

Books and Missiology

Missiological Ventures with Scripture

The Jesus Documents, by Alan R. Tippett

Ephesiology: A Study of the Ephesian Movement, by Michael T. Cooper

Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission, by Jackson Wu

Mission After Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation, by Amos Yong

— Reviewed by Brad Gill

Biblical study by those on the frontiers of mission may not be exceptional, but their contexts can make it extraordinary. They bring to Scripture their experiences, questions, predicaments, successes—all the exigencies of their concrete situations. They venture in pursuit of greater understanding and confirmation of God's ways in mission. They share the normal tendency to graft their experience inordinately onto the biblical narrative; but the sound and thorough study of biblical disciplines have trained their eye and yield greater awareness of all God intends on mission frontiers.

Each of these four authors has systematized missiological insights from his own vantage point into a fresh commentary on Scripture. Each also represents a significant trend in missiology: a Pacific island missionary who helped set the pace for 20th century mission anthropology; a systematic theologian who leads an emerging Pentecostal missiology; a scholar of the East who deploys more recent contextualization studies; and one who is knee-deep in the phenomenal growth of movements to Christ taking place today.

The Jesus Documents, by Alan R. Tippett, The Missiology of Alan R. Tippett Series, eds. Shawn Redford and Doug Priest (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishers, 2012), xiii + 116 pp.



SOME OF US LIKE OLD BOOKS, AND Doug Priest and Shawn Redford have done us a great service to edit and publish posthumously the works of Alan Tippett. This Australian mission anthropologist was a Methodist missionary who served in the Fiji Islands and eventually taught at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary during its inaugural years (1965–1977). Tippett had worked in and around people movements to Christ in Polynesia, and the study of this phenomenon required the disciplines of an ethnohistorian. He heralded the addition of ethnohistory to the corpus of missiological study, and in the mid 70s he turned that lens to a study of the four gospels in *The Jesus Documents*.

Tippett had a refined sense for the tribal world. Following in the train of Malinowski and the early masters of anthropological science, he applied that tribal acuity to our understanding of how these four gospel writers cast their genre. It was an anthropological approach rather than a critical approach to the biblical records, an attempt to reach out *symbiotically* and add his discipline to theirs. Darrell Whiteman, one of Tippett's students who shared a similar Pacific island experience, pointed out that Tippett wanted to get behind biblical literary criticism and its tendency towards a patchwork of gospel fragments (ix). Tippett thought critical scholarship had obscured the true nature of the Gospels

by shifting the focus from the character and purpose of the Gospels to the synoptic problem—a useful but thoroughly Western tool, problem-oriented and analytical at the expense of function and wholeness. (23)

As an ethnohistorian, Tippett insisted “that each Gospel must be read whole,” and only then would we “discover the cultural relevance and literary holism of the Gospels” (ix). Thus Tippett has offered more of a “question to the critics than a criticism of them” (7). His conviction is that his method can help us “discover the contours of the essential configurations that hold each document together as a unique thing in itself” (6).

His ethnohistorical approach, then, requires you absorb his introduction, “An Anthropologist Looks at the Jesus

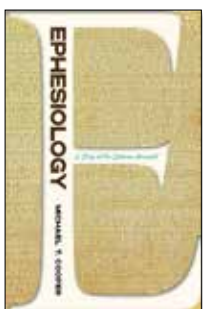
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Documents.” He situates his method as a “configurational anthropology” that identifies how the components of each gospel relate to the overall meaning intended for their respective audiences. Their distinct styles are captured in their titles: “A Tract for Our Times” (Mark), “The Historical Monograph” (Luke), “The Saga” (Matthew) and “The Sacred Drama” (John).

In particular, I noticed the value of Tippet’s anthropology in “the saga quality” of Matthew’s gospel. His description and framing of the saga recalls Tolkien’s epic tales, which were themselves modeled on the great northern European sagas. This epic style forces the reader to notice “a hero who fulfills the ancient traditions of his people, establishes a kingdom and rule, and sets up the ideal criteria and pattern for living” (51). Matthew is “the saga par excellence,” but this saga of Jesus is not “just another mythological record, or a philosophical allegory for noble living” (56). Tippet moves beyond simple cultural relevance and notes that the saga of Jesus is “also a current and continuous operation . . . the message is supracultural and the Hero or Key Personality is the Eternal Contemporary to all who believe” (56). The saga motif also frames the missiology of this gospel: the sublime uniqueness of the hero; a mission rooted in the themes of cultural tradition; the emergence of the missionary band and a great commission; and the transmission of a value system.

Since Tippet framed this anthropological treatise in the 70s, there has been a legion of biblical research that either confirms or challenges the interpretations of this ethnohistorian.¹ You’ll note that Tippet repeatedly suggests that the Gospels were a *new* literary genre, a common perception in biblical scholarship. But the recent work of Craig Keener suggests that the writers of the canonical gospels followed the literary practices of the classical biographers, whose writing was more historically grounded than the imaginative epic poetry of that day.² Those who studied under Tippet know that he would have warmed to the idea that the gospel writers had adapted a cultural form for their purposes.

Ephesiology: A Study of the Ephesian Movement,
by Michael T. Cooper (Littleton, CO: William Carey
Publishers, 2020), xv + 226 pp.



MICHAEL COOPER HAS EXPERIENCED Christ-centered movements and he can see many of those same dynamics reflected in the pages of the New Testament. From the different epistles, gospels, historical material (Acts) and John’s Revelation, he teases out aspects of a Christian movement that emerged out of Ephesus in those early decades. A

single biblical book or epistle is unable to capture the breadth and genius of that diachronic movement, but by grafting in a lens from his modern experience, Cooper is able to pull from a cross-section of New Testament materials. He draws a remarkable portrait of a movement that began in Ephesus and spread throughout the province of Asia—the dynamics represent, in his terms, an “Ephesiology.”

Like many others of a missional orientation, Cooper is motivated by the unfortunate results of a Western institutional method “that squelched what the Holy Spirit was doing.” He’s seen too much of ecclesiastical structures going to and fro throughout the earth propagating their “correct” model for Christianity. His biblical corrective begins with an assessment of church planting movements in the book of Acts (chapter 2). In his analysis, he weaves together social science, statistics and the biblical text to confirm a very different ecclesial dynamic. He invites the reader to listen carefully to the texts associated with the town of Ephesus, and to hear them (exegetically) in their cultural context.

Cooper’s own research into contemporary paganism sensitized him to Paul’s approach to the religious world of Acts 14 and 17.

He channels the more typical methods of contextualization into a biblical method he calls “missiological exegesis” (chapter 3). The launching of a movement requires an indigenous gospel, and Cooper unpacks this by studying the way idolatry was first encountered. Cooper points out a remarkable assessment of Paul’s gospel by the town clerk of Ephesus who, when Paul’s disciples Gaius and Aristarchus were embroiled in a riot, said to the rioting silversmiths, “these men are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess [Artimas]” (Acts 19:37). Cooper’s own academic research took him deep into contemporary paganism, and it sensitized him to Paul’s approach to the religious world of Acts 14 and 17. This missiological exegesis requires we see from the get-go the value of dialogue, the observation of culture, and the study of history as necessary for an apologetic that interlaces the story of God into the stories of other religious worlds.

Cooper then takes a further step of “missiological reflection” which will develop into a “missiological theology.” This reflection is “the intermediate step toward the intersection of this (initial) exegesis with a theology that will connect with culture.” Cooper begins on the pages of the New Testament, with Paul and John, but then reaches into the succeeding centuries to illustrate the important function of the

missiological theologian (e.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, Origin, Augustine, Vincent of Liens). I felt suddenly lifted out of those early years of this Ephesian movement. This shift to successors in the 2nd century—to their issues of heresy, hermeneutics, theological consistency and consensus—raises the question as to when missiological theology really crystalizes. (Isn't that like studying 21st century theologians to understand the actual dynamics of the 19th century Second Great Awakening in America?) But, aha! In his circuitous way, Cooper makes some vital points that boomerang back to the apostle John, a missiological theologian whose first-century biblical corpus reflects the dynamics of the Ephesian movement. He contends that careful historiography (Irenaeus, Polycarp, Cerinthus, Eusebius) establishes that John wrote his Gospel from Ephesus with particular sensitivity to that context.

The Fourth Gospel is an evangelistic presentation focused on addressing the religious and philosophical systems of Asia, and specifically those associated with the goddess Artemis and the god Dionysus, as well as the philosopher Heraclitus . . . it was a message that would have connected with a people who were proud to live in the city of a wonder of the ancient world, where "all Asia and the world worship" Artemis (Acts 18:27). (87)

In chapter 6, Cooper finally steps back to the epistle of Ephesians, for what he calls the "grounding of a movement." Rather than John's theology in the latter part of the century, Paul is the apostle who builds the early foundation of the movement. Paul's understanding of adoption and identity "in Christ" (Eph. 1:1–4) is a vital theocentric focus that takes precedence over any sociological factors in the movement; it is here that the battle for the movement will be fought (Eph. 6). Cooper focuses on all the relational (versus institutional) dynamics of this theocentric movement, which then leads him in chapter 7 to describe the nature and essential *diakonia* (service, ministry, diaconate) of leadership in this nascent fellowship of believers.

In his treatment of leadership (from primarily the pastoral epistles), Cooper quite suddenly begins to use the term "structures." Prior to this, and at times throughout the book, the term "institution" is used to speak of a movement's attempt to organize and systematize. As is so typical in nomenclature today, structure is a positive term, while institution is a more negative one. Structure has life, the latter is deadening, as in "institutionalization." Terminology must not obscure the fact that movements will develop simple institutions, simple structures, to establish their perpetuity. They are relational, as Cooper points out in his exegesis of Ephesians, but they have structure (i.e., deacon, bishop, elder); they are institutions that have yet to over-institutionalize, yet to suffocate under an overly rigid structure. Cooper states clearly that "we should fully expect some sort of institutionalizing of leadership . . .

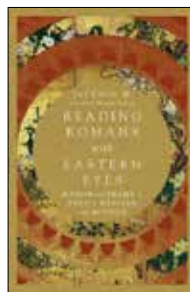
[that] structures help provide order, and there is little doubt that the early church did likewise." Movement and institution are in tandem through these final chapters as the leadership structure matures and the multiplication of a movement extends (chapter 8). Finally, in "sustaining of movement" (chapter 9), Cooper shows us that this Ephesian movement had to address the different challenges of institutionalization in the life of the seven churches of Revelation (which includes Ephesus and other cities in this Ephesian movement).

Cooper has provided us with an anatomy of a movement here in the New Testament—its characteristics, framing and indigenous features (chapter 10). In one last salute to his initial insistence on missiological exegesis, he quotes Ralph Winter's insight into indigeneity:

The New Testament is trying to show us how to borrow effective patterns; it is trying to free all future missionaries from the need to follow the precise forms of the Jewish synagogue . . . to allow them to choose comparable indigenous structures . . . (184)

Movements, indeed, will do a lot of borrowing. He quickly suggests the *oikos* (household) model as one of the prevalent social patterns that is borrowed in movements across the world.³ But to *borrow patterns* requires a further sensitivity to contextualization, and that we find in the biblical lens of our next author.

Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission, by Jackson Wu (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), xiii + 231 pp.



JACKSON WU HAS EMPLOYED AN Asian lens to the book of Romans, specifically the honor-shame sensibility of a Chinese Confucian world. The modern consciousness of Western readers can fail to appreciate the way they have grafted their own socio-cultural values onto Paul's letters, and Wu wants to re-contextualize Romans by using a more compatible Eastern perspective. Whether one agrees with his hermeneutical slant or not, this cultural sensitivity—so thoroughly engaged with biblical scholarship—is a model that can begin to equip the church to minister across the frontiers of Asia.

He begins by offering an apologetic for this Eastern perspective (chapter 1, "How to Read with Eastern Eyes"). It's unavoidable that we read the Bible through some sort of lens, that our cultural assumptions shape our perspective. But his conviction, which is fundamental to all his exegetical efforts, is that the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures of the biblical world resonate with the honor-shame perspective

of the East Asian world. Citing key scholars, Wu interprets Paul's use of *glory* (*doxa*, Gr.) not so much as splendor but rather as denoting honor, as in the exalted status of a king. The glory of the believer "is being placed in an exalted status or status of honor associated with a position of authority or rule" (23). These cultures stress tradition, relationship and hierarchy, and he believes their values of collectivism, social identity, loyalty, and personal worth are embedded in the cultural ethos in which Paul wrote Romans.

view of power and authority in Romans 13. And the Eastern manner of *guanxi* (the relational reciprocity of obligation) can help us understand Paul's exhortation in Romans 14.

"We who are strong have an obligation ["are indebted"; *opheilo*] to bear the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rm. 15:1). Why do they have this debt? Paul has an Eastern view of relationships. He understands they entail mutual obligation. Having God as Father (Rm. 15:6), Christians are "debtors" (Rm. 8:12). In Rm. 13:8, their debt is to love one another.⁴

Wu claims a Confucian view of human nature can make us more sensitive to what Paul is saying in Romans 7; an understanding of the nature of ancestor veneration can help us interpret Paul's view of power and authority in Romans 13.

Wu claims that behind Paul's framing of his Roman letter is an Eastern sensitivity to "saving face" (chapter 2). Paul's motivation is pragmatic, and in Romans 1 and 15 he bookends his epistle with his mission: gaining the support of this Roman church for his future apostolic effort to minister in Spain. But, there's a problem. From the very beginning, Wu understands Paul is addressing a Greek "cultural centrism" (Wu's terminology) which will inhibit that church's participation in his mission. In an indirect Eastern manner, Paul addresses this problem more subtly in the way he frames his entire exposition. Wu sees evidence of this in Paul's precise use of terms like "Greek" and "barbarian," in his choice to use the example of Jewish superiority in circumcision (Romans 2), and in Romans 7 with his use of the personal pronoun "I" to indirectly address Israel's failure. Paul had an Eastern manner of speaking truth.

Honor and shame are indicative of more hierarchical societies, and the modern Western mind will tend to minimize their relevance to biblical interpretation. The Eastern way of estimating collective human worth, that fundamental value Wu calls "collective identity," shapes Paul's treatment of his great theological themes throughout this letter. Sin is framed as the dishonoring of God and ourselves, of diminishing his glory (*doxa*), and it is only Christ who saves God's "face." Justification is recast "as a way of recognizing a person's honorable status." And the hope of glory (honor) comes through suffering, but "whoever believes will not be put to shame."

The various realities of honor-shame societies peek through chapter after chapter. The concept of the Filial Son—the faithful one—is an Eastern perspective on Jesus in Romans 5 and 6. Through a Confucian view of human nature, we become more sensitive to what Paul is saying in Romans 7. An understanding of the nature of ancestor veneration helps us interpret Paul's

Wu also addresses the recent controversy surrounding Paul's theology of justification from his honor-shame perspective, and he interacts with scholars like N. T. Wright and the "new perspective" on Paul. Wu proves he is not just conversant with New Testament scholarship, but he is able to build on this scholarship. For instance, he dovetails with John Barclay's recent study of Paul and the way his anthropology of human "worth" in first century society complements an Eastern perspective.⁵ Yet, with all due respect to his command of recent scholarship, Wu is more likely to cite the Psalms and the book of Isaiah in forging a biblical basis for Paul's honor-shame outlook.

Wu's commentary is a bit like commentaries can be—weighty and dense in style. His scholarship is impressive and indicates he's not superficially grafting an Eastern perspective onto the text. Let's face it—with his choice of Romans, Wu has gone where angels fear to tread, and the technicality requires the reader slow down and absorb the intricate way Wu weaves context and text into a fresh missiology.

As a Western reader, I found Wu's re-contextualizing of Romans quite beneficial, both personally and missiologically. For starters, it applies a fairly heavy torque on an unexamined modern consciousness. His exegesis of another kind of "social self" in Romans, one embedded in the institutions of honor and shame, forced me as a Western reader to reexamine human worth and human collectivity in a fresh way. As I write this review, my country (USA) is experiencing unprecedented public protests that declare "black lives matter"—human worth is at stake. Wu's commentary, like the many placards one sees on these streets, calls for a reexamining of any "cultural centrism" that could inhibit justice and equity.

Second, Wu helps moderns face how they may have lost a sense for the *real* biblical context. It was Barclay who pointed out

the Reformation's impact on our understanding of Paul (and Romans), how that modern reformation 500 years ago provided a European re-contextualization of Paul's missionary concern.

The *originating context* of Paul's theology—the Gentile mission that dissolved the distinction between Jews and non-Jews and relativized the Torah—became a matter of merely historical interest to later theologians.⁶ (emphasis mine)

In that more Christianized context, we modern Europeans began to appropriate Paul's theology for “the inner reform of the Christian tradition.” Wu's treatise is a further step towards rectifying this modern tendency, and his honor-shame perspective recovers Paul's missiological concern.

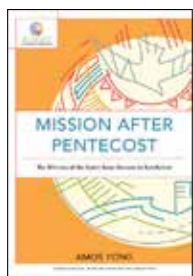
Yong has now published a biblical study of the Holy Spirit and mission. The *missio spiritus*, what his earlier writings have coined, the “missiological spirit,”⁸ is evident from Genesis to Revelation, and Yong believes it is the place to begin as we construct a missiological paradigm for the 21st century.

His motivation for this study arose from what he understands to be our contemporary missiological situation. First, he wants to address the predicament—the demise or the collapse—of the modern mission paradigm. Second, he wants to add his perspective to “the revitalization of the theology of mission” (a sub-field of missiology). And, third, he wants to resource missiology with an emerging “pneumatological interpretation of scripture.”

Yong's canonical approach forces us to exegete more inconspicuous passages—who would have thought that the book of Ecclesiastes would display a facet of the Spirit that speaks to the ephemeral and transitory nature of mission institutions today?

But, third, I had to tap the brake pedal a bit. While Wu's Eastern lens reestablishes the missiology of Romans, we must remember that this letter is focused on correcting and mobilizing the church for mission. It is not to be confused with the missiological apologetic we see in Paul's witness on Mars Hill in Acts 17. I suspect that readers of Wu may gloss over the differences. If the contextual reality of honor-shame is determinative, then so are the different contexts of church and mission field. Different contexts will accentuate different theology and different missiology. As John Flett has pointed out, the cultivation of the faith (Romans) can easily establish a range of controls over the communication of the faith (Mars Hill).⁷ Romans asserts that our collective identities are reoriented “in Christ” and for the “glory of God.” But Paul's way of prioritizing truth is not the same when communicating in a frontier mission context. As has been said, context is everything.

***Mission After Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*, by Amos Yong (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), xx + 300 pp.**



THE SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN AMOS Yong, now Dean of the Schools of Theology and Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary, uses another lens to frame a fresh biblical venture. A prolific Pentecostal scholar who has wedded theology studies with the inter-religious dynamics of Buddhist-Christian witness,

Yong employs a “triangulation” of lenses in approach to scripture, his term for the interface of theology, pneumatology, and missiology. His theological interpretation of Scripture is “bifocally mediated” through his missiological and pneumatological lenses. The missiological optic is the reimagining of Christian witness in light of the demise of a modern missionary enterprise. The pneumatological lens—the study of the Holy Spirit as divine wind or breath (*ruach*, *pneuma*)—provides the biblical starting points for reimagining a fresh missiological paradigm for today's world.

Yong uses a canonical approach, moving methodically from Genesis to Revelation and only engages those points where the “spirit” emerges in the text. This method of understanding *missio spiritus* sabotages our more familiar theological framing of the Spirit's manifestation in scripture. This singular textual focus forces us to exegete more inconspicuous passages—to be more comprehensively biblical. I found this to be stretching and refreshing, and especially so in his treatment of Old Testament portions (which take up a good half of the book). We confront what Yong calls the “ambiguity of mission” as the Spirit emerges in the period of the Judges and the early monarchy (“The Spirits of Ancient Israel,” chapter 2). While Yong faithfully tours the familiar turf of the great writing prophets, the chapter on “The Post-Exilic Ruah” offers surprising insights on the way the Spirit emerged in wisdom literature (Chronicles, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes) that were reappropriated in that broader Near Eastern context. Who would have thought that the book of Ecclesiastes would display a facet of the Spirit that speaks to

the ephemeral and transitory nature of mission institutions today? There's a startling relevance that begins to convince the reader that Yong's pneumatological approach to scripture is an excellent and very necessary venture for revitalizing our theology of mission today.

The frequent appearance of the *pneuma hagios* in the New Testament requires that Yong cover more pneumatological ground. He becomes more selective and examines "where pneumatology and missiology most directly intersect," and is guided by "those pneumatological passages that invite fresh consideration of *others*." To this missiological study of the mediatorial "go-between" Spirit, this author brings his deep sensitivity to religious pluralism, interreligious dialogue, comparative theology, and theologies of the unevangelized (especially Buddhist peoples). The evangelistic Spirit of the Gospel narratives and Acts, the Pauline testimony to the Spirit of apostolic mission, and the Johannine portraiture of the Paraclete, are all viewed through Yong's triangle of lenses. But, again, his canonical approach requires we look at the more marginal and intra-ecclesial books of Hebrews and the General Epistles.

These apocalyptically dominated epistles might be found to have missiological significance, not based on modernist notions of sending and going, but based on apostolic considerations of how to understand the time of the divine spirit in anticipation of the coming judgement. (228)

I have found that Yong's canonical process of applying a pneumatological lens to the biblical text, along with his use of original terminology, can lift one out of fixed missiological paradigms. His method of looking through three lenses is effective, and it creates a liminal space in which we can explore new biblical materials for reframing mission today. He alerts us to the range of ways the Spirit meets us on historically difficult frontiers.

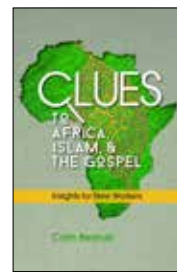
Tippett, Cooper, Wu, and Yong each bring their own missiological selectivity to the Bible. Tippett and Cooper both experienced movements to Christ, "people movements" and "church planting movements" respectively, but it was Cooper who chose to use that experience to frame his biblical study. Wu and Yong are both professors who scan the Asian frontiers, but Wu uses a Confucian lens while Yong's Asian sympathies lie with the inter-religious challenge of Buddhism. Like the cut and polished faces of a gemstone, their experiences reflect sparkling biblical facets of today's mission.

Endnotes

- ¹ One immediately thinks of the work of Kenneth Bailey in his *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976) and *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), or the work of Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
- ² Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2019).
- ³ For multiple articles on this *oikos* phenomenon see http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/34_1-4_PDFs/IJFM_34_1-4-EntireIssue.pdf.
- ⁴ Jackson Wu, *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 184–185.
- ⁵ John M. G. Barclay, Chapter I: "The Anthropology and History of the Gift," *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 11–65.
- ⁶ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 570.
- ⁷ John G. Flett, *Apostolicity: The Ecumenical Question in World Christian Perspective*, Missiological Engagements (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 16.
- ⁸ Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

Clues to Africa, Islam and the Gospel: Insights for New Workers, by Colin Bearup (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2020), vi + 110 pp.

—Reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith



Colin Bearup concentrates a lifetime of missionary experience in Africa into 110 pages, covering the fundamental cultural traits of the continent and applying them to missionary endeavours to Muslims. The clue to how he accomplishes this task is in the subtitle, "Insights for New Workers."

Though concise in his introductory approach to Islam in Africa, and latterly to each cultural trait, he does manage to provide thorough theological reflection. This makes the book interesting to weathered practitioners among Muslims as well as to beginners.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the purpose of the book, "To prepare the Christian worker to engage fruitfully with people who identify themselves as Muslims raised in Africa."

Chapter 2 explores expressions of Islam in Africa, making the point that community cohesion rather than doctrine identifies Muslim communities. Throughout the book Colin

Muslims of the Arab World have been Keith's focus for more than 40 years. He ministered with the Anglican Church in Egypt and Jordan under the auspices of the Church Mission Society. He then served in a variety of leadership roles with Arab World Ministries in Media, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, and the UK.

emphasises that, “In traditional Africa, religion is inseparable from life. It is not a subject to be taught but a reality to be lived. The natural and the supernatural are not separated.” As such, Islam has contextualized itself, being flexible in its local expressions and often unusually tolerant of other faiths, animism or Christianity.

A brief historic overview of the distinct African geography of Islam is given in chapter 3. A recurring concern of Colin’s is that we ask the questions, “How is this or that perceived? How does it colour the understanding and interaction between Western Christian workers and indigenous peoples?” Globalisation is but another expression of neo-colonialism and the Western Christian comes encumbered with the baggage of cultural individualism. Background study is not an optional extra for the academic but essential for all Christians planning to minister cross-culturally.

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Chapter 4 is entitled, “The African Incarnation of Islam.” Colin begins to help us get under the skin of African Islam and its distinctives. He spends time unpacking Sufi-style Islam which has found a resonance in the tradition of “shamanism,” i.e., the providing of tools to control the supernatural. Since my working with Nigerian Christians, I have always wondered why African Muslims are resistant to the gospel without being hostile to Christians. Now I know; diversity and the power of kinship normally trumps militant confrontation.

Handling the invisible world dominates chapter 5. Colin uses Scripture extensively to help the reader negotiate a subject which still embarrasses some Western Christians: “signs and wonders.”

In chapters 6 through 9, the author focuses on the distinctive African cultural traits that influence Islam and the Westerner’s interaction with Africans, Christian and Muslim. He draws from a deep well of personal experiences to illustrate his points, often humorously. Tables compare Africa to the West, Individualism with Collectivism and High Context with Low Context societies. In chapter 8, law-guilt, honour-shame, and

power-fear are discussed. Colin never lets us off the hook and frequently applies the theoretical to real-life situations, especially how the explanation of these traits impacts evangelism and church planting. He is refreshing and insightful.

Having been the beneficiary of, and the victim of patronage, I found chapter 9, “What are friends for?” particularly helpful. A list of proverbs pertinent to relational interdependence reminds the reader of another window onto culture. It is a salutary warning to know that the terms “brother and sister” carry a much greater implication in Africa than they do in the West. Privacy does not exist.

Chapter 10 is a theological discourse on 1 Cor. 1:23, “We preach Christ crucified.” Drawing on the cultural markers of African society and the Church Fathers, Colin considers how this verse can be explained to Muslims. The next chapter follows a similar path and Colin illustrates two ways of using the Scriptures to communicate the good news: the first, Paul’s teaching about Christ and Adam; and the second, Christ healing the unclean.

The final chapter is how to “do church” with Muslim-background believers. This is full of sound advice and he touches on familiar current issues, like the Church Planting Movement and the place of Discovery Bible Studies, to establish communities of believers.

The book lacks an index or a separate bibliography. However, every chapter, apart from the last, ends with a couple of recommended texts. These “weaknesses,” if they be that, are far outweighed by the penetrating questions appended to each chapter with space for handwritten notes. These can be used personally, but their benefit would be greatly enhanced by group study.

This is a “must buy” for anyone considering or planning ministry with Africans. Churches and individuals supporting Christian workers in Africa would find it extremely informative. Personnel, African and non-African, involved in regional partnerships would benefit greatly from its joint study.

This book would certainly have helped me as Director of Global Mobilisation for AWM. I thank all my African colleagues who taught me so much. **IJFM**