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## Minding the Gap

Frontier missiology stands on the shoulders of spontaneous forums. Two consultations which resulted from these conversations recently published their compendiums, both significant for frontier missiology. This issue spotlights one convened by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) in 2018, because we like the way it explored the intersection—a missiological gap—between Jesus movements, relief and development, and the least-reached peoples. Ten principles are addressed in their subsequent publication, *Undivided Witness* (ad, p. 92; book review, p. 106), and the publisher has generously given us permission to offer you an excerpt (p. 93).<sup>1</sup>

The second publication is from the “Rethinking People Groups Forum,” which was sparked by discussions at ISFM 2018. Any attempt to clarify the global demographics of the remaining frontiers must address the emerging debate over the concept of “peoples.” After a year and a half of many virtual and face-to-face deliberations, Marv Newell, editor of the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ)*, agreed to publish an extensive compendium of those perspectives (now available online from MissioNexus).<sup>2</sup>

Both these forums highlight the complexity of culture, context, and community, where conditions of place (community) weave themselves in and through any sense of peoplehood. The rethinking of people groups analyzes the way identity and ethnicity are stretched, contested, re-created, or affirmed in an urban and globalized world. But, conceptually, this rethinking of people groups evaluates only two of the three domains addressed in the OCMS forum, i.e., the emerging fellowships of Jesus followers among the least-reached peoples.

This OCMS forum saw a gap that divided our witness, and they pursued a more integral mission. For half a century we in evangelical missions have sought a greater reconciliation between proclamation and social action. We’ve addressed a missiological tension—a conceptual and institutional binary—that endures between word and deed. This recent forum in Oxford reframed this historic effort for frontier missiology. It explored the space—that place of convergence—between (1) these least-reached peoples, (2) the emergence of vibrant fellowships of Jesus followers, and (3) community development (see diagram 1, p. 58). In that interface of three domains, this forum discovered a set of strategic principles. They’re minding the gap.

Editorial *continued on p. 58*

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

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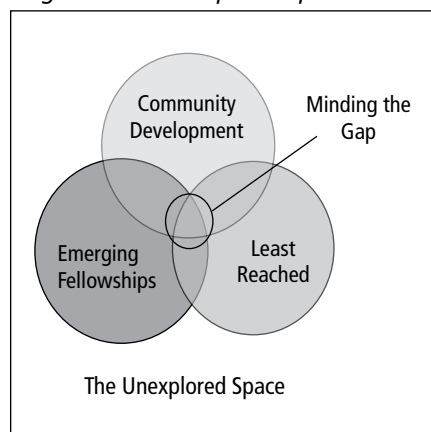
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The third leg of this stool, the matter of *development*, forces us to use a wider lens on all the contextual realities. It forces us beyond any singular focus on culture and community (peoplehood) to a broader assessment. Lacing across the inclusive categories of family, ethnicity and socio-religious identity are the intersecting realities of the human condition: physical, economic, religious, environmental, political, urban, and technological. Any witness to the whole person must appreciate the warp and woof of a community.

The articles in this issue of the journal (and Bob Sluka's article from our previous issue) suggest some of the

Diagram 1: The Unexplored Space



Adapted from *Undivided Witness*, p. 3

disciplines and specializations that cut across any frontier situation. Sluka, a marine biologist who has worked in the Muslim world, actually got us started with his study of creation care and its convergence with frontier missiology.<sup>3</sup> His environmental perspective from the coastlands of the world challenged us to reimagine our theological and biblical assumptions. In this issue, Todd Pokrifka also reflects on this divided witness as a systematic theologian (p. 67), and he favors the kingdom of God as the ground on which we integrate our spiritual and material well-being in greater fullness and transformation.

But it's in our mission praxis that we can feel this divide, and it's those same practitioners whose expertise can help us integrate our witness. Andrea Waldorf's article from *Undivided Witness* (p. 93) combines her street-level savvy and global experience to distill the common principles she sees both in community development and in our efforts to foster vibrant fellowships of Jesus followers. Margaret Pennington, a licensed counselor, was surprised that her training gave her an eye for family systems and the healthy way Hindus must come

to faith in India (p. 59). Steven Spicer fuses the science of innovation with spiritual discernment to suggest a way to catalyze more genuine transformation in frontier settings (p. 81). And Dwight Baker reviews two books that force us to admit that the reality of war and state totalitarianism can complicate and divide our witness (p. 100).

In Him,

Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel, *Undivided Witness: Jesus followers, community development and least-reached communities* (Regnum Books International: Oxford, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Go to [www.MissioNexus.org/emq](http://www.MissioNexus.org/emq) for details.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Sluka, "Creation Care and Frontier Missiology," *IJFM* 37:1 (Fall 2020), [http://ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/37\\_1\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_37\\_1-Sluka.pdf](http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/37_1_PDFs/IJFM_37_1-Sluka.pdf).

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- ☞ 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.

Towards an Integral Mission

# Ecclesial Challenges on the Frontiers: A Clinical Counseling Perspective

by Margaret Pennington

**A**s a licensed professional counselor, when I meet with a new client I am ethically required to begin with a disclosure statement, so clients can enter into therapy with fully informed consent. So, here is my disclosure statement for you: I am not a professional missiologist. Even though my heart and my experience have been in cross-cultural work, my academic training is in education, counseling, and family studies. As we wrestle with the missiological issues associated with the frontiers, my perspective is through the lens of emotional, relational, and spiritual well-being. It is impossible for me to see these issues as simply academic or theoretical. I want to invite you to look through this lens with me to hopefully enrich our discussion of missiology in the frontiers.

I was invited to go to India for the first time in 2010 to teach counseling at a small seminary in Chennai in their Master of Divinity program. Previously, I had lived and worked in both Thailand and Zimbabwe, but India was new for me. India is such a varied, complex society with such a myriad of cultures, that I confess I had never been quite so culturally overwhelmed as when in India.

In addition to teaching at the seminary, I am regularly asked to give mental health seminars and occasionally offer counseling services. In many conversations I would hear stories of pain and heartache, often told from the perspective of the person who was rejected by his family when he became a Christian. Several related how they had been beaten or disowned. One man told me that his parents, upon hearing that he became a Christian, both considered suicide.

Herb Hoefler, longtime researcher of followers of Jesus in India, told of one young man who received a letter from his mother after he said he was going to convert to Christianity. She said, in part,

Once you decide to convert yourself from one thing to another thing, you can convert yourself to anything. You can find a mother of your own choice, father of your own choice, sister and brothers of your own choice. You can convert your nationality, race . . . It could have been very, very easier for me to console myself

---

*Margaret Pennington has worked cross-culturally in Thailand, Zimbabwe, and India. As a licensed professional clinical counselor she has served individuals, couples and families, and has taught and supervised counselors at the university level. In their involvement in the Indian context, God has led Margaret and her husband Paul to deeply examine long-held assumptions of Christianity, the church, and missions. They are currently coming alongside and encouraging those who seek to follow Jesus outside of traditional Christianity, exploring with them alternative approaches in these challenging contexts.*

if you were dead than hearing this nonsense. You are a murderer, liar, criminal, actor, cheater, and bluffer, most of all a heartless and selfish person.<sup>1</sup>

My heart was touched by so much pain, and I wondered what kind of family can treat their child this way. But I had a lot to learn about India and the Indian family.

To understand what is really happening in these stories, it is important to look at the family as a system. A system is defined as a whole made up of interrelated individual parts which function together, but it is more than the sum of its parts. A family system functions because it is a unit where every family member plays a critical, unique role in the system. What one family member does affects the other family members. Like an ecosystem, one member of the system cannot change without causing a ripple effect throughout the family system. A system strives for "equilibrium" to maintain balance, stability, and resist change.

## A collectivist family system requires each to put the needs of the group ahead of his own. Decisions about education, career, marriage, and life are not up to the individual. Independence is not only unnecessary, but undesirable.

When Westerners talk about our families, we usually mean the nuclear family, the parents and children who are living in the home. We talk about the "extended family" which may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Within the family, however close, our family system allows for each individual to develop his own identity and be fairly independent. Each individual can make his own decisions about education, career, marriage, and life.

The Indian family is assumed to include all those we call family, plus extended family and even "shirt-tail relations." Indians often live with multiple generations in the same household. They are in a collectivist family system which requires each to put the needs of the group ahead of his own. Decisions about education, career, marriage, and life are not up to the individual. Independence is not only unnecessary, but undesirable.

Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar writes,

A man's worth and, indeed, his identity are inextricable from the reputation of his family. How a man lives and what he does are rarely seen as a product of individual effort or aspiration, but are interpreted in the light of his family's circumstances and standing in the wider society. Individual success or failure makes sense only in a family context.<sup>2</sup>

Craig Storti, a cultural consultant, sums it up this way,

In the West, the central function of the family is to prepare its members to be able to live on their own, whereas in India the central function of the family is to guarantee that no one ever *has* to live on his or her own.<sup>3</sup>

My Indian friends are astounded and somewhat horrified if I tell them that one of the goals of American parenting is to teach our kids to be independent. I want my adult offspring to want to be with me, but not need me for daily functioning. I want them to be able to responsibly stand on their own. Indian mothers do not typically want this.

One Indian woman came to me in tears. Anu<sup>4</sup> was a highly educated professional. She was married with two teenage daughters. She went on a trip to another part of India to participate in a conference. One morning she called home to check in with her family. Her 16-year-old daughter told her that she didn't like the way the dad had braided her hair in the mom's absence, so she braided it herself. The daughter was so proud of her accomplishment, she told her mom, "I think I can fix my own hair every day, even when you get back." Anu cried to me, "What if she doesn't need me anymore?" In my

American mind I thought, "Awesome!" but I paused and gave a more appropriately Indian response.

For a family system to function, it requires each person in the system to fill his assigned role. This is true of every human system. If one person tries to make changes, the system has unspoken rules in place to pull everyone back to homeostasis, the norm, the comfort zone of the family system. If the person persists in changing, even if it would be a "good" change, the system will try to pull him back in, and if that doesn't work the system may begin to fall apart.

A good example of this is in the family of an addict. Alcoholics Anonymous is a program that very effectively helps people overcome their addictions. But it became quickly apparent that family systems often sabotaged recovery. The very qualities that allowed the family to survive addiction, were the qualities that held back recovery. They also observed that when the alcoholic could successfully maintain sobriety, his family would often fall apart. The family system that functioned, however unhealthily, with the addicted person could not survive without the addiction. So, AA began to work with the families through Al Anon and other groups to help the whole system change.

Teaching counseling in India, students often tell me, "I wish we had more independence, the way Western college students do." Often the pressing issue in their minds is, "We want to choose our own wives." They sometimes ask, "Did you let your

son choose his own wife?" I explain that, "Yes, my son chose his own wife. But he is part of a family system and cultural system that has fostered independence from birth. In this system, when my son was 15 years old, he had a job." Jaws start to drop as I continue, "When he wanted to drive, he had to pay for his own car insurance and eventually his own car. When he wanted a mobile phone, he had to pay for it." By this point in the discussion, the students look like they are in shock. I explain that our son chose his own wife, though he did ask for our opinion. And they got married knowing that they would be responsible to make their own choices and pay their own way. I explain that a part from one system cannot replace a similar part in a different system. Putting Western independence into an Indian family system is like trying to use a part from your motorbike to fix your mobile phone, an illustration they quickly grasp. Parts of different systems are not interchangeable.

So, the Indian family system requires the wholehearted buy-in from everyone in the system. If one person opts out, it is detrimental and destructive to the system. Kakar explains,

In a country without large government programmes of social security, unemployment compensation and old age benefits, the family must give temporary relief when a man loses work, a young mother is ill, or monsoon floods destroy the harvest... it is the family that provides the only life insurance most Indians have.<sup>5</sup>

Neither family system is superior, but they do not share interchangeable parts.

- When it is time to choose my education and career path, it is my choice. The Indian has a family for that.
- When it is time to choose a marriage partner, the choice is mine. The Indian has a family for that.
- When it is time to plan my wedding, it's my "special day." The Indian has a family for that. It is the family's special day.
- When I consider having children or how to raise them, my husband and I will make those decisions. The Indian has a family for that.
- If I lose my job, I will file for unemployment. The Indian has a family for that.
- If I need financial assistance, I can apply for a loan. The Indian has a family for that.
- If I get sick or disabled, I will file with the insurance company. The Indian has a family for that.
- When it is time to retire, I will collect social security and hope I've put enough extra aside. The Indian has a family for that.
- When I consider my faith and/or religious traditions, it is my personal decision. The Indian has a family for that.

It is not just our Western view of family systems which is very different than the Indian reality. Even our understanding of

human development and mental health is based on a Western, ethnocentric perspective. We understand that, based on the work of Eric Erickson and others, to reach healthy emotional maturity an individual will go through stages of psychosocial development to develop an ego identity. This development includes separation from parents, the differentiation of self, and the adolescent identity crisis. The healthy ego asks questions such as, "Who am I? How do I live true to myself?"

In a collectivist culture, such as India,

self-identity is largely determined by one's identity in the society. In this system of social existence, there is practically very little room for the kind of individualism that characterizes the North American culture.<sup>6</sup>

I sometimes jokingly say that if an American has an ego, the Indian has a "we-go." The healthy "we-go" asks, "Who is my family and community? How do I live out my assigned role? How do I live true to my group?"

Alan Roland, a psychoanalyst who worked extensively in India, says,

The Indian extended family, whether living in a unitary or joint household, is the locus of an Indian's psychological life for both men and women. The ideal of family honour and reputation, cohesion, and harmony come first over individual strivings and are major ideals that help contain the not infrequent conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

From the Western perspective a healthy balanced ego is the core identity and necessary for emotional maturity. If someone has not developed a healthy individual identity, it is hard for them to function in life and relationships. And if some sort of trauma, such as childhood sexual abuse, occurs and the individual's identity or ego is fractured, he might be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder or dissociative disorder.

I've wondered how this might work in a collectivist culture. What if the core identity is not the individual identity, the ego, but the group identity? If the core identity is the "we-go," what if it is fractured? What if there is a rift within the collective identity? What does trauma or PTSD do to the "we-go"? Is there some sort of dissociative disorder or at least a comparable level of emotional or mental distress when the "we-go" is ruptured? What does this do to the family or the individual? Storti raised the possibility that

an individual's survival and well-being are inseparable from that of the group (the family and extended family)...the individual cannot survive emotionally and psychologically outside the group.<sup>8</sup>

This suggests that a person torn from his collective identity will experience trauma and psychological damage. While we don't have definitive answers to these questions yet, what we can be sure of is that we must not downplay the importance of the collective identity.

Now that we have been introduced to the Indian family system and the collective identity, let's look at a case study from this perspective. Raj was born into a Hindu family. His mother was the keeper of the family Hindu religious rituals. His father was not religious. The father was highly educated with an extensive library which he introduced to his son, encouraging him to read widely and to be open-minded.

The father taught his son through stories. Raj recalls,

One story he told was about a Jew who was a rebel who stood against corrupt religious and political powers. He stood up and was killed—Roman political crucifixion. He wanted me to learn from Jesus how he fought against power structures. He told me that the hurting world needed more people who followed his path of love. This is how I got my initial story of Jesus.

But the father warned,

If you want someone to follow, Yeshu stood for truth, but he lost his life. That is the price. Don't be mediocre, be like Jesus.

Raj said he developed a huge respect for Jesus as a person. "The character of Jesus attracted me every time I encountered him." His father gave Raj a small book on the Sermon on the Mount, saying, "This was what guided Gandhi." As Raj read the Bible, he began to follow Jesus.

Let's pause to consider terminology. What does it mean to be Hindu? This is a Hindu family. The mother practices some religious aspects of Hinduism. We would probably classify the father as agnostic. Raj is following Jesus. Each person in the family self-identifies as Hindu. What does it mean to be Hindu?

Westerners tend to draw lines and see things in distinct categories. We usually think that Hinduism is a religion in the same way that we think of Christianity as a religion. We might define a Christian as a person who believes and follows the teachings of Jesus. So, we assume that a Hindu is the person who believes and follows Hindu teachings. Dayanand Bharati, a teacher among Hindu followers of Jesus, explains,

We cannot put a Hindu's life in water-tight compartments. It overlaps with so many aspects like culture, religion, tradition etc. So, what is culture and what is religion cannot be decided by any outsider and even a Hindu is not sure where to draw a clear line. In a few contexts what is definitely culture becomes religious and what is religious become culture.<sup>9</sup>

The Indian family system is centered around a collective identity, an individual's identity is the family he belongs to. In the same way the socio-religious identity is centered on what family and community the person belongs to. To be Hindu is to be part of a socio-cultural-religious community identity. You are Hindu

because you were born into a Hindu family, whether or not you are a follower of any faith or if you are agnostic or atheist. A Hindu identity is part of the family system and part of a larger community that encompasses the family. Researcher Herb Hoefler adds,

Hinduism is a way of life with many different belief systems. . . You can have whatever belief you like, but you are expected to participate in the values and customs and organization of the society.<sup>10</sup>

This expectation to participate in the values and customs of your family and community is an important aspect of the Hindu value system.

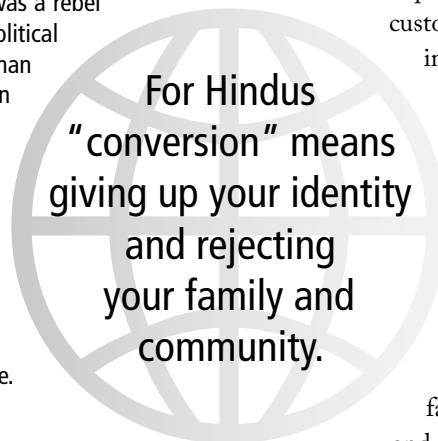
It is the concept of *dharma*. Dharma is "duty, righteousness, order, that which sustains society."<sup>11</sup> Dharma ties in with the collective identity. It means fulfilling your assigned role in the family system and the community or social system. To be a Hindu does not require a specific faith or doctrine, but it does require living out your duty and responsibility to your family and community. Dharma, this family and community duty, is one of the highest values in the Indian family and society.

While Raj was living out his dharma, fulfilling his role in the family system, he followed Jesus without a problem. But, Raj related, that some Christians told him he needed to "go to church" to grow in his faith. He expressed interest in baptism and was told that he had to go to court and get a "certificate." He was disturbed when he heard that it meant he would no longer be a Hindu. Raj related,

Finally, I said that I would take baptism, but not change my family and religion. One day a pastor agreed to baptize me without the legal certificate. But later I was told I had joined a church and was separate from my parents.

Again, we need to pause and think through terminology. Westerners typically think a "Christian" is a follower of Jesus, "conversion" is when an individual decides to follow Jesus, and the "church" is a body of followers of Jesus. These terms we use seem so simple to us because we don't understand what they mean in India. Let's listen with empathy to hear what these words mean to many Indians.

To Indians "conversion" is not about what god you follow or what your belief system is. In the same way that to be a Hindu is to belong to a community, not so much a matter of personal faith; to convert means to leave your family and community and join a different community. Conversion means giving up your identity and birthright. Conversion means rejecting and dishonoring your family and community. It means to break from your collectivist core identity and reject your dharma.





Conversion assumes that you cannot follow Jesus while staying in your family and socio-religious community. This is a question that followers of Jesus have always wrestled with. The very first followers of Jesus were Jews. They did not leave their socio-religious community. They continued to go to synagogue and temple, they kept their religious festivals and diets, they lived as Jews following Jesus. When some Gentiles wanted to follow Jesus, some of the Jews told them you need to leave your community and join our socio-religious community, then you can follow Jesus. As Bharati explains, the Bible

clearly teaches that a Jew can remain as a Jew and follow the Lord and non-Jews can remain non-Jews and still follow the Lord. In order to become a follower of the Lord a non-Jew need not become a Jew first ([in] particular being circumcised).<sup>12</sup>

The early followers of Jesus did not leave their families, cultures, or socio-religious community to be faithful to Jesus.

In India there are also legal ramifications of conversion. In our Western individualistic thinking, we might say it is not the government's business what religion I follow. But, in India there is one civil code (set of laws) for Hindus and another civil code for Christians, residue from the colonial era. In this context, it is definitely the government's business which community you are in. You may have heard of India's notorious "anti-conversion" laws. But all the laws seek to prevent any person from converting or attempting to convert, either directly or otherwise, through "forcible" or "fraudulent" means, or by "allurement" or "inducement."

**To many Indians,  
"church" can mean  
a foreign-funded aggressive  
religious group  
that calls itself a family,  
but undermines the family.**

To be a "Christian" or "join a church" is part of the conversion package. We hear the word "church" and think body of Christ, or a gathering of believers. After all, that is the meaning of the word "ecclesia." However, through time the word "church" has accrued many different meanings. It is often used to mean a building, "go to church"; clergy, "my church told me"; denominations with particular doctrines and political stances; traditions, including rules and expectations, most of which are extra-biblical; hierarchy and organizations. In India it carries the excess baggage of all of these meanings and more. To many Indians "church" also means foreign architecture; foreign

worship and foreign preaching styles and postures; foreign values. To many Indians, "church" can also mean a foreign-funded aggressive religious group; colonial power structure; the arbiter of cultural or contextual lines; the gatekeeper of who can be married and buried; the authoritative translators and interpreters of the Bible; a caste-based society outside of Indian castes, the community for the outcastes; a community outreach with a hidden agenda; a religious group that calls itself a family, but undermines the family.

Let me address just one of these issues: the church as the arbiter of cultural or contextual lines. The church often takes the role of rule maker for believers. The church decides what is syncretism and what is not, what is faith and what is sin, what a follower of Jesus is allowed to do or forbidden from doing.

- Many churches tell their members which family festivals they can attend. For example, in south India many churches say you cannot participate in Thanksgiving (*Pongal*) with your family.
- Some churches say, "don't touch your parents' feet, because it's idolatry." For most Indians bowing down to touch feet is a traditional sign of honor and respect.
- Many churches say you must have a "Christian wedding," which means a Western style wedding in a church building with the bride in a white dress (the color that Indian widows wear). This can be seen as an insult to the groom and his family.
- Many churches say a woman is not to wear the *bindi*, the dot on the forehead. For many Indians this is simply the indicator of a married woman, much like a wedding ring.
- Some churches dictate: change your clothes, change your diet, change your name.

All of these further communicate to Hindus that Christians are trying to undermine their families and society. Many of these prevent Indian sons and daughters from living out their expected roles in the family system. Remember our discussion of dharma, living out your duty and responsibility to your family and community is one of the highest Indian values. To interfere or not fulfill this duty is one of the most serious offenses, it brings shame to the individual, the family, and the whole community. Tim Shultz explains the seriousness,

If Hindu people come to believe that their faith in Jesus makes it impossible for them to participate in the dharmic culture of covenantal relationships within their extended family, and if they decide to align with the Christians on that basis, they have literally broken covenant with their family. They have not only spurned their privileges and responsibilities as a member of that family, but they have actually lost the right to live among their people.<sup>13</sup>

Often when young people are brought to Christ it is with the hope that they will witness to and evangelize their families. We need to understand this within the dharmic family

system. It is often considered shameful and disrespectful for a younger person, or someone lower in the family hierarchy, to instruct the older, especially in spiritual matters. We put these young people in an impossible position, expecting them to disrupt and shame the family.

Remember the letter of the mother to her son who wanted to be a Christian? She said, in essence, “You are a horrible person and I would rather you were dead than be a Christian.” When we hear such angry words, what goes through our minds? We may think it’s an overreaction to someone’s faith choice. We may think this is what Jesus meant when he said, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34) or “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you” (Matt. 5:11). Or we may think we need to help this boy escape such an oppressive home.

Whatever our first thought is, let’s put it aside to hear with empathy what is really happening in the heart of this mother. To practice empathy, we need to be able to step into the perspective of another. So, let’s try to imagine how we might feel in this situation.

Imagine a strange, foreign religious group, historically known for its aggression. Imagine this religion funded and sent groups here to infiltrate and convert our children. Imagine they taught that joining this group meant students must dishonor and publicly shame their parents. Imagine the church taught that it is evil to celebrate holidays with your family and deliberately scheduled meetings during these traditional family times. Imagine your son announces that he will no longer be at Thanksgiving or Christmas. Imagine that they told your daughter she must not participate in family weddings or funerals. And imagine that when we complained, they cried, “Persecution.” We would justifiably feel anger and hostility. And this scenario is in a Western family system which allows personal choice.

Is this a mother’s persecution or a mother’s pain? Listen again, carefully with empathy. “It could have been very, very easier for me to console myself if you were dead. You are a murderer, liar, criminal, actor, cheater, and bluffer, most of all a heartless and selfish person.” Just beneath these angry words, can you hear the mother’s broken heart at the loss of her child? Can you hear her fear? From an Indian family systems perspective, this is a fate worse than death, a threat to the survival of the family. From a dharmic perspective, it is total betrayal and rejection of everything the family values. It is no wonder conversion is seen as a hostile, destructive, rebellious act against the family and community. It is a dishonoring and disrespecting of them, their family, and their values. It is an unspeakable shame that ripples out to detrimentally affect hundreds of people in the community. Additionally, in the

Indian family system, this affects the siblings’ ability to get married. It affects the parents’ retirement. It affects the family welfare as a whole. It is a fracturing of the core identity. This confirms in the mind of the Hindu family that Christianity is an offensive, aggressive religion which is a threat to the Hindu community. This is the power of the collectivist family. This is the potential destructive power of conversion.

With this in mind, let’s return to Raj’s story. When the message reached Raj’s father and village that he had “converted” they were troubled. He knew he needed to go home and mend the relationship with his family. The church instructed him that if he went back he shouldn’t touch his parents’ feet, a traditional Indian sign of respect. They told him that if his family didn’t accept him and his conversion, it was a noble thing, it was what Jesus meant about “leaving father and mother” for the kingdom. They told him that they would be his family now, that he had a home with them. So, he returned home.

His parents were hurt deeply, but still welcomed him in. But late one evening people from the village came and said, “Your father is highly respected and wise. How can you dishonor him?” They told Raj he was not welcome, so he left his home and his village. He relates, “I went with a sense of pride that I had ‘left father and mother’ for Jesus.”

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Raj went back to the city to the church who had said, “We will be your family.” He approached the man who had counseled him to stand up to his father. That Christian said, “You cannot stay with me I have two daughters.” It might hurt his daughters’ marriage prospects if a single man from a Hindu background stayed at the same house. Raj recalled,

I had many “homes” but “no bed and no bread.” I had to sleep on the streets until finally a friend from college took me in. I was tired, confused, lost. I thought if I left my parents the Christians would take me. But none did.

His father heard he had slept on the street and sent some villagers to find him and invite him to come home. What a beautiful picture of the graciousness of a father’s pursuing love! But Raj was still torn because of the Christians’ teaching.

He found a teacher who explained that the Bible also says, "Honor your parents." So, Raj started home, realizing that he needed to live within his family in an honorable way, to fulfill his dharma. Raj told us, "My father was with some friends when he saw me coming down the road, he said, 'Raj, come, come, come!' He welcomed me home. I came and bowed down and touched his feet."

Raj summed up his journey this way:

If I had said I want to follow the path of Jesus, my parents would have been fine. But to "convert" brought shame, strife, and conflict. It brought mourning, not celebration. But I now understand that the Bible teaches me to be a devotee of Jesus and to stay a child of my family and remain a Hindu in my culture.

Bharati poses the challenge,

So if Muktvēda [the Bible] never expects me to change from one community to another in order to follow the Lord, and my own tradition gives space for me to remain as a follower of the Lord without compromising my bhakti [devotion] in Him, then why should I leave my Hindu community and join another Christian community?<sup>14</sup>

He explains why it is important to stay within the Hindu family and community:

The reason for us to keep our Hindu identity is to take the gospel inside our respective communities as leaven in the dough. This is possible when our own people realize that following Christ does not mean changing community allegiance. Unlike Western countries, here in India, particularly it is the community which holds the key both for our identity and survival and not personal religious faith and voluntary associations. It is not merely for survival, however, but because of our birthright, that we want to keep our Indian identity, which is always related to community identity.<sup>15</sup>

What might it look like to be a devoted follower of Jesus within the Hindu community and within the Indian family system? Raj married a girl from a Christian family, which was

an enormous concession on the part of his family. But Raj and Usha agreed that they would honor his family and live a life of dharma within the family system.

Against the advice of the church, Usha agreed to honor his family by following the traditional Hindu wedding customs. They wore traditional Indian clothes and did not get married in a church building. They did everything his family asked without compromising their devotion to Jesus. They chose to express their devotion to Jesus by honoring the family.

Raj and Usha came to the conclusion that they needed to step outside of the traditional Indian church in order to honor their family. They determined to just be followers of Jesus, to be the expression of Jesus in their community. They self-identify as Hindu followers of Jesus.

After the wedding they moved to stay with his family in the traditional way. The church had advised them to never let people see them argue, or they would lose their witness for Jesus. Raj said, "We couldn't live one way in public and another way in private, so we just did our best to live for Jesus." Raj's sister and husband came to visit and said "We see your life and marriage, how you treat each other with love and respect. We want to know about Jesus."

Usha's duty, her dharma, was often challenging for her as a daughter-in-law, one of the lower rungs of the family hierarchy. But she looked for ways to honor and serve her in-laws as an expression of worship to Jesus. Several years later Raj's father told him, "I was afraid we had lost you forever, but you set an example for everyone else. Usha is more Hindu in our village than my sister and her husband." Raj told us, "Usha is the daughter-in-law that every family wishes they had. Because of her many villagers are learning about Jesus and following him." **IJFM**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Herbert E. Hofer, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001), 235.
- <sup>2</sup> Sudhir Kakar, and Katharina Kakar, *The Indians: Portrait of a People* (Haryana, India: Penguin Books India, 2007), 11.
- <sup>3</sup> Craig Storti, *Speaking of India: Bridging the Communication Gap when Working with Indians* (Boston, MA: Intercultural Press, Inc., 2007), 29.
- <sup>4</sup> Note: I have changed names and details throughout this paper to ensure confidentiality and respect privacy.
- <sup>5</sup> Kakar and Kakar, *The Indians: Portrait of a People*, 11.
- <sup>6</sup> Storti, *Speaking of India*, 98.
- <sup>7</sup> Alan Roland, *Journeys to Foreign Selves: Asians and Asian Americans in a Global Era* (New Delhi, IN: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37.
- <sup>8</sup> Storti, *Speaking of India*, 21.
- <sup>9</sup> Dayanand Bharati, "Concession and Compromise," April 28, 2018, accessed July 22, 2019, <http://dayanandbharati.com/concession-and-compromise/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Dayanand Bharati, *Living Water and Indian Bowl* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2004), i.
- <sup>11</sup> H. L. Richards, *Hinduism: A brief look at theology, history, scriptures, and social system with comments on the gospel in India* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2007), 54.

<sup>12</sup> Dayanand Bharati, "In My Humble Opinion," November 21, 2016, accessed July 22, 2019, <http://dayanandbharati.com/in-my-humble-opinion/>.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Shultz, *Disciple Making Among Hindus: Making authentic relationships grow* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016), 99.

<sup>14</sup> Bharati, "In My Humble Opinion."

<sup>15</sup> Bharati, *Living Water and Indian Bowl*, 52.

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# Towards an Integral Mission Towards a Theology of Social Change and Development

by Todd Pokrifka

I must begin with a couple of stories. Though fictional, these true-to-life vignettes illustrate the need for a theology of social change and development.

A family living in rural Laos was lifted out of extreme poverty when a Christian non-profit organization gave them a small loan and helped them to sell their products to a wider market. But the father began to use the newfound extra funds to buy alcohol. This eventually led him to violence, created tensions in his family, and ruined his ability to sustain the business. The Christian NGO believed their loan would bring “the fullness of the kingdom,” but did it?

A young couple moved to a large city in Northern India. They were passionately committed to seeing a movement to Jesus in a particular unreached group that has a large presence in an urban slum where they live. As they arrived and began to learn the language, they became aware of how poverty and environmental deprivation were having great impact on the people they served. Yet they intentionally pursued discipleship in ways that didn’t specifically address these issues. In their view, mission work was exclusively a spiritual matter concerned with preparing people for the next life. However, when one of the main emerging leaders died at the young age of 45 due to complications from a preventable virus, they began to reconsider the nature of their ministry. Perhaps alleviating poverty and promoting good health was a part of their calling after all.

Stories like these—and there are potentially thousands more—illustrate the challenge of understanding both social change and development in a way that is sound and wise, biblically-based and experientially-attuned.

## *The Kingdom of God: Some Big Questions*

These common predicaments are prompting mission agencies to reconsider their theology of social change and development. In the organization in which I serve, we have a vision statement that beautifully proclaims our desired

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future: *Movements to Jesus expressing the fullness of the kingdom of God among all peoples.* But what is the “fullness of the kingdom of God”? To what extent can and should we participate in bringing about this fullness of the kingdom? Is it something only God can do? What would it mean for a movement to Jesus to express the fullness of the kingdom of God? Answering such questions are foundational for a theology of development that is both scripturally-grounded and relevant to contemporary missional practice.

To ask what the fullness of the kingdom is, requires that we have a solid understanding of what the kingdom of God is. One can hardly overstate how important this theme is in Scripture. If the kingdom was Jesus’ favorite topic and theme, then should it not be a central priority in our reflections? Yet traditional systematic and doctrinal theology has done little with the kingdom of God theme, and this has been to the detriment of the church and its mission.

The primary meaning of the kingdom of God in the Gospels, as G. E. Ladd emphasized,<sup>1</sup> is the “reign of God.” It is primarily about how, through Jesus Christ, the Creator God who is the God of Israel has become king on earth.<sup>2</sup> Only secondarily is the kingdom a place, such as the place we go (i.e., “heaven”) in the afterlife. But questions persist:

- How does God’s kingdom—and the fullness of the kingdom—relate to social transformation and to the human work of development?
- How does the kingdom of God bear on the spiritual and material aspects of human life? How do these aspects relate to one another?
- What are the most effective means of sustainable, positive social change? Scripture says little; we need to consult best practices.

## Part 1: An Initial Response to the Questions

### A Key Distinction: The Core and the Fullness of the Kingdom

One basic theological distinction that we can make, based on the overall biblical witness and story, is between the core of the kingdom and the fullness of the kingdom. This distinction is not made based on explicit biblical terminology, but rather on themes and emphases found in the way Scripture describes God’s kingdom, understood in dialogue with historical and contemporary missional practice.

- The *core of the kingdom* is primarily the spiritual and relational expression of God’s Christ-centered reign, focused on people coming into right relationship with God, with one another and with the world. This “core” or “center” is the main emphasis of Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom, and it addresses how God’s people may participate in it. (Kingdom core can be pictured as the smaller of two concentric circles.)

- The *fullness of the kingdom* is the comprehensive expression of God’s reign in all creation, overcoming all evil and undoing every cause of suffering, spiritually, materially, and ecologically. This fullness is a fulfillment of God’s penultimate goals in the created universe, which serve the ultimate goal of bringing him glory. (Kingdom fullness can be pictured as the larger of two concentric circles, a circle that includes the full scope of God’s kingdom purposes within it.)

### The Relationship between the Core and Fullness of the Kingdom

I wish to make the following claim about the relationship between the core and fullness of the kingdom: *The fullness of the kingdom cannot come in a society until the life-giving core of the kingdom has been established and continues to thrive in it.* We can understand this relationship with the help of an analogy. Imagine a spring of water that is the source of water and life for an entire society. A host of good things come from and depend on that water source. Yet if the spring dries up those good things fade away, sometimes quickly and sometimes over a much longer period of time. Some aspects of kingdom flourishing (say, a wise and healthy government or legal system) may remain present when core kingdom elements (say, multiplying gospel movements) have long since disappeared. Yet the fullness of the kingdom is not present unless there is a comprehensive expression of the kingdom of God that includes every major area of life.

### “Development” as Human Participation in God’s Bringing of Kingdom Fullness

In a biblical understanding of the kingdom of God, God is the only one who can bring or build the kingdom, but God chooses to rule in, with and through his people. Community and international development work can be understood as intentional human work that seeks to move broken human societies, especially the most poor and vulnerable ones, into a state of greater overall well-being or *shalom*.<sup>3</sup> Such development work is an expression of human participation in God’s kingdom work. Insofar as development work is corrupt or faithless, it is a human or even demonic work, but insofar as it is God-honoring and virtuous work, it can be ascribed to God or to God’s empowerment.

Development is rightly understood as holistic, comprehensive and systemic in character. Rather than reducing development work to its economic or material dimensions, these dimensions represent only parts of the fullness of the kingdom in a community or society.<sup>4</sup> The various aspects of development—addressing different fundamental human and creational relationships, freedoms and needs—are interconnected and interdependent aspects of God’s solution to the problems of fallen creation. When a problem in one part of life is

addressed or not addressed, it has an effect on other parts of life and their problems. In particular, the material aspects of fullness cannot be adequately achieved or sustained without addressing the core aspects of the kingdom involving right relation to God, the king.

### Life and Development Between the Present and Future Kingdom

The kingdom or reign of God is expressed in varying ways in different periods of the history of the world as well as in the history of different societies and communities. In the largest scope of universal, world history, Scripture shows that we currently live in an epoch between the initial inauguration of the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven) in Jesus' first coming and the final perfection of the kingdom in his second coming. For this epoch or age, then, the kingdom is both already present and also not yet full or complete. In different ways, God's reign is both now and not yet. This perspective avoids triumphalism (because we know that much is not yet fulfilled) and pessimism (because the kingdom and access to its resources is already a reality). Societies exist on a "development continuum" based on their level of progress toward the fullness of the kingdom.

### *PART II: Six Theses for a Theology of Social Change and Development*

With the above foundational categories and convictions in mind, I wish to propose six theses that outline dimensions of a theology of social change and development. These theses do not represent a comprehensive perspective, but focus on the relationship between the "material" and "spiritual" aspects of the kingdom. This relationship is key to answering the theological question: "How does the fullness of the kingdom relate to social change and development?" These theses offered are based on my understanding of both a biblical theology of the kingdom of God and empirical evidence gathered from history and recent case studies.

Before I state the first thesis, I want to comment on my use of the potentially controversial terms "material" and "spiritual" as aspects of the kingdom. These terms are imperfect, but are familiar and popular enough to warrant using them. I use the terms in ways that undermine some of the dualistic assumptions with which they are often associated, as aspects of God's interconnected, relationally-constituted creation. This is in contrast to how they have sometimes been understood in dualistic worldviews in the West and elsewhere as entirely distinct, watertight domains of reality. The spiritual aspects of God's creation and kingdom generally relate more closely to the core of the kingdom, whereas the material aspects relate more to the fullness of the kingdom.

### Thesis 1: Spiritual and material well-being are both deeply important to God.

To deny the importance of either spiritual or material well-being is an unbiblical dualism. Such dualism has often plagued the Western World, sometimes prioritizing the spiritual (in the pre-modern world) or sometimes the material (in the modern, especially the post-Enlightenment, world) in ways that excluded or diminished the other. Both are essential parts of God's kingdom: the spiritual, concerned with the activities and relationships of spiritual beings (God, humans, angels, and the like), and the material, concerned with physical beings and objects. The future "new heavens" and "new earth" will involve the perfection of both spiritual and material beings as well as a close and harmonious relationship between them. Humanity is a union of the spiritual and material; we are both spiritual and material beings. Accordingly, the incarnation of Jesus Christ indicates God's willingness to step into the spiritual and material aspects of his creation. As the Word becomes flesh (John 1:14), he takes human nature upon himself, including its embodied qualities. Sin and evil have deeply corrupted both the spiritual and material aspects of creation and, therefore, God's Christ-centered work of redemption, his recovery and pursuit of *shalom* or well-being, encompasses both.

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or develop affordable housing  
*simply* in order to  
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Because the spiritual and material well-being are both deeply important to God, we cannot reduce one kind of well-being to the other. They are distinct goods. Neither spiritual nor material well-being should be treated instrumentally as a mere means to the other. This means that we should not feed the hungry or develop affordable housing *simply* in order to lead more people to Christ or to disciple them more effectively. Neither should we lead people to faith in God *simply* because faith makes people more resilient and thus more upwardly mobile.<sup>5</sup>

In his time on earth, Jesus demonstrated a holistic ministry in which the spiritual and material were important and interwoven.<sup>6</sup> Preaching, focusing primarily on spiritual needs, went hand in hand with demonstrating the gospel of the kingdom in ways that often focused on addressing material needs (healing, doing miracles that benefited

the poor like the multiplication of food, and so on). Jesus ministered in words and works. Luke tells us, quoting Isaiah, that the kingdom was “good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1) and good exegesis shows that this is not merely spiritual poverty, although Matthew highlights this aspect in his beatitudes (“Blessed are the poor in spirit” in Matt. 5:3). The kingdom is not merely spiritual or concerned solely with the spiritual, and his healing and feeding miracles were never absent of spiritual aspects or meanings. Jesus’ signs and wonders involved both healing bodies of sickness and delivering people from spiritual darkness and oppression.

Jesus’ earthly ministry is important not merely as a testimony to his marvelous character and ways, but truly as model for us, demonstrating what it looks like for a human to partner with God in the Spirit. We have the same Spirit who calls and empowers for both spiritual and material service and redemption. Our particular forms and approaches to ministry will be different from what Jesus needed to do in first century Palestine as the unique God-man with a unique mission, but the importance of both material and spiritual well-being to God should be a consistent feature of our ministries. It expresses the constant character and revealed values of God.<sup>7</sup>

## Early Christian care for the poor and sick, at least in cities, took on proportions that were unprecedented in the Greco-Roman world.

### Thesis 2: Spiritual and material well-being are integrated and interconnected.

To deny the integration of spiritual and material well-being is another aspect of the dualistic error. Not only are the spiritual and material both important (Thesis 1), but they are interconnected with one another. Although tracing causation is difficult, it is clear that a change in one often affects the other. This is particularly obvious in human life. On an individual level, humans are created and saved by God as spiritual-material unities.<sup>8</sup> As such, a change in the (material) body (say, having too much or too little food or having an injury to one’s brain) can affect the spiritual (including one’s ability to live a virtuous life or one’s level of spiritual hunger) and a change in the spiritual (say, healing prayer) can affect the body (physical healing).

This mutual integration is also evident in the social or corporate lives of humans. The spiritual can affect the material, as when conversion of an individual or group gives them a motivating hope of a better overall life and as a result empowers people to be more economically successful and upwardly mobile.<sup>9</sup>

Conversely, the material can often affect the spiritual. For example, people who die young due to material deprivation have significantly less opportunity to hear the good news and receive the gift of eternal life.<sup>10</sup>

An admirable articulation of this integration and interrelatedness thesis (my Thesis 2) is “The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission,” which focuses on the integration of evangelism and social involvement:

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the *proclamation and demonstration* of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our *proclamation has social consequences* as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our *social involvement has evangelistic consequences* as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> (emphasis mine)

The early church was an example of this symbiosis of what I earlier called kingdom core and kingdom fullness. From Acts through the early fourth century, early Christianity is marked by a series of rapidly-multiplying Jesus movements, with conversions often growing at a rate of 30–40% per decade.<sup>12</sup> This is at the heart of the largely “spiritual” core of the kingdom

and its advance in this time. This kingdom core naturally grew into kingdom fullness that brought about growth in material well-being for Christians and non-Christians alike. Early Christian care for the poor and sick, at least in cities, took on proportions that were unprecedented in the Greco-Roman world. This led to Christians having a good reputation for care of the vulnerable, which seemed to lead to more conversions.<sup>13</sup> They first cared for “their own” in extraordinary ways (e.g., Acts 4:32ff), but as they grew in social power and influence, their care reached into the surrounding community—through extensive church care for the needy.

### Thesis 3: Spiritual well-being has priority over material well-being; the spiritual is central.

Despite what I have said in the first two theses, Scripture presents the ultimate priority of the eternal, spiritual aspects of the kingdom over its temporal, material aspects.<sup>14</sup> In a fallen and incomplete world, we must sometimes choose to prioritize the spiritual over the material, even though the material remains important in God’s purposes.<sup>15</sup> To say otherwise contradicts the testimony of Scripture and post-biblical history. Consider the words of Jesus and Paul and the



legacy of many “martyrs.” Jesus asks poignantly: “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 15:26).<sup>16</sup> Paul reasons, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:19; cf. 17–18, 33). The human soul has a worth that transcends what this world can offer, and there is a more valuable life that transcends “this life.” From the first century on, countless witnesses have suffered and died for their faith, knowing that such physical suffering and death was not in vain.

I realize that there is a danger in affirming this third thesis, since it might appear as if I am denying the sufficient importance of the material (against Thesis 1) or denying the symbiotic integration between the material and spiritual (against Thesis 2). But one can affirm a kind of priority for the “spiritual” or, better, a priority for what I have called the relational “core of the kingdom,” without denying or undercutting the truth of these earlier theses. For example, I want to affirm with the Micah declaration that “The struggle against injustice is spiritual”—and that such injustice often degrades the material well-being that God is working to maintain or develop.<sup>17</sup> In addition, we can affirm the “priority of the spiritual” without denying that material well-being is both important and eternal. Instead, we forward look to a renewed earth and to resurrection bodies, not to a disembodied, immaterial heaven. With Howard Snyder, we affirm that redemption is holistic and “salvation means creation healed.”<sup>18</sup> Yet we sometimes need to prioritize the “spiritual”—including suffering material loss in this life—in order to be faithful to Jesus Christ as Lord and to participate rightly in the eternal, comprehensive purposes of God for all creation.

Again, Jesus’ earthly ministry gives us an example of integral, holistic mission that nonetheless has a kind of priority on the spiritual core of the kingdom and the gospel of the kingdom. For example, Jesus demonstrates concern for the poor, but does not initiate a program of structural social change in the wider Roman society in which he lived.<sup>19</sup> While his ministry and perspective do clash with both Caesar and the Pharisees and Sadducees,<sup>20</sup> he does not overthrow the Roman Empire, nor does he press for a take-over of the religious leadership of Israel. Instead, he focuses on discipling twelve Jews and, through them, founding a new spiritual-religious community that would multiply and become a movement. Why? What does this focus imply? It *does not mean* that Jesus simply rejects the value of structural social change. Rather, we must understand that Jesus was in a setting in which he and his disciples were relatively politically powerless and in which the political options were limited and undemocratic.<sup>21</sup> Systemic social change as an aspect of the fullness of the kingdom could (and sometimes would) come later with a “critical mass” of believers and with some of them obtaining significant positions of social power and influence.

Instead, the spiritual-relational focus of Jesus does mean that he found much fruitful kingdom work to do without emphasizing wider structural social change or advocacy that directly challenged the Roman empire.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, it is often true today, especially in less-reached contexts or politically restrictive contexts, that it is entirely appropriate to focus primarily on the core matters of the kingdom, on discipleship and of proclamation of the offer of eternal salvation, without giving great attention to establishing material well-being. Jesus’ situation in founding a new movement is somewhat similar to the situation of believers in vulnerable, frontier situations in which right relationship with God must be prioritized and where seeking systematic and holistic well-being in the overall society is still relatively unrealistic as an immediate goal.

**It is often true, especially in less-reached contexts, that it is entirely appropriate to focus primarily on the core matters of the kingdom without giving great attention to establishing material well-being.**

In missiological language, how can we best express the insight that the core dimensions of the kingdom have priority? In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, both the course and its Reader, we find the helpful conceptions of frontier missions vs. regular missions and other related concepts. Unlike the typical work patterns in churches and mission agencies alike, we should prioritize frontier missions, especially in frontier situations, without denying the validity of regular missions. We may unpack this in more detail as follows:

- *Frontier Missions* seeks *missiological breakthrough*, the “essential missionary task,”<sup>23</sup> among unreached or “hidden” or neglected peoples.<sup>24</sup> This involves prioritizing the largely spiritual core of the kingdom through evangelizing, making disciples, planting churches (groups of Jesus’ followers), and fostering multiplying movements to Jesus.
- *Regular Missions* seeks *the fullness of the kingdom* in already “reached” peoples. This happens in diverse ways through ongoing expansion of discipleship and holistic community development. After a people or a community experience missiological breakthrough, “the beginning of all that God intends to do,”<sup>25</sup> the missional task remains unfinished.<sup>26</sup> The missional task to glorify God through ongoing evangelism, discipleship, and transformation of culture and society goes on until Jesus returns. This corresponds to how the Great Commission includes Jesus’ call to teach disciples to “obey everything that I have commanded” (Matt. 28:19).<sup>27</sup>

- Frontier and regular mission tasks can and should flow together and interrelate fruitfully (Thesis 2), but have different and complementary kingdom foci. Frontier missions should generally be prioritized as the initial focus of kingdom work and regular missions should not become a significant focus (in the overall work of Christians among a people or in a place) unless frontier missions has already been the main focus in a particular people or place. Yet frontier missions should not be conducted in ways that neglect the ongoing push towards the fullness of the kingdom among all people and in all places.

#### Thesis 4: Spiritual flourishing often accelerates material flourishing, but not automatically.

Spiritual flourishing—especially in settings of revival or multiplying Jesus movements—generally accelerates social change towards greater material well-being. All things being equal, redemption naturally tends toward material “lift.” This “redemption and lift” was stated in a classic form by missiologist Donald McGavran in his writings on church growth.<sup>28</sup> The biblical basis for this thesis can be summed up like this: the fundamental roots of poverty and social ills are often due to sin and the roots of material flourishing are due to spiritual and relational uprightness and renewal (e.g., Gen. 3, Lev. 26, Deut. 28; 3 John 1:2). Historical evidence, including the growth of positive social institutions in the West after the Reformation and the increased well-being of Dalits in India after their turn to Christian faith, also point in this direction.<sup>29</sup> Empirical data also indicates that a lack of spiritual flourishing, either in the past or the present state of a society, is generally correlated with a lack of material flourishing, as evident in data modeling concerning the “unreached” and various social and material ills.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, the “material lift” of an individual, community or society following “spiritual lift” in Christ is not automatic. Various factors inhibit this dynamic of “lift,” including:

- Lack of adequate integrative theology and theological ethics and a related lack of repentance regarding social evils.<sup>31</sup>
- Evangelism without discipleship or Christian formation that addresses social evils.<sup>32</sup>
- The majority of those who have become Christians do not have adequate social power among “elites.”<sup>33</sup>
- States and societies actively persecute Christians or resist values that make for greater prosperity among believers (e.g., in parts of China today).

Some historical examples of spiritual flourishing accelerating material flourishing are found in the history of European Continental Protestantism, namely, in the Moravians and other German Pietists in the early eighteenth century. Early German pietists built orphanages, cared for the poor (including widows) and sick (including building hospitals) and promoted universal education (emphasizing schools for the

poor and lower classes/castes)—all while still emphasizing the need for personal new birth and holiness.<sup>34</sup> In 1701, August H. Francke defined the goal of the Pietist renewal movement as the “concrete improvement of all walks of life, in Germany, Europe, in all parts of the world.”<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the early Pietist and Lutheran missionary to India, Bartolomaeus Ziegenbalg, declared that the “service of souls” and the “service of bodies” were “interdependent and that no ministry to souls could remain without an “exterior” side.”<sup>36</sup> The Moravians experienced spiritual revival marked by extraordinary unity, prayer, and mission (local and global). This spiritual renewal was correlated with, and seemed to lead to, their mission efforts which included an early form of “business as mission” and an emphasis on education. The presence of social elites among both groups (e.g., Franke, the royal Frederick III or Elector of Brandenburg [later known as Frederick I, Duke of Prussia], and Count Zinzendorff of the Moravians) seems to have allowed for greater social change in the first half of the 1700s, in keeping with James Hunter’s compelling argument about the need for elite involvement in pervasive social change, although such elite involvement within the Pietist movement either did not last or became conflated with a corrupt Colonialism.<sup>37</sup>

**Want a blossoming democracy today?  
The solution is simple—  
if you have a time machine:  
Send a 19th-century missionary.  
—Andrea Dilley**

A further example of how spiritual flourishing often accelerates material flourishing is found in modern Protestant missions in the nineteenth century which tended to establish a greater material well-being in many nations, including the foundations of democratic culture in those nations. In a summary of Robert Woodbury’s extensive research on this topic, Andrea Palpant Dilley writes:

Areas where Protestant missionaries had a significant presence in the past are on average more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, higher educational attainment (especially for women), and more robust membership in nongovernmental associations. In short: Want a blossoming democracy today? The solution is simple—if you have a time machine: Send a 19th-century missionary.<sup>38</sup>

Interestingly, the positive social gains of such Protestant missionary work did not come primarily because such missionaries were focused on social uplift or transformation.

“Conversionary Protestants” of the nineteenth century focused on evangelism, yet also “came at social reforms through the back door. That said, they were often critical of colonialism and promoted universal literacy and education, which made democratic movements possible.” Again, “Most of the early nationalists who led their countries to independence graduated from Protestant mission schools.”<sup>39</sup>

More recent social-scientific studies of communities in the Global South also confirm Thesis 4. One is a notable study by Yale researchers on faith and income among poor communities in the Philippines.<sup>40</sup> A randomized controlled trial of a Christian development agency in the Philippines found that very poor people earned significantly more money—9.2% more—as a result of receiving religious instruction. The study of two Yale professors (one an agnostic Jew and one an evangelical Christian) and an atheist from the London School of Economics, compared results between two groups over four months: one group received non-religious health and livelihood instruction only and the other group received that instruction plus instruction in Christian values. Why these results? The authors of the study believe that these results come down to two things: the power of Christian values/virtues of optimism (or hope) and grit (or perseverance).

To conclude this section, we can return to Richard Lovelace’s instructive treatment of “the spiritual roots of social concern.” He ably defends these two “balancing” claims based on historical analysis:

- *We need revival*: “No deep and lasting social change can be effected by Christians without a general spiritual awakening of the church.”<sup>41</sup> Because the roots of material poverty or other material ills are so often spiritual and relational, spiritual renewal or awakening is a great need.
- *Revival needs to be complete*: “Evangelicals must stress more than evangelism and church growth if they are to duplicate the social triumphs of earlier periods.”<sup>42</sup> The triumphs to which Lovelace refers include the abolition and anti-poverty efforts following from the First and Second Great Awakenings. While revival stressing evangelism and church growth may have some wider social effects, more conscious social efforts make the effects more extensive and lasting. The same can be said on an individual level: conversion must be complete, being marked by biblical transformation to a lifestyle of justice.<sup>43</sup>

### Thesis 5: Material well-being often inhibits or erodes spiritual well-being.

Despite what we have seen above, especially in our treatment of Thesis 4, we also find that material well-being can easily lead to a decrease in spiritual well-being in the forms of idolatry,

forgetfulness of God, increased vice, and a breakdown of social and family relationships. That is, in the context of fallen humanity in a fallen world liable to Satan’s influence, the very material blessings that often come from spiritual rebirth or renewal can also become an occasion for temptation that leads people away from God and his standards. We can speak of this as a *kingdom paradox*: The *fullness* of the kingdom ultimately includes material well-being,<sup>44</sup> yet this fruition can endanger the *core* of the kingdom! Further, when material prosperity leads people away from right relationship to God and one another, then people are liable to divine judgment, both temporal judgement and, without repentance, to ultimate, final judgment. Material well-being, despite being a gift from God, is spiritually dangerous to fallen people, even to redeemed people.<sup>45</sup>

Both Scripture and sociological research point to the spiritual dangers of material prosperity. Moses warned the Israelites not to forget the Lord and his laws once they were well fed and prosperous in the Promised Land (Deut. 8:11–20). Jesus warned his followers about the great difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom. In Sociology, these biblical warnings are confirmed by means of the widely known “secularization thesis” that modernization (including “rationalization” of social realities and “privatization” of religion) brings secularization, a social state in which religion progressively loses its authority, especially for public life.

John Wesley famously identified the dilemma that spiritual renewal leads to material prosperity which later leads to spiritual decline. He commented:

I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.<sup>46</sup>

Christians reflecting on the overall social effects of Christian mission and development work are among those most concerned about the dangers of increasing material well-being without due attention to other aspects of human life or creation. For example, Donald McGavran, to whom I referred above (under Thesis 4), saw the phenomenon of “redemption and lift” as potentially undercutting Jesus movements. The reason is that when believers become more “upwardly mobile,” partly through the gains produced by their faith,<sup>47</sup> they often leave the social group in which they grew up and forge relationships with a new wealthier social network, cutting off opportunities for the natural, relational spread of the gospel from them to those of their original group.<sup>48</sup> In the realm of Christian development work, David Bronkema points out that many development agencies are “flying blind,” unaware of how their economic strategies

have “anti-shalomic” effects in other important areas of life.<sup>49</sup> For example, business initiatives that increase economic gain could break down relationships between families and between rural and urban communities, or could damage the environment or public health, or could increase the opportunity for temptation (e.g., when new money can be used to purchase alcohol).<sup>50</sup>

Certainly, material well-being is a great test of kingdom faithfulness. Whether or not contemporary societies, communities, or individuals will pass this test depends in large part on whether they will be intentional to “strengthen the kingdom core.” If modern societies like the USA or South Korea were marked by an upsurge in holistic discipleship, then their material prosperity would not undercut the spiritual and relational well-being that is at the center of God’s vision for human life. Wesley’s wise solution to the problem of revival being short-lived (due to the growth of materialistic values and vices) emphasized thorough discipleship that included radical generosity (calling believers to give away as much as they can) and advocacy and action towards structural change in society, as in his rejection of slavery.<sup>51</sup>

### Thesis 6: The fullness of the kingdom involves lasting, holistic well-being.

With this final thesis, we remember that God’s ultimate desired purpose is holistic well-being. This means that, all things being equal, God desires not only spiritual flourishing, but material flourishing, which is the partial truth in the so called “prosperity gospel.” This partial truth is protected from becoming error and heresy through a balanced biblical vision of holistic and sustainable *shalom*. In the end, such all-encompassing well-being is only possible through the work of God.

Sustainable, overall *shalom*, including and integrating both the spiritual and material, has already been significantly approximated in some peoples, cities, and societies. However, the fullness of God’s kingdom of *shalom* and justice will only be completely realized on earth after the Second Coming when all peoples and communities will experience it. Yet, to work towards kingdom fullness now remains a worthy, God-honoring goal. If we do this work with the right mindset—one of participating in God’s current work with hope for his ultimate completion of it—we can be freed from the “burden” of needing to “change the world.” We will bring lasting change within the world, in small and partial ways, but only insofar as we participate in God’s own great work of changing the world.

There is much scriptural support for “final social change,” i.e., future eschatological change in this world. There is a glorious final future in store for this material world, not for a separate

and disembodied “heaven.” Our hope, which empowers and envisions our present action, includes many distinct dimensions of well-being:

- *All peoples in worship*: All nations, tribes, peoples, and languages will be at God’s throne (Rev. 7:9–12).
- *Regime change*: “The kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and Christ” (Rev. 11:15).
- *A restored and healed creation*: (Rom. 8:20–22.)
- *No more suffering, grief, or pain*: God will wipe every tear away (Rev. 21:4).
- *No more evil opposition*: Every enemy, including fallen Principalities and Powers, will be overcome (1 Cor. 15:24–26).
- *Ongoing human participation*: The saints are kings and priests and will reign with Christ (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27; Rev. 1:6; 5:10).
- *Summary*: A renewed creation in which heaven and earth are one and in which the kingdom has fully come in all creation.<sup>52</sup>

What are the implications of God’s multifaceted, coming kingdom of *shalom* for missional practice? Without getting into concrete practical recommendations (this article is not the place for those), I believe that wise missiology leads to a revised understanding of “vocation” or “calling” that rightly frames our praxis. In particular, we can distinguish the *general calling* of all followers of and believers in Jesus and the diverse *specific callings* of individual believers.

- *Our general (shared) call as believers* is to make known the gospel of grace and to make disciples from all nations. This is the kingdom core, which shows us as the overall Body of Christ, where to start and what to prioritize. This general call is not without social implications (such as caring for the poor in love), but the Body of Christ is not primarily called (nor is every believer or church called) to “change the world” in the sense of bringing systemic or structural change. This reflects Jesus’ ministry while in this world.
- *Our specific callings* as individual believers, based on our gifts and situation, involve different ways of extending the kingdom’s fullness, above and beyond our general call to disciple and proclaim the gospel. According to their callings, most believers (except those called to “full time” ministry in the institutional church) will have opportunities to be a faithful presence in diverse institutional settings in the world. Some, especially those with access to elite-level social power and its networks, will be particularly called and equipped to bring lasting systemic change in society. More generally, the call to pursue the fullness of the kingdom reminds us that our job is never done, even where spiritual movements have appeared; even there, the complete fullness of the kingdom has not yet emerged.

Both of these callings, our general calling and our specific callings, depend on biblical hope. We obey these callings in the knowledge that only God can bring the kingdom and yet with the trust that we can partner with him in his unfailing, consummating work of new creation.

### *The Role of the Church in Holistic Mission and Social Change*

We have now surveyed a series of theses that articulate a theology of social change and development. An important further question still remains, which is of both theoretical and practical import: what is the role of the church in the fulfillment of our callings and in the pursuit of holistic kingdom fullness? The church, understood minimally as fellowships of believers, is the “core community” of the kingdom and the people of God. It is unique among the various institutions and societal groups as the “living center” of God’s presence and work in the world and as the beloved Bride who will one day be fully united to Christ in perfect love and worship. The church, especially in the form of local congregations, is thus the hermeneutic of the gospel which already expresses and interprets, albeit imperfectly, the relational union between heaven and earth, between God and creation, that will one day be complete in all creation. As such, it is a distinctive “community of hope” that witnesses to, anticipates, and stewards the coming kingdom.<sup>53</sup> To be faithful to its God-given calling, the church must be attentive primarily to the spiritual-relational core of the kingdom, while not forgetting the full scope of the kingdom’s fullness.<sup>54</sup>

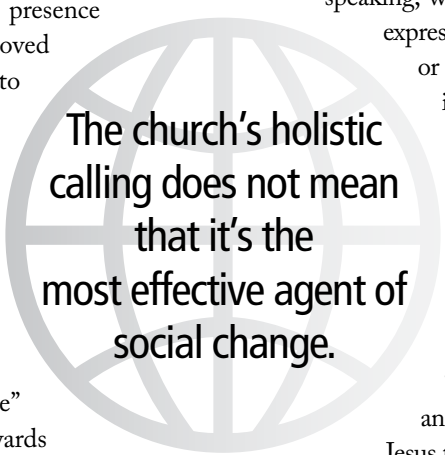
The church’s holistic calling does not mean that the church—at least as understood as a set of institutional and local bodies—is always the most central or most effective agent of either community development or social change. It depends on what kind of change is in view. In a helpful clarification of the church’s role in development, Richard Slimbach articulates that the institutional, local church is central and effective at spiritual, psychological and social (including interpersonal and intergroup) healing or change, but is generally ineffective (especially without collaboration with governmental and non-governmental institutions and their leaders) at institutional (structural) and ecological healing or change.<sup>55</sup> Slimbach here follows Abraham Kuyper and Tim Keller by distinguishing between the institutional, local church and the organic, universal church made up of all believers who live out their faith in all the spheres of society.<sup>56</sup>

A related point was made by Ralph Winter, namely, that the church should be understood broadly to include both “modalities,” local churches and related denominations, and “sodalities,” committed communities and agencies that carry out specialized aspects of God’s mission in the world.<sup>57</sup> The church includes both modalities and sodalities, both parishes and orders. As Keller explains,

A parish is a church that ministers to all kinds of people in one place. But an order ministers to a certain kind of people in all places... These institutions [specialized ministries or orders] must have a symbiotic relationship with each other and with [local] church congregations.<sup>58</sup>

To bring these two sets of terms together, we could say that the organic church formed by believers in society includes sodalities, organized sub-groups or networks of believers committed to specific aspects of God’s global purposes. Broadly speaking, we may consider all of the above as diverse expressions of the church as the people of God or bride of Christ, which transcends the institutional local church alone. With the church defined broadly and universally to include both the organic church and its various sodalities (agencies or orders) then we can say with Johannes Reimer that the church is “community-centred” and that “community development is what she does in her mission” or that the “mission of the Church is discipling nations and teaching them to live according to what Jesus teaches.”<sup>59</sup> If we considered the local church alone, we could not make such statements compellingly, and even if we were to do so, we must recognize that often sustainable social change requires extensive collaboration with non-church agencies and governments.<sup>60</sup>

In light of the above theology of social transformation, what kind of people are followers of Jesus called to be? We in the Christian community, the church, are called to “faithful presence” in the world.<sup>61</sup> We must be *faithful*, upholding a counter-cultural set of values. We must be *present* in the world, engaged with its problems and avoiding isolationism. We are individually called to be transformed agents of transformation<sup>62</sup> and “reflective activists” in God’s work for God’s glory. We need to reflect on the many questions that come up on the frontiers of mission and in the face of the vulnerabilities of creation. Yet we need to reflect in the context of action, not from an ivory tower or an armchair. We must be engaged in mission—in both word and deed, both in respect to kingdom core and in pursuit of kingdom fullness. Without reflection, our actions can fall into blind zeal. Without action, our reflection has no effect on the world that we are called to



The church's holistic calling does not mean that it's the most effective agent of social change.

serve and love—in union with our God who loves the world (John 3:16). Both our reflection and action must be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, who alone can enable us to partner with God fruitfully in his mission in the world.

### **Conclusion: Revisiting Laos and India with the Question “What if?”**

I conclude by returning to the hypothetical stories from Laos and India with which I began this article.

*Story 1: Microenterprise in rural Laos:* What if believers in that community worked together to combine economic development strategies with thorough discipleship and support of the father and the family, overcoming alcoholism and cultivating wise stewardship?

*Story 2: Frontier Mission in Northern India:* What if believers in that city worked together with one another and with other community leaders to build holistic development projects that would address both spiritual and material needs in harmony?

In situations like these, and in many more like them, may we embrace and encourage one another for our shared call to a kingdom core and to our special callings for kingdom fullness, unto God’s eternal glory. **IJFM**

### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> See especially George Elden Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, Revised Edition (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 2000).
- <sup>2</sup> See N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011).
- <sup>3</sup> The definition of transformational development provided by a team from Food for the Hungry is helpful: “Relief and Development work that promotes and facilitates mutual transformation to advance and accelerate measurable well-being improvements of the most vulnerable and the graduation of communities from extreme poverty” (Luis Noda et al, “God’s Story: The Foundation for FHs Work in Relief and Development,” *Food for the Hungry*, 2017, 38). By referring to “mutual transformation,” they refer to God’s transformation both of communities and of the development workers who serve them” (39). See also the definition of transformation found in the same document: “The Spirit-driven process of radical change in the behaviors, attitudes and worldviews of individuals, communities or cultures, towards living in healthy relationships with God, others and God’s creation” (37).
- <sup>4</sup> Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Revised and Updated Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), ch. 1 (sub-section on definitions; Kindle location 566): “I use the term transformational development to reflect my concern for seeking positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, psychologically and spiritually. The adjective transformational is used to remind us that human progress is not inevitable; it takes hard work.” I would add that the work of transformation is ultimately the work of the Triune God, in which humans may participate. Insofar as it is our work also, it is “Spirit-driven” work (Noda et al, “God’s Story,” 37).
- <sup>5</sup> See our treatment of Thesis 4 below for some examples of this dynamic.
- <sup>6</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1993), 143–145.
- <sup>7</sup> Yet the extent to which Jesus’ precise, particular ways of doing ministry—or any other biblical examples—should be a model for our own works of ministry, mission, and development is a complex problem. My own sense is that the Western church has, generally speaking, foolishly departed from the nature of Jesus’ ministry and mission on several levels and needs to accentuate a greater correspondence to it (e.g., prioritizing life-on-life discipleship, challenging religious and political leaders, conducting holistic ministry). At the same time, I realize that aspects of Jesus’ ministry were contextual and situational, corresponding more to some contemporary situations than others (i.e., corresponding more directly to Middle Eastern cultures, to societies in which there is a strong Monotheistic religious heritage and yet in which the Christocentric “gospel” is relatively new, small and divergent from the interests and perspectives of those with social-religious power). I will return to this question below under Thesis 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Scripture does not teach that God creates disembodied human souls first and then places them in bodies later, although this belief is found in early church fathers such as Origen, in Islamic sources (perhaps Sura 7, verse 172) and in the Church of the Latter Day Saints (the Mormons).
- <sup>9</sup> See Thesis 4 and Donald McGavran’s classic “redemption and lift” thesis, as found in his *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Revised Edition, 1990), 209–220.
- <sup>10</sup> See also Thesis 5.
- <sup>11</sup> “The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission,” Micah Network, 2001, accessible online at: [http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn\\_integral\\_mission\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf). See also the longer and similar conclusions of the Lausanne Paper on Evangelism and Social Responsibility in 1982, online at: <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-21>.
- <sup>12</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6–8.
- <sup>13</sup> For example, they offered an extraordinary response to epidemics in second and third centuries, caring for all when pagan leaders and priests fled (Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 73–94). In response to poverty, “Christian care for the poor was not distinctly Christian in

practice,” against some earlier historical perspectives, “but was indeed supported by a uniquely Christian worldview” (K. C. Richardson, *Early Christian Care for the Poor: An Alternative Subsistence Strategy under Roman Imperial Rule* (Cascade Books. Kindle Edition, Kindle location 222–229). Richardson goes on to say that Christians offered an “alternative subsistence strategy”—similar to that which was practiced in rural villages in their day, but now transferred it for the first time to urban settings. The subsistence strategies of the rural villages in the first century and in the later Christian communities were based on the principle of giving to those in need, not giving based on social honor (the latter was more common in urban settings in the Roman world).

- <sup>14</sup> Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 165–171. Sider insightfully discusses various aspects of this question of primacy, including the logical, ontological, vocational, temporal and “resources” aspects. His discussion of the ontological aspect is most relevant to my purposes in this section, while his discussion of the temporal and resources aspects shows that the ultimate ontological priority of evangelism over social justice should not lead to minimizing the amount of time and resources people should give to works of social justice.
- <sup>15</sup> Again, see the Lausanne occasional paper, the CRESR report of 1982 (<https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-21>), plus Christopher J. H. Wright’s careful reflections on the question of “primacy” in the concluding chapter of his *Mission of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Langham Partnership International, 2010, Kindle edition, Kindle locations 5288–5945).
- <sup>16</sup> Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 166–167.
- <sup>17</sup> “The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission”
- <sup>18</sup> Howard A. Snyder, with Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).
- <sup>19</sup> Some, such as Anabaptist John H. Yoder, especially in his *The Politics of Jesus*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), rightly argue for the “political” and structural implications of the teaching and ministry of Jesus, but also recognize that this new social “polis” is found not in a new order that overthrows the powers that be, but in the formation of an alternative counter-cultural community, the church, in the midst of the world ruled by fallen powers and principalities. The church manifests things like “Jubilee economics” in contrast to the typical ways of the world. When the church grows to a sufficient size it may begin to transform the powers that be, but this happens over long periods of time and often is difficult to maintain in purity; it will only happen fully and sustainably in the eschatological future (Rev. 11:15). For a helpful summary of Yoder’s *Politics of Jesus*, see <https://peacetheology.net/2012/06/16/summarizing-john-howard-yoders-politics-of-jesus/>. For reflections on Jesus and politics that parallel Yoder, but move beyond him, see Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 152–154.
- <sup>20</sup> Wright, *How God Became King*, 127ff.
- <sup>21</sup> Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 152–154.
- <sup>22</sup> Leslie Newbigin argues both that Christ demonstrates a “faith that rebels” against the status quo—never accepting sickness as God’s inevitable will, for example—yet also faith in a kingdom of “radical otherworldliness” that leads to the cross, rather than to a political program that finds worldly success (see his “The Kingdom of God in the Life of the World,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. Fourth Edition (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library/Publishing, 2009), ch. 15.
- <sup>23</sup> See Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 2009, ch. 84, 531–546, esp. 538–542.
- <sup>24</sup> Despite challenges in defining “reachedness,” the concepts of reached and unreached (or less reached) give us some simple strategic guidelines about whom to prioritize as having the greatest spiritual need. Generally, the areas in the world (and peoples of the world) with greatest spiritual need (the least reached) are also the places with the greatest overall need, including material need (e.g. the 1040 window). This is evidence for the next thesis, Thesis 4.
- <sup>25</sup> Winter and Koch, “Finishing the Task,” 542.
- <sup>26</sup> *Frontier Missions* seeks *missiological breakthrough* among unreached peoples until all peoples are “reached.” This is a way of saying that, in terms of our overall emphasis in the body of Christ (and not necessarily in a person’s individual calling), we need to prioritize the primarily spiritual core of the kingdom, both initially and (in some sense) ongoing. *Regular Missions* seeks *the fullness of the kingdom* in reached peoples through ongoing expansion of discipleship and in holistic community development. When peoples experience breakthrough, there is still much work to be done to be faithful to God and to seek the peoples’ well-being in love.
- <sup>27</sup> The Great Commission, in its various forms (in Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, and John), supports the “spiritual priority” thesis, Thesis 4, since it is focused on the witness and the discipleship of people. Even in its classic form in Matthew, the Great Commission is not about “discipling nations,” although this is widely claimed. A glance at the context of the command to “make disciples of all nations” in Matthew 28:19–20 shows that the command is referring to making disciples of *people from all nations (ethne)*. The next phrase says: “baptizing them . . . and ‘teaching them.’” We don’t baptize nations or people as collective wholes, we baptize *people*. Further, “Jesus can hardly have been referring to nations as collective entities in themselves, for then there would not have been the shift to the masculine ‘them’ when referring to baptism and instruction because the word for ‘nation’ is neuter” (Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003], 237). This doesn’t rule out the possibility that other parts of Scripture may support a general concept of “discipling” or teaching/guiding peoples or geo-political nations (indeed, this is an important theme in some passages), but this verse does not teach that.
- <sup>28</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 209–220.
- <sup>29</sup> See Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 355–399, where Lovelace traces “the spiritual roots of Christian social concern.” Another version of the claim that spiritual well-being

leads to holistic (including material) well-being is made in the works of Vishal Mangalwadi, such as *Truth and Transformation* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2009), *The Book that Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (Thomas Nelson, 2011). Mangalwadi shows the Bible's powerful role in Protestant Christianity and its multifaceted, positive social impact (in human rights, compassion, empowerment of women, intellectual and scientific advancement, educational flourishing), but also shows, conversely, that the roots of "backwardness" are also spiritual, rooted in non-biblical philosophical and religious perspectives and practices (e.g., concerning India, *Why Are We Backward? Exploring the Roots, Exploding the Myths, Embracing True Hope* (New Delhi, India: Forward Press, 2014).

- <sup>30</sup> See Paul Dzubinski, Sharon Mo and Gus Lee, "Reimagining the Way We Do Missions: The Kingdom-focused Missiology, Development, and Intended Impact of Data Visualizations Done at the Urbana 2018 Hack4Missions Hackathon," unpublished paper presented at the Evangelical Missiological Society Annual National Meeting in September 2019 in Dallas, TX. The authors of this paper, and others they worked with at Urbana 2018, created "a data visualization web application that dynamically brings together the unreached people data of the Joshua Project and databases that track the human suffering connected with their environments (health needs, extreme poverty, environmental crisis, etc.)" (1). They found that "The distribution of environmental degradation, food and water insecurity, health risks due to sanitation and pollution, human trafficking and slavery, political instability and religious freedom, susceptibility to diseases, and many other indicators of human suffering *heavily overlap* the areas of the highest concentration of unreached people groups" (5). See also how the 1040 window, where most of the least-reached groups are located, overlaps much with what is sometimes called the "arc of instability" in Africa and Asia with regards to political (and water) instability. An exception is that much of sub-Saharan Africa is both highly evangelized and yet numbers among the poorest and most disease-plagued regions of the world.
- <sup>31</sup> See especially Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 355–399, especially 358.
- <sup>32</sup> Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 117–118; 174–175. "Coming to faith in Christ . . . doesn't guarantee that we will have a major impact on society," 117.
- <sup>33</sup> Changing ordinary people in popular movements is not enough. James Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 32–87 and throughout.
- <sup>34</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 362–363, and David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Marynoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 254–255.
- <sup>35</sup> As quoted and translated by Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 254.
- <sup>36</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 254. Ziegenbalg's claims are a striking early affirmation of my theses 1 and 2 above.
- <sup>37</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 32–87. Lasting socio-cultural change doesn't happen just through changing ideas and hearts, but requires Christian presence among networks of elites and their institutions; populist revivals are not enough. Hunter's own historical analysis of the post-Reformation period focuses on the Anglo-American contexts, such as the anti-slavery movement associated with William Wilberforce (70–74). Bosch, in his *Transforming Mission*, had earlier made a similar point, noting how the Pietist movement, although it reached some early church leaders (253), never penetrated "into the heart of the German churches" and "remained a movement on the periphery" and thus vulnerable to the dominant spirit of the age represented by the Enlightenment or Colonial Westernization (255, 260, 302ff). Yet, Bosch does affirm that the "evangelical movement" as a whole, which included Pietism, "represented a fairly effective opposition, in some respect even an alternative, to the Enlightenment frame of mind" (281).
- <sup>38</sup> Andrea Palpant Dilley, "The Surprising Discovery about Those Colonialist, Proselytizing Missionaries," *Christianity Today*, Jan/Feb 2014, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/january-february/world-missionaries-made.html>. For an article presenting the original scholarly research, see Robert D. Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 106, No. 2 (May 2012): 244–274. See also, the summary of Bruce Wydick, *Shrewd Samaritan: Faith, Economics, and the Road to Loving our Global Neighbor* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing, 2019), 145–146.
- <sup>39</sup> Dilley, "The Surprising Discovery."
- <sup>40</sup> Gharad Bryan, James Choi and Dean Karlan, "Randomizing Religion: The Impact of Protestant Evangelism on Economic Outcomes," 2018. NBER Working Paper No. 24278, Feb 2018, accessed on September 30, 2019, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w24278> (also available in other sites online). The study is summarized in Wydick, *Shrewd Samaritan*, 147–148. See also the summary of this study and related interviews on the Freakonomics Podcast ("Is the Protestant Work Ethic Real?" Ep. 360, Dec 5, 2018, <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/religiosity/>). I thank Greg Parsons for making me aware of this study. For other support for Thesis 4, see the evidence and perspective presented by World Vision's Rachal Boyer in answer to the question: "Are Christian Charities More Effective At Humanitarian Work?" <https://www.worldvision.org/christian-faith-news-stories/christian-charities-effective-humanitarian-work> (updated July 20, 2017).
- <sup>41</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 358.
- <sup>42</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 358.
- <sup>43</sup> Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 116–118.
- <sup>44</sup> See Thesis 4 above and especially Thesis 6 below.
- <sup>45</sup> This is not to say that growing material well-being *always* has an inverse relation to spiritual well-being. The evidence is mixed, as are the viewpoints of practitioners and theorists. I believe that there can be a direct relationship between the two, with both spiritual and material well-being increasing over the long-term, and that this is the ideal, while also recognizing that this seems to be less common than an inverse relationship in both historical and current societies. A recent study of the viewpoints of the Accord network's members reported that "The responses we received . . . tilted strongly in the direction of believing that there is an inverse relationship between material



wealth and spiritual dynamism” (Stephen Offutt and Amy Reynolds, “Christian Ideas of Development: Understanding the current theories, networks and priorities of Accord organizations,” *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy* 1(1), Summer 2019, 6; accessed September 25, 2019, <https://crdajournal.org/index.php/crda/article/view/189>).

- <sup>46</sup> Rupert E. Davies, ed. *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 529–530. Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 181.
- <sup>47</sup> One “immediate economic benefit” is that “money previously spent on things that are now forbidden or frowned upon” by their new-found faith “is suddenly available” (David Bronkema, “Flying Blind: Christian NGOs and the Political Economy,” *Christian Mission and Economic Systems*, eds. John Cheong and Eloise Meneses [Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015], 239).
- <sup>48</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 209–220. McGavran asks: “How then can the church lift and redeem Christians and yet have them remain in effective contact with receptive sections of society that they can influence?” (213). His solution includes emphasizing how believers with newfound “upward-mobility” can continue to emphasize intentional social connections with the people group in which they were raised (217–218). See Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 181–182.
- <sup>49</sup> David Bronkema, “Flying Blind,” 211–245.
- <sup>50</sup> See Eloise Meneses, “Exchange, Relationships, and Reciprocity: Living as a Christian in a Capitalist World,” *Christian Mission and Economic Systems*, eds. John Cheong and Eloise Meneses (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 1–26. On another level, liberation theology, revolution movements and empirical studies of post-War global development projects have shown the inadequacies of the traditional development paradigm for addressing the systemic root causes of injustice and human misery (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 432–435; cf. 435–447).
- <sup>51</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 529 (note 2).
- <sup>52</sup> Many writings of N. T. Wright, especially his popular *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2011) emphasize this holistic (spiritual and material) vision of the future against the dualistic, spiritualistic vision of the future that has been present in much of Christian history. Again, see Snyder’s *Salvation Means Creation Healed*.
- <sup>53</sup> Lesslie Newbigin’s insightful treatment of the church congregation as the “hermeneutic of the gospel,” or chief interpreter and “plausibility structure” for the kingdom and its good news, concludes with the feature of hope (*Gospel in a Pluralist Society* [London: SPCK Publishing, 1989], 232f).
- <sup>54</sup> Jay Van Gronigen expresses a broad view of the church’s mission in his *The Theology of Development: A Biblical Understanding of Christian Mission and Community Development*. *Christian Reformed World Relief Committee*, n.d., accessed September 28, 2019, <https://network.crcna.org/community-engagement/theology-development-biblical-understanding-christian-mission-and-community>. Van Gronigen states: “the calling of the church is to equip men and women to be faithful servants of God in all these possible expressions of living faithfully to God’s call to steward the creation and to develop its potential” (26; cf. 34). The church’s focus is on equipping and developing people, but does so with a view to the broad end of creational flourishing. In the introduction, Van Gronigen states that “the church of Jesus Christ has vital roles as a witness to the power of the gospel and an agent of change in the world” (1).
- <sup>55</sup> Richard Slimbach, “Local Churches in Global Development: How ‘Central’ Are They?” *William Carey International University Development Journal* Feb. 28, 2013, especially discussion points 3–4, accessed September 27, 2019, <https://www.wciujournal.org/blog/post/local-churches-global-development-how-central-are-they>
- <sup>56</sup> Slimbach, “Local Churches in Global Development,” discussion point 2. See Keller, *Generous Justice*, 144–147.
- <sup>57</sup> Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures in God’s Redemptive Mission,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Fourth Edition, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library/Publishing, 2009), 220–230.
- <sup>58</sup> Tim Keller, “How a Gospel Movement Works,” Redeemer Report, December 2017, accessed September 28, 2019, [https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/how\\_a\\_gospel\\_movement\\_works](https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/how_a_gospel_movement_works). The words in brackets in the quotation are my clarifying additions.
- <sup>59</sup> Johannes Reimer, with Christopher Wright, *Rethinking Church: Community Called out to Take Responsibility* (IM Press, Micah Global, n.d.), 58–59. Accordingly, a team of authors from the sodality Food for the Hungry regard Food for the Hungry as “an extension of God’s universal church, helping the most vulnerable in the world” (Noda et al, “God’s Story,” 26). Of course, even such “sodalities” themselves do not automatically do great work in sustainable community development or global holistic mission, since they often do not attend to “structural” social change much better than local churches do (see Slimbach, “Local Churches in Global Development,” discussion point 9).
- <sup>60</sup> See Slimbach, “Local Churches in Global Development,” discussion point 10.
- <sup>61</sup> This is the terminology used by James Hunter in *To Change the World*, 238–272.
- <sup>62</sup> Rightly understood, transformation is both ongoing and mutual, for we “do not exclude ourselves from the process of transformation” (Noda et al, “God’s Story,” 38).

# CULTURAL GAPS

## Benjamin Robinson's Experience with Hindu Traditions

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## Lessons in Interreligious Encounters

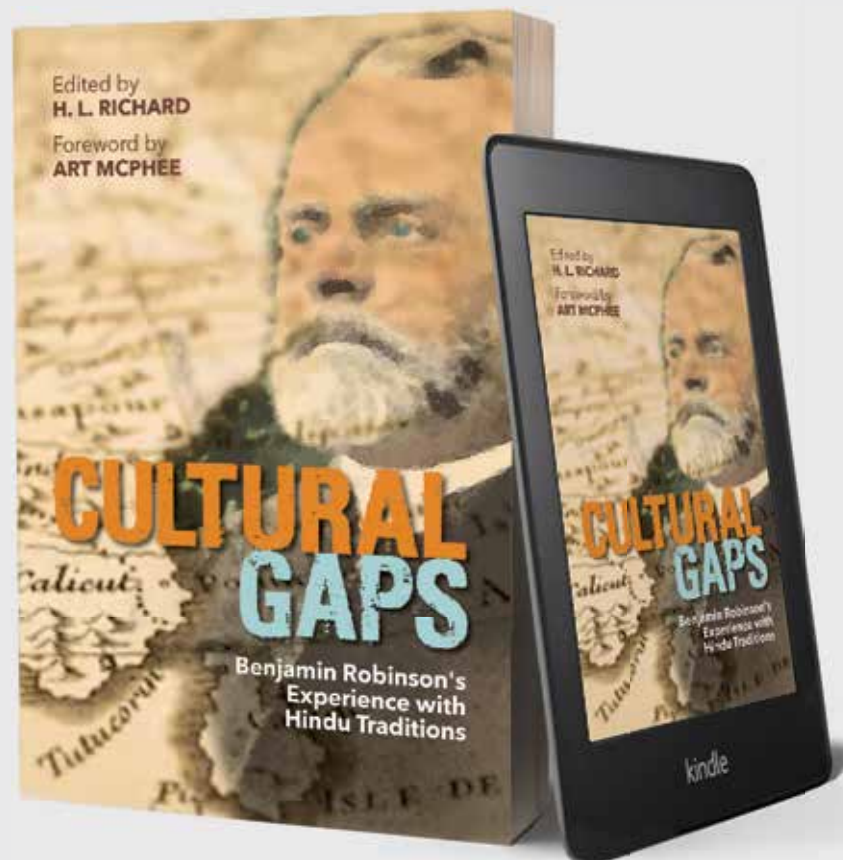
Focus on unreached people groups and the emergence of a global church have not yet eliminated massive gaps in the spread of the gospel. Differences between Hindu and Christian traditions account for the uneven reception of the gospel of Christ among Hindu peoples. Contextualization, best practices, and movements to Christ are central discussion points in response. In *Cultural Gaps*, H. L. Richard brings Benjamin Robinson, a forgotten nineteenth-century pioneer missionary, back into this conversation by reviving his memoir, *In the Brahmans' Holy Land*, with a new foreword, extensive footnotes, and a new introduction. Robinson's experiences in south India in the 1880s remain relevant, particularly his attempts at authentic interreligious encounter and his struggle to adequately integrate into the Hindu context. Robinson did not stop at language acquisition, cultural study, or personal relationships, but felt called to adapt his lifestyle further, trusting in God's help. Although his engagement with Hindus was cut short by health problems, he had a deep humility, an unflagging commitment to learn, and an exemplary sense of inadequacy for a high calling. Robinson's honesty regarding personal struggles with the perplexity of understanding Hindus relates immediately with current realities.

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Towards an Integral Mission

# Social Innovation in Frontier Mission: Discerning New Ways Forward

by Steven Spicer

What does creative innovation look like in frontier missiology? What kind of imaginative missiological discernment is required to overcome barriers to Jesus in frontier contexts? Ideally, that innovation should emerge among followers of Jesus in these very contexts. It is they who must daily navigate complex ethnolinguistic and socioreligious frontiers. And it is they who feel the barriers created by our current language, terminology, and models of mission. They know when our underlying mission paradigms do not resonate properly in frontier contexts. These barriers require a deeper reimagining of frontier mission.<sup>1</sup>

Since language both reflects and shapes the ways we see, our commonly used terms may restrict our missiological imagination and thereby hinder our discernment of new paradigms and models of mission. The innovative response needed here is not only new language and terms that better express the missiological nuances of frontier mission, but also new lenses for seeing, hearing, and discerning where the Spirit is leading. New language and new lenses will be much more perceptive if derived from national believers, themselves members of emerging Jesus movements.

Our team in the Winter Launch Lab prefers to speak of “walking alongside” followers of Jesus in frontier contexts. From the outset we must maintain a posture of humility and deference, working with experienced field practitioners who already have long-standing relationships of trust with new movements. As alongsiders we are then able to introduce a participatory process for discerning innovative ways of overcoming barriers to Jesus. By innovation in mission we mean, “the creation of sustainable new solutions to the problems faced in discerning, proclaiming, and living out God’s good news for individual persons, societies, and creation.”<sup>2</sup> Applied to frontier contexts, that means we are seeking sustainable transformation in the ways we speak, think, imagine, and act with God in order to better express Jesus’ gospel in the world. Our goal

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through this effort is to encourage sustainable innovation in mission praxis among Jesus movements as they follow the Holy Spirit and cross barriers to Jesus. My intention is to help us explore the ways we might both listen and learn from frontier movements who are discerning the Spirit's leading within altogether different linguistic, social, and theological imaginations. In the following sections, I will detail our emerging model of social innovation in mission, share some of the benefits and challenges of intercultural approaches to discerning mission innovation, and point us toward possibilities for catalyzing innovative discernment by coming alongside movements to Jesus.

While particular attention is given to the potential contributions of incarnational believers who choose to remain as socioreligious insiders, I do not intend to limit the scope of God's blessing to any one type of movement to Jesus.<sup>3</sup> This is not only a theological commitment to encourage what God may choose to bless, but a recognition that the socioreligious fabric of a given context may have significant ramifications for the particular expression of movement dynamics.<sup>4</sup> I am presenting an approach to missiological innovation that embraces this complexity and values the contributions of diverse perspectives. This is fitting as we seek to discern innovative ways forward to overcome barriers to Jesus in frontier mission.

### *A Participatory Model for Missiological Innovation*

The emerging field of social innovation is replete with various methods and tools for addressing complex social problems. From those options, we have chosen the U-process, developed over time by C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and others, and theologically adapted it for use in missiologically generative gatherings.<sup>5</sup> This U-process, as presented in *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, is designed to lead a group of stakeholders—those with a compelling interest in the outcome—through a change process using tools from systems thinking and design thinking to prototype sustainable social innovation.

This U-process is named for the “U-shaped movement” it leads participants through. First, in the “co-initiation” phase, participants gather shared intentions and understandings around a complex problem. Then, moving down the left-hand side of the U, the “co-sensing” phase focuses on letting go of the urge to jump to solutions. Instead, participants focus on observing the complexities of the system through research and learning experiences aimed at deep understanding of the problem. Then, a picture of the complex whole develops once the group reaches the bottom of the U. It is here that the

practice of “presencing” is introduced—a transitional space where a sense of purpose and vision for future initiatives can emerge. Finally, the movement up the right side of the U happens through a process of “co-creating” new ways forward, using tools of design thinking such as ideation and iterative prototyping. The entire process is designed to help groups of people inductively process together and shift the ways they listen and converse. When successful, we have found disparate groups moving away from patterns of listening with confirmation bias toward a posture of openness to the perspectives of many different participants and stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> This shift can have dramatic results in even a few days with generative dialogue taking place around emerging possibilities. It changes the relational patterns of the system.

#### *Complexity, Social Innovation, and Mission:*

Complex social problems such as global sex and labor trafficking result from the interplay of many actors in a given social system. In this social context, the overall behavior of the complex system is emergent and cannot be understood simply by looking at its individual parts. This means there are no best practices or go-to answers that fully address these problems. You cannot simply take apart the engine and fix the malfunctioning part—the causes and effects are all interconnected. Instead, progress on a complex social problem is a matter of helping the whole system to function in healthier ways.<sup>7</sup>

Social innovation is an approach to making progress on complex social problems by “getting the system in the room” in the form of a diverse set of stakeholders. By seeing the system from many angles and beginning to alter the relationships between different parts of the system, there is possibility for new ways forward to emerge. Then, instead of traditional modes of strategic planning, a better approach for addressing a complex problem is to develop a portfolio of prototype initiatives aimed at leveraging specific parts of the system for maximum influence.

In the context of mission, many of the intractable problems and barriers to Jesus we face are also complex social problems, created by patterns of relationships that are established in the paradigms and practices of the Western missions enterprise. Other problems are barriers in frontier contexts which also arise from complex social dynamics, rooted deep in the histories of peoples, places, and cultures. Where current approaches are not working, or worse yet, are causing harm due to unhealthy Western models, social innovation methods may help us discern new ways forward.

There are three key postures for making this shift toward emerging possibilities: an open mind, an open heart, and an open will. These postures of humility enable deeper understanding and empathy, and they allow participants together to embrace alternative ways forward. Briefly summarized, an *open mind* will suspend patterns of judgment and remain open to observing new and contradictory data. An *open heart* refers to a posture of empathy that redirects our perspectives from ourselves to other stakeholders impacted by the complex problem being addressed. Finally, an *open will* enables us to let go of control and begin to identify how our own deeper sense of vocation connects us to emerging inspiration for the future.<sup>8</sup> When combined, these three postures help participants access the kind of creativity found only through deeper authenticity and connection with themselves, and with one another, as they face a complex social problem.

Read through a missiological lens, we have adapted the U-process to function as a process of creative spiritual discernment. We acknowledge that Theory U presents a Western process that could run the danger of reducing what should be inherently relational to a linear process aimed at efficient results. However, while the U-process still forms the backbone, we have drawn significantly from Ruth Haley Barton's model of group spiritual discernment to form a contemplative and Spirit-sensitive approach to decision-making.<sup>9</sup> For us, discernment of innovative ways forward in mission is about the process of transformation as God shifts our ministry paradigms, focuses our vision, and calls us into new expressions of his kingdom we might not have imagined before. In other words, we are not only seeking new ideas, but expect that God will reshape us in the process. God's transformative work in our individual and communal lives is rarely linear and it does not fit Western standards of efficiency. Instead, our "success" looks like healthy relationships and faithfulness to where the collaborative community feels God is calling them. This happens in the context of worshipping and praying communities that are committed to walking together with God and one another.

To better reflect our approach, we have eschewed the original corporate language of the U-process and renamed the three phases: seeking understanding (co-sensing), prayerful reflection (presencing), and discerning new ways forward (co-creating). Additionally, at each stage of the process, the three key postures (open mind, open heart, and open will) contribute toward a further openness to hear the voice of God together and faithfully follow the leading of Jesus.

For us, an open mind is about suspending preconceived ideas to make space for God to show us something new. It is reflected in prayer for God to give us grace to see, hear, and

understand afresh what he is doing in our midst.<sup>10</sup> An open heart is about empathy, not only for other human perspectives, but also to consider God's perspective through prayer and reflection on scripture. We encourage discernment through both affective sensing and cognitive theological reflection, allowing us to embrace many spiritual streams and ways that people experience God's direction.<sup>11</sup> Both an open mind and open heart play an important role in shaping the seeking understanding (co-sensing) phase of the U-process. They help participants seek understanding of many perspectives as they draw together insights from research, theological reflection, and prayer.

## God's transformative work in our individual and communal lives is rarely linear and it does not fit Western standards of efficiency.

Then, particularly in the "prayerful reflection (presencing) phase,"—that turning point at the bottom part of the U—an open will is reflected in honestly coming before God, asking him to lead us toward new expressions of his blessing in the world. This means *choosing* faithfulness and trust when there are personal or organizational costs involved in seeking systemic change. Finally, the "discerning new ways forward (co-creation) phase" focuses on participants creatively imagining fresh possibilities to explore through the inspiration of the Spirit. All three postures remain vital as participants brainstorm and prayerfully discern the most promising initiatives to pursue together. Open minds, hearts, and wills help generate both the space for creativity and the relational trust necessary to pursue disruptive change—whether this change be shifts within Western missions, or new approaches to address barriers to Jesus in frontier contexts. This theoretical process has been applied in various situations, and we've gained some compelling insights about social innovation in mission.

### *Learning through Iteration: Exploring Categories of Social Innovation in Mission*

This Theory U approach to creating new and sustainable innovations coupled with prayerful discernment can be applied in many different formats and to a range of complex problems and barriers to following Jesus. To begin, the Winter Launch Lab formed innovation discernment gatherings. These initiatives were aimed at developing a portfolio of

innovative prototypes around particular problems in mission. These collaborative gatherings, aimed at ongoing feedback, learning, and improvement, were themselves a prototype that provided us further insight into the dynamics of group discernment and intercultural innovation. Throughout this process, we have identified a couple of broad categories of social innovation in mission (which I suggest below), each of which has been further defined by the stakeholders and all the contextual complexity of this process.<sup>12</sup> Each category brings its own challenges and potential for addressing complex problems. Each one also presents opportunities for

highlighting new language, images, and paradigms to help address barriers to Jesus in frontier contexts. I will outline these categories, share some things we have learned, and point toward an approach for walking alongside Jesus movements as they explore and catalyze innovation in mission.

### Category 1: Problems in Western Missions

The presenting problems in Western missions will include issues of church discipleship, mobilization, training, financing, sending, collaboration, organizational culture, the formation of humble, self-aware mission practitioners, and models of missionary

#### *"Transcending Mission" Innovation Gathering*

In our first iteration of the innovation discernment process, we partnered with Mike Stroope, author of *Transcending Mission* (IVP Academic, 2017) whose argument addresses the present global challenge of using modern mission terminology and identity. We gathered a network of fifteen colleagues and friends representing a wide swath of roles within churches and Western missions organizations. These participants met to discuss the question, "How can we work together in specific and tangible ways to facilitate a transformation of the assumptions and practices of the Western missions industry so to better engage in healthy global witness?"<sup>13</sup>

To begin the co-sensing phase, participants interviewed each other and then drew symbolic pictures to represent how they viewed the system of Western missions. From these first drawings it was clear that participants perceived something was amiss. One drawing that stuck with me portrayed money driving the "mission bus," with power and control among other notable passengers that perpetuated and justified the existing system. The artist questioned if we should abandon this bus altogether. Another image showed the missions industry as a large ship, representing large organizations that are quite organized, but inflexible in their direction. It could send out small ships and rafts, but was it enough to respond to the rapid change needed? Yet another showed missions as a machine that receives humanity as input and produces "holy" Christian people that leave people of other socioreligious backgrounds scratching their heads. It appeared the "missions machine" produces something altogether foreign and disconnected from society. These imaginative drawings captured in simple form much of the insight that would emerge in richer detail through the rest of the innovation discernment process.

After presenting their drawings, participants called and interviewed an outside stakeholder and leader in the Western missions enterprise to gather broader perspectives on the current functions of the system. These interviews were developed into personas that reflected perceived commonalities among stakeholders in similar roles. Next, participants listened to recorded interviews of Majority world voices and reflected on how those perspectives compared with the Western perspectives they already heard. Then, through a process of prayer and reflection on scripture, they listened to what God might be saying to the Western missions industry: what might God be celebrating, mourning, or calling us to repent of, in identification with Western missions as a whole? Finally, the co-sensing phase was wrapped up after a group analysis of emerging problems in Western missions (power and money, the influence of theology, the church and discipleship, need for Majority world voices, and the shaping and guiding power of strategy and tradition).

The "presencing" phase began at a second gathering with a time of personal journaling and reflection on the ways their own vocations intersected with the group's emerging understanding of the problem. Then, we asked participants to imagine new ways forward through a creative and prayerful process. This culminated in another set of drawings, this time picturing an ideal future of missions that expresses God's kingdom. This prayerful pause served as a launchpad for co-creating and together brainstorming new ways forward in several areas of mission innovation. The best ideas were presented by the group as possible prototypes. The primary prototype from this innovation discernment process was the encapsulation of our themes and suggestions into a "confession and invitation" that addressed several problematic areas of Western missions.<sup>14</sup> Two of these themes were: (1) the need to fully empower, honor, and learn from Majority world voices at every level and space of Western missions, and (2) a corollary need to address the culture and power of Western missions agencies and cross-cultural workers. Plans were made to propagate the ideas of the confession through grassroots word of mouth, conference presentations, and online invitations to sign the confession. As a proper prototype, these steps will yield feedback from which the gathering participants can continue to learn and take next steps.

witness, disciple making, and church planting. In this broad category, it is the dysfunctional patterns and systemic habits of Western missions that have created Christian barriers to Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Westerners have the station and authority to begin addressing these problems, but the contributions of Majority world voices are essential to identifying issues and providing correctives.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, this emerging missiological insight from frontier contexts will point toward new innovative initiatives to address further implications in Western models of mission training and mobilization.<sup>17</sup>

## Category 2: Majority World Partnership

As a method for addressing complex problems, social innovation emphasizes learning from the perspectives of a diverse set of stakeholders. Accordingly, there is clear potential for using this approach to address problems in world mission in partnership with the Majority world, whether that is with established churches in Latin America, Africa, or Asia, or in partnership with emerging movements, whether church planting, disciple multiplication, or “insider” in orientation.<sup>18</sup> In each of these collaborative contexts, it is vital that Westerners embrace a humble posture to learn from the creative expression and discernment of Majority world Christians and followers of Jesus.

Witness a conversation from one of our intercultural gatherings that exemplifies this need for Westerners to humbly learn from the Majority world. At one point in the innovation discernment process, while several small groups were discussing possible prototype initiatives they could pursue together, one participant from East Africa spoke up and said, “You Westerners talk about including Majority world people until it comes time to make a decision. Then you don’t listen to us.” While he and a few other Majority world participants had expressed the need for a more *relational* focus to any new initiatives, a couple Westerners in the group continued their *programmatic* course of action without any real discernment or self-awareness. This is certainly not an isolated incident. It demonstrated the significant need for humble, self-aware practitioners who are able to listen and make space for the full participation of voices from the Majority world.

The formation of self-aware practitioners is especially crucial for empowering new followers of Jesus who seek to maintain their socioreligious identity. In particular, there is a need for humble “alongsiders,” mature believers from another people or culture who are able to walk alongside emerging movements to Jesus. They neither control the new believers, nor direct the movement’s leaders as they navigate appropriate ways of following Jesus inside their socioreligious contexts.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, for the purposes of learning in partnership with frontier voices, we have begun working on facilitating social

innovation in mission by bringing together experienced Christian alongside with the leadership of followers of Jesus who are still socioreligious insiders. Catalyzing innovation *under* insider leadership does present many new challenges; but, there is the possibility of drawing out new language, images, and paradigms as Western alongside learn from insiders’ alternative perspectives, their current cultural practices, and their inclinations. While insiders offer greater understanding of the theological and social imagination of their people—and, therefore, drive the discernment process—Western alongside can reciprocate and contribute prototypes related to the formation of cross-cultural witnesses (be they Westerners or not) as fresh missiological insights emerge in the group.

It’s evident that this collaboration of insiders and alongside around a common goal might help frontier peoples follow Jesus while avoiding the harm caused by inappropriate Western models of mission. This partnership can generate a portfolio of prototypes as they deliberate and coordinate their response to different issues. But, while there are these collaborative possibilities that build on the strengths of insider leadership, there are also real challenges to be faced by having such a mixed group. Some of these challenges emerged in an innovation discernment gathering focused on the Hindu context.

**One participant from East Africa  
spoke up and said,  
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time to make a decision.  
Then you don’t listen to us.”**

**Strengths and Challenges of Intercultural Social Innovation:**

### *Reflections on a Hindu-focused Innovation Gathering*

We convened a Hindu-focused gathering around the shared desire to discern new ways forward that might result in more *savarna* (or forward caste) Hindus following Jesus. The primary concern was to discern how this could be realized while causing minimal harm to the socioreligious context. The complexity of this challenge seemed to warrant the process we had constructed through the use of Theory U. Again, our objective required that we focus on a Western mission problem (our assumptions about a Hindu context of ministry) and that we include voices from that socioreligious

world. Therefore, the group represented three constituencies: a majority of Americans with experience and formation as alongsiders, a few Indian “Christians” from established Indian churches, and some “Hindu followers of Jesus.” The leaders who guided the entire experience were two Hindu (insider) followers of Jesus and one American alongsider, weighting decisions towards an insider sensibility.

The initial format of the innovation discernment process included a panel of four Hindu followers of Jesus who shared their own stories of coming to Christ. This included the responses of their families, how they navigated Hindu and Christian identities over time, and ways they each experienced social dysfunction and inappropriate harm from missionaries, Indian churches, and the application of Western models of evangelism and discipleship.<sup>20</sup> In the group activity that followed, we asked participants to reflect on these stories and identify positive examples of applied wisdom or the negative reinforcement of barriers to Jesus. Their responses included advice about how to behave as an alongsider in Hindu contexts, and, conversely, how systemic thinking, training, and support methods perpetuate values and goals that result in inappropriate harm for Hindus who choose to follow Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

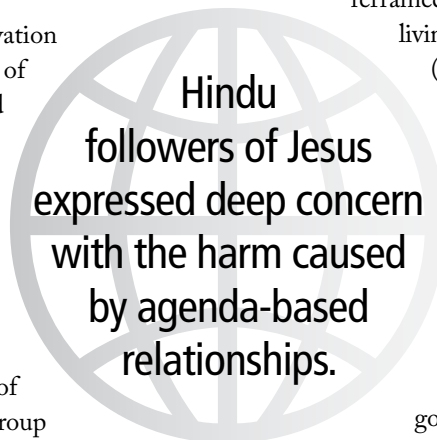
In particular, the (insider) Hindu followers of Jesus expressed deep concern with the harm caused by agenda-based relationships, duplicitous missionary identities, and styles of personal evangelism. Instead of methods focusing on witnessing to individuals, they pointed to the need to think of God’s transformative love for the whole village. It is their conviction that by living rightly in sight of the broader community, the whole community will be blessed. As part of the co-sensing phase of the U-process, these stories personified the need for new paradigms in mission. The following phases of our innovation process then moved toward prayerful reflection, to a presencing phase in which we began to discern new ways forward, and then together into a co-creation phase. This included an engaging series of conversations revealing ways that the perspectives and practices of incarnational believers could help shape group discernment.

### Strengths of Discerning with Insiders

The primary aim for this approach to alongsider/insider partnership was not merely to surface new language, images, and terms, but that alongsiders might begin to discern God’s leading through the linguistic, cultural and theological lenses of their insider partners. While this Hindu oriented gathering was

not focused specifically on developing new language or images, it did surface an alternative missiological lens—a certain methodological approach—for discerning new ways forward.<sup>22</sup>

This alternative lens, shaped by insider approaches to following Jesus, was most clearly represented in a rephrasing of the original problem statement developed during the process. The group reframed their shared focus as, “encouraging and living out *bhakti* (devotion) toward *Muktimath* (the Lord of salvation).”<sup>23</sup> Bhakti, defined most simplistically as “devotion” in English, carries a deeper set of sensibilities and imaginative content in this socioreligious context. It draws from a different set of practices, narratives, images, and paradigms for understanding and following Jesus. Specifically, it draws on a Hindu social and theological imagination for what it means to be devoted to a Hindu god, or for those following Jesus as *Yesu bhaktas*, as devotees of Jesus.



### *A Short Excursus into Charles Taylor and James K. A. Smith*

Allow me to step out of this Hindu context for a moment and draw on Charles Taylor’s study of our Western secular society. I believe his conceptualization of what he terms a “social imaginary” is helpful in understanding the way bhakti was discussed in this Hindu-focused gathering. Taylor wants to explain how a shared social imagination carries precognitive understandings (like bhakti in our case). Since a social imaginary is “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in *images, stories, legends, etc.*”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, “the social imaginary is that *common understanding which makes possible common practices*, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”<sup>25</sup> In the Hindu context, common understandings of bhakti are expressed in stories and songs that give background and context for shared practices of devotion that then resonate within this shared social imaginary. But this relationship between shared imagination and practices goes both ways: “If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice which largely carries the understanding.”<sup>26</sup> That is, without any theoretical articulation, without actually thinking about it, practices draw us as participants into shared images, stories, and legends.

Allow me one more step away from our Hindu consideration to cite James K. A. Smith, who in his *Desiring the Kingdom* builds on Taylor’s conception of the social imaginary. Smith, like Taylor, is speaking to our Western socioreligious orientations, identifying the significance of our precognitive and pre-reflective understandings of the world and how



they operate below levels of thinking and believing. Our imaginaries shape how we “imagine the world before we even think about it.”<sup>27</sup> Importantly, this affective level of the imaginary includes our vision of the good life and consequently shapes what we love—what we are devoted to. So, Smith is suggesting that our imaginary, embodied in shared practices, has greater influence than our theoretical worldview in forming us into particular kinds of people.

Smith turns to the practices and messaging of a shopping mall to capture this reciprocal influence of worldview and practice in a social imaginary. He asks, “What story is embedded in its practices? What does it envision as the good life? What is the shape of the mall’s worship? What kind of people does it want us to become? What does the mall want us to love?”<sup>28</sup> Smith then turns to how Christian practices of worship form us differently into who we are becoming and what we love. Likewise, in this Hindu context, the participants reflected on *Yesu bhakta* (insider) devotion to Jesus and vision for the good life.<sup>29</sup> We were discussing a social imaginary, one that needed to be appreciated for how it nuanced the formation of followers of Jesus and how they will see and love God.

This recognition is critical for any social innovation in mission. In this Hindu-focused setting, we understood that a particular kind of people is being formed by biblical and cultural narratives of love and devotion to God. Initially, we did not want to limit the social imaginaries and thereby reduce our creativity. We expected God’s surprising leadership, that he may draw us out of our current missiological paradigms. So, the devotional understanding of bhakti was identified and explored, and we allowed this particular imaginary to shape our discernment and the potential limits of what we could imagine as possible.

As part of the innovative discernment process, the group wanted to invoke the deeper social imaginary of bhakti by participating in some of the practices that carry and embody this imaginary. We opened the Hindu-focused gathering with a *satsang* (group devotional event) and then each day with *bhajans*—devotional worship songs from the Hindu tradition that are dedicated to Jesus. The narratives, images, and deeper connotations associated with bhakti are not the same as Christian expressions of discipleship—especially not American evangelical ones. Consequently, worshiping Jesus together through these Hindu devotional practices helps to decentralize Western Christian paradigms of missiological thought from their place of assumed normativity. As is true of social imaginaries, it is not only the worship forms that are different. The practices also recall, at the level of the imagination, differing lenses for loving Jesus. To the extent that participants have been shaped by or resonate with Hindu

bhakti toward Muktinath (the Lord of salvation), they will be more open to discerning God’s leading through that alternative imaginary. Thus, while the gathering participants were primarily alongsiders, the innovation discernment process was aimed at drawing out the theological and social imagination of the participating Hindu devotees of Jesus, specifically as this devotional prayer helped us imagine emergent paradigms—and the transformation of current mission practice required within Hindu contexts. Restated, this gathering’s aim was missiological discernment through the use of the social imaginary, and the application of that imaginative lens to Hindu *Yesu bhakta* storying and leadership. Several potential ways forward emerged through the participants’ discussions, prayerful reflection, and brainstorming. The group considered Hindu forms of social space for practicing bhakti toward Jesus in ways that might avoid extraction evangelism. Some participants explored possibilities for improving training of Westerners while others advocated the need for quality bhajans and poetry for Jesus devotees. Finally, one subgroup made plans for the curation of resources appropriate for Hindu devotees of Jesus, resulting in the creation and release of a phone app.

### Challenges in Intercultural Social Innovation

Through the particular Hindu gathering, we also discovered some of the unique challenges involved in social innovation when attempted by a mixed group of alongsiders and insiders. One intercultural dynamic that can emerge is felt pain or sensitivity around any topic.<sup>30</sup> Since the Hindu gathering was partially focused on understanding the unnecessary harm caused among Hindu followers of Jesus by Western expressions of Christianity, there was a greater need from the start to build trust between the Hindu background and Christian background participants. This trust was required as we faced the tension of culturally different values, leadership, group dynamics, and communication styles. There is no doubt we need to grow in understanding how this kind of innovative gathering can face cultural differences and generative social innovation in mission.

On top of the normal challenges of group innovation in a limited time frame, making creative space for ideas to emerge in an intercultural group requires a strong cultural intelligence. It’s a skill needed in navigating intercultural communication, ideation, decision-making, and discernment. One starting point for conceptualizing the different aspects which challenge a culturally diverse group are Hofstede’s six dimensions of organizational culture. Briefly listed, these dimensions are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint.<sup>31</sup> While Hofstede’s approach has drawn some criticism, these categories have

shaped further research around the relationship between culture and innovation.<sup>32</sup> For example, studies have consistently found that greater power distance and uncertainty avoidance have a negative effect on innovation, while individualism has a positive effect. In other words, innovation is hindered by management styles emphasizing hierarchy and unequal power, as well as organizational cultures that focus on standardization and resist change, whereas greater freedom for individual expression fosters innovation.<sup>33</sup> However, these cultural dimensions are expressed differently through political institutions, societal norms, group dynamics, and individual behavior.<sup>34</sup>

In particular, for this kind of innovation discernment process, we are interested in the ways that differences in these cultural dimensions shape small group dynamics and impact any brainstorming techniques. Studies around individualism and collectivism in idea generation point toward enhanced creativity when individuals in the group value collective goals over personal ones, but, conversely, construe their personal identities as more independent than interdependent.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in mixed groups, individuals from a collectivist background are more likely to be aware of contextual clues and will adapt to other group members' low-context style of communication.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is simplistic to say that individualism generates greater creativity. The reality is that collectivist tendencies toward group goals and the maintaining of relationships also play an integral role in group creativity alongside individual expression and divergent thinking.<sup>37</sup> This nuanced relationship between collectivism and individualism in group dynamics suggests that it is similarly worthwhile to explore the interplay of other cultural dimensions such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance in the group ideation process. The design of social innovation and discernment processes for Majority world contexts will benefit from a fuller understanding of these intercultural dynamics.

It is also important in this intercultural social innovation that we define valuable creativity. Simply generating more ideas does not ensure they are better ideas. In fact, in one study comparing the cultural contribution of Canadian (individualist) and Taiwanese (collectivist) participants, the Canadians generated far more ideas in individual and group brainstorming sessions, while the Taiwanese participants generated a higher quality in their ideas (demonstrating greater originality).<sup>38</sup> More important than quantity of ideas is the ability of a group to think in divergent ways and avoid what is called fixation—that “inability of people to break out of a routinized mental set by being fixated on preexisting knowledge.”<sup>39</sup> Valuable creativity in mission should be defined in terms of the group's ability to generate divergent ideas for many possible ways forward without getting stuck or fixated on current paradigms and practices in mission.

This kind of divergent thinking is aided by the perspectives of diverse participants in this process of intercultural social innovation. However, as suggested above, cultural differences do complicate group processes. One summary of two studies suggests that, “While deep diversity may improve divergent processes in groups, it may also hamper groups' ability to converge around creative ideas.”<sup>40</sup> It is more difficult for diverse groups to flesh out and integrate their ideas, so if they are forced to choose one outcome, this focus may counteract the benefit of more divergent thinking.<sup>41</sup> That said, in the context of social innovation in mission, what matters most is faithful discernment of God's guidance and wisdom. In this case, any added difficulty in arriving at shared understanding due to diverse perspectives is worth the hindrance if it helps us act wisely.

In true *alongsider* fashion, where there is disagreement between Majority world Christians, incarnational believers (insiders), and Westerners, it will generally be best to pause, listen, and learn from the wisdom of others who may be discerning new ways forward. These may be disruptive forms of innovation that significantly shift our missiology, organizational structures, and practices. This type of innovation in mission, and particularly frontier mission, emerges through learning to see things differently—by expanding our imaginations through an interface with other social imaginaries. To help us imagine fresh possibilities in mission, we may benefit from further exploration into another category of social innovation.

**Simply generating more ideas does not ensure they are better ideas. In one study, the Canadians generated far more ideas while the Taiwanese generated a higher quality in their ideas.**

### *Alongsiding Innovation: Possibilities for Learning with Movements*

Alongsiding innovation is the process of designing, together with incarnational believers, a completely recontextualized innovation discernment process, which they will later facilitate in gatherings composed entirely of their own movement or network.<sup>42</sup> To arrive at that intended outcome, there must be clear buy-in from movement leadership to shape the process for their context. If we, as the Winter Launch Lab, were to arrive with a prepackaged process that did not seem helpful, they would certainly not use it. Worse still, if they did use

a process based on our outside reading of their context, it could easily do harm to the movement—particularly in sensitive and religiously restrictive locations. Since we are not those who will bear the consequences, we should exercise caution and cultivate a reticence. Consequently, we should enter the scene with open hands to allow leadership of these movements to Jesus to define the language and the terms: for describing this entire discernment process; for the goals and problems they wish to prayerfully address; and for how the innovation process is shaped to better fit their context. Our desire is to develop a very malleable and reproducible approach to social innovation aimed at overcoming barriers to Christward movements in frontier contexts.

Our gatherings in these alongside settings introduce a basic outline of the innovation discernment process, and then proceed to the study of scripture, a reflection on the actual context, and then a contextualization of helpful practices. Let's look at these four elements more closely. First, we introduce the basic steps and postures of the U-process (co-initiating, co-sensing, presencing, and co-creating) using appropriate language (which has been discussed and translated with movement leadership ahead of any gathering). Next, and for each step (or new posture), we read scripture inductively with insider movement leadership, studying large sections of the Gospels and Acts, and facilitate a reciprocity between these passages and the innovation discernment process. We do have some suggestions for scriptural connections, such as the posture of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane as an example of what we call an "open will." But, we also desire to surface insiders' *scriptural imaginations* and see how they interpret these passages in relationship to the process. Then, in each step of the U-process, we also use the local movement's context—the social and cultural system—as a case study to think more concretely about issues. This means they pick a real barrier or challenge the movement would like to research, understand, and possibly address through new initiatives. This gives us insight into insider understandings of barriers and how they feel these challenges should be addressed. One example might be picking another people group in the movement's region and asking God for the wisdom to understand the particular barriers or boundaries keeping that people group from understanding the gospel. This would then lead to the next question: How can the existing movement to Jesus extend into that people group?

Finally, for each step we ask how they would organize activities or processes to reach the desired ends. For example, when we reach the presencing phase we ask participants to reflect on their own cultural and religious practices and how they make significant personal and leadership decisions in the movement. By encouraging storytelling, and by asking them

to reflect on their own cultural and religious practices, we hope to exegete the significance of those practices and surface deeper narratives, images, and associated terms.

In the immediate context, the benefit of this reflection is primarily for insider leadership to find helpful language and ways of recontextualizing the process. However, it can simultaneously provide us as outsiders with insight into these practices and their corollary social imaginary, that precognitive imagining of theological and social reality. As James K. A. Smith suggests, "By focusing on social imaginaries, the radar of cultural critique is calibrated to focus on exegeting practices, not just waiting for the blips of ideas to show up on the screen."<sup>43</sup> Since affective shifts of allegiance and behavior in movements to Jesus may often precede their ability to formulate belief at a cognitive level, a shift toward focusing on the precognitive interplay of shared imagination and practices provides the unique lenses through which insider movements discern their missiological vision.<sup>44</sup> Specifically, it is precisely because insider movements have alternative socioreligious practices (and associated imaginaries) that they may bring fresh missiological insight—certainly for their own contexts—but also to reveal the missing nuances in our language and imagination as Christians. These alternative ways of speaking and seeing could open up new avenues for imagining models and structures in frontier mission.

## Conclusion

Our hope, as we "alongside" innovation in frontier contexts, is that those in Jesus movements will discern the movement of the Spirit in fresh and theologically imaginative ways that lead toward wisdom to overcome boundaries and challenges as they see them. In the process, fresh language, terms, and images may emerge that express Jesus' gospel in ways that more deeply resonate in frontier contexts. And where our own missiological imaginations are limited, followers of Jesus remaining inside Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other socioreligious contexts may offer creative ways forward for faithfully following Jesus. As we humbly come alongside and under their leadership, share in their socioreligious practices, and begin to catch a glimpse of God's activity in the world through missiological lenses shaped by their imaginations, those of us from the West might start to see frontier mission from a new perspective. In short, we will best reimagine frontier mission by learning from frontier voices and prayerfully discerning new ways forward with them. Toward these ends, participatory social innovation and discernment methods will help foster the creative and collaborative space needed to listen, learn, and reimagine current paradigms and models for overcoming barriers to Jesus in frontier mission. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Brad Gill, “Reimagining Frontier Mission: When Terminology Dulls the Imagination,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 111-118.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Dzubinski, “Innovation and Startup Mentality in Mission,” *Lausanne Movement* (blog), August 17, 2017, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-09/innovation-startup-mentality-mission>.
- <sup>3</sup> I use the term “socioreligious insider” to specify those believers in Jesus who have turned to Christ and have maintained their socioreligious identity among their original community, whether it be Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or other religious worlds, and have resisted any automatic identification that binds them to a Christian community that stands in socioreligious opposition. While the term “insider” unfortunately highlights the social identity and location of believers over any faith commitments, I use it to highlight ways that the social location of believers inside their original communities forms them to follow and love Jesus in particular ways that may be illuminating.
- <sup>4</sup> Christian J. Anderson, “Navigating the Constraints of the Ummah: A Comparison of Christ Movements in Iran and Bangladesh,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 117-125.
- <sup>5</sup> C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges: The Social Technology of Presencing*, Second edition (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016).
- <sup>6</sup> Scharmer, *Theory U*, 10–13.
- <sup>7</sup> For an introduction to systems thinking and modeling of social problems, see David Peter Stroh, *Systems Thinking for Social Change: A Practical Guide to Solving Complex Problems, Avoiding Unintended Consequences, and Achieving Lasting Results* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015).
- <sup>8</sup> Scharmer, *Theory U*, 40–44.
- <sup>9</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012). Barton first describes the formation of communities for discernment; then she walks readers through the steps of a group discernment process in chapters 9–11.
- <sup>10</sup> In Mark 8:14–21 Jesus emphasizes the need for his disciples to properly see and understand. For our theological adaptation of the U-process these verses highlight that familiarity with a topic, particularly a complex one, does not mean we have properly seen or discerned what God is saying or doing in that context.
- <sup>11</sup> We draw upon the spiritual streams outlined by Richard Foster’s organization Renovaré (“The Six Streams,” <https://renovare.org/about/ideas/the-six-streams>) as well as Gary L. Thomas’ identification of nine pathways for people to love God in *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).
- <sup>12</sup> Another way to frame categories of innovation in mission is into products, services, processes, and organizations (Paul Dzubinski, “Innovation and Startup Mentality in Mission.”). More specific areas for practical innovation in mission are also identified in James W. Reapsome, *Innovation in Mission: Insights into Practical Innovations Creating Kingdom Impact* (Tyrone, GA: Authentic Pub., 2007).
- <sup>13</sup> Stroope’s work in *Transcending Mission* served as a conversation starter, highlighting the need for humble “pilgrim witnesses.” Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 355–385.
- <sup>14</sup> Michael W. Stroope, “Confession and Invitation,” (March 6, 2019), <https://medium.com/@mikestroope/confession-and-invitation-a7db8f5b88b3>.
- <sup>15</sup> Paul Pennington, in *Christian Barriers to Jesus*, highlights many of the ways that Christianity, the church, and its associated practices and theology of mission are functionally barriers to Hindus following Jesus. *Christian Barriers to Jesus: Conversations and Questions from the Indian Context* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishers, 2017).
- <sup>16</sup> Majority world voices that are highly influenced by Western Christianity or are otherwise culturally separate from their surrounding context may not offer as insightful correctives as those who are following Jesus in highly contextual ways.
- <sup>17</sup> Where new paradigms and models of mission begin to emerge in the frontiers there will be significant implications for changing Western approaches to mission mobilization, training, ministry, etc.
- <sup>18</sup> In addition to partnership with the West, Majority world leaders could also implement these social innovation and discernment methods in their own contexts or with a globally diverse team.
- <sup>19</sup> For an in-depth description of alongsiders and their roles, see John Travis and Anna Travis, “Roles of ‘Alongsiders’ in Insider Movements: Contemporary Examples and Biblical Reflections,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2013); and H. L. Richard, “Cultivating Reticence: The Supportive Role of the Alongsider in Hindu Ministry,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2015).
- <sup>20</sup> To describe harm, the Hindu insider participants referred to several common experiences. First, they felt used by agenda-driven missionaries who valued missional task over authentic relationships. They also experienced the pain of disrupted relationships with their families and communities as they were led into Western expressions of Christian discipleship. Finally, exacerbating the situation, they found that churches were unwilling or unable to fulfill the deep Hindu cultural role of community to care for one another.
- <sup>21</sup> While all believers must count the cost of carrying their cross and following Jesus, the sometimes irreparable harm that comes from having to become Western is truly not a requirement for following Jesus in the Hindu world.
- <sup>22</sup> New language was not the focus, but it was clear that Western missionaries’ continued use of Christian and evangelical language, which carries with it syncretistic assumptions, is problematic. Also, due to prior experience and conversations, basic concepts and terminology were already held in common between Hindus and alongsiders.

- <sup>23</sup> The group's complete focus statement also included these subpoints: 1) leading to humility and selflessness in us and others, 2) enabling restored and strengthened relationships in *savarna* Hindu families and societies, all while, 3) doing minimal harm.
- <sup>24</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1st Edition (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 171–172.
- <sup>25</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 172.
- <sup>26</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 173.
- <sup>27</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, vol. 1, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 66.
- <sup>28</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 95.
- <sup>29</sup> To be clear, I am applying the concept of a social imaginary in hindsight to the Hindu gathering to clarify how the group's discussions of *bhakti* and experience of related worship practices functioned to shape the group's discernment together and suggestions for possible ways forward. We did not directly ask Smith's questions, but the group's reflections surfaced an understanding of *bhakti* that provides insights that would correspond to several of those listed.
- <sup>30</sup> In any Majority world and Western intercultural gathering there may also be frustration from past experiences where Westerners assumed control and power or valued information and task over relationships.
- <sup>31</sup> Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, Third Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010).
- <sup>32</sup> Busse discusses scholarly dismissal of Hofstede's fifth category (short-term orientation) and criticism of Hofstede's equation of cultures and nations ("Is Culture Driving Innovation? A Multi-National Quantitative Analysis," *Human Systems Management* 33 [January 2014]: 91–98.) Kumar provides a broad literature review and categorizes studies around innovation and culture into six areas: innovation characteristics, adoption of/propensity to adopt innovations, geographical innovations (region-specific variations and cross-national differences of the diffusion process), market characteristics, learning effect, and organizational functions. Kumar notes that Hofstede's dimensions of cultural values have shaped further research in several of these fields (propensity to adopt innovations, market characteristics, and organizational functions are specifically mentioned). V. Kumar, "Understanding Cultural Differences in Innovation: A Conceptual Framework and Future Research Directions," *Journal of International Marketing* 22, no. 3 (2014): 1–29.
- <sup>33</sup> Carsten Deckert and Rahel M. Schomaker, "Cultural Impacts on National Innovativeness: Not Every Cultural Dimension Is Equal," *Cross-Cultural Research* 53, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 192–194.
- <sup>34</sup> Deckert and Schomaker, "Cultural Impacts on National Innovativeness," 207–208. It may be worth exploring how these cultural dimensions of innovation are expressed in social movements, with implications for movements to Jesus.
- <sup>35</sup> Hoon-Seok Choi et al., "Collectivistic Independence Promotes Group Creativity by Reducing Idea Fixation," *Small Group Research* 50, no. 3 (June 1, 2019): 381–407; Hoon-Seok Choi and Young-Jae Yoon, "Collectivistic Values and an Independent Mindset Jointly Promote Group Creativity: Further Evidence for a Synergy Model," *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 22, no. 4 (December 2018): 236–248; Hoon-Seok Choi et al., "The Joint Impact of Collectivistic Value Orientation and Independent Self-Representation on Group Creativity," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 37–56. Complicating matters further, while individualistic expression as a group norm engenders creativity, group pressure to conform to that norm has only been found to increase divergent thinking among less creative people. Jack Goncalo and Michelle Duguid, "Follow the Crowd in a New Direction: When Conformity Pressure Facilitates Group Creativity (And When It Does Not)," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 118 (May 2012), electronic version.
- <sup>36</sup> The contextual malleability of communication style is seen in one study where individuals from Chinese high-context communication cultures were found more likely to be aware of contextual cues and conform to low-context styles of communication. Hao-Chuan Wang, Susan R. Fussell, and Leslie D. Setlock, "Cultural Difference and Adaptation of Communication Styles in Computer-Mediated Group Brainstorming," *Proceedings of CHI 2009* (New York: ACM press, 2009): 669–678.
- <sup>37</sup> Individual expression alone can easily disrupt a group brainstorming process through even a few individuals who are not attentive to the group goal or honoring relationships at the table.
- <sup>38</sup> Gad Saad, Mark Cleveland, and Louis Ho, "Individualism-Collectivism and the Quantity Versus Quality Dimensions of Individual and Group Creative Performance," *Journal of Business Research* 68, no. 3 (March 2015): 578–586.
- <sup>39</sup> Choi et al., "Collectivistic Independence Promotes Group Creativity by Reducing Idea Fixation," 383.
- <sup>40</sup> Sarah Harvey, "A Different Perspective: The Multiple Effects of Deep Level Diversity on Group Creativity," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49, no. 5 (September 2013), abstract, 822.
- <sup>41</sup> Harvey, "A Different Perspective," 823.
- <sup>42</sup> In this section I primarily discuss the particular benefits of alongsiding innovation with insider movements to unpack their social imaginaries which are connected with non-Christian religious practices, but many of the same benefits will apply to learning from the imaginative missiological lenses of other highly contextual frontier Jesus movements.
- <sup>43</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 133.
- <sup>44</sup> John Jay Travis, "Insider Movements among Muslims: A Focus on Asia," in *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus Within Diverse Religious Communities*, eds. Harley Tallman and John Jay Travis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 138. Travis suggests that heart allegiance and demonstrated behavior may be a valid expression of the maturity of a movement to Jesus.

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community development,  
and least-reached communities

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REGNUM PRACTITIONER SERIES

Towards an Integral Mission

# Community Development and the Formation of Vibrant Communities of Jesus Followers: Shared Principles of Excellence

by Andrea C. Waldorf

Ten principles are developed in the book *Undivided Witness*, exploring the themes captured in its subtitle. In her chapter, Waldorf explores the ninth principle, which states that:

*There is significant overlap between the principles of excellence in community development and the formation of vibrant communities of Jesus followers including:*

- Commitment to serve the least reached*
- Working collaboratively*
- Adopting locally reproducible approaches*
- Living incarnationally*
- Solidarity with those who suffer*
- Benefiting the whole community and sowing the seeds of the gospel widely*
- Focus on teamwork*
- Focus on groups and the existing community*
- Empowering people and making disciples, not "converts"*
- Local leadership and local ownership*

*Further, the community development sector offers familiar and accepted strategies involving a mix of international and local experts who work together in partnership with local civil society organizations. This increasingly includes partnering with churches and other faith communities. (p. 18, Undivided Witness)*

*Editor's Note: This article is a slightly revised version of chapter 9, entitled, "Principle 9: Shared Principles of Excellence," in Undivided Witness: Jesus Followers, Community Development, and Least-Reached Communities, edited by David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel. Regnum Practitioner Series. Oxford: Regnum, 2020. Used by permission; not to be reproduced in any form nor reused without permission of the publisher.*

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*Andrea C. Waldorf (MSc Global Health) has been involved in community development work in Central Asia since 1996. In 2008 she became country director for her organization and since 2019 has served as its international director.*

One Christmas Eve in a small city in Central Asia, we cooked something not too strange for our local friends: grilled chicken, boiled rice, and vegetables. Sitting around the *dasdihon* (a tablecloth spread on the floor) a few hours later, our friends diligently moved the food around on their plates; some ate the chicken, but few touched the rest. Losing my patience, I asked, "Why don't you eat this? It has the same ingredients as a chicken pilau!" Astonished, my friends looked at me and said, "Yes, but if you knew that, then why did you cook everything separately when it is so much tastier blended together?"

Why indeed? Many of us like to take things apart in our research and analysis. Wanting all the details, we divide our lives and ministries into the secular and the sacred, our work-life balance, word and deed, community development, and church planting. But is the secular not sacred in our hands, our work not part of life? Is not the gospel only whole when heard, seen, and tasted? Is not ministry only whole when we include and integrate all we know, do, and believe?

Our ministry and lives could be tastier to those around us when we live as whole people presenting a whole gospel. A key part of that is to recognize the great compatibility of community development and church planting principles as described in the last two decades.

### **Active Participation**

One of the most important principles in community development today is the active participation of the community in finding solutions and setting the agenda and direction for any development process. This goes back to initial work on participatory rural appraisals (PRA) described by Robert Chambers in his 1983 writings aptly titled *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*.<sup>1</sup>

Chambers' writing on community development issues parallels some of the best thinking in missiology of the time, including the emphases on educational theory and spiritual formation by Ted Ward.<sup>2</sup> Both drew on the pedagogical thinking of Brazilian Paulo Freire,<sup>3</sup> who stressed the importance of the contribution of the local population who can and should be able to analyze their own reality. This concept overlaps with a key principle of Paul Hiebert's description of "critical contextualization"<sup>4</sup> and many of the principles discussed in the "vulnerable missions" movement today.<sup>5</sup>

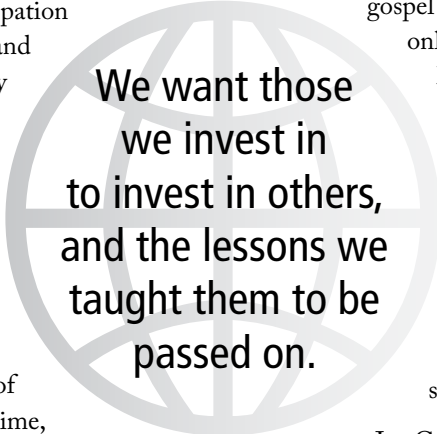
This principle of a deep level of connection to local language and culture has also been discovered in church planting movements (CPM). David Garrison and others emphasize the importance of contextualization, indigenization, and evangelism in the heart language of the community as key principles in seeing a CPM happening among those we desire to reach.<sup>6</sup>

Integration into the community in all aspects of life is clearly described in Luke 10, the account of Jesus sending out the seventy-two. He instructs them to stay in the community, live with the people, become part of their life, their joys, their sorrows, their fears and pains, to know what makes them cry or laugh. In other words, he tells his disciples to become neighbors.

Bryant Myers reminds us that to share *our* story, we need to also listen to *their* story. He says,

...we face a challenge. How do we merge these stories so that they enhance each other, and everyone learns and grows? The key is becoming community to each other... Building community is what good neighbors do.<sup>7</sup>

Next, Jesus tells the disciples to deal with the different aspects of life that enable the Kingdom to break into the community through healing the sick (demonstration in the physical realm), proclaiming that the Kingdom is near (proclamation in the intellectual realm), and freeing from demonic oppression (freedom in the unseen spiritual realm). Only in the experience of healing, knowledge, and freedom as a whole can the community understand the fullness of the gospel and embrace it fully. But it is also true that only when the church touches all these areas of life can it be truly vibrant.



**We want those  
we invest in  
to invest in others,  
and the lessons we  
taught them to be  
passed on.**

### **Reproducibility and Scalability**

Another key principle in community development is reproducibility and scalability. Will your intervention be picked up by the local community and reproduced locally? Is it simple enough, using locally available resources? Can someone reproduce what you are modelling?

In Central Asia, we designed and locally built assistive devices for children with disabilities, using plastic pipe, wood, and other materials available in the bazaar to build walkers, corner chairs, and other devices. Fathers, grandfathers, and local craftsmen soon came to copy and build their own simple and inexpensive versions for their children or to sell on the local market.

It is the same principle we see in reproducibility and disciple making: We want those we invest in to invest in others and the lessons we taught them to be passed on to others. We want others to look at our friends and say, "I want what they have: hope for a future, joy in a relationship with God and neighbors, a new center in life that is infectious." We want the idea of meeting with others to read God's word to spread from neighbor to neighbor. In a best-case scenario, passing on simple, appropriate technology and sharing the good news go hand-in-hand, truly integral by nature.

In an agriculture project carried out in another community, we provided individual families with a way to grow produce and increase their food security; now the local government has asked us to scale it up for every school in the district. We did not have resources to provide the same technology for all schools, but the project caught others' attention, became a vision that spread and an effective strategy to be adapted and applied elsewhere.

Just as these ideas have been adopted and spread, we want to see groups of people experiencing the vibrancy of a new community of Jesus followers. They in turn will intentionally want to take this to villages and towns that have not yet tasted these good fruits.



## Community-Based Services

Further, we should consider the nature of community-based services and how that translates to local churches.

A backbone of community development is the idea that health, rehabilitation, education, and self-help groups (SHGs) are located in direct proximity to the people in need of such services. In this, we speak of primary health versus larger polyclinics in the closest city, village schools established even in remote or nomadic settings, inclusive education for children with disabilities rather than boarding and special education options, and access to legal and peer support through local women's self-help groups rather than isolation.

I sometimes hear the challenge of “a church in reach of every person”—a community-based church. Johannes Reimer writes that our place of living, our community, is where “neighboring” happens and where social networks are formed and maintained. If we want churches to be a transformational power in these networks and communities, they must be part of the community to be “local.”<sup>8</sup> Yet too many of our churches in the West have become anything but community-based. The idea of a village church—a locally accessible parish—is a dying concept in Europe where many people commute long distances to the church of their flavor. Consequently, the church is no longer physically and socially at the center of community life or the marketplace. Sad to say, I have seen this as well in some post-Soviet republics, with “old” churches in the cities expecting believers in the villages to travel to the city, rather than to see a small church planted in the villages.

Although we do not promote this model of large churches, common in our home countries and often featuring “performance style” worship and “professional preachers,” it is present in the media and accessible to new believers far away. A Central Asian colleague belongs to a small, community-based house church. A year ago, she participated in a financial management course in Germany. While there, she attended a German church with some former colleagues. I picked her up when she returned home. Talking about her trip, she said, “Finally, I was in a real church; it was like the ones on TV with the music and the preaching.” This broke my heart. I tried to explain that her little group in Asia is also “real church” and is even more like what the first disciples experienced. She seemed to agree, but I cannot forget that initial heartfelt emotion she showed over attending “real church.”

As we engage with least-reached communities, let us seek a community-based church model and not repeat the mistakes of the decline of Christianity in our home countries: a church within walking distance, a church for all, a church accessible without a car or funds for local transport, a church where you meet people facing the same struggles as yourself, a

church where fellowship continues throughout the week as neighbors interact. Reimer says a missional—we would say a vibrant reproducing—church has an external focus:<sup>9</sup> It looks like its local community; its programs do not attract into a church building but happen among the people and with the highest level of participation possible.

This church will be a highly participatory and reproducible house church. Apart from such issues as legal registration and buildings, let us consider a *med punkt* (small primary health care building) model from the former Soviet Union that was staffed by local communities, within walking distance of the community, and supervised and trained by a regional healthcare worker. Can we imagine churches being at the heart of the village, the marketplace of life, again? Can we imagine our SHGs, farmers' clubs, and parent support groups leading to or becoming vibrant communities of Jesus followers? Can we have spiritual health points overseen by regional apostles in every community?

## Focus on Groups and the Existing Community—Community Formation and Transformation

What comes first in the formation of a vibrant community of Jesus followers, the community or the Jesus follower? Community development is based in the community for development of the community. People with a common felt need come together in peer support and problem solving, initially with outside support but focusing on utilizing local assets. They form communities to impact their own community. Dave Andrews challenges us as Christian community development workers to practice the principle of community formation since “Jesus developed an alternative model of community in contrast with the dominant model in the society that he denounced.” Rather than just criticizing the injustice of the existing systems, Jesus developed new models. Andrews continues,

Then Jesus encouraged a movement of people in society who would take the alternatives he had developed with his disciples and implement these principles, practices and processes in their lives individually and collectively.<sup>10</sup>

Forming a community of new believers from different classes, families, and networks is difficult and often unsuccessful. Community development focuses on key values of community formation, creating networks of trust around common purposes of health, education, agricultural models, non-hierarchical servant leadership, and participatory decision-making that recognizes that all are gifted and can contribute. This fresh approach helps us to see biblical aspects of group focus and formation that are not rigidly defined by ethnicity or class—concepts that are important to consider as new communities of believers form.

I was once involved in the set-up of a cooperative for artisans. Our initial employees were widows and other marginalized women of the community. Within a relatively short time, they became a community that looked out for and supported each other, gaining standing in the community both by earning income and enriching their community through tourism.

**In a short time, these widows and marginalized women became a community that supported each other and gained standing by earning income.**

We prayed for their needs and the business, and we shared our lives. A combination of seeing faith in action, dreams not of Jesus but pointing to “fruit” in her workplace, and the witness of a local believer led to the first woman coming to faith. Within six months, a large cohort of the workshop had become a community of Jesus followers, reading his word, praying, and supporting each other. It started with community formation, followed by a discipleship of values, integrity, proclamation of the word, and witness falling on fruitful ground where weeds and stones had already been removed by the community itself.

### *Impacting the Whole Community*

This new community is also the place where wide and relevant seed sowing happens, another principle often quoted in the church planting movement context. Too often when hearing of wide seed sowing, we fall back upon stereotypes of literature and media distribution. These have their place—what is happening these days through social media is amazing—but in our context, the key work is relevant seed sowing into a wide network.

Secular development work often focuses on practical, technical and knowledge solutions. However, in most cultures the underlying question in relation to the development need is often relational and spiritual. As Christians, we can answer the underlying spiritual question of “[w]ho sinned: this man or his parents?” (John 9:2). Sharing development and worldview-relevant good news in community groups and networks helps to identify those who are earnestly seeking God and truth. By sowing relevantly into a wide network of women, farmers, and parents along with the continued watering of these seeds through engagement with the group, those ready for the next step of regularly reading God’s word emerge. Interacting with God’s word brings a change of worldview and, for some, a change in allegiance and lordship. These changes lead to changed behavior and lasting transformation in the whole community as a result of obedience to God’s word.

### *Solidarity with Those Who Suffer*

“Walking with the poor” and “putting the last first” are key phrases in the titles of Bryant Myers’ and Robert Chambers’ great works on community development referenced earlier. There is anecdotal evidence from the recent refugee crises and conflicts in the Middle East that often the forgotten who live in suffering are those responding rapidly to the gospel. At the same time, David Garrison has found a correlation between CPMs and the experience of personal suffering in the workers involved.<sup>11</sup>

Living incarnationally in proximity with the poor and suffering is best demonstrated in Jesus Christ, who was born in poverty, ate and drank with “untouchables,” and was angry with those supporting unjust systems and exploitation. Having an answer—a theology of suffering that holds up not only as we face their suffering but even in our own—is something unique that especially touches the hearts of those who feel forsaken by their god and their own religious brethren.

At the 2018 gathering hosted by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies giving rise to the book from which this article is taken, we discussed a concept since then affirmed by Warrick Farah: Many of the newly emerging church movements have been holistic in nature and naturally contribute to the common good of the community.<sup>12</sup> This seems to be linked at least partly to the more integrated worldview of the national worker and disciple-maker compared to our Western platonic tradition of a divided worldview. Suffering paired with an incarnational, integral mission response through community development and simple acts of mercy is indeed fruitful ground for the emergence of a vibrant church.

In addition, Garrison mentions in his latest book that “ignored injustices” are a barrier to a church planting movement and conversion. Taking Micah 6:8 seriously to “act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God” is good advice for all of us wanting to reach the least reached.<sup>13</sup>

### *Focus on Teamwork*

Finally, the role of intercultural teams is a point of synergy between principles of excellence in community development and the formation of vibrant communities of Jesus followers. More than a decade ago, the development sector addressed what equal participation and inclusion means, both for local community members and Global South staff of NGOs and humanitarian agencies. In the early 2000s, half of my fellow country directors of international NGOs in an Asian network were from the Global South. Between 2010 and 2015, we saw local leadership at the highest national levels in international organizations like Save the Children and Caritas, but many mission organizations lagged behind. Faith-based agencies,

once primarily Western in makeup, are finally giving room to our local and Global South brothers and sisters. Some Christian agencies have embraced them for decades but are only now coming to grips with what equal participation and inclusion really mean.

Why is it that those engaged with international development efforts already model some values that the church and those involved in mission among the least reached should deeply believe and readily adopt? These include being diverse and international, giving room to local believers to grow, and as they gain experience, space and opportunity to serve internationally. If mission organizations and churches can become more diverse and empowering—seeing those we disciple as fellow workers in the harvest and as future leaders of communities and organizations—we will have come a long way.

### Comparing Principles

Recently, Operation Mobilization identified ten principles that would help guide us towards fulfilment of our vision “to see vibrant communities of Jesus followers among the least reached (VCJF).” In the table below, I compare a brief statement of these principles with its corresponding practice in community development, highlighting how these can reinforce and complement each other.

All that we have talked about is more clearly defined and distilled in Micah Global’s statement on integral mission:

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and

Table 1: VCJF Principles and Community Development Practices

| <i>VCIF principle</i>   | <i>Transformational community development context and parallel principle</i>  |
|---|---|
| 1. Prayer and fasting   | We care for widows and orphans, described as true fasting in Isaiah, and as we engage in transformational development, we need to be aware of the spiritual worldview and powers in the community.  |
| 2. Collaboration  | We collaborate with the community and all stakeholders. Development should always be an inclusive process.  |
| 3. Prepared to suffer   | We live among those who suffer and mourn with the mourning, even if this creates risk for us. We seek a theological perspective on suffering together.  |
| 4. Do what is easily reproducible   | Our development projects are based on local assets and appropriate technology that is reproducible and scalable.  |
| 5. Our wide sowing is relevant, contextual, and seeks to elicit a next step | We insert relevant and contextually appropriate spiritual truth in a wide network built through our community involvement.  |
| 6. We are in and engaged with the least-reached communities                 | The least reached are often also least reached in development, education, and economics. Especially in the poorest areas of the world, living in a community as development workers gives us an authentic presence.                             |
| 7. Form and utilize teams appropriately                                     | Community development is teamwork and already is often multi-cultural and interagency teamwork.   |
| 8. Focus on groups  | We practice community formation and model healthy communities of peer support and peer learning in our projects.  |
| 9. Make disciples, not converts   | Community development always views the participants as agents of change, people who hold the potential to change and transform their communities and societies.   |
| 10. Local leadership and ownership  | Community development is temporary assistance. We model, assist, and lead from the beginning to develop community leaders. As Christian development organizations, we model and teach servant and shepherd leadership to all levels of society. |

repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

If we ignore the world we betray the word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.<sup>14</sup>

### *A Banquet of Flavors*

A few months ago, I visited a refugee family in a Middle Eastern city, together with a team of our organization consisting of a Western pediatrician and a Middle Eastern pharmacist. Both spoke Arabic and English well and deeply loved the people they were serving. We visited a family living in utter poverty: the woman was facing difficulties in her marriage and four of

her six children had a disability or stigmatizing features like albinism. While I observed, the team listened and comforted, gave quality medical advice and referral, and helped the illiterate woman to read medical papers. They shared a lot of smiles and the two sang a few songs with the children and gave exercises for the girl suspected to have cerebral palsy. Toward the end of our visit, a neighbor came over. My Arab colleague told a story of Jesus, answered more questions, and prayed a blessing on the family. Then we left.

Seldom have I seen all that I have written above lived out in such a small space and time—integral mission lived out and visible in a sixty-minute visit, a banquet of flavors and tastes well blended and pleasing to man and God.

Let us keep together what belongs together; things are tastier when thoroughly blended! **IJFM**

### *Endnotes*

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Burnt Mill, England: Longman Scientific & Technical, 1983).
- <sup>2</sup> Duane Elmer, Lois McKinney, and Muriel Elmer (eds), *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Ted W. Ward* (Monrovia: MARC, 1996).
- <sup>3</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1986).
- <sup>4</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 171–92.
- <sup>5</sup> Alliance for Vulnerable Mission, accessed 19 February 2020, <http://www.vulnerablemission.org/>.
- <sup>6</sup> V. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake, 2004), secs 2736, 2756.
- <sup>7</sup> Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011), 218.
- <sup>8</sup> Johannes Reimer, *Die Welt Umarmen: Theologie des Gesellschaftsrelevanten Gemeindebaus, Transformationsstudien*, Bd. 1 (Marburg an der Lahn: Francke, 2009), 253, 254.
- <sup>9</sup> Reimer, *Die Welt Umarmen*, 2009, 254.
- <sup>10</sup> Dave Andrews, *Compassionate Community Work: An Introductory Course for Christians* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2006), 42.
- <sup>11</sup> Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 2004, sec. 3784.
- <sup>12</sup> Warrick Farah, “Motus Dei: Disciple-Making Movements and the Mission of God,” *Global Missiology* 2, no. 17 (23 January 2020), <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/2309>.
- <sup>13</sup> V. David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam: How God Is Drawing Muslims around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ* (Monument, CO: WIGTake, 2014), sec. 3810.
- <sup>14</sup> Micah Network, “Integral Mission,” accessed 25 March 2020, <https://www.micahnetwork.org/integral-mission>.

# DISCIPLE MAKING AMONG HINDUS

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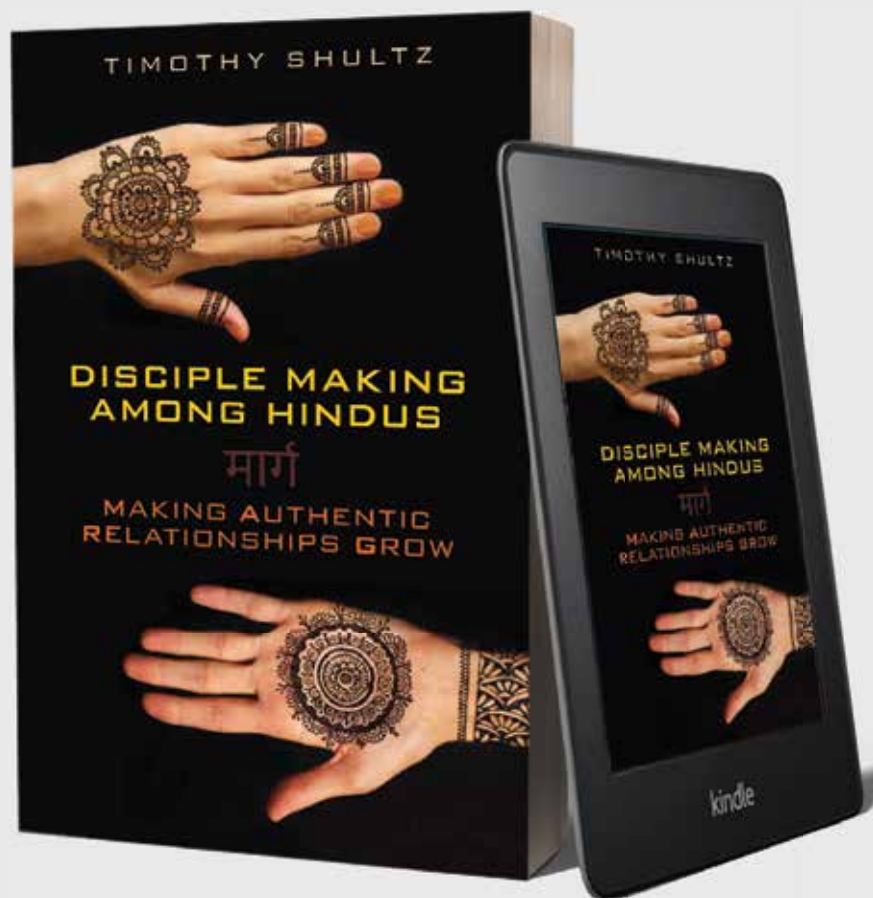
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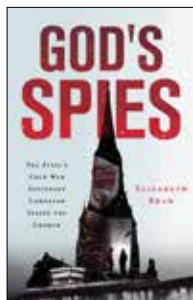
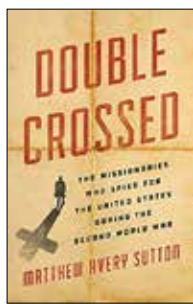
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# Books and Missiology

*Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War*, by Matthew Avery Sutton, (New York: Basic Books, 2019), x + 401 pp.

*God's Spies: The Stasi's Cold War Espionage Campaign inside the Church*, by Elisabeth Braw (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), xxiv + 277 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



From whence comes the fodder to assuage the appetite of Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan is a matter of indifference to him; he is not overly delicate as to what he consumes. Or as the title of John Le Carré's 1974 novel *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* reminds, spies and double agents come in diverse stripes and hues. Ceaselessly creeping and snooping, they are well-nigh ubiquitous. When circumstances are propitious, they can even be found wearing clerical collars and living in manses. Some teach in theological institutions, occupy high ecclesiastical positions, or gain luster—and cover—serving on the mission field. Indeed, the greater the spread between appearance and intended role the more useful a spymaster may find a potential

spy to be. From the spiritual or theological side of the equation, there are many ways to align—or misalign—missionary engagements and those of the state. Outright spying is but one of the more egregious possibilities.

Matthew Avery Sutton's *Double Crossed* is far from subtle in approach. Just in case readers might miss the message of the book's subtitle, *The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War*, the publishers have placed on the book jacket an image of a professional, possibly clerical,

man looking northeast, facing away from the viewer. Ahead is bright sunlight; behind him stretches his shadow transformed into an elongated cross. The cross behind me, the dawning of a bold new day before me, indeed.<sup>1</sup>

Sutton does not merely tip his hand; he spreads it out broadly in his Introduction, though he tries there and at various other places throughout the book to pose the issue as a question yet to be decided: Will they? Won't they? Read on, dear reader, read on. Can the tensions between being a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ and playing a clandestine role of deceiving, killing, conniving, and betraying trust dwell together in one heart? Is reconciliation possible? Sutton finds a clue in an extensive assassination plot devised by missionary spy William Eddy. Sutton writes that World War II

seemingly changed everything for religious activists turned spies like Eddy. Or maybe it didn't. Maybe assassinating those who did the devil's handiwork represented the logical culmination of their sense of global Christian mission, how they planned to bring peace and charity back to earth. If they hoped to restart their religious work after the war, they first had to defeat the evil that blocked their path. Perhaps for Eddy and dozens of other holy spies, serving a secretive, clandestine US wartime agency tasked with defeating German and Italian fascism and Japanese militarism was another way, maybe the best way, to serve the very same Jesus they sought to emulate as missionaries.<sup>2</sup>

But lest the story be over before it begins—for it begs for moral tension to be sustained—he helpfully appends, “They were never quite sure.”<sup>3</sup> Chatter of this sort is idle trifling. Such statements dangle a pseudo-suspense that seems to promise a theologically risqué exposé, but the book fails to deliver on that titillation. It is much more a relation of what *he* did, then what *they* did, followed by brief bits about the missionary spies' post clandestine years, capped by a sum up, than it is either an exposé or a plumbing of the anguished souls of the spies.

Of the four male missionaries whose stories are told over the course of the book—William Eddy, the scion of a missionary family whose service in Lebanon and the Middle East ran generations deep; John Birch, a lone wolf missionary/guerilla band leader serving in China who became the eponym of the later John Birch Society; Stephen B. L. Penrose Jr., a mid-level US mission society administrator with foreign contacts; and Stewart Herman Jr., the US pastor of the American Church in Berlin at the war's beginning—Eddy seems to be the most deeply marked by moral misgivings. Serve Jesus by killing the enemies of the United States by all means possible? “We

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*Dwight P. Baker retired as associate director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut, in 2011. He was associate editor of the International Bulletin of Mission Research (2002–15) and has coedited several books, including Serving Jesus with Integrity: Ethics and Accountability in Mission (2010) and People Disrupted: Doing Mission Responsibly among Refugees and Migrants (2018).*

deserve to go to hell when we die,' he later lamented. 'It is still an open question, . . . whether an operator in OSS or in CIA can ever again become a wholly honorable man.'<sup>4</sup>

It was also highly questionable that such a person could ever serve as a missionary again. The director of the Office of Strategic Services, William "Wild Bill" Donovan, "ensured that the stories of the OSS's godly spooks remained top secret," doing so in league with the missionary spies themselves.<sup>5</sup> After all,

they did what they did because they needed the United States to win the war in order to guarantee their freedom to work around the globe. But they did not want to bring any attention to their wartime actions. If native peoples knew that some missionaries had worked as government spies, how could they ever trust the ones who insisted they were only doing the Lord's work? They couldn't.<sup>6</sup>

He states, "As a result, the wartime stories of Wild Bill's religious operatives have remained almost entirely hidden." Then he adds in true exposé style, "Until now."<sup>7</sup>

### *Clarifying Priorities?*

The entanglement and at times entwinement of Christian mission from the United States with US foreign policy is too well known to detain us at this point. (Such entanglement and entwinement are hardly unique to the United States. It is characteristic of empire to spread its tentacles everywhere and to coopt religious sentiments and motivations to *its* own purposes.) Sutton's rhetorical question, "If native peoples knew that some missionaries had worked as government spies, how could they ever trust the ones who insisted they were only doing the Lord's work?" and his answer, "They couldn't," are spot on. That point could be developed at length. But when he claims to be *the* unveiler of this great secret, he overreaches. He provides considerable information on four particular OSS missionary operatives, more than I knew, but he is not the first to write about missionary connections with the OSS. See, for example, *Protestants Abroad*, by David Hollinger.<sup>8</sup>

In his final chapter, Sutton reviews concerns and forebodings that missionaries and church leaders have had about mixing gospel and espionage or missionaries for CIA purposes, but he is clear on two points:

American leaders—political and religious—embarked on a crusade to remake the rest of the world in their image. God, they believed, expected no less from his chosen people and his chosen land. The integration of ecumenical Christian ideas of religious freedom with advocacy for an aggressive, interventionist American foreign policy, forged in the embers of the war, echoed throughout the speeches and policies of just about every president since FDR. Victory over Japan and Germany seemingly demonstrated that God had anointed the United States to use its military and economic might to establish peace, security, and religious freedom for all.<sup>9</sup>

For its part, the CIA continued to recruit "missionaries and other religious activists for clandestine work. The CIA also created fake religious groups."<sup>10</sup> As a result, "by the early 1970s, missionaries were regularly suspected of working for the US government."<sup>11</sup> Over the final third of the twentieth century, the CIA promulgated some at least nominal safeguards on its recruitment of missionaries and the impersonation of US missionaries as "cover" for its agents. Sutton concludes that during World War II, the OSS needed the skills, local knowledge, and linguistic capabilities that only missionaries possessed. Today a larger pool of non-missionaries with such capabilities is available. "We can," he writes,

be grateful that during World War II, American missionaries carried dung bombs and poison pills with their Bibles, and some even hatched assassination plots. We can also be grateful that today, they shouldn't have to.<sup>12</sup>

Wall of separation between church and state, indeed. The flexible phrase "shouldn't have to" leaves room for discretionary judgment, and whether to exercise that judgment lies all on the side of the government and military. It leaves an exceedingly wide opening for summons to service to be issued and for mounting a claim that a missionary obligation exists to put Christ on hold while tending to the demands of Mars. When the chips are down, missionaries are still on tap, available to be drawn into service of a higher cause: Lay aside the cause of Jesus Christ and serve the State. If you can encompass both, probably fine; but if not, don't forget which has the higher priority and deserves your all.

**Sutton concludes that during World War II, the OSS needed the skills, local knowledge, and linguistic capabilities that only missionaries possessed.**

### *Looking Deeper*

In *God's Spies*, by Elisabeth Braw, the same contest between the things that are God's and the things that are Caesar's exists—it overarches everything—but the terrain shifts markedly.<sup>13</sup> For one thing, the setting for *God's Spies* lies on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and behind the Iron Curtain. By drawing on archives and interviews, Braw interrogates the role that ecclesiastical espionage played during the brief life span of the German Democratic Republic (GDR; commonly referred to as East Germany). For another thing, the spies in the two books looked in diametrically opposite directions. The OSS and CIA enlisted US missionaries to monitor and undermine the power of its foes *over there*; the objects of espionage were external to the country. The objective of the Stasi, the GDR's secret police, in contrast, was to spy on and control its own people.

Though her book is shorter, Braw's investigation probes more deeply into the moral challenges posed by ecclesiastical entry into espionage, than does Sutton's. Questions raised include: Who spied on whom? How were spies recruited? These potential spies knew that they were being asked to play a pedestrian role; they were not destined to become movers and shakers, say on a par with William Eddy, so what motivated them to spy on fellow clergy? The money, ingenuity, and person-power the government of the GDR invested in clandestine surveillance was considerable. What did the GDR seek to achieve in return? How well did the project succeed? Then a question Braw addresses, but not exactly in the way that I phrase it here: Not everyone collaborated; why, at considerable risk and cost to themselves, did some resist the advances of the spymasters while seemingly everyone else was on the take? Finally, I would ask: Are there lessons from ecclesiastical derring-do under the thumb of the Stasi that missionaries today might take to heart?

the harsh measures the Soviets used against the church. The church, however, could easily harbor or generate pools of resistance, and it did not dare to be too lax for fear of incurring the wrath of the USSR. On the other side, overly harsh measures against the church would cause the GDR to lose face and standing in the West, where the GDR wanted to cultivate a favorable image for its brand of socialism. It also wished to maintain countenance with international church convocations and organizations as venues for disseminating propaganda. How was a totalitarian socialist society to impose its yoke upon the church? The solution the GDR embraced was to create a special branch within the Stasi, Department XX/4, dedicated to cultivating ecclesiastical spies, that is, members of the clergy, theological professors, and church leaders who would submit reports on the views, opinions, activities, aspirations, weaknesses, and moral lapses of their colleagues, congregations, and parishioners.

**Theology professors informed on their students and their colleagues;  
students on each other and their professors.  
Pastors reported on other pastors . . . Seemingly everybody  
collaborated and spied on everybody else.**

*God's Spies* covers roughly the period from the rise of the Iron Curtain to the fall of the Berlin Wall and a bit beyond. In its effort to spy on its own people, the GDR did not stint on human resources. For a mere 16 million or so population, the Stasi directly employed 91,000 agents supplemented by some 170,000 informants. That comes out to something like one out of every sixty persons in the country was engaged, willingly or by being dragooned, in surveillance of colleagues, family, friends, and neighbors. The intent was to achieve total social control of the populace, by monitoring speech and channeling action. By the time the Berlin Wall came down, the Stasi had 111 kilometers (69 miles) of files prying on individual lives. Color and vibrancy were stripped away, and life froze into a gray pall. The movie ran backward and monochrome ruled.

***Special Treatment for the Clergy***

The church and its clergy, however, posed a special challenge. Institutionally the church had a weight and gravitas that might be harnessed, but that could ill simply be extinguished. The weight of history—this was the land of Luther after all—garnered the church a degree of latitude not accorded other sectors of society. The GDR tried to dance between two millstones. On the one side it did not want to impose

Who spied on whom? Theology professors informed on their students and their colleagues; students on each other and their professors. Pastors reported on other pastors, and church administrators transmitted information on church programs and plans. Seemingly everybody collaborated and spied on everybody else. The information that was collected flowed upward to central repositories, but the system worked in the other direction as well. It served as a conduit for pushing state and party line messages down and outward for dissemination through church organs and events. Did the GDR want to polish its image in the eyes of its Soviet overlords? There were ways to insinuate criticisms of, say, the United States into the speeches and minutes of international church convocations. Such messages could be entrusted to "reliable" church dignitaries who were then granted special permission to travel abroad. Tit for tat, quid pro quo. Presently a statement would appear among the reports of this or that august assembly's resolutions and addresses.

If you are going to eschew harsh methods, how does one go about enticing a person of the cloth to betray fellow church leaders? How does one gain informers' compliance? Department XX/4 did so largely, it seems, through observation



and cultivation of weaknesses. “Handlers” would immerse themselves in information about potential recruits.

Where does he live? What sort of work does he do? What sort of connections does he have? Does he have a family? What are his interests, opinions, preferences? How is his marriage going? What sorts of things would he like to have or achieve?<sup>14</sup>

Certainly, pressure was part of the toolkit; hints might be dropped: *You might want to reconsider and decide to work with us. If you do not, information about this or that indiscretion—which you know about and so do we, but your wife does not—may become public.* But severe pressure was likely to be held in reserve. More often cultivation of an informant took the form of granting favors, such as, *You have a son that you would like to see admitted to a prestigious university? Maybe we can help. Or, You would like a promotion within the church administration? Or to teach in the university? Maybe we can help.*

Many who became informants wanted much less, medical care for a spouse, permission for a trip abroad, an article of Western goods, a symbolic pat on the back. Some wanted and received substantial sums of money and fast cars or prestigious positions, but on the whole the impression left is of the small-scale venality and pettiness of God’s spies. Reverend personages sold their birthright by betraying their brothers and sisters’ trust for much less than a bowl of porridge: good cigars, a car tire (hard to obtain in the GDR), a lamp from the West, a theological book, permission to travel to a spa, a capitalist washing machine. Oftentimes what Department XX/4 handlers had to offer informants was a listening ear. “I wouldn’t have poured my heart out to you if I didn’t know that you would have sympathy for my problems, . . . Apart from you there’s no one I can talk to.”<sup>15</sup>

If so many were weak, did all pastors and ecclesiastics comply with overtures from Department XX/4? By no means. Some pastors informed recruiters that they would report their approaches to their bishops. Some bishops shielded ordinary pastors by remonstrating with the Department XX/4 directly. Some stood forthrightly on principle:

“Please don’t take it personally, but I want absolutely nothing to do with the institution you represent,” a brave pastor named Heinrich Rathke told [two recruiters] when they explained the nature of their visit.<sup>16</sup>

Maybe it was grudging respect, maybe it was because other pickings were so plentiful and so easy, but it seems that those who stood on principle or strongly objected were largely bypassed. Does this mean that things were easy in the GDR or that the decision of whether to collaborate or not bore few consequences? Not at all. Reprisals could take many forms. One might be reassigned, demoted, or one’s children might be denied access to education, for example. One outspoken GDR

pastor became the intended victim of a rare assassination attempt by the Department XX/4. The stories of Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass and Roman Catholic Tomáš Halík come from elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc, Hungary and the then Czechoslovakia, respectively, but they are instructive accounts of the weight that official ecclesiastical repression could bring to bear, including harassment, removal from office, and imprisonment.<sup>17</sup>

### *Awash in “Information”*

When the GDR collapsed, the Stasi had files on roughly every fourth person in the country—and two million others in West Germany. The information that Department XX/4 as a subbranch gathered was itself voluminous. Some of this information was consequential for the GDR’s purposes of propaganda and control, but much was file cabinet fodder. For the personnel of Department XX/4, what mattered most was the quantity of records collected, not the value of what they turned in. Everybody knew that the Stasi was gathering information, and for some of the GDR’s purposes having that knowledge dragging at the back of people’s minds was enough. When people felt the weight of watching eyes and listening ears, they muted their inclinations to express dissent. The existence of ecclesiastical informers ensured that that weight was felt within the churches as well. But it was not enough. At the end of the 1980s, when the time came to slough off the detritus of the GDR regime, the church played a vital role in the movement toward liberation. How could that be? Not surprisingly, a liturgy that includes memories of exodus and anticipation of resurrection proved able to spark, or at least to provide support for, a desire for emancipation. With its small degree of autonomy, the church provided a space where anticipations of change could be nurtured. In it, likeminded persons, who could not meet in the same manner elsewhere, could share hope—despite the busy unceasing efforts of Department XX/4 in amassing and filing informants’ reports.

Exodus, anyone? The church had a lock on that story, and people flocked to the church during the years of Stasi oppression in a way that fell off starkly when the bands of restraint were broken. After the fall of the GDR, East German church attendance dropped sharply to 4 percent of the population. This precipitous decline gives evidence of the extent to which the church had been a vehicle of resistance. When the GDR collapsed, that function of the church was no longer needed in the same way, and attendance fell away. But when the collapse came, it came as a surprise to the Stasi, to Department XX/4, and to the government. So, the question arises, how could the Stasi and Department XX/4 have failed so utterly? They were supposed to be the government’s antenna. They had been collecting data assiduously, so why were they, their superiors, and the government itself taken unawares?

By way of explanation, Braw advances a comparison to the way the CIA works in the United States.

Department XX/4 was good at doing what the CIA's Clandestine Service does, that is, assembling the intelligence. Disastrously, however, it lacked skills on the Directorate of Intelligence side, where the enormous quantities of information of vastly varying quality collected by spies are turned into a meaningful picture.

Add to that the fact that

while many pastor spies may have been prolific, by and large they were not particularly effective. If the selfishly motivated [pastor] agents understood the larger meaning of what they were reporting, most of them didn't bother explaining it to their masters.<sup>18</sup>

So, Department XX/4 lacked the vision or staff to integrate the data they collected, but even if they had made the attempt, the data that they had collected from nonprofessional snoops and snitches was of dubious quality and would likely have produced meager low-grade intelligence anyway.

### *Missionary Lessons?*

If missionary lessons from the era of the Stasi are to be sought, missionaries serving in "difficult access" countries might consider the experience of couriers of Bibles and Christian literature through the GDR. The literature conduits ultimately intended to run all the way through the Eastern Bloc to destinations in the USSR where the Bibles would be delivered and distributed. The difference between intent and achievement presents dismal reading. For starters, Department XX/4 infiltrated their lines of communication and transport. Donors in the West put up the money to print Bibles, tracts, and other materials and to transport them. Volunteers set out on arduous journeys in vehicles with built-in secret compartments loaded with Bibles, etc. The secret police monitored their progress. Some they arrested. Some they let deliver their Bibles and tracts, then arrested the recipients. Sometimes they allowed the Bibles and literature to fall into the hands of supposed middlemen who then resold them on the black market at a markup. Some they destroyed or burned. Some they stuck in storage buildings, where they remained locked up. When the Berlin Wall fell, Department XX/4 had 30,000 Bibles tucked away in a basement.

If there is a lesson in all this, it is that those seeking to operate "under the radar" of the intelligence apparatus of a police state face daunting challenges and scant prospects of success. One part of what Amy Peterson records in her memoir, *Dangerous Territory*, is that the consequences can be far reaching, personally and for those to whom one is seeking to bring gospel light.<sup>19</sup> Once one has embarked on the path of subterfuge, clean hands are hard to come by again. Maybe there is a better way. Rick Love, co-founder of Peace Catalyst, seems to have come to think so.<sup>20</sup> The apostle Paul insisted that the matters

related to the gospel "were not done in a corner." (Acts 26:26). Jesus before Annas spoke in a similar vein: "I have spoken publicly to the world. . . . I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said. They know what I said" (John 18:20–21). Is there a lesson there?

### *After the Wall Fell*

The author of *God's Spies*, Elisabeth Braw, grew up in Lund as the daughter of a Swedish theology professor. One of the GDR's ecclesiastical spies on whom she reports—not known at that time to be an informer—would visit their home, bringing along unsuspecting East German church leaders. Views expressed freely in this "secure" setting became content for the informer's reports to his handlers. She is now a research fellow and director of the Modern Deterrence Project at Britain's Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Her solid prior experience as a journalist shows to advantage in this excellently assembled and well-written account. In addition to research in the Stasi/Department XX/4 files, she was able to conduct interviews with a number of significant persons who figure in her account. Of special importance is the insight brought by her repeated visits with Colonel Wiegand, Department XX/4's overseer.

## Those seeking to operate "under the radar" of the intelligence apparatus of a police state face daunting challenges and scant prospects of success.

From an impoverished background and an early conversion to the promise of the GDR, Wiegand remained a true believer even after the fall of the Wall and German reunification. "He seems troubled," writes Braw, "by the question of where Communism went wrong. 'The idea [of Communism] was good, but it was poorly executed.'"<sup>21</sup> He sought to master the church and to undermine its potential for subverting the GDR, but he did not viciously despise the church. "I never condemned religion. . . . I remain an atheist through and through. I accept the church and appreciate some of its teaching, but I'm an atheist."<sup>22</sup>

His wife is more ardent.

Despite a devout upbringing, Gerda Wiegand no longer believes in God. If God exists, she asks, why do all these bad things happen in the world? . . . How can she be a Christian when priests abuse children, she asks . . . But [her husband] interjects. "These priests who abuse children are just tumors. . . . You can't dismiss the whole church on account of them." Then he adds: "You can't blame God for the bad things that people do." Colonel Wiegand, the man whose mission was to undermine the church, is defending it.

He is the honorable opponent according credit where due to his adversary. He acted on the principles he embraced in his youth and remained steadfast in them. He

met more than his fair share of debased and opportunist clerics, the kind who could make the most devout Christian question the virtues of religion. Yet somehow he's not cynical about the Christian faith.<sup>23</sup>

It was Wiegand who decided the fate of the 30,000 Bibles left in the hands of Department XX/4 after the GDR collapsed. What should be done with them? Should they be destroyed? Colonel Wiegand, head of Department XX/4, refused permission and eventually had them shipped on to Russia, their originally intended destination. So, did the Bible couriers triumph in the end?

For Wiegand, honoring a commitment, keeping a promise, and standing by one's word were important. Numbers of former ecclesiastical spies whom he could easily have betrayed at great gain to himself were spared because of his steadfast refusal to do so. He kept his word. For that among other reasons, it might be tempting to call him, the spymaster, the only honorable man in this dismal record of spy and counterspy within the GDR, but that would not be correct. There are as well the pastors and bishops who paid a cost for refusing to collaborate, who spoke up within the limits of their circumstances and capabilities, who spurned the opportunity, by becoming informers, to make life just a little less gray and a little less monotonous for themselves and their families, who saw doors to educational opportunities closed in the face of their children, yet stood firm on their principles. Hail to them and blessed be their memory.<sup>24</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War* (New York: Basic Books, 2019). Sutton is the Edward R. Meyer Distinguished Professor of History, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington. He is the author of several previous books on evangelicalism in the United States, including *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Sutton, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Sutton, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Sutton, 5. The acronym OSS stands for the Office of Strategic Services and CIA for the Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>5</sup> Sutton, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Sutton, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Sutton, 4.

<sup>8</sup> David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017); reviewed in *IJFM*, 35:2 (Summer 2018): 90–98.

<sup>9</sup> Sutton, 338.

<sup>10</sup> Sutton, 339.

<sup>11</sup> Sutton, 341. See David Stoll, *Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire? The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, 1982), who, in touring Latin America, seems quite unable not to find a missionary in the employ of the CIA lurking behind every bush.

<sup>12</sup> Sutton, 347.

<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Braw, *God's Spies: The Stasi's Cold War Espionage Campaign inside the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Braw, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Braw, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Braw, 47.

<sup>17</sup> László G. Terray, *He Could Not Do Otherwise: Bishop Lajos Ordass, 1901–1978*, trans. Eric W. Gritsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Tomáš Halík, *From the Underground Church to Freedom*, trans. Gerald Turner (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Braw, xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> Amy Peterson, *Dangerous Territory: My Misguided Quest to Save the World* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Jayson Casper, "The Redemption of Interfaith Dialogue: Three Evangelicals Wrestle with Faithful Witness in Conversations with Muslims," *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/july-august/interfaith-dialogue-muslims-evangelicals-cumming-love-shenk.html?share=UXmsfYxjIln3PuvcVIBh6xT01qTKhur+>.

<sup>21</sup> Braw, 257.

<sup>22</sup> Braw, 264.

<sup>23</sup> Braw, 264.

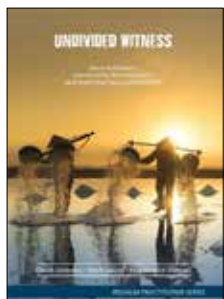
<sup>24</sup> When Anne Applebaum interviewed Marianne Birthler recently, she broached the subject of why people within the GDR became collaborators. Birthler, a youth pastor and resistance leader within the GDR who after Germany's reunification served for ten years as overseer of the Stasi records, had no patience for the topic. "Almost everyone was a collaborator; 99 percent of East Germans collaborated. If they weren't working with the Stasi, then they were working with the party, or with the system more generally. Much more interesting—and far harder to explain—was the genuinely mysterious question of 'why people went against the regime.'"

Of interest, also, are the steps of hope that Birthler offers, steps that can lead people to extricate themselves from being collaborators by default. "Just as people can adapt to corruption or immorality, she told me, they can slowly learn to object as well. The choice to become a dissident can easily be the result of 'a number of small decisions that you take'—to absent yourself from the May Day parade, for example, or not to sing the words of the party hymn. And then, one day, you find yourself irrevocably on the other side. Often, this process involves role models. You see people whom you admire, and you want to be like them. It can even be 'selfish.' 'You want to do something for yourself,' Birthler said, 'to respect yourself.'"

Applebaum's whole essay, published in the July/August 2020 print issue of *The Atlantic*, merits close reading. It can also be found online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/07/trumps-collaborators/612250/>.

*Undivided Witness: Jesus Followers, Community Development, and Least-Reached Communities*, edited by David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2020), x + 184 pp.

—Reviewed by Jakobus Dirksen



**I** am ready to die for the Lord but would not die for just installing tube wells.” This is how one of my colleagues in a Christian development organisation in a closed country viewed his daily work. Proclamation of the good news had top priority. To him providing clean drinking water was little more than a way to get a visa.

*Undivided Witness* challenges that bifurcation of life. The authors, Christian professionals pressing for a more holistic view of mission, “present ten key principles linking community development and the emergence of vibrant communities of Jesus followers among the ‘least reached.’” The three editors are practitioners of Integral Mission. David Greenlee (PhD) is Operation Mobilisation’s Director of Missiological Research and Evaluation. Mark Galpin (PhD) has thirty years’ experience in community development in South Asia and Africa, and serves as the Postgraduate Programme Leader at All Nations Christian College. Paul Bendor-Samuel (MD) is Executive Director of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and formerly the International Director of Interserve.

Alongside the editors, the nine authors, including three women, have hands-on experience in living out this integral witness in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and South, Central and Southeast Asia. Most of the authors have a link of some kind with Operation Mobilisation, but professionally their expertise ranges over a number of different development specialities. These include community and public health care, education, consulting and project management, creation care, agriculture and rural development, disability, poverty and justice issues, missiology, refugees, the homeless, and human trafficking.

Together these authors weave kingdom theology and development practice into a single piece of cloth. Each writer, from a different angle, shows why and how proclamation and sound community development contribute to what they call “vibrant communities of Jesus followers” (VCJF). Their

examples do not come from locations where Christians abound. No, this approach, and the examples shared, arise among those referred to in evangelical mission as the “least reached.”

The book punctuates a half century tradition of books written since the Lausanne Congress (1974) when C. René Padilla called us to reunite what had been rent asunder a half a century earlier: word and deed. These authors do reunite the two, building on the best of community development principles, as well as on the latest theological insights. They show how the key principles in both disciplines can overlap. The book reads like a 2020 update on a kaleidoscope of earlier contributions.

This book’s attempt to reunite assumes a dilemma, a divided witness, which they explain as follows:

In practice, a number of mission organisations focusing on evangelism and church planting among the least reached have included aspects of community development in their work, though often not as a mainstream activity. Meanwhile, those organisations focused on community development have often found that their work with communities leads to people coming to faith in Jesus Christ and, at times, the emergence of fledgling churches. While this has happened in practice, and is a phenomenon familiar to practitioners, rarely have missiologists explored the overlap between these domains. Indeed, often the respective disciplines of church planting and community development have been treated as being in tension or competition with each other rather than as areas of potential fruitful synergy with many principles of good practice in common. (2–3)

They introduce three domains of mission endeavour that need to find an integral space, a place of convergence and integration. In the introduction, Galpin and Greenlee summarize this conceptual space as follows:

The contributors to this book address this gap by exploring the conceptual and practical intersection between community development, the least reached, and the emergence of vibrant, growing churches or “communities of Jesus followers” that we refer to as the “Community Development Least Reached” (CDLR) space.” (3)

They begin their analysis with an explanation of their ten key principles for this intersection—this gap or conceptual space—they call Community Development Least Reached (CDLR). These principles provide the framework for the book, and a chapter is dedicated to an explanation and evaluation of each principle. Also included are three reflections which discuss themes linking the main points.

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In my opinion, the main strength of the book is that it combines the theoretical with the practical. It argues that what Alan Kreider claimed about Christians in the first three centuries is still true: faith lived out in the radically changed behaviour of the followers of Jesus is what draws people to Him.<sup>1</sup>

The first-hand stories about how each of the principles has worked out in practice are gems. Some you may never forget, but for me, two stories stand out, both examples of the negative impact of doing divided witness. Rizalina (Sally) Ababa writes:

Some years ago, I helped a friend establish a foundation to aid scavengers and street children in one city in Mindanao, southern Philippines. As their projects began to thrive, my friend started on a path of believing in and following Jesus. Over time, though, he became discouraged by the attitudes he encountered. "When I think of Jesus Christ and reflect on his teaching, what he did and how he lived his life, he is the closest thing I can picture of God and anything spiritual," he told me. "However, I dislike church leaders and pastors; they are not in touch with realities. I am giving up on Christianity; I cannot be a Christian." (43)

The second vignette comes from Gabriel (Gabby) Markus who in chapter five recalls:

One day, someone flew to Greece with an intention to "evangelise" the refugees but with limited understanding of the situation (or desire to inquire). She had only a short time to "serve God" before returning to her normal life. After a few days of distributing Bibles and other Christian literature in the camp, she returned to her country satisfied that her mission was completed. A few days later, the evangelical churches received a letter from the government informing them that they were no longer allowed to work in any refugee camp. Despite being the first respondents to help, they were henceforth banned. Additionally, several refugees who were seen with the Bibles and Christian literature were stabbed and hospitalised. (56–57)

What an indictment! How sad if our good intentions and "mission" result in the very opposite of what we hoped for.

This book answers these sad experiences with some very positive principles and perspectives. Greenlee's contribution in chapter two on how people enter the kingdom I found particularly relevant for his intended audience. He refers to Paul Hiebert's insightful framework of set-theory (bounded-sets, centered-sets, and fussy-sets) as a helpful way of seeing reality and adjusting our expectations to it. (35–36)

In chapter six Robert Sluka makes a strong case for creation care. Among the helpful things he suggests is a fresh re-focusing of our Lord's mission commission. He suggests, "Perhaps we should use Mark's version of the Great Commission—to preach the good news to all *creation*—rather than Matthew's." (92)

Writing on the seventh principle, Mark Galpin addresses the tension between what restrictive governments allow and do not allow:

One helpful distinction to avoid this dilution of our witness is to distinguish between the restrictions placed on the organisation, and those placed on individuals working for the organisation.... Our approach was to clarify that, while restrictions placed on our organisation meant that we would not have any programmed evangelistic activities, they as individuals not only had a basic human right to manifest their own faith (Article 18 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights) but that as Christians they had a biblical responsibility to do this. A key verse for us was: "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15)." (102)

Galpin also has a very practical suggestion on how to move forward for leaders of Christian organisations in restricted contexts:

While contextual challenges and the danger of implicit coercive messages often make the inclusion of formal programmatic approaches to evangelism with our community development unwise, the equipping of our staff and partners to "give a reason for the hope that is within them... with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15) is a critical component of transformational community development in least-reached settings. Incorporating the profoundly biblical concept of "blessing" into both our community development work and into the discipleship and training of our staff and leaders of the emerging churches is important in ensuring that we and they are faithful to the call to "be a blessing" and to sustain the process of transformation. (106)

In the Epilogue, Paul Bendor-Samuel sums up all the principles and lessons learned in a succinct statement: "our need [is] to listen closely... to see clearly... to ask humbly." (163–165)

**"I dislike church leaders and pastors;  
they are not in touch with realities.  
I am giving up on Christianity;  
I cannot be a Christian." (43)**

The authors have made a strong case for "undivided witness." Is there more they could have done or that could have been said? I would like to make three suggestions.

Although there are hints at the need to deal with structural reasons for poverty and injustice (28), there is little substance contribution. Maybe they have assumed that structural transformation will follow if there are truly vibrant communities of followers of Jesus. Sadly, the case of the evangelical church

in the Global North suggests otherwise. There is nothing automatic here. I wonder if a broader selection of authors (not all OM-linked) might have brought in a greater emphasis on structural—a systemic treatment—of poverty and injustice.

Secondly, the book uses the word “balance” a lot to describe how proclamation and demonstration are related (26). This takes us back to that unhelpful, and historically unevangelical, division of what the gospel is meant to be. The writers themselves present real-life examples numerous times of how, if there were a distinction, it is often one of timing. Usually demonstration comes earlier in the process and proclamation follows in due course. When it comes to the various elements of Christian witness, I see more use for the word “blending” than “balancing.”

Finally, and probably most fundamentally, I see the book as completely within the current mission paradigm described by Bosch as “mission in the wake of enlightenment.”<sup>2</sup> As such, the witness envisaged is still riding the wave of modernisation and “progress” as defined by the West. The link between community development (a grassroots component of modernisation) and witness is therefore logical. But what do we do now with that wave coming to an end? What if we need to transcend mission as we have known it for the last few centuries?<sup>3</sup>

*Undivided Witness* is a must read for those believers and their churches who say they are committed to “Integral Mission,” but who may not fully understand what that means. As Melba Padilla Maggay writes in the book’s endorsements:

Many churches now fly the flag of “Integral Mission,” but often this simply means moving into poor communities and using community development or some such intervention as a platform for evangelism. Mission groups and development organisations in hard places find themselves in tension between “church planting” and the demands of “Kingdom witness.” This book is a good start in exploring from the ground up the paradigm shifts needed so that community engagement becomes truly missional.

This book is also a must read for young, evangelical Christians who feel uneasy about the tension they sense between demonstration and proclamation of the good news. Furthermore, mission leaders who were brought up with the idea that proclamation had top priority may also benefit from the book. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), chapter 9.

<sup>3</sup> Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (IVP Academic, 2017).

## Suggested Reading List

- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.
- Clarke, Matthew E. *Mission and Development: God’s Work or Good Works?* London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012.
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- Stott, John R. W. *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*. Houston: World Wide Publications, 1975.
- Stroope, Michael W. *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.

# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, websites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase.*

## Coronavirus and Then Some . . .

In the wake of the outbreak of the coronavirus in Lebanon, a four-minute [video in Arabic](#) was produced with prayers from diverse religious leaders for the safety of the people of their country. These prayers are needed more than ever since the [devastating explosion in Beirut](#) and the [resignation of the government](#) in August, [the horrific fires in September](#), the resulting [food insecurity and explosion of COVID-19](#). Some Christians objected and asked, "Are you all praying to the same God?" See the [September 14, 2020, IMES blog](#), "Christians and Muslims Praying Together: Compromise or a Sign of Hope?"

Thankfully, there is a reported 10% slowdown of the coronavirus in many African countries. For an update, see the [BBC's "Coronavirus: Is the rate of growth in Africa slowing down?"](#) October 1, 2020. But in Nigeria, massacres and conflict have not slowed down. "In the last 10 years, an estimated six million Nigerians have fled their homes for fear of extermination, abduction . . . by the Boko Haram group in Nigeria." (See [Opinion](#) in *The Guardian*, September 3, 2020). And from an interview with a Nigerian bishop:

The walls of Jericho fell not by gunfire but by prayer. The walls of Communism crumbled not by nuclear power but by, among other things, prayer. We in Nigeria are quite at home with what prayers can do and have done for us . . . Stalin mocked the pope, wondering how many divisions the pope had. Today, we know better . . . [But] Nigerian conflict is a Molotov cocktail of anger, frustration, religious extremism, toxic politics, corruption and deep rut. (See the September 3 article in *Cruz*, "[Bishop Says Nigeria a Molotov Cocktail of Violence](#)," cited in Roundup #218, Justin Long, Beyond)

## Why Missiology Needs Political Theology

What does politics have to do with missiology, especially in the Middle East? Dr. Nabeel Jabbour has released, free of charge, his 47-lecture training course online, entitled, "Islam and the Geopolitics of the Middle East." In his July 9 missiology blog, "[Circumpolar](#)," Warrick Farah says,

Much more than the title suggests, the course is full of missiology and practical advice for ministry to Muslims, not just simply on politics and Islam. But Jabbour's handling of politics demonstrates just how necessary and beneficial it is to incorporate political theology into missiology—this is often a glaring blindspot for workers in general and Americans in particular."

## Uighur Scandal and Surveillance

Disney found itself embroiled in an international scandal when it became public that its latest Mulan movie variation with live actors had been filmed with the cooperation of the Chinese Communist Party in Xinjiang Province (the Uighur homeland where millions have disappeared or been incarcerated in gulags). "Disney, in other words, worked with regions where genocide is occurring, and thanked [in their film credits] government departments that are helping to carry it out." See the *Washington Post's* "[Why Disney's Mulan is a Scandal Again](#)," September 3, 2020.

For a chilling discussion of the surveillance capabilities of the Chinese Communist government, don't miss the September 2020 issue of *The Atlantic*.

The Uighurs who were spared the camps now make up the most intensely surveilled population on Earth. . . . The system was capable of detecting Uighurs by their ethnic features, and it could tell whether people's eyes or mouth were open, whether they were smiling, whether they had a beard, and whether they were wearing sunglasses. It logged the date, time, and serial numbers—all traceable to individual users—of Wi-Fi-enabled phones that passed within its reach. ("[The Panopticon is Already Here](#)," *The Atlantic*, September, 2020).

Lest you think this massive surveillance on the part of the Chinese government is only directed at its own people, think again. A Chinese high-tech company (with links to its military and intelligence networks) has been amassing data on 2.4 million people all over the world. Australia was shocked to find 35,000 of its own leading citizens on that list. See the article, "[China's 'hybrid war': Beijing's mass surveillance of Australia and the world for secrets and scandal](#)," on the website for *ABC News Australia*, September 13, 2020.

## Indigenous Chinese Missions

Packed full of articles of significance and importance to frontier missiologists, the summer issue of the [China Source Quarterly](#) is squarely focused on the new cross-cultural workers being sent from Christian churches in mainland China. Don't miss: "[Doing Missions with Chinese Characteristics](#)." Another article, drawn from interviews with those currently on the field, takes up some of the specific problems facing [Chinese workers sent from China to Muslim countries](#).

## Training Workers in a "Slowbalizing" World

For insights on new ways of training future cross-cultural workers, see Michael Rynkiewicz's article in *IBMR*:

There is and has been for the last four or five years, a resurgence of nationalism, racism, populism, and jingoism, in the United States and in the world at large. Today neither people nor goods nor ideas are able to travel as easily or unencumbered by restrictions as they were five years ago. While some missiologists are still trying to figure out how to be in mission in a globalizing world, the world has downshifted into an era of "slowbalization." Slowbalization is the slowing down and even the reversal of globalization. Witness the

reassertion of the importance of national borders, coupled with a reemerging sense of national identity... If I cannot prepare my students for every eventuality in the culture where they are going to be in mission, then I can... train people in critical analytic skills, both in ethnography and in historical analysis. That is, teach them how to do research so that they can figure it out for themselves." (See "[The Challenge of Teaching Mission in an Increasingly Mobile and Complex World](#)," *IBMR*, October 2020.)

## A Joyful Issue

From the recent *Missiology* (July 2020) comes a group of excellent articles honoring the late Evelyne Reisacher, all oriented on the importance of joy in mission, the topic of her 2016 book, [Joyful Witness in the Muslim World: Sharing the Gospel in Everyday Encounters](#). In particular, see Amos Yong's insightful comparison of Christian and Buddhist joy: "While there is an extensive missiological literature on Christian mission in the Buddhist world, to my knowledge none has factored joy and gladness into the equation." (See "[Gladness and Sympathetic Joy: Gospel Witness and the Four Noble Truths in Dialogue](#)," by Amos Yong.)

## Two Book Reviews of Interest

Take a look at the review in the [Wall Street Journal \(July 14, 2020\)](#) of the book *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and US Foreign Relations*. The reviewer, Mike Watson of the Hudson Institute, comments that

diplomatic historian Lauren Turek offers a sophisticated survey of how evangelicals think about foreign relations by showing how this amorphous, decentralized group has applied its theology to human rights and has developed advocacy and policy organizations during the Cold War and its aftermath... But at a time when voters have turned away from a robust internationalism—both the Obama and Trump administrations have adopted different forms of retrenchment—evangelicals could be powerful advocates for U.S. engagement abroad.

A new book just out examines some of the new forms of "religion" springing up. Check out the [Christianity Today article](#) (August 17, 2020) entitled "Secular Faiths are Remaking the American Religious Landscape," a review of Tara Isabella Burton's new book *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*. Her research, although US-based, could be strategic to missiologists as secularism and its neo-religious consciousness impacts frontier peoples.

Burton [profiles] three movements vying to become America's new, outwardly godless civil religion: social justice culture, Silicon Valley techno-utopianism, and a reactionary alt-right. Each contender offers a totalizing—and in some cases intoxicating—narrative of the world, our place in it, and the wicked forces that need to be rooted out. Radical social justice movements build their cosmology entirely upon "nurture": the tabula rasa of humanity corrupted by the original sin of Western patriarchy. By contrast, the alt-right leans exclusively on "nature," declaring that the original sins of political correctness

and feminism have obscured certain uncomfortable, biologically grounded realities. And although it claims fewer actual adherents, techno-utopianism—with its promise of bio- and cyber-hacking our way to eternal life—boasts by far the most cash. Not inconsequentially, it also controls the platforms (and devices!) on which its two rivals wage their battles.

For a global comparison, see Ian Johnson's article "[Religion in China: Back to the Center of Politics and Society](#)." He talks about an "unprecedented religious revival" involving hundreds of millions of Chinese—who actually live in a godless nation.

## Speaking of New (and Old) Religions

One African traditional religion (known as Ifa) has become very intertwined with Black Lives Matter, the organization. See the article entitled "[The Fight for Black Lives is a Spiritual Movement](#)," (Georgetown University's Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs). During a June 2020 protest in front of the Los Angeles mayor's house, African religious libations were poured out, names of murdered African-Americans were intoned, and spirits of the dead were invoked. (See "[Healing, Spirituality, and Black Lives Matter](#)" in *JSTOR DAILY*, June 10, 2020.)

## First Gunshots in 45 Years between India and China

A very tense situation developed in the Himalayas last June with over twenty soldiers killed on both sides. September 7, 2020 saw warning gunshots take place, the first in 45 years. India has subsequently banned 167 Chinese apps (including TikTok and WeChat) and has demanded that there be "freedom of navigation operations," referring to the Chinese military buildup in the South China Sea. See the September 8 article in *The Economist*: "[India and China Exchange the First Gunshots in 45 Years](#)."

## Peace between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain

An historic peace deal was brokered between Israel and two of the Gulf states (UAE and Bahrain) this past August. Don't miss Frederick Kempe's Op-Ed for *CNBC*, September 20, 2020: "[UAE-Bahrain Deals with Israel Offer Chance of a Warm Peace](#)." He noted the significance of

the 20-nation Arab League's [rejection](#) of Palestinian efforts to condemn this week's agreements. Despite the opposition of their leaders, Palestinians in the end could be the biggest benefactor in a two-state solution embedded in a more vibrant and integrated Middle Eastern economy.

For an explanation of the role of the US Iran policy in this deal, see "[How Trump Defied the Experts and Forged a Breakthrough in the Middle East](#)," September 15, 2020, *The National Review*. For a more pessimistic but probably realistic Arab Christian commentary on what this might mean for the region, see "[Are We Closer to a Peaceful Middle East? Politics, Abraham, and the Good Samaritan](#)," by Nabil Habibi of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut, Lebanon. **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).

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**Articles in IJFM 37:2**

|  | Lesson 11: Building Bridges of Love (C) | Lesson 12: Christian Community Development (S) | Lesson 13: The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches (S) | Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S) |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Ecclesial Challenges on the Frontiers: A Clinical Counseling Perspective</b><br>Margaret Pennington (pp. 59–66)     |   |  | X   | X                                      |
| <b>Towards a Theology of Social Change and Development</b> Todd Pokrifka (pp. 67–79)                                   |   | X  |   |  |
| <b>Social Innovation in Frontier Mission: Discerning New Ways Forward</b><br>Steven Spicer (pp. 81–91)                 | X                                       |  |   | X                                      |
| <b>Community Development and the Formation of Vibrant Communities of Jesus Followers</b> Andrea C. Waldorf (pp. 93–98) | X                                       | X  | X   | X                                      |



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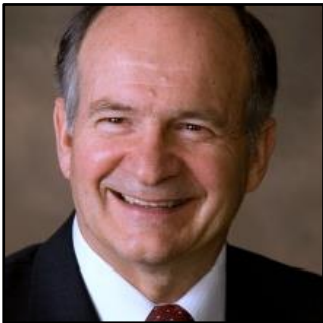


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