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# EMQ



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# Geography and Place Still Matter

Marvin J. Newell

Ever since Jesus gave the Great Commission mandate to the Church, geography has been an integral part of accomplishing that task. Right at the start Jesus told his disciples to “go into **all the world**” (Mark 16:15); to “make disciples of **all nations**” (Matthew 28:19); “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to **all nations** beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47); and more specifically to witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the **ends of the earth**” (Acts 1:8).


The geographic aspect of the mandate has not diminished in importance. After all, that is where mankind is found – clustered in people and affinity groups all over the earth. If we are to reach individuals with the gospel, we need to penetrate their ethnic group. To enter these groups, we need to go to where they are located. The core aspect of “going” in missions is still the same.

This is actually quite intuitive. As Christ’s ambassadors move across geographic boundaries, they enter regions and countries where they encounter ethnic groups and cultures, which in turn permit encounters with individuals so that these might hear the message. The “least reached,” or “frontier peoples,” are just that – still on the frontiers of gospel awareness and located in places other than where the Church already is.

That is one reason why David Platt recently wrote on the topic. In his thought-provoking article, “Rethinking Unreached Peoples: Why Place Still Matters in Global Missions,”<sup>1</sup> he proposes a refined definition of unreached. As you read the definition, notice the insertion of “place:” *Unreached peoples and places are those among*

*whom Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help.* The thrust of Platt’s article is to bring us back to the importance of “places” in missions.

Even in today’s environment of advanced technology, international migration, and missions “from everywhere to everyone,” geography and place still matter. That is why we have devoted this edition of *EMQ* to it. Each article relates to an issue within a specific country or geographic location. Each “nation” has its unique challenge to the gospel. The writers have grappled with those challenges and bring to light what it takes for the gospel to enter and become established within those national or geographic confines.

And don’t skip over the unique missiographic that helps one visualize the geographical aspect of missions in proportion to population sizes. 



Marvin J. Newell  
General Editor

## Notes

1. Platt, David. “Rethinking Unreached Peoples: Why Place Still Matters in Global Missions.” <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/rethinking-unreached-peoples>.



# Conversation and Conversion: The Gospel of John and an Alternative Orality Strategy in Mozambique

Alan B. Howell and Arie De Kruijff

A small group working in partnership with the Leprosy Mission gathered to discuss an important question. *How can we connect people in this context, especially those with leprosy, to the biblical story?* People here communicate primarily orally – through spoken words. They also practice a form of “folk” Islam which combines Islamic and traditional religious practices.

We agreed that Chronological Bible Storytelling was the best place to begin. We knew that creating audio recordings would also be useful. But how can we use these forms to create a program that effectively connects people from an oral culture with Christ?

This question is not unique to northern Mozambique. Tom Steffen says that, “illiterate and semi-literate people in the world probably outnumber those who can read. And people with such backgrounds tend to express themselves through more concrete forms (story and symbol) than abstract concepts (prepositional thinking and philosophy).”<sup>1</sup> In mission circles, recognizing the impact of orality has created a deeper appreciation for storytelling as an effective means for sharing the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> Graham, for example, believes that “worldview transformation requires story-tellers who grasp the whole biblical story and can meaningfully communicate it among a people.”<sup>3</sup> In the process of developing story-tellers he realized that, “knowing the story did not necessarily make them good story-tellers. They had to practice telling the story” as well as understand their audience “to effectively communicate the biblical story.”<sup>4</sup> Graham suggests that the church focus on multiplying “story-tellers who understand the whole story.”<sup>5</sup>

While developing individual story-tellers is certainly a good and useful strategy, the Gospel of John reminds us that conversations are another mode of oral communication that can facilitate transformation. After briefly exploring Jesus’ conversational approach we will share our experience of using recorded conversations about core Bible stories among the predominantly folk-Islamic Makua-Metto people of Mozambique.

## Conversion and Conversation in the Gospel of John

In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), conversions seem to happen mostly in

the context of miraculous signs and storytelling (parables). But the book of John offers us a different perspective. In that Gospel, conversion happens in the context of large signs and life-giving conversations that all point to the resurrected lamb who fully reveals God’s love. Eugene Peterson frames it this way,

“In the quartet of gospel writers, John gets the final storytelling word. John writes his Jesus story in quite a different way than his canonical companions... who all follow the same basic outline... John primarily tells stories. But as Jesus speaks, his words flourish into conversations and discourses with all sorts and conditions of people, conversations brief and lengthy, conversations pithy and elaborate, but always *conversations*. Several times the conversations develop into discourses, but the conversational tone is always maintained.”<sup>6</sup>

John presents Jesus as the *Logos*, the conversational word of God,<sup>7</sup> made flesh (1:14). His first miracle stems from a conversation with his mother (chapter 2). And that dialogical pattern continues with a wide variety of people. There are those who are receptive (like some of the disciples in 1:35–42); those who are reluctant or resistant (Nathaniel in 1:43–51); people in need of rescuing (the adulterous woman in chapter 8) and even people who resolutely want to reject him (the Jews in chapters 5, 8, and 10). He has tough conversations with Mary and Martha about his absence at their brother Lazarus’ death where he takes very different approaches to each sister depending on their own personalities

(chapter 11). And maybe most importantly, the disciples’ conversion experience, their confession of Jesus as the Christ, happens in the context of a conversation (6:69).

For the purposes of this article, though, we will briefly highlight two sets of “Conversion Conversations.”

### 1. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman

In chapter 3, Jesus receives Nicodemus, a respected religious leader, who appears suddenly one night to converse with Jesus. They discuss belief and eternal life and talk about the need to be born of water and spirit. Nicodemus seems to misunderstand nearly everything Jesus says and leaves this conversation feeling more confused than converted.

Then, in chapter 4, during the heat of the day, Jesus converses with a Samaritan woman with a scandalous backstory. She tries to trap Jesus in a religious discussion about the proper place of worship, but quickly recognizes Jesus as the source of living water.<sup>8</sup> By sharing the story of her encounter, she succeeds in bringing her whole village to Jesus to converse with him directly.<sup>9</sup>

Examining these conversations together, it is surprising that the Samaritan woman’s faith grows quickly while Nicodemus’ seems to die on the vine. But, if we are patient with this religious leader and follow his story through the rest of the Gospel, we can see how his faith builds behind the scenes until he publicly questions the actions of the Jewish leaders against Jesus (7:45–52) and eventually aligns with Jesus by asking to bury his body when all the disciples have abandoned their teacher (19:38–42). Both Nicodemus



and the Samaritan woman are converted through their conversations with Jesus, but John reminds us that their faith journeys each had different timetables.

## 2. The Lame Man and the Blind Man

The stories of both the lame man and the blind man have many similarities. Both include short personal histories (5:5 and 9:1) before Jesus takes the initiative to heal on a Sabbath (5:6, 9 and 9:6, 14), then the men are challenged by the religious leaders about the source of their healing but don't know where Jesus is (5:12, 13 and 9:12, 15), until finally Jesus finds them and invites them to believe (5:14 and 9:35). This is the part where their "conversion" stories diverge. While the lame man's faith dies abruptly as the result of pressure or persecution (even tattling on Jesus to the religious leaders), in the blind man's conversion story, the challenges act as catalysts for his faith to grow. Interestingly, their conversion stories seem less connected to their conversations *with* Jesus and more connected with the impact of their conversation *about* Jesus with others.

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus can be overheard conversing with people who are resistant, reluctant, receptive, as well as those who flatly reject him as Lord. His engagement with these characters highlights the connection between conversation and conversion. Those same types of people can be found in the world in general and in our context of Mozambique more specifically. John's Gospel witnesses to the power of conversation in shaping a faith journey.

In the next section, we turn our attention to describing the way we used conversation as a way to communicate biblical stories among the Makua-Metto people.

## Chronological Bible Storying through Conversations in Mozambique

Our approach was to follow the meta-structure of Chronological Bible Storying<sup>10</sup> but to allow each story to be told in a dialogical, or dialogue-based, format. We created a list of fifty core stories that included narratives of people with leprosy (2 Kings 5; 2 Kings 7:3–20; and Luke 17:10–18), and also encouraged the conversation participants to make those presentations sensitive to Muslim hearers. For the first round of recordings we provided two conversation guides to help participants understand how the process would go. After that, local pastors and

church leaders prepared and organized a conversation about each biblical story. If the scriptures for that section had not been translated yet, members of the Bible Translation team would work on a provisional copy of the text to be read as part of the recorded conversation.

One advantage of this dialogical technique was that it allowed the weight of the biblical storying approach to be a communal process. Walking through the story collectively in conversation involves less risk than one person having to get the story exactly right alone. As it is a conversation (group) and not just a person listening (attending) on his/her own, this widens the scope of potential impact and can stimulate deeper levels of social change and innovation.<sup>11</sup> We tried to use only one Bible text in each recorded conversation and only referred to stories as part of the group discussion if they had already been covered in previous recordings.

Another advantage we noticed is that the dialogical approach models a communal hermeneutic. The conversation teams connected the biblical stories to application in a comfortable, natural way. Modeling the application of the story in the context of conversation is important for equipping and training people to use dialogue as an orality strategy. Brown notes that, "oral communicators learn how to do things, not so much by formal study or how-to-do-it manuals, but by observation and mimicry."<sup>12</sup> So, each of the recordings modeled not only a method of storytelling, but also modeled an obedience oriented hermeneutic that demonstrated the process of communal exploration in order to find appropriate applications.<sup>13</sup>

One surprising observation was that the conversation group spent much more time than we expected in the initial greetings at the beginning of each recording. While Western-style recordings might "get down to business" and jump right in to the topic at hand, conversational patterns among the Makua-Metto do not. Conversation is to be enjoyed and if you have something worth saying then you need to establish connection and trust with a long time of greeting. Greetings are vital for participants to believe that they can trust this person to share what is important and true. From anecdotal observation of people listening in groups, we were pleased and surprised that the long introductions served to build credibility.

Conversation provides means of verifying information, is a natural setting for

disbanding false information or false beliefs, promotes ownership and empowerment by not assuming that trained 'clergy' have a monopoly on knowledge or the only right to speak, has greater potential for social inclusion (giving opportunity for marginalized voices like people with leprosy or women), provides space for addressing taboos. "Oral communicators tend to communicate in groups, and they learn through interacting with other people. They cannot think about something for very long without discussing it with others... In a survey conducted by Trans World Radio, they found that their most popular radio programs were those which included drama and dialogue, rather than one voice speaking for a long time."<sup>14</sup> While re-enacting a drama may not be easily produced on recordings, everyday elements of conversation certainly are.

## Example Conversation Guide

Text: Genesis 22:1–19

Theme: Abraham Offers Isaac as a Sacrifice

Time: 20 minutes

1. Facilitator greets and is greeted by conversation participants. One woman says she is doing well, but she's having problems with her neighbor who always wants to borrow their new radio.
2. Facilitator summarizes what we learned from the previous story regarding Abraham:
  - Abraham is an important person to people of different religions.
  - God called Abraham to leave his clan and go to a new land.
  - Even though Abraham was old and childless, God promised to bless Abraham with many children – turning him into a great nation and promising to bless the rest of the world through Abraham's family.
3. Facilitator connects the woman's personal story to today's biblical story and reads Genesis 22:1–19.
4. Conversation: Participants take turns sharing what they learned, relating the following points:
  - God gave Abraham and his wife Sarah a son in their old age.
  - God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering up on a mountain.
  - Abraham ties up Isaac and puts him on




the altar, is ready to kill him, when a voice from heaven tells him to stop.

- The angel says that now God knows Abraham loves him with his whole heart, because he is not withholding even this beloved child from God.
  - The angel points out a ram stuck in the bushes nearby and Abraham and Isaac offer it as a sacrifice.
  - God says he is pleased with Abraham and again promises to bless him.
5. Facilitator asks the participants: "So, what did you think of this story? What does it mean for us today?"
- One man replies that he was amazed at the way Abraham trusted God, but wonders why God would ask someone to do that.
  - Facilitator admits that this is a strange and difficult story and explains that, of course, most people know (though some still don't!) it is wrong to kill children, but back then many of the gods or evil spirits that people worshipped would tell them to offer their children as sacrifices in order to gain a blessing. So, God tests Abraham's faith, but importantly Isaac is spared because a substitute is found.
  - The woman replies that she was surprised to hear how openhanded Abraham was with God. Most people she knows, (laughing) herself included, struggle with being tightfisted with the blessings that God has given (selfish). But Abraham kept his hands open, knowing that God could take the blessing away, too.
  - Another responds by saying that yes, it's true Abraham's openhandedness means God could have taken the blessing away, but it also means that Abraham's hands were open to receive more blessings from God – so many blessings that his family would be able to bless the whole world! That is amazing and requires much faith – that's why many people refer to Abraham as the 'Father of Faith.'
  - Woman says that this story is challenging her to not be selfish with what she has and to be openhanded with God and have faith in His goodness just like Abraham did.
6. Participants say goodbye and encourage each other to share what they have learned with others.

## Conclusion

The Leprosy Mission's primary objective with this program was to find a practical way to expose people affected by leprosy to Scripture and the Gospel. The second objective was to raise awareness of leprosy and address issues of stigma and discrimination that are still prevalent in the community and possibly also among the church. People affected by leprosy regularly gather together in small community groups to practice and teach self-care principles to prevent physical complications due to leprosy. Solar powered MP3 players were given to group leaders to play the Bible stories during these meetings. SD cards were also used to share these recordings with church leaders to spread these conversations and raise awareness of leprosy and stimulate the debate around stigma and discrimination that is often still present in society. This open format allowed for easy sharing of the recordings with even those outside the leprosy groups or the church for listening on cell phones or MP3 players.

"Oral strategies are an essential part of bringing about gospel movements" in many parts of the world today.<sup>15</sup> Steffen notes that, "The orality movement is a work in progress, and must remain so if the disciple-making process is to improve in its journey cross-culturally at home and abroad... We can expect other new research to emerge in the near future that will influence and mature this orality movement. Yes, there is more to the story."<sup>16</sup> From our reading of the Gospel of John and experience in this process, we believe that orality in a dialogical format reveals a deep connection between conversation and conversion that the church should use to further the Kingdom of God. 

**Alan Howell**, his wife Rachel, and their three girls live in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. Alan is a graduate of Harding School of Theology. The Howells have lived in Mozambique since 2003 and are part of a team serving among the Makua-Metto people.

Arie and Marié de Kruijff have been working with the Leprosy Mission in the Cabo Delgado province since 2004. Arie comes from a medical background and the Leprosy Mission has been assisting the local Health Department to implement the leprosy control program which is very community based.

## Notes

1. Tom A. Steffen, "Why Communicate the Gospel through Stories?" *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. (2009): 441.
2. For more see Tom A. Steffen, "Orality Comes of Age: The Maturation of a Movement," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 139-147. Also, for a summary of Chronological Bible Storying with a helpful of analysis of its efficiency versus its sufficiency, see Cameron D. Armstrong, "The Efficiency of Storying," *EMQ* 49, no. 2 (July 2013): 322-326.
3. D. Bruce Graham, "Transforming Worldviews through the Biblical Story," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. (2009): 442.
4. *Ibid.*, 443.
5. *Ibid.* For examples of how individual storytellers were trained see, Avery Willis and Steve Evans, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (International Orality Network, 2005), 46-47. See also Paul F. Koehler, *Telling God's Stories with Power: Biblical Storytelling in Oral Cultures*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010).
6. Eugene H. Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), 321-2.
7. In John's Gospel, Jesus is the "locus of God's presence on earth, through whom all divine communication comes and goes." Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 120.
8. Her thirst satisfied, she leaves her bucket behind (4:28).
9. In the following conversation with the disciples it is clear that they are spiritually less perceptive than the Samaritan woman was!
10. For more on why Chronological Storying matters see International Orality Network, "Making Disciples of Oral Learners" *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. (2009): 438. For more on different types of stories for evangelism and discipleship, see Kelly Malone, "The Power of Biblical Storytelling," *EMQ* 50, no. 4 (July 2014): 314-320.
11. For more on the power of connectedness and conversation for the process of social innovation see C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009).
12. Rick Brown, "Communicating God's Message in an Oral Culture," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 125.
13. Or as Weaver puts it, this method models "promoting informed discussions among listeners." For more on reaching oral cultures see, Ed Weaver, "Orality is Just Good Missiology," *EMQ* 51, no. 2 (April 2015): 220-224.
14. Brown, 125-6.
15. International Orality Network, "Making Disciples of Oral Learners" *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. (2009): 439.
16. Steffen, "Orality Comes of Age: The Maturation of a Movement," 146.



# Conceptualizing a Mission to the Chala Peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa

Alrena V. Lightbourn and Richard K. Kronk

Equipping and training young leaders who are sensitive to missions to the unreached must be a deliberate exercise in their Christian development. Through teaching, preaching and practical demonstrations, Jesus Christ equipped his disciples for missions, a focus that must become a priority for modern churches. Hence, the purpose of this article is to suggest a basic conceptual approach for engaging in missions to an unreached people group.

## Establish Goals of Christian Missions

In the 'Great Commission' found in New Testament scriptures, Jesus Christ sends His disciples to all nations<sup>1</sup> throughout the world<sup>2</sup>. Their biblical mandate specifically required that they: use the very example of discipleship that Christ modeled before them<sup>3</sup>; baptize converts in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; teach them to obey all of Christ's commands<sup>4</sup>; preach the good news to all creation<sup>5</sup>; and, preach repentance and forgiveness of sins first to Jerusalem, then to all nations, having witnessed Christ's crucifixion and the resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

In executing the mandate, the first apostles exemplified several leadership qualities deemed essential for alignment with the biblical model of Christian missionary etiquette.<sup>7</sup> Right up front, Christian missionaries must assume a subservient role amongst those served, exuding a pleasant, humble, honest but purposeful disposition. A concerted effort should be made to learn and understand both the language and the culture of the community, making it easier to adapt to the new environment. While not losing sight of one's own spiritual identity in Christ, the missionary should try to identify with the ethnicity of people, adopting them and their nation as your own. Always keeping the vision of the mission in focus, the missionary should affirm his call to serve as often as necessary, while remaining accountable and responsible for any decisions or measures undertaken.<sup>8</sup>

## Identify and Characterize Your Target Population

A 'people group' ("*panta ta ethne*") is evangelically defined as "the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church

planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."<sup>9</sup> An 'unreached people group' within this subpopulation is specifically characterized by the absence of an indigenous community of Christian believers to evangelize the community.

Such is the case with the 'Chala peoples', who number 4,400 persons and were identified as one of 111 people groups in the African state of Ghana.<sup>10</sup> Among the Chala, there are only 5% (220) Christians, among whom are at least three of the world's major Christian groups. Independent (20%, 44), Protestant (20%, 44) and Roman Catholic (60%, 132) denominations make up Christian segments of this community. Only 1% (44) of this indigenous, Sub-Saharan subpopulation is represented by evangelical Christians. The vast majority of the Chala people follow ethnic religions as their primary source of inspiration (93%, 4092), and non-religious practices (2%, 88) persist. Interestingly, there are no Muslims among the Chala.<sup>11</sup> This unique unreached people group is further classified under the 'Sub-Saharan peoples' affinity bloc.<sup>12</sup>

## Survey the Religious and Cultural Diversity within the Geographical Region

The Sub-Saharan region is home to more than 500 million Christians, the third largest in the world, and Ghana contributes 0.8% of this Christian population.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, it is estimated that 24 million lost people of Sub-Saharan Africa are without access to the Gospel of Christ via Bibles, radio stations, or even access to Christians<sup>14</sup>. Resident within this region, the unreached Chala people group is only found in the Volta Region of Ghana.<sup>15</sup> Roughly seventy-five percent (75%) of Sub-Saharan people are under 29 years of age and tend to migrate from animistic practices of their villages to a hedonistic lifestyle in the large cities.<sup>16</sup> The Chala, however, have not migrated cross-continently or internationally.<sup>17</sup> Based on a relief map, obstacles to travel may include hills, elevations up to 100m, dense national forests, and difficulty crossing the headwaters of the Volta River. The north central location of two Chala communities is within the Volta region (Figure 1), on either side (west and east) of this major waterway.



**Figure 2.1**  
General  
Regional  
Map of the  
Volta Region

■ The red markers indicate the north central locations of two Chala communities on either side of the Volta River.



The Middle Volta was not without its challenges, given its longterm preference to exercise religious freedoms. In areas where Islam successfully gained converts, Christianity was weak. However, Muslim clerics who were by practice given to experimentation with

spiritual powers failed to convince local cults to join their faith. Instead, they cast aside their Islamic beliefs to become employed as diviners among the local cults.<sup>18</sup> In 1995, prospects for evangelism of the Chala became a concern for the Joshua Project, a

church planting agency that identified and enumerated the Chala peoples, recording their great need for evangelization and a Bible in their language.

### Consider Language Barriers and Discover Ways to Overcome Them

A review of language notes (Ethnologue.com/country/GH) revealed at least two dialects for Chala peoples: Cala and Tshala.<sup>19</sup> These findings were limited but consistent with the Open Language Archives Community<sup>20</sup> Resources archives and Max Planck Institute.<sup>21</sup> Also identified as the 'Bagon', 'Bogon', 'Bokkos', or 'Ron-Bokkos' people (ID#19022), 'the Chala' people cluster belongs to a larger grouping of closely related ethnolinguistic peoples, coded 'NAB56a', whose principal language is 'Gur'. The historical, social, religious, political, traditions, beliefs, ethnic practices, and cultural profiles of the Chala tribes are poorly documented.<sup>22</sup> The dominant language, Chala, is consistent in both of the two locations (Figure 2) of this people group. Bogon, a Gur language, (Cala) is also referenced by the Mainz University as the corresponding language of record for the Chala.

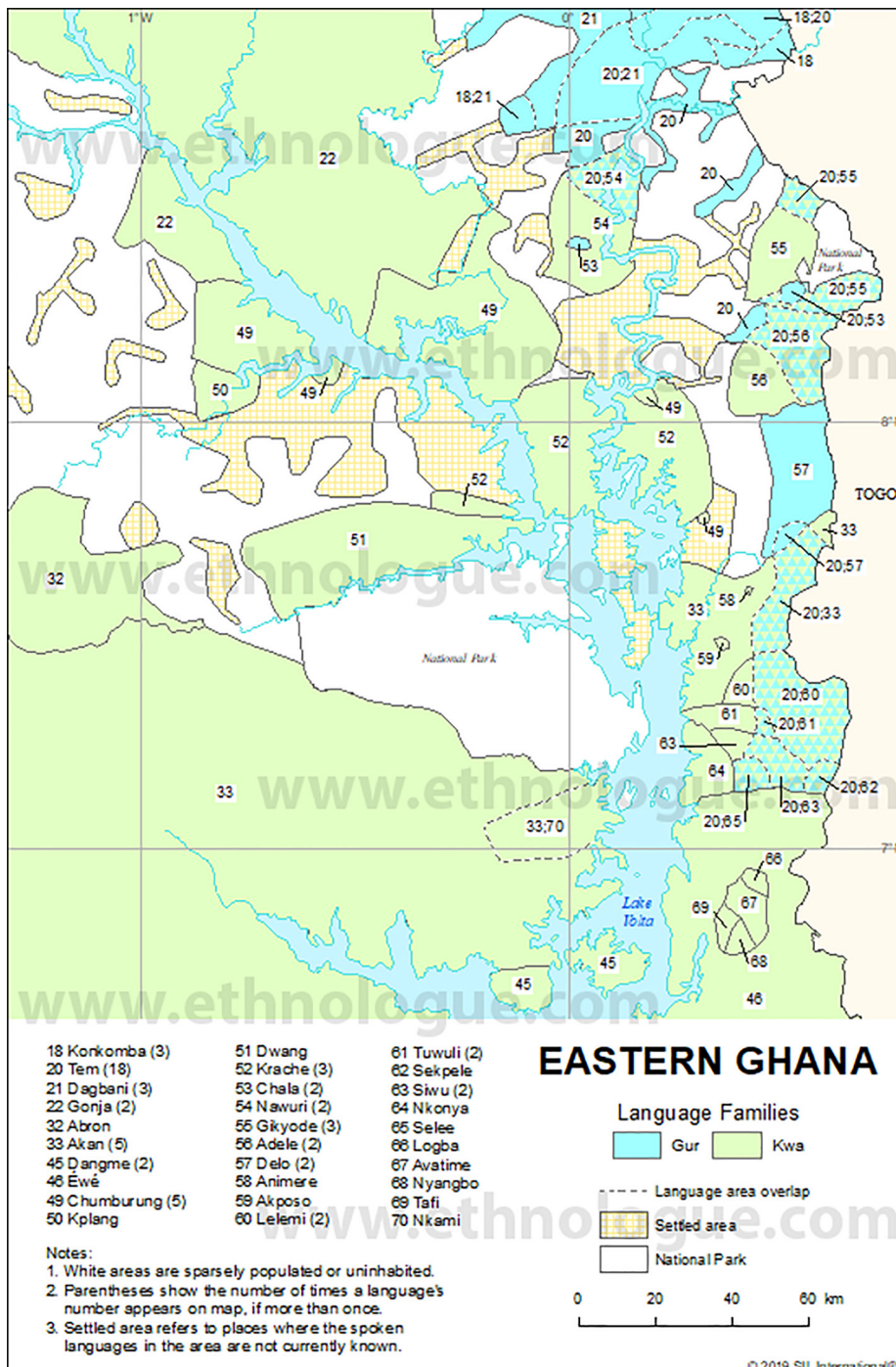
In order to establish a significant Christian community among the Chala, several needs have been identified. There is presently strong emphasis on the acquisition of a missionary worker, skilled in linguistics, to assist with the translation of the English Bible into the mother tongue of the Chala peoples. No count of available English Bibles was found. The Ghana Institute on Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) has listed a need for envisaged Bible translation in the Chala language from scratch.<sup>23</sup> Christian resources available to the Chala included audio recordings of the Bible teaching numerous printed stories, and God's Story Video.<sup>24</sup> Global Recordings Network is noted as the only organization that has produced media in the Chala language. Efforts to preserve the dominant Chala mother tongue through Bible translation will also impact education and literacy while teaching Biblical principles and building community relations.

### Study the Lifestyle, Governance and Ethnic Heritage of the People

Not much is published about the basic culture, society, norms, education, literacy, lifestyle, worldview and values of the Chala peoples. Besides emerging religious efforts

**Figure 2.1** Map of the Languages of Eastern Ghana

David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 22nd ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2019), [https://www.ethnologue.com/map/GH\\_z](https://www.ethnologue.com/map/GH_z).





to access this people group, much work is needed to document and memorialize their culture, customs, language, internal governance, rules, actual religious practices, and much more. Although a need for Bibles in the Chala language has been expressed,<sup>25</sup> local collaborations and access to the community are needed for full characterization. Translating the Bible into the Chala language would improve communication with this community by increasing the level of effectiveness of the ministry of the gospel, and by helping to improve Chala's understanding of Christ's mission to share the gospel and bring the blessing of Abraham to all nations.

### **Explore the Socioeconomic, Education and Health of the Peoples**

Regional socioeconomic, education and health trends,<sup>26</sup> were examined in the absence of data specific to the Chala. Poverty is widespread in the northern region of Ghana, and access to transportation, healthcare, and industrial centers is limited. Literacy statistics are not available for the Chala, but at least 76.6% of the national population is considered literate. A greater percentage of persons over 60 years reside in the Sub-Saharan region where life expectancy is generally 67 years old. Healthcare, nutrition, fertility, and infant mortality statistics are not available for the Chala. However, data suggests that a decline in population health may have been precipitated by relocation to coastal areas which are more demanding but better resourced.<sup>27</sup> National public health and environmental information are also not specifically sourced to the Chala. However, within the Ghanaian population, public health concerns include: HIV (1.6% prevalent); food or waterborne disease (e.g., hepatitis A); vectorborne disease (e.g., malaria); respiratory disease (e.g., meningitis); and animal disease carriers (e.g., rabies).<sup>28</sup>

### **Identify Historic Missions and Previous Attempts at Evangelism**

Accounts of Christian missions and previous evangelistic efforts to the Chala deserve careful documentation. Based on denominational distributions above, the Chala have tolerated Christianity only to a small extent.<sup>29</sup> It is known that the Chala peoples have already begun to be sensitized to the gospel of Christ through audio recordings of the Bible and video footage about the nature of God. It is likely that translation of the Bible into the

Chala language will enhance the missionary work possible in their communities. Support for this effort is building but much of the work is incomplete.

Existing media resources in the Chala language include 'The God Film' and recorded stories of the Bible, as well as small segments of the Bible in the Chala tongue.<sup>30</sup> Once the language is properly documented, cultural storybooks, leaflets for evangelization, skits/plays, culturally-sensitive religious art, etc. can be designed in conjunction with local artists to reinforce key lessons from the Bible and to demonstrate Chala art and culture. It may also be feasible to incorporate proverbs of Chala origin into these activities.<sup>31</sup>

### **Propose Initial Evangelism and Church Planting Strategies**

Within the first six months of arrival, a missionary should become immersed in observing the language and culture of the Chala people. Through direct interface with existing missionaries, the newcomer can build a network within the community without imposing the values and behaviors from the home country on the peoples served. Prospects for a gospel mission to the Chala peoples is promising, especially since it might involve engaging both communities on either side of the Volta.

As a navigable alphabet and vocabulary are being established, missionaries can work with Chala families to enhance language skills and cognitive abilities within communities by teaching them how to read the Bible. Working with local artists to develop culturally-relevant visual aids would increase participation and perception of biblical stories, making it easier for the group to relate to the gospel and to decide to accept Jesus Christ as Lord. Evangelism targeting individuals (children, adults), small groups, and larger groups can serve as stepping stones to evangelizing the entire community. When tribal leaders recognize a correlation between Chala beliefs and what the Bible teaches, their intervention to help motivate the masses may trigger lasting change (e.g., commitment to Christian faith, church growth and multiplication) that would persist beyond the missionary's involvement in the community. For a sustainable church presence, however, embarking on structured theological training of candidates within the community would produce church leaders with a solid foundation, thus ensuring impartation of the Truth and accurate interpretation of the Scriptures.<sup>32</sup>

According to the Lausanne Covenant<sup>32</sup>, "to evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord He now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe." Application of the 'Unique Solution Strategy' would allow missionaries to tailor the evangelization experience to the peoples and their culture. With planning and the leading of the Holy Spirit, the missionary team can learn from the mistakes and accomplishments of the past and move progressively forward to achieve set goals.

On hearing and receiving the gospel message, a spiritually convicted Chala assembly is expected to gravitate toward the drawing of the Holy Spirit. Their decision to accept that God wants them to follow Him wholly, abandoning all allegiances to traditional religious and ethnic practices, would then make way for the Chala to participate in God's mission to share the gospel to all peoples. On embracing the greater spiritual redemption Jesus Christ affords those who receive Him as Lord, the Chala necessarily accept the blessings of good news for the poor, release for captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the downtrodden<sup>33</sup> should trigger repentance. Solid teaching of the Word in simplified, native language, and using cultural art forms to illustrate Biblical themes, will help to paint a clearer picture of what the missionary is sharing. Those who come to Christ must continue to be taught and nurtured, and their ability to read and interpret the Bible accurately is a hallmark of evangelistic efforts. Through prayer and fasting, the missionary can be available to facilitate these and other transformational changes in the lives of the Chala peoples, recognizing that it is the Holy Spirit (and not self-effort) that is guiding the process and finishing the work in the individual and in community. This is one approach that could result in an initial evangelism effort being effective.


### **Identify Opportunities to Partner with Global Christian Organizations**

Organizations with access to the Chala peoples include: GILLBT, GRN, the Joshua Project, and SIL. Bible translation may be accessed through partnership with Wycliffe Translators. Support from international funding agencies and mission societies is available to either initiate or advance missions. Collaboration with the business community in



the missionary's home country could be one mechanism of promoting entrepreneurship, economic self-sufficiency, and sustainability as community infrastructure expands according to mission. Peculiar among the Chala is the notion that converting to a major world religion like Islam or Christianity is like joining another tribe.<sup>34</sup> They expect strict adherence to their sayings within the culture<sup>35</sup>, which suggests the existence of strong leadership and perhaps a severe punitive system for keeping order in their communities. Hence, strategic collaborations with local government and churches within Ghana will reinforce the overall effort and create an opportunity for community and government leaders to participate as stakeholders in matters of national concern (i.e., preserving the legacy of the Chala peoples).

## Conclusion

Missionaries are often encouraged to carefully examine their call to serve an unreached community through persistent prayer, fasting and steadfastly seeking God's guidance for a clear and specific vision for a Christian mission. Without doubt, an exciting opportunity exists for evangelistic outreach to the Chala peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa, bringing transformation and lasting change through the Gospel of Christ. 

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# The Influence of Ethnocentrism, Nationalism, and Mono-culturalism on Chinese Missionaries

Tabor Laughlin

In recent decades, many Chinese missionaries have been sent from Mainland China to countries around the world. In 2009, Todd M. Johnson estimated that there were approximately 5,600 Chinese missionaries around the world.<sup>1</sup> This is a praiseworthy statistic. It is staggering to consider the number of Chinese missionaries on the field in 2017 compared to the amount in 2007, or 1997, or 1987!

As is often the case, the increasing numbers of missionaries do not tell the whole story. The growing numbers do not necessarily tell us if the Chinese missions movement is growing in maturity over these years, or just growing in numbers. Many of those Chinese missionaries who have been sent out over the years have not flourished long-term. Initial mission zeal can get someone to a new country. But it is not enough to sustain them long-term. Many Chinese missionaries have either returned to China within two or three years, not seeing any fruit on the field. Or they have remained in the foreign country – maybe partly out of a fear of shame if they did return to China as “mission failures” – but they focus on Chinese living in the foreign country, rather than reaching the locals they were initially sent to reach.

An effectual missions movement is not just related to sending a large number of missionaries. An effective missions effort necessitates going to the foreign country, learning the local language, and building deep relationships, thus having some kind of spiritual impact on the locals. But Chinese missionaries who have done this have been the minority. Most Mainland Chinese missionaries sent out have not flourished long-term nor seen fruit among the locals.

This article deals with the reality of Chinese ethnocentrism and the Chinese mono-cultural background hindering Chinese missionaries on the mission field. The following seem to be factors for some of the Chinese missionaries who have struggled to do cross-cultural ministry or struggled to overcome their ethnocentric ideologies.

## Brief History of Chinese Missions

The modern-day Chinese missionary-sending efforts date back to the 1920s when it was started by the Jesus Family house church network led by Jing Dianying. It was intended to move across China to reach the Muslim world.<sup>2</sup> In the 1930s there was a group that broke off and founded the “Northwest Spiritual Band.” In the 1940s, the leader, Simon Zhao, led them all the way to Xinjiang Province in Western China.<sup>3</sup> A similar movement was later started by Mark Ma of the Northwest Bible Institute, called the “Preach Everywhere Gospel Band.” Some Chinese connected to Mark Ma’s group travelled to other countries to preach the gospel. Outside of China, those missionaries were later termed by Helen Bailey as the “Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band.”<sup>4</sup> This missionary vision was almost completely forgotten during the era of intense Christian persecution in China through Chairman Mao and other Communist Party leaders, particularly in the periods from 1949 to the early 1990s.

Since the early 1990s, house church leaders around China have propagated the Back to Jerusalem Movement. (Their intent is to take the gospel back the way the gospel first came to China many centuries ago – via the ancient Silk Road. The ancient Silk Road is the path right through the center of the current “10/40 Window,” through Central Asia and into the Middle East and North Africa. Some Chinese missionaries presently on the field are heavily motivated by the “Back to Jerusalem” ideals. Other Chinese missionaries are mobilized for missions through their

house church network or mission organizations and are less concerned about “Back to Jerusalem” ideology.

## Definitions of Ethnocentrism

Ivan Hannaford writes how, “modern race consciousness and ethnocentricity were accelerations of forces that had been there from time immortal.”<sup>5</sup> So race consciousness and ethnocentricity are not modern-day phenomena though the thoughts and definitions of race and ethnic differences have varied from period to period.

Similarly, Jonathan Hall writes how the concept of “ethnicity” is an ancient concept. Hall continues, “The genesis of nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not create ethnic consciousness but demanded that ethnic boundaries should be coterminous with political ones.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of “ethnicity” is an ancient one. Both Hannaford and Hall recognize that ideas of “race” and “ethnicity” are closely related to “nationalism” and “ethnocentrism.” When there is a strong attitude of one’s own unique race, there is more likelihood that one will think oneself superior to others that are different or outsiders. These naturally come from being human.

An older definition of “ethnocentrism” came from W.G. Sumner in 1906. Sumner defines ethnocentrism as “the technical name for the view in which one’s own group is the center of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.”<sup>7</sup> Sumner notes the centrality of a person’s own group and the idea of having everything else revolving around it, with one’s own group at



the center.

In 1998 Carley Dodd defined “ethnocentrism” as “the cultural attitude that one’s culture or group is superior to another person’s culture or group.”<sup>8</sup> This definition is slightly different than Sumner’s. Whereas Sumner’s definition was related to one’s group being at the center in comparison to outside groups, Dodd uses the language of “superiority” and “inferiority.” For example, according to Dodd’s definition, I would be acting ethnocentrically if I was in a new land and felt like my own culture and own customs were the best, and the local culture and customs were inferior to my own, if not outright wrong. Having such an ethnocentric attitude in a foreign context is very easy, even if these ethnocentric thoughts are our own private thoughts that we do not verbally express.

Duane Elmer, a Christian expert on cross-cultural communication, gives another definition of “ethnocentrism.” He defines it as “the tendency of every person to believe that their own cultural values and traditions are superior to those of other cultures.”<sup>9</sup> This is similar to Dodd’s definition, in that both Elmer and Dodd focus on “ethnocentrism” as having a feeling of superiority. Elsewhere Elmer writes how the word “ethnocentrism” literally consists of the words “ethnic-centeredness or culture-centeredness.”<sup>10</sup> This thought would resonate more with Sumner’s definition, and in particular his thoughts on us being at the center of everything. Elmer is noting how our ethnicity is at the center, or our culture is at the center.

Related to the idea of a feeling of “superiority” noted by Dodd and Elmer, Wagatsuma and De Vos describe how the Japanese “know who they are, and especially who they are not.” Japanese believe that they are from the same bloodlines and historical ethnicity, even if that may not necessarily be the case. Japanese believe that physically they look different and distinct from other Asians. The author writes, “In the Japanese mind, only those born of Japanese parents are genetically Japanese – nobody can *become* Japanese.”<sup>11</sup> It seems that these strong attitudes of their own distinctness would not just characterize Japanese people, but also those from some other Asian countries that are particularly nationalistic and mono-cultural in nature, including China and Korea. Certainly this same feeling of distinctiveness would also be a potential hurdle for missionaries that are sent from countries that have like ethnocentric sentiments, like Japan, Korea, and China.

## Chinese Nationalism

Chinese people historically have had significant sentiments of not only ethnocentrism, but also nationalism. Scholar Lucian Pye writes how Chinese do not have a concept of nationalism that is strictly related to common principles and ideologies. Pye believes, rather, that the Chinese “are left with only a keen sense of ‘we-ness versus they-ness,’ an outlook that can only serve xenophobic passions.”<sup>12</sup> So Pye believes that Chinese follow a similar pattern similar to what Wagatsuma and De Vos described about the Japanese – they have a clear understanding of who is like them, and who is not. I question Pye’s description of Chinese nationalism and how it is not related to common principles. It seems as though one of the greatest tasks of the Communist Party is to spread certain ideologies to all the people. This is certainly a way for the Chinese government to build nationalism. But Pye is accurate in how the Chinese attitude of “we-ness versus they-ness” can negatively cause them to be ethnocentric and xenophobic.

In 2004 Zhao Suis wrote about how the Communist Party, after the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, spread propaganda far and wide throughout the country. This propaganda was spread through the education system, beginning by brainwashing children at a young age, and continuing through all stages of education. It was used to compel the Chinese people to have a greater sense of loyalty to the government. Since then the government – in order to bring the Chinese people together and give them a common sense of unity – has utilized Chinese nationalism for their own purposes. Zhao writes, “The goals of the campaign were to rejuvenate China’s national spirit, to strengthen the unity of the Chinese people of different ethnic groups, to reconstruct a sense of national esteem and dignity, and to build the broadest possible coalition under the leadership of the CCP.”<sup>13</sup> The Chinese government achieved those purposes for the most part, bringing unity and loyalty to the state, and encouraging nationalism and patriotism.

Related to China’s nationalism is a fascinating article from 2012 that analyzes results related to a 2008 China Survey that compared China’s nationalism to 35 other countries’ nationalism in a 2003 National Identity Survey.<sup>14</sup> The questions for the survey were: I would not want to be a citizen of another country; other countries need to be more like my country; my country is a better

country than most other countries; and, I feel proud when my country does well in international sports. The results were that Chinese people expressed the highest score of nationalism among the 35 developed or developing countries surveyed. Their nationalism is not necessarily based simply on just those who are the majority Han people, but also was found high among those who were of other people groups, including Hui, Uyghur, and others. So, such nationalism is not necessarily based on historical roots as the Han people, but is a large result of a multi-ethnic community that has been established by the Communist Party over the past 70 years. Such high nationalism helps maintain the stability to the regime of the Communist Party.

## Korean Missionaries Hindered by their Mono-Cultural Background

Often, when people come from a mono-cultural background, they tend to have more nationalistic and ethnocentric propensities. If their culture is mono-cultural, they will have very few, if any, experiences interacting with those who are different than them. People like this have little perspective of how people different from them think or what is important to them. Because of their lack of experience interacting with outsiders, those from a mono-cultural background would not only struggle in cross-cultural interaction, but they may tend to believe that their country and their culture are superior to outsiders. Often ethnocentrism and nationalism may go hand in hand, particularly in countries like Japan, Korea, and China.

A challenge for many Korean missionaries has been their mono-cultural background and ethnocentric tendencies. Timothy Park writes, “The Korean culture is mono-cultural. Thus, Korean missionaries in fields often try to impart their culture to the churches they serve. It is important to respect the host cultures and communicate the gospel in a way natives can accept. Unfortunately, some Korean missions and missionaries work without accurate information of the fields and workable strategy.” (Steve Moon echoes some of Park’s concerns. In a survey of Korean missionaries in Turkey, Moon found that over 60% of the Korean missionaries there felt like their “ethnocentric tendencies” inhibited Korean missions work in Turkey. Elsewhere, Moon writes how the largest factors against Korean missionaries contextualizing the gospel to the local context are



their “mono-cultural orientation and ethnocentrism.”


When James Wong first researched the Majority World Missions movement in 1972, he wrote about how Asian missionaries in particular may have difficulty in cross-cultural ministry. At least one Korean missionary disagreed with this perspective. Samuel Kang – a long-time Korean missionary in Thailand – wrote in 1973 how the idea that Asians cannot effectively do cross-cultural ministry was erroneous. Kang actually found that the Thai were much more receptive to Asian missionaries than they were to Western missionaries.

### Application to Mainland Chinese Missionaries

Thus the question: Will Mainland Chinese missionaries have a similar experience as some Korean missionaries have had? Will they similarly struggle with ethnocentric tendencies? Certainly their mono-cultural background is a reality. Though the positive in China at present is that globalization is bringing people from all countries to cities all around China. This means that more particularly, younger Chinese are having opportunities to interact with foreigners, whether they are from North America, Africa, the Middle East, or elsewhere. This means that Chinese living in larger cities will have more opportunities to build relationships with non-Chinese. This may simply mean foreigners teaching kids and teenagers and college students English, and the Chinese feeling more comfortable being around foreigners, and having a better idea of how those foreigners think. It may be Chinese could have foreigner friends that they get to know in an even deeper way, and get an even greater understanding of their home culture. Whatever the case, these opportunities for Chinese to

interact more with foreigners means that those Chinese are less likely to struggle with ethnocentric ideologies. Thus, for those Chinese who do interact with foreigners their context is no longer “mono-cultural.”

This could also be a contributing factor in better preparing Chinese missionaries to be less ethnocentric on the mission field. If Chinese Christians experience being around foreigners in China and getting to know them and learn about their culture and worldview, they will be better prepared if they go to a foreign country as a missionary. Once they begin to serve in that country, hopefully they will have more respect for the local culture and customs where they are serving than their predecessors.

Elmer gives tips on ways to deal with ethnocentrism, including building deep relationships with the local people. When this happens, stereotypes and prejudices are broken down, you can learn more about the local people, and you can have positive interaction with the locals. It provides someone to be around you to share in your experiences and it helps you understand what is important to them and how they see things.<sup>15</sup> All expat workers need to engage the host culture in this way. But because of their nationalistic upbringing, this poses a particular challenge for Chinese workers. 

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# The Fairy-Tale World of Korean Dramas (K-Dramas): Using Korean Pop Culture for Evangelism

Song (Joseph) Cho

Superhero movies seem to be everywhere nowadays. From Batman to Iron Man, these comic book based movies continue to dominate the box office. It would not be uncommon for a pastor in the US to describe Jesus Christ as the real superhero, who is always there to protect us. In this way, an illustration drawn from the world of superheroes can be utilized to talk about the Gospel. Can Korean pop culture be used in a similar fashion? More specifically, can Korean dramas be employed to address some of the deepest human longings from a Christian perspective? It should be noted that throughout history Christians have borrowed elements of the wider culture to introduce the Gospel. As Ken Myers points out, “John lifted the idea for his Logos Christology from contemporary philosophy, Paul quoted pagan poets, and Luther borrowed tunes from drinking songs for hymns.”<sup>1</sup>

## Korean Pop Culture

The popularity of Korean culture is commonly known as the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*. South Korea has become “the Hollywood of the East.”<sup>2</sup> In 2012, South Korean singer Psy took the world by storm with his hit song “Gangnam Style.” The music video became an instant Internet sensation, drawing unprecedented attention to the Korean music industry. Korean dramas, commonly referred to as *K-dramas*, have also become very popular. Ranging from the historical to the present, these well-crafted, highly entertaining and informative dramas are capturing the hearts and imaginations of viewers as they hit airwaves across the globe. For instance, consider *My Love From the Star* (2014). This romantic comedy about an alien stranded on earth falling in love with a woman was so popular in China that Chinese officials were left wondering why they could not duplicate the success of K-dramas.<sup>3</sup>

## Western Fairy Tale Elements in K-Dramas

People all over the world are watching Korean dramas. What makes them so globally attractive? To answer this question, it may be helpful to keep in mind that many of these dramas draw their narrative nourishment from Western fairy tales in which the good characters live “happily ever after.” It is no coincidence that many K-dramas are named after popular fairy tales such as *The Idle Mermaid* (2014), *Pinocchio* (2014–2015), and *Cinderella and Four Knights* (2016), to name just a few.

J.R.R. Tolkien once pointed out that the “consolation” of fairy tales is “the joy of the

happy ending.”<sup>4</sup> K-dramas’ feel-good, happy endings are particularly appealing for fans, who find these television series to be more palatable to their cultural sensibilities and substantially more family-friendly than Hollywood films. Not unexpectedly, fans often draw parallels between K-dramas and Western fairy tales especially the story of Cinderella. For Tolkien, these fairy tales point to the greatest happy ending the Good News of Jesus Christ. K-drama fans are drawn to the fairy tale elements. In *Faerie Gold: Treasures from the Lands of Enchantment*, Kathryn Lindskoog and Ranelda Mack Hunsicker outline the reasons for reading fairy tales:

1. They stimulate imagination and creativity.
2. They help readers empathize with others and develop compassion.
3. They carry readers beyond the restrictions of time and space and promote a sense of mystery and transcendence.
4. They satisfy the innate desire for communion with other living things.
5. They show how the small and powerless can triumph through perseverance and patience.
6. They awaken higher ideals without preaching.
7. They help readers envision a better society where intelligence, courage, and compassion prevail.<sup>5</sup>

In his sermon titled “Beholding the Love of God,” Tim Keller says:

And the Christian understanding of art is a very profound one. The Christian understanding of art is: All good stories, all the stories that we love, all the stories

that move us are really about Jesus. The great thing about being a Christian is that every story is two stories, every song is two songs. Think of it this way: Are you a Christian? Then you know what? We are going to fly like Peter Pan. Are you a Christian? Then there is a handsome prince who will kiss us and wake us out of sleep. Are you a Christian? Then someday someone will, a beauty will come and kiss us and though we are beasts make us something gorgeous.<sup>6</sup>

In considering this genre, it is of interest to note that Hollywood has been churning out a number of fairy tale movies recently, such as *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), *Mirror Mirror* (2012), *Snow White and The Huntsman* (2012), *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013), *Frozen* (2013), *Maleficent* (2014), *Cinderella* (2015), *The Huntsman: Winter’s War*, and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). This fact alone testifies to their enduring appeal for both young and old. Fairy tale expert Jack Zipes makes the following claim: “So it is not by chance that the fairy-tale film has become the most popular cultural commodity in America, if not the world.”<sup>7</sup>

## Winter Sonata in Japan

Every once in a while a television drama comes along that perfectly captures the zeitgeist of a particular social group. *Winter Sonata* (2003) was just such a series. This critically acclaimed K-Drama (known as *Fuyu no sonata* in Japan) holds the distinction of being the melodrama that triggered the Korean Wave, tapping into deep-seated nostalgia among middle-aged Japanese women who describe



the love in the drama as pure and innocent. Norimitsu Onishi explains its popularity as follows:

Fads come and go in Japan, but this one touches upon several deep issues in Japanese society and its relationship with South Korea. In a society gripped by a pervasive malaise, where uncertainty and pessimism fill magazines with headlines about men and women who don't marry, don't have children, don't have sex, Yon-sama seems to touch upon middle-aged women's yearning for an emotional connection that they lack and perhaps believe they cannot find in Japan.<sup>8</sup>

Starring Bae Yong-joon, the actor is affectionately known as "Yon-sama" in Japan. It is worth noting that the word "sama" is an honorific title reserved for royalty and aristocrats. So popular was the Korean actor in Japan that the then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said, "I will make great efforts so that I will be as popular as Yon-sama and be called Jun-sama."<sup>9</sup> According to Youna Kim, "The hero's unconditional love for a woman – faithful and devoted to one lover, sensitive and understanding of a woman's emotional needs – captivated many women in Japan. Fans of *Winter Sonata* in Japan are particularly women in their thirties and fifties, and the depth of their adulation for the hero is striking: 'If there was ever such a man in Japan, then I wouldn't be suffering like this.'"<sup>10</sup> Another fan described the actor in the following manner: "There is no man like him in Japan. Have you ever met a man like him? He is like a prince. But he might not be. We might not be able to meet him somewhere. I feel very close to him."<sup>11</sup>

*Winter Sonata* pulsates with the power of unconditional love. It ripples with sacrificial love. Filled with stirring moments, everything in the series is redolent of the power of first love. These are the intertwined themes to which the fans were acutely and emotionally attuned. The Gospel tells the story of such love. To quote C.S. Lewis, "God will look to every soul like its first love because He is its first love."<sup>12</sup> Carrying echoes of the Gospel, this K-drama is a work of art, and "all great art contains elements of the true story: the story of the good creation, the fallen world, and the longing for redemption."<sup>13</sup> Japanese popular culture expert Kinko Ito observes:


One of the reasons why *Winter Sonata* appeals to so many people is that watching the melodrama is a *spiritual or religious experience* [...] An opportunity to be able to meet again deceased loved ones is one of the most basic desires of human experience, and *Winter Sonata* fulfills that need very nicely.<sup>14</sup>

Can missionaries in Japan make references to this drama as a springboard to talk about the unconditional and sacrificial love of Christ? Can they employ a K-Drama like *Winter Sonata* to talk about Christ, the ultimate Prince who is always faithful and tender? What if someone told the above viewers that Prince Charming does indeed exist? That someone loves them sacrificially and unconditionally? The Cinderella and Prince Charming figures often reflected in K-dramas provide powerful imageries that can be used in a sermon. This is important if the missionary seeks to preach to the heart. To preach in a way that engages the heart, Tim Keller encourages pastors to: "1) Preach culturally, 2) Preach from the heart, 3) Preach imaginatively, 4) Preach practically, 5) Preach wondrously, 6) Preach Christocentrically."<sup>15</sup>

### *Hallyu* and Korean Missionaries

It is not a stretch to say that people's familiarity with Korea comes primarily from Korean popular culture. For Korean missionaries, there has probably never been a more propitious time for evangelism than the present. The Korean Wave has in a curious fashion provided a fertile ground for them to use Korean popular culture products such as K-dramas as a springboard to introduce the Gospel message. They would do well to remember what founding religion editor for *Publishers Weekly* Phyllis Tickle once said concerning television: "more theology is conveyed in, and retained from, one hour of popular television than from all the sermons that are also delivered on any given weekend in America's synagogues, churches, and mosques."<sup>16</sup>

With this in mind, it behooves them to take a fresh look at *Hallyu* as an evangelistic tool.

Taking a cue from their American counterparts who do not hesitate to use Hollywood materials, Korean dramas can serve as a cultural bridge between them and the people they are serving by providing an ideal forum to introduce the Gospel. 

**Dr. Song (Joseph) Cho** recently received his doctorate in Intercultural Studies from Western Seminary (Portland, OR). The title of his dissertation was: "A Missiological Study of the Use of Korean Popular Culture (*Hallyu*, The Korean Wave) for Evangelism in Japan and Peru." He has published articles on biblical allusions in English literature such as "The Book of Proverbs in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*" and "Charles Dickens' Jacob Marley and the Gospel of St. Mark."

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# N. Saloff-Astakhoff and Russian Tent Missions: Reflections on History That Unites

Michael Cherenkov

These reflections contribute to the history of missions in the former Soviet Union during a very difficult time. They connect with Mennonite and Baptist and mission efforts. I will present seven characteristics of the tent-mission style of Nikita Ignatievich Saloff-Astakhoff to illustrate how it operated and especially how it brought diverse Christian groups together.

Few examples of mission strategies that brought different traditions together can be found in the evangelical movement to unreached Eurasia in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This history presents an important lesson in new attempts to unite fragmented evangelical churches. However, unity can be found when churches participate in something that is greater than themselves, in something that belongs to God. When churches and individual believers come together for missions, they unexpectedly find the unity they desire. But when they seek it any other way, the path is endlessly long and confusing. Missions is the only way churches can be united, and the most important way the church remains active and effective.

I have professed this relationship between the unity of the church and missions for a long time: the church becomes unified through its engagement in missions. Historical examples make this point clear, understandable, and inspiring.

## The Russian Tent Mission

One example is the Russian Tent Mission (1918–1923) that mainly spread around eastern Ukraine, known then as “south of Russia” (currently the Kharkiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhia oblasts of Ukraine). It was a time of civil war in the former Russian empire, a bloody and devastating war between “red” communists, “white” monarchists, and “green” anarchists.

The Russian Tent Mission was founded by Jacob Dyck who grew up in the church but experienced new birth through faith after joining with the Mennonites. He was then called to missions. After Dyck was killed by the Makhnovists in 1919, Nikita Saloff-Astakhoff

took over the ministry. This Russian young man grew up in an Orthodox environment. After being born again he joined the Mennonites. Even though Dyck and Saloff-Astakhoff came from different countries and grew up in different kinds of churches, the experience of the new birth and a calling to missions brought them together. Much has been written about Dyck in detail<sup>1</sup>. For personal reasons, I am more interested in Saloff-Astakhoff – a Russian who joined with a German mission movement going into Russian cities and Ukrainian villages. The ministry eventually expanded beyond the Mennonite world and was supported by the leaders of evangelical Christians and Baptists.

Saloff-Astakhoff’s ministry, including his tent mission, is a good example of unity in missions. Personally, this example is clear, understandable, and inspiring for three reasons.

First, I grew up in the region of eastern Ukraine where tent mission evangelists preached sixty years ago. This is my home, and I know many of the cities and villages there firsthand. For this reason I am interested in the history of the church and missions in this area.

Secondly, Saloff-Astakhoff was my childhood hero. My parents and I read his books, which had been printed illegally in the USSR. The stories in them were exciting, scary, and inspiring. They were etched into my mind and became a guide to me.

Thirdly, tent missions began in a time of civil war. This is very relevant, today, as the eastern portion of Ukraine is again engulfed in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. A kind of “Makhnovists” (anarchists) has arisen once more forming the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic (pro-Russian quasi states on the occupied territories of

Ukraine). Evangelicals are banned in these areas as extremists and sectarians. Only atheistic Moscow communists and old style Russian Orthodox monarchists are allowed.

So the story (or history) is repeating itself. In fact, it continues. Our predecessors offer good examples and valuable lessons that show us the possibility of missions which can unite nationalities, cultures, churches, and traditions. We cannot repeat their experience, but we can creatively build on it.

## Uniting the Incompatible – Lessons from Nikita Saloff-Astakhoff

Nikita Saloff-Astakhoff serves as an example of how Christ reconciles and unites the people who wouldn’t otherwise connect. He grew up Orthodox, worked with Mennonites and served as a Baptist pastor. He remained a committed pacifist through two world wars. He studied at the university but spent his life preaching the Gospel. He served on the streets of Moscow and New York. He preached to embittered military men, rebellious metropolitan youth, and hungry villagers.

Today, we lack an understanding of how missions unites Christians of different traditions, that confesses the supremacy of Christ over our differences, and shows God’s healing love in our conflicts. The ministry of Saloff-Astakhoff and Tent Mission teaches us important lessons.

## Mission is a Testimony

Mission is not an organization or a strategic plan. It is a movement of living witnesses who are ready to die for the cause of Christ. They do not conform to the demands of society but boldly proclaim the radical truth of the Gospel. For modern Christians it is



important to hear the resolve of those in past years: *"It turned out that there is a place on the cross for truth, and not in the center of society."*<sup>2</sup>

Missions is not for conformists but for Christian radicals. At the end of his book *Tent Mission*, Saloff-Astakhoff seems to address modern Christians who face few hardships:

Sheep of Christ, if you are wearing a wolf's mask, take it off! During our time, an open confession of Christ is needed. "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father," says the Lord. There are now many wolves who are wearing sheep's clothing in order to be in a sheep's flock. Quite often those wolves preach from the pulpits of Christian churches. Give up your brazen hypocrisy and do not create an easy profession from the Blood of Christ, from the blood of His followers and martyrs.<sup>3</sup>

This appeal is not addressed to an individual church or organization, but to all believers. Christianity is not divided into Orthodox, Baptist, Mennonite, and others, but into two categories: conformists or radicals; "easy believism" or martyr-witnesses.

### **Mission is Not a One-time Phenomenon**

Mission is ongoing. It continues under different conditions, responding to the new needs of people and new assignments from God. The Mennonite initiative has continued in new forms of ministry:

A group of soldiers (Soldier's Circle) could not be a lasting organization; it could exist only as long as the war continued and the army existed. At one of the last meetings of the Board of the Circle in Moscow, the question was posed: "How can this organization be preserved and how can its work for Christ continue in peaceful times?" One of the zealous workers of the circle expressed this desire: "If the Lord gave us a tent, we could continue our work, traveling around the country and carrying the Gospel to places where it has not yet been preached."<sup>4</sup>

In other words, missions is a movement that constantly expands, embraces new

groups of people, and responds to their changing needs.

### **Missions Unites Individual Churches Within the Universal Church**

Of this Saloff-Astakhoff says the following:

Missions worked exclusively in the religious context; it was interdenominational and international. By their nationality, the co-laborers were Russians, Germans, Jews, Finns, and Latvians. By their religious beliefs: they were Mennonites, evangelical Christians, Baptists and Lutherans. They were of different nationalities, different religious backgrounds, different classes and positions, but all were striving for the same goal in the person of Jesus Christ, who was number one for all of them. Ahead were Christ and His Calvary and all around were perishing souls. Therefore, there was no time for disputes about opinions, about the correctness of this or that religious trend. No one even thought about arguing. We were all aware that the Lord had not called us to that. He did not shed His blood so that the members of His church would spend time arguing. We are all saved by Him in order to, in turn, save others. This is our calling here on earth; this is our mission. The hearts of co-laborers were filled with the awareness that the coming of the Lord is near. We knew that our world did not need our opinions or theoretical Christianity. The world is suffocating amidst doctrines and human institutions. The world is looking for life, simplicity, and light. During our work, we did not organize individual communities but sent converts to already existing communities of believers. Our goal was not to baptize but to preach the crucified Christ; not to organize visible churches, but to reach souls for Christ and to add them to the universal Church.<sup>5</sup>

Tent Mission was interconfessional; it was not a substitute for the church but brought together different groups who served together as diverse members of a united family.

### **Missions Must be Non-partisan**

More simply stated: missions should be outside politics. Even during the conditions of the civil war, Tent Mission workers appealed to the authorities, completed all

the paperwork, referred to laws, and sought legal solutions. At the same time, they clearly understood that any political power during those years – Red, White, or Green – was anti-national and anti-evangelical.

Being non-partisan, the leaders of Tent Mission exercised the important gift of spiritual discernment and discrimination in political matters. That is why Saloff-Astakhoff wrote a letter to Prime Minister Chamberlain in 1938, warning of the terrible consequences of the "appeasement" policy, i.e., concessions and sacrifices to Hitler in exchange for "peace:"

Hitler will start treating nations at his own will; people will have to fulfill his will unquestioningly, for no one will have the moral or physical strength to resist him. As soon as Hitler cleanses the countries of the Jews, he will begin destroying Christianity with fire and sword. You avoided the war in which several millions could have died, but you have prepared the ground for the death of tens of millions. Judas betrayed Christ once with a kiss, a sign of love. You have betrayed the nations with the kiss of peace, betrayed Christianity and the people of Israel. Woe to the world from the maniac who appeared, who infected tens of millions of people in his country with his mania, but sad will be the memory of those who helped the maniac acquire strength and power at a decisive moment.<sup>6</sup>

It is curious that the author of this political statement identifies himself not as a citizen or a public figure but as a "servant of Christ and His church." This document compels us to be more careful in our understanding of pacifism during those terrible years. As we see, a personal pacifist position did not rule out appealing to the state to defend the international order, particularly in regard to Jews and Christians.

### **Missions Continued Into the Next Generation and Grew With New Leaders**

In the midst of a terrible time, God called young people who were poorly trained and entrusted them with ministry. Here is what Saloff-Astakhoff writes about his leadership calling:

The summer of 1920 was the time of intense trials for the author. In the



autumn of 1919, seven co-workers from the Mission were killed while preaching the Gospel in the south. Among those killed was the organizer and the head of the Mission, Jacob Dyck. At the general meeting of the remaining staff, future leadership was conferred on the author. This decision was such a heavy burden for a young man who had converted only three years ago and did not have the proper experience.<sup>7</sup>

Missions does not belong to individuals; it continues with new leaders. And here experience and giftedness are not as important as a simple willingness to take the place of one's slain brethren and continue the mission.

### Missions is Following the Voice of God

This is living beyond the material world and accepting the miraculous. The main characters in the Tent Mission story constantly heard voices and responded to them. They heard God say things like: "Get up and walk," "Get up now or never," "Go immediately to Chicago," or "Go immediately or the disease will return."

During my childhood, Saloff-Astakhoff's books interested me because of the miraculous stories. This was not very common for my native Baptist tradition, so I was curious. This shows us that missions is not so much the realization of a deliberate plan, or "religious activity" according to rules; rather it is obedience to the Word, wherever it calls you. It is full of uncertainty and trust and always has room for a miracle or surprise.

### Authentic Missions is Holistic

It is a place not only for Tent Mission but also for work with the hospital orderly, the soldiers' circle, the youth union, and the soup kitchen. It includes the distribution of spiritual-moral literature, the care of the sick and courses about preaching. Holistic care for people during the war is what distinguished Tent Mission from the programs of competing religious groups, including proud Orthodox traditionalism and various sectarian approaches, which offered easy, one-sided solutions. Unfortunately, these lessons have not yet been accepted and understood. The history of Tent Mission is not well-known among modern churches.

My older friend, Johannes Reimer, is one of the few who has tried to apply the experiences of Tent Mission to our current time. He understands the special value of

missions seeing how Mennonite Germans served Russians and Ukrainians sacrificially. Perhaps the persecution by the Reds, Whites and the Greens was the payment for the rich past of the Mennonite colonies and "unfair treatment of Russian servants." Even so, we can agree with Reimer's point of view that:

the Mennonites went through a deep, divine purification. They accepted their destiny with words of repentance. But at the same time they did not abandon their mission among Russians; quite the contrary. The Mennonite's guilt before the Russians could be blotted out only in this way – by evangelism.<sup>8</sup>

We know from the writings of Saloff-Astakhoff that there were various types of Mennonites. Some of them obstructed missions and even made armed threats. Others zealously evangelized neighboring nations. But the personal story of Nikita Ignatievich Saloff-Astakhoff shows that missions changed the life of Mennonite communities, opened them to the outside world, and brought them closer to other evangelicals. It was no coincidence that German Mennonite Jacob Dyck's initiative was continued by the Russian Baptist Saloff-Astakhoff. This missionary brotherhood has withstood the test of fire and today serves as an example for us.


I conclude my reflections on the lessons of Russian tent missions with a quote from Reimer's book. It is helpful because it comes from the "Russian" German, the heir of the tradition I've written about here:

Today we live in a time of terrible individualism, and we talk about the tolerance of peoples. But this is still far from being a brotherhood. Here we can learn a lesson from Russian tent missionaries. Among the children of Russian Protestantism today there is no more relevant topic than unity. Missions, which counts on the blessing of God, advances such unity. May this passionate example of Russian tent missions help us comprehend again the truth of these words!<sup>9</sup>

The accounts of Nikita Saloff-Astakhoff and Mennonite tent missions show that unity in missions is possible, even in the hardest times. It is through missions that national and social conflicts can be reconciled. Born-again Mennonites and born-again Orthodox can serve together. In the end there could be no Mennonite missions or Baptist missions.

Rather there could only be partnership and participation in God's mission. Our churches and traditions become alive every time there is a desire to cooperate in God's mission. We see that our part is small while the possibilities are great.

### Conclusion

At times our task as founders might be to simply pass the mission on to the local leaders and celebrate their success. Mennonite Jacob Dyck was pleased with "Orthodox Baptist" Nikita Saloff-Astakhoff. If we want to restore the history of cooperation in mission between "Russian" and "German" Christians, and between "evangelical" and born-again "Orthodox," then we need to draw lessons from what was done in the past and follow good examples. 

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# Proselytism vs. Evangelism: Challenging Relations Between Evangelicals and the Romanian Orthodox Church

Tamara Henkes

As I prepared to embark on my first long-term missionary journey to Romania in 2006, one question surfaced multiple times from various non-Christian family, friends, and acquaintances: “Are you moving to Romania to proselytize?” This question affronted me somewhat. Rather than address it head on I responded defensively. I did not take into consideration their cultural lens for perceiving the concept of proselytism, nor did I attempt to investigate their definition of proselytism and whether they viewed it as negative, positive, or neutral. Now, after living twelve years in a majority Orthodox Christian country, my eyes have opened to the sensitivity around proselytism while witnessing ongoing battles between Orthodox churches and Evangelical churches. It has disheartened me to see some of the biggest obstacles to evangelism come from leaders and members of other Christian traditions.

I have worked as a Pentecostal Christian missionary serving in Eastern Europe since 2006. To some, the calling of evangelism and discipleship is considered proselytism. Cecil Robeck summarizes this common misperception stating that “one group’s evangelization is another group’s proselytism.”<sup>1</sup> It is not my intention to change anyone’s mind as to the legitimacy of what missionaries do if their worldview of missions is negative causing them to believe that these actions are merely proselytism. Instead, this article proposes a self-critique for Evangelical missionaries to address the issues, concerns, and misconceptions regarding the negative connotation of proselytism. The scope of this article seeks to address common aggression towards proselytism and to outline a response towards hostile reactions from those opposed to the perceived proselytism of evangelical Christian missionaries serving within a majority Orthodox context.

## Definition: Biblical Definition and Contemporary Perceptions Towards Proselytism

The definition of proselytism varies widely depending on one’s religious background, cultural context and personal experience. Therefore, seeking a foundational understanding of what other people perceive proselytism to mean is crucial in striving to understand their perspective.

The word proselyte [Greek *proselytos* προσήλυτος], referenced in the Septuagint (LXX) seventy-seven times, translates the Hebrew word *ger*, for a stranger, sojourner, or resident alien in the land. Scholars, however,

debate whether the use of *προσήλυτος* in the LXX refers to sojourner or a convert to Judaism challenging its frequent use of the word in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The New Testament mention of proselyte can be found four times referring to a convert to Judaism (Matthew 23:15, Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43).

Contemporary use of the word proselytism brings an entirely new perspective. This simple word, typically used in a pejorative sense, although hardly referenced in the Bible, can spark discord, disunity, and antagonism amongst people around the world, especially among Christians. Tad Stahnke defines proselytism as “expressive conduct undertaken with the purpose of trying to change the religious beliefs, affiliation, or identity of another.”<sup>3</sup> The World Council of Churches defines proselytism to mean “the encouragement of Christians who belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance, through ways and means that ‘contradict the spirit of Christian love, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the church.’”<sup>4</sup>

The word proselytism invokes negative emotions amongst not only those outside the church but also inside the church as many consider it a “derogatory term, depicting the image of coercion, force, abandonment, threats, manipulation, and cults.”<sup>5</sup> Some even consider those who proselytize as “arrogant, ignorant, hypocritical, meddlesome,”<sup>6</sup> while others have defended the ethical form of proselytism (ethical evangelism) while opposing any unethical form of proselytism (coercion, deception, manipulation or

force). Statements from the Geneva World Council of Churches claim that “proselytism ... is considered a betrayal of authentic evangelism. To renounce proselytism does not mean to renounce evangelism.”<sup>7</sup> Nicastro cites Georges Lemopoulos from an unpublished paper that “Proselytism is not the opposite of evangelization but a corruption of it.”<sup>8</sup> The concern that Nicastro points out is not a matter of the evangelistic effort itself but rather with the attitude, goal, means, and the target population of the proselytizer.

From personal experience, the word proselytism still conjures up negative emotions and, in some cases, antagonistic behavior from one group to another in response to what some consider proselytizing efforts. Many evangelical Christians would not use the term proselytism to describe their mission and calling to fulfill the Great Commission; however, many times it is used to describe other people’s behavior when participating in evangelism with which others may not agree. Some consider proselytism an obstacle to the real work of missions. Robeck declares proselytism, in any deceptive, coercive or manipulative form, to be “a blight on the veracity of the Christian message and on the effectiveness of Christian mission.”<sup>9</sup> He challenges those who indiscriminately label all forms of evangelistic efforts as proselytism claiming that legitimate evangelism towards persons of other “religious communities” exists.

While the question remains debatable as to the definition of proselytism, it is essential to understand the viewpoint of those with whom one interacts. The remainder of this



article will not seek to answer the question regarding whether proselytism is correct or incorrect, moral or immoral. Instead, it will focus specifically on the responsibilities of Evangelical missionaries serving in majority Orthodox countries attempting to balance allegiance to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and obedience to His calling to fulfill the Great Commission without compromise with the concerns expressed by many scholars regarding unethical forms of evangelism which may be rightly caused proselytism.

## Response of Evangelical Missionaries

This conflict of proselytism may never resolve as long as the word itself and the perception remains skewed. Evangelicals cannot naively think that a list of simple steps will bring ecumenical unity or to change the perceptions towards evangelistic efforts. However, a change in attitude, behavior, and mindset may help bridge the relational gap. The following section involves a self-critique looking inward towards the motives and thoughts about what it means to serve in missions as Evangelicals in a majority Orthodox context.

### Willing to Be Humble

Obedience to God's command to go into all the world, preach the good news and make disciples of all nations should take precedence above all (Matthew 28:19). The growing concern about proselytism continues to rise as the increase of pluralism could lead to competition towards a "war for souls."<sup>10</sup> However, proselytizing, defined in an ethically positive manner, can be "a good thing, a natural expression of human dignity and the human desire to communicate...and can be seen as an expression of care and concern for others."<sup>11</sup> This expression will require coming to the mission field with humility which recognizes that only Jesus, not missionaries, can save people and cultures (John 10:7-9). Avoid arriving with an attitude assuming one group is right and another is wrong. Also avoid imposing the cultural standards of the sending country upon other cultures by associating any sense of economic or political advancements with spiritual superiority.<sup>12</sup>

Many articles regarding proselytism have been written at the height when the majority of missionaries were from Western cultures. However, there is now a shift, and more of the countries which, at one time, were fields for missionary activity are now sending missionaries out to proclaim the Good News to

other countries. No longer is missions and the "propaganda" it spreads considered now only western but now from all ends of the earth. As a result of this shift, missionaries, regardless from where they come, should also be mindful of ethnocentric tendencies, even subconscious ones.<sup>13</sup> Fletcher warns that unethical proselytism expresses "negative judgment of another's identity" and typically results in one group exchanging ideas from a superior vantage point rather than to consider each other as equals.<sup>14</sup>

### Willing to Evaluate Motives

Many Christian churches oppose proselytism as they consider it to be "sheep stealing." In Eastern Europe, the influences of Communism, with a primarily atheistic worldview, will undoubtedly be substantial after an entire generation lived with this propaganda. Once the doors in Eastern Europe opened up after the fall of Communism, Christians flooded in "needing to bring them Jesus." Regardless of the impact that Communism had on Eastern European countries, now that these countries are open for opportunities to share Christ, missionaries need to recall that Jesus has always been present and avoid the idea that He needs to be brought in. Rather, the challenge, faced, today, is to "Wash the face of Jesus, that beautiful face that has been dirtied not only by Communist propaganda but also by so many compromises our churches – both the established and evangelical – have made through the centuries."<sup>15</sup>

There are still many who need to hear the Gospel. Churches fighting against each other distracts us from God's calling. Be cautious not to pass judgment and assume that those of different Christian traditions are not 'true' Christians. Proper motive entails teaching the truth from the Word of God with humility and praying for God to lead those who need to hear this truth to those who will properly share. The focus needs to be on God's mission while at the same time making an effort to recognize local churches and not substitute them. Churches, whether consciously or subconsciously, need to stop the practice of looking at one another's church as a potential "field for the harvest." Horner challenges this fact, arguing that there is evidence for the need to reach nominal Christians resulting in possibly a change of churches if that individual so desires as they pursue a deeper relationship with God. He resolves to ask the question:

Is it never legitimate or desirable to

change one's church membership? That, I believe, is not the question before us. Any valid concept of religious liberty presumes that right, and it must be defended. Such a change for some people may indeed make the difference between merely perfunctory religious allegiance and vital faith – but only when it is an act of free volition, free from any kind of external pressure.<sup>16</sup>

Horner also shares the importance for Evangelicals, when serving in countries with more traditional cultures, to understand the complexities of closely intertwined "social and ecclesiastical moorings" and the trauma that can result when Christians break away.

### Willing to Change Mindset

Language can reveal a level of humility, or lack of, as some may refer to a missionary's calling to "bring the Gospel" to a country assuming the Gospel never existed before the missionary arriving. Ion Bria expresses his concern with projections being made about Orthodoxy in Romania saying that those making claims assume that the "traditional Byzantine churches are unable to understand what is happening in this historic transitional period: a crisis of paradigms and the need for new models to interpret and to renew the present realities."<sup>17</sup> A common complaint from Orthodox leaders is the perspective that Evangelicals perceive the Orthodox church as a harvest field of unbelievers or nominal Christians.

Lawrence Uzzel shares the frustration experienced by Orthodox Russians in the early 1990s how Americans "swept into Russia ... as if it were a land of pagan savages who had never heard the Gospel ..." Unfortunately, Orthodox views towards Evangelicals point to similar perceptions. *Christianity Today* reports on an interfaith marriage encyclical, in which Archbishop Lakovos of the Greek Orthodox Church of North and South America labeled Assemblies of God and Pentecostal members as non-Christians.<sup>18</sup> A resolve to this mistrust involves each group learning the other's beliefs, traditions, and rituals and to have a willingness to change one's mindset towards the other.

### Willing to Listen

James chapter one refers to the importance of taking time to listen. As a skill, listening is crucial for all relationships. Between Evangelicals and Orthodox adherents, taking the time to listen to and learn each





other's perspective and foundational beliefs is essential. It is risky to say that one does not care what others think and approach conversations with an arrogance believing one holds the truth and it is a duty and calling to tell others this truth. This attitude will serve only to build up more walls and confirm the negative perspective other have towards missionaries. Jay Newman shares strong opinion towards missionaries, whom he lumps together in the same category as proselytizers stating:

We usually do not like the people who come to convert us. We often find them arrogant, ignorant, hypocritical, meddling. One does not have to be a religious relativist to resent the fact that missionaries and proselytizers have made little effort to understand the depth of our own personal religious commitments. We are prepared to listen to them, but we soon lose our patience when we find that they are not prepared to listen to us.<sup>19</sup>

Newman articulates the need for open dialogue between those of different religions in order to establish "ecumenical activities," however, he feels the impossibility of

constructive, open dialogue if conversion remains the missionary's sole purpose. Listening to the voices of others, especially those opposed to proselytism helps to understand that in many cases a desire for open dialogue exists. Thiessen, although agreeing that dialogue may facilitate mutual understanding, gives caution to the use of dialogue as a form of persuasion and a potential "tactical maneuver" used to accomplish the end purpose to convert. A desire for everyone to hear and to have a chance to respond to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ does not equate to free reign regarding the ends justifying the means. Ultimately motives of those serving must be pure with a priority on relationship, value, and the dignity of people.

#### **Willing to Learn**

Learn to share the gospel within the context of the culture one is serving in. Take the time to learn the language and culture. From personal experience, serving twelve years in Romania, many doors of conversation opened up because of the time I spent learning the language. Interactions led to curiosity – why would an American learn their language – and as a result this opens hearts for sharing life stories.

Take the time to understand the Orthodox Church and their beliefs. Zernov states that "The quarrel which has divided the Church for so many centuries has impaired its understanding of true Christian teaching, for each branch has been able to see only one side of the whole paradoxical truth."<sup>20</sup> Zernov elaborates on the importance of both western and eastern Christians investing in the lives of each other, living amongst each other learning how the other lives, worships, and values. This process to "interchange church leaders" leads to richer mutual understanding moving forward towards reconciliation. Vassiliadis also challenges the church to set aside "selfish theological preoccupations and proceed to a 'common' evangelistic witness" knocking down denominational walls and placing emphasis on rediscovering:

The catholicity of the church; ... because the ultimate goal and the *raison d'être* of the church goes far beyond denominational boundaries, beyond Christian limitations, even beyond the religious sphere in the conventional sense: it is the manifestation of the kingdom of God, the restoration of God's 'household' (οἶκος), in its majestic eschatological splendor; in



other words the projection of the inner dynamics (love, communion, sharing etc.) of the Holy Trinity into the world and cosmic realities.<sup>21</sup>

Achieving all this requires self-critique and a willingness to question the theology and practice of missions while stepping out of a traditional missiological structure bringing incarnated love onto the mission field crossing denominational boundaries for the common purpose of reaching the world for the Kingdom of God.


## Conclusion

No step-by-step checklist exists in order to bring about unity and collaboration amongst Evangelicals and the Orthodox Church. Regardless of whether or not one is Evangelical or Orthodox, faithful obedience to God's calling in teaching His truth and reaching the lost remains paramount. An understanding exists, especially in majority Orthodox countries, that evangelistic efforts may be portrayed negatively as proselytism. A responsibility of Evangelical missionaries lies in an awareness of the complexity of the cultural dynamics and to make every attempt to understand the perspectives of the Orthodox church towards evangelistic efforts.

Try to avoid entering into a mission field blind to this complexity and reframe from ignoring the conflict. Enter into the mission field with humility and willingness to listen, to learn, and to change one's mindset if needed. No longer can the Evangelical Church ignore the Orthodox Church, nor can the Orthodox Church ignore the Evangelical Church. Christians have a call to be servants and to approach this call with pure motives in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ calls all followers of Him to be one (John 17:21). Not one as in united as one organizational structure but united in love, obedience to God's word, and to follow His will for this world

to know Him. Zernov makes a call for unity for the purpose to work together and reach the lost in this world and how much more powerful the efforts would be:

If the barrier between East and West is to be broken down there must be a definite movement to overcome this mutual ignorance and misunderstanding. It is obvious that there must be a missionary movement for the reunion of the Church similar to that for the conversion of the heathen; and it is probable that the two movements will work in close contact, for the reunion of the Church and its missionary activity are strongly interwoven.<sup>22</sup>

Collaboration displayed through powerful evangelistic efforts as Christians look beyond denominational, governmental, structural and ecclesial walls and celebrate inter-ecclesial relations as one body of Christ serving the mission of God (1 Corinthians 12:12). A challenge established for the church's focus not to argue doctrinal differences or attempt to reach an agreement on "church government or administration of the sacraments" but for the hearts of the Christians to be freed from the "spirit of superiority and self-satisfaction which at present makes friendly relations almost impossible."<sup>23</sup> 

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# Worshipping in Lahore, Pakistan, March 2050

Steve Coffey

One of the great joys of my life was to be part of seeing a church established among North African immigrants living in France. On a number of occasions we had friends and family visit us from the US. What they experienced in our small church in Lyon was not what they were used to here in the US. There were elements that were different because of culture, language, and customs.

A couple joined the group who were from a Middle Eastern country where there had been significant missionary activity over the past 100 years. By God's grace these ministries bore fruit and today there are communities of believers who worship our Savior in that country.

Ironically, this couple proved to have a perspective of the church that became problematic. Though they were from an Arab culture, their understanding of the church was based upon its form. We came to understand that they did not view the group of believers worshipping Christ there in Lyon as a church because there was no pulpit in the room where we met and the seats were not in rows. Though it caused some confusion at first, it provoked us to go deeper into the Word with local believers in order to understand what the church is, what it does, and how it manifests itself.

One day, by God's grace I too may have the privilege of visiting a grandchild who is also engaged in the establishment of a church. What will this church be like? Will it have a pulpit? Will the seats be in rows? Is it possible to have an understanding of what the church will become some 40 to 50 years from now? Yes it is.

By applying foresight techniques such as scanning, trend-impact analysis, roadmapping, and developing scenarios, one can gain an understanding of potential, probable, and preferred futures. Of special importance is the understanding of how social, technological, economic, ecological, and political (STEEP) factors impact it.

To do so, let's take a look at a journal entry that I might write to describe what I experienced when visiting this church in the future.

## March 10, 2050 – Lahore, Pakistan: With Jason & his family

Jason and his family have been here for eight years, sent by the Church in Manila, Philippines, to assist with leadership development. His educational degree provides him with an excellent opportunity to serve the community as well as the Church.

The church is located in Lahore, Pakistan, now one of the 58 world-class cities that have over 10,000,000 people. The trend toward urbanization began its major shift in 2007 when for the first time in history more people lived in cities than in rural areas. It appears to have reached its apex in 2042 when, after the urban population had doubled,<sup>1</sup> the Global Unity Council passed limits on the number of cities in the world allowed to have more than 15 million inhabitants.

This church has a delightful amount of youth in it, probably because there are more people in the world over 60 than under the age of 15.<sup>2</sup> The youthful feel of the church is because the largest amount of graying of the population is taking place in the developed world. Here in Pakistan, the lifespan is shorter and the youth of the nation are numerous.

The church is modest in terms of facilities, which is not unusual as 8 out of 9 people in the world live in less developed countries.<sup>3</sup> Modesty in this sense is not what it used to mean. Simply stated, it means that all of the "normal" technological advances that you would find in other places, such as doors opening before you as your eyes are scanned, are not operational in this one. Though there were churches in more affluent areas that wanted to assist with

upgrades of this nature, the local leadership did not want to deter anyone, whether Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim, from being able to access the facilities.

Such a mentality did not always exist. The believers of Lahore have grown in their courage due to a number of events. After the nuclear conflict with India in the 30's, the level of persecution of minorities in each country (Muslims and Christians in India, Christians and Hindus in Pakistan) expanded beyond what was already a significant level. The Church of Malaysia and the Philippines were most generous in assisting the Church in Pakistan and India through resources and encouragement. The believers of Pakistan understood the beauty of God's people around the world standing with them.

The biggest influence of the boldness of the Church in Pakistan came from Chinese believers. As the "Back to Jerusalem" movement grew just after the turn of the century, more and more Chinese moved into communities in Central Asia and began proclaiming their faith in Christ. Their perseverance in the midst of persecution, as they had endured in China, was an example to fellow believers in the places where they settled.<sup>4</sup> The impact of the Movement was not only an increase in the number of people who placed their faith in Christ, but also in the encouragement of those who were already believers.

Though official restrictions on religion have been eliminated in Pakistan, local Muslims and Hindus continue to live with contempt for Christians, especially those who have converted from other faiths. It is in response to this reality of large numbers of conversions, that the government is consid-



ering the approval of a law that forbids the departure from one faith for another. This would follow the model of laws developed in Europe that only allow for a change from a faith to “no-faith.”

This facility may be modest but the reality of the believer’s faith is vibrant. The transformation from a beaten down population of “Christians” at the turn of the century to a strong and bold community of believers is hardly imaginable. The facility exists as a central location for multiple forms of activities, ranging from church activities to educational development, vocational training, and medical assistance. In truth, though there is a structure known as a “church,” the church is not centralized. Groups of believers meet all over the city of Lahore at varying times and places for worship, encouragement, and service.

Due to the influence of Chinese “missionaries,” the predominant language of worship material is Chinese, though English is understood all around the world through the Global Communication System [GCS], known as the “internet” in its primitive stages.<sup>5</sup> Worship has a global perspective though. From the 2030’s the ability to meet for worship with teaching being led by someone in another location became common. Now here in Lahore, it is not unusual to have worship led by Chinese but teaching provided in the Punjab language or English, and presented by people in other parts of the world.

Though there continues to be geo-linguistic distinctives, many aspects of the worship in Lahore can also be found in San Salvador, Brisbane, Tokyo, or London as the effects of globalization produce a global culture, especially related to media. The global generation, those born around the turn of the century, was the first to have such a strong intermingling of culture around the world. As they grew and became leaders in the church, these commonalities eventually

superseded the existing differences. Because of the simplicity of global communication and interaction, theological issues that were once so divisive have lost their impact.

Instead of divisiveness, there is an incredible unity that exists in the church. The variety of insights into the Word of God has expanded beyond imagination as Wycliffe Bible Translators and the United Bible Societies achieved their goal of providing a Bible in every language of the world by 2030 (five years after Wycliffe’s target date). The ensuing result has been a deep authenticity related to the theology of the church.

The issues of life confronted by so many cultures and discussed on a global scale, have produced a teaching that is theologically solid while remaining real to life. In fact, due to the global technological advances, the predominant discussions relate much more to ethics than to theology. Most of the Theological Societies that were present 40 years ago ceased to function in the 30’s.


A challenge to the Church has been the global adoption of what is called “the myth of the absolute.” With the increased interaction among cultures through vacations, migrations, and global communications, the belief in absolutes continues to be challenged by a global culture of mutual acceptance.

The Church in Lahore has not had to deal with some of the predominant issues that other churches face. Because of the ongoing economic challenge, the first issue is related to ethics. In the more prosperous Church in India the question of how to ethically treat sentient robots is extremely important. Are they allowed to be programmed to accept religious perspectives and viewpoints? Are they able to develop an understanding of right and wrong?

Another issue, related to motivations and lifestyle, which has been prominent in other more affluent areas of the world, is apathy. When the Chinese and Indian economies

passed those of the West, a new level of affluence became a trap to their churches. In Lahore, this has yet to take place. The economic level of the city is far beyond most other world-class cities.

As opposed to the ethical issues that some other countries face, the church in Lahore continues to deal with how to equitably provide assistance, especially among the hundreds of thousands who have migrated to the city from the desert plains. There is assistance available from other areas, but on a matching basis. Thus the economic realities of Lahore continue to affect the development of the Church.

Is such a journal entry plausible? It definitely is. Many of the seeds for such a church are being planted today. 

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# South Asia: God's Kingdom Advancing through Discovery Bible Studies

The Walker family

Over the past few years, together with national partners, we have been involved in a movement in South Asia. The first time we collected data on the work was in December 2012. At that time there were 55 outreach Discovery Bible Groups, all consisting of lost people.

By December 2013 there were 250 groups (churches and Discovery groups).  
By December 2014 there were 700 churches, and an estimated 2,500 baptized.  
By December 2015 there were 2,000 churches, and an estimated 9,000 baptized  
By December 2016 there were 6,500 churches, and an estimated 25,000 baptized.

The movement has consistently reached 4th generation in many places. In a few locations, it has reached 18th generation. This is not just one movement, but multiple movements, in more than four geographical regions, multiple languages, and multiple religious backgrounds.

Through these few years, we have learned many vital lessons.<sup>1</sup> One lesson our national partner has spoken of in many ways is the importance of Discovery Bible Studies (DBS). These studies are effective for both proclaiming the gospel to the lost and for enabling believers to mature in Christ. In our context, we also found it extremely helpful to use rechargeable inexpensive speakers with story sets on memory cards. Using these speakers empowered illiterate and semi-literate people to plant churches through listening to Scripture. Roughly half the 6,500 churches have been planted through using these speakers.

We asked our national partner to share some ways he has found the Discovery Study approach to be fruitful. He said, "I've written down twenty-two. But to keep it short, I'll tell you just the top six." Here is what he told us.

## Blessings of DBS

The first blessing is that when a family starts the Discovery Study process, they are free from the problems that come with relying on just one teacher. The family can invite anyone to join them, whether they're followers of Christ or not, or from some other religion. Any neighbor can come to their house, and if they're interested in what they're hearing, they'll stick around. If not, they won't. They can easily discover who else from the neighborhood is interested in the stories.

The second blessing is sometimes we meet a person of peace and want to establish a relationship with that person's family, but we don't have time. Or they are illiterate. In cases like these we can give them a speaker with memory chip. We tell them, "There are stories on this speaker. If you'd like to learn about life (or wisdom or whatever), then please listen to these stories when you have time. After listening, stay seated with each other and discuss the stories. Discussion together is necessary."

We don't need to tell them to accept Jesus immediately (which we used to feel pressured to do when we relied on preaching as the only method). We just tell them, "If you listen to the stories, you will be blessed." So they can study God's Word without us being present. It also gives us time to develop a relationship with them because we don't demand instant acceptance of Jesus. We just tell them we have a request: if they want to be blessed, they should listen to the stories on the speaker, even without us being there.

Third, many people truly do not have time to come to a service in a church building. The one church building that might exist in their whole county is very far away. They don't own a bicycle, much less a motorcycle or car. Walking takes hours, and can even be dangerous. They are poor farmers who work by hand. Who will tend their fields if they take a day off? Discovery Bible Study is fruitful among people like these. They have jobs working near their home. They have crops to tend and cows and goats to care for. But they can gather in a home, all sit down together, hit play on the speaker, listen to a story, and then discuss it together.

While they are discussing the story with

each other, other families in the village can watch and listen in. (If people went far away to a traditional service, their neighbors would miss this witness). The neighbors wonder to themselves, "What are these people doing?" This is a blessing because no outsider or expert is the "face" of the gospel message. It is all a work of God. When the neighbors hear the family discussing, "What does this passage teach us?" it becomes a chance for them to also listen and learn.

In this way a first generation church easily develops a second generation church, even without waiting for someone with specialized training. So Discovery Study is a great way for the gospel to spread – even among those who are geographically isolated or illiterate.

Fourth, DBS allows us to enter a family's home as friends with something interesting rather than as an enemy bringing something suspicious. People love stories, so stories are a great way to catch people's attention and hold their attention while conveying God's truth.

The fifth blessing is actually the most important. By using the Discovery Bible Study method, families can very easily listen to and learn, not just one story (like they would if they had to wait for a visiting pastor). They can continually learn from so many stories without waiting for an outsider to visit again. The memory chip in each player contains creation to Christ stories, the Proverbs, Psalms, the book of Matthew, and Acts. In less than six months, new families can listen to, discuss, and apply stories from all these books! Through learning stories from so much of the Bible, strong house churches are established in a short amount of time.



People get baptized quickly and grow in a healthy way: rooted and established in Christ and His word.

Finally, Discovery Study helps people to wrestle personally with the Word. They discuss the questions with each other and have to listen to each other's observations. If an outsider or a pastor came and spoke to them forcefully, they'd get angry and not listen. But since the truths in God's word come out during their discussion, they aren't offended by the message. Also, when they leave that discussion and share the story with others, the others quickly accept what the person says. He or she is not preaching at them, but sharing out of his or her own experience of wrestling with the passage and applying it. The neighbors see that this person isn't a "Christian" as they define that term – a Westernized person with strange customs. This is simply a person they know who is now doing good things and saying good things, so this story must be good. In this way, new disciples are being made very easily and quickly without having to wait for outside leaders.

These are my main reasons for preferring Discovery Study over traditional preaching for spreading the gospel. The good news can advance so much more quickly and widely, and so many more people can be rooted and established in Christ. Here are some illustrations of ways God is using DBS to advance his kingdom. (Note: this should not be read as simply a promotion for DBS or as advocating a too-heavily focus on DBS while missing the big picture. The goal is not making DBS groups; the goal is a CPM/DMM.)

## DBS in Action

The main leader in one area of our country, "Abeer," has consistently reported that the Discovery Study approach is a great tool for growing people's faith quickly. Abeer has many generations of disciples that have been reproduced from his ministry. One of the fifth generation leaders, "Kannah," is 19 years old. One day, this young man went to G. Village, and was surprised to discover that a family there said they were followers of Jesus! Kannah visited the seven members of the family, including the 47-year-old mother, "Rajee." During their conversation, Rajee said, "Yes, we know about Jesus, but we have no idea how we will ever grow in our faith because pastors do not come here."

Kannah felt great sympathy for this family because his testimony was the same. When he first gave his allegiance to Christ, there had been no pastor to teach him in the

ways of his new faith. Pastors would come to his village occasionally, just as one had visited this family, but the pastors would only come to preach for a while, collect an offering, and then leave. They had never committed themselves to regular visits or actual disciple-making of any kind. They had only been taught to preach, so that is what they had done.

After listening to Rajee, Kannah said to her, "Auntie, I tell you truthfully, my story is just like yours. But one day, after I had been alone in my faith for a long time, I met a team who told me that while it was so good I had given my allegiance to Christ, I hadn't been told the whole story. Not only are we to follow Jesus and be His disciple, but we are also called to make other disciples." He continued, "The team told me that Jesus has given all of us, His followers, this command that we're to go and make disciples of all nations." In this simple way, Kannah spoke with the mother in the house, even though she was his elder. He finished with, "This is what the Bible says."

Rajee said, "We don't have a Bible and we don't know how to read. Some of our children are able to read some words, but none of us here is truly literate."

Kannah said, "Yes, I understand. In my village there are also many people who cannot read, but this team gave me a speaker with Bible stories on it, including wise sayings (the Proverbs), and holy songs (Psalms). If you listen to this speaker, you'll hear God's word and learn it, and there are also good questions on this speaker. As you discuss the questions after listening to each story, the truths will go deeper into your heart and life."

Rajee asked if she could have such a speaker. Kannah said that on that particular day, he didn't have one, but the next time he came, he'd be sure to bring one for her. Two days later, he returned to that village and gave the family a speaker. He explained: "After listening to these stories, it's very important to discuss the five questions so you can grow in your faith without depending on someone to come from far away and teach you. Listening to Bible stories and discussing them as a family will give you the opportunity to grow that you've been longing for."

Kannah has already started Discovery Groups in three different villages. In each village, the original group he started has started a new group. Although they are new in the faith, these believers are growing the work of disciple making. They are sharing the stories with others and multiplying disciples.

Abeer, the main leader for that area, now plans to share with Kannah verses about the Lord's Supper and baptism, so Kannah can take those verses to the groups. We look forward to seeing the groups continue to grow and multiply.

Rajee's family had waited a whole year for a pastor to return and teach them, but no one ever came. Then this young 19-year-old simply visited one day and gave them the tools they needed to grow in their faith. In ways like this, the Holy Spirit is working and this movement is growing. Kannah isn't a pastor; he's not had any Bible training. He's not even a member of a big church. He's just a simple guy from a village. And because he himself has followed this pattern for learning and growing in faith, he is able to share it with others. We praise God that even simple people are functioning as a royal priesthood – serving God and bringing His salvation to others.

In another case, a woman named Diya lives in "K. Village," far from any town. Residents there cannot travel or leave their village often because it is so remote. No traffic reaches their area for them to hitch a ride and they own no means of transport themselves. This isolation really bothered them. Once, they heard a man talk about Jesus; that He is great and able to do miracles. Without a vehicle or anything more than a footpath out of their village, they wondered if they would ever hear more about Him.

One day several disciple makers met in the home of a church leader who lives in that general area. The leader put this question to the disciple makers: "What do we do about people with whom we've been able to share a little bit about Jesus, but they need to know more? How can we follow up with people who live so far away that it's hard for us to reach them?" This question touched JP, one of the disciple makers.

He thought, "I have a bicycle. I could go visit with people who live in remote villages." This is how JP ended up in Diya's village. He met with her and her whole family and they talked about Jesus. He told them about Matthew 28, that we who are His disciples are commanded to go and make other disciples. He told her how she and her family could also obey Jesus' commands and that as they applied Jesus' instructions to their lives, their faith would grow. Diya and her whole family were so happy that someone from the "outside" had come all the way to their village to meet with them to talk about Jesus!

JP had a speaker with Bible stories on



it. He pulled it out of his bag and gave it to her, saying, "Sister, here is a simple way you can worship Jesus together in your home. I, too, am illiterate. I am not wise. I was never trained in an official pastor training program. But I have this speaker here with many Bible stories on it." JP told Diya how she and her family could use the speaker to study God's Word. He left it with her, and worship to Jesus began in that village for the first time.


One day, a neighbor family came to Diya's house to join them in their Bible study. However, as soon as Diya hit "play" on the speaker and they heard the voice start to narrate the Scripture, the 19-year-old daughter in the neighbor's family began to cry out – truly wailing. Priya had a demon in her, and everyone was very afraid.

What would happen? None of them were pastors. What were they supposed to do? What would the demon do? No one knew. So they all just kept listening to the story. The narration went on while Priya kept wailing and everyone else present was secretly, silently asking God to please do a miracle. Finally, the story ended, and the voice on the speaker asked the first question to facilitate the group discussion. Finally, someone was brave enough to say, "Let's pray!" So they all prayed for Priya and she was freed of the demon! And that's not all. She also had been ill for a long time, and during that meeting, God not only freed her of the demon but also healed her illness. After witnessing these two miracles, both families declared that they wanted to be followers of Jesus! Priya's family has now also started hosting a Bible study group in their own home.

Diya and Priya have since visited fourteen

different villages for the purpose of spreading Jesus' story! In those fourteen villages, twenty-eight Discovery Bible studies are taking place regularly. These groups are not yet spiritually mature. They are infants in the Lord, but the ladies have faith that many disciples will be made in those places. The main church leader in the area who hosted the meeting that JP attended, has visited these groups himself. He has talked to them about growing mature in Christ, and also about the Lord's Supper and baptism.

This is the power of God's Word and His Spirit, working where there are no seminaries or paid clergy. Just people hearing God's words and putting them into practice like the "wise man" Jesus described in Matthew 7. Jesus said that anyone who hears His words and obeys is like a wise man who built his house on rock so that nothing moved it, not rain or even floods. How precious and wonderful to be taught this lesson by people who can't even read!

How sad if all the world's unreached people had to wait for an ordained pastor or someone with a seminary education to bring them the good news of salvation. We praise God that Discovery Bible Studies are enabling disciples to make disciples even to the ends of the earth! 

## Notes

1. These are summarized in "God is Sweeping through South Asia" by the Walkers and Phoebe, a sub-title in "[God is Using Movements to Reach the Unreached](#)"; *Mission Frontiers*, Jan/Feb 2018.

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**The Walker family** (pseudonym) began cross-cultural work in 2001, joined Beyond ([www.beyond.org](http://www.beyond.org)) in 2006, and started applying CPM principles in 2011. They are the authors (under a different name) of the book *Dear Mom & Dad: An Adventure in Obedience*.

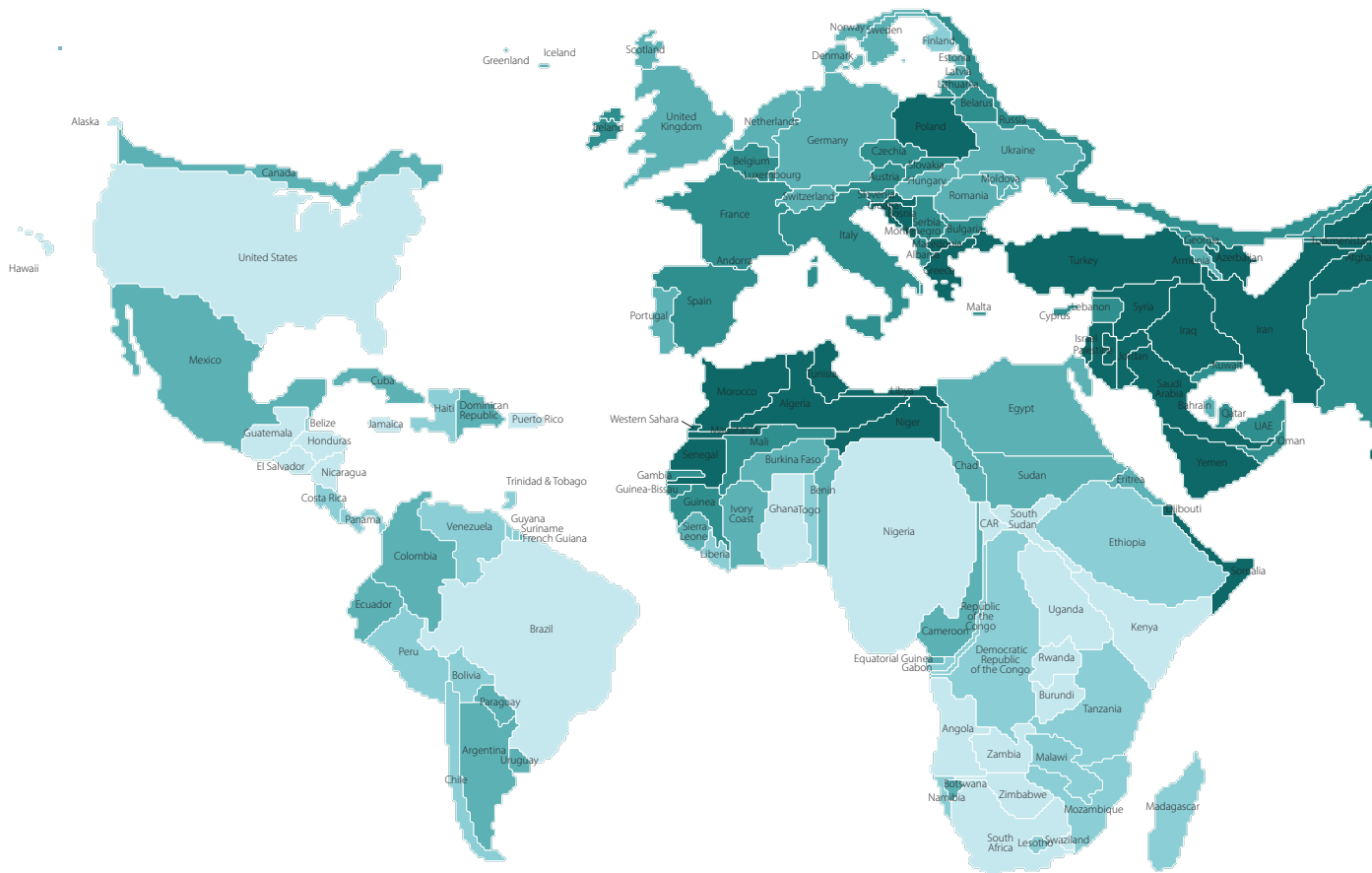


# Unreached People (not land masses!)

July 2019

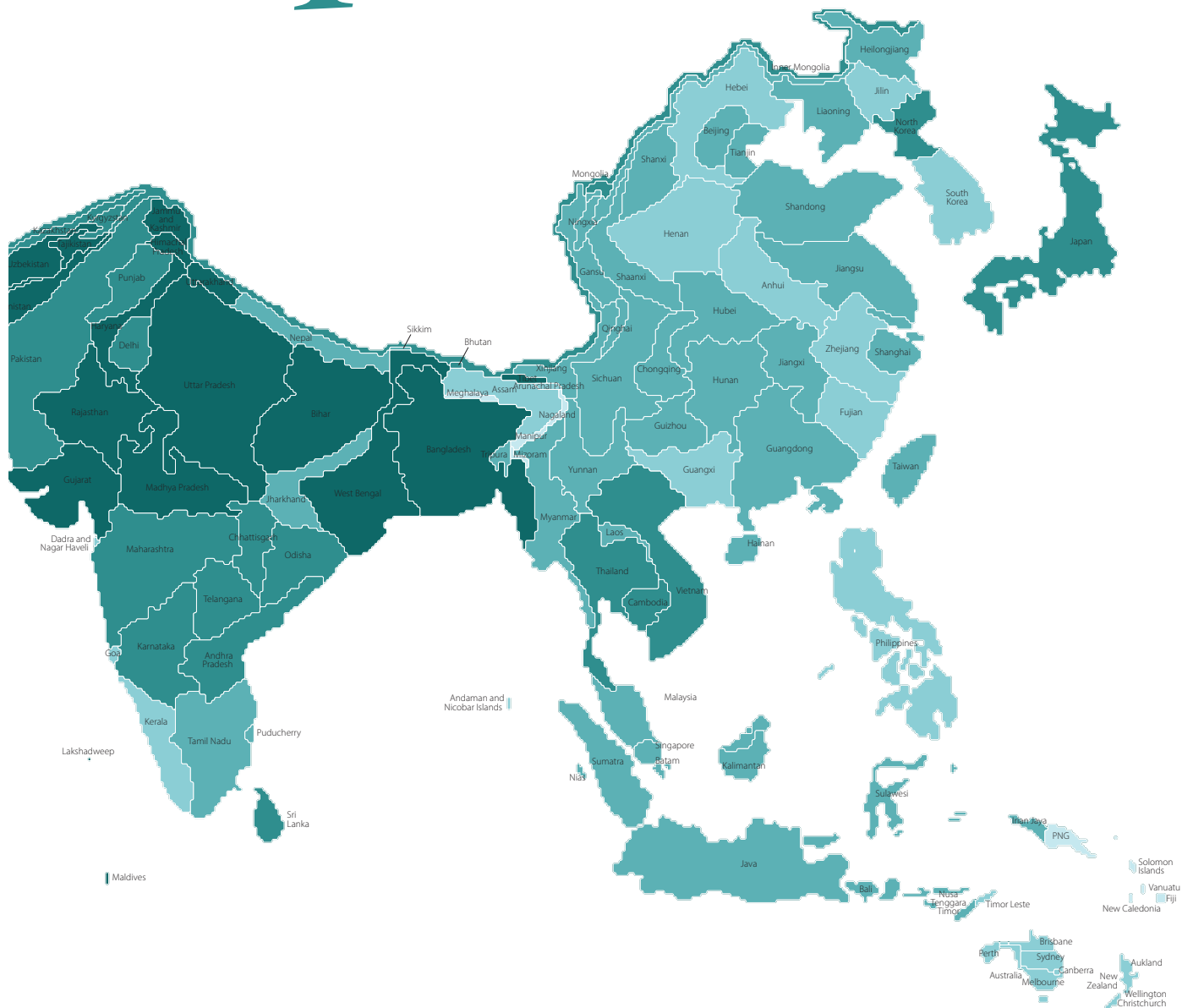
**IF THE GREAT COMMISSION IS ABOUT PEOPLE, WHY DO WE REPRESENT IT WITH GEOGRAPHIC MAPS?**

Geographic maps skew our perception of the task. Huge, unpopulated areas look like a priority, while geographically small regions with huge populations (like Bangladesh and Java) are overlooked, and the diverse populations of single but large countries (like India and China) are under-represented. This world map is a cartogram based on 2020 population estimates. Each pixel represents 100,000 people while the shading indicates the percentage of professing Evangelicals. 





# Unreached *People* [not land masses!]





# The Spirituality of William Ward

Matthew R.

I learned the hard way how important it is to pay attention to the “check oil” light. Knowing our car had a slow oil leak, I was in the habit of seeing the light and occasionally adding a quart of oil as needed. But this time I thought I could make it a little further before adding more oil. I was wrong. The friction of moving parts in the engine was too much, and the engine locked up completely. What could have been remedied with an inexpensive purchase of engine lubricant ended up costing my wife and me dearly.

Missions and missions teams are comprised of living, moving parts. These moving parts are the men and women that make up the mission. With so many moving parts, there is also friction. Many a missions team has fallen apart when this friction has not received the attention it needed. In thriving missions, however, there are often certain people – often behind the scenes – that help reduce friction. Like a soothing oil, their presence exerts a calming, peacemaking influence on those around them. William Ward was such a person in the Serampore Mission in the early nineteenth century in Bengal, India. At critical junctures, his irenic influence and wise counsel reduced friction and helped preserve the Mission.

## Brief Biography

The only “William” from the Serampore Mission with whom most are familiar today is the “Father of Modern Missions,” William Carey (1761–1834). But like most missionaries today, William Carey was part of a team. His two closest colleagues in ministry were Joshua Marshman (1768–1837) and William Ward (1769–1823). Together, they made up the Serampore Trio and served alongside each other for over twenty-three years. Though numerous missionary biographies have been written about William Carey, the historical reality is that he, Marshman, and Ward worked together as a leadership team. For several decades they complemented one another in an intricate way. Indeed, very few people in Britain ever realized how dependent Carey was on his partners for insight and a wide range of initiatives.<sup>1</sup> William Ward played many vital roles at the Serampore Mission, but sadly, after he died, “he slipped

from the memory of succeeding generations almost as soon as he was laid to rest.”<sup>2</sup>

William Ward was born in the town of Derby, England, October 20, 1769. He was born into a working-class family to a carpenter father and a pious Methodist mother.<sup>3</sup> As a young man, Ward apprenticed as a printer under John Drewry, a printer and bookseller in Derby.<sup>4</sup> Ward went on to work as a newspaper editor for about four years – first for *The Derby Mercury* and then for the *Hull Advertiser and Exchange Gazette*.<sup>5</sup> But Ward was not to remain in the newspaper business. Though the details are not clear, Ward began to align himself with Particular Baptists around 1791.<sup>6</sup> He made a public profession of his faith in Christ around 1794 or 1795<sup>7</sup> and was baptized a year later while attending the Baptist church on George Street in Hull.<sup>8</sup> Following his baptism, he began to preach in the villages around Hull<sup>9</sup> and eventually attracted the attention of a patron, one Mr. Fishwick, who offered to sponsor Ward’s preparation for gospel ministry.<sup>10</sup> This took place under the direction of prominent Particular Baptist minister, John Fawcett (1740–1817), at his residence of Ewood Hall.<sup>11</sup> It was there that he met one of the members of the newly formed Particular Baptist Missionary Society, probably John Sutcliffe (1752–1814).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps, at this time, Ward recalled Carey’s words to him prior to his departure for India: “If the Lord bless us, we shall want a person of your business, to enable us to print the Scriptures; I hope you will come after us.”<sup>13</sup> What is certain is that soon after this visit from the PBMS member, Ward wrote to Society secretary, Andrew Fuller, to express his “readiness to engage in this great cause.”<sup>14</sup>

On May 7, 1799, Ward, along with Daniel

Brunsdon (1777–1801) was “set apart to the work of a Christian Missionary.”<sup>15</sup> Seventeen days later, William Ward, Joshua and Hannah Marshman (1767–1847), and Daniel Brunsdon and William Grant and their spouses boarded the *Criterion* and embarked for India, and four and a half months later, they arrived in Serampore, Lord’s Day morning, October 13, 1799.<sup>16</sup> Apart from one international tour toward the end of his life, Serampore would be the center of Ward’s life and ministry for the rest of his days. Though Ward is primarily known for his role of printer at the Mission, he came, in time, to fill many vital roles in the Serampore Mission and beyond. These included “peacemaker, personnel manager, pastoral counselor and publisher,”<sup>17</sup> preacher, evangelist, mentor, mission administrator, missiologist, theologian, historian, draftsman, author, college professor, pastor, husband, father, and friend.

## The Context and Nature of Ward’s Spirituality

What is now called “spirituality,” Ward called “real religion.” He writes, “For a more correct idea of real religion can hardly be formed by us, than that it is a deep and lasting impression of the immeasurable importance of the truths of the Gospel, and fervency of spirit in seeking to be brought permanently under their influence.”<sup>18</sup> In Ward’s understanding, spirituality or “real religion” was a matter of “seeking to be brought permanently under” the influences of the truths of the Gospel. The spirituality he esteemed could be measured objectively by the degree to which one’s life adhered to Scripture. Put another way, one’s spirituality is shaped by one’s theology.

In Ward’s case, he stood in a theological



stream that ran from the Reformers of the sixteenth century to the English Puritans of the seventeenth century to George Whitefield (1714–1770) and Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) in the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s. Those affected by Whitefield's ministry included Dissenters (including Ward's Particular Baptists) and Anglicans alike. Though denominationally different, these all shared a common love for the doctrines of grace. Regarding these doctrines Ward writes,

The more we know of mankind, and the more we know ourselves, the more shall we see of the importance of the doctrines of grace; that there is an imperious necessity that these doctrines should be faithfully and fearlessly preached and as thoroughly and heartily received, seeing the very life of religion within us, the very life of the churches, and the success of the ministry, depend upon it.<sup>19</sup>

From this theological foundation, four themes emerge in William Ward's spirituality. These are readily identified from both his memoir and his swansong, *Reflections On The Word of God For Every Day In The Year*, a two-volume daily devotional which he wrote about five years before his death. These themes are love, prayer, humility, and usefulness. These traits coalesced to form a warmhearted, theologically robust spirituality that had a salutary effect on both the Serampore Trio and Mission. Many examples could be given to illustrate the impact of Ward's spirituality on the Serampore Trio and Mission, but only the following two examples are included in this article.

### The Effect of Ward's Spirituality on the Serampore Trio and Mission

Until 1813 when the East India Company charter was renewed with terms more favorable to mission endeavors, Ward and company labored under the constant threat of expulsion from India and the extinction of their mission. To maintain control over Bengal and other areas of India, the Company relied on its sepoy army comprised of local Hindu and Muslim soldiers.<sup>20</sup> Because of this, British rulers could not afford to risk offending local religious sentiments. This was tragically illustrated on July 10, 1806 when Muslim sepoys massacred fourteen officers of the garrison, including the colonel, in addition to ninety-nine commissioned officers – while they were asleep and unarmed!<sup>21</sup> It seems the

mutiny stemmed from an order that sepoys should wear a new turban that was repugnant to them as it bore strong resemblance to an English hat. This repugnance morphed into revolt as family members of the defeated Tipu Sultan spread the report that this was a first step toward full-scale forced conversion of the Indian populace to Christianity.<sup>22</sup>

Following this mutiny, Company rulers were especially alert to anything that might inflame local passions. A year later, in this combustible environment, an overzealous convert from a Muslim background struck a match by writing a tract that referred to the Prophet Muhammad as a “tyrant” and the *Qur'an* as an “imposture” – i.e., a work which is intended to deceive. It slipped through the press without Ward's knowledge and was deemed by the government “sufficient to excite rebellion among the Mussulmans.”<sup>23</sup> With so much at stake the British authorities could not take any chances. A little over a week after the Serampore missionaries first learned of the inflammatory tract they received an alarming letter from the Company Government demanding that the house of worship in Calcutta be closed, and worst of all, that the Mission's Press “be transferred to this Presidency where alone the same Controul that is established over presses sanctioned by Government, can be duly exercised.”<sup>24</sup>

On receipt of this news, the Mission was brought very low. Carey “wept like a child.”<sup>25</sup> They called a special prayer meeting. Their ally and protector, Danish Governor Krefting declared that “he would strike the flag, & surrender himself a prisoner, but that he would not give up the press.”<sup>26</sup> A showdown was brewing between the Serampore Mission and their Danish protector, and the British government of the East India Company.

In the midst of this tense situation, with the continued existence of the Mission on the line, Ward offered his colleagues some sagacious counsel. First, he reminded them of all they stood to lose if they could not find a way to assuage the Company's ire. They could lose Carey's salary which would put an end to translations and send them to jail for debt. The Government could stop the circulation of any and every item issued from their Press. They could prohibit their entering British territories altogether.<sup>27</sup> Second – and in lieu of their dire reality – Ward recommended the following pacific course:

We should entreat their clemency, & try to soften them. Tender words, with the

consciences of men on our side, go a long way. We can tell them to take the press to Calcutta would involve us in a heavy and unbearable expence, break up our family, &ca . . . that we are willing to do every thing they wish us, except that of renouncing our work and character as Ministers of the Saviour of the world . . . If they listen to this we are secured, with all the advantages of their sufferance. If they are obstinate, we are still at Serampore. I entreat you dear Brethren, to consider these things, and give them all the attention that our awful circumstances [require].<sup>28</sup>

In the end, the missionaries had to submit for a time to certain “restrictions imposed upon them” by the Government, but they were able to keep their press and continue printing Bengali Bibles.<sup>29</sup> Ward knew that his actions might be interpreted in England as a compromise of their gospel calling. But given what would have happened had they remained estranged from the ruling powers, Ward felt justified in the decision they had made. To help Fuller see things from their perspective he challenged, “I suppose, for the sake of preaching at the bull-ring in the market-place, you would not think it right to quarrel with the mayor of Northampton, if you knew that the result of this quarrel would be the silencing of all the Gospel Ministers in England. ‘If they persecute you in one city, flee’, &c.”<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion


A few years after the Persian Pamphlet Controversy, Ward was involved in another standoff. But this time, he faced off not against the East India Company, but against his closest colleagues, William Carey and Joshua Marshman. They differed over whether communion at the Mission Church should be open or closed. Through the years they had practiced both at different times. However, in March 1811, Marshman, convinced by Andrew Fuller, prohibited an independent missionary from observing the Lord's Supper with them. And with that, the Mission Church resumed the practice of closed communion.<sup>31</sup> So strongly did Ward resent this move that he rejoined, “[I] would rather die than go into such a measure.”<sup>32</sup> But in the end, he did what he had said he would do should such a decision ever be made:

We admit paedobaptists to communion with us; but should the Serampore



church change its practice, which, in my opinion, is its glory, I would take all proper occasions to protest against its spirit; but should I abandon all means of doing good, because they acted wrong? Would not my opinions, mildly and properly urged, be more likely to do good, than if I left the church, and placed myself at a greater distance from my fellow-christians?<sup>33</sup>

Or, as he expressed his rationale to John Ryland (1753–1825) over four years later, “I throw away the guns to preserve the ship.”<sup>34</sup>

Ward’s spirituality is both relevant and imitable. Many a missionary who departed for the field with intentions of serving a lifetime, has returned a short time later because of team conflict. Consequently, mission fields and agencies are in sore need of William Wards today. Unlike the independent trailblazer, William Ward is a missionary hero of a different kind. 

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## Notes

The full list can be seen at [http://www.finishingthetask.com/downloads/FTT\\_UUPG\\_List.pdf](http://www.finishingthetask.com/downloads/FTT_UUPG_List.pdf).

1. A. Christopher Smith, *The Serampore Mission Enterprise* (Bangalore, India: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006), 3.
2. Smith, *Serampore Enterprise*, 46.
3. Samuel Stennett, *Memoirs of The Life of the Rev. William Ward, Late Baptist Missionary in India; Containing A Few Of His Early Poetical Productions, and A Monody to His Memory* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1825), 6.
4. Stennett records his master’s name as “Drewry” while J. C. Marshman spells the same “Drury.” Stennett, *Memoirs*, 10; John Clark Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward* (1859; repr., Serampore: Council of Serampore College, 2005), 1:93.
5. A. Christopher Smith, “William Ward, Radical Reform, and Missions in the 1790s,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (September 1991): 221–22.
6. Smith, “William Ward, Radical Reform,” 230.
7. Stennett, *Memoirs*, 13–14.
8. J. C. Marshman, *Life and Times*, 1:96; Smith, “William Ward, Radical Reform,” 233.
9. Stennett, *Memoirs*, 29.
10. J. C. Marshman, *The Life and Times*, 1:96; Smith, “Radical Reform,” 237; Stennett, *Memoirs*, 30.
11. [John Fawcett, Jr.], *An Account of the Life, Ministry, and Writings of the late Rev. John Fawcett Who Was Minister Of The Gospel Fifty-Four Years, First At Wainsgate, And Afterwards At Hebdenbridge, In The Parish Of Halifax; Comprehending Many Particulars Relative To The Revival And Progress Of Religion In Yorkshire And Lancashire; And Illustrated By Copious Extracts From The Diary Of The Deceased, From His Extensive Correspondence, And Other Documents* (London, 1818), 284.
12. Stennett, *Memoirs*, 49. Smith feels the visiting BMS member was probably John Sutcliffe. Smith, “William Ward, Radical Reform, and Missions in the 1790s,” 237.
13. Stennett, *Memoirs*, 49. Smith feels the visiting BMS member was probably John Sutcliffe. Smith, “William Ward, Radical Reform, and Missions in the 1790s,” 237.

14. Stennett, *Memoirs*, 50.
15. Stennett, *Memoirs*, 61.
16. J. C. Marshman, *Life and Times*, 1:111.
17. Smith, *Serampore Enterprise*, 24; H. Helen Holcomb, *Men of Might in India Mission* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901), 89.
18. William Ward, *Reflections On The Word of God For Every Day In The Year: In Two Volumes* (Serampore: Mission Press, 1822), 2:138.
19. Ward, *Reflections*, 2:66.
20. “Sepoy” is an Anglicization of the Persian and Urdu words *sipahi* which means “soldier.”
21. J. C. Marshman, *Life and Times*, 1:263.
22. J. C. Marshman, *Life and Times*, 1:261–65.
23. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Thursday, September 3, 1807, 580.
24. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Friday, September 11, 1807, 589.
25. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Tuesday, September 15, 1807, 592.
26. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Monday, September 21, 1807, 594.
27. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Monday, September 21, 1807, 595.
28. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Monday, September 21, 1807, 595–96.
29. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Saturday, October 10, 1807, 601–02.
30. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Monday, September 21, 1807, 596.
31. Ward, *Journal MSS*, Lord’s Day, March 3, 1811, 749.
- Mr. Pritchett is called an “independent missionary” in J. C. Marshman, *Life and Times*, 1:461.
32. J. C. Marshman, *Life and Times*, 1:460.
33. Ward to a friend, March 3, 1810 in Stennett, *Memoirs*, 245.
34. Ward to Ryland, November 14, 1815, BMS MSS.



# The Challenge of Liberation Theology

Emilio Antonio Nunez

Liberation theology is a good example of the tremendous influence exercised by the social sciences on contemporary theological thinking. Even if we trace liberation theology to its European sources, we'll discover that theologians like Bonhoeffer, Metz, and Moltmann were deeply concerned about social problems, although they were doing theology in a cultural context that is quite different from ours in Latin America.

The existential hermeneutics of Bultmann, the secular approach of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Christianity, the political hermeneutics of Metz, for example, have been influential to a large extent on liberation theology. Of course, the representatives of this theological system are not eager to admit their dependence on a foreign theology. They argue that European theologians are doing their work in a capitalistic society, for people who enjoy the material advantages of a highly developed country. By contrast, they say, liberation theology has emerged from a situation of poverty, in countries that are underdeveloped because they are dependent on Western capitalism and neo-colonialism. For the same reason they believe they have gone, in their theological thinking beyond vanguard Catholic theologians like Rahner and Kung, who belong also to an affluent society.<sup>1</sup>

Liberation theology claims to be a theology produced in Latin America, by and for Latin Americans. It is the attempt to contextualize the Christian message according to the particular needs of men and women who live in a social context which is crying for radical changes. The motivation, method, and goals of this theology demand, to some extent, a different approach to the one we use in evaluating other theological systems. For instance, it is indispensable to give serious consideration to the social milieu in which liberation theology is framed.

## The Sociological Context of Liberation Theology

It is evident that we cannot achieve a proper understanding of liberation theology unless we are aware of the particular social problems confronting Latin Americans today. I am not talking of approving, or accepting, this theology, but about understanding its motivation, its method, and purposes. As evangelicals educated according to the principles and ideals of

American Protestantism, it is usually difficult for us (I include myself because theologically I am a creature of American evangelicalism) to think in categories that are different from those in which we have been trained to think. For instance, some evangelicals, here at home and abroad, have believed that if you are on behalf of social reform you are already a communist, or at least, you are foolishly helping the cause of international communism. Some evangelicals have also left the impression that in their minds they are equating the gospel with capitalism, more or less in the same way in which some revolutionaries in Latin America come asking us to wear Fidel Castro's beret as the symbol of our loyalty to the gospel of Christ. This is a symbolic way to speak about the tendency to identify the gospel with a political system, whatever this may be.

It is also undeniable that to have a proper understanding of liberation theology we need to take seriously into consideration the extenuating circumstances in which millions of Latin Americans live. Luis Marchand, the Peruvian ambassador to the Organization of American States, reported that about 43 percent of the Latin American people live in extreme poverty. At least one million babies die every year, because of lack of medical care, or undernourishment. One hundred million Latin Americans are illiterate. Out of this group of people who cannot read, 56 percent are under 15 years of age. There are no schools for them. From 125 million to 130 million Latin Americans have no drinkable water, and 150 million Latin Americans lack sanitary facilities. At least 20 percent of the population merely subsist. It is a miracle they are still alive.

If you go to Central America and associate yourself with the masses, not only with high-class, or middle-class people, you will understand better the theology of liberation. And if you are a Latin American, and you were born and raised as the child of a poor family, you have better understanding of the motivations behind this theological system. In view of the fact that the vast majority of the people belong to the low classes of society, liberation theology may exercise a strong influence on the future of our countries, and on the future of the Third World as a whole.

In evaluating liberation theology, we Latin American Christians have to be sincere to ask

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ourselves whether we are really concerned about the gospel of Christ, or about a particular political system. Are we defending the gospel of Christ or capitalism? Are we more concerned about free enterprise than about the gospel? Ox, are we more enthusiastic about socialism than about New Testament Christianity? Our political convictions may play an important role in our evaluation of liberation theology, because this is apolitical theology, based to a large extent on the Marxist analysis of society. It is therefore natural for conservatives to reject liberation theology just on the basis of political conviction. On the other hand, it is also natural for a liberal minded citizen in the United States, or somewhere else, to be in sympathy with the viewpoint of theologians who emphasize the need of a radical change in the social structures of the Third World.

We Latin American evangelicals should not be indifferent to our own social reality. On the contrary, we are supposed to identify ourselves with our people in their sufferings and longing for freedom. And we have to admit that traditional capitalism has not been able to solve our problems; that generally speaking, the rich are getting richer, and the poor, poorer in Latin American society. Industrialization is creating new problems, which in many respects are more difficult than the ones we had when our economy depended only on agriculture. And we have the right to ask whether socialism shall succeed where capitalism has failed.

We conservative evangelicals in Latin America have usually been concerned only about the individual, without taking into consideration his social context. We have been preaching about the spiritual element in man, without really paying attention to his physical and material needs. We have been preaching about heaven and hell, without declaring the totality of the counsel of God in relation to life this side of the grave. We have been denouncing the sinfulness of the individual, but not the evils of society as a whole. Our message has not been a threat to people in the wealthy class, in government, in the military.

We conservative evangelicals in Latin America are known as "good people," because we do not interfere in political affairs, and do not make the people aware of their need of total liberation. Dictators have loved us and protected us for almost a century, in Central America, because of our non-involvement in politics. Of course, our non-involvement has been a political option, by which we have

contributed to the preservation of the status quo in Latin American society.

Now, with liberation theology the pendulum goes to the left. We are told that to be an authentic Christian one must be concerned about poverty and do something about it; that we have to find Jesus in the poor; that political action is included in the gospel; that we have to identify ourselves with the cause of the oppressed and fight the oppressors; that God is active in history on behalf of the poor and against the wealthy; that the mission of the church is to help to change social structures in the process of establishing the kingdom of God on earth; that the future is always open for Christian thought and action; and that we should see God's hand in any movement striving for the economic, social, and political liberation of man.

Without closing out eyes to our own socio-economic reality, and without establishing a dichotomy between our Christian faith and our social responsibility, we Latin American evangelicals have to approach liberation theology from a biblical standpoint. Our highest authority has to be the Word of God. Any ideology, or system of thought, or socio-political movement, is imperfect and transitory. But the Word of God is perfect and remains forever. If we are faithful to our evangelical inheritance, we'll let God say the first and final word about our social problems in Latin America.

### A Theological Evaluation of Liberation Theology

First of all, we are concerned about the point of departure, and the theological foundations of liberation theology. In an interview on television, in Guatemala City, a Catholic priest was right when he said that liberation theology is a new method of doing theology.

Segundo Galilea, a Roman Catholic apologist of this theology, says that there are three ways of doing theology: (1) the spiritual study of the Scriptures; the emphasis here is devotional; (2) systematic or scientific theology, which according to Galilea – is the attempt to relate faith and reason in the study of divine revelation; and (3) pastoral theology. In this case the point of departure is the church, the pastoral ministry, the social action of Christians, the social context in which the church carries on its mission.<sup>2</sup> Liberation theology belongs to this last category.

Galilea says that this theology has two sources: (1) Latin American social reality and (2) the objective faith of the church.<sup>3</sup> Answering the objection that liberation theology is

«sociologism,» because of its overemphasis on the social sciences, Galilea indicates that theology has always used auxiliary sciences; for instance, philosophy was extensively used by theologians in the past.<sup>4</sup> But when we read liberation theology, we discover that the social sciences are not only instruments in the hands of the theologian, but the dominant element in this system of thought. The basic presuppositions are not biblical, but sociological. In our opinion, liberation theology is not the product of biblical exegesis, but of biblical eisegesis. We have found that liberation theology is based more on the social context than on the biblical text. It is a movement from the context to the text.<sup>5</sup>

But Galilea speaks also of four tendencies he sees in liberation theology at the present time. The first tendency emphasizes the biblical notion of liberation and the application of this concept to our society. The second tendency takes as a point of departure Latin American history and culture, and the liberating potential possessed by the people in these countries. The emphasis of the third tendency is on economics, or class struggle, and the ideologies confronted by the Christian Faith.

In this type of liberation theology there are points of contact with the Marxist analysis of society. But this analysis is used only insofar as is valid for the social sciences today. The fourth tendency is, according to Segundo, more an ideology than a theology, and it is definitely under the influence of Marxism. Segundo declares that in this case we are not any more on theological rounds, and there is no reason to speak of a theology of liberation.

In practice, it may be quite difficult to distinguish one type of liberation theology from another; but it is possible to say that the first three tendencies are represented in the type of liberation theology that is becoming popular among Catholics today. There is a strong emphasis on history as a process of liberation; there is an extensive use of Marxist interpretation of society, and there is an effort to find liberation theology in the biblical text. But we still have problems with the hermeneutics employed by liberation theologians, and with their low view of biblical authority. We must not forget that liberation theology, as it is, presented today, in a systematic form, is a Roman Catholic creature. The church of Rome does not have as high a view of Scripture as conservative evangelicals do. In regard to existential hermeneutics, political hermeneutics, and



symbolic hermeneutics, there is an extensive field for research, in relation to the theology of liberation.

We evangelicals have to ask whether the social analysis made by liberation theologians is in harmony with reality, and most of all, whether this analysis is in agreement with the biblical concept of human society. We are not supposed to stop thinking and swallow the Marxian analysis of society, just because the defenders of Marxism use the adjective "scientific." Marxian dogmatism has been questioned on scientific grounds, and Marxian reductionism does not explain the total problem of the total man in Latin America.

We evangelicals have to ask whether the anthropology and soteriology of liberation theology are biblical; whether liberation missiology is in agreement with the missionary mandate in the New Testament; whether liberation hope is based on biblical eschatology. Evaluating the theology of liberation in the light of the Scriptures, we discover that the answer to these important questions is negative.

On biblical grounds, we question the anthropology and soteriology of liberation theology. This theological system is to a large extent anthropocentric, humanistic. Liberation theologians leave the impression that they believe in "the natural goodness of man." They tend to overlook the doctrine of the sinfulness of all men. Their emphasis is not on sinful individuals, but on evil social structures.<sup>6</sup> They strongly denounce the capitalist system, international and national colonialism, the wealthy classes, the military and the civil rulers who, using the doctrine of national security as a pretext, permit the exploitation of the masses by foreign and native oppressors. But these theologians de-emphasize the sinfulness of the poor. Reading their argument we may get the impression that the rich are sinners just because they are rich, and that the poor are not sinners just because they are poor.

Liberation theologians make a good deal of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ was born and lived in poverty, and that he identified himself with the masses. But they do not underline that the Messiah did not come to promote class struggles, much less social violence. They do not underline that he taught that evil comes from the heart of man. They do not underline that he was willing to receive and liberate the rich, and to die for all, because all human beings are sinners, separated from God and from their fellow men.

As it is natural in Roman Catholic thought, there is no room in liberation theology for the total depravity of man. Human beings are able at least to cooperate with divine grace for their own salvation. It is a salvation by human works, plus divine grace. Matthew 25:31-46 is one of the favorite Scriptures of liberation theologians. Jesus is in the poor—they say—and we have to identify ourselves with the poor, supplying their physical and material needs, liberating them from their socio-political oppression, if we want to be approved by the Lord.


In the final analysis, it is man who delivers himself from evil. It is he who builds up the kingdom of God on earth, although the consummation of this kingdom comes from heaven. The kingdom is a reality that is now present – inaugurated by Jesus, the Son of God—and at the same time a reality that is on the way to its completion. It is the "now" and the "not yet" of the kingdom. God is working in history, establishing his kingdom now, by means of the church, through the instrumentality of sociopolitical movements created for the humanization of man.

In liberation theology the kingdom is not equated to any political system. The church is not the kingdom of God, it is only an agent of the kingdom. The kingdom is in progress. The future is always open. The eschatological horizon is always expanding before the eyes of the church. Therefore, theology is in the making. There is no room here for any theological dogmatism. Liberation theology depends on the praxis of the church; it may be the result of political involvement on behalf of the poor. Action comes first; theology follows as a consequence of social action.<sup>10</sup> This may indicate that there are no absolute or final theological truths. Relativism is indeed one of the dangers in liberation theology. Universalism is another threat in this theological system. There is a tendency to overlook the doctrine of personal regeneration; but, on the other hand, a great deal is made of the identification of Christ with mankind as a whole, and great emphasis is given to liberation as a process embracing the totality of human beings, in the New Man created in Christ.

No wonder that liberation theology has been opposed by Christians who prefer to be faithful to the distinctives of the evangelical faith, including, of course, the uniqueness of the gospel as the only way of salvation in Christ. Even among Catholics there is disagreement in regard to the theology of liberation.<sup>11</sup> The arguments pro and con

ate historical, sociological, political, and theological in nature. The Third Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Puebla provided a battleground for friends and foes of this theological system. But the ideas of Gutierrez, Assmann, and other vanguard Catholic theologians, are commanding the attention of Roman Catholicism around the world. The Catholic Church in Latin America cannot be the same after the impact received from the theology of liberation.

We have also to take into consideration that some Protestants have been attracted by this theology, which is capturing the minds of many Latin Americans today. To understand better the religious scene in those countries, it is indispensable to study the theology of liberation.

We Latin American evangelicals have also the responsibility to read the Scriptures within our own social context, under the light of the Scriptures, attempting to avoid any social or political prejudice, and then proclaim the whole counsel of God for the total man in Latin America. 

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**Dr. Emilio Antonio Núñez** (1923–2015) was widely regarded as one of the foremost biblical scholars in Latin America. Born in El Salvador, he lived in Guatemala since 1944. He was founder and first rector of the Central American Theological Seminary, and founding member of the Latin American Theological Fraternity. Dr. Núñez taught theology for over sixty-five years. He held administrative positions as Director of the Department of Theology and Rector of SETE-CA. He authored several books and articles, including: *Crisis and Hope in Latin America*, co-author with William Taylor, *Towards a Latin American Evangelical Missiology, Theology and Mission: A Perspective from Latin America*; *Pastoral Challenges, Contemporary Apostolic Movement*.

## Endnotes

1. Hugo Assmann, *Teología desde la Praxis de la Liberación* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1973), pp. 16-20, 23-25, 44, 76-89.
2. Segundo Galilea, *Teología de la Liberación* (Bogotá: Indo-American Press, 1976), pp. 14-16.
3. Galilea, op. cit., pp. 21-22.
4. Ibid., pp. 17-18. See also Assmann, op. cit., pp. 51-52.
5. Assmann, op. cit., pp. 39-42, 48, 51. Gutierrez Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1972), pp. 26-41.
6. Gutierrez, op. cit., 236-237.



# The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology

By Michael. W. Goheen

Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018

220 pages

USD \$22.99

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Reviewed by Jonathan K. Dodson, church planter in Austin, TX and author of various books including *The Unbelievable Gospel* and *Here in Spirit*.

After speaking with Lesslie Newbigin about some of the liberal opposition he was facing regarding his views of scriptural authority, Goheen anxiously entered the Duke Chapel to hear Newbigin lecture. As he did, Newbigin said to Goheen, "There will be many who oppose what I say. But I must be faithful whatever the consequences and leave it in God's hand." As Newbigin spoke with peace and assurance, Goheen describes his anxiety and fear "dropping away" (215).


What accounted for Newbigin's unanxious witness? For Goheen's fear dropping away? Goheen attributes it to Newbigin's theology: a deep confidence in the rule of the Father over all of history and "the Spirit as the first and only effectual witness to Christ" (21). Although we may agree with Newbigin's trinitarian theology of mission, our anxiety may remain when we face the possibility of rejection while sharing the gospel.

Whether we're doing cross-cultural missions in the Majority world or sharing the gospel in the suburbs, it is tempting to feel as though the burden of conversion and justice rests on our shoulders. Alternatively, we might blame "the Church" for not being more engaged. Newbigin offers a timely corrective, "It is not the Church who bears witness [while] the Spirit helps the church to do so. This kind of language completely misses the point. The point is that the Church is the place where the Spirit is present as witness" (emphasis added, 58). The only effective witness to Jesus is the Spirit of God.

It is massively relieving, and motivating, to know the Spirit is the only effective witness to the

gospel. It relieves us of cul-de-sac efforts to find confidence in technique, frequency, or knowledge. Yet, the Spirit motivates his new creation to joyfully testify to the reality of the person and work of Jesus. Goheen explains that Newbigin saw the locus of the witness of the Spirit in the Church, through its deeds and evangelistic words. Furthermore, deeds and words should not be pitted against one another. Rather, there is an indissoluble nexus between word and deed (94). If nothing is happening in the Church that calls for an explanation of the gospel, then our words are empty. We must be acting in a way that demands a gospel explanation. Without a gospel explanation, a deed cannot speak fully. As the famous Newbigin adage goes, "The Church is the hermeneutic of the gospel" (81).

Goheen unearths insight after insight from his decades of reflection on Newbigin's corpus. I found myself underlining both Newbigin and Goheen over and over again. Goheen's explanation of Newbigin's emphasis on the gospel as the true story of the world freshly reminds us the story is not illustrative of another truth; it is the true story.

Thus, the Church bears the blessed responsibility of both words and deeds to narrate the gospel story. Indeed, "there is no other body that will tell it" (93). Therefore, it is relieving that the Spirit is the only effective witness, yet motivating to know we are the only people entrusted with his message. May the indwelling Spirit stir up unanxious eagerness to witness his witness of the risen Christ. 

## For Further Reading:

Weston, Paul, ed. *Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 2006.

Goheen, Mike. *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 2011.



# Discipling in a Multicultural World

By Ajith Fernando

In *Discipling in a Multicultural World*, Ajith Fernando quotes Australian pastor Richard Brohier to describe one of the primary challenges facing the church today, “Our culture of individualism sees [discipleship] as a program rather than a lifestyle of sacrifice and inconvenience.” To address this discipling “crisis” Fernando draws on over 40 years of ministry experience focused on making disciples and leading the organization Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka. He suggests that the best solution to this problem is to view discipling as spiritual parenting.


Fernando brings the spiritual parenting analogy to life by presenting scripture passages that portray discipling as a kind of parenting. He refers to the “born again” language of the book of John, the apostle Paul calling Timothy his son, and Peter calling Mark his son. Fernando focuses on spiritual parenting throughout the first half of the book.

Just as multiplication is the result of parenting from one generation to the next, Fernando argues that when disciplers act as spiritual parents of their disciples, we can expect to see the multiplication of believers. In this way, even in an individualistic society, discipleship ceases to be a program run by churches and becomes a lifestyle that requires communal commitment and sacrifice – just like literal parenting.

Building upon this discipling as parenting metaphor, Fernando describes what discipling

has looked like for him in his context in Sri Lanka, and what it could look like for anyone brave who undertakes this difficult but necessary work in a multicultural world. The applications Fernando suggests come out of his more communal context but are aimed at helping those in individualistic Western cultures and the ever increasingly individualistic cultures of the rest of the world.

The book is more practical than theoretical, walking the reader through immediately implementable ways to interact with disciples as a spiritual parent. Fernando address everything from how to keep disciples as connected to their earthly families as possible to instilling a passion for disciple making in one’s disciple, as well as the various and specific ways a discipler should pray for their disciples. While addressing all these topics, Fernando maintains a vigorous commitment to scripture and emphasizes that spiritual parenting should occur within the context of the body of Christ.

Seemingly written for a general western audience, Fernando’s experience and examples come from vocational ministry in a communal culture. So, it seems as though the book might be more useful in the hands of a cross-cultural Christian worker in the Middle East than in the hands of a typical American churchgoer. However, it is a valuable resource for anyone who is serious about engaging seriously in the glorious calling of making disciples. 

Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019

288 pages

USD \$19.99

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Reviewed by John K. who lives and serves in ministry in Central Asia with his wife and two children.

## For Further Reading:

Laniak, S. Timothy. *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*.

Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2006.

Smith, L. Edward. *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders*. Nashville, B&H

Academic, 2008.



# Following Jesus in Turbulent Times: Disciple-Making in the Arab World

By Hikmat Kashouh

Carlisle, UK: Langham Publishing, 2018

152 pages

USD \$17.99

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Reviewed by Fred Farrokh, a Muslim-background Christian serving as an International Trainer with Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples.

Few books combine missiology with a practitioner's testimony as well as *Following Jesus in Turbulent Times: Disciple-Making in the Arab World* by Hikmat Kashouh. In this brief work, Pastor Kashouh chronicles what has transpired at Resurrection Church Beirut (RCB) in Lebanon which he pastors. The church has grown from an attendance of 70 to now over 1,300. Seventy percent of the church members are refugees, mostly from Syria and Iraq.


Kashouh's story shows how the "all things" God of Romans 8:28 is alive and well in the Middle East, moving in a way that we have never seen before. The first 16 years of Pastor Hikmat's life coincided with the protracted Civil War in Lebanon, 1975–1991. This difficult experience prepared him and other Lebanese Christians to empathize with and embrace the Syrians fleeing ISIS.

Kashouh and his ministerial team were willing to take risks by adapting their church structure, leadership, and decision-making processes to their changing context. Kashouh intentionally brought non-Lebanese into leadership roles. Women have also come into leadership roles in the church for the first time. Two hundred "life groups" provide a place for encouragement and discipleship.

Kashouh is also a scholar, having completed a PhD in Theology at the University of Birmingham. The author explains, missiologically, how Resurrection Church Beirut carries out its ministry to refugees. Kashouh provides concrete examples, such as some church members complaining about the smell of the desolate refugee

arrivals and the church leaders' response. The cross-cultural stretching has impacted many of the church members for the good. Even the challenge of doing worship songs in multiple languages and multiple styles caused the optimistic Kashouh to state, "The clash of two cultures within one setting has created a third culture that we all can enjoy" (p. 32).

Since the work is so new, many problems still need to be solved, especially those that relate to Muslim background believers (MBBs) now following Jesus. Kashouh emphasizes on several occasions that he treats other religions with respect. He struggled as one MBB testified that he would throw his five Qur'ans in the trash, feeling he had been led astray by them. Kashouh responds, "How can you have such hatred now that you have seen a community that loves even its enemies and has reached out to you when you were among those 'enemies?'" (p. 114). Perhaps the new believer from a Muslim background is not expressing hatred to human enemies, but to what he considers a spiritual foe. Pastor Hikmat also endorses use of the term, "Muslim follower of Jesus" (p. 102), which is confusing to many Muslims when used by Christ-worshippers. It is likely that as more MBBs assume leadership roles at RCB, their voices will provide needed input on these controversial topics.

*Following Jesus in Turbulent Times* will inspire and challenge those who are serving refugees. It is realistic and instructive. The testimonies sprinkled in will leave the reader wanting more. 

## For Further Reading:

Houssney, Georges. *Engaging Islam*. Boulder, Colorado: Treeline Publishing, 2010.

Leatherberry, David. *Abdul and Mister Friday: Neither Wanted to Go to Heaven without the Other*. Springfield, MO: Onward Books, 2016.

Miller, Duane A. *Living Among the Breakage: Contextual Theology Making among Ex-Muslim Christians*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016.



# For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes a Difference

By Miroslav Volf & Matthew Croasmun


News of theological institutions closing their doors is no longer news. According to Yale theologians Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, such is the case because professional theology has lost its way. Instead of discussing life's primary question of how one truly lives the good life, academics opt for work that either protects or destroys long held assumptions.

The authors call their book a “manifesto” written for all types of theologians, both amateur and professional. Divided into six chapters, *For the Life of the World* is well-structured and the argument is simple to follow. Chapter One demonstrates that all humans, religions, and worldviews wrestle with the concept of what constitutes a truly flourishing life. Volf and Croasmun define the flourishing life as life going well, life led well, and life feeling as it should. Chapter Two explains that theology is in crisis because academic theologians have largely ignored the fundamental question of how one lives the flourishing life. The crisis is felt both externally, by realities of a shrinking job market and audience, and internally, by the avoidance of dealing with questions of human flourishing. Chapter Three forms the heart of the “manifesto,” calling theologians back to the ancient task of articulating visions of the flourishing life. Because God has made his home among us, the authors argue, such theological visions must vary according to context. Chapter Four discusses how a theology of the flourishing life is possible in modern pluralistic societies, with competing narratives based on various

philosophies and religions. Flourishing life must also contain individual expressions. Chapter Five calls theologians to articulate visions of flourishing life they are willing to practice themselves, thereby giving credence to such theses. Finally, Chapter Six offers a Pauline vision of the flourishing life, grounded in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

One strength of the book is its compelling argument for the flourishing life as the overarching goal of theological study. The authors argue that Jesus' main message concerned the inauguration of God's kingdom, thereby providing the foundation for abundant, flourishing life. Likewise, many of the great theologians of Christian history centered on this theme.

One weakness is the authors' hint of theological relativism. The Christocentric vision of flourishing life could be more so if, like Jesus, the authors would declare it right or true. Choosing not to take this step betrays a desire not to risk alienating people with other belief systems. Readers are left wondering why the great task of reclaiming theology's purpose is worthwhile if the Christian vision is merely one possible path among many viable ones.

Nevertheless, the book is worthy of consideration for anyone interested in the future of academic theology. Imagining the modern theological academy articulating livable visions of the flourishing life in Christ is difficult. Yet, as Volf and Croasmun indicate, such visions are both possible and necessary. 

Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019

208 pages

USD \$21.99

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Reviewed by Cameron D. Armstrong, International Mission Board, Bucharest, Romania; PhD candidate, Biola University.

## For Further Reading:

Kelsey, David H. *Between Athens & Berlin: The Theological Education Debate*. 2nd edition. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.

Volf, Miroslav. *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.



## Four Views on the Church's Mission

By Jonathan Leeman, Christopher J.H. Wright, John R. Franke, and Peter J. Leithart

General editor, Jason S. Sexton

Grand Rapids, MI: Harper Collins Publishers, 2017

198 pages

USD \$16.99

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Reviewed by Tim Pewett,  
missionary in Madrid, Spain and  
doctoral student in Intercultural  
Studies at Columbia International  
University.

It's been said that ideas have consequences. In ministry and missions, perhaps nowhere is this more evident than attempting to answer, "What is the mission of the church?" Asked differently, how inclusive (broad) or exclusive (narrow) is the mission of the church? In *Four Views on the Church's Mission*, Jason Sexton assembled key authors to represent differing positions within Protestant evangelicalism: Soteriological Mission (Jonathan Leeman), Participatory Mission (Christopher J.H. Wright), Contextual Mission (John R. Franke), and Sacramental Mission (Peter J. Leithart).

Dialogue around this question has increased since Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert published *What is the Mission of the Church?* in 2011. I counted at least twenty substantive references to their work and two facts stood out. First, every writer (except Franke) cited DeYoung and Gilbert. Second, Wright cited their book the most, making up 50% of all references. To read *Four Views* is indeed to have a conversation in light of DeYoung and Gilbert's work.


Leeman's Soteriological view slightly expands the narrower view of DeYoung and Gilbert, allowing for both a "broad" and "narrow" mission. The broad mission (for the church-as-its-members) is the "kingly" labor for all Christians to be disciples while the narrower mission (for the church-as-organized-collective) is the "priestly" work to make disciples.

In Wright's Participatory view, the church's mission is to cultivate the church (through evangelism and teaching), engage society (through compassionate justice and service), and finally to care for creation.

In Franke's Contextual view, the church's mission is to represent (be the image of God, the body of Christ, and the Spirit's dwelling place) and extend (proclaim) the Gospel as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God. The expression of mission will result in "fresh adaptations of the Christian faith as the message of the gospel spreads..." (128).

Leithart's Sacramental view emphasizes the often-neglected role of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He argues the mission of the church is broad. In principle, nothing is outside its scope as baptized believers are sent to live out their lives in the world. The mission is also political, the church should have an ongoing, public, and visible place in its work towards social justice.

Some readers may have a harder time working through vocabulary and concepts in Franke and Leithart's essays. If there is any quibble with the book, it would have to be with the fact that authors did not have space to respond to the objections raised to their essays. In addition, as Sexton notes, all contributors were white males which does not reflect the diversity within modern evangelicalism.

How expansive or not is the mission of the church? While we have not achieved a unified and collective answer, there is growing clarity on the different positions and underlying reasons given in support, making this a good and timely read. Students, teachers, church workers, and missionaries will all find this book engaging and helpful. Importantly, the conversation is friendly and the tone respectful, something we should always agree on. 

### For Further Reading:

Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert. *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011.

Craig Ott, ed. *The Mission of the Church, Five Views in Conversation*. Downers Grove, IL: Baker Academic, 2016.



# How to Lead When You're Not in Charge: Leveraging Influence When You Lack Authority

By Clay Scroggins


By the very nature of their calling, missionaries tend to be highly motivated to become change agents wherever God has called them. It is not surprising that missionaries frequently experience significant frustration in pursuing their calling when they lack the position or authority which they feel is needed to bring about the change they envision. Mission structures and leaders might even inhibit a missionary's pursuit of a deeply held vision. For example, this may happen when missionaries try to give deference to national leaders in partner churches; they may feel stifled and helpless to move ahead with what they believe God has called them to do because of existing structures.

From its title, one would think that Clay Scroggin's book would be an ideal resource for such frustrated missionaries. However, Scroggins, site pastor of North Point Community Church in Atlanta under Andy Stanley, writes from a North American ministry context for North American leaders. So how relevant and transferrable will his advice be to missionaries serving in cross-cultural ministry in other parts of the world? It turns out that he is much more relevant than I expected when I first picked up the book.

Scroggins begins by exploring our identity in Christ and how that shapes our capacity to influence others whether or not we hold a position of authority because, "Leading well without formal authority has less to do with your behavior and far more to do with your identity" (39). Building on that foundation, Scroggins then proposes four

behaviors essential to leadership: 1) Lead yourself by modeling followership, monitoring your heart and behavior, and making a plan; 2) Choose positivity, demonstrated by enthusiasm for your work, humility before those in authority, and unity with your associates; 3) Think critically by shifting from thinking as an employee to thinking as an owner, from stacking your meetings to scheduling thinking meetings, from being critical to thinking critically, and from giving others a grade to giving them a hand; and 4) Reject passivity by training "yourself to choose what's not getting done, plan time for future planning in the margins of your calendar, and then respond to what is most pressing for your boss" (164). The book finishes with practical advice for challenging those in authority in ways that will build bridges or relationship rather than walls of distrust (184). In short, Scroggins encourages all leaders to make themselves and those around them better people regardless of their position.

The general principles are valid cross-culturally, but the practical advice in the latter chapters would seem to be more culture specific. Scroggins' writing style makes generous use of pop cultural allusions, which may not communicate to people from other backgrounds.

Younger missionaries struggling with working under the constraints of organizational or national church authority structures will find the book encouraging and helpful. But even those at the top of organizational structures will find much to challenge their thinking. 

Grand Rapids, MI:  
Zondervan, 2017

230 pages

USD \$22.98

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Reviewed by Bob Bagley who has been a missionary with Global Partners since 1981 and currently resides in Johannesburg, South Africa where he serves as Global Partners' Africa Area Director.

## For Further Reading:

Bonem, M., Patterson, R., and Hawkins, G. *Leading from the Second Chair*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Elmer, D. *Cross-cultural conflict: Building relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Lingenfelter, S. *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008.



# Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts

By Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah, Editors

William Carey Publishing, 2018  
Pasadena, CA

220 pages

USD \$13.50

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Reviewed by Amit A. Bhatia, PhD/  
Intercultural Studies; Adjunct  
Professor,

Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL, and  
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There are over 1.8 billion Muslims in the world, living in over three-thousand cultures worldwide and speaking many different languages. Given this diversity, how does one effectively prepare for and engage in ministry to Muslims? The authors of this book argue that Christians have done so, up to now, by learning from classic books authored by leading scholars such as Samuel Zwemer and Phil Parshall. The books authored by these scholars, along with most other missiological books on Islam, while providing excellent information, share a common weakness: They present the view that Muslims all over the world are a monolithic bloc because they all practice the same religion. The result of this approach is that we focus on learning about Muslim commonalities, about the Qur'an, the five pillars, and other elements of orthodox Islam. But given the lived reality of practicing Muslims, and the resultant diversity within Islam, this book argues that such an approach is unhelpful in preparing Christians to minister to Muslims in many contexts. *Margins of Islam* offers a corrective by providing us with a better lens to view and minister within this "lived experience" of Muslims.

Through the scholarly and practical case studies presented by missiologists and mission practitioners who have served in church planting and mission work in the UK, Pakistan, Thailand, North Africa, Middle East, China, and Turkey, to

name just a few, this book offers valuable lessons for mission students and missionaries. First, it reminds the reader that even in our globalized world, context is important. In order to be effective in ministering to Muslims we need to look past "surface commonalities" and navigate within their unique social, cultural, and historical contexts. Second, it clearly demonstrates through the pictures painted by the authors that Muslims in different contexts, while connected to a common core of Islam, do indeed have divergent practices and live differently. Third, the book helps the reader apply the lessons to his or her own ministry context.

The most effective way to learn from the lessons presented by these scholar-practitioners is by viewing each chapter as a missiological case study describing key concerns for each ministry context. Missionaries must recognize that "popular" Islam and Orthodox Islam are not mutually exclusive, and that it is quite common in the Muslim world, both tribal as well as Westernized, to blend the two. Furthermore, Muslims in our globalized world often live in more than one cultural world, and Christians working in their particular field of ministry must be prepared to adequately address the multicultural contexts where Muslims live and practice their faith. This book, rich in social sciences and missiology, will help the gospel worker to become a "reflective practitioner." 

## For Further Reading:

Bhatia, Amit A. *Engaging Muslims and Islam: Lessons for 21st-Century American Evangelicals*. Portland, OR: Urban Loft, 2017.

Oksnevad, Roy, and Dotsey Welliver, editors. *The Gospel for Islam: Reaching Muslims in North America*. Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service.



# Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts

By Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham, Eds.

The topic of Insider Movements (IMs) is hotly contested in contemporary missiology. Proponents of IMs encourage believers from Muslim backgrounds to remain in their socio-religious contexts in order to impact the existing community for Christ. The advocates of IMs might embrace a positive view of the Qur'an and the prophethood of Muhammad, in order to enable believers from Muslim backgrounds to follow Jesus while keeping their socio-cultural identity as Muslims. Much of this evangelistic strategy is borrowed from the Messianic Jewish movement.

This book is wholly dedicated to critiquing IMs and drawing attention to syncretistic ideas that some IM proponents propagate. Part 1 consists of an article by Brent Neely where he presents an extensive critique of the prophethood of Muhammad based on a Nestorian Patriarch, Timothy I, leading to the conclusion that Christ-followers cannot consider Muhammad a prophet.


Parts 2 and 3 consist of 30 chapters in which various authors use biblical, theological, historical, and missiological arguments to generally critique and expose the potentially dangerous elements of IM strategies. The articles decry the use of the Qur'an in Muslim evangelism, the concept of dual identity as followers of Jesus and Muslims, and the confession of the Shahada. The authors argue that these practices will lead to a compromised view of the divinity of Jesus and the authority of the Bible, encouraging weak believers to revert to their old beliefs and practices. They acknowledge the good intentions of

IM proponents, but ask for a reevaluation of IMs in light of the unintended confusion that has been created.

To ensure fairness, the editors invited several authors who support IMs to contribute. These chapters explain why they believe that IMs are a legitimate strategy to spread the gospel. Although some chapters are shorter and less academic than others, each one presents serious challenges and difficulties that believers from Muslim backgrounds may encounter in IMs.

This book is aimed at critiquing and exposing the inherent dangers of IMs as well as underlying weaknesses in the interpretation of biblical and non-biblical materials. It sends a stern message to IM proponents, at the risk of alienating the two sides. The intention of this book is to defend a biblical view of Christianity in the context of other religions. It has successfully achieved its goal to critique the theories and practices of IMs. I anticipate this book will generate a more fine-tuned discussion between the critics and the proponents of IMs.

The Epilogue is also noteworthy, presenting a first-person account of a major missions organization's decision to use Muslim idiom translations of Scripture and the resistance they encountered from local believers from Muslim backgrounds.

This book highlights the potential dangers of the IM approach. It will help mission scholars and practitioners to better define mission strategies for the Islamic world as well as strategies for the Hindu and Buddhist worlds. 

Peter Lang Publishing Co.,  
29 Broadway, 18th Fl., New  
York, NY, 2018

679 pages

USD \$114.95

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Reviewed by Daniel Shinjong  
Baeq, Senior Pastor, Bethel Pres-  
byterian Church, Ellicott City, MD

## For Further Reading:

Coleman, Doug. *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology and Ecclesiology*. EMS Dissertation Series. Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, 2011.

Morton, Jeff. *Insider Movements: Biblically Incredible or Incredibly Brilliant?* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub., 2012.

Talman, Harley and John Jay Travis, Eds. *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus Within Diverse Religious Communities*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015.



# Saving Truth: Finding Meaning & Clarity in a Post-Truth World

By Abdu Murray

Grand Rapids, MI:  
Zondervan, 2108

243 pages

USD \$14.99

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Reviewed by Mark A Strand,  
professor, School of Pharmacy,  
North Dakota State University,  
Fargo, ND.

Abdu Murray, author of *Saving Truth: Finding Meaning & Clarity in a Post-Truth World*, is the North American director of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, and his intellectual approach is similar to that of his mentor, Ravi Zacharias. Raised a Muslim, and trained in law, Murray spent nine years wrestling with the claims of the gospel before embracing Christ as his Savior. He is thus well qualified to address audiences from a variety of backgrounds in a way that reflects this rational approach to truth.

In *Saving Truth* Murray sets out to defend the gospel in the face of a cultural slide into what he calls a Culture of Confusion. The confusion to which he refers has two modes. The “soft” mode is seen in individuals who accept that truth exists, but do not allow it to get in the way of their personal preferences. The “hard” mode is seen in individuals who deny the existence of absolute truth and blatantly propagate falsehoods. Murray is most concerned about the former. Murray considers the soft mode to be driven by a desire for unfettered freedom. Wearing the mask of personal freedom, the soft mode is, in fact, built on autonomy, or “self-law.” This reckless autonomy makes everything subject to one’s own personal preferences. It sacrifices people’s ability to reason, their moral accountability, and some aspects of human value. Murray calls the reader to reclaim true freedom and its source, Jesus Christ.

Once he has explained the way out of the Culture of Confusion, Murray goes on to present

well-developed chapters on freedom, human dignity, sexuality, science, and religious pluralism. Murray explains the dual trajectories of freedom, freedom from and freedom for. Many people focus on the freedom from aspect of freedom; that is, the freedom from interference and constraint. But true freedom also has freedom for, freedom for those things which are excellent and virtuous. Many people are crying out for freedom from restraint, but once grasped, its vacuity is felt. Only when a person’s freedom compels them to a vision and a purpose is it fulfilling.

*Saving Truth* is not written for missionaries, but it has application for missions. People the world over are striving for freedom. Think of the Arab Spring, the Saffron Revolution, and the Orange Revolution. For missionaries serving in countries where people are struggling for freedom from oppressive forces, Murray’s book provides an intellectual framework for casting a vision of freedom for among these people. One of the weaknesses of the book from a missiological perspective is Murray’s assumption that a logical or apologetic approach will be persuasive across cultures. It has been this reviewer’s perspective that sharing the gospel in collectivist societies is often more effective beginning with shared concerns and interests in life, than beginning with differences in thought. Having said that, the logical argument of *Saving Truth* can be used in many cultural contexts. 

## For Further Reading

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989.

Kraft, Charles H. *Christianity In Culture: A Study In Biblical Theologizing In Cross-cultural Perspective*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.



# The Politics of Ministry

By Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie

Although missionaries-in-training often hear that conflict between missionaries is the number one cause of missionary attrition, few are prepared for the intensity of the anger, the pain, the accusations, and closed-mindedness that may be encountered when working on a missionary team. *The Politics of Ministry* provides missionaries and all who are in ministry with a framework to make sense out of whatever conflict they may find themselves in, however complex it may seem. Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie (all with many years of ministry and seminary experience) focus on four themes that serve as tools to understand ministry-based conflict: interests, negotiation, power, and ethical challenges.


At the root of any conflict lie differences in interests. Politics is “the art of getting things done with others” (5) so that people with different interests (the first theme of the book) can cooperate and collaborate. The authors provide excellent illustrations of the complexity of the issues, compromises, and mistakes that people make when they run into other Christians who have different interests. They also provide principles for understanding others’ perspectives and concerns.

A second theme of the book is on power and how the organizational system, organizational culture, and multiple stakeholders influence the use of power, a topic not often addressed in

Christian circles. Much of the book focuses on power differentials and what to do when one is in a position of either lower power (to avoid being crushed) or higher power (to avoid harming others and to serve them). No one-size-fits-all answers are provided, but a range of possible responses are presented and analyzed.

Negotiation, the third theme of the book, must be done to manage conflicts and find the solution that best responds to the interests of all parties. This theme (and the closely related idea of mediation) is developed a bit less than the others but is well covered in other books (See “For Further Reading”).

The final theme, ethical implications, emphasizes Christ-centered, Bible-based responses. This discussion is carried out in a rational, calm way, perhaps characterized by understatement, enabling the reader to reflect on his or her behavior, rather than to act impulsively which happens all too often in conflict.

There are several useful tools in the appendix and many excellent discussion questions throughout the text. As a former missionary and a professor whose research program focuses on conflicts in Christian organizations, *The Politics of Ministry* has now become my preferred book to recommend to missionaries who find themselves in painful conflicts. 

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019

216 pages

USD \$18.00

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Reviewed by David R. Dunaetz, associate professor of Leadership and Organizational Psychology, Azusa Pacific University, adjunct professor of French, Claremont Graduate University, and former church planter in France.

## For Further Reading

Fisher, R., Ury, W. L., & Patton, B. *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. New York: Penguin, 2011.

Wilmot, W. W., & Hocker, J. L. *Interpersonal conflict*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Moore, C. W. (1996). *The mediation process: Practical strategies for resolving conflict*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011.



# Walking Together on the Jesus Road: Discipling in Intercultural Contexts

By Evelyn and Richard Hibbert

William Carey Library, Littleton, CO, 2018

18 pages

USD \$19.99

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Reviewed by Hoon Jung, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, USA.


This volume is designed to help missionaries serve and make disciples in cross-cultural contexts. Evelyn and Richard Hibbert, former church planters in the Middle East and Bulgaria and now professors at Sydney Missionary & Bible College, believe that missionaries are often unprepared to carry out a cross-cultural discipleship ministry. The authors' thesis is that intercultural discipling "is a mutual exploration of what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus in the various contexts we find ourselves in. The Holy Spirit is the teacher. We walk together alongside him" (9). As the title *Walking Together on the Jesus Road* implies, the emphasis is on "mutuality" in cross-cultural contexts.

There are two principal strengths in this book. First, the book examines aspects of discipleship from both practical and academic perspectives. To be specific, from a practical perspective, the authors explore topics such as sharing life (Section 1), listening closely (Section 2), and respecting disciples (Section 3). From an academic perspective, the authors address the topic of contextualization, a major theme of contemporary missiology. Thus, the book appeals to those who are interested in both the practical and academic aspects of disciple making.

The second strength is that the authors' thesis is timely and proper for contemporary Western missionaries and missiologists in the

post-Western and post-colonial era. People in the majority world are more aware of culture, especially their own culture, than ever before. This means that respect for indigenous cultures and a willingness to learn from indigenous people are essential for contemporary missionaries. In this regard, the main topic of this book, mutuality, is an essential value for today's missionaries from the West.

The fourth section "Contextualize" may be a bit confusing. The meaning and definition of the term "contextualization" varies in contemporary missiology. Here, the term is not explicitly defined. The authors argue, for example, that missionaries should contextualize the way that they explain sin. They imply that contextualization means that the gospel should be presented in a way that is comprehensible in the indigenous culture (138). But many missiologists use "contextualization" to describe self-theologizing. For example, Minjung Theology has emerged in South Korea as the contextualized form of the Latin American liberation theology. Whenever authors discuss contextualization, they need to define what they mean by it to avoid unnecessary confusion.

This book will be helpful for missionaries and students of missiology who are seeking to serve in a cross-cultural context and to focus on a disciple-making ministry. 

## For Further Reading

Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Hull, Bill. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006.

Wrogemann, Henning. *Intercultural Theology: Intercultural Hermeneutics*. Translated by Karl E. Böhmer. Vol. 1. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016.



# Wealth and Piety: Middle Eastern Perspectives for Expat Workers


By Karen L. H. Shaw

“How much do you make and who pays you?” A simple question, yet it may cause us expatriate workers to squirm and change the subject. This commonly experienced inquiry might be taken as an intrusion into our private affairs. An honest answer might reveal creature comforts we could not leave behind or expose our support network back home. But such questions are normal in the Middle East and Asia where perceived wealth is laden with cultural assumptions. How we as expats answer this question will have a significant impact upon our witness. This book challenges our assumption that the recipients of our ministry will share our understanding of the sacrifices we have made to leave our country and live among a people not our own. Karen Shaw says, “We compare our incomes and lifestyles with our friends back home, or with what we might have had if we stayed home, and we feel virtuously deprived. Yet we will never convince the majority of our Middle Eastern acquaintances other than that we are rich” (Kindle location 210-212). Shaw’s research may cause us some level of discomfort, compel us to consider our motives anew, and, where needed, shift our orientation towards how we use our resources in ministry.

The first two chapters deal with the question, “Who are the righteous rich?” Shaw examines the Old and New Testament peering into the lives of many biblical characters including Abraham, Solomon and Jesus. She gives no simple answers or solutions regarding the Bible’s attitude towards righteousness and wealth. Rather, Shaw balances

the tensions of cultural and historical context with passages that often are assumed to discourage the amassing of wealth, or at least the pride of wealth.

Chapters three through nine explore themes from interviews with Middle Easterners of various countries, ages, religions, and economic backgrounds. Her analysis reveals the cultural blind spots of some expats and how Middle Easterners may come closer to upholding biblical principles than do North American Christians. Other insights expose areas in Middle Eastern culture where God’s Kingdom has yet to take root.

This book addresses those involved in cross-cultural ministry who have struggled with how to respond to requests for money and how to live generously without creating dependency upon outside resources. Though Shaw’s informants are Middle Eastern, there is much that can be generally applied to the Global South. The book is peppered with practical insights into how expats are perceived, how they can be more culturally sensitive, and how they might embody righteousness in culturally relevant ways while also challenging aspects of culture which do not please God. If there is any area left unaddressed, it would be real-life examples of how expats have sought to live out the principles of the righteous rich. The reader can expect personal blind spots to be exposed, areas sensitive to offense to be softened, and a new hope to live out their faith in both word and deed as a member of the righteous rich. 

William Carey Publishing,  
Littleton, CO, 2018

214 pages

USD \$12.79

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Reviewed by C. Jeremy Lind,  
Business as Mission (BAM)  
practitioner among Muslims in  
Southeast Asia and current PhD  
candidate at Cook School of Inter-  
cultural Studies, Biola University,  
La Mirada, California.

## For Further Reading:

Corbett, S., & Fikkert, B. When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012.

Myers, B. L.. Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.

Mallouhi, Christine A. Miniskirts, Mothers & Muslims: A Christian Woman in a Muslim Land. Oxford: Monarch, 2004.



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