Tell me about your sabua.

Driver (very excited): Oh, everyone was there... my family, friends of my family, the neighborhood.

Jon: Did your father kill a lamb?

Driver: Yes, of course. People ate a feast. It's very necessary to kill the sheep.

Jon: Why?

Driver: Because when my father kills the sheep, he utters my name for the first time, and I become part of the family.

Jon: But aren't you already part of the family?

Driver: No, you see, there has to be the spilling of the blood of the sheep, and then and only then am I accepted into the family.

Jon: That's fascinating. That explains why Jesus (*Sidna Isa*) had to die on the cross. You see, it's his blood spilt on the cross that allows me to receive my name as a child of God and then accepted into the family of God.

Driver (stunned, reflective): I never knew before why the Prophet Isa had to die on the cross. Now I understand.

This type of evocative analogy in a culture (often called "redemptive analogies") can disarm inter-religious defensiveness by reaching into the imagination. These potent analogies, rituals, symbols and life passages exist on the margins of formal religious life; yet, they're sacred and embedded in one's *primal* religious experience. They

lie on the surface of deeper paradigms which mold one's values and worldview. Using those terms and images provides a detour around the religious-mindedness of our day. These are pictures that sidestep textual debate and any prescribed inter-religious argument. According to Chan, it's another way of thinking.

Understanding is achieved not by breaking up reality into its constituent parts and analyzing each part separately, but by grasping it in its concreteness. It is not so much the analytical process as an imaginative process.³⁴

He suggests this concreteness is true of the family (*oikos*) structure in Asia, where "the primary locus of religious life is the home."³⁵ As an association and in our literature we have studied this *oikos* (household) structure within new movements to Christ. Chan expounds on the metaphorical power of a terminology that surrounds the sacred place of family relationships—the images, symbols, personages and narratives.³⁶ He believes it to be a primal religious structure—a paradigm, a social template—which prompts fresh theological study of the *priestly* role of Christ (beyond King and Prophet).³⁷ He states:

The focus on the family and the rites associated with ancestral veneration and filial piety are best understood in the context of priestly ministry, where sacrifices are a significant part of religious expression...³⁸

Chan dares to explore the primal religious experience of Asia as a source for reimagining. His hope is that the solidarity of the family structure and the sacredness of ancestral veneration will press theologians to think from the ground up.³⁹ It's at the grassroots that one discovers the powerful metaphors of life that resonate with biblical images.

Reimagining Allows the Spirit to Disrupt Our Models

Many of the images we're offered in the New Testament are a rebirthing of Old Testament images that express the fullness of Christ or the nature of God's people. Emerging terms like *miljah* reimagine the meaning of *ekklesia* (church), that Greek political metaphor used in translating the identity of God's people in a Greco-Roman world. But for the purpose of reimagining mission, we must also search for those biblical metaphors that frame God's *agency* in the world. What are the biblical models and images of God working in the world? These images may seem less prevalent, but they are clearly there—ambassador, apostle, witness, making disciples, sending, all peoples—but we tend to interpret and synthesize our concept of mission (*agency*) from the rich narratives and epistolary material of the New Testament.

In his recent historiography of modern mission Mike Stroope contends that a modern metaphor, rooted in the Latin term *missio*, has powerfully shaped our “mission” imagination.⁴⁰ He calls us to self-reflection, to examine taken-for-granted presuppositions which lie deep within the Western heritage. Again, our language matters, for it rests on the surface of paradigms that have been birthed and shaped through history. We face new global conditions, and Stroope's claim is that this mission construct—with all its attendant terminology, attitudes and institutions—must be transcended. He believes we need a new freedom to reimagine biblical images of kingdom, pilgrim and witness for this day. He's answering a deep sensitivity within mission studies.

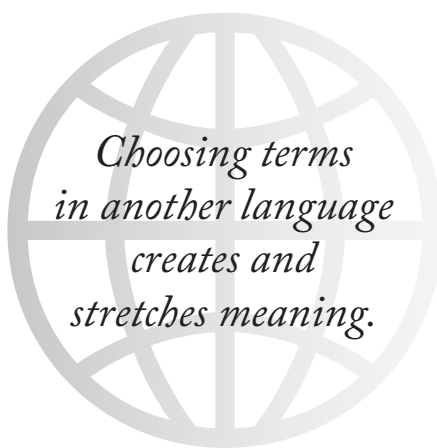
It would do us well to admit that frontier mission works from certain models, ones we believe to be biblical and to have succeeded over time. They are deep metaphors in our thinking, what the missional writer Alan

Roxburgh calls “default” metaphors. These metaphors are powerful in the way they shape imagination, and we use them reflexively when facing the unknown. Roxburgh describes these default metaphors as:

the way in which systems (natural, social and mechanical) build into themselves taken-for-granted explanatory frameworks that kick into place and predetermine actions;

the internalized habits, practices, attitudes, and values individuals and social systems we use to read and navigate actions in their environment;

the taken-for-granted ways we've worked out over time to get things done.⁴¹



He goes on to advise:

Learning to see defaults and understand how they work *helps us begin to frame alternative imaginations*. It isn't an easy task. When the Spirit disrupts established categories, this creates resistance that triggers our defaults. *Changing imagination is about changing defaults*. To a large extent imagination is about the metaphors we use to describe who we are and how we engage our contexts.⁴²

Sometimes we are able to see and reflect on these metaphors, but Roxburgh's concern is that too often the most determinative metaphors are not so obvious. Since they are precritical, they can lie hidden in our consciousness. But, notice he mentions that “the Spirit disrupts,”

that there can be certain points of self-awareness prompted by divine intervention. We all witness the way crisis can disorient one's thinking and expose a default way of doing things. We watch the global upheaval of migrations today and the way they disrupt and open people to change. The Spirit can use circumstances and changing conditions to disrupt our default ways of living life.

Frontier mission is an intentional way of disrupting our models.⁴³ The terminology of frontier assumes some kind of threshold that impedes the transmission of the gospel. Translation is often the imagination's answer to this disruption. Choosing terms in another language creates and stretches meaning. One can almost say that ethnolinguistic and socio-religious frontiers are God's way of helping us confront our deeper metaphors of mission.

This disruptive space was very apparent in Peter's encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10). The Levitical nightmare of animals Peter was told to eat over three occasions was a divine picture the Spirit used to force Peter to adapt his mission paradigm. His default models were found wanting, and his normative strategies suspended as he was led down that road. Again, for understanding the place of reimagining mission, I make three simple observations.

First, the Spirit of God is guiding the entire process through which we confront our default models. The Spirit is the “Go-Between God”⁴⁴ who disrupts. Peter's obedience culminated in the proclamation of the gospel, but only after he had been tempered by how the Spirit was working in “the other,” Cornelius. This episode opens up “how the early church learns to embrace God's Spirit at work in the other.”⁴⁵ Especially today amidst increasing pluralism and the tempest of global religions, we must affirm the candid confession of the mission historian, Scott Sunquist:

It was in a moment of sudden insight that I realized that our struggle with “religions” is that we usually start with

Jesus (which is not a bad idea) rather than the Holy Spirit (which I think is a better idea). Simply put, I have come to believe that God's Spirit is at work in all peoples and his Spirit seeks to recover the image of God in each person and in every culture.⁴⁶

Second, this text illustrates how these paradigm shifts happen *locally and contextually* in concrete experience. Peter was repulsed by this particular vision because he was a Jew. Certain pictures assault certain minds, because our imaginations are formed by a particular culture and socio-religious world. No one picture will universally impact societies and peoples. Well and good that we attempt to amalgamate religious experiences and craft a meta-theory of inter-religious relations.⁴⁷ But reimagining thrives in the local.

Third, this narrative has a timely relevance for the inter-religious frontiers of our day. The structure of this encounter in Acts is paradigmatic, and complements our evangelical prioritization of the "great commission" in Matthew's gospel (Matt. 28:19–20). Just as David Bosch recognized distinct mission paradigms throughout history,⁴⁸ so a fresh exegesis of this Lucan material could help us reimagine mission for counteractive religious contexts. Today we may be reaching for a model beyond the clear mandate to "disciple the nations."⁴⁹ The story in Acts 10 models the Go-Between God for today's inter-religious frontiers.

Trusting and Listening

A number of years ago someone walked alongside me and helped me reimagine the frontier. He was a Syrian, like a beloved older brother, a published author, who was able to help me start a carpet business in the mountains of North Africa. He never ceased to surprise me with his energy for life, his irreverent jokes and his proverbial wisdom as he shared the love of Jesus in the very restricted public sphere of Muslim society. He was so random and unorthodox that on two occasions I almost missed his

He confided, "When I share Jesus with a Muslim friend, I see us as two pilgrims walking together towards God."

philosophy of ministry for that frontier—he could so quickly draw verbal pictures in just a sentence or two.⁵⁰

One time he said, "I see it like this. They're the host and I'm the guest. That's how I understand my place. You don't dishonor your host." The second picture was a few years later, again in just a fleeting moment. He confided, "When I share Jesus with a Muslim friend, I see us as two pilgrims walking together towards God." These two pictures have impacted my default models of frontier mission more than any other. Their profundity helped me reexamine my posture and orientation in intercultural and interreligious settings.

These two pictures are also biblical images. Jesus knew the honorifics required of a guest. Fellowship around a table became a favorite image for the kingdom he preached.⁵¹ This simple picture of hospitality is reshaping our models of interreligious encounter.⁵²

And didn't Jesus convey his message as he journeyed with men? That pilgrim manner, that "journeying with," seemed to disarm any power differential. The more recent coining of the term "alongsider" carries the same meaning—the same manner.

What's vital to realize is that it was a Syrian who helped me reimagine. His models in life were Arab and Muslim; he was so conversant with that social, commercial and intellectual world. He found it easy to grab any of the symbols and events of Muslim life and use them for the gospel. At the celebration of my daughter's birth, he brought a special brother in Christ to our mountain town to "chant" the stories of Jesus in the eloquent rhythm of the Qur'anic suras. Unprecedented. Unpredictable. He was so responsive to the Spirit in the moment, and so

willing to follow his spiritual gift of discernment. For me he created that "disruptive space." He exposed my deeper structure of ministry and forced me to reimagine many of the ways I have shared throughout this paper.

We need to invest a whole new level of trust in these voices from across the frontier. Our missiological imagination depends on it. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ On the nature of maps and reality see <https://fs.blog/2015/11/map-and-territory/>.

² Paul Friedrich, "Poetic language and the Imagination," in *Language, Context and the Imagination: Essays by Paul Friedrich* (Stanford University Press, 1979), 446.

³ Friedrich, "Poetic language and the Imagination," 447.

⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

⁵ Friedrich, "Poetic language and the Imagination," 441. The full quotation of William Wordsworth is, "Language is not the dress but the incarnation of thought."

⁶ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission* (IVP Books, 2015), 111.

⁷ Ann Marie Kool explores how certain images have shaped missiological perception in *The Atlas of Christianity*. See her article, "Revisiting Mission in, to and from Europe Through Contemporary Image Formation," in *The State of Missiology Today*, ed. Charles E. Van Engen (IVP Academic, 2016).

⁸ I will discuss Alan Roxburgh's concept of "default metaphors" or models later in the article. See Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 106–108.

⁹ Psalms 61:4; 91:1; and 31:20.

¹⁰ Minear's catalogue of New Testament images for the church does not include "shelter." See Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1960).

¹¹ A panel discussion at Duke Divinity School where Richard Hayes introduces his concept of scriptural imagination: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTOVoWbRc0A>.

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975).

¹³ I appreciate Paul Pennington reminding me of the way each of the New Testament authors “foregrounds” different images and metaphors.

¹⁴ In his first chapter, Minear discusses his method and approach and deals with how certain images are given more ontological weight, see Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, 11ff.

¹⁵ Dom Gregory Dix, *Jew and Greek: A Study in the Primitive Church* (Dacre Press: Westminster, 1953) 76–81.

¹⁶ Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Beacon Press: Boston, reprint 2103).

¹⁷ The missiologists Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Kwame Bediako were prolific on general mission theory and mission historiography, but especially advanced the theory and impact of bible translation in Africa.

¹⁸ John G. Flett, *Apostolicity* (IVP Academic, 2016), 172.

¹⁹ Flett, *Apostolicity*, 173ff.

²⁰ Flett, *Apostolicity*, 170.

²¹ Henning Wrogemann has recently published a thorough overview of interreligious dynamics in *A Theology of Interreligious Relations: Intercultural Theology*, Vol. 3 (IVP Academic, 2019). See especially pages in Part Three where he addresses identity, inclusion/exclusion, recognition, and the dynamics of pluralist societies, 227–303.

²² Wrogemann, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations*, 241–242. He uses this term “collective-we” in the formation of group identity and cohesion, especially as they ascribe to themselves distinctives over and against “the other.”

²³ There were major deliberations over this term “socio-religious” when it surfaced between 2010 and 2016 at meetings between representatives of those who minister among Muslims. It appears to be far more acceptable today among evangelicals.

²⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Univ. of Chicago, 1968).

²⁵ Daryush Shayagan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (Saqi Books, 1992); Akeel Bilgrami, ed., *Beyond the Secular West* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

²⁶ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 103–116.

²⁷ Wrogemann, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations*, 21–26. He takes the analytical step of moving beyond a theology of religion (or a theology of interreligious

relations) to develop a theory of interreligious relations.

²⁸ Martin Accad, *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching Across the Christian-Muslim Divide* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2019).

²⁹ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (IVP Academic, 2014).

³⁰ Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 26.

³¹ Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 29.

³² Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, 21–22.

³³ Dix, *Jew and Greek*, 80.

³⁴ Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 42.

³⁵ Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 162.

³⁶ Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 42–45, 76–78.

³⁷ Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 43.

³⁸ Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 43.

³⁹ Chan suggests that ancestral veneration prompts the global church to reexamine its own creedal affirmation, the “communion of the saints,” and discern our solidarity with those beyond death, 188–201.

⁴⁰ Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (IVP Academic, 2017).

⁴¹ Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 106.

⁴² Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 107.

⁴³ Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 108.

⁴⁴ John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

⁴⁵ Pascal D. Bazzell, “Who is Our Cornelius?” in *The State of Missiology Today*, ed., Charles Van Engen (IVP Academic, 2016), 111.

⁴⁶ Scott W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 260.

⁴⁷ Wrogemann’s meta-theory of interreligious relations is trying to face the ongoing process of pluralization, that religious movements are less homogenous than they were in the past, and that everyday life tends to have very different modes of religious life.

⁴⁸ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

⁴⁹ Colin Yuckman, “Mission and the Book of Acts in a Pluralist Society,” *Missiology*, 47, no. 2, April 2019.

⁵⁰ Paul-Gordon Chandler tells this story of my friend Mazhar Mallouhi in, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths* (Cowley Publications, 2007).

⁵¹ Antonia Pernia points out that “the primary image Jesus used for the kingdom was table fellowship, the subject of many of

his parables and the object of many meals he shared with outcasts and sinners.” Bazzell, “Who is Our Cornelius?” 118.

⁵² Amos Yong, “The Spirit of Hospitality: Pentecostal Perspectives toward a Performative Theology of Interreligious Encounter,” in *The Missiological Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 77–95.

Nurturing Vitality through Appropriate Structure: A Challenge for Ecclesial Movements

by Richard and Evelyn Hibbert

An emerging challenge for believers who work cross-culturally is facilitating the growth of rapidly multiplying movements towards Jesus. Whether these Jesus movements are “church planting movements” (CPMs), or those characterized either as “disciple making movements” (DMMs) or “incarnational movements,” the need is to help local believers find structures that will continue to nurture the essential nature of *ecclesia* in their context. Movements are often hindered when an appropriate structure is not found. Among many people groups around the world, “. . . the very reason for devastatingly slow church growth is that the church has been locked into cultural structures which inhibit and cripple church growth.”¹

As they grow, gospel movements need to develop structure that supports and sustains their health and growth. David Garrison explains that all church planting movements “have some kind of organization.”² Steve Addison adds: “The most dynamic and effective movements live in the tension between the chaos and creativity of spiritual enthusiasm and the stability provided by effective strategies and structures.”³ But in the very process of becoming more organized, movements can lose the vitality that once characterized them. The challenge is to develop structure that nurtures rather than stifles spiritual vitality, health and growth.

Many excellent publications help cross-cultural workers to plant fellowships that can multiply. Most of these emphasize the early phase of movements, in which keeping everything as simple and reproducible as possible is a top priority. This avoids dependency on foreign resources and empowers local believers to take responsibility for reaching their own people and leading their own ecclesial movement.⁴

In contrast, not nearly as much has been written about what facilitators of these initial beginnings of church planting should do about nurturing appropriate structure. Cross-cultural agents of the gospel have an undeniable influence on the DNA of newly planted fellowships, which includes the structures

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they adopt. Eventually, in the development of a movement, when new gatherings of believers form associations and work together on projects such as training workers and respond to contextual issues of theology and practice, the cross-cultural missionary is often asked for input on the development of structure to support these initiatives.⁵

This article addresses this gap by exploring how cross-cultural workers and alongsiders can help new church movements develop structure that supports and nurtures spiritual vitality. To do this, we examine insights on the institutionalization of movements, reflect on the relationship between vitality and structure in the light of the Bible and models of ecclesia, and draw out implications for missions practice.

The Life Cycle of Ecclesial Movements

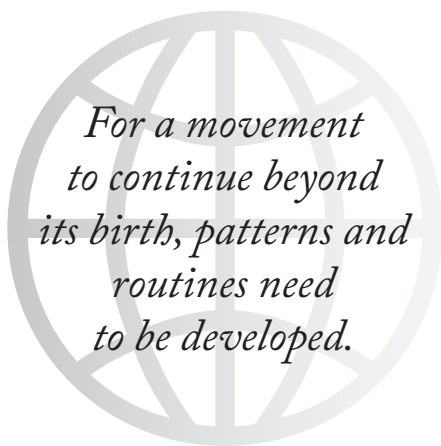
The process by which religious movements (which includes churches and Jesus movements) develop their structure and become organized has been extensively researched. In this article, we draw on some of this literature to recommend insights that can help church planters facilitate, rather than stifle, the development of a structure that nurtures the life of these fellowships.

Organizational researchers have described an organization's history in terms of a life cycle that has identifiable stages of development.⁶ David Moberg has drawn on this cycle to trace the stages through which a church or association of churches typically passes. The first three of these are:

1. Birth, characterized by spontaneity, vision, and often a strong, charismatic leader
2. Growth, characterized by the formulation of beliefs and goals, with codes of behavior
3. Maturity, in which formal structure develops and rapid growth often continues⁷

The early church's development throughout the entire book of Acts reflects these stages. Founded by Jesus, its early development was a spontaneous response to his and the Holy Spirit's direction. Yet even Jesus' pattern of making disciples suggests that he made some use of organizational structure in his choosing twelve disciples, in establishing an inner circle of Peter, James, and John, and with the wider group of seventy-two. This suggests that there was some kind of organizational structure to his plan for training and empowering his disciples to plant and nurture a church movement.

As the fellowship of believers grew and multiplied, under the continuing



leading of the Holy Spirit, it developed patterns for doing things, such as patterns for recognizing leaders and convening church gatherings. The apostle Paul had a key role to play in this development of structure. Examples include his listing of qualifications for someone to be an elder and a deacon (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1), and his instructions on how to order meetings in a "fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:40, cf. 11:17–34; 14:26–40). This kind of organization was essential to the flourishing of the Christian movement.

Paul's major success was not to have founded so many congregations, but to have successfully imposed his model of effective organization upon them....⁸

After birth, growth, and maturity, there are two subsequent stages of the life cycle in many—maybe even most—gospel movements:

4. Decline, or the "institutional stage," in which formalism saps the group's vitality. Leadership becomes dominantly bureaucratic. Organized worship becomes a ritualistic empty formality to most members. The institution "has become the master of its members instead of their servant. . . ."⁹
5. Disintegration, which often evidences formalism, irrelevance, absolutism, red tape, patronage, and corruption

The Dilemmas of Institutionalization

Institutionalization is the process by which people embody their response to God in certain patterns, forms, and structures. In order for a movement to continue beyond its birth by visionary, charismatic leadership, patterns and routines need to be developed for a stable community of disciples. Max Weber named this phase of the institutional process the "routinization of charisma."¹⁰ He observed that movements that fail to achieve routinization tend to fail. Mission anthropologist Paul Hiebert noted that institutionalization is necessary because it creates routines and clarifies processes for how things get done. This reduces the decision making and redundancy of effort necessary for the group to function. Institutions make the group more stable and able to continue functioning despite constant changes of personnel.¹¹ Religious studies scholar Ninian Smart concluded that every movement needs some kind of organization in order to perpetuate itself and embed itself in society.¹²

Despite a structure of some kind being necessary, three key dilemmas plague the process of church movements becoming more organized:¹³

1. The essential translation of Christian meanings into concrete forms

can distort the gospel. The implications of the gospel do need to be spelled out in terms of practical, concrete actions in daily life and in worship. But this translation of the implications of the gospel in each local setting contains the danger of reducing it to a set of rules, which is a substitution of the letter for the spirit (cf. Rom. 7:6). Forms of worship can also become standardized and rigid,

not immediately derivative of individual needs, but rather an objective reality imposing its own patterns upon the participants.¹⁴

Symbolic elements in worship, which once were relevant and real expressions of individual response, become irrelevant to the participants. They create more of a barrier to worship than a structured pathway which facilitates worship. O'Dea captures the heart of this dilemma when he states:

To symbolize the transcendent is to take the inevitable risk of losing contact with it. To embody the sacred in a vehicle is to run the risk of its secularization.¹⁵

2. Administrative structures can become over-complicated. As new problems are faced and new precedents established to cope with them, an elaborate system of rules and regulations can develop. This can too easily lead to a shift of focus from implementing values and goals to maintaining structure for its own sake.¹⁶ Mixed motivations among leaders make this dilemma even more difficult to resolve, as existing leaders may interpret organizational reform as a threat to their status and security.
3. Leadership can distance itself from the rest of the church. In the early stages of a church's birth and growth, leaders and people function together and "you couldn't tell one from the other. They worked together, thought together, prayed

Any of these models, taken in isolation, will lead groups to a serious distortion of what *ecclesia* is designed to be.

together. . . ."¹⁷ All too often, though, as a movement develops and leadership is formalized, the leadership team and the congregation begin to pull further and further away from each other. In the early stages the priesthood of all believers is emphasized, but as spiritual hierarchies develop, they can stifle growth through control.¹⁸

Church movements need to find ways to overcome each of these dilemmas by finding workable compromises between spontaneity and structure. These Jesus movements need a balance of creativity on one hand and stability on the other if there is to be continued growth. The question for fellowships (new and old) is "not whether they can survive without institutional structures, but whether they can develop structures that do not convert themselves from means unto ends."¹⁹

The Role of Structure in Theological Perspective

Howard Snyder's comment that a degree of institutionalization is "inevitable and even desirable in the Church" is representative of most Christian authors.²⁰ The theological roots of this consensus are explored in this section.²¹

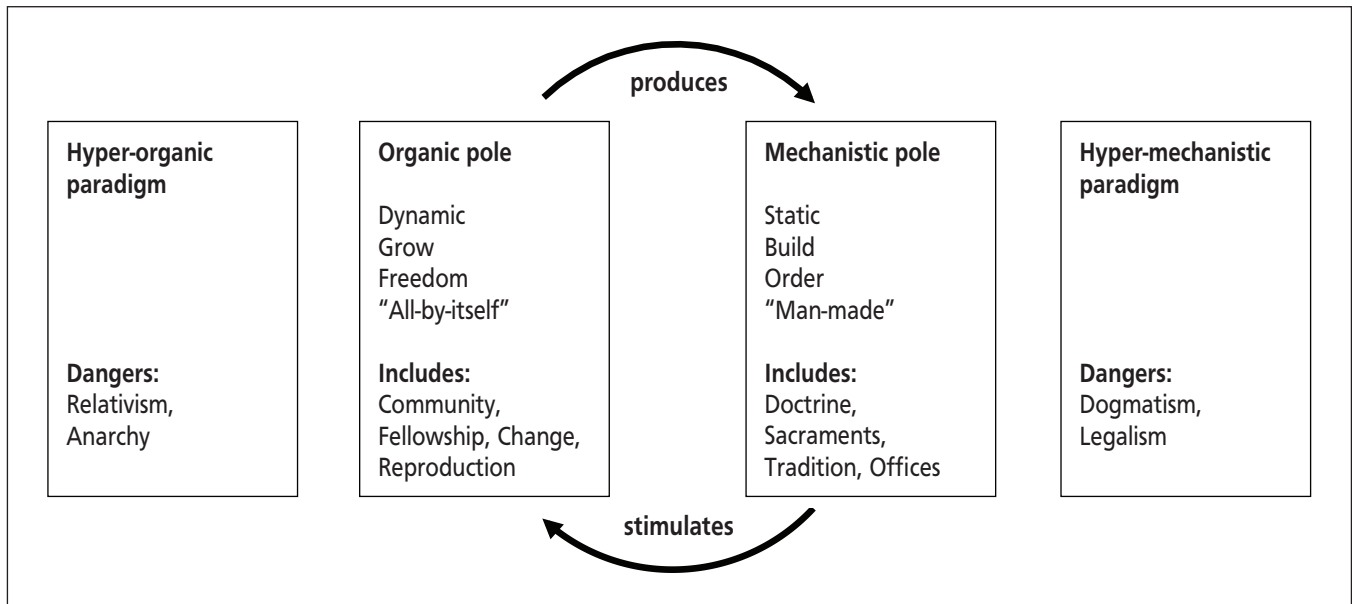
An influential concept that illuminates the role of structure is theologian Avery Dulles's understanding of the church in terms of five models or extended metaphors: the church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, and as servant. Each of these models is based on a sub-group of the more than one hundred New Testament images of fellowships, gatherings, or assemblies of believers—the *ecclesia*. Dulles convincingly argues that any of these models, taken in isolation, will lead groups to a serious distortion of what *ecclesia*

is designed to be. But understood as a united whole they give a full-orbed appreciation of the church.²²

The institutional model, if adopted in isolation from the other models, will lead to churches being rigid, doctrinaire, and conformist. Institutional elements of the church are not ends in themselves, but means to helping the church to be the community of disciples that expresses Christ to the world in word, sign, and deed.²³ The church's focal point of reference is not structure but a set of relationships—relationship with God, with other disciples, and with other people.²⁴ The primary dynamic in its growth is not structure, but the presence and power of God dwelling among His people. It is God himself who causes the "seed" to grow (1 Cor. 3:5–7). This means that structures and institutional facets that develop in ecclesial life must remain servants rather than masters. They are instruments that serve the purpose of nurturing the life of these fellowships. Since this life flows from encountering and relating to Christ as Head of the Body, of loving one another and expressing Christ to the world, structures must serve this central dynamic.

Christian Schwartz explains the relationship between structure and life in the church.²⁵ He identifies two poles—the organic pole, which sees the church as a living organism, and the mechanistic pole, which sees the church as a structure. The organic pole is reflected in images such as "God's field" (1 Cor. 3:9) and the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27), while the mechanistic pole is reflected in images such as "God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9) and "God's household" (1 Tim. 3:15). Schwartz explains that the organic pole produces the mechanistic pole, which in turn stimulates the organic

Figure 1. *The Bipolar Concept of the Church* (Adapted from Schwartz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, pp. 85, 95)



pole. Churches in which this dynamic interdependence is preserved are typically healthy and growing, according to Schwartz.²⁶ This is illustrated in the diagram in figure 1, above.

Treating either pole as if it was the only one leads to hyper-mechanistic or hyper-organic forms of church which is unbalanced and unhealthy. Over-emphasizing the technical or institutional aspect of the church leads people to think that if only they can get the structures right, then the church will automatically be healthy.

The New Testament provides a clear picture of the essence of ecclesia in the form of several basic principles which can guide the formation of structure. These principles are few and simple and leave a lot of room for culturally shaped expression and innovation. They revolve around:

1. Believers meet together regularly to learn from the Scriptures, to encourage each other to live for Christ, to eat and share in the Lord's Supper together, and to pray (Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:25).
2. Gatherings are participatory and every member has the freedom and responsibility to use their

God-given gifts to strengthen the community of believers (1 Cor. 14:26; Rom. 12: 6-8; 1 Peter 2:9).

3. Leaders are good examples of godly character who have a good reputation, who care for and about the people they serve, and who clearly communicate the gospel and God's vision for the church (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Matt. 28:19; John 20:21).
4. People wanting to join the church are baptized (Acts 2:38).²⁷

Howard Snyder helpfully compares the essence of the church with its structures in a way that highlights the temporary, expendable, and secondary function of structure and contrasts them with the essential aspects of the church. This is shown in the table below.²⁸

Facilitating the Development of Structure that Nurtures Life

Structure affects many things in fellowships including how things are done when the group meets together, how decisions are made, how leaders are chosen and how they lead, how resources are distributed, how much room there is for everyone to participate, and how the church relates to other churches locally and internationally. People who start fellowships of believers commonly either downplay the importance of structure on the assumption that it will evolve naturally, or intentionally impose structures from their own background that they think are best. Those who think that structure is unimportant often fail to see that they are still imposing a structure by default or are uncritically

Table 1. *Comparison Between the Essence and Structures of the Church*

<i>Essence of the Church</i>	<i>Structures of the Church</i>
God's creation	Humans' creation
Cross-culturally valid	Culturally bound
Essential	Expendable
Eternal	Temporal and temporary
Given by divine revelation	Shaped by human tradition

allowing a structure to develop which may not nurture life.

Facilitating the development of structure that nurtures life and growth can require a shift of mindset. This shift can be understood in terms of a vine and a trellis.²⁹ The trellis is the structure up which the living vine grows. The structure is needed, but only to the extent that it supports the vine and its growth. To facilitate the development of a trellis for emerging churches in another culture in a way that best supports their life and growth, we need to keep our focus on the purpose of the trellis—the growth of the living body of Christ in the context in which we serve—rather than on the details of the trellis itself. This means instilling flexibility into the way structures are thought about, focusing on relationships, developing culturally meaningful structures and forms, and periodically reviewing structures.

Model and Teach Flexibility and Creativity concerning Forms

The flexibility that entertains alternative ways of doing things, and the understanding that no believer or fellowship is already perfect, characterizes healthy ecclesial life. In their teaching and example, both the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul focused on helping people grow in dependence on God while retaining flexibility concerning forms. For example, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that true worshippers are not bound to worship in any particular place, but instead worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21–24). Paul insisted that believers have been set free from having to follow rules and regulations of the Old Covenant in order that they can follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in every part of their lives—the Spirit who gives freedom (2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13–25). This kind of freedom gives room to explore new ways of discovering, communicating, and responding to truth about God.

A key emphasis in missionary anthropology has been to allow this flexibility of

For genuine Christian community to thrive, space must be left for “an element of serendipity that cannot be planned or programmed.”

forms while holding firmly to the gospel. Alan Tippett wrote that church planters,

while maintaining a fixed faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, and the Bible as norm for faith and practice, will need to be the most flexible with respect to the forms in which or through which the faith is practiced and transmitted.³⁰

Charles Kraft advances the need for “dynamic equivalence,” meaning that forms believers adopt and make use of in response to Christ “should carry, as close as possible, the same meanings as the ideals presented in the Scriptures.”³¹ Dynamically equivalent, or contextualized forms, will speak most powerfully and clearly not only to members of a local fellowship but also to their families, friends and neighbors.

If the first people disciplined in a movement see cross-cultural workers and local leaders modeling and teaching a creative openness to the Holy Spirit and flexibility in ways of responding to God, they will be more likely to model this to others. However, modeling flexibility and creativity concerning forms can be difficult for missionaries. “As creatures of habit, we struggle to dream outside of the box and the structure of our own experiences.”³² One way for cross-cultural workers to develop more flexibility and creativity is to explore the images, symbols, stories, poetry, metaphors, visual arts, dancing, and music of the local culture and to discuss with local believers how some of them might be employed in worship, discipling, and evangelism.

Focus on “Adaptive” Forms that Nurture Relationships

Structures or forms are meant to serve the functions of the ecclesia described in Acts 2:42–47: teaching, fellowship, worship, evangelism, and service. Each of these functions has the overarching

purpose of nurturing relationship with God, relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, and relationship with people who don’t yet know Christ.³³ “Relationship should be the point of reference out of which structure flows.”³⁴ Structures that facilitate relationship with God, fellow believers, and others are helpful. Those that don’t are not.

Structures that serve the vital functions of ecclesial life (rather than being ends in themselves) are “adaptive” in that they enable a movement to function in ways that can adapt to a changing environment and ways that help it expand into new fields.³⁵ This means that while structures and programs are important, for genuine Christian community to thrive, space must be left for “an element of serendipity that cannot be planned or programmed.”³⁶

To foster a growing relationship with God and with other believers requires us to hold structure in creative tension with the freedom and spontaneity that are inherent in these relationships. Nevertheless, our focus should be on the relationships themselves. In the same way, cross-cultural facilitators who initiate fellowships of believers and the growing movements to Jesus that result, should do all they can to encourage and support leaders who are deeply relational and who empower others to live for Christ and advance God’s kingdom. These kinds of leaders can be recognized by their investment in the lives of fellow believers. Structures should be kept flexible enough to provide enough space within them for people to relate spontaneously and grow in their relationships with Christ, with each other and with those who do not yet know Jesus.

Small groups are an example of a broad type of structure that facilitates relationships between believers in

every culture. They, along with larger meetings, were a feature of the fellowships throughout the New Testament (Acts 2:46; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15). They facilitate each believer being able to use his or her gifts to strengthen others (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:16). Howard Snyder observed that

the use of small groups of one kind or another seems to be a common element in all significant movements of the Holy Spirit throughout church history.³⁷

Various kinds of small groups will have different foci—Bible study, prayer, fellowship, etc.—and some will be house churches in their own right. Each kind of small group facilitates relationships among believers but how the group is conducted can vary greatly from context to context. In addition, members are encouraged through them to learn, grow, worship, and witness together in a participatory way.

Encourage Believers to Use Forms that Are Most Helpful and Meaningful to Them

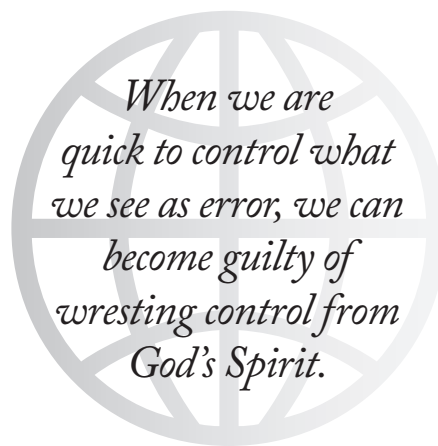
New groups of believers need to be able to express their new faith in ways that express biblical meanings, and their life together must function in forms that are helpful and meaningful for them. For this to happen, cross-cultural facilitators need to firmly resist imposing their own forms of faith and worship on disciples, realizing that they cannot know in advance how social gatherings in another culture should organize themselves. Jean Johnson puts it this way:

We need the wisdom, patience, and self-control to encourage our host cultures to implement their own culturally relevant forms to fulfill the functions of the church of Jesus Christ.³⁸

The following examples in Hindu and Islamic contexts illustrate the need to find meaningful forms and the role that cross-cultural workers and church leaders can play in this process.

1. A number of expatriate Christian workers are working with Hindu

background believers and their leaders to help them find and use contextualized forms for worship. New Indian believers who have struggled for many years, feeling unable to join established churches because they are culturally too foreign to them, have begun forming or joining a *Yeshu Satsang* or “truth gathering,” in which participants sit on the floor, sing devotional songs in a traditional Hindu style, and listen to a devotional talk given in a traditional Indian form. These contextualized practices have helped the believers to achieve a settled sense of identity as followers of Jesus.³⁹



2. Mamado is a Fulani believer who came to Christ from a Muslim background in West Africa. When he came to faith there was no gathered group of Muslim background believers, so he joined the local church comprised of people from other ethnic groups who were previously animists. These believers loved to worship God with loud singing, dancing, and clapping. Mamado felt extremely uncomfortable worshiping in this way. In the two years he was a part of this church he never got used to it. Mamado preferred quiet, reverent prayer and postures for worship such as kneeling, bowing, and

prostration that he was familiar with from Islam. After lots of conversations with his pastor, and the pastor’s eventual blessing, he formed a new gathering for Muslim Fulani who were coming to faith in Christ. This group uses many forms that they had grown up with and helped them worship God and feel at home in their new faith. These included sitting on the floor for Bible study, praying using ritual movements, and chanting prayers and Scriptures. The pastor’s encouragement of Mamado to start this new gathering and use different forms than he was familiar with was vital to this gospel breakthrough.⁴⁰

If we find ourselves reacting negatively to indigenous forms and structures, we should do everything we can to exercise restraint. It may help to reflect on the negative consequences of putting out the Holy Spirit’s fire (1 Thess. 5:19). When we are quick to control what we see as error according to our own conception of order, we can become guilty of wresting control from God’s Spirit, as well as from disciples.

Encourage Periodic Re-evaluation of Structures

As new fellowships emerge, and as movements develop, they nearly always become more complex. Heavy and complex structure is not as effective at promoting a movement’s life and growth as simple, lightweight structure.⁴¹ Some structures that brought initial success lose their relevance, meaningfulness, or helpfulness in changing circumstances. Alternatively, they become “formalized in inflexible and complex policies and procedures.”⁴²

Cross-cultural facilitators of discipling and Jesus movements therefore do well to encourage local leaders to periodically evaluate the relevance and helpfulness of their movement’s structures. E. Stanley Jones wrote that all institutions “need constant review, perpetual criticism, a continuous

bringing back to original purposes and spirit.”⁴³ Monitoring structures for relevance is particularly important because we all face

the pervasive human temptation to canonize as essential patterns of relationship patterns that evolved to meet the needs of one era [or culture] but no longer respond to the needs of the present era [or culture].⁴⁴

The evaluation process can be guided by questions such as:

- How congruent are the structures with the vision and values of our fellowship of believers? (Authenticity)
- How relevant and meaningful are the structures for the local people? (Relevance)
- How well do these structures nurture relationship with God and one another? (Functionality)
- How flexible and open to change in response to the input of church members are the structures? (Flexibility).⁴⁵

Some structures may have reached the extent of their use—they're dated—and become an impediment to growth. These should be discarded or replaced with more meaningful forms. This process of evaluating whether what the church has been doing is contributing to heaviness or nurturing life and growth takes discipline and courage.

As cross-cultural workers and emerging national leaders seek relevant patterns for worship, discipling, fellowship, and ministry, they must resist communicating that forms adopted by the first groups of fellowships are set in concrete. Instead, structures and forms should be understood as flexible and as an arena in which experimentation is encouraged, and creative new ways of listening to and responding to God are tried out. Translation of the faith and ecclesial life into concrete contextualized structures is essential for meaning to be communicated, but this process must have an inbuilt ongoing flexibility which allows continuing modification and experimentation. Only by retaining

All institutions “need constant review, perpetual criticism, a continuous bringing back to original purposes and spirit.” —E. Stanley Jones

such flexibility can worship and ministry forms be reshaped so that they can retain meaningfulness and continue to resonate with the people as their corporate life develops.

Conclusion

Every living thing, including ecclesial life, needs structure for its survival and growth. It is an inescapable reality that movements need to develop some aspects of institutions as they develop. But overly structured groups of fellowships tend to stagnate, and dysfunctional structures damage the health and vitality of movements and lead to their eventual death. Disciple-making movements, Jesus movements, and CPMs are most likely to keep growing in size and depth if life-nurturing structures are found. Church planters and the initial leaders who emerge in a movement have a key role in influencing the development of these structures.

In order to avoid the negative aspects of institutionalization while retaining the benefits of organization, cross-cultural workers who are working to facilitate the development of dynamic, growing, contextualized movements to Jesus need to model and teach a flexible attitude to structure that understands structures as serving biblical values and meanings—especially the development of relationship with God, fellow believers, and the world. Most helpful to the health and growth of local fellowships are structures that are simple enough to allow maximum freedom for spontaneity and creativity in worship, discipling, fellowship, and witness, and that also clearly express biblical principles in meaningful ways. Those in cross-cultural mission would do well to encourage the emerging church movement and their leaders to discover and use simple forms,

especially indigenous forms, and to periodically evaluate structures for their relevance, meaningfulness, and usefulness for worship, fellowship, growth and mission. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ John R. Davis, *Poles Apart: Contextualizing the Gospel in Asia* (Bangalore: Bangalore Book Trust, 1998), 245.

² David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 260.

³ Steve Addison, *Movements that Change the World* (Smyrna, DE: Missional Press, 2009), 107–108.

⁴ An excellent recent example of this genre of practical help for church planters is Jean Johnson, *We are Not the Hero: A Missionary's Guide for Sharing Christ, Not a Culture of Dependency* (Sisters, OR: Deep River Books, 2012).

⁵ Four phases of gospel movements and the varying roles of missionaries in each phase are analysed in Craig Ott, “Movement Maturity and Missionary Participation,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2018): 8–12.

⁶ The classic work on this is Mason Haire, “Biological Models and Empirical History of the Growth of Organizations,” in *Modern Organizational Theory*, ed. Mason Haire (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1959), 272–306.

⁷ David O. Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution: The Sociology of American Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 118–124.

⁸ Rodney Stark, “How New Religious Movements Succeed: A Theoretical Model,” in *The Future of New Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromiley and Phillip E. Hammond (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 17.

⁹ Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution*, 121.

¹⁰ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1947), 363.

¹¹ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 163.

¹² Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Cross-cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 8.

¹³ Five dilemmas inherent in the process of institutionalization are described in this seminal article: Thomas F. O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1, no. 1 (1961): 30–39.

¹⁴ O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas," 34.

¹⁵ O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas," 35.

¹⁶ Oliver R. Whitley, *Religious Behavior: Where Sociology and Religion Meet* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 53, 55.

¹⁷ Linda Cannell, "Naming the Issues," Notes from session 1, "The Unnecessary Leader: Leadership for the Whole People of God," 2000 Leadership Conference (Regent College, May 19–20, 2000), 7.

¹⁸ Bryan R. Wilson, "The New Religions: Preliminary Considerations," in *New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society*, ed. Eileen Barker (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 18–19.

¹⁹ Andrew Greeley, "Sociology and Church Structure," in *Structures of the Church*, ed. J. Teodoro Urresti (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 26.

²⁰ Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1977), 63.

²¹ An alternative viewpoint, held by a very small minority, must also be mentioned. Rudolph Sohm believed that the church was not and should in no sense be an institution, that the spontaneity of Christians responding to the Spirit creates order, and that formal authority is unnecessary and unhelpful. He felt that it was only the unbelief of people which led to God's gifts of grace being declined, and the consequent need for organization. In his view, it is wrong for the church ever to be an institution in any way. This is explained by Oliver Whitley in Whitley, *Religious Behavior*, 49–50.

²² Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Bantam, 2000), 194–195.

²³ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 206.

²⁴ Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 111.

²⁵ Christian A. Schwartz, *Natural Church Development Handbook: A Practical Guide to a New Approach* (Moggerhanger, UK: British Church Growth Association, 1996), 83–99.

²⁶ Schwartz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, 85.

²⁷ This is not an exhaustive list. For example, L. D. Waterman, "What is Church? From Surveying in Scripture to Applying in Culture," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2011): 464, adds church discipline to the four principles listed here. A helpful and fuller list of biblical principles of the essence of church forms the backbone of Brian Woodford, "One Church, Many Churches: A Five-Model Approach to Church Planting and Evaluation," PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1997.

²⁸ Howard Snyder, *The Problem of the Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975), 162.

²⁹ The image of the trellis and the vine is drawn from Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything* (Sydney, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013).

³⁰ Alan R. Tippett, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973), 175.

³¹ Charles Kraft, *Issues in Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016), loc. 829, Kindle.

³² Johnson, *We are Not the Hero*, 235.

³³ That structure is meant to express relationship is a key point made in Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 65.

³⁴ Tom Julien, "The Essence of Church," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1998): 150.

³⁵ Addison, *Movements that Change the World*, 110.

³⁶ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 212.

³⁷ Snyder, *The Problem of the Wineskins*, 139–140.

³⁸ Johnson, *We are Not the Hero*, 237.

³⁹ This brief case study is drawn from descriptions given in Herbert E. Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001); J. A. Jorgensen, "Jesus Imendars and Christ Bhaktas: Report from Two Field Studies of Interreligious Hermeneutics and Identity in Globalized Christianity," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33, no. 4 (2009): 171–176; Darren Duerksen, "Ecclesial Identities of Socio-Religious Insiders: A Case Study of Fellowships among Hindu and Sikh Communities" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 2 (2013): 86–89.

⁴⁰ Mamado is a pseudonym to protect this brother's identity. This information

came from a conversation between Mamado and Richard in West Africa in 2004.

⁴¹ Roy Moran, *Spent Matches: Igniting the Signal Fire for the Spiritually Dissatisfied* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 61.

⁴² Addison, *Movements that Change the World*, 111.

⁴³ E. Stanley Jones, *The Reconstruction of the Church—On What Pattern?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1970), 8.

⁴⁴ Greeley, "Sociology and Church Structure," 27.

⁴⁵ Thomas M. Lodahl and Stephen M. Mitchell. "Drift in the Development of Innovative Organizations," in *The Organizational Life Cycle: Issues in the Creation, Transformation, and Decline of Organizations*, eds. John R. Kimberley, Robert H. Miles, and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), 187–8, 203

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God as Patron and Proprietor: God the Father and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context

by Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery

“What do you Christians mean when you call God, ‘Father’?”

My friend, a respected Muslim imam, posed this question during a conversation at my (Alan’s) house. We had covered a wide variety of topics that day, mostly centered around what it meant to follow Jesus as teacher.¹ So it seemed natural for him to then ask what it meant for Jesus to call God “Father,” and, more importantly for him, what it meant for me as a follower of Jesus to use that same title for God.

Instead of beginning my response with a defense of Trinitarian doctrine, I used a relevant example from our context in northern Mozambique. To talk about what it means for God to be our Father, we talked about what it means for God to be our Patron. I told my friend, the imam, the story of a young man I’ve been discipling for many years now. His biological father, a good friend as well, had passed away. Since then, my wife and I have been his patrons, helping with his living expenses. As patrons, we also became his brokers to find scholarship donors so he could complete secondary school and begin his studies at a Mozambican university. One day, this young man introduced me to some friends as his “father.” While certainly not his biological parent, he used kinship language to describe my role as his patron in a way that honored me in front of others. The imam began nodding his head as I finished my story noting that the Creator God is certainly the best Patron of all. He observed that since using kinship language to refer to a human patron is honorable, it would not be a shameful way to speak of God, the divine patron.

In my experience, this line of thinking has been a simple and surprisingly appropriate way to defuse Islamic sensibilities about preconceived misconceptions of what it means for God to be Jesus’ father. It mitigates the way the Trinity has been a significant obstacle to inter-religious dialogue. Makua-Metto culture includes structures and expectations of a Patron-Client system, and it is natural to explore this social arrangement and its accompanying elements of honor and shame² in addressing theological questions.

Alan B. Howell, his wife Rachel, and their three daughters resided in Mozambique from 2003 to 2018 as part of a team working among the Makua-Metto people. Alan (M.Div.) is currently serving as the Visiting Professor of Missions at Harding University.

Robert Andrew Montgomery served in an internship with the Makua-Metto team in Mozambique in 2017. He now lives in Memphis, TN and attends Harding School of Theology, pursuing an M.Div. degree.

While Patron-Client dynamics may seem strange to Westerners,

knowledge of the social codes of patronage and reciprocity...[are] of great value to our appreciation of early Christian theology.³

Malina notes that,

the theme of God as Patron is heavily and explicitly underscored in Matthew. More than 70 percent of his sixty-four uses of the word "father" refer to the God of Israel. Since "father" here does not mean "father" in any actual first-century, Mediterranean social sense...the closest translation into contemporary English, mirroring first-century Mediterranean behavior, is "patron."⁴

Jesus, in calling God "Father," applied

kinship terminology to the God of Israel, the central and focal symbol of Israel's traditional political religion. This sort of "kin-ification" is typically patron-client behavior. God, the "Father," is nothing less than God the Patron.⁵

Certainly, the inverse of that is true as well: God is more than merely God the Patron. Since characteristics of the Patron-Client system are shared by the cultures of the New Testament and the Makua-Metto people of Mozambique, it should come as no surprise that this approach could be helpful in forming a theology among an African folk Islamic people group. This article begins with an exploration of how the Gospel of Matthew uses parentage, patronage and proprietorship terms and images to understand God. Then we will explore how presenting God as Patron and Proprietor resonates well among the Makua-Metto people and has the potential to be a fruitful way of talking about God the Father.

Parentage, Patronage and Proprietorship in the Gospel of Matthew

The patron-client system is crucial for understanding the world of the New Testament, since

it was within this world that Jesus' message took shape and throughout

this world that the good news of God's favor was proclaimed.⁶

In the first century, personal patronage was the standard way of acquiring goods, protection, and advancement; the patron would offer these things to his client in return for honor.⁷ "Not only was it essential—it was expected and publicized!"⁸ A major gap between the wealthy and peasant classes in first century Palestine existed. Limited access to goods and an honor-shame worldview were key ingredients that led to this type of essential relationship between patrons and clients.⁹

In the language of the New Testament, even common terms, such as χάρις ("charis" meaning "grace"), were



shaped by the patron-client system. Today, grace is primarily a religious word, heard only in churches and Christian circles.

For the actual writers of the New Testament, however, grace was not primarily a religious, as opposed to a secular, word. Rather, it was used to speak of reciprocity among human beings and between mortals and God.¹⁰

In the first century, grace between two people in the patron-client relationship was not something that was freely bestowed by benefactors; rather it was given with the expectation that the client would respond with honor. After receiving an act of grace, the beneficiary would then return grace, initiating a

"circle dance in which the recipients of favor and gifts must 'return the favor.'"¹¹ Likewise, πίστις ("pistis" meaning "faith") is best understood within this relationship. Faith referred to dependability: both the patron and client proved their reliability in upholding their end of the relationship.¹²

Another expression of the way that the patron-client system shaped language was through kin-ification. Through the patron-client relationship, the two people are kin-ified, in which both become "suffuse[d] . . . involved with the aura of kinship, albeit fictive or pseudo-kinship."¹³ Therefore, in calling God "Father," Jesus applied kinship to the God of Israel, and in doing so, established God as the divine patron.¹⁴ Within this understanding of God, the kingdom of heaven, something Jesus widely proclaimed in all four gospels, is now seen as God's patronage. Those that enter into the kingdom, then, enter into the patron-client relationship with the divine patron, God the Father. When Jesus told parables, he opened by saying, "the kingdom of heaven is like . . ." In light of the kingdom as God's patronage, this is understood as "the way God's patronage relates and affects his clients is like . . ."¹⁵ Additionally, as patron over the kingdom of heaven, God is its Lord and Owner, the completely sovereign and authoritative proprietor. This can be particularly seen in the Great Commission, in which Jesus receives all authority in heaven and earth from God to spread the kingdom to all nations (Matt. 28:18–20).

Therefore, as God's clients and recipients of God's grace, the human response is to give honor and worship.¹⁶ Every creature is indebted to God because of the sheer act of creating and sustaining that God continually offers.¹⁷ Those that enter into the kingdom of heaven, then, recognize their debt to God, and in response offer worship and dedicate their lives to that kingdom. As Christians enter

the kingdom, they then become heirs to the kingdom, receiving “adoption as sons,” (Gal. 4:5) and thus are suffused in kinship to God.¹⁸

While not exclusive to the first gospel, Matthew’s use of the patron-client relationship in characterizing God is substantial.¹⁹ As we have already discussed, a major theme throughout Matthew is the proclamation of the “kingdom of heaven,” which, when understood in light of the patron-client relationship, is referring to “God’s patronage and the clientele bound up in it.”²⁰ Jesus makes God’s role in this relationship abundantly clear in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, Jesus promises favor towards the lowly that join his reign, for

blessed are the poor in spirit . . . those who mourn . . . those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.²¹ (Matt. 5:3–10)

In the Lord’s prayer (Matt. 6:5–13), Jesus petitions, “give us this day our daily bread,” which shows his dependence (i.e., faith) on the heavenly patron. And in Matthew 6:25–26, for example, Jesus encourages his followers not to be anxious but to trust in the divine patron’s provision. In promising to always provide for his clients, God is putting his honor at stake by promising to be faithful.

Outside the Sermon on the Mount, we find other examples of patron-client language used to characterize the kingdom of heaven. For example, in Matthew 11:28–29, Jesus promises,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . you will find rest for your souls.

The lowly clients, unable to create their own rest, rely on the heavenly patron. Later, in Matthew 19:27–29, Peter asks what their reward will be for leaving all their own. Jesus responds,

Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed

God the patron shares his power through the broker, Jesus, who uses his influence to put his followers in proper relationship to the patron.

me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Because the disciples chose to enter into the patronage of the kingdom of heaven, they will be lifted up.

A final way Matthew makes use of patron characterization for God is through the use of parables, seen particularly in the parable of the talents. In Matthew 25:14–30, Jesus tells of a master going on a journey. He entrusted his money to three of his servants. Two of the servants honor their master by investing the talents and doubling the patron’s investments. The third servant, however, buries the talent he is given, bringing no honor to the master. To each one that showed him honor, the master says,

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

With this statement, the proprietor (God) invites the client (disciples) to enjoy the full benefits of his patronage. However, the master shames the servant that squandered the talent (and in turn insulted the master), casting him into the darkness, and thus making it abundantly clear that those who choose not to enter the patronage of the kingdom of heaven have rejected the benefits of grace.

In this understanding of God as the divine patron, Jesus plays the role of divine broker. Brokers had a special role in the patron-client system. A social broker’s job was to place patrons and clients in touch with one another.²² Therefore, Jesus

is a broker of the Kingdom of God/heaven, offering to put people in contact with a heavenly patron, who, in turn, is ready to provide first-order resources of a political, religious and economic sort.²³

Two criteria were used to measure a broker’s success: (1) he had a growing social network in which to connect with patrons; and (2) he used the power from his social network as distributors of top-quality resources.²⁴ Matthew shows Jesus meeting both of these goals in 4:23–25:

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.²⁵

Jesus meets these two criteria as many followed him, opting into the kingdom (patronage) of heaven as they were blessed through his many healings, exorcisms, and profound teachings.²⁶ Jesus is viewed as an exceptionally successful broker because he is sought after by so many. Through this perspective, we recognize that God the patron is generous in sharing his power through the broker, or intermediary, Jesus, who in turn uses his social influence to put his followers in proper relationship to the patron.²⁷

As we have shown in this section, understanding the patron-client relationship offers a helpful way of viewing God the Father, the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus. God, the heavenly patron, provides grace and protection for those that enter into the patronage (i.e., becoming a disciple of Christ), promising to uphold his end of the covenant. Jesus, the great broker, connects potential clients with God, extending the invitation

to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' healings prove his authority in offering such extraordinary benefits. As Christians join the patronage of heaven, they are kin-ified with God and treated as sons and daughters of God.

Parentage, Patronage and Proprietorship and the Context of the Makua-Metto

Now we will turn our attention from the Mediterranean world of the New Testament to the Makua-Metto people of Mozambique. While these two expressions of patron-client systems are separated by time and space, in both societies the systems serve to mitigate specific challenges. Malina notes that

patron-client relations are commonly employed to remedy the inadequacies of all institutions, to cushion the vagaries of life for social inferiors,

as seen, for example, in "Third World preindustrial markets" today.²⁸

The patron-client system offers benefits to the poor in these societies, but

as a rule... leadership is concerned with plundering rather than developing, and taxation exists for the benefit of elites and not for the common good.²⁹

While the patron-client system shapes the national (or macro) story of Mozambique,³⁰ it also often outlines the micro (the local and personal) dimension of our ministry context as well. Malina notes that,

In ancient societies (as in most traditional societies) institutionalized relationships between persons of unequal status and resources were highly exploitive in nature. They are based on power, applied vertically as force in harsh and impersonal fashion. Superiors sought to maximize their gains without a thought to the gains of those with whom they interacted.³¹

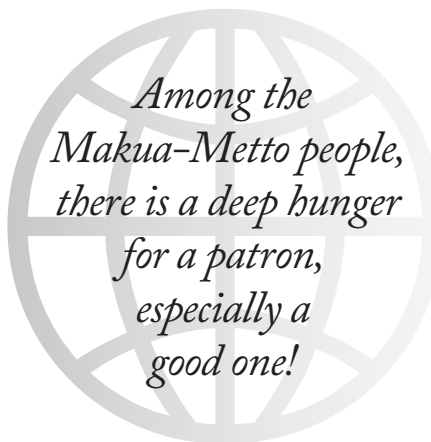
This does not negate the ideal (hope) for this system,

that even though a patron-client relationship connects persons of unequal

status and power, it requires that they treat each other, and especially that the patron treat the client, equitably and with a special concern for each other's welfare.³²

As we have seen in our ministry among the Makua-Metto people, there is a deep hunger for a patron, especially a good one!

The title of "Patron," (*Patrão* in Portuguese and *Nkunya* in Makua-Metto), is used to respectfully address both human beings and God. An additional, related term and the title most commonly used for God is *Mwaneene* (meaning owner, master, or proprietor). "God as Patron," or the related image of "God as Proprietor," offer a better lens for understanding "God



as Father" in the African folk Islamic Context of the Makua-Metto people for four reasons:

1. "God as Patron and Proprietor" offers a clear call to discipleship. Referring to God as the *Mwaneene* implies God's authority over an area and is useful in noting the kinds of behavior that the Owner will not tolerate (for example, idolatry and injustice). While God is *Nkunya Mwaneene*, the best Patron and Owner possible, Satan and the demonic powers are bad patrons. Witchcraft, drunkenness, and the other powers of this world only oppress and destroy people. As "clients"
2. "God as Patron and Proprietor" provides a contextualized approach to Christology. In the previous section we looked briefly at Jesus' role as Broker in connection to God the Patron. Jesus is our intermediary and the blessing of God flows through him.³³ Through this lens we understand that the incarnation means that Jesus bridges the realms of heaven and earth and uses his power and influence to bless his followers. He is not a corrupt patron or a poor client but is uniquely positioned to remedy our needs and help us respond well to suffering.³⁴ Using the language of kinification we can take the language of broker one step further in considering a broker who is also the child of the patron. The broker who also happens to be the child of the owner has total authority and "run of the house." This individual has the right to lend or give what he sees fit because he is the owner's child (*Mwana a Mwaneene*).³⁵ In turn, becoming a follower of Jesus makes us, his disciples, into brokers, and Jesus himself into a patron.³⁶

we need to carefully weigh which patron will receive our allegiance and honor and choose to follow that Patron's direction. We must also match our character to the right Patron and follow his desires for those under his authority. We learn to live honorable lives by watching Jesus, who teaches us the Owner's "code of conduct" (in Matthew 6, for example, Jesus teaches about prayer and about how to appropriately make requests of the Patron). While many Makua-Metto people pray at sacred trees or in spirit houses, Jesus, the broker, teaches us about how to make petitions of our God. The Father of Jesus is a good patron and is generous in offering blessings to us.

3. “*God as Patron and Proprietor*” sidesteps the awkward connotations and misperceptions created by the minimized role of fathers in a traditional matrilineal culture. For the Makua-Metto people, the most important man in a person’s life is not one’s biological father, but the mother’s brothers. Uncles, in this context, typically have a more “fatherly” relationship with their nephews and nieces than their actual fathers often have.³⁷ Early in our ministry our mission team wondered if shifting language in the Lord’s Prayer, for example, from “Heavenly Father” to “Heavenly Uncle” would be necessary; but, in practice, the term for father is often kin-ified to include other people and still used as a term of respect and influence even though it is not selected as primary title in reference to God. For example, people will refer to others who they respect as “father,” but here in this context it may have less positive associations or connotations than it would in other cultures. From anecdotal evidence it appears that Protestant Christians among the Makua-Metto make reference to God as Father almost exclusively in the context of saying the Lord’s Prayer or in derivatives of that prayer.³⁸ The most common titles for God are those related to Patron and Proprietor and those seem to mostly bypass problems that could arise from referring to God as Father in this matrilineal context.³⁹
4. “*God as Patron and Proprietor*” avoids problems with Folk Islam and the challenge of speaking of “God as Father.”⁴⁰ While Father is a common title in the Christian Scriptures, the Qur’an explicitly states that Allah is not a father.⁴¹ Interestingly, while the famous list of the 99 names for God in Islam unsurprisingly does not include

The titles for God related to Patron and Proprietor bypass problems that arise from referring to God as Father in this matrilineal context.

the terms “father” or “parent,” the title Patron⁴² and the term Owner⁴³ are included. For those who find it difficult to consider God as Father, we dialogue with them at that early stage in coming to understand God in a new way. We’re able to affirm that God is not one’s literal father or mother and that we’re applying terms and making analogies which will help them understand our relationship to the Divine. Using Patronage (*Nkunya*) and Proprietorship (*Mwaneene*) language allows us to establish that we are applying concepts that can serve as stepping stones to approach the concept of God as Parent, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 11:31; 1 Peter 1:3; Eph. 1:3) in a way that is potentially more palatable.

While care should be taken to be sensitive to potential colonial and racial connotations of God as *Nkunya* (or variations of this term), interviews with Makua-Metto speakers revealed that pairing *Nkunya* with *Mwaneene* mitigated those associations and focused on the idea of patron not necessarily linked or associated with a white, Portuguese speaking person. Contextualized concepts of patronage and proprietorship provide a helpful lens for understanding and appreciating the parentage of God among the Makua-Metto people.⁴⁴ This way of speaking allows us to work around potential barriers related to culture and further interreligious dialogue with Muslims.

Conclusion

While a Patron-Client system can and should impact the shape of ministry and missiology on a number of levels in those relevant contexts,⁴⁵ this

article focused on its implications for theology and Christian-Folk Islamic dialogue. We found that speaking of God as the best possible Patron and Proprietor works well as a way of relating to God as Father in honor-shame shaped cultures, from Matthew’s Gospel in the first century to the modern day Makua-Metto people of Mozambique.⁴⁶ As Malina notes:

If the only adequate analogy for describing God in biblical tradition is that of person, obviously God is a central person *par excellence* and can be none other than a social entrepreneur. As creator and covenant God, he clearly controls first-order resources, and hence can be readily understood as Patron.⁴⁷

And becoming clients (children) of this Patron puts us in a position of special blessing and favor.

God not only dispenses general (rather than personal) benefactions like the grant of life to all creatures (Acts 14:17) or gifts of sun and rain (Matt. 5:45), but he becomes a personal patron to [those] who receive his Son. Those believers become a part of God’s own household (see, e.g., Gal. 3:26–4:7; Heb. 3:6; 10:20–21; 1 Jn. 3:1) and enjoy a special access to divine favors.⁴⁸

We are offered the

assurance of welcome into God’s own extended household (thus into a relationship of personal patronage)—even to the point of adoption into God’s family as sons and daughters and to the point of sharing the inheritance of the Son (which is exceptional even in personal patronage). The authors of the New Testament therefore offer attachment to God as personal patron, something that would be considered highly desirable for those in need of the security and protection a great patron would provide.⁴⁹

As followers of Jesus, we also become brokers of God's blessing and call others to enjoy the patronage of God.

From the gift of life and provision of all things needed for the sustaining of life, to the provision for people to exchange enmity with God for a place in God's household and under God's personal patronage, God is the one who supplies our lack, who gives assistance in our need.⁵⁰

That message of hope resonates deeply in African folk Islamic contexts today—a promise of a powerful Patron and Proprietor that cares for and provides for his children. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ For more on this topic, see Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery, "Jesus as Mwalimu: Christology and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 2 (2018): 79–87.

² For more on the implications of honor and shame on theology, specifically the doctrine of the atonement, see Alan B. Howell and Logan T. Thompson, "From Mozambique to Millennials: Shame, Frontier Peoples, and the Search for Open Atonement Paths," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 4 (2017): 157–165.

³ David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 137.

⁴ Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 147. For an important survey of the criticisms against Malina's model of honor and shame and a proposal for updating the way we understand its impact, see Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 591–611. In light of the shift from focusing on the individual to a deeper appreciation of the role of the public court of reputation in honor-shame dynamics, Crook suggests replacing Malina's terms "ascribed honor" and "acquired honor" with new terms: attributed honor (honor given by the public court of reputation at birth based on "family name, ethnicity, and gender") and distributed honor (honor distributed by the public court of reputation "whenever someone outwits another, when a benefaction is made, or after any kind of public challenge and riposte." (593)

⁵ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

⁶ David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 121. For a thorough examination of the impact of patronage in the Ancient Mediterranean world, see Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, trans. from *Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur die Neutestamentliche Wissensch*, 130 (Berlin: De Gruyter), 2004.

⁷ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 97. This is why the patron needs the client, for the patron cannot shower himself with the honor that the client is capable of doing. For a discussion of honor-shame cultures, see deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 23–93.

⁸ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 96.

⁹ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 143. While Westerners may be more familiar with a patron-tenant relationship, the fundamental difference between that and a patron-client relationship is that the tenant is under no obligation to honor the patron; the payment is the return of investment. However, the client gives no physical or monetary return to the patron. Instead, he or she offers "payment" in the currency of respect and honor toward the patron.

¹⁰ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 104. He notes three major definitions for the word "grace" in the first century context: (1) the willingness of a patron to grant some benefit to another person or to a group; (2) the gift itself, that is, the result of the giver's beneficent feelings; (3) the response to a benefactor and his or her gifts, namely, "gratitude."

¹¹ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 106. Jesus' statement in the Lord's Prayer suggests this type of response to the grace we receive: "Forgive our debts, as we too have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). This is later reemphasized through the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21–35. We do not, however, wish to suggest that grace is something that is "earned." Instead of something that is earned, the unearned grace necessitates a certain response (e.g., discipleship). This is the point Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes in *The Cost of Discipleship* when referring to "costly grace" as opposed to "cheap grace." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, translated by R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 43–56.

¹² deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 117.

¹³ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 146–147. With this new joining, the two interact on political, economic, and religious levels that would otherwise be impossible for members of different social classes. Further, most relationships between people of different social classes were extremely oppressive, based mostly on power and exploitation. The patron-client relationship, however, connected the two in such a way that required them to treat each other with honor.

¹⁴ Malina suggests the best English translation of πᾶτερ ("pater" meaning "father") is "patron." See Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

¹⁵ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

¹⁶ One potential problem with this metaphor is the suggestion that God needs our worship, just as the human patrons need their clients' honor. This is not the case, however, for every metaphor describing God eventually breaks down, and God is not like earthly patrons that need anything from his client (creation). Rather, as a maximally great being, God offers us benefaction in the hope that we will respond with faith. For a philosophical discussion on the doctrine of aseity, Jeffrey E. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105–128.

¹⁷ deSilva, *Honor Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 129.

¹⁸ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 207.

¹⁹ deSilva aptly shows that Luke uses this system as well, especially seen through the centurion in Luke 7. See 2000: 123–124. Further, Jerome Neyrey provides a helpful chart that shows the range of benefaction that God offers, including power, commitment, inducement, and influence. See Jerome H. Neyrey, "God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 4 (2005): 491.

²⁰ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

²¹ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

²² Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 151.

One example of this in the United States today is the role of real estate brokers.

²³ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 152.

²⁴ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 153.

²⁵ Also see Matthew 9:35–37.

²⁶ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 153. Further, Jesus' repeated healings throughout

the gospel highlights the validity and efficacy of his care. See, for example Matthew 4:23; 8:1–17, 28–29; 9:1–8, 18–34; 12:9–14; 14:34–36; 15:29–31; 17:14–20; 20:29–34.

²⁷ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 155.

²⁸ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 145.

²⁹ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 171n1.

That is one of the reasons why teaching on servant leadership is so difficult in this context. For more on this topic in Mozambique, see Alan B. Howell, “When Having a Bad Leader is Good: Processing a Negative Experience and Applying Leadership Lessons from the Kings,” *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Practice* 8, no. 2 (2017). For a work on how leadership can be done well in a modern Asian Patron-Client context, see Larry S. Persons, *The Way Thais Lead: Face as Social Capital* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2016).

³⁰ Merle L. Bowen, *The State Against the Peasantry: Rural Struggles in Colonial and Postcolonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

³¹ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

³² Carl H. Landé, “Introduction: The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism,” in *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, eds. Steffen W. Schmidt et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), xiii–xxxvii.

³³ For more on the topic of blessing among the Makua-Metto people, see Alan B. Howell, “Building a Better Bridge: The Quest for Blessing in an African Folk Islamic Context,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 32, no. 1 (2015): 43–51.

³⁴ For more on the topic of suffering among the Makua-Metto people, see Alan B. Howell, “Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 29, no. 3 (2012): 129–137.

³⁵ Colossians 1:16 has been a helpful text for this line of thinking as “all things are made through him and for him.” One helpful parable is of a father and son building a house together, admiring their handiwork and the father handing over the keys to the son. Christians assert that this world belongs to Jesus and it is for him to reign and rule. The Broker becomes the Patron. While other Christological motifs are effective in African contexts (such as Chief, Healer, Ancestor or Liberator), we have argued elsewhere (Howell and Montgomery, “Jesus as Mwalimu,” 79–87) that Jesus as Teacher, or *Mwalimu*, is perhaps the most relevant for the African Folk Islamic

context. That being said, Jesus as Broker can be a potential secondary or tertiary image of Christ, though space will prohibit an adequate exploration of that in this article.

³⁶ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 156.

³⁷ The Makua-Metto are matrilineal and matrilocal but are not structured matriarchally.

³⁸ While the term for father is used surprisingly sparingly, referencing humans as God’s children happens all the time—another example of kin-ification.

³⁹ Interestingly, the words for Lord (*Apwiya*) and Queen (*Apwiya Mwene*, literally “Lord King”) are linguistically related. So, in prayer for example, it is common to hear people refer to God as Lord God (*Apwiya Nluku*) which seems to reflect, in some form, the matrilineal culture of the people.

⁴⁰ While this article is focusing on folk Muslims in a Patron-Client context, presenting God as Father to Muslims in other socio-economic contexts, even those potentially less influenced by folk elements, is problematic as well. One recent study of Dutch Muslim teenagers discovered that they found the metaphor of God as Father to be unacceptable. See Aletta G. Dorst and Marry-Loise Klop, “Not a Holy Father: Dutch Muslim Teenagers’ Metaphors for Allah,” *Metaphor and the Social World* 7, no.1 (2017), 66–86.

⁴¹ “That they should invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a son. Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant” (Surah 19 Maryam (Mary) verse 91–93).

⁴² *al-Wali* (#77 Name of Allah), in Surah 13:11 “. . . and there is not for them besides Him any Patron” (Sahih International).

⁴³ Depending on the translation (#84) in Surah 55:27; 55:78 and (#85) in Surah 3:26.

⁴⁴ The flexibility with metaphor and meaning in this folk Islamic context may make them more predisposed than other peoples to accept Patron language as a stepping stone to thinking about God as Father.

⁴⁵ For more on the impact of Patron-Client system on ministry see Jayson Georges and Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016). See also Delbert Chinchén, “The Patron-Client System: A Model of Indigenous Discipleship,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1995): 446–451.

⁴⁶ “Christians were not alone in this view of God; the Stoic philosopher

Epictetus also suggested that a person could find no better patron with whom to attach oneself than God—not even Caesar could compare (Diss. 4.1.91–98).” deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 131n22.

⁴⁷ Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 151.

⁴⁸ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 130.

⁴⁹ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 131.

⁵⁰ deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 133.

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"I am truly thankful for this site and all God has done through it! Without it I never would have met Joseph, and that is truly amazing."
- Diana

"I opened a CalledTogether account and met my wife there. We got married less than two months ago and are very happy. Thank you!"
- Foster

"I met someone on CalledTogether that is amazing. Thank you so much for creating the website for people to meet that have a heart for missions."
- Eduardo

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"Born Again" Muslims: What Can We Learn from Them?

by Colin Bearup

Within what many see as the monolith of Islam, there are diverse streams and movements. Young, nominal Muslims engaging with a new experience of Islam may go through something very much like a conversion experience. Can we learn something from this? What are they seeking? What attracts them? Could it be that we have what they are looking for, but they don't recognise it?

"He Saved Me"

Suleiman (pseudonyms used throughout) was in a state of crisis. His romantic (un-Islamic) relationship was falling apart, there was conflict in his wider family, and he was in deep personal crisis. "I could have gone haywire. I could have gone both ways but to be honest could have gone down the Islam way, probably become an extremist. But the thing is, I didn't. The Sheikh came and *he saved me.*"

New Lives with New Masters

Over the last few years, it has come to my attention that British Muslims born into families of South Asian heritage are turning to Sufi movements unfamiliar to their families. Despite the abundance of spiritual masters on offer within the Sufi movements from their own Indian Sub-Continent, they are pledging their whole-hearted allegiance (making *bay'ah*) to Sufi masters from such places as Turkey, Syria, Yemen, and Morocco. Some are even swearing to obey sheikhs who are first generation converts of Western heritage. These particular Sufi movements which they are joining are thoroughly international and are recruiting "members" from across the world. Although my research was locally specific, I believe that it may have relevance right across the Muslim world on account of globalisation.

In 2018, I had the opportunity to conduct some research into how and why Muslims of South Asian heritage in the UK were switching to international forms of Sufism. I was particularly interested to know what these individuals

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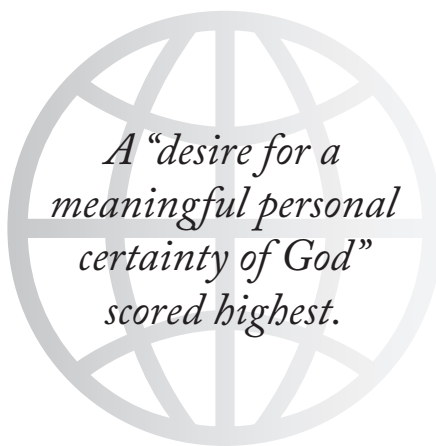
were seeking, what they felt they had found, and how this might inform missional strategies for calling them to follow Christ. I am convinced that this admittedly limited research among the South Asian diaspora in just one locality of the UK has a much wider relevance. Wherever members of this new generation are growing up in the world, globalised media networks make them aware of the many competing narratives in the Islamic world. When they wrestle with the question of what it means to be an authentic believer, reference to their own inherited or local tradition no longer carries the weight it once did. The matrix of globalisation, international travel, modern education, urbanization and the spread of science are generating new challenges, fresh outlooks and new felt needs in every part of the globe. If, as representatives of Christ, we are to engage with members of the rising generation of Muslims, it would be valuable to know what they are seeking and what sort of things they identify as signs of authenticity.

The Conversion Experience

The transition from the experience of Islam with which my respondents had grown up, to their new paths, would be classified by secular sociologists as a conversion experience.¹ As we shall see below, most of my respondents went from being Muslim-in-name-only to re-orienting their lives around Islam as taught by their new Sufi sheikh and as practised by the community of his followers. This would be analogous in several respects to someone from a nominal Christian home embracing Christ and starting a new life in a new church.

As Evangelicals, we are accustomed to approaching conversion theologically. The needy sinner responds to God's provision in Christ with the Holy Spirit playing a key role in that process. Since all people are sinners and we know that there is only one way of salvation, we may not think in terms of

different kinds of conversion. However, looking at even Christian conversion narratives, we can easily identify three different lived experiences. One is that of someone who was brought up in church but at some specific point is born again. What is already familiar to them comes to life in a new way. The new beginning is real and significant. We would also use the word conversion to describe someone with no religious experience of any kind who suddenly comes to faith in Christ. That transition includes entering new relationships and adopting new patterns of life. Theologically, the same event has occurred but humanly speaking the number of changes is considerably greater. Then,



of course, we use the word conversion to describe the transition from being a member of a non-Christian faith to becoming a Christian. The changes this entails are different again, especially if the person was fully engaged in their previous religion.

Secular academics studying religious conversion from a sociological point of view recognise all these forms. Lewis Rambo has developed a widely used model for analysing religious conversion that seeks to identify typical stages.² As Green writes in his thesis:

These days, in Anglophone studies, including conversion to and from Islam, Rambo's seven-stage model dominates the field.³

Rambo regards conversion as a process and looks for seven stages. These are Context, Crisis, Quest, Encounter, Interaction, Commitment and Consequences. My respondents' stories exhibited all of these stages, thus giving some basis to regarding these accounts as being a kind of conversion—and Rambo's model proved useful in analysing them.

Reasons To Commit

I modelled my research on that of Dr. Julianne Hazen, herself an American convert to Islam, who investigated what influenced people to commit to a particular sheikh in America.⁴ Her initial research mainly focused on first or second generation converts to Islam. When she repeated the research in the UK, a much higher proportion of her sample were people of Muslim heritage. The difference in pattern was sufficiently marked for her to present these findings as a discrete sub-set.

Following Hazen, I used a brief questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview. Unlike Hazen, all my respondents were from South Asian Muslim families. Whereas Hazen's research subjects were all following the one sheikh, my respondents had committed to three different Sufi sheikhs of different *tariqa* (traditional Sufi organisation). Sheikh Mehmet (like his father and predecessor Sheikh Nazim) is a Turkish Cypriot of the Naqshbandi *tariqa*. Sheikh Yaqoubi is from Syria, currently based in Morocco and is a master in the Shadhili *tariqa*. Sheikh Habib Umar is from Yemen and is the head of the Ba'Alawiya *tariqa*. None of the three is based in the UK. See table 1 on page 139.

As Hazen found in her survey of those already Muslim, a "desire for a meaningful personal certainty of God" scored highest (34) along with "the charisma of the sheikh." A "desire for spiritual healing" came close behind. The two highest scores are far from incompatible, since the desire for certainty is met in a person whose charisma is such as to deliver that certainty.

Table 1. Reasons to Follow a Sheikh

Which of these were important reasons in your decision to follow your sheikh? Give each line a score from 0–5 where 5 is highly important and 0 is no importance whatsoever.	
Potential Reasons offered on the questionnaire	Sum of scores maximum possible 40
Desire for more meaningful personal certainty of God	34
Charisma/leadership style of the sheikh	34
A desire for spiritual healing	29
Desire for a supportive community of faith	21
Personal, mystical experiences	19
Desire for intellectual development	18
Dissatisfaction with dominant social and moral norms	14
Dissatisfaction with previous religious/spiritual path	5
Fulfilling an expectation of family or community	4
Other? Please specify.	(2 responses)

Since my version of the questionnaire did not require the subjects to rank one above the other, the two reasons could potentially be scored equally. In the semi-structured interviews, the respondents told their own story of the need they felt and how their bonding with the sheikh brought them into a place of greater certainty, awareness and stability.

Only one of the respondents was of the Ba'Alawi tariqa. His admittedly solitary account was indicative of some significant differences in this tariqa's modus operandi. His pledge of allegiance was made to Sheikh Habib Umar, a man he had never met. The reason he had not met him was that this sheikh does not visit the UK. The work is done through intermediaries, deputies or senior members, and so this would also be true for many, if not all, of his group. The personal presence of the sheikh could not therefore have the same impact as for the other two tariqas. Nevertheless, the charisma or persona of the sheikh's representatives was a key factor in his decision. The desirable spirituality was embodied in real people, not in texts or other media. As this respondent put it in his interview:

So Habib Kazim fortunately comes to the UK... he will accept someone's pledge... on behalf of Habib Umar and seeing Habib Kazim, he's a man

who had a good influence on me... He seems very pure himself and conducts himself how I would expect someone of that ranking to conduct [himself]... And it was not just him, it was all the people and Sheikh Ibrahim being one of them and a number of other people that I have seen on this spiritual path, ... that's the type of person I would like to kind of maybe become or be under.

A desire for "spiritual healing" scored very highly in our questionnaire. In Hazen's US survey it came 5th but in the subset of those whose starting point was within Islam it came top. I was conscious in using Hazen's questionnaire that the term "spiritual healing" lacked definition and did not correspond to any particular Islamic concept. Nonetheless, my respondents were quick to identify it as a valid term to describe their need. The interviews give us a better idea of what they mean by it. Safe to say, it was clear that they were referring to a personal, individual need. The individual dimension was clearly operative.

Family Influence and Dissatisfaction

The reasons that scored least well in our survey are also significant findings. Family expectations scored just

4 out of a possible 40. The interviews confirmed family expectations as being of minor importance. Not one of the respondents was following parental example or recommendation in pledging allegiance to their sheikh. Just one had brothers who were already committed *mureeds* (fully committed Sufi disciples) but his verbal testimony demonstrated that his path was not significantly influenced by them. While he could have followed his brothers' sheikh, he chose to follow an Asian sheikh for a few years instead. His account of how he finally decided to follow their sheikh did not involve any input on their part.

"Dissatisfaction with previous religion" scored just 5 out of a potential 40. However, since the subjects were not abandoning Islam but rather finding a place within it that met their needs, it is not surprising that they did not assign a high value to dissatisfaction. In a sense, their dissatisfaction was with themselves. They have not started attending new mosques; rather they have found out how to be real Muslims in their home mosques by following a Sufi path. They have supplemented regular worship in the mosque by also attending regular Sufi gatherings elsewhere. In their verbal accounts, their previous inability to find what they needed in their mosques and parental traditions was very evident.

All but two described themselves as previously non-practising and one of those two described himself as "practising but not fully." When they started seeking solutions to their issues, they did not find them in the norms of their local mosques nor with South Asian sheikhs. For all but one of them, committing to a sheikh was the culmination of a personal process of seeking to engage with Islam as a whole. They were moving from nominalism to commitment. Although dissatisfaction with their previous religious path was not given as a primary reason for taking the Sufi path, it is

clear that their previous religious setting was far from satisfactory, as these samples indicate.

Rashid: I started going to the mosque and...at that time, there were no young people.... You'd see just the elders. There was a complete detachment. I wouldn't feel comfortable and confident going to any of the elders to say, you know, could you help me in this kind of thought process.

Salim: First time I ever met [the sheikh] and he's come out with some humour...and he amused the people around him and I could tell it was to amuse other people and I thought wow!... You know, I went to mosque there was no laughing and joking when we were kids at the back we were told to shut up.

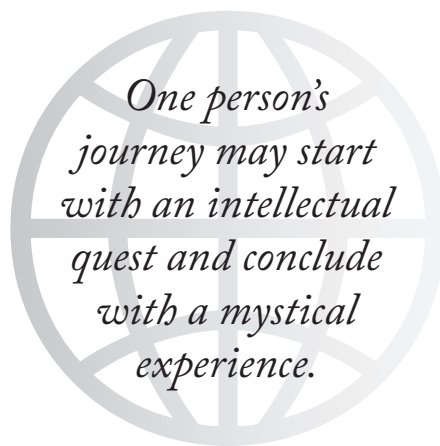
Suleiman: This religion looks like it's just for Pakistani people. You go to the mosque, all you see is Pakistani people and it's in Urdu, everything's in Urdu there's no catering for anybody else at all and I thought that was the religion.

The desire for supportive community scored moderately well, but only one respondent gave it a score of five. As we shall see below, the interviews made it clear that for several the fact of being in a community was highly valued even if it was not a major consideration in the decision to make the initial pledge allegiance.

Two respondents supplied answers under the "other" category in addition to the reasons for which they gave scores. One wrote "to reach God" which corresponded with his giving highest scores to "desire for spiritual healing" and "desire for meaningful certainty." The other wrote "ease of access to the sheikh" and "the learning environment." For this respondent, too, "spiritual healing" and "certainty" scored very high. His two other reasons seem to correlate with his registering a score of three against dissatisfaction with his previous religious path. In his interview, he spoke unbidden of the way in which his tariqa's teaching was delivered in contrast to anything he had come across previously.

Their Need and God's Provision

From my own perspective, when I heard their stories it seemed to me that what they had really been seeking was to be found in the gospel of Christ. None of them were approaching their need from the point of view of being separated from God by sin, but all were aware of being alienated from God, lacking what he intended for them. They all recognised their inability to achieve what was necessary. When they encountered a person and a community that seemed to possess answers, they opened themselves up to new teachings, new practices and a new identity. True, there was no question of breaching the outer boundaries of Islam, which would have certainly raised the



stakes enormously, but the fact remains that they were seeking things that God provides through Christ.

Conversion Motifs

In the world of conversion theory, Lofland and Skonovd advocate the identification of what they term *conversion motifs*.⁵ These are themes that characterise different types of conversion stories. It is an approach which allows for the classification of the subjectively expressed account of the convert and has been used as a frame of reference by other researchers.⁶ The six motifs listed by Lofland and Skonovd are Intellectual, Experimental, Mystical, Affectional, Revivalist, and Coercive.

The Intellectual Motif describes the conversion of individuals through intentional private research whereas the Experimental Motif concerns persons entering into the life of a group, behaving as though they were believers before coming to a settled conviction. The Affectional Motif refers to the phenomenon of individuals being drawn to conversion by people with whom they have close emotional bonds such as a marriage partner, close family members, or intimate friends. The Revivalist Motif relates to the sort of conversion experience which occurs in the intense atmosphere generated by a mass meeting or some other highly emotive occasion. The Mystical Motif covers sudden paranormal-type insights or experiences. The Coercive Motif signifies genuine conversion that comes about as a result of the pressures of family, group members or imposed circumstances.

Lofland and Skonovd's original model presupposed that a conversion story would show one main motif, but subsequent writers have found it useful to identify different motifs at different stages in the conversion process especially if the journey is long and conflicted. One person's journey may, for example, start with an intellectual quest and conclude with a mystical experience.⁷ In my research, I looked for these motifs without predetermining how many might be found in any one account.

Each interview was recorded, transcribed and analysed with a view to identifying Lofland and Skonovd's conversion motifs. A score of 2 was given where the motif was prominent, 1 where the motif was present but not prominent, and 0 where the motif did not occur. The results are presented in table 2, on page 141. In general, the motifs came through clearly but since this assessment is necessarily subjective, I then had someone who was not involved in the process or acquainted with the respondents make a similar evaluation based

Table 2. Occurrence of Lofland and Skonovd's Conversion Motifs

Motif	Score (Max 16)
Mystical	12
Revivalist	4
Experimental	3
Intellectual	2
Affectional	2
Coercive	0

purely on reading the transcriptions and then compared their findings with mine. Where we differed on our identification of motifs, I went back to the recording and made a fresh evaluation.

The Mystical Motif is clearly dominant. For half of the respondents, dreams were a prominent feature. This is not to say that the place of dreams was identical in each account. One respondent reported that he had been learning from a variety of sheikhs for some time but had never met his current sheikh nor heard him speaking before the sheikh came to him in a dream. On the other hand, another respondent listed “mystical experience” as a reason for becoming a mureed in the questionnaire but in the interview couched his whole story in terms of logic and reasoned decisions. When I asked about the mystical component and whether dreams featured at all, he looked a little awkward and said that he had received two significant dreams. I suspect that as a young man in a highly secular professional workplace it was his habit to downplay the paranormal side in his daily discourse with outsiders. It was nonetheless a significant factor in his journey.

All respondents, whether identifying dreams as important or not, spoke of some kind of transcendental encounter in which some other power seemed to take control and direct them. This aspect carries over into their accounts of their current life as mureeds. As respondent Yasin put it, “they say your sheikh chooses you, you don't choose your sheikh.” This would be generally

true of Sufism, both South Asian and other expressions, and in itself does not shed light on the phenomenon of South Asians joining non-South Asian traditions. The similarity between their experience and that of many Christians should not go unnoticed. Their words seem to echo those of Jesus himself in John 15:16,

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. (ESVUK)

That experience of both making a choice but also recognising God bringing us to that point despite ourselves is one many of us can identify with. We will explore this further below.

In three respondent accounts, the Revivalist Motif was evident. Each time it came in combination with the Mystical motif—that is to say, the key mystical experience occurred in a highly charged environment. In one case, the highly charged moment was the key turning point. For the other two, it was an important step along the path that led to the decision. The mystical component was combined with, but not confined to, that highly emotive episode.

The Affectional Motif appeared only twice and never strongly. The two who experienced this were not following the same sheikh nor in the same tariqa. In the one case, though the respondent had initially met the sheikh through his brothers who were already mureeds, he then sought out other sheikhs. His

own perception is that he was strongly led through dreams and other experiences in which his brothers had no part. The second respondent in whom the Affectional Motif was present had originally only met the sheikh by tagging along with close friends. He had been aware they were going to a conference about Islam but at that point neither he nor his friends had been aware of Sufism as a lifestyle nor of the sheikh as anything more than a good conference speaker. He described how his friends were inspired to make bay'ah (pledge allegiance) at the conference and how he had simply followed them. However, the sheikh told them they were not ready and refused to accept them. Subsequently, he and his friends committed to learning more about this and other tariqas. When he eventually offered himself to the sheikh and was accepted, it was along with two friends but also with a strong sense of being personally guided.

In two respondent accounts, the intellectual motif was present but not dominant. Their period of searching included some research of their own but other motifs were also present and more significant.

The Absence of Coercion

The coercive motif did not appear in any account, much as one might have expected. However, it is worth noting that the absence of pressure to submit was explicitly remarked on by several respondents as something that touched them. For example:

Suleiman: There was *no* emphasis on you to practice, there's *no* emphasis on you to follow or take initiation. You just come, you experience it for yourself. . . . And I thought there must be something *real* here.

Salim: Not once did anyone say that you must take allegiance or *bay'ah* or anything like that.

Muzammil: The environment was a very good—or for me—enjoyable learning environment, very chill[ed], very

laid back and it was easy for me to sit there and actually think, you know what? This is actually different to what I've got—of what's in my mind about how to become a practicing Muslim.

This lack of coercion is in implied (and occasionally explicit) contrast to both the ways of their home mosques and of the Islamic fundamentalist groups that some had encountered at university. The value they placed on freedom to participate or not, to interact without being criticised, and to commit or not, came through in the interviews without being solicited.

Although the Mystical Motif is clearly dominant, the variety of experience should not be ignored. The secondary motifs show significant variation. One respondent conformed exactly to the Experimental Motif. He came across a Naqshbandi *zikir* gathering (chanting and meditation) that happened to be using his local mosque and he was attracted to it. He participated in it for some years before seeking bay'ah. Perhaps a larger sample may well have provided more examples of this and other motifs.

Being Connected

The respondents were all asked what difference having a sheikh made to them. I asked them how they would explain it to a fellow Muslim who did not have a sheikh. The positive things they spoke of corresponded with the need for "spiritual healing" which they had listed as a primary reason for needing a sheikh. A sense of being connected to the sheikh was expressed by all respondents. All were asked how that works in practice when the sheikh lives overseas. For the Naqshbandis, travelling to Cyprus at least once a year to meet the sheikh is now a part of their lives. While having that personal access was very important to them, being connected was not limited to face-to-face meetings.

Only three mentioned access via the internet or other media and none of them saw that as of primary importance.

Connection via the group's network was strongly indicated by two and mentioned by two others. Respondent Amir explained it most fully.

Within all tariqas...there's a structure. You will have a sheikh, underneath that sheikh you will have deputies. Beneath those deputies, you will have other leaders of smaller *jamaats* [groups] and within those groups, you will have leaders and all the direction and the messages that filter down from the sheikh, filter down the structure and then you hear at the ground root level.

Some respondents did not choose to mention this aspect of connection but that cannot be taken to prove that it was of no significance to them.



Nevertheless, the plain fact is that half of them made no mention at all of this communal aspect and instead spoke of a mystical connection. This was true for members of all three tariqas.

Salim: You have this spiritual connection is called *rabita* [bond or tie] that spiritual connection is you can call them from millions and millions of miles away and they will come just like that.

Ahmad: In practice, how that works, we do what we call *muraqaba* [supervision]. We do meditation and we believe in heart to heart transmissions.

Yasin: If you have a sheikh—you know that that they're watching you—in a sense they're connected with you.

Muzammil: What we are taught is that [the sheikhs] will have some effect on you...just because of how spiritual they are, that will just have an effect on you whether you are making an active effort or not it'll just have an effect.

The most striking of these was respondent Muhammad. Speaking three years after Sheikh Nazim's death and quite deliberately speaking in the present tense he said,

He comes and says things to me in my dreams that I need to do... When I'm in need of help, I'm going through some trouble sometime. I spiritually direct myself to him and I seem to get an answer.

Having a Guide

In terms of the benefit they found from having pledged to follow a sheikh, all the respondents spoke of having a guide. They spoke in different but complementary ways of what this meant. It is not so much that they had contrasting views but rather that each expressed in their own way the part of the overall picture that seemed to them to answer my question. Reference was made to such things as decision-making, having a framework within which to understand their faith, direction in personal development and access to the divine. An appreciation was expressed for the clarity they now had in dealing with matters from an Islamic point of view which came from a confidence in the knowledge possessed by the sheikh and those close to him. The following quotes give an idea of the range of what is meant by being guided.

Rashid: So, over the past 10 years of my life, I can confidently say that any major decision that has been taken has not been taken without that consultation.

Muhammad: The difference it makes is that having a sheikh, having a tariqa, you follow certain ways that keep you in touch with Islam, in touch with your God... With Sheikh Nazim, he comes and says things to

me in my dreams that I need to do. He may give me advice or may give me certain readings to do.

Salim: Guidance in the way that... you can change your views on things, for example, service and humanity. You can read all the quotes you've got about service from different people out there but when I went to Cyprus I saw service and I saw humanity was more important than the actual religion itself.

Suleiman: This sheikh has taught me everything—love, family, work and community, spirituality, friendship, children—everything.

Ahmad: It's like a guide, guide to God which you can't get in books. You've got books, you know, there's a lot of guidance in books, but it's the sheikh who has actually reached God and he can say "look this is the way come follow me."

Amir: So it's given me progression in the ability to serve, for example, but it's also developing me in my thinking and what I consider to be important and why consider not to be important and it's giving me some awareness about what matters and what doesn't matter.

Muzammil: If he [the sheikh's representative] is closer to God, he's gonna have a little bit more access. If I can get in with that person or we get a bond, and then that way we've got a chance of getting a closer or we are going to get closer to God.

False Christs?

What these men are describing is a far cry from the standard representation of Islam as a dry set of rules and rituals; in reality, Islam has always been more than that. On hearing these accounts, I found myself reflecting from my Christian perspective that what they long for is something God desires them to have and has actually made provision for. It is Christ who brings the believer into right standing with God. It is through Christ that the Holy Spirit is given, the ultimate connection to the divine. The gospel

I found myself reflecting from my Christian perspective that what they long for is something God desires them to have and has made provision for.

calls believers into mutually supportive communities. The head of those communities is Christ, who describes himself as our shepherd. The Epistle to the Hebrews expounds how it is Jesus who meets our need. Because we are so quick to sum up everything in identifying Christ as God, we overlook the many other roles he plays for the believer. All the qualifications that supposedly give Sufi spiritual masters authority are actually found in the person of Christ in abundance. To put it the other way around, Sufi sheikhs are false Christs, pale alternatives to the real thing. The need the research respondents feel for a relationship to God through a mediator is entirely appropriate but they are not finding the mediator that God has provided for all mankind. That mediator is Christ.

The communities from which these people come have a long history of Sufi-style spirituality, that is to say a collective, family-based association with Sufi sites. Their forebears may have prized ancestral links to specific locations and familial association with *pirs* (Sufi masters in South Asia), but the rising generations need to find their identity on an altogether broader stage. In today's context, the fact that their sheikhs have a following of a multi-national character and have a global reach plays a part in establishing a greater credibility in the eyes of these respondents. The variety of nationalities among the followers was explicitly and without prompting mentioned as a sign of authenticity by two of the respondents. That such diversity serves as an attractor says something about those attracted by it, living as they do in a world in which global events are acted out in their living rooms via the television and for whom Islamic teachers compete with each other on the internet. What is true of the diaspora

community is likely to be increasingly true across the world as globalisation challenges traditional norms.

Sufi Mission

In past ages and even in the present, Sufi sheikhs traditionally set up a residence in a particular location, drew people to them and sent out representatives. However, in today's world the emerging sheikhs are highly mobile. Respondent Rashid was able to meet Sheikh Nazim because the sheikh was making one of his regular visits to London as part of his regular itinerary.⁸ In passing, one respondent mentioned that he had heard the sheikh speak once before, when the sheikh had visited a little-known small town in northern England. Sheikh Yaqoubi also travels regularly to meet with and to build up his following. It was at a residential conference at a venue on a university campus hired by the sheikh's people that respondent Yasin first came across him. During the research period, Sheikh Yaqoubi came to the UK during the Christmas holidays to hold a conference. It was live-streamed across the world. Respondent Muzammil was able to join the Ba'Alawi tariqa because it had a well-organised programme of study circles and travelling teachers across the UK led by Sheikh Ibrahim Osi-Efa.⁹

Missional Reflections

These research subjects felt a compelling need to seek spiritual change and were willing to restructure their lives around the thing that met that need. They were looking for spiritual security and expected to find it in a person. They were not looking for an idea or the answer to a puzzle. The decision to commit was based on a belief in the power and presence of a mediator. It

required a mystical experience to get them to that place of certainty.

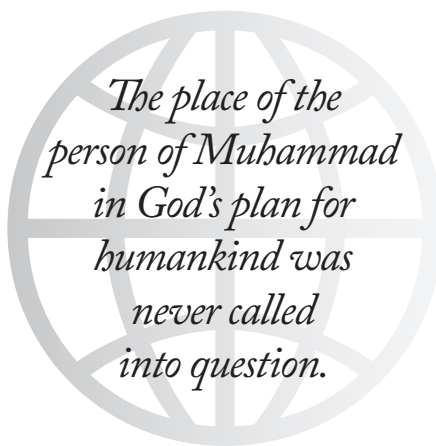
As Christians, we can identify with their sense of need and we can see their sheikhs as poor alternatives to Christ, the saviour given by God. We have all heard many accounts of how our living Christ has connected with Muslim individuals in different places through a mystical experience, usually a dream. These individuals did not encounter that experience. They took the path they did because it was made available to them.

We do not have access to data on what opportunities they may or may not have had thus far in their lives to engage with Christ and his people, but we can reasonably hypothesize that the qualities they admired in those who represented the Sufi masters could, if met in followers of Jesus, also command their respect and attention. These qualities include a calm, peaceable confidence that enabled an informal accepting style. Their focus was always on connecting the seeker to the master who they themselves were pledged to. Their quality of personal spirituality impressed the seekers. Ibrahim Osi-Efa, who champions the Ba'Alawi cause so effectively in the UK, should be of particular interest to us. In his case, his disciples let him guide them to putting their trust in a sheikh they could not physically encounter but to whom they now believe they are connected. As representatives of Christ, we too commend a Master who cannot be visited in person, but who calls people into a spiritual relationship. Osi-Efa, a man of African descent, crossed sharply defined cultural boundaries in winning the confidence of South Asians.

What We Might Learn

To be sure, none of these research subjects faced the traumas inherent in breaching the outer boundaries of Islamic identity. The place of the person of Muhammad in God's

plan for humankind was never called into question. It would be naïve in the extreme to imagine that simply adopting a certain style would in itself win people like these over. However, one might reasonably speculate that if their sense of need was sufficiently intense and if they met Christians who were sufficiently impressive and who could engage with them on their terms and then they experienced a sufficiently strong mystical encounter to confirm the way ahead, such seekers could come to Christ. One might also reasonably say that representatives of Christ exhibiting lesser qualities should expect no hearing. The quality of the messenger is paramount.



This paper may have ended with mere speculation. However, I have recently met a man with a proven fruitful ministry among Asian Muslims who has successfully become the sort of messenger I am talking about. He presents himself as a follower of Christ who loves Muslims. He avoids argument, offers prayer and spends time with them in their homes and their mosques. They detect something special in him. In response to their invitation, he opens up the scriptures to show them the person of Christ rather than a theological scheme. People are putting their faith in Christ and then learning about what he has done for them. And then they are commending the messenger to others. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2–3.

² Lewis Rambo and Charles Farhadian, "Converting: Stages of Religious Change" in *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, eds. C. Lamb & M. Bryant (London: Cassell, 1999), 23–34.

³ Tim Green, "Issues of Identity for Christians of a Muslim background in Pakistan" (PhD thesis, SOAS, 2014), 88.

⁴ Julianne Hazen, "Conversion Narratives among the Alami and Rifa'i Tariqa in Britain," in *Sufism in Britain*, eds. Ron Geaves and Theodore Gabriel (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 138–157. Also: Julianne Hazen, "Contemporary Islamic Sufism in America: The Philosophy and Practices of the Alami Tariqa in Waterport, New York" (PhD Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2011).

⁵ John Lofland and Norman Skovovd. "Conversion Motifs" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 4 (1981): 373–85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1386185>.

⁶ For example, Green, "Issues of Identity"; Hazen, "Contemporary Islamic Sufism in America" and "Conversion Narratives."

⁷ Green, "Issues of Identity," 96.

⁸ Ron Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain* (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 1999), 146–148.

⁹ The tariqa has attracted a following in the UK mainly as a result of the efforts of activist Ibrahim Osi-Efa, who is of Nigerian heritage. He was introduced to it by Californian Shaykh Hamza Yusuf. The role of Osi-Efa is described by Sadek Hamid in "The Rise of 'Traditional Islam' Networks: Neo Sufism and British Muslim Youth" in *Sufism in Britain*, eds. Ron Geaves and Theodore Gabriel (London, Bloomsbury 2014), 183–186 and also in *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

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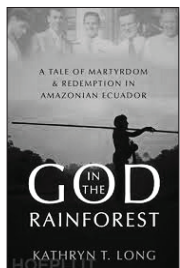


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Books and Missiology

God in the Rainforest: A Tale of Martyrdom and Redemption in Amazonian Ecuador, by Kathryn T. Long (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), xix + 446 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



When the auca/Waorani burst onto the world stage on Sunday, January 8, 1956, they and the five men whose lives their spears cut short became *the* missionary story of the century.¹ Though the missionary Paul maintained that the testimony of his life and teaching was not hidden from public view—“was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26 NRSV)—this particular effort was deliberately shrouded in secrecy. In planning and carrying out their foray, the five missionaries shut out both colleagues and wider family members. The set on which the script played out was a seemingly out-of-the-way sandbank deep within the Ecuadoran rainforest, but all the ingredients of high drama were present. The five men paid with their lives, but much more would follow. The story sold well in its day, and its reverberations continue into the present.

Even at first glance, the binaries are abundant: cultured vs. primitive, high tech vs. “stone age,” outward looking vs. a fixed inward focus, contact vs. flight to the recesses of the rainforest, new life vs. old ways, light vs. darkness, hope vs. despair. On the one side stand youth, ambition, US-tinted religious idealism, glamour and prestige in certain circles, entrepreneurship, advanced technology, and extreme risk taking. That side of the story—abundantly documented in logs, journals, letters, photographs, and interviews—offers the tension, with nerves taut to the snapping point, of a cloak and dagger operation, but one carried out in the name of Jesus Christ.

On the other side lay the untamed presence of the forest primeval in the form of wide expanses of exceedingly thinly populated rainforest at the headwaters of the Amazon River. In it dwelt a people living—that is, judged from the perspective of, say, New York City—in extreme isolation. Their

isolation was both intentional and occasioned by fear: fear of outsiders and fear of one another. In the mid-twentieth century they constituted one of the world’s few remaining examples of a people living lives largely untouched by the instruments, ambitions, affectations, and maladies of the modern age. Or, at least, so it seemed. As noted, the people who lived in that forest were the Waorani. They had already made it abundantly clear that outsiders who encroached on their territory did so at their peril. The prospect of being speared to death restrained even bold men from intruding.

Spurring the story forward was ambition, some holy and some less so. The five missionaries—Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, and Roger Youderian—were filled with ambition to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Waorani, whom they unwittingly called by the disparaging Quechua word “auca,” meaning “savage.” The missionaries were also burning with a less holy ambition: a desire to be themselves *the ones* to make contact, to open the gospel to the auca, and to open the auca to the world. Hence the secrecy about their plans and the steps they were taking. They wanted neither to be forestalled by having others arrive first nor to be thwarted in their attempt. After all, if the Ecuadoran government were to learn of the endeavor, it might delay or even forbid the entire project. One further ambition, at least on the part of Jim Elliot, was to be able to establish a pure form of the church in wholly virgin territory, untrammled or unadulterated by prior contact with lesser or distorted manifestations of what the church should be, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic. Of Plymouth Brethren background, he knew best the form the church should take. Why have to cope with rectifying the mistakes of others? By being present at the inception of a wholly new branch of Christ’s church, the enterprise could be launched correctly from the start.

The five missionaries were young. All were men, all married, most with children looking for their return home. When on Sunday afternoon, January 8, 1956, they were killed on “Palm Beach” on Ecuador’s Curaray River, the news flashed around the world. Newspapers, radio news programs, TV, and magazines, all carried the story. Governments sent rescue parties which became burial parties. News organizations sent correspondents and photographers. All wanted to know who were these men? Why were they in eastern Ecuador, in the headwaters of the Amazonian Basin? Why were they trying to make contact with the reclusive Waorani in the first place, a people who quite plainly wished to avoid all contact? Why were they so secretive about their project? Certainly, they were evangelical missionaries, but what did that mean?

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When they went to live in a Waorani settlement alongside the very persons who had killed their brother and husband/father, the account became quite simply the missionary story of the century—and well beyond.

When the sister of one of the men and the widow and young daughter of another went to live in a Waorani settlement alongside the very persons who had killed their brother and husband/father, the account became quite simply *the* missionary story of the century—and well beyond. Much has transpired since that epic confrontation in the mid-twentieth century, but both missionally and for the Waorani the events of that Sunday have colored everything that has happened since.

Early Contacts

I first encountered the story of the “auca martyrs” as framed in the books of Elisabeth (Betty) Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* and *Shadow of the Almighty*.² I was then in my teens. Elliot’s martyrology of the five men and her exaltation of Jim Elliot as the epitome of Christian spirituality fit right in. They meshed with and carried forward the image of the missionary role as the Christian’s highest calling that I had imbibed within my childhood home and church. It all fit as well with the quest for entrance into the innermost circle of fellowship advocated at summer Bible camps. Why be satisfied to be an Andrew or Bartholomew, still less a Thomas or Judas the Zealot? Aspire, young man, to join Peter, James, and John, the spiritual elite in closest and most intimate fellowship with Jesus. Seek to know, with full certainty, God’s will and to embrace and enact it.

My direct contacts with principal figures of the auca/Waorani story were few. In the fall of 1964 and recently married, I as a senior in college along with my wife, Lois, attended a writers’ conference that featured Elisabeth Elliot. She spent her allotted time interrogating several of our common tradition’s assemblage of assumed verities. Should prepackaged outlooks and “answers” be presumed serviceable by default, in advance of testing? Might not experience lead to deeper pondering and raise questions as to their adequacy? Emerging as I slowly was from the fundamentalism in which I had been raised, I was attracted to issues of epistemology. So, during the time allotted to discussion, I rose. “You have mentioned,” I said, “a number of things that we cannot know. What can we know for certain?” I hope that query was more a quest for enlightenment than an attempt at a “gotcha,” but unfortunately, my words must have sounded like a challenge. Elliot was non-plussed and ended up at a loss for words. After an awkward pause, Frank Gaebelein, also on the program, stepped in to patch things over, and the program went on.

I may have been young and gauche, but I was not pleased at the response my “confrontation with Elisabeth Elliot” received back at the much smaller fundamentalist college

where I was enrolled. Other attendees relayed the story, eliciting the dismissive remark from one faculty member that Elliot was “just a woman who has read a book.” I did not possess the language of sexism with which to label denigration of women, but I still recoiled instinctively from the fact of it. Further, I objected to the dismissal of ideas, not on their merits, but because of their pedigree: uttered by a woman, therefore, obviously not worth considering. Besides, I was all for reading books; I was reading a few myself, among them Elisabeth Elliot’s *The Savage My Kinsman* and, when it was published, *No Graven Image*.³

A decade later I had one other contact with Elisabeth Elliot. Our family had moved to northern Minnesota and there became neighbors to Betty Elliot’s younger brother Jim. Once when she was visiting his family, she came over to our house for tea and we visited. I have no reason to think that she recalled our earlier encounter at the Wheaton College’s writers’ conference. Only long after her compilation of *The Journals of Jim Elliot* was published in 1978 did I come across a copy of it in the library of a missionary guesthouse. I took the opportunity to read large swathes of it as well.

The Story Line Becomes More Complex

Rachel Saint I met once. At her invitation we became tablemates during a dinner at a Minneapolis conference organized by Sherwood Wirt, then editor of Billy Graham’s *Decision* magazine. That would, I believe, have been in the early 1970s. My recollection is of an evening of congenial conversation and her kindness to an aspiring writer with a strong interest in missions. I am confident that her nephew Steve Saint, the son of pilot Nate Saint, and I would have crossed paths on various occasions on the campus of the US Center for World Mission (now Frontier Ventures) in Pasadena, California, in the 1990s, but I do not recall that we ever spoke to each other.

With that my contacts with the principals are, I believe, now fully acknowledged. (In the 1960s I had encounters with Walter Liefeld, the husband of Olive Fleming, Peter Fleming’s widow, but I have no recollection of ever having met her.) Readers can be pardoned, however, if they think they anticipate a whiff of conflation, first, of the story of the auca/Waorani with the story of the five martyrs *and*, second, of the story of the five men with the story of Jim Elliot. Kathryn Long carries the regression further, remarking on the conflation of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Ecuador with that of the five men who died that Sunday on Palm Beach, a distinction to be made but one that possibly is of more importance to the families

The stage for the drama stays roughly the same, the eastern Ecuadoran rainforest, but the roster of *dramatis personae* is crowded, with mission organizations, corporations, and government institutions jostling for position.

involved and the sponsoring missions of the five men than to others.⁴ One gains the impression that SIL was not eager to cut off the accrual of glory by association, however much Elisabeth Elliot might remonstrate.⁵ Reflections of the approbation that surrounded the five martyrs were known to ease open generous purse strings. Further, when SIL's work among the Waorani did begin, it quite simply grew out of the seed planted by those five men. As Rachel Saint (SIL), Betty Elliot (not a member of SIL), and Betty's daughter Valerie entered the Waorani settlement in October, 1958, they were walking in the all but discernible footsteps that those men had intended to plant on the trail. The residence of the three, along with Dayomæ (Dayuma), in the Waorani settlement, was a continuation of that story.

The conflation of the story of the five men with that of Jim Elliot was both real and deliberate. With the help of Harper and Brothers, Elisabeth Elliot published the focal interpretation of the men and their story. The circle of widows was often asked to speak, and they responded to requests for brief articles, but by and large they deferred to Elliot, consciously avoiding putting forward counter perspectives or narratives that might detract from the picture she developed. Peter Fleming's widow, Olive, states as much in *Unfolding Destinies*, the account she finally published in 1990.⁶

Years later in "Missionaries in the Movies," a seminar that I led for a half dozen years at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut, I screened both the half-hour documentary *Through Gates of Splendor* (1967), narrated by Elisabeth Elliot, and the Saint family rendition, *End of the Spear* (2005), made for the big screen. Both were potent and effective.

If *Through Gates of Splendor* and *Shadow of the Almighty* seemed to have fixed Jim Elliot's halo firmly in place, it is to Elisabeth Elliot's credit that some adjustments crept into *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (1978). The sheen of idealization, if anything, shone brighter in this more expansive rendering, but room was found as well for glimpses of his humanity, not all of a sort that he might have chosen for public display. Jim Elliot's ability to confuse every vagary that passed through his mind with the very mind and will of God received less ready obeisance. For Olive Fleming Liefeld's part, three and a half decades was a long time to hold her breath; still she treads softly, even if firmly, making clear that Jim Elliot was allowed to suck up too much of the air in the room, both at the time and in later narratives. *End of the Spear*, released in 2005, both decentered the story of Jim Elliot and dared to portray him with a touch

of the buffoon, definitely not the characterization accorded him by Olive Fleming Liefeld. Old divergences of perspective insisted on being given recognition.

Carrying the Story Forward

Certainly, I read accounts such as *Jungle Pilot: The Life and Witness of Nate Saint*, an MAF pilot and one of the five men on Palm Beach, and Wycliffe/SIL publications such as *Two Thousand Tongues to Go* and doubtless *The Dayuma Story*, but not later books focused on SIL's work among the Waorani.⁷ For me the trail in the rainforest largely petered out when Elisabeth Elliot moved on to fields further west in Ecuador and then to the United States. The literary tracks I followed tended to skirt around or reach back across the ever-lengthening span of ministry to and among and by the Waorani themselves. I had much on which to catch up.

So it was with high anticipation that I came to read Wheaton College professor Kathryn Long's *God in the Rainforest: A Tale of Martyrdom and Redemption in Amazonian Ecuador*—and she does not disappoint. Her work is informed and judicious. She is willing to make assessments and to take sides on disputed points. When confronted with divergent accounts of significant events, she has amassed sufficient information to assess their credibility. To which report or reconstruction, if either, do the records and evidence lend support? *God in the Rainforest* brings the account down to the present decade of the twenty-first century. The stage for the drama stays roughly the same, the eastern Ecuadoran rainforest, but the roster of *dramatis personae* is crowded, with mission organizations, corporations, and government institutions jostling for position. Individuals and organizations gain and lose advantage. There is sufficient time and space for the mettle of individual actors on the stage to be tried, tested, and assayed. She issues even-handed judgment on the work carried out by the principals involved. For example, what can be said of the character of the Christianity and church life Rachel Saint sought to instill among the Waorani? Long is equally even-handed in assessing the claims of both promoters of SIL and critics of the organization's presence and activity among the Waorani.

The volume is not an attempt to give an overview of the whole of SIL or its operations. Long's conceptual bailiwick is to give—over the span of approximately seven decades—the happenings within the territory of the Waorani, the Waorani populace itself, and the doings of non-Waorani agents, frequently non-Ecuadoran, active in or impinging on both the rainforest and its inhabitants. To a degree the relevant non-Waorani consist of oil company personnel, loggers,

Rachel wanted to shield the Waorani from the inroads of outside influences. Dayomæ sought to replicate the patron/client peonage she had experienced at the hacienda, only this time with her at the top of the hierarchy.

and encroaching squatters close at hand, as well as mission administrators and government functionaries impinging upon the Waorani and their affairs from a distance. But mainly the persons in view are the Waorani themselves and the missionaries, including SIL personnel, active among them. As a group the missionaries were more numerous and more diverse than one knew if one's access was mainly through the gateway opened by the books of Elisabeth Elliot and her successors. For one like myself whose acquaintance tapered off sharply when Rachel Saint took over, *God in the Rainforest* admirably fills in the story.

A New Order in the Rainforest

And take over Rachel Saint not only sought to do, but did, though in league with Dayomæ. Over the years, the two drew upon each other in working toward their overlapping but progressively diverging purposes. In 1949 Rachel arrived in Peru. Soon after she first learned of the auca/Waorani during a visit to her brother Nate in Ecuador. Err long she became convinced that they were hers, that God had given it to her to be the one to open the gospel to this "savage" tribe. When she learned of a young Waorani woman who had fled to the outside some years before, but who still retained knowledge of her language, she moved to the hacienda where Dayomæ worked as a peon, sort of an indentured servant. Grabbing what snatches of time Dayomæ could spare from her work and her child, Rachel sought to learn the language. With her rudimentary skill in the language when she entered the Waorani settlement, she was dependent on Dayomæ linguistically and for insight into the culture. Rachel wanted to shield the Waorani from the inroads of outside influences. Dayomæ sought to get everyone clothed and to replicate the sort of patron/client peonage she had experienced at the hacienda, only this time with her at the top of the hierarchy.

Rachel Saint's ideal of protectionism was an illusion. She could no more prevent the incoming flood of outside influences than she could stop the flow of the rivers to the Amazon. She did retard the penetration of outsiders within her "Christian" settlement for an amazing period of time, thus buying the Waorani some time as they made adjustments in their life patterns and expectations. Still, as David Stoll points out, Rachel, her SIL colleagues, and Dayomæ had themselves introduced new patterns of thought and behavior along with igniting a burgeoning desire for market goods previously unknown to them. Steel knives they already knew about and appreciated. SIL personnel represented a cornucopia of food and things, which they used to ingratiate themselves with the Waorani and which the Waorani avidly sought to acquire.

Rachel knew what God's will was. God had granted the Waorani to her. She also knew what God's will was for others. She had sought for someone to teach her the language of the Waorani and "discovered" Dayomæ. Therefore, Dayomæ was hers and not to be made available to her more linguistically gifted colleague, Betty Elliot. Dayomæ was assigned by God to be the key that would help her unlock the gospel to the Waorani. Later, she recognized at once that Oncaye was to be the key to entry among the downriver Waorani. She certainly had the strength of her convictions, for herself and for others. Elisabeth Elliot's heart and mind probed spiritual issues differently, and Rachel expedited her withdrawal from the settlement. Elliot first shifted to work further west in Ecuador and later to a writing and speaking career back in the United States. For better or worse, the fate of the Waorani, it seemed, lay in Rachel's hands.

SIL in the Rainforest

Who stands athwart a tsunami to impede its advance is not likely to emerge looking dapper and unsoiled. That is exactly the position in which SIL, preeminently in the person of Rachel Saint, had placed itself. To the Ecuadoran government, it promised to facilitate the induction of the Waorani into national plans that included exploitation of their lands, trees, and underlying mineral resources, especially oil. To the Waorani it held out the prospect of an enclave free, in the name of God, from internal spearing and protection against being gunned down by operatives of the oil companies or the Ecuadoran military "clearing" the way for them. For the oil corporations as well as the government, SIL promised pacification, that is, removal of the Waorani from the land and their relocation within the restricted and protected zone set aside for them.⁸ SIL had made promises to three parties, not all of which and maybe none of which it could fulfill.

What SIL offered to do for the oil companies could hardly have been more baldly stated than it was in a prayer letter sent by Bill Eddy. A former JAARS airplane mechanic, Eddy had been "asked to serve as a public relations coordinator between the various oil company headquarters in Quito and [Catherine] Peeke, [Rachel] Saint, and others participating in Waorani relocation."⁹ He wrote:

Twenty-five years ago the Shell Oil Company lost many workers to Auca spears. For several reasons Shell decided to leave Ecuador. Suddenly with the discovery of a vast reserve of oil under the Eastern Jungle, twenty-one companies are working 1500 men there. As they advance, we fly ahead of them and explain to Aucas living in their path that they are coming. We persuade

A blizzard of distressed commentary forced Wycliffe to seek to explain: “Our interest is not in oil but in Aucas” and that Wycliffe/SIL preferred Indian removal to the likely alternative of Indian slaughter.

them that they should move out of the way. This is done by Auca Christians through a loudspeaker mounted on the plane. As the Indians move, we notify the oil companies. As a result of this close coordination by radio and telephone through our Quito office, there has not been one life lost to date. PRAISE GOD!!¹⁰

Eddy’s comment, described by Long as “at best a simplistic description of what SIL was trying to do,” elicited a blizzard of distressed commentary and forced Benjamin Elson, Wycliffe’s North American director, to seek to explain: “Our interest is not in oil but in Aucas” and that Wycliffe/SIL preferred Indian removal to the likely alternative of Indian slaughter.¹¹

For the prospect of an end to intra-tribe spearing and slaughter by external corporate and governmental forces, the Waorani voted with their feet, walking for days through the jungle, and with their seats, riding in JAARS and oil company planes and helicopters, to promised new homes at Tewæno. Around the resettlement area, Rachel Saint tried, as noted, to impose a perimeter of exclusion to preserve the Waorani from Quechuaization. The result was more a sieve than a dam. The Quechua wanted to take advantage of Waorani fish, game, forest, and land resources, and they found means to do so. Even more powerful was the appeal that “modern” Quechua ways and goods in Quechua markets had for the Waorani. They wanted what was “out there”; they wanted to be “modern” too. SIL had used trade goods to gain entrée among the Waorani and to entice Waorani compliance. The urge for more and more of the same could be neither suppressed nor controlled. Further, a prime mover in stoking these desires was Dayomæ, Rachel Saint’s Waorani informant, colleague, and increasingly co-leader.

Belatedly and over the objections of Rachel Saint, in 1974 SIL assigned one of its few members with a PhD in anthropology, James Yost, to do fieldwork among the Waorani and compile a comprehensive report. Eventually, his studies of Waorani hunting and horticultural practices undergirded appeals for enlargement of the land reserves allocated to the tribe. More immediately, he characterized the worship Rachel Saint had introduced among the Waorani as “an oppressive type of Christianity.”¹² SIL had already assigned additional SIL members to work among the Waorani so as to dilute Saint’s dominance, but Yost’s severe critique of her control over the community forced it to take further steps.¹³ Saint refused to accede, and the process of transition dragged out for eight years. Her last ties with SIL did not end until April 1982. “By then she was back in the Ecuadorian Amazon as a retiree living next door to Dayomæ in the small village of Toñæmpade. It had been established only a few years earlier, independent of any SIL support” by Dayomæ and her son.¹⁴

Observations

There are other chapters to the story: the Waorani and the oil companies; saving the rainforest; setting apart sufficient land for the Waorani to enable them to continue their traditional mix of hunting, fishing, and horticulture; the creation especially by Dayomæ’s son of rainforest tourism with the auca/Waorani and Palm Beach as the prime attractions; Rachel Saint’s interactions with other missions’ engagement with the Waorani, especially that of the Roman Catholic missionaries; and two more missionary martyrs, this time Roman Catholic.

A word on the last of these before some concluding observations. Alejandro Labaca, bishop of Aguarico, “was an outspoken defender of Wao rights.”¹⁵ For some years he had been spending shorter or longer periods of time in the rainforest, staying as a guest in settlements of the “wild” downriver Waorani. During these visits, Labaca wore the same apparel his hosts did; he went nude except for a string called a *come* tied around his waist. Over the years, he “found it difficult to recruit missionaries, particularly nuns, to share in the [Waorani] project. Inés Arango [Velásquez] was the only nun in the vicariate who expressed a specific calling to be a missionary to the Waorani.”¹⁶ Her practice was to wear her white habit but to remove her head covering and shoes when visiting the Waorani.

On Tuesday, July 21, 1987, the two were deposited by helicopter in an isolated “wild” Waorani settlement. Though they had been warned not to make a visit there at that time, both were veterans of numerous visits to Waorani settlements, and they persisted with their plans. The next morning the clearing was found deserted except for their two bodies, riddled with spears. Little known in the English-speaking world, “among Catholics in the Spanish-speaking world, especially in Ecuador, Colombia, and Spain, Labaca and Arango [Sister Inés Arango Velásquez] would be recognized as martyrs who gave their lives for the Waorani.”¹⁷

What, I thought, is going on? In reading *God in the Rainforest*, I was struck by the similarity in outlook and objectives of SIL among the Waorani and those that were current among missionaries to Native Americans in the United States a century and more ago.¹⁸ Was this some type of intellectual joke? Had nothing been learned? Words and phrases used to identify the role of SIL’s personnel in Ecuador could have been taken straight from descriptions of what nineteenth-century missions among Native Americans thought they were doing in behalf of the US government. The aims and the slogans were the same. See the quotation from Bill Eddy that appears above. As

What, I thought, is going on? I was struck by the similarity in outlook and objectives of SIL among the Waorani and those among missionaries to Native Americans in the United States a century and more ago.

mentioned, a number of times James and Marti Hefley identify Wycliffe/SIL's goal, in behalf of oil companies and the government, as one of "pacification."¹⁹

Rachel Saint was quite simply an in-country administrator's nightmare in spades. She took her orders only from God. OK, but what did God want to have done? She alone was the judge of that. (Leave aside that she also knew what God wanted various other persons to do and that she alone was the judge of that, as well.) Financially, she received her support from a constituency that lay outside of SIL's control. She was, in effect, an independent ministry unto herself, facilitated by the Wycliffe/SIL twin organizations.

More mundanely, Rachel had a direct conduit, over the country administrator's head, to Wycliffe/SIL's founder/director, Cameron Townsend. Therefore, her grievances and requests had to be handled delicately. At the same time, Townsend had the same direct line of communication to her. Organizationally, the lines of communication were a mess.

Rachel Saint had star power because she was embedded in Wycliffe/SIL's star setting: among the Waorani. Townsend wanted to use that star power and prevailed upon her for the tours and books, written by others, that touted the story for public relations, fundraising, and recruitment purposes.

Rachel Saint had both conviction and courage. At least twice she stepped in directly to avert outbreaks of bloodshed and reprisal among the Waorani. When one man announced that he was sharpening spears to avenge a perceived affront, Saint marched into his dwelling, confiscated his spears, and hid them under her own bed. In another instance, she maintained the sanctity of her Christian community's cardinal rule, "No killing," by seizing the intended killer's spears and breaking them in pieces. To surmise now that by the time Saint intervened both men may have been secretly ready to welcome a face-saving way out of a step that, noisily announced, would have almost certainly led to their own deaths as well, does nothing to detract from her courage and the strength of her convictions. Quite probably she was the only person who could have done what she did and not have been killed.

From SIL's perspective, an immediate effect of Rachel Saint's retirement might be thought of as quasi-logistical. The path was finally clear for progress to be made on the long promised and as long deferred translation of the New Testament into *Wao tededo* (Wao language). Catherine Peeke and Rosi Jung, assigned to pursue the task together, carried it through to completion. "Five hundred copies were printed in May 1992 for a population of about twelve hundred, of whom

some 30 percent were marginally literate."²⁰ If the long delay is to be laid at Rachel Saint's feet, then the fact that the Waorani had grown so significantly in number during the same period should be credited, in part, to her account also. Breaking the cycle of killing had borne wholesome fruit.

Of the two women who followed Dayomæ to the Waorani, Elisabeth Elliot was the one with gifts as a linguist. But Saint could not let go of either the task of language analysis or that of translation. Developing an orthography was hers to do; translating the New Testament had to be done by her. Why? Was it because she was caught in the bind of the SIL vs. Wycliffe self-representational sleight of hand? If she surrendered the linguistic role, would she have lost her standing in the Ecuadoran government's eyes for remaining in the country? If she were not there translating the New Testament, would she have had no standing among her supporters in the United States? That was what they were contributing money for her to do. So, she drove Elliot from the rainforest and, by her insistence that she and she alone (though with the aid of Dayomæ) must be the one to do the translation, effectively obstructed progress on the translation until after her retirement.

What is to be made of the exploitation of the auca/Waorani, the strutting of them on the US and world stage in person and in print as fundraising props? The killing story—these were the men—and the conversions made outstanding press. Elisabeth Elliot objected, asking whether that was best for the Waorani, but Rachel Saint acquiesced and served as interpreter. Though Dayomæ and other Waorani were pressed into service, little of the money came back to Ecuador and less to the Waorani work.²¹ They were made to serve Cameron Townsend's larger cause.

Was it that larger cause—and the pressure to write glowing accounts of progress in prayer letters—that generated the "grade inflation" that caught up to SIL when Jim Yost reported on his fieldwork findings in the mid-1970s? SIL/Wycliffe was caught in a bind, but why did it equivocate instead of then and there rectifying the misinformation it had been giving out?²² In the 1970s, results of SIL's work among the Waorani were somewhat less than they had been reported to be. By the 1990s, an estimated 15 to 20 percent of the Waorani were practicing Christians.²³

The Will of God

When the five young men were killed on Palm Beach, much was spoken and written about the will of God, searching earnestly for a quid pro quo. Some thought they found it when reports came back that various Waorani had

When the five young men were killed, much was spoken and written about the will of God, searching earnestly for a quid pro quo. Elisabeth Elliot was not so sure that the mind and will of God could be read so easily.

become Christians or when the last of the five men identified as their killers had been baptized. Five for five, ergo, God willed that those five should die so that these men could receive salvation.

Elisabeth Elliot was not so sure that the mind and will of God could be read so easily. Both she and Rachel Saint thought long and hard about God's will, but Elliot seemed to be more restrained in her conclusions. She continued to ask probing questions, but was more reserved in her certainties. What we take to be a window into the mind of God might prove to be only a mirror. To be faithful to our conviction of God's calling on our lives and to be obedient to it, yes; to presume to know God's mind or purpose, no. Even though I am paraphrasing some of Elliot's later reflections, I am glad that she continued asking questions, and I appreciate the point that she, even in my lesser wording, was making.

In Sum

Perhaps the last word should be given to Kathryn Long. She correctly observes in concluding *God in the Rainforest* that

perhaps it is time for critics to concede that SIL workers did help the Waorani end some patterns of internal violence and survive contact with outsiders. By the same token, it may be time for North American evangelicals and also missionaries to recognize that the Waorani do not live in a historical, cultural, or geographic vacuum, nor are they frozen in time.

She goes on to add:

The Waorani are much more than the "supporting cast" for missionary heroism. They are people with a unique language, culture, and geographic location that—in common with all other cultures—reflects both the goodness and the brokenness of the created world.

To which, amen. A fitting conclusion to an exemplary study over the *longue durée* of a highly complex and at times hotly contested portion of mission history.

Endnotes

¹ I am following the convention used by Kathryn Long, *God in the Rainforest*. She does not capitalize "auca" since it is a Quechua term of disparagement, meaning "savage," not a proper noun. Those called "auca" referred to themselves as Waorani (sing. Wao, pl. Waorani; also spelled Huao, Huaorani, etc.), that is, "people." The names of persons and places show similar variations.

² Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor: The Martyrdom of Five American Missionaries in the Ecuador Jungle* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958) and *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

³ Elisabeth Elliot, *The Savage My Kinsman* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) and *No Graven Image: A Novel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

⁴ I have the impression that many persons refer offhandedly to the five men as though they had been members of SIL; see, for example, David Stoll, *Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire? The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, 1982), 298. For more on the vexed relationship between the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators, see the work by David Stoll just mentioned and Boone Aldridge, *For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

⁵ James Hefley and Marti Hefley, *Unstilled Voices* (Chappaqua, NY: Christian Herald Books, 1981), 185.

⁶ Olive Fleming Liefeld, *Unfolding Destinies: The Ongoing Story of the Auca Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1998; orig. 1990). See Hefley and Hefley, *Unstilled Voices*, 68.

⁷ Russell T. Hitt, *Jungle Pilot: The Life and Witness of Nate Saint* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), Ethel Emily Wallis, *The Dayuma Story: Life under Auca Spears* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), as well as such books as Ethel Emily Wallis and Mary Angela Bennett, *Two Thousand Tongues to Go: The Story of the Wycliffe Bible Translators* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959).

⁸ Hefley and Hefley use the term "pacification" a number of times in referring to SIL's program undertaken for the Ecuadoran government.

⁹ Long, *Rainforest*, 175.

¹⁰ Louis Wolf, "Pious Infiltrators: The Summer Institute of Linguistics," *Covert Action*, no. 18 (Winter 1983): 45, <https://archive.org/details/CovertActionInformationBulletinIssue18Winter1983CIAAndReligion/page/n43>. Wolf is citing from Laurie Hart, "Pacifying the Last Frontiers: Story of the Wycliffe Translators," *NACLA's Latin America & Empire Report* (December 1973): 22. See discussion by Long, *Rainforest*, 175 and 387n19.

¹¹ Long, *Rainforest*, 175.

¹² Long, *Rainforest*, 205; see elaboration on 206.

¹³ Long, *Rainforest*, 167.

¹⁴ Long, *Rainforest*, 211.

¹⁵ Long, *Rainforest*, 275.

¹⁶ Long, *Rainforest*, 281.

¹⁷ Long, *Rainforest*, 275.

¹⁸ Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018) and R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians: Two and a Half Centuries of Partnership in Missions between Protestant Churches and Government* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1966).

¹⁹ Hefley and Hefley, *Unstilled Voices*.

²⁰ Long, *Rainforest*, 301.

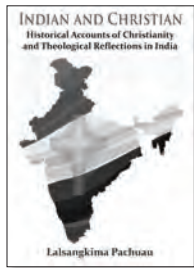
²¹ Long, *Rainforest*, 385n21.

²² Long, *Rainforest*, 210.

²³ Long, *Rainforest*, 301.

Indian and Christian: Historical Accounts of Christianity and Theological Reflections in India, by Lalsangkima Pachuau (Delhi: ISPCK, 2019), vii + 198 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



This brief collection of seven previously published essays constitutes an excellent introduction to Christianity in India and issues related to the gospel among India's peoples. In his brief introduction the author refers to an "epistemic moment" on noticing a book on Ethnonationalism; that term encompassed a reality that the

author, a Mizo from the far northeast of India who is Dean of Advanced Research Programs at Asbury Seminary, had not yet been able to put his finger on. He goes on to describe his book by saying that "At the heart of these accounts is what it means to be an Indian Christian."

Part one is three essays on "Indian Christianity and Indian National Identity." The first essay is a stimulating discussion of Mahatma Gandhi and his meaning in and for Indian Christianity. The title is profound and provocative: "Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalit Movement to Christianity in India: Clashing of 'Mass Movements.'" Complex and controversial topics are handled with carefully nuanced arguments as the significance of nationalist India to Christianity is drawn out. Gandhi's discomfort with conversion has had a great influence on modern India; missionary and Indian Christian discomfort with Gandhi is helpfully analyzed. The practical wisdom evident throughout this small book is seen in the concluding sentence of this first chapter:

One should also recognize that Gandhi's disapproval and denigration of the missionary practice of mission also challenges Christians to be prudent in their understanding of conversion and practice of mission. (41)

Chapter 2 develops the Gandhian angle further by looking at nationalism and Indian Christians. This begins with a stark acknowledgement that "only a small minority elite group of Christians participated in the nationalist movement" (48). This is then nuanced with the fact that the nationalist movement was an urban elitist movement, and most of Indian Christianity was rural and poor and low caste, segments of the populace that in general were not interested in the political agitation. The main impact

of the nationalist movement on Indian Christianity is seen in strong moves to make the church more Indian. This is traced through the Madras Rethinking Group, the Christian ashram movement, and the much more conservative Indian Theological Conferences up through the dialogue and nation building focus to the emergence of Dalit theology.

Chapter 3 looks at the transition from foreign missions in India to the indigenous missions of the Indian church in the post-independence period. This includes a valuable summary of the progress of policies restricting foreign missionaries beginning in the early 1950s. The development of indigenous Indian missions is easily traced in early independent organizations, but gets too complicated for neat summary as foreign missions always relied heavily on local workers and then eventually passed on all responsibilities, and many independent churches and individuals are active now.

It is impossible to know how many Indian missionaries are working in India today. But it is clear that there are more "missionaries" in India today than ever before, and almost all of these missionaries are Indians. (97)

This chapter includes brief discussions of the evangelism vs. social action tension as it manifested in India, and on following Jesus outside of Christianity.

Part two is two chapters on "India's Theologies in Their Religious Contexts." The fourth chapter is perhaps the most ambitious in the book, as it takes on the interaction of Hindu and Christian traditions, focusing on their views on sacred texts. After summarizing Hindu views of scripture, the Hindu response to Christ and the Bible comes into focus, referencing both fundamentalist anti-Christian responses and positive absorption-of-Christ syncretism. Pachuau concludes his survey saying that "There is no room for haste in the Hindu world. The biblical message and essential Christian beliefs will have to be translated into practical and realistic living principles" (123). And the encounter of the gospel with Hindu traditions has to be from *inside* those traditions, not as an attack from a foreign religion (122–124).

Chapter 5 turns to the author's own Mizo people of north-east India, also the focus of his doctoral work. He begins with the confusion over "religion" and "tribal religion" based on the alien worldview of missionaries imposed onto an indigenous term.

Any study of the primal religion of most tribal groups such as the Mizos must avoid the highly western sacred-profane

H. L. Richard is an independent researcher focused on the Hindu-Christian encounter. He has published numerous books and articles including studies of key figures like Narayan Vaman Tilak (Following Jesus in the Hindu Context, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998), Kalagara Subba Rao (Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005), and R. C. Das (R. C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity, Delhi: ISPCK, 1995).

Pachau concludes his survey saying, “There is no room for haste in the Hindu world. The biblical message and essential Christian beliefs will have to be translated into practical and realistic living principles.”

dichotomy and look at the entire socio-cultural life system for the meaning of the people’s religion and religiosity.... The interconnectedness of all aspects of life in the society and the interlocking meanings of symbols of various domains of life do not permit such clear dichotomy, as life is seen and treated as one whole. (128)

The chapter goes on to argue against the idea that tribal ways were all abandoned in favor of the new way of Christianity; rather “traditional primal religion as well as religiosity live on in some form to become a foundation for the newly embraced Christian religion” (129). The total conversion of Mizos in about half a century shows there was resonance in serious areas, as outlined in this chapter. Even the Mizo Christian focus on revivals is traced to their tribal heritage. This is stimulating and important material for missiological reflection.

The final section of two chapters is on “Christianity and Nationhood in Northeast India.” Chapter 6 surveys the seven states in the region and how Christianity was introduced. This is an excellent brief summary of the area where over a quarter of Indian Christians live (157). In a one sentence summary:

If one is to give an overview of how Christianity spread in Northeast India, it may be said that the missionaries initiated the movement by introducing Christianity to a few individuals, and the native converts spread it. (175)

The concluding chapter “is a modest attempt to highlight the complexities of ethnopolitics in Northeast India” (194). Serious political unrest and movements to separate from India in the most Christian part of the country contribute to India’s unease with Christianity. Dual influences of Sanskritization (or Hinduization) and westernization are noted. “Tribal” identity is a constitutional category (“Scheduled Tribes”) but this is hardly a meaningful designation due to the diversity of peoples across India who are so listed.

The list of criteria includes “tribal language, animism, primitivity, hunting and gathering, ‘carnivorous in food habits,’ ‘naked or semi-naked,’ and fond of drinking and dance.” The list, in my opinion, is simply absurd; and the criteria do not match those listed. (190)

This is simply ethno-centric prejudice, and “an honest recognition of the pain and harm caused by [this] marginalization” (194) is a necessary part of solving the political tensions. But this is a double-edged issue, and “Northeasterners also need to self-critically examine the practice of stereotypical constructions of the image of the ‘outsiders’” (194).

There are so many Christianities in India and so many complex challenges in that vast nation that a simple introduction is impossible. This book is not simple, and does not shirk the complexities of the gospel encounter with both existing Christianities and the variegated cultural traditions of India. It is not by any means a thorough introduction to Christianity in India, but it is a well-reasoned engagement with that complex world and is highly recommended for anyone who wants to start towards an understanding of that fascinating sub-continent and what “good news” means in worlds so foreign to traditional Christendom.

The Cow in the Elevator: An Anthropology of Wonder, by Tulasi Srinivas (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), xvii + 269 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



The odd title of this book illustrates one of the tensions under discussion. Auspicious cows are often part of house-warming ceremonies, but it gets a bit complicated when the “house” is an apartment in a high-rise building in Malleshwaram in modern Bangalore.

A peculiar benefit of this book is present in another oddity; the research was initially done in 1998, but was interrupted by the death of the author’s father (noted sociologist M. N. Srinivas). In her own words, “In the following thirteen years, in a vain attempt to return to my previously unbroken life, I forced myself repeatedly to Malleshwaram and to the temples” (59). When the author finally returned to her research, Bangalore (and Hinduism) had changed.

The book is not arranged chronologically, rather topically. Thus, the changes between the first and second phases of research are outlined in each chapter. An opening chapter introduces the key players, particularly priests at two Hindu temples but also including the city of Bangalore and Malleshwaram and the key concept of wonder as the heart of religious experience. A weakness of the book is that “wonder” sometimes seems forced into discussions, and dubious means of creating a sense of wonder are not adequately critiqued.

This statement prepares the reader for what lies ahead in the book:

Against expectations of growing secularism, India has seen a remarkable and visible growth in ritual acts largely due to the

Against expectations of growing secularism, India has seen a remarkable and visible growth in ritual acts largely due to the growth of the boomtown bourgeoisie. Ritual life allows people hope to survive and flourish. —Srinivas

growth of the boomtown bourgeoisie. Funds from the market economy have enabled temples to be built and restored, allowed forgotten pujas to take place, revived ancient ancestor sacrificial ceremonies, and resurrected many deities. . . . Ritual life is full, competitive, and intense . . . because it seemingly allows people hope to survive and flourish in times of extreme uncertainty and change. (15)

The first chapter deals with space and the remarkable transformation of Malleshwaram,

from low-lying, middle-class, and upper-caste small bungalows of local “old money” families to vertical upper-middle-class luxury apartment complexes, largely occupied by a new, boomtown bourgeoisie, a global software workforce, to whom locality and ecology seemed unimportant (38).

Uncertainty and insecurity fuel a return to Hindu ways, including Vaastu, which claims scientific confirmation for traditional patterns for the layout of houses and apartments.

Chapter 2 focuses on a common ritual where deities are taken from their temples on procession into surrounding neighborhoods. An extensive ethnographic description is provided with profound explanations comparing modern marriage relationships with the “marriage” of the temple deities. But during the interlude in the research, everything changed. One rather cosmetic change was a printed program with a timetable, in English rather than Kannada or Tamil. The order of the procession, which carried so much of the profound relationship to human marital relations, had been changed; more oddly, no one seemed to mind, and the traditional Brahman family had European members by marriage who were honored by the Brahman priests. Modernity is forcing massive adjustments to traditional Hindu practices and attitudes.

Money and wealth come into focus in the third chapter, and how wealth is flaunted both in society and in temples. Srinivas is troubled by this, and the corresponding neglect and even disregard for the poor: “Troublingly in Malleshwaram the pursuit of wonder led not to the ethical goal of inclusivity but to individual gain and the criminalization of the poor” (128). Yet with all the flow of money there is a breakdown of trust, and temple priests are not highly regarded figures. Both Hindu and Christian traditions (Christianity is not in the book; only mentioned here due to the context of this review) have long histories of distrust of wealth as a blinding and binding force over people; yet both now have prosperity theologies that are oblivious to the traditional perspectives. Technology and innovation, including new spectacles in the temples of Malleshwaram,

are highlighted in the fourth chapter. The wonder and money-making potential of new developments (a helicopter dropping rose petals, red powder and holy water on a deity and devotees is one example) draws crowds to the temple. Ritual and innovation are then discussed and illustrated, and Hindu ritual is “understood to inherently accept and promote experimentation . . . even juxtaposition of seemingly conflicting elements” (169).

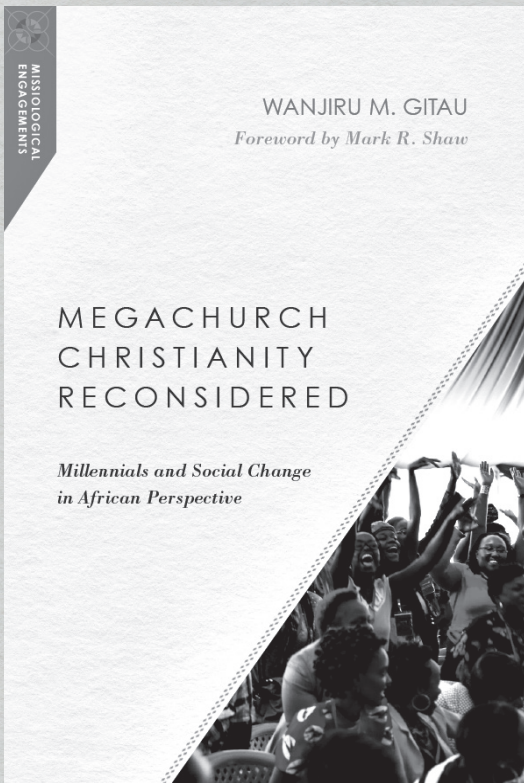
The final chapter looks at time, both in traditional senses and in the disjointed sense of call center workers in Bangalore who work on USA time schedules (i.e., up all night and asleep all day). Everything has become rushed in the modern city, and new methods of coping are developed. A dilapidated Mariamman temple, traditionally a goddess to invoke about infectious diseases, has been reconstructed and is thriving as a talisman against traffic accidents (196–98).

In her conclusion Srinivas states:

I began this work suggesting that this book be read as a folio composed of fragments of creative experiments. But at the end, I realize that what I offer here is more a manual of wonder combined with a ledger of possibility. (214)

Readers will no doubt feel differently about aspects of the book, and many different conclusions can be drawn. At the least the book is valuable for documenting change in Hindu traditions in modern urban India. **IJFM**

MISSIOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENTS FROM IVP ACADEMIC



In this case study of Kenya's Nairobi Chapel and its "daughter" Mavuno Church, Wanjiru M. Gitau offers analysis of the rise, growth, and place of megachurches worldwide in the new millennium. This engaging account centers on the role of millennials in responding to the dislocating transitions of globalization in postcolonial Africa and around the world, gleaning practical wisdom for postdenominational churches everywhere.

"Besides an awful lot of fascinating ground-up information, Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered is also rich in cultural insight and social-political wisdom. The book is even more important for its deep theological testimony to the potential of holistic Christianity wherever it takes root."

—MARK NOLL,
author of *The New Shape of World Christianity*

RECENT RELEASE

MORE VOLUMES



In Others' Words

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Hong Kong: Who's Stirring the Pot?

A proposed new law that would extradite Hong Kong citizens under arrest to the People's Republic of China has sparked massive demonstrations in Hong Kong. Hong Kong citizens, including the 10% who are Christians, have good reason to be concerned about extradition, loss of free speech and religious freedoms. The Chinese government has labeled the protests the doing of the CIA ("Why Chinese Officials Imagine America is Behind Unrest in Hong Kong" in *The Economist*, August 15, 2019, but the influence of Hong Kong Christians on these demonstrations is undeniable. See "With Hymns and Prayers, Christians Help Drive Hong Kong's Protests," *NYTimes*, June 19, 2019. For an excellent timeline of Hong Kong protests going back to February, see "How Months of Protests Have Unfolded in Hong Kong" (*Bloomberg*, Aug 23, 2019). For a more in-depth look at President Xi's hardline stances since 2012 and their impact on Hong Kong, read "China's Hong Kong Dilemma" in the *The New Yorker*, September 2, 2019.

Missionary Spies in WWII?

A new book has just been published about the religious professionals (missionaries, priests, and rabbis) who helped the US intelligence services during WWII. Entitled *Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States During the Second World War* and written by Matthew Avery Sutton, it is reviewed in an article in the August 19th issue of *Christianity Today* called "America Needed Spies in World War II. Many Missionaries Were Ready and Willing." *CT* author Andrew Preston calls this a "magnificent" book written by a renowned historian of religion: "The result is not only a profound history of American Christian missions but also one of the most original and interesting histories of World War II in several decades." This is reminiscent of another book about the impact of Protestant missionaries and their adult children called *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* by David Hollinger. See the excellent review by Dwight Baker in a prior issue of the *IJFM* 35 no. 2.

Religion in China: from the ZG Briefs

One of the best weekly sources of links about religion in China and the Far East (including many links about Hong Kong) is the [China Source ZGBriefs](#). Worth looking at

is a book review by Peregrine de Vigo, PhD (pseudonym) of *From Kuan Yin to Chairman Mao: The Essential Guide to Chinese Deities* in the July 31st blog. Eleven papers have been published online (Open Access) on the topic of Religiosity, Secularity, and Pluralism in the Global East: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/east#info. In particular, Daan F. Oostveen's article on "Religious Belonging in the East Asian Context" deals with religious hybridity and identity (*ZGBriefs*, August 8, [Links for Researchers](#)).

Global Free Speech and Privacy at Greater Risk

"The Global Gag on Free Speech is Tightening," a report on the status of free speech and government repression worldwide, was published August 17, 2019, in *The Economist*. This past year alone twenty-five governments have blacked out the internet from their citizens. And even in democracies like the US,

the 37% of American college students who told Gallup that it was fine to shout down speakers of whom they disapprove will be entering the adult world in their millions. So will the 10% who think it acceptable to use violence to silence speech they deem offensive. Such views are troubling to put it mildly. (*The Economist*, August 15, 2019: "As Societies Polarize, Free Speech is under Threat.")

In "Free Speech and Privacy on the Wane across the World," *The Guardian*, August 8, 2019, the authors summarize findings of a recent [human rights report](#) (Human Rights Outlook 2019):

China...home to one-fifth of the world's internet users, already faces the most severe internet restrictions. However, the study warns of the impact the 2020 rollout of the controversial [social credit system](#)—a mass surveillance and AI [Artificial Intelligence] programme that gives citizens a social credit score based on their social, political and economic behavior—could have, both within and beyond the country's borders.

Kashmir: Down the Rabbit Hole?

But by far the largest democracy to resort to a complete blackout of millions of its citizens is India. On August 5th, India abruptly stripped statehood and all semi-autonomy (guaranteed by the Indian constitution) from Jammu and Kashmir and instituted an all-encompassing internet, cellphone, landline, and postal blackout. Read "Inside Kashmir's Lockdown: Barbed Wire and a Sense of Loss" (August 14, *The Christian Science Monitor*). See also *The New Yorker* interview with Kashmiri novelist Mirza Waheed in which she describes shocking percentages: 1/6 of Kashmiris have been tortured in the last thirty years and 45% of the population suffers from some form of PTSD. ("A Kashmiri Novelist On a State Under Siege," August 16, 2019, *The New Yorker*.) The historical backdrop is presented in the *BBC's*: "Article 370: What Happened with Kashmir and Why It Matters."

Modi's Machiavellian Maneuvers

How could this happen?

In theory, changing this part of India's constitution requires a two-thirds parliamentary majority, which the BJP does not quite have. So the party devised an easier way: . . . annulling Kashmir's special status. That should have required assent from Jammu & Kashmir, too. But since June 2018 . . . the state had been under direct rule from Delhi. So the rest of India assented on Kashmir's behalf. That allowed parliament to abolish the state, and split it into two new "union territories" under the centre's direct rule. . . . The ease with which the state was dissolved will spook some of India's other regional governments. A challenge has already been filed with the Supreme Court. But there is considerable popular support for Mr Modi's sleight of hand. (See "[India Abruptly Ends the Last Special Protections Enjoyed by Kashmir](#)" in *The Economist*, August 8, 2019.)

See also "[Why Modi's Kashmiri Move is Widely Supported in India](#)" (*BBC*, August 15, 2019,) the haunting five-minute video on the *New York Times* website called "[Kashmir: Life on Lockdown](#)," and the opinion piece "The Silence is the Loudest Sound" (*NY Times*, Aug 15, 2019) by the well-known Indian writer, Arundhati Roy.

South Asia's Water Crises: Long Droughts and Late Monsoons

Severe water shortages in the rest of South Asia are very much a destabilizing factor for Kashmir. The waters of the Indus River which rise in Kashmir have been meticulously shared by Pakistan and India along the [Indus Water Treaty](#) lines since 1960. Ninety percent of Pakistan's fresh water comes from the Indus and Pakistan is projected to run out of water by 2025 (*Deutsche Welle* "[Water Crisis: Why is Pakistan Running Dry?](#)") Twenty-one cities in India will also run out of groundwater by 2020 including New Delhi. (See "[India Faces Worst Water Crisis](#)," in *The Hindu*, June 2018.) Water shortages in both countries, critics say, are not just from climate change but from human mismanagement. See "[Thirsty Indian Cities Have a Management Problem Not a Water Problem](#)," *The Economist*, July 6, 2019. See also the *National Geographic* article, "[India's Water Crisis Could be Helped by Better Building, Planning](#)," (July 15, 2019). Finally, here is an opinion piece in the *New York Times* by an Indian environmentalist suggesting local solutions to the water crisis: "[India's Terrifying Water Crisis](#)" (July 15, 2019).

Islam: Margins and Misinterpretations

For a perceptive book review of *Margins of Islam* (William Carey Publishers, 2018) by Warrick Farah and Gene Daniels, see the UK magazine *Affinity*, Spring 2019 online issue (<http://www.affinity.org.uk/foundations-issues/issue-76-review-article>). For a concise summary of this review, see Farah's blog "Circumpolar" (<http://muslimministry.blogspot.com/>).

Also on Farah's blog is his detailed introduction to the contents of his colleague Professor Martin Accad's new book *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching Across the Christian-Muslim Divide* (Eerdmans, 2019). Professor Accad will be the ISFM 2019 plenary speaker.

Christian Muslim Encounters Enriched by Medieval Thought

Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies just released a special issue on "Christian Reflections in Diverse Contexts of Islam." Included are two articles about historic Christian-Muslim encounters; both bring in 7th–8th century thought. The first is "Christian Defence of Free Will in Debate with Muslims in the Early Islamic Period," and the second is a fresh look at understanding the nature of God: "Allah: Internalized Relationality: Awwad Sim'an on the Trinitarian Nature of God." Kuhn does the English-speaking world a huge service by commenting on the Egyptian intellectual Awwad Sim'an's heretofore untranslated scholarly Arabic works. The third article of great interest is "Saint-Making' in a South Asian Tradition of Islam." David Emmanuel Singh examines how saints emerged in a South Asian Muslim sect, the Mahdawiyya or the Mahdavi. At the end of the article, he draws some fascinating parallels between his own South Asian Pentecostal rituals and traditions, and those of the Mahdawiyya.

Scholarly Papers on Prayer and Worship

Six of the papers that were presented last year at the June, 2018 conference, "Scripture, Prayer and Worship in the History of Missions and World Christianity," hosted by the Yale-Edinburgh Group on the History of the Missionary Movement and World Christianity have just been published in the journal *Studies in World Christianity*. (See the titles below and the abstracts at: <http://www.cswc.div.ed.ac.uk/2019/07/studies-in-world-christianity-issue-25-2/>.) Unfortunately, to access these articles you have to subscribe—but that might be worth your while! The articles include one on Ghazals, Bhajans, and Hymns in North India; one on the function of prayer in the Student Volunteer Movement; and one on the narrative history of the Lisu Bible in Southeast China. This journal is offering twenty-five other articles for free in honor of the 25th anniversary of publication as a journal, including one by Andrew Walls and another by Brian Stanley. Click here to access those: <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/story/10.3366/news.2019.02.08.500307?> Also, on the same website is a link to a tribute to the recently deceased but greatly missed Professor Lamin Sanneh written by his long-standing friend and colleague, Professor Andrew F. Walls: "[In Memoriam: Professor Lamin O. Sanneh \(1942–2019\)](#)." **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.

Articles in IJFM 36:3

	Lesson 7: Eras of Mission History (H)	Lesson 9: The Task Remaining (H)	Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)	Lesson 11: Building Bridges of Love (C)	Lesson 13: The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches (S)	Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)
Reimagining Frontier Mission Brad Gill (pp. 111–18)		X		X		X
Nurturing Vitality through Appropriate Structure: A Challenge for Ecclesial Movements Richard and Evelyn Hibbert (pp. 119–27)					X	X
God as Patron and Proprietor: God the Father and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery (pp. 129–36)			X			X
"Born Again" Muslims: What Can We Learn from Them? Colin Bearup (pp. 137–44)			X	X		X
God in the Rainforest: A Tale of Martyrdom and Redemption in Amazonian Ecuador, Books & Missiology Dwight P. Baker (pp. 146–52)	X					
Indian and Christian and The Cow in the Elevator, Books and Missiology H. L. Richard (pp. 153–55)	X		X			X

Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

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