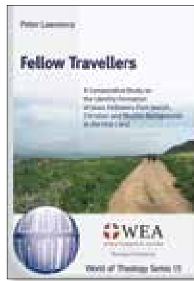
# Books and Missiology

*Fellow Travellers: A Comparative Study on the Identity Formation of Jesus Followers from Jewish, Christian and Muslim Backgrounds in The Holy Land,* by Peter Lawrence, World Evangelical Alliance World of Theology series no.15, Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, edited by Thomas Schirmacher (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 113 pp.

*—Reviewed by Tim Green*




Originally a master's degree thesis, *Fellow Travellers* explores the following question:

> How can the identity formation of Messianic Jews, Arab Evangelicals, and Muslim-background believers in Israel be described and in what way are their personal and collective experiences similar and/or dissimilar in this domain? (9)

Its *focus* is identity, the *comparison* is between first-generation believers from three different religious backgrounds, and the *context* is wisely restricted to one small region to reduce the number of variables.

Despite its shorter length and more limited scope than a doctoral study, this book is fully worthy of publication. It deserves attention firstly, because the topic of identity is missiologically significant, and secondly, because the book extends existing theory in new ways and in an unusual context.

## *Identity, a Missiologically Important Topic*

"Identity" has become a key concept in our rapidly changing world. Personal and corporate identities flex under the impact of globalization. Travel and the internet expose people to new worldviews. Migration and intermarriage create new hybrid identities. Pluralizing societies challenge formerly fused notions of faith, ethnicity, and nationality. The resulting insecurity causes many societies to push back against globalization as they yearn for their former stability. This appears to be a factor in the rise of assertively nationalist regimes today, a full generation after they had experimented with 1990s liberalism and open borders. Nevertheless, people are digitally connected across borders as never before, enabling the emergence of youth cultures and identities in which people have more in common with each other than with their own parents.

Every year, millions of people migrate to a different country or a different faith from what they were born into. They inevitably face challenges of identity which continue to morph for their children. Thus, identity transition is key in both migration studies and conversion studies, and these two fields shed light on each other. Recently they have even been joined by gender studies, where the previously unthinkable notion of gender fluidity is now being vigorously promoted. Evangelicals in post-Christendom societies find their own identity under threat.

What can missiologists learn from comparing these different kinds of identity transitions while focussing especially on faith formation? How may the descriptive tools of sociological research be combined with more prescriptive theological approaches? Can they indeed be combined at all, or are they different-but-complementary? At the very least, might missiologists benefit from analytical frameworks offered by psychology, anthropology, and sociology, in exploring the multi-dimensional nuances of identity? I agree with the author of *Fellow Travellers* that "[m]issiological concerns—such as: evangelism, conversion, discipleship, and church planting—seem to be, in one way or another, all related to the topic of identity formation" (49).

In recent years, some researchers have started to explore these frontiers of missiology in relation to the ever-growing number of Muslims turning to Christ. Much research has focussed on the *processes* of conversion—how and why Muslims turn to Christ. But now attention has shifted to conversion's *consequences* in the ensuing years and decades.[1] How do these believers grow in a new personal identity in Christ, alongside a new group identity in Christ's community, while still staying connected with their Muslim communities? What new identity labels do they acquire? What factors help them to pass on the faith to their children? Lawrence rightly states that "the topic of identity formation has emerged as a research gap within the field of missiology" (14).

These identity questions for believers of Muslim background can be echoed for believers of Hindu, Buddhist, or Jewish backgrounds. But research runs separately in these different religious contexts, without comparing between them. It is rare for a study to straddle two movements to Christ, as in Jonas Jørgensen's fine work comparing identity issues for Jesus

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followers of Muslim and Hindu backgrounds.[2] To compare three different movements at once is rarer still. This is where Peter Lawrence has broken new ground and why his book *Fellow Travellers* is important.

## *Strengths of Lawrence's Research Study*

### 1. A comparison of three communities in the same context

One risk in comparative studies is to try to compare different things in different contexts. This introduces too many variables at once. It is wiser either to compare the same thing in different contexts, or else different things in the same context. Lawrence chose the latter approach, by taking the highly unusual context of Israel where three different movements of Jesus followers can be compared side by side.

His historical overview of these three communities is illuminating. Messianic Jews, at first a majority of Jesus-followers in the early church, were later reduced to a minority as the Gentile church swelled. That church, wielding state power from the fourth century, enforced a full identity separation between "Christian" and "Jewish" so that Jesus-believing Jews "even had to denounce their own people and heritage in order to demonstrate their commitment to Christendom" (22). The equivalent denunciation was required by rabbinic Judaism, and the two communities drew apart for many centuries.

Later evangelical efforts to reach the Jews resulted in many thousands being absorbed into denominational Christianity by the end of the nineteenth century, but at the cost of their Jewishness. The twentieth century saw the emergence of Messianic Jewish congregations as a new collective identity where "they could express their newly-found faith in accordance with their Jewish heritage" (23). Exponential growth in the twenty-first century has resulted in around three hundred Messianic congregations and thirty thousand Messianic Jews in Israel alone (23). This is a sizeable and expanding community.

By contrast, Arab Evangelicals in Israel are a smaller and shrinking group. Their origins are in the Arab Christian communities which existed in the region from the third century and were still numerous a hundred years ago when Christians played a leading role in the Arab nationalist movements. From these Orthodox and Catholic communities, Protestant missionaries established new churches, and the resultant denominational tensions are still felt today. With their numbers drastically reduced by emigration, Arab Evangelicals in Israel comprise a minority (just three percent) of the Christian community who form a minority (ten percent) of the Arabs, who in turn are a minority (twenty percent) of Israel's population.

However, even while "Arab Christianity in the Middle East is threatened by extinction, a new community of evangelical faith is emerging in the region" (27). These are Muslim-background believers, currently numbering around five hundred individuals in Israel but with substantial growth in the last twenty years. This growth is mirrored in the region and Lawrence considers that "they might turn out to be a lifeline for the Church in the Middle East" (27).

Thus, the demography of Christianity in the Holy Land is changing at an accelerating rate, with Arab Christians in numerical decline but now augmented by Jewish-background and Muslim-background followers of Christ. Lawrence opens a window for us on this fascinating, fluid situation which naturally gives rise to questions of identity.

Lawrence summarises points of commonality between Messianic Jews, Arab Evangelicals, and Muslim-background believers. They have all been shaped personally by the political and theological force-fields that created the State of Israel—a joyous fulfilment for some, a painful eviction for others. They often speak each other's languages, since many of them are bilingual or trilingual between Hebrew, Arabic, and English. All three communities derive directly or indirectly from Protestant missionary endeavours in the past and are the subjects of contemporary missiological interest. All three face some hostility and pressure from their parent communities, whether Jewish, Arab Christian, or Muslim, with the last of these facing the biggest rejection. Also, all three groups are viewed by outsiders as evangelical Christians but themselves view the label with some ambivalence. Thus, all three groups "are, to some extent, disconnected from their communities of birth and, at the same time, do not feel fully part of the global evangelical community." Nevertheless, members of all three groups have experienced "one essential element to the evangelical faith . . . namely the life-changing encounter with the person of Jesus" (34).

Members of all three groups are, to some extent, disconnected from their communities of birth and, at the same time, do not feel fully part of the global evangelical community.

### 2. Useful coverage of relevant literature

To survey relevant literature in any one of these fields is a major undertaking; to do it for all three is daunting indeed, especially for a master's level thesis. Lawrence was necessarily selective, prioritizing research work done specifically on the target groups in Israel itself, while including some wider material.

He cites several studies on Messianic Jews caught between "two communities at odds with each other" (40, citing Stern), namely the church and the people of Israel, yet seeking their own identity. They are

> trying to find "a third way"…constantly crossing the well-established borders between Judaism and Christianity and…marking new boundaries between Messianic Judaism and these two religions. (39, citing Fehler)

Historically this third way was tightly sealed, because Jewish religious law had defined followers of Jesus as outside the boundary of Judaism. However, "Jewish people today are much freer than ever to shift, choose and interpret the components of their Jewish identity" (40, citing Warshawsky). This creates space for Messianic Jews to join other Jews in the quest to define modern "Jewishness." By prioritizing their ethnic and cultural identity as Jews, and downplaying the religious element, they

> challenge the common notion that Rabbinic Judaism is the norm for "Jewishness" and, simultaneously, they refuse to accept that their faith in Jesus is a boundary marker between them and their fellow Jews. (40–41)

How do Arab Evangelicals form and view their identity? In contrast to Messianic Jews, whose identity options have opened up over the last century, for Arab Christians they have become tighter. A hundred years ago "Muslims and Christians started to identify themselves mainly by their shared ethnicity and nationality as Arabs . . . their 'Arabness' was considered a unifying factor for their people group" (44). But in recent decades, the Judaization of Israeli society and the Islamization of Palestinian society squeezed Arab Christians into a tight spot. Excluded by both Israeli and Palestinian mainstream communities, they are drawn to emigrate to the West where they will not be stuck in ethnic or religious boxes. Findings by Salim Munayer are confirmed by Ajaj and Miller, that today Arab Evangelicals

> prefer to identify themselves, first and foremost, by their religion (Christian) before their ethnicity (Arab/Palestinian) or nationality (Israeli)…there has been a noticeable change from forty years ago when their Arab identity was more prominent than their religious beliefs and affiliation. (48, citing Ajaj and Miller)

Thirdly, Lawrence observes that for Muslim-background believers the topic of identity formation has generated much missiological interest. Tim Green's work on this is discussed further below. Kathryn Kraft[3] found that Muslim-background believers in Lebanon and Egypt faced a similar dilemma, and those most comfortable in their new identity were the ones who had "successfully adhered a Christian religious identity onto a pre-existing Muslim ethnic identity" (51, citing Kraft). Jens Barnett developed a nuanced model of identity which "provides a helpful insight into the complexity of multiple belonging and hybrid identification among Muslim-background believers in the Levant" (52). Studies specifically in the Holy Land include the 2003 research by Ant Greenham,[4] which raises the question of whether women believers form identity in a different way from men.[5]

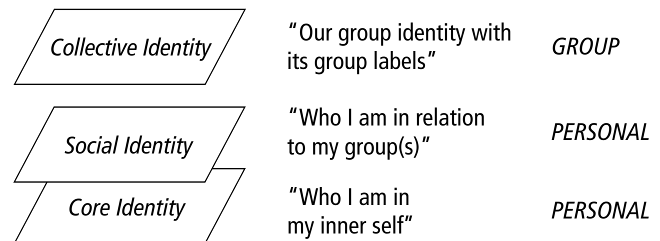
## 3. Application and extension of theory

As a reviewer evaluating Lawrence's work, I now find myself in the curious position of being evaluated by him in turn, since he bases his theoretical model for identity on the one I developed for believers of Muslim background in Pakistan.[6]

Lawrence thus summarises my identity model:

> Tim Green's research on the conversion experiences of Muslim-background believers in Pakistan is one of the most frequently quoted studies on the issue of identity formation among Jesus followers in the House of Islam…he presents a dynamic model with three layers of identity (figure 1 below) in which *core* refers to the construction of a personal identity, *social* to the formation of an individual identity within a community, and *corporate* [actually *collective*] to the positioning of a group within society. (50)

*Figure 1. Three layers of identity (Green)*

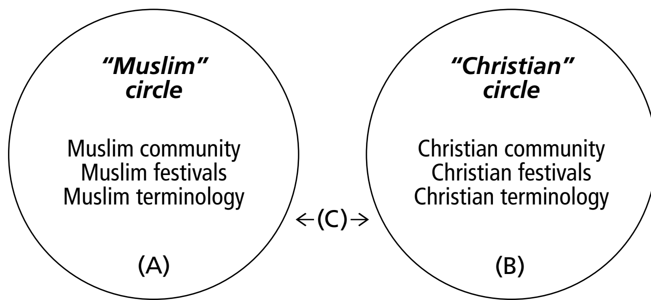



Like migrants from one country to another, "spiritual migrants" from Islam to Christ undergo deep loss and change, struggling to integrate their old and new identities and wondering how long it will take to truly feel at home. For instance, on the social identity level,

> these "spiritual migrants" find themselves on the borderzone of Islam and Christianity and are confronted with a sense of dual belonging to both religious communities.… Green observes various coping strategies among these Jesus followers, such as: 1) switching between both religious communities until they are forced to choose between one of them; 2) supressing one side of their social identity by associating completely with the other religious community; 3) finding a synthesis—through the creation of a "third culture"—which is tolerated by their family members and friends. (50–51)

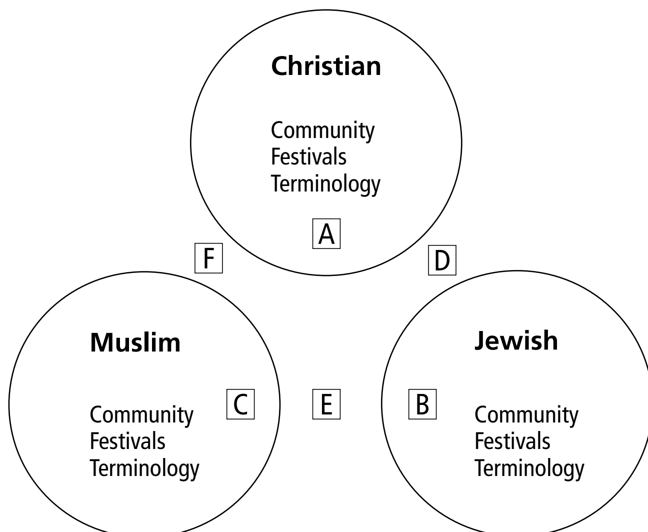
In my own research, I had represented this dilemma of dual belonging as two circles, functioning on the social identity layer and had asked my interviewees whether they felt they belonged in positions A, B, or C (figure 2, at the top of p. 59).

*Figure 2. Social identity options with two communities (Green)*




In quite an innovative way, Lawrence extended this diagram to three communities, thus opening up identity options A to F:

*Figure 3. Social identity options with three communities (Lawrence)*




He further considered the possibility that believers, instead of having to choose between or oscillate between mutually exclusive communities, could find themselves in the overlap where their simultaneous belonging is tolerated by the different communities. (See figure 4 to the right.)

In contrast to traditional collectivist societies, where a person is required to belong to one tribe or another, dual and multiple belonging is a feature of modern pluralistic societies. So our identity frameworks need to include this possibility and I commend Lawrence for extending the diagram to include it. In practice this final diagram proved a little difficult for some of Lawrence's interviewees to grasp, because the areas of overlap could be interpreted either as simultaneous belonging to different social communities or else a higher-level unity in Christ between believers of different backgrounds. This is an important distinction and the diagram could perhaps be adapted to show it.

## 4. Careful, appropriate methodology

I commend Lawrence's careful, transparent interview technique and his reflections on what it means to be an insider-outsider in ethnographic research. I agree with him that the insider/outsider distinction can be over-emphasised, since "[u]ltimately, the level of reflexivity—regardless whether the researcher is a so called 'insider' or 'outsider'—is key to the quality of data collected and analysed in a field study" (68, citing Kraft).

His interview guide drew from my field work and that of Warshawsky (for Messianic Jews in Israel). Lawrence wisely combined some open-ended listening to interviewees telling their own story in their own way, along with some perceptively chosen questions designed to explore his research topic. The nine interviewees comprised three individuals from each target group. They ranged in age from 25 to 55 years, with a mix of marital status, and two-thirds were female. Lawrence recorded the data in a careful way and analyzed it with standard techniques.

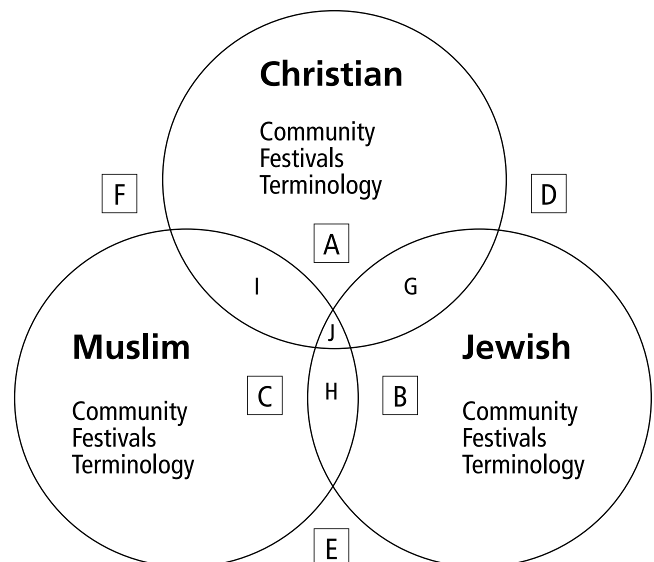
## 5. New findings

The small sample size of just nine interviewees is acceptable for a master's level study but can lead to only tentative conclusions, especially since each target group is represented by just three individuals. However, Lawrence also compared his limited findings with the wider literature for the three communities of Jesus-followers and his conclusions draw on both sources.

### *a. Identity formation for Messianic Jews*

Messianic Jews in Israel mostly continue to identify as ethnically and culturally Jewish, often feeling more Jewish since coming to faith in their Messiah, and thus with a renewed

*Figure 4. Social identity options including overlapping possibilities (Lawrence)*



identity as fulfilled Jews. "I feel more Jewish than ever, I feel so complete" was the comment of one interviewee. The second one similarly embraced his Jewish identity more fully than before since "that is what God gave me." The third likewise affirmed "I am completely Jewish, believing in Jesus didn't make me lose my Jewishness." They feel loyal to the State of Israel and part of the Jewish community, though distancing themselves from rabbinic Judaism. "I don't feel like I need to go to a synagogue. I don't feel like God is there," commented one (75–76).

They felt more strongly connected to their birth community than to the Christian community:

> I never call myself a Christian. I am Messianic who believes in Yeshua Messiah. He is the Son of God, he came to this world. He died for my sins. Theology, we are the same, I don't disagree with the Christian theology, but I would use the Jewish terminology to describe myself.

However, they strongly connect with believers of evangelical faith from other backgrounds, and consider faith to be more important than ethnicity for choosing a marriage partner (85–86).

### *b. Identity formation for Arab Evangelicals*

Arab Evangelical interviewees still connected somewhat with friends and relatives in the traditional Christian community, with some low-level opposition from that community. But they "have drawn a clear boundary between their own faith and their religion of birth" with the label "evangelical" as an identity marker to mark this distinction. They did not feel they really belonged inside either the Christian or the Jewish community, let alone the Muslim community. One interviewee commented "I am Israeli citizen, but not Jewish. I am a Christian. I don't forget that I am Palestinian, I am Arab. I am Israeli, I am not a Palestinian citizen" (80).

### *c. Identity formation for Muslim-background believers*

Lawrence found that in relation to their Muslim birth community these Jesus followers experience "high levels of discontinuity in their social identity from the moment they make their newly found faith public." Of his three MBB interviewees, one had not yet told her parents of her faith in Jesus. When a second one told her parents, it brought "a wall in our relationship, especially between me and my father. My mother was struggling a lot, but more accepting. The children made my parents closer to us . . . it is better now, praise God." The parents of the third interviewee said, "Don't bring us shame, whatever you want to believe, keep it away from the family" (84).

These interviewees had ceased to celebrate Muslim religious festivals and no longer use Islamic terminology or give their children Muslim names (87). All three of them used the Christian or Hebrew terms for Jesus, not the Muslim name. The interviewees had joined an Arab Evangelical church and/or a Messianic congregation (the reasons for this surprising choice are not given by Lawrence but would be interesting to know). One of them was happy to call herself a Christian, but also "a Muslim who believes in Jesus." Another said, "I am from a Muslim family, but I follow Jesus" (83). Both of these were hesitant to place themselves fully in the "Christian" community.

### *d. Continuity and discontinuity*

Lawrence found that the continuity with the birth culture and religion seems strongest for Messianic Jews, who redefine Jewishness into a space they can occupy: "they feel more Jewish because their ethnicity is no longer defined by Rabbinic Judaism" (91). Arab Evangelicals, by contrast, define themselves in distinction to the traditional Christian community, though still with points of social connection. For Muslim-background believers there seems to be the greatest discontinuity from their birth community: "these Jesus followers from the House of Islam definitely do not see themselves as part of the Muslim circle" (91).

These differences strike me as important, and they beg a deeper explanation. I return to this question below. Lawrence's finding is also significant that Messianic Jews become more politically engaged after they have come to faith while Arab Evangelicals and MBBs tend to disengage.

In terms of their self-descriptions, Lawrence found that

> the interviewees do not call themselves anymore by their ethnicity or religion of birth only—i.e. Jew, Arab Christian, Muslim—but add a word to indicate that they are Jesus followers, such as: "Messianic Jew," "Arab Evangelical," "believer from a Muslim family," and so forth. (92)

Similarly with religious terminology, such as the names they use for Jesus, interviewees from all three groups tend no longer to use the terminology of their religion of birth but use modified terms.

### *e. A new community in Christ*

Lawrence found that:

> Regardless of their ethnic, social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, the majority of them find themselves in the circles that bind them together with other Jesus followers . . . [E]ach one of them indicated that they experience—in their daily lives—a closer connection and stronger sense of belonging to other believers of evangelical faith than to members of their own community and religion of birth. (93)

This echoes what first took place in the very same region two thousand years earlier, as "followers of the Way" came together from the mutually exclusive communities of Jew and Gentile, to create one new identity in Christ.

## 6. Valuable conclusions

Lawrence has broken new ground in comparing the identity formation of first-generation Jesus followers from three different religious backgrounds, living at the same point of time,

in the same geographical context. I agree with him that this provides "a missiological framework for a comparative study between members of these target groups" and "a model for further research among these communities of evangelical faith in Israel and beyond" (100–101). I also appreciate the way he has extended my binary social identity diagram to create more possibilities. It would be most interesting to see other researchers try out his diagrams in different settings, with some modification to remove one area of ambiguity noted above.

Physical migrants, who leave one country to settle in another, face similar identity issues to spiritual migrants who leave one faith to settle in another. The comparisons should be explored.

### *Limitations or Weaknesses of the Study*

Given the tiny sample groups comprising only three individuals each, Lawrence could be accused of overreach in describing his data as "rich," and in extrapolating its significance to verify or modify the findings of the literature which is based on larger field studies.

Although Lawrence sprinkles his text with a good number of short quotations from the interviewees, at times his own interpretation takes precedence over theirs. Thus, he argues that Muslim-background believers in Israel "might find themselves unable to pursue a new and/or renewed identity because of the pressure they encounter" (89–90). However, studies in other contexts show that MBBs may well have a more nuanced awareness of identity than Lawrence allows.

This tendency for the researcher's voice to override that of the subjects can be exacerbated when only short excerpts are cited from the transcripts. This usually results in fragmented sound bites, selected and arranged at the whim of the researcher. I see the same tendency in Lawrence's book, and I would have liked to hear more of the interviewees' accounts in their own words. However, having conducted similar research myself, I well know the problem of trying to achieve this within the constraints of word count.

In fact, the author could have liberated word count by reducing the amount of repetition in the book. Phrases like "as already discussed" show the need for tighter editing, or even some restructuring to collate and condense those points which recur repeatedly in different parts of the book. Tighter editing would also have corrected the occasional missing or misspelt words. Although Lawrence is generally clear in his arguments, this clarity is sometimes lost when, for example, he tries to distinguish between *new* and *renewed* identity and to connect those with *discontinuity* and *continuity* respectively.

However, these are minor points. To Lawrence's credit, he is aware of several limitations in the scope and scale of his study. I do not consider these to be weaknesses as such, but springboards into further research, and to these we now turn.

### *Springboards for Further Research*

I affirm Lawrence's six recommendations for further research (p. 96 onwards). I comment here on three of them, then add five more of my own, with reference to Muslim-background believers in particular.

#### Three of the author's suggestions

First, he would like to investigate whether the metaphor of "being on a journey," used by himself in the book, is also prominent in the theology or liturgy of Jesus followers in Israel (96). This metaphor resonates with my interest in migration. Physical migrants, who leave one country to settle in another, face similar identity issues to spiritual migrants who leave one faith to settle in another. These comparisons could be researched in a more rigorous way, or a more ambitious project could be attempted to explore the identity journey of those who are simultaneously geographic and spiritual migrants. These days thousands of Muslim migrants to the West are also migrating to Christ, so how do they juggle both transitions at the same time? In joining an American church, for example, how can they discern what is cultural and what is Christian? Do they form their closest bonds with those who are fellow-migrants from the same country or fellow-migrants from the same faith, or both? A cluster of questions awaits research. Studies in this will not only be of academic interest, but also of great practical and pastoral benefit.[7]

Second, Lawrence would like to "find out what the differences are in identity formation between first- and second-generation believers between the target groups" (97). This is an urgent question in countries like Algeria, Bangladesh, Iran, and Kazakhstan where the first-generation movement is now transitioning to the second generation.[8] What will happen to the children of Muslim-background believers as they grow up? At the *core identity* level will they make their parents' faith their own, in a living way? In terms of *social identity,* will they be able confidently to maintain relationships both with the community of believers and the Muslim community, and into which community will they marry? What *collective identity labels* will distinguish the MBB community as it matures in the second generation?

Third, Lawrence proposes that comparative missiological research be carried out on areas of contextualization including Insider Movements. I agree with him that this should be done within a single context to reduce the variables, for in the Insider

Movement debate, much unnecessary missiological heat has arisen from failing to understand how the factors play out differently in different local contexts. How much more, then, is a single context needed when making missiological comparison between different religions. Lawrence has done this for Israel, pointing the way for similar research in other regions.

### Five additional proposals

First, I hope that researchers can explore in a more rigorous way than Lawrence does, his fascinating hints about continuity and discontinuity working out differently for believers of different backgrounds. He rightly points out that missiologists make unsupported comparisons between Jesus followers in Insider Movements and Jesus-believing Jews in the early church (95). However, in his sociological conclusions about why Messianic Jews experience much more continuity with their Jewishness than do MBBs with their Muslimness, Lawrence seems to miss the theological elephant in the room. St. Paul as a Jew-in-Christ wrestled with this question of continuity and discontinuity after his conversion. How could he reconcile God's promises to his people Israel—"theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises"[9]—with those promises being fulfilled in Christ and in Christ's followers? Paul carved out a theological path for Messianic Jews to reconcile their old and new identities which is not available in quite the same way for believers of Muslim background, I would argue. Perhaps that is controversial, but it needs to be explored theologically to avoid over-simplistic comparisons. This begs for further empirical studies to compare the theology (and associated psychology) of Messianic Jews and Muslim-background believers, in Israel and beyond.

Second, Lawrence hints at the psychology of language in the religious terminology which first-generation believers choose. As he observed for Jesus followers in Israel, so I found in different Muslim countries, some believers of Muslim background prefer to use familiar names for God and Jesus while filling them with new meaning (expressing continuity) while others prefer completely new words (expressing discontinuity, new wineskins for new wine). What psychologically are the reasons for these choices, how may the psychology shift over a period of time as the new believers get established in their core identity, and how do believers switch between different terminology according to their audience? This is pastorally relevant, in the choice of vocabulary used in discipleship courses,[10] for instance.

Third, it would be useful to test in other contexts the identity model I proposed for Pakistan and which Lawrence extended in Israel. He mentions other researchers on MBB identity[11] who have also used this framework, and a recent doctoral study in Bangladesh has done the same.[12] However, Jens Barnett's model[13] is also important to consider and in some respects is better than mine. We need models that are simple enough to give us a handle on the slippery issues of identity but not so simplistic that they distort the research or the findings.

Fourth, the sociological concept of liminality has been explored in relation to believers of Muslim background, but it would be very interesting to compare it for all three communities in Lawrence's study. Liminal people are those at the edges and the gaps, an uncomfortable place to be but also a creative place where ultimately new hybrid identities are formed. Lawrence hints at this phenomenon but it should be examined further through the lens of identity theory.

Fifth, Lawrence's study (like most such qualitative research) is a snapshot at a moment of time. To some extent it allows for backwards reflection, as interviewees comment on their past experiences, but it does not point forward to what their perceptions will be ten years into the future. Identity is not fixed in time, especially for liminal people in transition. So how will the identity of new believers continue to evolve as they marry (typically locking them into one community or the other), give names to their children (also an identity marker), reconnect with their estranged relatives, and pass through stages of faith? Even at the end of life's journey the identity questions remain: in which religion's graveyard will they lay their head, and what will be inscribed on the tombstone? As for individuals, so for communities, the questions of identity shift as first generation believers give way to the second. With the movements to Christ that are now 30–40 years old, what can be gleaned from their wisdom to avoid repeating their mistakes?

Some believers prefer to use familiar names for God and Jesus, while others prefer completely new words. What are the psychological reasons for these choices?

### *And Finally . . .*

These topics are relevant not only to new believers in non-Christian cultures, but also to western believers in the identity confusion of their post-Christendom cultures. Lawrence comments that Christian young people in Europe are "asking the same kind of questions as Muslim-background believers around the world." I agree with him that first-generation Jesus followers can be

> leading the way for other believers of evangelical faith around the world. These Jesus followers have learned through trial and error how to form their identity in accordance with the gospel and, as such, they seem to be forerunners in this endeavour. (103)

We have much to learn from them!

## *Endnotes*

[1] This shift is seen in the two volumes edited by David Greenlee. The 2006 publication *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way* (Milton Keynes, UK) collated research on conversion of Muslims to Christ, but by 2013 attention was shifting to MBB identity in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library).

[2] Jørgensen, Jonas, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas: Two Case Studies of Interreligious Hermeneutics and Identity in Global Christianity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

[3] Kathryn Ann Kraft, "Community and Identity among Arabs of a Muslim Background Who Choose to Follow a Christian Faith" (PhD dissertation, Bristol, University of Bristol, 2007).

[4] Anthony Greenham, "Muslim Conversions to Christ: An Investigation of Palestinian Converts Living in the Holy Land" (dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004).

[5] Women's perspectives have unwittingly been overlooked by male missiologists. The network When Women Speak (https://whenwomenspeak.net/) is working to redress this imbalance and part of its focus is on hearing the voice of female believers of Muslim background.

[6] My full research is in Tim Green, "Issues of Identity for Christians of a Muslim Background in Pakistan" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of London, 2014). The framework is presented in two chapters "Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories" and "Identity Choices at the Border Zone" in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?,* edited by David Greenlee (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013).

[7] See for example Tim Green and Roxy, *Joining The Family* (UK: Interserve, 2016) and the accompanying video discussion course, which explore some of these issues for Christ's followers of Muslim background in Britain. This draws on Roxy's first hand experience and that of more than twenty other interviewees.

[8] For an interesting comparison between two contexts, see Rania Mostafi and Pat Brittenden, "Movements in Iran and Algeria: The Second Generation Challenge" in *Motus Dei : The Movement of God and the Discipleship of Nations,* eds David Cole and Wes Watkins (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, forthcoming).

[9] Romans 9:4, NIVUK.

[10] This especially arises when there is an established "Christian" minority in a Muslim country, and where the choice of language is a clear badge of loyalty to one community or another. Should discipleship courses align new believers with the old or new communities, or a mix of both? For example, this question arose for the Urdu, Arabic, and Russian translations of the discipleship course *Come Follow Me* (Tim Green, USA: Lulu Press, 2013).

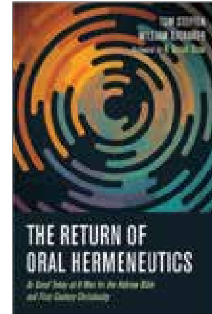
[11] Azar Ajaj, Duane Alexander Miller, and Philip Sumpter, *Arab Evangelicals in Israel* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

[12] Peter Kwang-Hee Yun, *An Exploration of the Social Identity of Muslim-Background Believers in a Muslim Majority Community in Bangladesh* (UK: Langham Publishing, forthcoming 2021).

[13] Jens Barnett, "Refusing to Choose: Multiple Belonging among Arab Followers of Christ" in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?,* edited by David Greenlee, 19–28 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013).

## *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics: As Good Today as It Was for the Hebrew Bible and First-Century Christianity,* by Tom Steffen and William Bjoraker (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 393 pp.

*—Reviewed by David Beine*




In the fall of 1986, I found myself near Dallas, Texas, registered for a grammatical analysis class at the University of Texas. The summer before, I was immersed in the intensive Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) courses at the University of Washington. There, a fellow classmate and I discussed the continuation of our program in Texas. My classmate told me that he had heard from his roommate that one of the upcoming grammar course offerings was much more difficult than the other and that we should avoid that class when we arrived in Texas. That fall, as I stood looking at the course registration sheet, I struggled to recall which was the difficult course. Was it Discourse Analysis with Robert Longacre (which employed a more functionalist approach to grammar), or Communication Analysis taught by Ilah Fleming (that used a stratificational grammar approach)? Based on the written course description, I decided the harder course was the former, and I selected the latter, the one we all called Strat. Shortly thereafter, I ran into my former summer classmate and was reassured when he told me he had also signed up for the same class.

We were both wrong! Strat was by far the more difficult course. But it was revolutionary to my understanding. It opened my eyes to the fact that there is meaning beyond just the words on the page (the text). Every dialogue recorded on a page takes place within a unique "communication situation" (CS) that also includes several different aspects of communication, irreducible to written text, and therefore missing in the text alone. We were asked to consider possible aspects of the CS in our analysis of meaning *along with* the more traditional structural and functional grammatical analysis of the text itself. As the idea of the CS was drilled into my head, it opened my mind to the reality that words on a page are only symbolic representations of actual events that were much richer in meaning, more than simple letters combined into words on a page could contain or constrain. It taught me to look deeper, to understand the contexts beyond the words, and to include these insights in the ultimate interpretation of meaning, even for sacred text.

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I began this review in a rather unorthodox way, by telling a story. Similarly, authors Tom Steffen (professor emeritus, Biola University) and William Bjoraker (Associate Professor, William Carey International University), present their book, *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics* (based heavily in oral storying methodology), in an unorthodox manner: They move from the concrete to the abstract (as oral hermeneutics does), instead of abstract to concrete, as most Western analysis is structured. The authors begin and end their book with demonstrations of oral hermeneutics, sandwiching supporting theory from the fields of cultural studies, linguistics, neuroscience and theology in between, as they lay out their case for the "return" of oral hermeneutics (OH). I found the book fascinating as I spent many weeks really chewing on and digesting the tome's premises and implications.

Utilizing recent findings of modern neuroscience and linguistics, the authors assert that orality is the more natural state of meaning-making for humanity.

### *The Layout of the Book*

After briefly setting the stage for the book (including assuring the reader of their orthodox theological stances on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and the canon—which should alert us that the authors understand that some classical theologians might challenge their ideas), the authors open with a powerful demonstration. Part 1, titled "Demonstrations," uses the scriptural story of Elisha and the widow's oil (chapter 1) along with reflections on the story (chapter 2) to illustrate the power of the OH methodology. In part 2, "Propositions" (chapters 3–8) lays out the authors' proposals about how the canon of Scripture, as we know it today, first evolved from voice (spoken and collectively shared) to mainly text-based analysis today (as a product of the Enlightenment and rationalism). They argue that today's textual hermeneutics (TH) methodologies and resultant systematic theologies (taught at most Western seminaries and exported to overseas seminaries and Bible schools) are incomplete by themselves and should be supplemented with OH methods to provide the richness and breadth of meanings that were originally part of the Old Testament Hebrew and first-century Christian church hermeneutical processes (thus the "return"). In part 3, "Echoes," they represent the ideas of the preceding chapters through the story of Elisha and Naaman (in the same format as chapter 1). Both stories about Elisha are taken from the pages of 2 Kings in the Bible. The authors' overall contention is that people at their created core are oral storytellers. Therefore, Scripture is best understood and conveyed through the oral storying methodology.

I am going to again break with book review convention. Assuming that many readers of this journal have access to the internet, and might not have the $42 to buy the book, I want to recommend some sources that do a good job of highlighting the main points of the book. The best I have found comes from an interview with one of the authors (Steffen) about the content of the book. Jackson Wu presents the rationale for, and overview of, the book in the form of two blog entries that can be found at: https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2020/08/26/the-need-for-oral-hermeneutics/ and https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2020/09/02/the-return-of-oral-hermeneutics-an-overview/respectively. The first addresses the need to develop a model of oral hermeneutics while the latter provides a wonderful overview of the book itself. I would commend these sources to the budget-conscious reader.

### *Application to Frontier Mission*

A key application for the majority of readers of this journal (many labor among oral learners) is that it lends support for the continued emphasis upon the use of oral methods. The authors' primary contention that oral hermeneutics was the main model (pre-enlightenment) practiced by Old Testament Hebrews and early Christians (both oral-preferred cultures) would suggest by inference, that it is still an appropriate model for use in world missions today where most unreached, frontier peoples are also non-western oral learners. Further, utilizing recent findings of modern neuroscience and linguistics, the authors assert that orality is actually the more natural state of meaning-making for humanity. Far more than just "sugar-coating the gospel in order to make it more palatable to oral cultures" (as I have heard some assert about oral storying), the orality method is a better model for meaning-making of Scripture than textual hermeneutics alone.

Such a proposal is likely to ruffle the feathers of a few theologians, particularly those who have been promoting TH as a universal model and exporting it to a variety of biblical education spaces across the mission world. This book challenges whether it is appropriate to do so. Perhaps more threatening, it challenges the assumption that TH, the model practiced at most western seminaries and Bible colleges, is the universal model of meaning-making ("methodological imperialism").

Those currently engulfed in the OH movement would do well to consider the authors' constructive critique of the question sets currently employed in the most popular models of the modern-day orality movement, *"Questioning our Questions."* While the orality movement is amiable to OH methods, the authors contend that the question sets currently used originate primarily from TH, thus making them culturally unrecognizable. They advocate studying the receivers' cultures and adjusting our questions to their cultural preferences accordingly, to

increase effectiveness. They also provide alternative questions that might better fit value-moral systems that exist outside of the west (e.g., honor/shame, fear/power and purity/pollution).

### *Applications beyond Frontier Mission*

Beyond the frontier mission context of this journal, there might be deeper implications for us all. Some of these, as noted above, may be considered provocative. They may ruffle the feathers of traditional Western theologians who rely alone on textual hermeneutics, considering TH sufficient for discerning biblical meaning and, therefore, a universal model. Although taking care not to say so too strongly, the authors certainly challenge the idea of a universal model throughout the book.

Ultimately, the authors are calling their readers to consider a complete paradigm shift (although carefully couched in the language of "addition to" rather than "replacement by"). Oral hermeneutics (OH) is good not just for the mission fields' oral learners, but it also works better (i.e., "best practice") for all current and upcoming generations of "postmodern, post textual, and post factual" people, such as millennials and Generation Z. This is a bold and audacious claim. I invite readers of this review to pick up the book and ponder the evidence provided and give serious consideration to the authors' contentions.

I decided to try OH with my eighty-three-year-old, GED-educated mother and my fifty-two-year-old, highly educated (medical doctor) wife. I used the demonstration stories (which read like movie scripts) to walk them through the two stories of Elisha included in the book. Both have read the stories and heard expository sermons (based on TH methodology) on these passages. After concluding the stories, I asked them about their experience, and both told me that it was personally more meaningful than anything they had done before. The experience seemed to confirm the authors' contention that "while TH educates the head, OH educates the heart" (306) and to affirm their use of the tag line, borrowed from the orality movement (47), "the word made fresh." It proved to me, rather conclusively, the effectiveness of the method even in highly textually-based societies such as ours. It made me wonder if there is a secondary reason that we call it SCRIPT-ure.

Personally, I learned many new things and big ideas by reading this book. I never realized that I, like many, read out loud inside my head using an "inner reading voice" when I really want to understand, and I do not do this when I am skimming. I learned so much from the book including: the prominence of narrative genre in Scripture (and what that means); the preeminence of orality in the human species (and what that means); "creative fidelity" and "ruled spontaneity;" the very *words* of Jesus and the very voice of Jesus; the possibility of multiple boundaried truths emerging from a single passage; "scribality," and orality's influence on text; the development of writing upon textual development and teaching; character analysis, character thinking, and character theologizing; why the grand metanarrative of Scripture is so important; the richness and purpose of story, symbol, and ritual; and so much more. In short, I learned about the need for oral hermeneutics. If there were ever a Christian *Theory of Everything* this would be it. My copy of the book is now heavily highlighted and richly annotated (with my personal scribblings in the margins), and the pages are severely dog-eared. Reading this book has changed how I see many things and how I will choose to communicate the gospel in the future. I highly recommend this book.

Oral hermeneutics works better for all current and upcoming generations of "post-modern, post textual, and post factual" people.

### *Necessary Critique*

Any good book review needs to address both "the good" and the problematic. Regarding the book's structural strengths, there is much to comment on. The book is richly footnoted, which allows readers to go deep into the academic literature (if desired) while keeping the rich story line from getting lost in "the weeds." The authors frequently identify which author is speaking, provide periodic comical semantic word play, almost reaching the level of haiku (e.g., "the red bird proposition is nested . . . ," "Wright is right," etc.) which made reading the book fun, and the questions the authors want readers to personalize *are always italicized.* Regarding the book's weakness, there is only one critique I can offer. The authors contend that OH needs to sequentially precede TH, but in both of their demonstrations they open the storying sessions by first providing background on the Scriptures that certainly have their origin in TH approaches. If OH followed by TH is a "necessary sequence" (306), there is a seeming contradiction. Perhaps the next edition of the book will clear up this incongruity and remove the suggestion of a required order if one is not, in fact, fundamental.

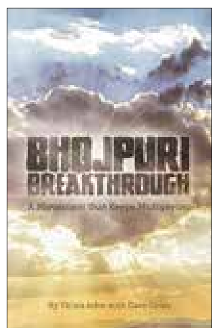
Finally, in my nearly thirty years of experience on the mission field I have seen almost every conceivable model of mission practiced (even at the same time in the same place), covering the favored practices of almost every era of mission past and present. And I have seen the gospel, the true gospel, spread and thrive despite the limitations of the missiological model being employed. This gives me great hope. While the principles gained in this book are insightful (and we would be wise to implement them), I take great confidence that God will continue to grow and build his church around the world despite our weaker or stronger hermeneutical methods. I believe that OH is a valuable tool in

reaching our world, but it is not *the* "silver bullet." It is another good, and perhaps even superior, "bullet" (a silver bullet), but it is one of many "bullets" that God can and does use in calling his own from around the world. I believe anyone who adopts this new model in practice should keep this in mind as a humility check.

Hopefully, readers of this tome will seriously ponder these important perspectives and not just let them go in one eye and out the other. It could positively impact ministry both abroad and locally.

### *Bhojpuri Breakthrough: A Movement that Keeps Multiplying,* by Victor John with Dave Coles (Monument: CO: WIGTake Resources, 2019), xviii + 209 pp.

*—Reviewed by H. L. Richard*




This book is about a church planting movement in North India, straddling the borders of the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. But, in fact, *Bhojpuri Breakthrough* is more focused on a parachurch group that claims to be the originator and main support of the Church Planting Movement (CPM). Each chapter until the last two is about breakthrough, including the opening "Before the Breakthrough" up through "Breakthrough in Caste" and "Breakthrough among Muslims" to chapter 11, "Breakthrough in Leadership Development." The closing two chapters deal with principles of the movement and frequently asked questions.

This is a multi-authored book (nine contributors, all local parachurch employees, mentioned on page xv, along with the co-authors). A careful read of the book raises more questions than it answers, as this review will demonstrate. Very little data is presented that would enable a reader to draw his own conclusions, and very little missiological analysis is present in the volume. The tone of the book is decidedly promotional, including a fundraising hook at the end.

There are both errors and highly dubious statements in the book, but this review will highlight two issues of central importance, caste and the role of money. Some errors were introduced as the result of generalizations that are far too broad: for example, the statement on page 4 that the British opposed missionaries because missionaries associating with the local people "caused embarrassment to the British Raj."[1] A worse error on page 6 is surely an editorial problem as no one could possibly think (about missionaries) that "instead of using the local Hindi word for God they used the English word for God;" the context of the statement suggests that this was a problem up through the 1990s.[2] Anti-Hindu errors also appear; on page 21 there is a claim that in past centuries the first-born son of Dalit (untouchable) families had to be drowned in the Ganges River,[3] and that textual references to pouring molten lead into ears "would kill the person, but that's what was done; it's written in their scripture."[4] South Indian Christians are also brutally caricatured as we are told on page 23 that "They have a very distinct division between the churches, with high-caste churches and low-caste churches that never interact with each other."[5] A last example from page 122, "India has 92 different cultures."[6]

Perhaps the most astonishing claim in the book is this: "If the high caste in our area are only 2 percent or 10 percent of the population, that same percentage is also reflected in the churches. . . . God is at work in all the castes" (24). If this could be documented and demonstrated it would be revolutionary to all church growth and church planting movement thinking, which since J. W. Pickett's 1933 study of *Christian Mass Movements in India* have always recognized the central place of sociological groups (castes) in movements to Christ. Has any church anywhere in the world ever achieved what is claimed here, a perfect cross section of every strata of society?

This seems a clear case of saying what people (particularly gullible Christians in the West with their lack of understanding of India) would want to hear. Other examples of statements that would fall into this category are: "in this movement each person is being discipled and mentored" (23); "practically everyone who has partnered with us has been happy, healthy and successful" (159); "most of the leaders in the movement spend three to five hours a day in prayer" (193); "shallowness comes from either ignorance of God's Word or a person knowing more truth than they obey. Discovery Bible Studies prevent both of these" (199–200); the principles outlined here "will work anywhere" (200). Finally for this list, on page 12 it is suggested that the movement really began when the Bhojpuri New Testament was released. But, in fact, Bhojpuri is traditionally a *spoken* rather than a *written* language. Even now, Bhojpuri churches use Hindi Bibles for preaching rather than the Bhojpuri version. Serious research is needed into the effectiveness and impact of the Bhojpuri Bible.

Returning briefly to the caste question, on page 28 there is a claim that "I consider it important to teach believers from all castes to meet and worship together, even while being sensitive to local customs." "Local customs" will be vastly varying among the various castes, including significant differences in language/dialect; to mix all varieties of castes and simultaneously be sensitive to local customs is simply not possible. This seems confirmed on page 123 where we are told that "the movement has

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spread in a variety of ways to different language groups, different geographical areas, *multiple caste groups* (within those language and geographic areas), and different religions" (emphasis added; page 151 suggests that "the homogeneous unit principle . . . can sometimes be useful" but "we've used the language and culture to reach people and let them form their own groups").

## The current fads regarding movements require serious missological analysis.

There are multiple passing references to money throughout the book. Page 32 mentions a church meeting of three to four hundred people in a community learning center; whether that building is owned or rented and who is paying the bills is not mentioned. Page 43 refers to a slum ministry where funds were given to provide soccer uniforms and shoes and balls. Page 48 refers to a need for funds for a Christmas program, but the group was told there are no funds. Page 100 says fifty children are sent to school in every city where there is children's work. Page 104 tells of hiring a full-time worker, but page 159 says

> a movement cannot depend on salaries and money. A movement has to depend on God and bi-vocational leaders. If we started paying leaders, it would kill the movement (and we don't have the money anyway). (cf. 173)

The situation is that staff are hired for social service work and training movement leaders (56) but local leaders are not paid. There are also training centers with "a systematic set curriculum" (162). Page 177 brings some of these tensions together:

> Most leaders in movements work bi-vocationally. We don't pay pastors or hire leaders.… Rather than thinking in terms of full-time versus part-time workers, we see everyone as a worker in God's Kingdom.… In fact, some of us who live as itinerant mission workers rightly get support for doing ministry.

One doesn't have to read very far between the lines to know that such financial policies and practices produce tension, resentment and division. Such topics are not helpful in promotional literature, but a peek is given on page 198: a strategy of Satan is to provoke comparison, like "He's succeeding; I'm not. He got a motorcycle, but I didn't. He's building his house; I'm not." (There is a negative reference to other Christian organizations "enticing leaders to join their staff through financial offers," this in the context of ministry to Muslims, 155.)

Reticence related to finance is maintained until the final statement of the book, where the last of the frequently asked questions is about supporting the work, and a web link is provided. That web link takes one initially to just a sign-up page, but from there into the world of high-powered fund-raising ("train a leader for only $96 per year") and phenomenal claims of millions of converts ("our vision is that thirty million people will come to know Christ by the year 2018;" this obviously needs an update). This type of hype easily gets into the wrong hands and brings a backlash against local Christian workers who are sincerely and humbly seeking to serve Christ. Promotion in America often harms the cause of the gospel.

One may question whether a missiology journal should even review a book like this. But serious missiological analysis is necessary related to the current fads over movements. Better data is needed than this type of book provides, but until that data is available, it was thought worthwhile to examine some of the claims laid out in this study.

### *Endnotes*

[1] This is far too broad a generalization about the British approach to missions. From 1813 missionaries were allowed in India and received much imperial favor, particularly for their educational enterprises. The British Empire was vast, even within India, and many local authorities at various times and places were zealous believers who supported missions within their role in the political setup.

[2] What local terms to use for God was a constant point of discussion, not resolved even to the present time. I have written on this at https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/33_1_PDFs/IJFM_33_1-Richard.pdf.

[3] This is far too broad a generalization. For an account of William Carey's responses to infanticide, with some estimates of the prevalence of the practice, see https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/ministry-in-killing-fields/.

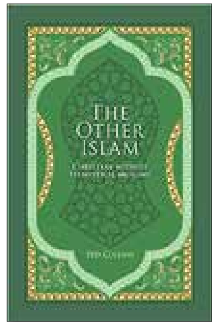
[4] There are a number of references to pouring molten tin or lead or hot oil into the ears of recalcitrant (by some authority's definition) low caste people, such as the Dharmasutra of Baudhayana 12.4 *(Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha,* ed. and tr. Patrick Olivelle, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98, or the Laws of Manu 8.272 *(Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra,* ed. and tr. Patrick Olivelle, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 182. The *practice* of this, however, is another matter. Ludo Rocher, in his paper on "Inheritance: *Dāyabhāga*" in *The Oxford History of Hinduism, Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmaśāstra,* elucidates a "principle of textual interpretation" whereby "distinguishing 'injunctions' *(vidhi),* which have to be taken literally, and broad statements that hyperbolically underscore general principles *(anūvāda)*" plays a crucial role (eds. Patrick Olivelle and Donald R. David, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 170. This pouring of lead into ears is clearly the latter hyperbolical affirmation of a principle, not a practice that was, or was intended to be, literally carried out.

[5] There are notorious caste problems in all the South Indian churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal) but this broad generalization is truly a caricature of a complex scenario.

[6] The claim of ninety-two cultures sounds clear and scientific, but there is no agreed definition that clearly distinguishes one culture from another. The 1961 Indian census claimed there were 1,652 mother tongues (http://www.languageinindia.com/aug2002/indianmothertongues1961aug2002.html), but the Anthropological Survey of India in 1992 concluded that there were only 325 languages, showing again the difficulty of defining what a language or culture is. But one would expect at least 325 cultures when there are 325 languages (in fact there are surely many more cultures than this in India), so the figure of ninety-two is perplexing.

*The Other Islam: Christian Witness to Mystical Muslims,* by Ted Collins (Manchester, UK: The Higher Path, 2021), 156 pp.

*—Reviewed by Keith Fraiser Smith*



One of my early memories of Cairo as a mission partner is enduring many hours of the repeated name of Allah broadcast from a shop-front mosque beneath our apartment's windows. I had heard and read about Sufi brotherhoods but was unprepared for them in a conservative Sunni country like Egypt. Having now read Ted's book, I wish I could enter a time machine and return to 1976 and drop into that neighbourhood mosque.

Many years later, I began attending Friday prayers at neighbourhood mosques in the Potteries. I would enquire about the men in green turbans but received vague answers which made me none the wiser. Reading informed me of the Barelvi and Deobandi strands of Asian Islam. These experiences enlightened me to how "being Muslim" could be expressed in multiple ways, beliefs and practices, while tightly bounded by Asian Islamic culture.

However, until reading Ted's book I had no idea how important Sufi movements are to the spiritual life of Muslims, their mission *(Da'wah),* and their accommodation of Western culture.

The book consists of seventeen pithy chapters, an epilogue, a glossary, and a page of further resources.

Ted relates many personal experiences of attending Sufi gatherings, talking to Sufi adherents, and drawing on his MA research, which focused on "conversion" to Sufism in the UK. We are introduced to a Sufi world within an orthodox Islamic world, underscoring this when he writes, "The outlook of Sufis is significantly different from that described in typical Christian books about Islam" (16).

In chapter 3, Ted defines anad describes the structure of mystical Sufism as being primarily relational and experiential. At the centre is a *shaykh* (or *pir)* (feminine—*shaykha* or *pirra)* who attracts *mureeds* (feminine—*mureedas).* They are akin to disciples. Beyond them are "followers" and then "people who believe in Sufism." Ted goes to great length to indicate the pervasive influence of Sufism, particularly in the Barelvi tradition. The shaykhs' influence is established through their accredited spiritual experiences and effectiveness to provide mediation between themselves, their disciples, and God. They are spiritual power brokers. What shaykhs do is expanded further in chapter 6.

The activities and history of Sufism are covered in chapters 4 and 5. Ted, here and elsewhere in his book, underlines the point that the roots of Sufism in Islam are ancient,[1] Quranic, and modelled by Muhammad. This legacy vindicates several unorthodox beliefs related to Muhammad.

Chapter 8 introduces us to the current "Sufi Celebrities" and movements which the reader may encounter in conversations with Muslims: Nazim Haqqani (Naqshbandi-Haqqaniya), Hamza Yusuf, Ibrahim Osi-Efa (Ba'Alawi), and Muhammad Abu-Huda al-Yaqoubi.

Chapter 9 looks at shaykhas who draw their inspiration from Rabi'a Adawiya. She lived in the city of Basra and died in the year 801.

After the riveting revelations of the first nine chapters, chapter 10, entitled "Darkness," concentrates on the negative aspects of Sufi mysticism. Ted begins by offering us a new and helpful way of answering the question, "Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?" He writes, "Same God, different story about him" (80). He writes that there is a darkness in Sufism which is more than a darkness of ignorance but something "that works against what is true and right" (81). He highlights the testimonies of Sufi mureeds who commune with their dead shaykhs as examples of the strong occult element in their spirituality.

Chapters 11 and 12 unveil the Sufi *Noor Muhammadi* (Light of Muhammad) teaching which may seem "weird and alien" (97) to the reader. According to Sufi scholars, the Qur'an justifies the belief that God created Muhammad in the form of light. Then there is the widespread practice of celebrating the birthday of Muhammad that is related to the tendency of Muslims to elevate him to a position of a mediator, one to be venerated, in addition to that of messenger. In Egypt, it was a popular festival, especially among the uneducated.

In chapter 13 ("Sufism, Politics, and Holy War"), Ted's conclusion is that "Sufism does generally prioritise peace, love and harmony" but "it is not the simple antidote to extremism that politicians dream of." (103)

The final four chapters provide insights into how Christians may present the Christ of the Gospels to Sufi Muslims by looking at how Sufism is growing.

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Chapter 14 is a fascinating chapter entitled "Born again Muslims?" It reminds me of an Egyptian Muslim woman whom I met in Cairo. We were alumni of the same residential 6th form college in the UK. The circumstances gave us an opportunity to share our religious experiences. It transpired that while at the college, we had both been "born again" within our Christian and Islamic heritages. I wonder which conversion motifs would have applied? Using these motifs,[2] Ted analyses three Sufi friends who have been "born again." The one common motif is the mystical, usually dreaming about the shaykh.

"Sufi mission" adapts to secular Western culture and it appeals to nominal Muslims because it endorses their Asian Islamic inherited culture, while revitalizing their spiritual, personal, and family lives.

Chapter 15 is a fascinating chapter on "Sufi Mission" and how it is being adapted to the secular Western context. Sufism appeals to nominal Muslims because it endorses their Asian Islamic inherited culture, including faith, while revitalising their spiritual, personal, and family lives. Ted writes of Sufi "taster" meetings to which Muslim and non-Muslims are being invited.

So how should the gospel be presented to mystical Muslims, mureeds, followers, or seekers? Ted suggests the following:

1. As shaykhs are "saviours," mediating figures between humanity and God, so we can present Jesus in his intermediary role. Jesus is God's provision to them to establish a living relationship.
2. Sufis respond to a "quietness"[3] that speaks louder than assertive and aggressive polemics.
3. Subtle, loving language which stimulates further discussion. Ted calls this, "Fishing with bait, not nets" (128).
4. In common with other Muslims, issues of assurance are important.
5. The use of parables.
6. Stretching their vision beyond their expectations of what their chosen shaykh can deliver.
7. Encouraging them to experience Christ-centred community activities (taste and see).

Sufis come with a discipleship mentality looking for guidance. Our willingness to be Christ's representatives to them, Jesus-shaped people, is important. Ted puts it this way. "It's who we are, how we behave, and evidence of the Lord being with us that are really important parts of making our message credible" (136). We are to be engaged in authentic, concerted, persevering prayer for those God introduces to us.

The good news for Sufis is that Jesus supplies all that they are looking for in a shaykh and much more besides. He has inaugurated the characteristics of the kingdom of God. Ted reminds us that faith in Christ gives us the confidence to step back and wrestle with the challenge of seeing him through different cultural and religious lenses: preparing us to tell of the great mysteries of the faith, "The incarnation of Christ, death as sacrifice, his glorious resurrection, his ascension to the right hand of power, and the giving of the Holy Spirit" (139).

Ted alerts us to the growth of Sufism, its strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Reading his book, may we equip ourselves for gracious encounters with Sufi shaykhs and their disciples. **IJFM**

### *Endnotes*

[1] Chapter 7 provides short histories of Al-Jilani (1077–1166), Ibn Arabi (1162–1240), and Rumi (1207–1273).

[2] The author uses the following motifs designed by Lofland and Skonovd: intellectual, experimental, mystical, affectional, revivalist, and coercive.

[3] Such as the "Kerygmatic Approach" as advocated by Martin Accad, Steve Bell, and others.