Presentation Responses

Assessing the Effectiveness of "Inreligionisation" for Interreligious Communication:
A Response to Dr. Kang-San Tan (Part I)

by Alan R. Johnson

Dr. Tan's paper on interreligious communication focuses on four contextual frameworks, defined as "dynamic interpretive lenses which communities use to frame different ways of understanding truth and interpreting realities whenever . . . interreligious exchanges occur" (5). He proposes that interreligious communication is needed to tackle the issue of how the church on the ground in the Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist worlds can address the lack of success of the Christian mission across these three large religious blocs.

The Problem of Interreligious Communication

The central problematic for the paper is the historical ineffectiveness of evangelical missions among committed Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists across Asia over the past two hundred years (7). He proposes that the reason for this ineffectiveness is "the evangelical approach of trying to replace other religions with Christianity" (6). He suggests that part of the slow response among Asian religions stems from these communities having adopted these highly complex trans-cultural world religions that make proprietary claims of revelation. These belief systems "provide sophisticated explanatory systems of belief capable of coping with major crisis and social changes," and become "intricately laced into the folklore, myths, parental morality, and societal values" (7).

While the paper is on interreligious communication and the use of the contextual frameworks he proposes, Dr. Tan privileges a particular kind of approach to these "creative exchanges between adherents of different religions" in the "zones of contact" that are the "frontiers of religions" (see Tan's Endnote 1). He makes his view explicit in three places across the paper. First, in his introduction he asserts that "the future task of missiology is not limited to the more understood process of inculturation, but also involves 'inreligionisation'" (5). Drawing on a neologism coined by Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius

Pieris, he unpacks 'inreligionisation' as the first of three missiological themes that serve as communication frameworks among religions (9–12). Finally in his conclusion he says:

> The challenge of engaging with Asian religions is a formidable task, and my assessment is that evangelicals do not have a very good track record. My "Macedonian call" is to invite contributions of missiology on the question of how the meeting between religions can co-generate new inreligionisation communities that are unashamedly committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Christian scripture—the only two non-negotiables. (13)

While the only time he uses the term "inreligionisation communities" is here in his conclusion, his two references to Pieris (5, endnote 2; 10, endnote 20) via Bosch indicate that he is talking about the development of expressions of the Christian faith that can be best described as a Hindu Christianity or Buddhist Christianity.[1] Three times in the course of the paper he talks about the "inreligionisation project" as something that he conceives of as an outgrowth of interreligious communication in the way he is proposing. Clearly inreligionisation is not just one of the frameworks for interreligious communication, but for Tan it serves as the substructure—and the preferred option—for the entire program of communication at the frontiers of religions.

In this response, I begin by exploring how he uses the term "inreligionisation" in the context of the paper itself, offer some critique of the idea, arguing that this approach is not helpful to the Asian church, and conclude by suggesting a pathway for recasting his vision of interreligious communication around the ideas of the translatability of the gospel, drawing from the work of Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls.

> ## For Tan, inreligionisation serves as the substructure—and the preferred option—for the entire program of communication at the frontiers of religions.

The Inreligionisation Concept: An Overview

First, let me begin by saying that there are a number of interesting and helpful ideas presented in the valuable essay: the contextual frames for doing theology; his analysis of the communication challenges of the Asian church; the ineffectiveness encountered in the history of Christian mission to the Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu worlds; the factors regarding the function of Asian religion; the three missiological themes for communication frameworks; and the numerous thought-provoking

questions he raises throughout the presentation. I particularly appreciate that Dr. Tan's proposal for interreligious communication is addressing the critical questions he raises and is seeking answers to these questions with the explicit goal of making the good news of Jesus known and seeing people within these religious blocs bring their lives under the lordship of Jesus.

I wholeheartedly agree with his assessment that the Asian church needs to do a better job of communicating with the Asian religions they live among, and that further understanding requires more listening and an openness to learn from them. When Dr. Tan says, "the Asian church needs resources to understand these Asian religions," and that "this will require specialists from among these religious traditions," I say, "Amen!" The Asian church not only needs help "to discover meaningful ways to engage and witness," but this church "needs to learn how to receive insight and wisdom from these religious traditions so that the gospel can be incarnated within them" (8).

The lack of detail on this inreligionisation concept does not allow the reader enough guidance for how working "in," "within," and "amid" the religions is to be done.

Having said this, I think the "inreligionisation project" he proposes is not the most fruitful way to call the Asian church to the kind of interreligious communication he is advocating. I begin here with an assessment of some of the issues that appear in the paper itself, and then in the next section sketch briefly the reasons why I feel that the proposal is problematic for the Asian church.

I was surprised that the central construct of such a radical call to the existing Asian church—namely "inreligionisation"—was so underdeveloped in this paper. We meet the term in the first few lines of the paper where it is contrasted with inculturation, which is similarly not defined. Dr. Tan cites Bosch's reference to Pieris' notion of inreligionisation as an example of the need for work on the theology of religion.[2] We never actually get to hear the voice of the person who coined the term. There is no discussion of the history of the term and the work of Pieris, nor is there even a paper trail to any of his work other than the single Bosch citation. Following on the heels of this initial appearance of inreligionisation, Dr. Tan then interjects Phan's definition of "religionisation," explaining that some Asian Christians are attempting to believe in the possibility and even necessity of accepting doctrines and practices of other religions and in some way incorporating them

into their lives (10). The reader is left wondering about the precise relationship between Phan's "religionisation" and Pieris' "inreligionisation" and in what way the addition of the preposition "in" changes the concept.

The idea next appears as the first of Tan's three missional themes under the heading "Evangelicals and Inreligionisation." In arguing that mission needs to go beyond inculturation towards inreligionisation, he cites Bosch's reference to Pieris (1986) about the possibilities of a Hindu Christianity that goes beyond an Indian Christianity (10, endnote 20). Dr. Tan then expands further on the concept by citing some of his own work which indicates a more radical goal of seeing "Jesus confessed as Lord over every aspect of life, *including past religious cultures*" (italics mine) (10, endnote 18).

The most programmatic detail on what inreligionisation actually might look like in interreligious communication is expressed in a series of six questions. Dr. Tan poses these questions as part of the process whereby we "begin to meet religions and grapple with deeper issues of discipleship within those religious systems" (10). The questions address:

1. How can Christianity meet other living faiths in such a way that there will be a Hindu Christianity or Buddhist Christianity?

2. What is the theological value of other religions and how should religious plurality inform and challenge the development of new understandings of Christian witness among living faiths?

3. What is the relationship between the gospel, local culture, and non-Christian religions for those who are insiders?

4. Should it be—or would it be—possible for evangelical Christians to boldly and humbly move into new strategies of mission which included intentional discipleship amid non-Christian religions?

5. To what extent could Asian Christians be given the freedom of experimenting with religious devotional practices which were traditionally identified with non-Christian religions?

6. How can we do critical contextualisation Christo-centrically?

The lack of detail on this inreligionisation concept in the paper does not allow the reader enough information to imagine how working along these lines is then expressed in one's Christian faith and identity. Neither does it give any guidance for how working "in," "within," and "amid" the religions is to be done, and what is meant by these prepositions. While this particular paper was presented to a missions society with cross-cultural

workers being the primary audience, when he talks about "our Macedonian call," it is as an Asian leader addressing the Asian church. As one who is part of that Asian church, and no doubt aware of its broader ethos, it would have increased the usefulness of the paper to offer historical insight into the concepts. I would have preferred he problematize these concepts in order to find useful practices, rather than take on the whole program inherent in the work of Pieris.

A Critique of the Inreligionisation Concept

While I agree with Dr. Tan's assessment of the problem, I feel that interreligious dialogue framed as "inreligionisation" is not the most helpful route to pursue. It will not advance his goal of an Asian church communicating better with their non-Christian neighbors, nor their doing critical contextualization work. I briefly sketch here four main problem areas: this approach does not fit well with the lived experience of the participants in the potential dialogue; it is offensive to the sensibilities of much of the Asian church; Dr. Tan has taken an original framework that eschews evangelism and has bent it to fit an evangelical vision of mission that would be unacceptable to the originator; and finally, there is no New Testament evidence that the apostolic bearers of the good news endeavored to dialogue in this fashion as part of their mission praxis.

> Despite what is said about non-essentialist views of religion, those in the Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu worlds recognize there are local essentialisms that inform belief, practice, and commitment.

Recognizing Intuitive Essentialisms

The first big issue that jumped off the page in reading Dr. Tan's call to the Asian church, was that the proposal does not adequately take into consideration the daily lived experience of both the Asian religionist and the bulk of Asian Christians. Despite what is said about non-essentialist views of religion—and Pieris' claim that "in our Asian context, religion is life itself rather than a function of it,"[3]—those on the ground in the Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu worlds recognize there are local essentialisms that inform belief, practice, and commitment. These common essentialisms impact communication and relations between non-Christians and their Christian neighbors.[4]

Asian religionists have experiences with spiritual powers, and thus have an intuitive sense that some of these powers are mutually exclusive. They do not "get along." While scholars may cite the eclectic and transactional drawing upon practices from different religious traditions in everyday experience, there is also a strong underlying sense that to be a Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, or Christian actually entails commitment to things that cannot be glossed as "cultural." These realities have worldview functions that are "religious." For instance, how are we to understand when a Thai person is invited to a Christian church service, who then stands outside the building and never comes in, even though the Thai friend who invited him is in the gathering? For those familiar with the Thai setting, there are a number of sociocultural reasons that can create such fear. However, when asked why he did not come in, can we completely discount his explanation that as a Buddhist he felt there was something wrong about participating in another religion's gathering? The notion of multiple religious belonging does not fit well with the way Asians respond to these religious boundaries.

Asian protestations that religions are "all the same" and "teach us to be good" often have more to do with a social cosmetic that relieves a potentially stressful encounter than it does actual beliefs. When you scratch below the surface, there is something they will consider more "true" or "real." They are more likely to identify the religious other in terms of their own religious worldview roots. My own experience of living and interacting with Buddhists and Muslims for decades does not align with those who assert multiple religious belongings. I resonate more with Daniel Strange's comment on religious worldview:

> Given the systemic/organic totalitarian nature and function of worldview, there is simply no liminal space for the dual belonger to occupy which does not fatally compromise their two or more "belongings."[5]

My argument would be that eclectic religious practices are not evidence of "multiple belongings" as much as they reflect a religious worldview that can incorporate other powers into their system. (God and Jesus would be just two examples.) Thus, they do not see themselves as "belonging" to alternative religious systems, but rather draw upon another source of power while still remaining in the metaphysical big picture worldview of their birth religion system.

In trying to learn more about Pieris and his original concept of inreligionisation, I came across a helpful article by Devaka Premawardhana and a series of responses. It examines Pieris' view of multiple religious belonging and contrasts it to four other proponents of the idea. It is interesting that even Pieris

sees distinct differences in religious traditions that do not disappear. Premawardhana, commenting on Pieris' use of essentialist terms like religion, traditions, and identity, says:

> To the extent that he has used reified labels, he has revealed that, despite his professed distaste for intellectualism and academicism, he too is not averse to linguistic conventions indispensable for indexing where one stands in relation to others. Moreover, his terminological recognition of different religious traditions—Buddhism as distinct from Christianity—reflects his conviction that each is meaningfully different from others. He has even written, again in a more recent essay, of "the non-negotiable differences between Buddhism and Christianity."[6]

The idea of doing something *within* another religion is automatically going to raise all kinds of red flags for most Asian Christians.

At the academic and scholarly level, a comparative theological work[7] that seeks to operate from inside the perspective of the other religion may be possible, but it is much more difficult for everyday people who see "meaningful difference" between their different traditions to feel comfortable engaging in such an endeavor. Any proposal to help the Asian church communicate better with its non-Christian neighbors needs to appreciate the power of local essentialism if lay practitioners are going to be doing the actual interreligious communication.

The Unfeasibility of Mixing Allegiances

A second related point grows from the first. Dr. Tan's proposal underestimates Asian Christian identity as having been forged in contradistinction to the majority religion from which it has emerged. There is a strong sense, in both the person in the pew and church leadership, that a critical Christian distinctive is one's forsaking of idolatry and one's sole allegiance to Jesus Christ. Therefore, the idea of doing something *within* another religion is automatically going to raise all kinds of red flags for most Asian Christians. The spatial metaphor will cause many people to see this as an exercise that is fraught with opportunity for inappropriate mixing of allegiances. Phan himself recognizes this fact and indicates that it raises questions for the whole project:

> …even if multiple religious belonging is a fact of life in Asia and in Asian Christianity—a statement regularly and stridently rejected by a large number of Asian Christians themselves—it is still necessary to inquire if this is something theologically feasible and, if so, desirable.[8]

Bending the Original Concept

A third issue is that Dr. Tan has appropriated the inreligionisation framework in a way in which Pieris as the originator would disagree. Kenneth Fleming's summary of how Pieris views the program of inreligionisation gives insight as to what motivated this approach.[9] Fleming notes that Pieris parses the problem of a small Christian presence in Asia as the result of the metacosmic religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism subsuming the cosmic religions (Pieris' term for primal or traditionalist religion) before Christianity appeared.[10]

> The way forward for Christian mission, he therefore argued, is not in a forlorn attempt to woo Asians to Christianity, which still seems like a foreign import from the West to them, but to appreciate and work "within the soteriological perspectives of Asian religions."[11]

Fleming says that Pieris saw inculturation as attempting to "adopt and adapt appealing ideas from Asian religions," complaining that "merely taking attractive philosophical concepts from other religions—as Western theology did with Greek thought—without reference to the soteriological basis and religious life behind these amounts to 'theological vandalism.'"[12]

In Pieris' view of religion, as explained by Premawardhana,

> the idea of inserting "the Christian religion minus European culture" into an "Asian culture minus non-Christian religion" is untenable. Inculturation would therefore be wisely recast as "inreligionisation," Pieris's intriguing neologism that entails "developing a new Asian identity within the idiom and the ethos of another metacosmic religion such as Buddhism."[13]

Fleming interprets Pieris' inreligionisation approach as participation in the other's religious world to appreciate its own inner dynamics with the goal of dialogue being to "access the liberative core of the other religion."[14]

An extended quote from Pieris reveals how radically different his views are on the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus Christ:

> Let us disinfect our notions of baptism, nations, and disciples from the venomous zeal for proselytism. Did not Jesus criticize and even ridicule proselytism or conversion from one religion to another in Mt 23:15? Jesus' call was to change one's ways (metanoia, shub) and not to change one's religion. He invites all to abandon slavish dependence on creatures (idolatry) and to enjoy the freedom that comes from sole dependence on God, our Maternal Father. This beatitudinal spirituality of Jesus is, naturally, couched in a strongly theistic idiom, whereas Buddhists and Hindus, for instance, have a non-theistic version of it in alpecchatā and vairāgya. In either case, it is our rejection of every form of idolatry that constitutes conversion. Those who renounce the worship of creatures are his disciples. The Kingdom belongs to the Poor.[15]

By contrast, Dr. Tan has a clear goal in his advocacy of interreligious dialogue—to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ. It appears to me, however, that he has drawn upon Pieris' framework in a way that Pieris himself—and other Asian theologians who advocate dialogue as a move away from evangelism—would not find acceptable. Thus, Dr. Tan has had to bend another framework designed to be non-proselytizing to his own evangelical mission vision of the Lordship of Jesus Christ among all peoples.

There is no indication in the New Testament that there was any attempt on the part of those who took the gospel cross-culturally to work inside pagan religious systems.

The Lack of Biblical Precedent

Finally, and most compellingly for evangelicals, there is no indication in the New Testament that there was any attempt on the part of those who took the gospel cross-culturally to work inside pagan religious systems. Certainly, as Dean Flemming shows, there was contextual work being done, adaptations of terms, practices and forms being made, but nothing that would look like a Christianity tailored to one of the existing cults of Greco-Roman deities.[16] The apostolic call to repentance and to turn from idolatry was a call to faith in Jesus Christ. While this call is considered inappropriate by theologians like Pieris, there is a significant and growing number of Asian people, born into Asian religions, who have found new life and liberation in Jesus and who want to make Him known to their people.

I have explored here some reasons why I think that an "inreligionisation project" is not the best way to solve the problem of poor communication between the Asian church and their neighbors. This is not a framework that fits well with the ethos of an evangelical commitment to call people to faith in Jesus Christ. Yet the problem that Dr. Tan addresses is a reality and cannot be ignored. We must explore a framework for better communication and sensitivity to the religious other which emerges from our biblical texts, one that legitimates such an exploration on the part of the Asian church.

Alan Johnson has served for three decades in Buddhist Thailand. He is an associate professor of anthropology in the Intercultural Doctoral Studies program of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary.

Endnotes

1   Aloysius Pieris, S. J., "Inculturation in Non-Semitic Asia," *The Month*, no. 1420 (1986): 83. In Dr. Tan's paper, this citation from Pieris is noted as being in David J. Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 9th ed., vol. 16, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991): 478 citing Pieris, 83.

2   David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 477–78.

3   Aloysius Pieris, S. J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, *Faith Meets Faith Series* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 90.

4   N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Vol. 1 in the series *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), xiv–xv. N. T. Wright makes a similar observation when he challenges the assumption that all monotheists believe in the same god. He goes on to say,

> It may or may not be true that any worship of any god is translated by some mysterious grace into worship of one god who actually exists, and who happens to be the only god. That is believed by some students of religion. It is not, however, believed by very many practitioners of the mainline monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) or the non-monotheistic ones (Hinduism, Buddhism, and their cognates).

5   Daniel Strange, "'There Can Be Only One': The Impossibility and Idolatry of 'Dual Belonging,'" in *Buddhist–Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*, ed. Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson (London: Routledge, 2016), 74.

6   Devaka Premawardhana, "The Unremarkable Hybrid: Aloysius Pieris and the Redundancy of Multiple Religious Belonging," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46, 1 (2011). https://www.academia.edu/753846/The_Unremarkable_Hybrid_Aloysius_Pieris_and_the_Redundancy_of_Multiple_Religious_Belonging.

7   For an excellent example of a careful, comparative theological work see Amos Yong, *Pneumatology and the Christian–Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way?* Studies in Systematic Theology (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

8   Peter C. Phan, "Responses to Devaka Premawardhana's 'The Unremarkable Hybrid: Aloysius Pieris and the Redundancy of Multiple Religious Belonging,'" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2011).

9   In trying to track down the paper trail on the inreligionisation concept, I was unable to find the Pieris article that Bosch cites, but I did find digital copies of some of Pieris' other work, and a doctoral thesis by Kenneth Fleming examining the theologies of three Asian theologians, one of whom was Pieris. See Kenneth Fleming, "Asian Christian Theologians in Dialogue with Buddhism: A Study of the Writings of Kosuke Koyama, Choan-Seng Song, and Aloysius Pieris" (PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2000).

10   Fleming, "Asian Christian Theologians," 184.

11   Fleming, 184.

12   Fleming, 184.

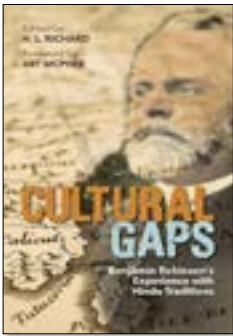13   Premawardhana, "The Unremarkable Hybrid."

14   Fleming, 184.

15   Aloysius Pieris, S. J., "Ecumenism in the Churches and the Unfinished Agenda of the Holy Spirit," *Spiritus* 3 (2003): 65.

16   Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IV Press Academic).

References
Same as the References after Johnson Part II, see page 34.

Further Resources on the Hermeneutical Process

Cultural Gaps: Benjamin Robinson's Experience with Hindu Traditions

edited by H. L. Richard | William Carey Publishing: Littleton, CO, 2020

Differences between Hindu and Christian traditions account for an uneven reception of the gospel of Christ among Hindu peoples, and these difference call for a deeper understanding of intercultural hermeneutics. In *Cultural Gaps*, H. L. Richard brings a forgotten nineteenth-century pioneer back into this conversation by reviving his memoir, with a new forward, extensive footnotes, and a new introduction. Robinson's experiences in south India in the 1880's remain relevant, particularly his attempts at authentic interreligious encounter and his struggle to adequately integrate into the Hindu context.

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=benjamin+robinson+Cultural+gaps&i=stripbooks&crid=151ZBRLTP2FOI&sprefix=benjamin+robinson+cultural+gaps%2Cstripbooks%2C64&ref=nb_sb_noss
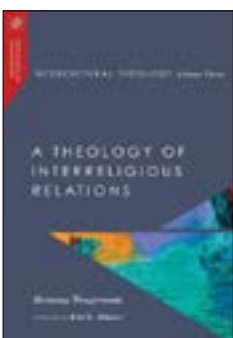
Intercultural Hermeneutics (Vol. 1, Intercultural Theology)

by Henning Wrogemann | IVP Academic, 2016

In Henning Wrogemann's first of three volumes on intercultural theology, this leading missiologist of religion brings together religious studies, missiology, social science research and Christian theology in a fresh investigation of what it means to understand another cultural context. As one who represents the emergent German emphasis on intercultural hermeneutics, the author surveys different hermeneutical theories and concepts of culture as he addresses the difficult questions of syncretism, inculturation and identity. This is a textbook for understanding the hermeneutics underlying the development of Christian diversity across time and space.

https://www.amazon.com/Intercultural-Theology-Hermeneutics-Missiological-Engagements/dp/083085097X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1DER0KNJXFEUL&keywords=Intercultural+Hermeneutics+%28Vol.+1%2C+Intercultural+Theology%29&qid=1663579153&sprefix=intercultural+hermeneutics+vol.+1%2C+intercultural+theology+%2Caps%2C88&sr=8-1

A Theology of Interreligious Relations (Vol 3, Intercultural Theology)

by Henning Wrogemann | IVP Academic, 2019

In this third volume of his three-volume Intercultural Theology, Henning Wrogemann proposes that we need to go beyond currently trending theologies of mission to formulate both a *theory of interreligious relations* and a related but methodologically independent *theology of interreligious relations.* Amidst the ongoing religious pluralization in societies that were once more religiously homogenous, the author addresses the fallacies of different theology-of-religion models and identifies the most pertinent factors at play when those from different cultural and religious traditions come in contact in real-life situations. Wrogemann provides a masterful scope to the study of interreligious relations.

https://www.amazon.com/Intercultural-Theology-Three-Interreligious-Missiological-ebook/dp/B07MTS6X25/ref=sr_1_4?crid=3EWCFB38UVB0B&keywords=henning+Wrogeman&qid=1653675802&s=books&sprefix=henning+wrogemann%2Cstripbooks%2C77&sr=1-4

Presentation Responses

Recasting Interreligious Communication Around the Notion of Translation: A Response to Kang-San Tan (Part II)

by Alan R. Johnson

My recent opportunity to engage Dr. Kang-San Tan's presentation on the subject of "inreligionisation" has provoked further reflection. The interreligious challenge that exists today for the Asian church demands we welcome and entertain new modes of communication. While I do not join Dr. Tan in pursuing interreligious dialogue in an inreligionisation mode, it does pose a question: What might be the alternative ways to improve the relationship between the Asian church and the non-Christian cultures in which it finds itself?

Dr. Tan wants to get the players at the frontiers of religions communicating with each other. We can only speculate on the variety of possible motives or influences that would provide an impetus for Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus to engage in interreligious dialogue with their Christian neighbors. However, we do know that on the Christian side of this dialogue there is a significant amount of biblical, theological, and historical material that shapes engagement with neighbors of other religions. Fresh material is also emerging, especially on the processes of local appropriation happening in world Christianity.[1]

> Religious frontiers by their very nature are spaces that require translation to create understanding between participants who hold vastly different conceptual universes.

Broadly, my argument here is that the impetus to engage "the religious other" is inherent in biblical faith and the redemptive trajectory of Scripture. If this is true, then the breakdown in communication Dr. Tan notes is best approached by seeking to be more faithful to our own texts and mission history. It is getting inside and listening to our own story first that will open the church to constructive relations and dialogue with our non-Christian neighbors. The well-documented critiques of attitudes and practices in the modern missionary

movement[2] and the resulting foreign forms of faith that characterize much of the Asian church are best tackled by reinvigorating our work from biblical texts and theological work. How can an Asian church that has emphasized separation from its non-Christian past become one of the players at the table of interreligious dialogue? This church will be more open to a call to the task of critical contextualization and to dialogue with the non-Christian if they understand this call as coming from the Bible that they hold dear.

Religious frontiers by their very nature are spaces that require translation to create understanding between participants who hold vastly different conceptual universes. This is significant and more hopeful, for as Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and other missiologists remind us, translatability is at the very heart of the gospel. This means that rather than distancing ourselves from the religious other—or demonizing them—Christians come into any social and religious setting knowing that by the power of the Spirit working through his people, Jesus is fully able to be translated into, understood by, and experienced in that social system.

For Walls, the Christian faith is essentially vernacular in nature, and rests

> on a massive act of translation, the Word made flesh, God translated into a specific segment of social reality as Christ is received there. Christian faith must go on being translated, must continuously enter into vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades.[3]

In the incarnation of Jesus, "Divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language."[4]

For Sanneh:

> It seems to be part of the earliest record we possess that the disciples came to a clear and firm position regarding the translatability of the gospel, with a commitment to the pluralist merit of culture within God's universal purpose.[5]

The divine initiative in the Word becoming flesh is carried on by the Spirit working through God's people in an ongoing process of translation in word and deed. This translation shows what it means to follow Jesus as Lord such that non-Christian neighbors can see him and encounter him. It speaks to the local church level, to a fellowship of believers rooted in a specific religious community, that calls for "the acts of cultural translation by which the Christians of any community make their faith substantial within that community."[6]

My proposal is that a recasting of interreligious communication as flowing from Jesus—the living Word who became flesh and dwelt among us—will then provide the Asian church with a theological basis for communication at their religious frontiers. It will establish this act of translation as a legitimate part of their calling as witnesses of all God has done in Jesus.

Sketching a Translation Approach

What would it look like if the existing Asian church took an intentional "translation" approach—one generated from biblical texts, missional theology, and mission history—when relating within their Buddhist, Muslim, or Hindu settings? What follows is a brief sketch of some of the perspectives that could be drawn upon to help local churches and their leaders feel biblically legitimate in considering new ways of relating to their non-Christian society.

Both Dr. Tan and I are speaking in broad strokes when assessing the Asian church. While a contrary example could be offered for any particular statement we make, in general it is accurate to say that there is a social and conceptual distancing from the local religion and a corresponding lack of engagement by the church in Asia. The sharing of the good news can often be reduced to an invitation to cross the divide and come into the Christian place of worship, or in a worst-case scenario, it degenerates into an unpleasant encounter where the non-Christian is told how wrong his religious beliefs are.

Changing the way existing church movements conceive and practice their faith is not something that will happen by simply telling people to change or giving them something to read. Coming to see that the Bible legitimates learning from our non-Christian neighbor is best accomplished over time and in dialogue with a friend who walks with them on a journey of discovery in the Scriptures as they personally interact with those of another religion.

The material that follows is illustrative and offers tools which can be drawn upon by those who want to come alongside and be a friend in this journey of discovery.

1. The Ethos of the Translation Approach: Humbly Bearing Witness

The divine initiative in the incarnation of Jesus as an "act of translation" is the foundation of the Christian impetus to reach out to the non-Christian neighbor. Chris Wright's detailed walk-through biblical monotheism[7] reminds us that the living God wills to be known throughout his whole creation as Creator, Ruler, Judge, and Savior[8] and that it is "through Jesus that God will be known to the nations. And in knowing Jesus, they will know the living God."[9]

God's initiative in this act of translation has four profound implications for the church living among its non-Christian neighbors. First, the living God who loves the world and has designated his people to be his witnesses initiated the translation process. He did not wait for humans to seek him out but moved to make himself known. This means that the church is always turned to the world to make Jesus understood. Second, translation also means that we have to intimately understand the language and worldview of the receptor, which puts the church constantly in the position of learning. Third, we enter this dialogue to bear witness. As Newbigin reminds us, "Christians go to meet their neighbor of another religion on the basis of their commitment to Jesus Christ."[10] We do this knowing that our partners in the dialogue also have a faith that "provides the basis of his or her own understanding of the totality of experience and, therefore, the criterion by which other ways of understanding, including that of the Christian, are judged."[11] Finally, the translation process should remind us that there are always new insights gained in new contexts, and that our understanding of God's truth is never complete.

> The divine initiative in the incarnation of Jesus as an "act of translation" is the foundation of the Christian impetus to reach out to the non-Christian neighbor.

2. Learning to Discern between Mission as Diffusion and Mission as Translation

Sanneh's observation that there are two ways of gospel transmission, mission as *diffusion* and mission as *translation*, provides a frame for parsing the problems of interreligious communication that Dr. Tan observes, and I believe it provides a way forward. With mission as diffusion, the missionary culture becomes the inseparable carrier of the mission, and "religion expands from its initial cultural base and is implanted in other societies primarily as a matter of cultural identity."[12] Alternatively, mission as translation makes the recipient culture "the true and final locus of proclamation, so that the religion arrives without the presumption of cultural rejection."[13]

Analyzing the poor communication of the Asian church through the lens of diffusion provides helpful perspectives on two key problems in gospel transmission that Dr. Tan has identified in his paper. First, the experience of a diffusion process by the recipients of the gospel explains the ongoing perception that Christianity is the faith of the Western foreigner. Whether imposed or unconsciously imported, gospel transmission as diffusion fossilizes the message, its framing, and its forms in the life of God's people with the *version* of faith from the sending culture.[14]

Second, this diffusion also sheds light on why the Asian church has struggled so much in connecting and interacting sensitively with the non-Christians of their own societies. The church's ongoing diffusion of a cultural identity which was originally passed on from the Western message bearers becomes a barrier to an effective interreligious dialogue. Terry Muck sees this dialogue as a "sustained conversation among parties not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect contradiction and mutual exclusions among their various ways of thinking."[15] In diffusion this dialogue is ignored, and the church uncritically accepts and reproduces both the theology and attitudes from the original missionary culture.

In my experience, Christians hold their particular expressions of the Christian faith as the right way, not as one of many ways to follow Jesus. These expressions, a blend of the Bible and their local culture, are inextricably woven together into beliefs and practices. As a shorthand for referencing these configurations, I find it useful to talk about *versions* or *modes* of faith. It is natural for people who come to faith in a local setting, who are then socialized into that version of faith, to assume that what they believe and how they practice their faith is based on the Bible. Their version of the faith is dear to them and when others come to faith it is natural for them to think that these people should follow Jesus the way they do. They rarely interrogate the origins or the cultural nature of the forms their version of faith employs. They simply understand them to be mandated by the Bible.

When we learn that our version of faith is not the *only* version of faith, but one that is historically and culturally conditioned, it creates space to allow others to respond to Jesus in ways that are meaningful to them. We don't require them to enter our version. The Asian church wants its non-Christian neighbors to join them in their version of faith—which seems foreign to these unbelievers. When the Asian church can rejoice in its version of faith and at the same time long for and create opportunity for non-Christian neighbors to develop a different version of faith, interreligious communication will be strengthened. For those moved by the Spirit to respond, new communities of faith will be formed.

3. Tools for Thinking about the Bible and Human Culture

The translation process cannot begin until people see that the Bible itself actually reveals that they can use local cultural forms to convey biblical truth. The biblical materials not only give us a final *product* but also model the *process* of people doing theology in context—engaging cultures and giving fresh articulations of the gospel.[16] I have found it helpful in working with local Christians to use the metaphor of a toolkit for increasing the ways in which we see how God's people relate to local culture. Most people have only one tool in their toolkit to deal with gospel and culture; they tend to reject whatever is local because it is tainted by religion. The following material is not an exhaustive list, but it provides key starting points for any discussion on the relationship of God and his people to human culture.

a). God Communicates through a Human Symbolic System

Hesselgrave and Rommen point out that when we come to Gen. 1:27–28 where God blesses and speaks to humans created in his image "contextualization, culture, and theology all have a simultaneous beginning…the silence was broken by the voice of God. Communication commenced between God and man."[17] This is a very profound point: the living God was communicating with humans in a human symbolic system, and not a divine one. There is no single heavenly language by which He communicates with humans, but instead every human language

is capable of being the vehicle through which God communicates about himself to us. We always meet God through the mediation of human symbolic systems of language.

There are many implications for this reality, but primarily it can help people think about the Bible and human culture. It becomes natural to expect different versions of faith as people in different cultural settings work out what it means to live and obey God.

b). God Communicates through Common Cultural Forms

When we come to the Old Testament, we see a multitude of ways in which God communicates with his people through commonly known cultural forms in the Ancient Near Eastern world. Brian Petersen's look at Old Testament precursors in the Pauline mission can help people appreciate the use of local cultural forms in the story of God's people.[18]

> Most people have only one tool in their toolkit to deal with gospel and culture; they tend to reject whatever is local because it is tainted by religion.

c). God Expects Cultural Diversity.

I have already mentioned Dean Flemming's careful work in providing biblical material that illustrates "how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious and historical setting."[19] Special attention needs to be paid to Acts 10 with Peter's interaction with Cornelius and Acts 15 with its rejection of the need for proselyte conversion. Newbigin reminds us that:

> We often speak of this as the conversion of Cornelius, but it was equally the conversion of Peter… It is true that Cornelius was converted, but it is also true that "Christianity" was changed. One decisive step was taken on the long road from the incarnation of the Word of God as a Jew of first-century Palestine to the summing up of all things in him.[20]

In the apostolic council of Acts 15, Walls reminds us that the apostles and elders "agreed that followers of Jesus the Messiah, even if not ethnic Jews, had indeed entered Israel. They did not need the traditional signs of Jewish religious culture, circumcision and Torah-keeping."[21] The critical decision that sees followers of Jesus as converts and not proselytes[22] "marked the church's first critical departure from Jewish tradition and experience. It built cultural diversity into the church forever."[23]

What does all of this mean for local Christians living among non-Christian religions who fear that interacting with local culture and religion will in some way be an inappropriate mixing of Christian faith with a non-Christian one? This biblical material indicates that God uses "things cultural"—meaning those shared symbolic systems that we utilize

to navigate social life—to communicate truth. By extension this means that every human language and social system can serve as a conduit for God's truth. This then helps us to see that our own version of faith and the forms we employ to worship and serve God are of necessity culturally embedded. Even more importantly, if the living God used local culture to communicate truth about himself, that opens up the possibilities for us to find local forms that can adequately carry God's truth to people.

4. Respect and Openness to Learn from Neighbors of Other Faiths

In the diffusion process of gospel transmission, the sending culture provides the ways to believe and practice following Jesus which were developed in its own sociocultural setting. The translation process builds upon the old and works with what is present in local culture, turning it toward Christ.

Walls, in an essay on the missionary movement and Africa observes:

> …Christianity was first accepted in terms of traditional worldview and in relation to traditional goals. It is impossible for any of us to take in a new idea except in terms of an idea we already have.[24]

Similarly, Sanneh points out:

> In the classical world, mission subsisted on the signs of vitality in ancient life and reconstructed from the old materials an achievement that simultaneously advanced the Christian cause and revitalized the best in the old.[25]

Walls sees this translation process as "less about content than about direction. It involves turning the whole personality with its social, cultural, and religious inheritance toward Christ, opening it up to him. It is about turning what is already there."[26]

The incarnation of Jesus and the apostolic example of seeing new Christ followers can open the Asian church to a profound missiological insight—that it is not required to reject everything in the local culture. The local cultural system, which includes religion, can be drawn upon to express Jesus to their social setting. Dialogue, relationship, and learning are inherent in the translation process. The old cultural inheritance is the grist from which a new life under the Lordship of Jesus is built. Such an understanding legitimates listening and learning, seeking understanding in order that communicating Christ in word and deed may be understood. It also demands a completely different way of relating to our non-Christian neighbors. Instead of rejection, separation, and condemnation, God's people seek to imitate Jesus—the one who came into our world—by entering the world of their neighbor.

At a methodological level, believers need to be exposed to the apostolic example of gospel sharing in Acts and the Pauline letters. The NT record of evangelism challenges us by holding practices and attitudes together that have often been seen as mutually exclusive. The apostolic impulse to proclaim Jesus as the way of salvation for all peoples, in Newbigin's words, "begins with a kind of explosion of joy. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed. It must be told."[27] The news we proclaim is centered in what God has done in Jesus: "He is the Way, the Truth and the Life," (John 14:6); "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12); and this good news "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

> ## Dialogue, relationship, and learning are inherent in the translation process. The old cultural inheritance is the grist from which a new life under the Lordship of Jesus is built.

Having said this, as we read the record of bold proclamation and the exhortation of apostles to these new churches there is no evidence that this was carried out with a militant triumphalism, cultural arrogance, a coercive approach, or by demeaning non-Christians and their cultures. While it is true, as Chris Wright notes, that Christians in different eras have indeed been infected with these viruses, he reminds us that mission flows "from the roots of our faith in Old Testament Israel and their belief in the God, the only true and living God, whose mission of love for the world had led to the election of Israel and the sending of the church."[28] When Christians through the ages have conducted themselves in this way—with arrogance and a self-righteous superiority—they are not being faithful to their own texts.

It is also important to note that the NT's critical stance toward idolatry and the work of Satan in blinding unbelievers does not translate methodologically into mission that condemns or demonizes the other. Paul's reminder to the people in Lystra about the kindness of God in bountiful provision (Acts 14:17–18), his familiarity and use of Greek poets in Acts 17, his concern to be all things to all people (I Cor. 9:19–23) and to please others and seek the good of many "so that they may be saved" (I Cor 10:33), his reminder to Timothy that the servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be kind and gently instruct (II Tim. 2:24–25), Peter's instruction to give reason for our hope with gentleness, respect, and a clear conscience, and the frequent exhortations in the NT letters to live good and honorable lives before their non-Christian family and neighbors, are unambiguous guidance to shape our encounter with non-Christians in a respectful manner.

Beyond examples and instructions in specific texts that show a respectful, humble, and learning attitude towards the non-Christian, there are theological resources from the Bible that shape

our encounter with religions as well. Dr. Tan broaches this in his communication framework on inreligionisation when he looks briefly at Trinitarian theology and points out that there are many evangelical theologians who do not take a pluralist position, but who see God's Spirit at work in all of human culture, and that includes religious culture (9). Unfortunately, he does not expand on these ideas and unpack how this biblical data relates to working on the inreligionisation project. In my view, this is a strategic error, for the Asian church needs biblical and theological tools to help them see how God's work in human cultures legitimates their learning and listening from non-Christians rather than only having rejection as their single tool.

What begins as an act of translation becomes a discovery of a new dimension of Jesus (Newbigin)

As examples here, I draw from Gerald McDermott and Lesslie Newbigin who bring helpful perspectives that can demonstrate to Asian Christians that a learning stance toward the religious other is biblically modeled. McDermott argues that the translation process inherent in the Christian faith means that God chooses to "unfold his truth gradually through time" and that he has used "other religious and philosophical systems to help unfold and interpret his reality."[29] He says that there is abundant evidence in the history of redemption that "God redeems not only individuals and nations but the wisdom of the nations."[30] He illustrates this borrowing, baptizing, and reconfiguring from other faith traditions "into Christ by relating them to, and reconfiguring them in, the larger vision of God's revelation in Christ" from the use of Mesopotamian, Persian, and Hellenistic practices and thought which we see across the entire span of the OT and the NT.[31] He concludes that while:

> . . . there is no new revelation behind or beyond the Triune God, there is, nevertheless, new development in the history of revelation as Christ makes himself more fully known by the progressive illumination of the Holy Spirit. What begins as an act of translation becomes a discovery of a new dimension of Jesus Christ. The attempt to transmit faith in Christ across linguistic and religious frontiers reveals that the Spirit of Jesus Christ has unveiled meaning and significance never known before. In this unveiling, there are new glimpses of the Trinity's glory.[32]

Newbigin draws on John 1:1–5 where Jesus is the light that gives light to every person,

> to affirm that the presence and work of Jesus are not confined within the area where he is acknowledged. John also says, in the same breath, that the light shines in the darkness

and that the darkness has not mastered it…the light shines in the darkness to the uttermost; this is not the point at which light stops and darkness begins.[33]

Newbigin draws a powerful implication from this text which can shape the attitude of the Asian church toward their non-Christian neighbors. Our confession of Jesus as Lord does not involve the denial of the reality of God's work in the lives of those outside the church— "it ought to involve an eager expectation of, a looking for, and a rejoicing in the evidence of that work."[34] Newbigin provides the needed balance for emphasis on God's work among non-Christians by acknowledging the dark side of the human project. He recognizes "our capacity to take the good gifts of God and make them into an instrument to cut ourselves off from God, to establish our independence from God."[35] But Newbigin's theological underpinning of God as the Father of all, and Jesus as the light that shines in the darkness, leads to an eagerness to listen, learn, and receive even what is new and strange; in our meeting with those of other faiths "we are learning to share in our common patrimony as human beings made by the one God in his own image."[36]

This quick assembly of biblical texts and theological work indicates that respect, humility, and openness to learning from non-Christians and their religions is something generated from the Bible itself. Such a position does not mean we must forsake the clear proclamation of Jesus as Savior and Lord. This attitudinal orientation is foundational for evangelicals who hold to the uniqueness of Jesus and salvation in him. Our sharing of good news does not have to be accompanied by a negative attitude towards the cultural inheritance of the non-Christian, nor should it make dialogue with the non-Christian impossible.[37]

5. Critical Contextualization: Cultural Acts of Translation that Make Jesus Real

Dr. Tan has suggested that the critical contextualization process as developed by Paul Hiebert would be the way to develop his five frameworks for interreligious communication. My observation is that intentional contextual processes are not normally undertaken by local church movements. They do not see the need since they understand their "version" as the right way to follow Jesus. Neither do they feel that the Scriptures legitimate their exploration of local culture—and particularly local religion.

Contextualization is often mistaken as the work of the cross-cultural worker who needs to try and figure out how to make Jesus understandable in a new setting. (This, of course, is absolutely essential for cultures with no existing fellowships of believers.) Rarely is contextualization viewed as the communal work of existing church movements and non-Christians in their society. It is they who need to go back and interrogate the forms of their version of faith, to critically assess whether these

forms are helping them fulfill biblical functions in their setting. Thinking in terms of "mission as translation" makes Hiebert's rubric a perfect vehicle for a communal dialogue. It encourages the existing church and the non-Christian to examine both scripture and culture to find ways to communicate Jesus clearly.

> The critical contextualization process does not require the church to go "in" the other religion, nor should the goal be the development of "inreligionisation communities."

The critical contextualization process does not require the church to go "in" the other religion, nor should the goal be the development of "inreligionisation communities." Rather, the aim is a church that has listened deeply, learned from their non-Christian neighbors, and wrestled with Scripture, both as a faith community and with their non-Christian neighbors. This is the critical contextualization process in which the church finds ways that express Jesus in cultural idioms, attitudes, dispositions, and practices that allow the non-Christian to see and experience him.

Conclusion

Helping the Asian church to see that the impetus to engage and learn from the non-Christian world around them stems from their own scriptures, and legitimates this process, will be a crucial step in creating understanding and ownership that will lead to actual change in the practices by which they relate to their societies. These historical, biblical, and theological materials can help local Christians frame their relationship with non-Christian neighbors and their religions in ways that will lead to the better communication that Dr. Tan is seeking without feeling that they have to back away from their commitment to proclaiming the good news of Jesus or having to exist inside another religion.

Dr. Tan has helped us all by highlighting the problem of poor communication and relationship between the Asian church and the Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu societies within which they find themselves. He challenges the Asian church to address the reality that they are perceived as followers of a Western and foreign religion. I have suggested that his proposal of pursuing interreligious dialogue through an inreligionisation approach is problematic for much of the Asian church. In my view, a mission-as-translation approach rooted in the incarnation of Jesus will find much greater acceptance in an Asian church that holds to the authority of the Scriptures and a commitment to proclaiming the good news about Jesus. A translation approach can provide perspectives and tools rooted in the Scriptures that

frees the church to engage their non-Christian neighbors. They can enter a communal process of critical contextualization that will lead to a social connectedness and loving relationships with family and community for the sake of the gospel. **IJFM**

Alan Johnson has served for three decades in Buddhist Thailand. He is an associate professor of anthropology in the Intercultural Doctoral Studies program of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary.

Endnotes

[1] John G. Flett, *Apostolicity: The Ecumenical Question in World Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 285.

[2] Kenneth Fleming, "Asian Christian Theologians in Dialogue with Buddhism: A Study of the Writings of Kosuke Koyama, Choan-Seng Song, and Aloysius Pieris" (PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2000), 33–34, 45–46; Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

[3] Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 29.

[4] Andrew F. Walls, The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 27.

[5] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 1.

[6] Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 13.

[7] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grover: IVP Academic, 2006), 75–135.

[8] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 127.

[9] Wright, 122–123.

[10] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 168.

[11] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 169.

[12] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 29.

[13] Sanneh, 29.

[14] Sanneh, 36.

[15] Terry C. Muck, "A Theology of Interreligious Relations," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 4 (2020): 323.

[16] Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 296.

[17] David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 28.

[18] Brian K. Petersen, "A Brief Investigation of Old Testament Precursors to the Pauline Missiological Model of Cultural Adaptation," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24, no. 3 (2007).

[19] Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 13–14.

[20] Newbigin, 182.

[21] Andrew F. Walls, "Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, no. 1 (2004): 4.

22 It is important to clarify here that Walls is using the term convert in a specific and technical sense and not in the way the term is used in conventional speech. English language dictionaries will often make "convert" and "proselyte" synonyms. In addition to this, in some parts of the world local people understand "convert" and "conversion" in terms of communal change. Thus, a person who converts to Jesus is leaving their birth community and becoming a part of Christendom with all of the negative connotations that this carries in much of the majority world. Walls is using the term convert in juxtaposition to Israel's missionary tradition "whereby Gentile proselytes were welcomed to the fold of Israel" by males taking circumcision and taking on the lifestyle of Torah-keeping, devout, observant Jewish believers ("Converts or Proselytes?", 5). To capture the impact of the Acts 15 decision to not have Gentiles live as Torah-keeping Jews, Walls uses the term "convert" not as communal change but rather to remain in community and to bring Hellenistic social, family, and intellectual life under the influence of Jesus as Lord. He unpacks what he means by calling these Greek "converts" in this way:

> It was their calling to open up the ways of thinking, speaking, and acting characteristic of Hellenistic society in the Roman East Mediterranean to the influence of Christ. Those ways needed to be turned to him—converted, in fact—until he was enfleshed there, as securely at home in the Hellenistic East Mediterranean as he had been in Jewish Palestine. ("Converts or Proselytes?", 6)

He goes on to say,

> Converts have to be constantly, relentlessly turning their ways of thinking, their education and training, their ways of working and doing things toward Christ. They must think Christ into the patterns of thought they have inherited, into their networks of relationship and their processes for making decisions. ("Converts or Proselytes?", 6–7)

In this sense, to convert is not to join an existing foreign Christendom culture, but to live within their culture and work to bring all its aspects toward obedience to Jesus.

23 Walls, "Converts or Proselytes?", 5.

24 Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith,* 90.

25 Sanneh, 26.

26 Walls, "Converts or Proselytes?", 6.

27 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

28 Wright, 134.

29 Gerald R. McDermott, "What If Paul Had Been from China? Reflection on the Possibility of Revelation in Non-Christian Religions," in *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions,* ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21.

30 McDermott, "What If Paul Had Been from China?", 22.

31 McDermott, 22.

32 McDermott, 25.

33 Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission,* 174.

34 Newbigin, *The Open Secret,* 175.

35 Newbigin, 176.

36 Newbigin, 183.

37 It is interesting to me that writers like Bosch, (1990, 483–489), Newbigin (1995, 160–189), and Yong (2001, 57–58) who have very nuanced and sophisticated ways of looking at interreligious dialogue do not see it in any way as being incompatible with evangelism.

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