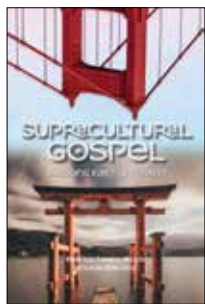


Books and Missiology

Supracultural Gospel: Bridging East and West, by Mary Lou Codman-Wilson with Alex (Qin) Zhou (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2022), x + 224 pp.

—Reviewed by Andy Bettencourt



Today the missiological spotlight has fallen on the drama of global migrations, with over 200 million people displaced and in transition from their homelands. This phenomenon is often referenced as one grand homogeneous narrative, but we're all quite aware that the individual stories, the trauma, the wrenching displacement of lives

represent very different experiences. We can persist in believing this broad and varied demographic shares a common vulnerability to the claims of the gospel—but, again, isn't this a rather dubious assumption of homogeneity. Perhaps truer is that in every migratory narrative the gospel will have to bridge the two worlds of this diaspora. In the recent book *Supracultural Gospel*, the authors Codman-Wilson and Zhou want to focus our attention on how one can bridge the gospel in one particular diaspora between East and West.

While some readers may question the exact focus of this text and its primary audience, it's clear that the *Supracultural Gospel* attempts to enable Asian internationals and immigrants to thrive in their Christian life back in their home country (7). The authors also hope to “provide helpful contextual tools for those who reach out to and disciple Asian internationals while they are in the West” (7). In both cases, the authors want to explore how to think outside the box of the gospel in the West and East, and they propose a supracultural gospel that can be contextually suitable in both cultures (14). This goal is admirable, and a handful of Western and Eastern authors are enlisted into a conversation about how to communicate the gospel in both contexts.

The authors first compare the Western “boxes” of the gospel with Eastern “boxes,” both of which restrict the gospel (17–40). The four major Western boxes include Western captivity of the gospel, individualism/materialism, “Christianity Lite,” and

the prosperity gospel (19), whereas the Chinese boxes include persecution, cultural resistance, viewing Christianity as an outsider religion, the prosperity gospel, and collectivism/realism (29–34). Interestingly, Zhou includes boxes from within the Chinese church as well as the broader Chinese culture. Within the Chinese church:

Church members—both new converts and longtime believers continue to draw parallels between commercial wealth and Christian faith . . . among Christians in rural China, a major reason for people to convert to Christianity is the benefit of being healed and protected by Jesus. The claim that belief in Jesus can cure illness is a popular one and has a deep root in rural believers' hearts. Yet some rural believers practice their realistic faith in an unrealistic way. They refuse to take medical treatments for illness and pray instead for God's healing. Such rural believers came to faith when their illnesses were healed after praying, but they would also question God if the illnesses lasted longer. (32, 33–34)

Thus, Zhou's criticism is equally leveled at tension points within the broader Chinese culture as well as the Chinese church.

The Japanese and Thai boxes include *wa* (the value of harmony or living together without tension), *jyoushiki* (adhering to the common sense or assumed standard), *gimu* (obligation to reciprocate received kindnesses), and more generally the dominance of Asian values that affect Christian witness (35–38).

For the Thai, harmony is a key issue particularly when there are significant relationships between Christians and Buddhists. All the Thai informants in the research expressed the concern that dialogical discussion would cause arguments and break relationships. This same issue is dominant in Japan. (38–39)

One wonders here if the gospel is being adequately communicated to Thai and Japanese people, since these boxes strike most readers as rather positive. Perhaps there is need for further exploration on how dialogue is conducted in Japanese and Thai contexts, especially amidst differences. Among the reasons for relational tension quoted in the text are philosophical differences, religious differences, inability to converse, inability to participate in traditions and practices, and inability to carry on family traditions (39–40). These are indeed weightier matters in Asian cultures as they involve connection to the family, community, and culture and can unintentionally communicate one's desire to leave the family, culture, community, and relationships behind due to religious and philosophical commitments.

Andy Bettencourt (M.Div., Fuller Seminary) serves in the Winter Launch Lab (<https://www.winterlaunchlab.org/>) and works alongside workers, agencies and networks in discerning innovative ways forward on the frontiers of mission. He is passionate about interfaith dialogue and a mutually enriching discipleship that unpacks each person's identity and life experience alongside the Scriptures.

The authors are challenged by the width of their categories and the limited space to dialogue across these cultures. For instance, the prosperity gospel shows up as a challenge in both the Western and Chinese boxes. Also, combining collectivism/realism and individualism/materialism without delving into the uniqueness of these terms seems inadequate. In general, the approach of cultural boxes also commits a common Western mistake of essentializing and categorizing elements of culture rather than presenting them as embodied and interconnected aspects of a given culture. These are helpful values to discuss, but their limited presentation and framing as boxes prevents the deep engagement needed to make sense of another culture and adequately proclaim the gospel in that context.

Part three of the book attempts to explain the core of the supracultural gospel (44). Salvation's unconditional love is centered through the cross, God's care for his people, and a transformed life (48–53). The authors then attempt to reframe sin by focusing on Jesus's own shame before and during his crucifixion (58–61). The authors acknowledge the difficulty of communicating the concept of grace, so they instead use brokenness, honor, and restoration as lenses for understanding grace in an Asian context (63–69). The authors note that all those who come to faith in Christ need to live out their Christian lives connected to Christ's body, and that believers need to ask for God's help and possibly even start a small group if they cannot find a fellowship to join (83, 89). Followers of Jesus are then called to live out God's mission in the world out of obedience, the reality of people's lostness, a sense of integrity, and for God's glory (94–97).

The authors acknowledge the difficulty of communicating the concept of grace, so instead they use brokenness, honor, and restoration as lenses for understanding grace in an Asian context.

There is much to unpack from this supracultural representation of the gospel. The authors toggle between contributors from the West and Eastern thinkers as well as Asian interviewees. At points, Western resources predominate, especially in the Holy Spirit chapter, but these six essential aspects of the gospel do a decent job of communicating elements of the Christian faith. However, they require further unpacking in larger theological and missiological works as well as engagement from a primarily Eastern perspective. This work does a fine job in

attempting to produce a resource for Western spiritual leaders that dialogues with Asian immigrants and international students; however, it ultimately is challenged in trying to speak to multiple audiences and contexts while covering a wide breadth of material.

Part four addresses discipleship essentials that undergird thinking outside the box, which includes a Christian mind, five essential attitudes, Christ's lordship, internalizing God's word, powerful prayer, and effective spiritual warfare (99–157). These discipleship essentials are introduced in a manner that is helpful for beginning dialogues. However, unpacking each of them in detail requires further explanation, but that is not the intent of these authors. It is particularly important to ground the spiritual warfare conversations in specific contexts so that the ideas presented are not misunderstood. This is likely why the questions for disciplers focus on the experiences of disciples, the realities of their world, how the discipler is counseling them, and practical ways for practicing the given methods (157). Much nuance is needed here, as spiritual warfare has often clouded conversations around one's cultural and religious experiences.

The last section of the book contains practical examples of living outside the box (159). The first of these final chapters focuses on a few metaphors for transformation as well as transformation in familial relationships, approaching cultural traditions, and how one relates to one's own children (161–73). The last chapter of this section and the book re-roots the gospel in Japan by helping the reader to learn how to witness in more nontraditional ways. These might include witnessing through Japanese testimonies, praying for family members, the modeling of love through service, striving for peace and holiness, helping others to see God's pain, and lastly, through counsel on how to remain faithful disciple-makers (197–206). If I were to encourage anyone to read one section of this book, it would be this one. The content and examples are solid. The experiences of Asian believers are highlighted alongside excerpts and quotations from the writing and statements of Asian teachers, pastors, missionaries, and theologians. This allows one to experience and appreciate the differences and challenges of faith in Christ lived out in an Asian context. Although the sections on transforming familial relationships and ancestor veneration are brief, they present enough information for those conversations to begin.

Now for the title: the word "supracultural" is complicated. While scholars debate the essential meaning of culture, it's clear that culture isn't simply a "thing" but describes different patterns, practices, and experiences that form and inform groups and individuals. Culture is how we live as individuals and communities and how we make sense of the world. The gospel, on the other hand, is good news and will be embraced by people who wish to follow Christ throughout the world (4). Thus, the

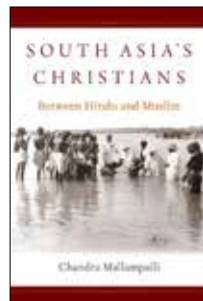
good news should be communicated to individuals and groups in a manner that can be culturally understood, embraced, and lived out. However, the author's phrasing is confusing regarding this matter. Although the gospel is to be communicated cross-culturally and into different cultures, it must be nuanced, discussed, and lived out in specific understandable ways. The authors' attempt to speak to both Western and Asian cultures at the same time leaves their message unclear. A decisive question to ask here is if the book is primarily for a Western or an Eastern audience? The authors note that the goal of this resource is first and foremost to enable Asian internationals and immigrants to thrive in their Christian lives back in their home countries (7). However, the content seems to prioritize a Western audience, which is not wrong, but should be made clear by these authors. Otherwise, it may not be experienced as good news. The authors attempt to bring Western and Eastern ideas together, to facilitate dialogue and conversations that include both; however, the title of their book confuses its purposes. Ultimately, this is a fine resource for Western Christians hoping to engage with Eastern Christians or seekers, but to say that this book is primarily for Easterners is to ignore its Western slant and emphasis on Western resources and categories.

The authors note that their goal is to enable Asian internationals and immigrants to thrive in their Christian lives back in their home countries.

This book begins some significant conversations, but it ultimately serves missions best when put into the hands of faithful ministers who wish to come alongside Asian immigrants and students and are curious to learn more about Eastern cultures and ways of life. It's hard for a Western reviewer to comment on how a book might be received by those from other cultures; however, I'd imagine that Asian readers of this book might have difficulties with some of its sections, unless they were able to have conversations with a Westerner. To put it simply, this book starts a decent dialogue between Western and Eastern cultures, but by no means finishes that dialogue or clarifies important details. One can hope for more books like it that would press further into the nuances of Western and Eastern cultures, the concept of sin, spiritual warfare, and living out one's faith in Asian contexts.

South Asia's Christians: Between Hindu and Muslim, by Chandra Mallampalli (Oxford University Press, 2023), xvi + 351 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



South Asian society defies simplistic analysis. Thus, presenting an overview that gets the nuances right is a rare achievement. This book is an impressive example of success in this area, despite its focus being on the somewhat narrow world of Christianity in South Asia. (But the subtitle of “between Hindu and Muslim” makes clear that there can be no valid study of South Asian Christianity that does not deal with the overshadowing Hindu and Muslim presences.)

Mallampalli surveys the historical development of South Asian Christianity with a decided focus on current issues, as is fitting in a book in the series “Oxford Studies in World Christianity.” His introduction provides a number of the careful nuances which make the book so valuable. In the Christian encounter with South Asia, Mallampalli sees three major aspects of interaction; knowledge production, debate, and conversion (6). The latter two are more easily recognizable, but missionary contributions to understanding life and thought in India should not be underestimated, despite Mallampalli's wise observation that missionary debate and learned engagement with “other religions” (quotation marks as used by Mallampalli) had nothing to do with the conversion of the Dalit and tribal peoples. “The unmanageability of Dalit converts and their identities not only places them *between Hindu and Muslim* but also at the margins of organized Christianity in South Asia” (12, italics original).

Indian Christianity is vital for understanding India since Christians were “both catalysts of nationalism and the ‘other’ of nationalism” (12). Christian education especially stirred nationalist thought and action, but a Christian “vision that began with universal claims and transformative aspirations triggered anticolonial nationalisms that portrayed Christians as foreigners” (12). Mallampalli suggests that “as cricket originated in England and eventually became a genuinely South Asian sport, Christianity underwent a similar transformation through which it became a genuinely South Asian religion” (13). Yet Mallampalli also warns not to “overlook instances where Christians have asserted clearer religious boundaries and have developed a distinctive consciousness through revival movements, theology, or exposure to global Christian networks” (11).

H. L. Richard is an independent researcher focused on the Hindu-Christian encounter. He has published numerous books and articles including studies of key figures like Narayan Vaman Tilak (Following Jesus in the Hindu Context, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998) and Kalagara Subba Rao (Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005).

The historical survey of Indian Christianity predictably starts with chapters on the St. Thomas churches and then the Jesuit mission to Akbar. Mallampalli provides an excellent overview of the traditions (and texts) related to the Apostle Thomas in India, perhaps the best place to start investigating these stories. Mallampalli grants the possibility that Thomas was in India, and even the possibility that some early converts were Brahmans, but if that was the case “they were Brahmins who lacked the social capital they would enjoy later” (24).

From 1580, Jesuit missionaries began a series of visits to the court of Akbar who welcomed and interacted with them for complex political and spiritual reasons. In the end, Jesuit dreams of converting the emperor (and thus the entire kingdom) were revealed as empty. Mallampalli compares this failure with the four-centuries-later failure of Christians to understand Mahatma Gandhi’s similar surface openness to Christianity which was also undergirded by an adamant embrace of pluralistic universalism.

In his third chapter, Mallampalli takes on the complex historical heritages of Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili under the broader rubric of cultural accommodation. The turmoil surrounding these issues has not yet stilled; Mallampalli insightfully suggests that “In key respects, the Jesuits appear to have made a virtue out of what would be a natural tendency toward cultural accommodation in regions beyond the reach of Goa” (87). It is not possible to prevent all accommodation (or syncretism) so one must beware of being too concerned about these matters. Mallampalli also helpfully highlights a tension between foreign priest and local agent:

Priests faced a constant irony: Catechists made the difficult task of cross-cultural evangelism possible while at the same time contributing to the priests’ sense of vulnerability and resentment. (82)

Foreign missionaries have never been as effective as local workers, and the fact that this simple and obvious truth is not yet widely understood reveals missionary insistence on keeping themselves in the center of the story.

The complex relationship between Christianity and European colonialism (chapter four) raises a simple question, which Mallampalli proceeds to answer:

How exactly did a religion that spread within a context of war capitalism become translated into one that was genuinely owned by Indians? Despite the history of European exploitation, violence, and racism, Indians became Christian. They did so not by accepting every cultural or political assumption of their European rulers, but by embracing a faith that was translated into their own language and experience. (110)

“The argumentative Protestant” is a fitting title for the fifth chapter, and Protestant argumentativeness continues to be a stumbling block to this day. An extensive quotation from

the pro-Western Muslim reformer Sir Syed Ahmed Khan strikingly makes the point:

The missionaries introduced a new system of preaching. They took to printing and circulating controversial tracts, in the shape of questions and answers. Men of a different faith were spoken of in those in a most offensive and irritating way. In Hindustan these things have always been managed very differently. Every man in this country, preaches and explains his views in his own Mosque, or his own house. . . . But the Missionaries’ plan was exactly the opposite. They used to attend places of public resort . . . to begin preaching there. It was only from fear of authorities that no one bids them off . . . And then the missionaries did not confine themselves to explaining the doctrines of their own books. In violent and unmeasured language they attacked the followers and holy places of other creeds. (135, from *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, 1873, 18)

This is not merely a historical embarrassment but a crucial factor for understanding current “religious” realities. As Mallampalli states, “Relentless public criticism of the beliefs of others mobilizes opposition funding, counter-propaganda, and new patrons of opposing agendas” (140). Something like a Protestantization of other faith traditions results, and unsympathetic analysis (Mallampalli singles out Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* as an example of offense in this area) “de-historicizes difference and presumes uniformity where it does not exist” (143).

Protestant argumentativeness continues to be a stumbling block to this day.

Mallampalli appropriately focuses his sixth chapter on “Upper Caste Converts to Protestantism” before shifting the focus (also appropriately) of his concluding four chapters to the establishment of Protestantism as a religion of the poor and oppressed in India. In a book that is remarkably free from error, there are two minor slips in dealing with forward caste converts. On page 148 discussing Narayan Vaman Tilak, Mallampalli references his friendship with missionary Justin Abbott who “had produced” volumes on the Poet-Saints of Maharashtra; but those volumes post-dated Tilak’s life, so the phrase here should be “who would go on to produce.” Similarly, on page 158 Mallampalli quotes Frykenberg on Pandita Ramabai’s shift to a focus on “*bhakti*, or personal devotion to God expressed with great emotion,” but this is dated too early, tied to “America’s populist Christianity” during Ramabai’s 1880s USA visit, when in fact that emphasis developed later related to crises in India in the 1890s.

Mallampalli goes from south to northeast to northwest India in documenting “Mass Conversion among Dalits and Tribals” in chapter seven. Like the stories in chapter six, this is stimulating reading with many nuances which explode our tendencies to develop simplistic talking points.

On the contrary, missionaries were often overwhelmed by the eagerness and scale with which Dalits and tribals sought baptism. Native evangelists and catechists bore the brunt of the burden as they assisted with Bible translation, propagated the faith, and provided Christian instruction for new converts. (188)

Chapter eight looks at “Nationalist Politics and the Minoritization of Christians,” a topic on which Mallampalli has previously published (*Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India, 1863–1937: Contending with Marginality*, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).¹ Western colonial frameworks distorted reality, and “decolonization in South Asia consolidated notions of nationhood that were built around Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist identities” (204). This dynamic, as quoted above, “de-historicizes difference and presumes uniformity where it does not exist” (143).

Chapter nine gives an insightful and nuanced approach to “Dalits and Social Liberation,” although I feel there may be some measure of special pleading for the missionary approach. In a section on “Multiple Identities,” Mallampalli points out that:

Converts moved constantly between the domains of village life and those of the Church. As they did so, they negotiated their original identities with their new Protestant selves. Missionaries may have aspired to see converts make a clean break from their past, but this would have required them to provide those converts with an entirely new source of livelihood and an alternative social existence, removed from village life. As noted above, they neither aspired to nor were able to achieve such ends among their mass converts, who were compelled to maintain dual participation and dual identities. (228)

This seems to understate missionary commitment to remake Indian society. The consistent critique of caste (a topic only cursorily touched on by Mallampalli) was self-described by missionaries as an attack on the foundation of Hindu society. True, the mass movements made it impossible to extract converts into a new civilizational set-up, but the missionary attack on caste was not lessened and aimed at uprooting traditional Indian society (as also with many Christian attacks on caste today).

Christian appeals for the Indian government to provide affirmative action programs for Dalit Christians is one of the complex topics addressed. That conversion to Christianity disqualifies a Dalit from government aid is seen by many Indian Christians as blatant injustice. But Mallampalli points out three assumptions behind the 1950 Constitutional Order that established this system: “. . . the castelessness of Christianity; its transformative impact on the lives of converts; and its capacity to bring foreign resources to bear upon the plight of India’s untouchables” (235).

What of those points can be denied without bringing shame to Christianity and its teachings and practice? Yet a 2005 government appointed Mishra Commission stated bluntly that

Their [persons of Scheduled Caste origin converted to Christianity] position both in the Church as well as amongst fellow Christians is no better than that suffered by their counterparts in other religious denominations. (237)

A final chapter looks at “Pentecostalism, Conversion and Violence in India.” Pentecostalism is the most dynamic and expansive variety of Christianity in India today, as well as being the branch of Christianity most likely to continue the older missionary tradition of attacking other faiths. Mallampalli suggests that:

It is one thing to say that Pentecostals are attacked in India because they attack other faiths. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Pentecostals are attacked because they attract. (242, italics original)

Mallampalli points out that “Pentecostalism and Hindutva are clearly at odds with each other; and yet they appear to draw from a common set of tools arising from globalization” (243).

The rise of Pentecostalism does not have a simple explanation.

The emergence of Pentecostalism in Kerala and in South Asia as a whole involves many variables, sometimes in tension with each other. These include the role of overseas patrons, the quest for local autonomy, enterprising and visionary leadership by Indians, and interpersonal conflicts and church splits that created new churches. Out of this complex array of factors, Pentecostal and independent churches multiplied throughout South Asia and became the force in World Christianity that they are today. (248)

The Pentecostal vision is strikingly at odds with that of liberation theology, and Mallampalli’s perspective in this matter is insightful:

Some contend that Pentecostalism has had a greater impact on the poor than liberation theology, despite the strong emphasis of the latter in Catholic and Protestant seminaries in South Asia. Although its message is not oriented to matters of social justice, Pentecostalism has had an impact on self-worth, empowerment, and dignity for the poor. In this respect, the aims of Pentecostalism intersect with those of liberation theology. (251)

Mallampalli has some concern with the approach of Chad Bauman to anti-Pentecostal violence in India today.

His [Bauman’s] analysis appears to walk a fine line between portraying Pentecostals as victims of unlawful violence while also identifying them as bringing the violence upon themselves through triumphalist rhetoric and practices. (255)

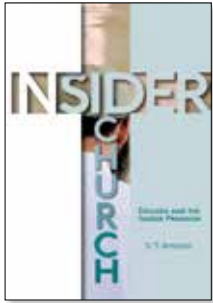
Mallampalli wisely refrains from projecting the future of India or of South Asian Christianity. But clearly his account sets the stage for many more dynamic chapters ahead in the saga of gospel encounters with the complex peoples of South Asia.

Endnotes

¹ See my IJFM review at https://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/27_2_PDFs/27_2%20Book%20Reviews.pdf.

Insider Church: Ekklesia and the Insider Paradigm, by S. T. Antonio (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2020), xxiii + 211 pp.

—Reviewed by Andy Bettencourt



In *Insider Church*, S. T. Antonio takes a fresh look at the nature of the church in Scripture and tradition and brings it into a missiological conversation with the insider paradigm (xxii). Antonio's aim is to deepen a vision of the church that would invite Muslims to join the number of the redeemed (xxiii). His book is a substantial resource for ecclesiology that engages deeply with the scholarly work of alongsiders and their reflections on insider movements.

He traces the church's identity through the Old Testament people of God, Jesus' kingdom family, Pentecost, the apostles' teaching, and the Bride of Christ in the New Jerusalem (26). Antonio highlights that this ekklesia has a unique redemptive relationship to the triune God, that it is a global, multiethnic family that gathers locally, and that it is an observable fellowship that partially reveals the New Jerusalem. He also views the church as one holy, catholic, and apostolic community that abides in the Word, that celebrates the sacraments of baptism and communion, and which is an important instrument for salvation and spiritual formation. He concludes that this ekklesia has an apostolic mission to bring the nations under the reign of King Jesus and into his kingdom community (68–69). In such an ecclesiology the desirable goal is a legitimate indigeneity/inculturation/contextualization, and the undesirable outcome is a total indigeneity/culturalism/syncretism (84).

Antonio argues that faith in Christ not only brings us into the global body of Christ but also gives us an alternative history (87). However, the insider paradigm envisions the church as embedded within the world:

The relationship between the church and the world is a critical facet of the insider model of the church. While acknowledging the presence of the kingdom of darkness in the world and the need for God's transforming work, the insider paradigm emphasizes the positive value of social and cultural structures and religious structures as either established by God or as spheres within which God is present and at work. The insider church is envisioned as a community embedded within the social, cultural, and religious structures as yeast in

the dough, a change agent which spreads the transformation of the kingdom and God's new creation within these structures without rejecting them or separating from them. (121)

Antonio concludes that the insider paradigm converges with the biblical vision at some points and departs from it at others (164). He neither condemns the insider paradigm nor completely affirms it; instead, he evaluates its strengths and weaknesses with an eye towards the further multiplication of biblical churches among Muslims (166). He notes that the insider paradigm offers a model which unleashes the yeast of the kingdom while opening the door to another yeast that may also leaven the pure biblical nature of the church (169).

The author concludes with questions. He interrogates the larger goals of the insider paradigm and whether remaining inside one's community of birth promotes spiritual maturity. He also questions whether groups of believers can fully express dynamic visions of the biblical church while retaining significant connections to Muslim religious identity (172–73). Antonio's chief concern is that believers of Muslim background may become indistinguishable from their Muslim community and fail to express the uniqueness of Christ and his kingdom (182).

His book is a substantial resource for ecclesiology that engages deeply with the scholarly work of alongsiders and their reflections on insider movements.

It is intriguing that none of Antonio's eight principles directly attend to the stated longing to see Muslim-background fellowships remain in their communities or offer guidance to believers in navigating their Muslim contexts (182–83). His principles offer rich biblical imagery and solid contributions to ecclesial tradition, but one may wonder about their contextual depth and any potential for shaping a sociocultural engagement with Muslim peoples.

While I highly recommend it for increasing one's understanding of insider missiology and ecclesiology, I wonder how it would interact with Kevin Higgins' most recent work and perspective on *Insiders and Alongsiders: An Invitation to the Conversation*.¹ Higgins notes that the deepest markers of an insider movement are not the questions about socioreligious decisions themselves,

Andy Bettencourt (M.Div., Fuller Seminary) serves in the Winter Launch Lab (<https://www.winterlaunchlab.org/>) and works alongside workers, agencies and networks in discerning innovative ways forward on the frontiers of mission. He is passionate about interfaith dialogue and a mutually enriching discipleship that unpacks each person's identity and life experience alongside the Scriptures.

rather they concern other questions: *Who makes decisions in the movement? How do they make those decisions? Why do they make them?*² Higgins' model highlights deep engagement with indigeneity, where the insiders themselves make decisions through the use of Scripture, ongoing dialogue, and perhaps an alongsider's presence.³

Higgins also addresses the eventual socioreligious place of insider movements. He approaches the ongoing shape of insider movements rather open-handedly by presenting a range of possibilities, at least these three are future faithful directions for insider movements: (1) critical mass and then separation as "Christians"; (2) "yeast in the dough" (i.e., movement leaders believe that faithful discipleship involves biblically shaped adherence to Jesus within their birth religion); (3) "wheat and tares" (i.e., movement leaders believe they will eventually experience overt, consistent persecution or that fellow adherents to their birth religion will declare them heretics).⁴ Jesus speaks to the latter in John's gospel:

I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. (John 16:1–4)

The deepest markers of an insider movement are the questions: Who makes decisions in the movement? How do they make those decisions? Why do they make them? (Kevin Higgins)

One should note that Higgin's publication emerged after Antonio's book,⁵ so it may contain ideas about ecclesiology and insider movements of which Antonio was unaware. Nevertheless, Higgins engages and presses beyond the "yeast in the dough" ecclesiology that Antonio primarily used to characterize insider movements.

From the perspective of insider advocates, Antonio's attempt to assess the insider paradigm as a viable tool or strategy (4, 126, 169, 176), is lacking and by necessity will require a process worked out by those within these movements.⁶ Thus, viewing insider movements simply as a strategy is a rather poor conceptualization, because insider movements centrally focus on the decisions, reflections, and conversations of either the group or movement in question. Those within these movements dialogue and reflect over the Scriptures and come to various decisions

regarding life, faith, and practice over different periods of time.⁷ This matter of time is an ongoing question, one that involves the duration required for these movements to continue to grow and develop. One might say until the return of Jesus, but Antonio's ecclesiological model acknowledges the need to see continual fruit and ongoing maturity in their life together.

Antonio's ecclesiological model provides a helpful conversation partner for any group wishing to discern just how believers may remain committed to following Jesus and bear witness to his kingdom in their context. The insider paradigm, however, offers fruitful questions about the roles people should play in a new movement and who ought to be the decision-makers. And any reflection on how insiders distinctively bear witness to Christ presses against Antonio's suspicion that insiders may remain too similar to the people of their culture. However, other inherent challenges remain. There is the matter of overt persecution. There is also the barrier of deeply understanding another culture. It is hard for outsiders to understand when and how actions may challenge another's culture or resonate with it, to have that ability to assess the degree of this imposition. There's also the challenge of interpreting the biblical text, whether head coverings' passages, passages interacting with the lives of women, or Jesus's own discussions regarding political powers and religious authorities.

Nevertheless, Antonio has given missiologists, church leaders, and movement leaders a thoughtful engagement of the ekklesia in both Scripture and tradition that will be helpful to reflect upon as movements grow. He also shows an interest in deeply engaging the thoughts and ideas of others, even those who may have different understandings of insider movements and the ekklesia of Jesus Christ. He should be commended for setting up this conversation as a dialogue that can challenge multiple sides rather than taking expressed aim at one group. This type of dialogical engagement is refreshing, nurturing, and invites further conversation. One would hope that more authors would assume this disposition, so that the church can experience a healthier dialogue seasoned by encouragement and thoughtful critique. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Kevin Higgins, *Insiders and Alongsiders: An Invitation to the Conversation* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishers, 2021), 15–22.

² Higgins, *Insiders and Alongsiders*, 19.

³ Higgins, 37–43.

⁴ Higgins, 53–58.

⁵ *Insiders and Alongsiders* was published in 2021 whereas *Insider Church* was published in 2020.

⁶ Higgins, 19.

⁷ Higgins, 37–43.