

# Reimagining Frontier Mission

by Brad Gill

**F**rontier 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,"<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup>

## 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.<sup>4</sup> In any effort to reimagine, we must confront our models and the way they configure our mission orientation.

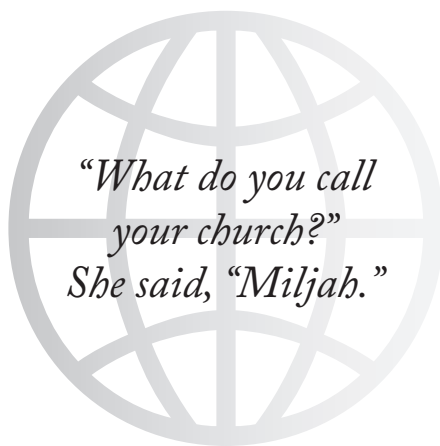
## Language is the Incarnation of Thought

We’re indebted to the poet Wordsworth for this profound statement about language.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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 default<sup>8</sup> 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”<sup>9</sup>—and they juxtaposed their experience with a particular picture from scripture. They reached back over all the New Testament catalogue of images for the church<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

Second, it was their *metaphorical* imagination that selected *miljah* as a fresh analogy for the church. Basic to “the rule of metaphor”<sup>12</sup> 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.”<sup>13</sup> In his treatment of New Testament images of the church, Minear asks why biblical scholars speak of “major” and “minor” images for the church.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>16</sup>

### *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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> Sanneh was the great champion of the “principle of indigenous reconstruction” that repeatedly

expresses “the vernacular character of Christianity.”<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.”<sup>23</sup> 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,<sup>24</sup> as each tries to reconcile the distortions and compromises with secular humanism.<sup>25</sup> 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).

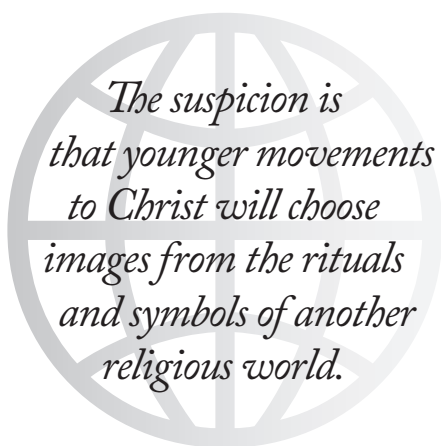
It’s the *religious-mindedness* generated in the interface of these religious frontiers that creates pervasive distrust. It affects how we listen. It can virtually silence our ability to hear the indigenous reimagining that comes with newfound faith. As our sister shared about her *miljah*, I couldn’t 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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,”<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup>

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?<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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*.<sup>33</sup>

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.

**T***axicab 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.<sup>34</sup>

He suggests this concreteness is true of the family (*oikos*) structure in Asia, where "the primary locus of religious life is the home."<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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).<sup>37</sup> 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 . . .<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.

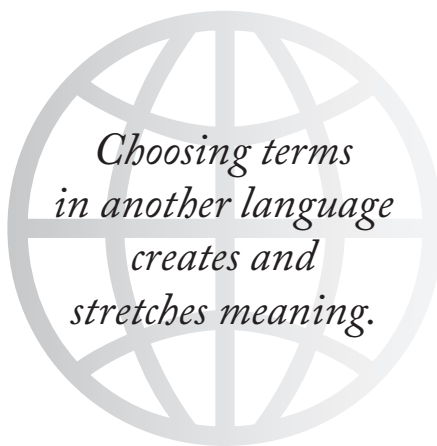
It would do us well to admit that frontier mission works from certain models, ones we believe to be biblical and to have succeeded over time. They are deep metaphors in our thinking, what the missional writer Alan

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.<sup>41</sup>



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.<sup>42</sup>

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.<sup>43</sup> 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”<sup>44</sup> 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.”<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup> 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,<sup>48</sup> 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."<sup>49</sup> 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

**H**e 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.<sup>50</sup>

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.<sup>51</sup> This simple picture of hospitality is reshaping our models of interreligious encounter.<sup>52</sup>

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*

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich, "Poetic language and the Imagination," 447.

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup> 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).

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

<sup>9</sup> Psalms 61:4; 91:1; and 31:20.

<sup>10</sup> 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).

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

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

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

<sup>14</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> John G. Flett, *Apostolicity* (IVP Academic, 2016), 172.

<sup>19</sup> Flett, *Apostolicity*, 173ff.

<sup>20</sup> Flett, *Apostolicity*, 170.

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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.”

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Univ. of Chicago, 1968).

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

<sup>26</sup> Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 103–116.

<sup>27</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>30</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, 21–22.

<sup>33</sup> Dix, *Jew and Greek*, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 162.

<sup>36</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 42–45, 76–78.

<sup>37</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 43.

<sup>39</sup> 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.

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

<sup>41</sup> Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 107.

<sup>43</sup> Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 108.

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

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

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

<sup>47</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>50</sup> 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).

<sup>51</sup> 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.

<sup>52</sup> 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.