O

ver the past two decades, no area of missions has generated more heat and light than that of contextualization in Muslim settings. Debates range from translation philosophies to insider movements and from missionary lifestyles to evangelistic methodologies. EMQ has been in the middle of many of these debates, publishing articles on both sides in the hopes of moving discussion forward. In this issue, we revisit the C-Spectrum, which first appeared in EMQ in 1998. Originator John Travis reflects on the past fifteen years and offers recommendations for the future. While the C-Spectrum describes the fellowships that Travis observed (and continues to observe) in Muslim settings, no one has proposed a parallel spectrum of the roles that missionaries take on in Muslim settings. Warrick Farah and Kyle Meeker propose a W-Spectrum to explore this facet. Finally, Fred Farrokh sharpens discussion on who should recite the Shahada, and Kevin Higgins responds.

Additionally, we offer our usual array of columns and multiple articles to equip each of us as we work in diverse settings and tackle various challenges. I invite you to enjoy the rich reading feast set out in this issue!

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There are few concepts as central to the task of missions as reaching and reconciling. The tip of the spear in mission endeavor is to see that unreached peoples are reached with the gospel so that “all the families of the earth” are blessed through Abraham, and those described in Revelation 5 and 7 do indeed represent some “from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

At the same time, God’s people are called to a “ministry of reconciliation.” They are to be reconcilers of the lost to God, and reconcilers of all kinds of people to one another through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But what do you do when reaching and reconciling seem to work against each other?

All would agree that it is wonderful when Christians play a key role in facilitating reconciliation between parties harboring long-term animosity—whether based on race, ethnicity, social class, religion, or anything else. Sometimes, that comes through simply reminding people of who they are in Christ, and the values they share because of that. Other times, it comes through modeling love and acceptance with those whom the world would consider their natural enemies, or at least their competitors.

The most pronounced gaps between people, however, are usually in contexts where few are experiencing a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Reconciliation then ideally involves reconciliation with God first, but very often it does not. In such contexts, it is often the visible reconciliation of Christians from groups that don’t normally associate with one another which shines like a beacon to those who are not currently people of gospel faith. This becomes the catalytic agent to show the way forward.

That being the case, how far should the homogeneous unit principle or HUP (very loosely defined as “birds of a feather flock together”) be held as missiologically sacrosanct? I am speaking as one who believes that strategic application of the HUP is good missiology. Good because the object in outreach to least-reached peoples (both ethnic and otherwise) is to remove as many unnecessary obstacles to faith as possible. Only then can people confront head-on the only important stumbling block that is the cross and, drawn by the Holy Spirit, come to faith.

The challenge that remains, however, is at what point does the evangelistic
power of the HUP need to give way to the maturing and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s people so that reconciliation as the unique product of the gospel can shine forth? This is a particularly important question for the sake of those for whom it is the very lack of reconciliation in the Church that is their chief obstacle to faith.

  Looked at in more theological terms, when does “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22) as an evangelistic stratagem morph into “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18) as a product of our sanctification.

  The bottom line is that horizontal reconciliation, like reconciliation to God by grace through faith, must start with the Church. When does relaxed homogeneity become slothful and/or disobedient sanctification? Are we working hard enough to break down barriers of division as Christ’s Church through our ministry of reconciliation, or are we blindly perpetuating division through our neglect of this calling?

Cultural preferences don't change just because we desire a higher level of reconciliation with those whom we don't naturally associate.

  It should come as no surprise that pulling off deep-seated and visible reconciliation is not easy. Cultural preferences don’t change just because we desire a higher level of reconciliation with those whom we don’t naturally associate. It takes work, and it takes a looser grip on our own preferences and scruples. It also takes creativity.

  It’s not necessary to be something that we are not in order to be an agent of reconciliation, but it is necessary to appreciate what makes others who they uniquely are, and to find ways of showing it. We are brothers and sisters of all people as creatures created in the image of God, and we are brothers and sisters at an even deeper level with fellow members of the household of faith. As members together with everyone in at least one of those ways, and in both ways with many, we must spend time with those to whom we desire to be agents of reconciliation. Obviously, no one can do that with everybody, but we can all do it with some.

  Let us not, therefore, neglect our calling as agents of reconciliation out of a too shallow understanding of sanctification or the HUP. The world is watching, and the world desperately needs a ministry of reconciliation that none but the Church is able to provide.

Gary Corwin is staff missiologist with the international office of SIM.
Friends recently asked my wife and I how we became involved in outreach among Muslims and about the origins of the C1–C6 Spectrum (see Travis 1998, 407-408). We shared with them our personal journeys.

I explained that in the 1970s I had the privilege of living with a Muslim family in Asia as a university student. I was a nominal Christian at the time. Some years later, when I was a committed follower of Jesus, my wife and I moved to that same Muslim country, spending a month with the family with whom I had previously lived. We ended up living for more than twenty years in that country and raising our own family there—all the while sharing the good news of Jesus with Muslim neighbors and friends.
Regarding the C1–C6 Spectrum, I explained that it was my attempt to describe six types of fellowships that I had seen people who were born Muslim either form or join after they began to follow Jesus. Each type of fellowship I referred to as a different form of Christ-centered community (hence the letter C in the Spectrum). I had not initially planned to publish the C-Spectrum, and only did so when some who knew of it were objecting to certain types of fellowships it describes (see Parshall 1998, 404-410; Travis 1998, 411-415).

I explained that the C-Spectrum was primarily descriptive. I had hoped it would increase awareness among cross-cultural workers of various ways God was moving among Muslims. I had also hoped it would bring greater unity and mutual respect among workers who were using different ministry approaches but who had the same goal of seeing God’s kingdom grow. I mentioned to our friends some of the limitations I saw in the C-Spectrum as well.

After hearing our story, our friends felt that the C-Spectrum had often been misunderstood or misused and that it would be good to write an article explaining its intended use and limitations. This article is my response to their suggestion.

Use and Description of the C-Spectrum

The C-Spectrum has been used widely in mission circles and literature over the past fifteen years to differentiate various types of Christ-centered communities (biblical ekklesiae) found in the Muslim world. It has been adapted for use in other socioreligious contexts such as Hindu and Buddhist-background fellowships as well. Additionally, it has been alluded to in reference to the postmodern West (Frost and Hirsch 2003).

The C-Spectrum is framed around two central issues: (1) the socioreligious identity of fellowships of Jesus-followers who were born Muslim and (2) the linguistic, cultural, and religious forms they use. It is assumed that each of these types of Christ-centered communities follows Jesus as the risen Lord and Savior and the Bible as God’s word. Any group along the C-Spectrum could, however, become sub-biblical if adherence to scripture becomes weak. The following is a brief description of the six basic types of Christ-centered communities.

The first type of Christ-centered community, which I called C1, refers to churches in the Muslim world that use distinctly non-Muslim, “Christian” forms (music, liturgy, architecture, prayer posture, etc.) and hold their worship services in languages other than the mother tongue of the surrounding Muslim population. Thousands of these churches exist in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, some of them predating Islam (e.g., Eastern Orthodox and Armenian churches).

C2 refers to churches similar to C1, except that the worship is conducted in the mother tongue of the surrounding Muslim population. However, although they use the daily language of the local Muslim population in wor-
ship, they seldom use the same religious terms as local Muslims—such as *Isa* for Jesus, *Yahya* for John the Baptist, or *Zabur* for Psalms. In terms of socioreligious identity, the central issue of the C-Spectrum, members of C1 and C2 fellowships refer to themselves as Christians or by the name of their denomination/church (e.g., Orthodox, Catholic, or Coptic). Muslim-background believers are found in various C2 congregations or in specialized subgroups associated with them.

C3 refers to fellowships that incorporate local or indigenous ethnic and cultural forms such as music, dress, and artwork rather than distinctively Western or Christian ones. C3 groups thus aim to develop indigenous expressions of congregational life while avoiding forms that appear “Islamic.” An underlying assumption of C3 groups, therefore, is that “cultural” and “Islamic” forms can be separated in Muslim societies. C3 groups would typically avoid using Muslim terminology. As with C1 and C2 communities, C3 groups refer to themselves as Christian.

The fourth type, C4, differs from C3 in that instead of avoiding Islamic forms (religious terminology, holidays, personal names, diet, dress, prayer posture, etc.), these groups retain them, filling them where necessary with new biblical meaning. In general, they avoid the label “Christian” due to the unfortunate cultural baggage it carries. C4 groups tend to refer to themselves as “followers of *Isa*” or in other, similar terms that focus on Jesus and allegiance to him.

The fifth type of Christ-centered community, C5, consists of groups of Muslims who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior and the Bible as God’s word without taking the step of leaving the religious community of their birth. Some C5 groups relate with Christian-background believers for friendship and spiritual interaction, but they form and lead their own groups (*ekklesiae*) for prayer, fellowship, and Bible study. By remaining part of the Muslim community, they are a source of salt and light for family and friends.

The C-Spectrum does not attempt to describe C5 in terms of linguistic, cultural, and religious forms, as there is too much variance worldwide to discern a common pattern. As a general category of the C-Spectrum, what makes a C5 type of group distinct is maintaining a Muslim socioreligious identity. In other words, they integrate the practice of their biblical faith in Jesus into
their everyday life in the religious community of their birth. A “C5 movement” would therefore be synonymous with an insider movement. I know of C5 group members who refer to themselves with various descriptions such as “Holy Spirit Muslims,” “Muslim believers,” “Muslim followers of Jesus,” or simply “Muslims.”

Finally, C6 refers to the many small and scattered groups of Jesus followers who are underground, isolated, or restricted in their ability to meet. Their context limits their ability to gather openly and makes public witness difficult, yet many find creative ways to connect with other Jesus-followers and share the good news discreetly as God’s Spirit leads. Similar to C5, these Jesus-followers retain their Muslim identity as they follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. As with C5, the C-Spectrum does not attempt to describe them in terms of linguistic, cultural, or religious forms.

Seven Common Misunderstandings and Misuses

Much has been written about these six general types of Jesus-centered communities since the C-Spectrum was first published in 1998. Some literature has been for or against various points along the C-Spectrum, with most of the discussion focused on C5. Other literature does not critique the types of fellowships per se, but rather discusses the strength or weakness of the model itself.

Some critiques have dealt squarely with what I have written and intended. Others, however, have been based on misunderstandings or misuses of the C-Spectrum. Below I address common misunderstandings and misuses, followed by my own critique of the C-Spectrum, where I point out some of its limitations and make suggestions for the future.

1. The first common misunderstanding has to do with what the letter C represents. It does not stand for “contextualization,” “cross-cultural church-planting spectrums,” or “Christian”—all terms that have been mistakenly used. It stands for “Christ-centered communities”; in other words, fellowships or groups of Jesus-followers—biblical ἐκκλησίαι.

2. The C-Spectrum is meant to show how groups of Jesus-followers who were born Muslim express their faith, not how cross-cultural workers among Muslims express theirs. Unfortunately the first article critiquing the C-Spectrum (Parshall 1998) focused much of its attention on a few foreign field workers who had assumed a Muslim identity to reach Muslims. This actually has nothing whatsoever to do with the C-Spectrum, yet the idea of cross-cultural workers “becoming C5” keeps resurfacing in C-Spectrum discussions.

3. No point along the C-Spectrum is intended to be better or more biblical than any other. Any expression of faith in Jesus along the C-Spectrum could be appropriate for a particular culture or group. Any group along the C-Spectrum could become sub-biblical if adherence to the Bible
becomes weak. Some would argue that C1 or C2 types are more biblical or less prone to error than, say, C4 or C5. The reality of the situation does not bear this out. Some of the most nominal and sub-biblical groups fall into C1 or C2 categories. I was shocked recently to learn that, in one country, many cross-cultural workers had understood C6 to be the ideal because it was the highest number on the C-Spectrum! The reason for portraying these different types of fellowships along a flat, linear spectrum was to communicate that in God’s eyes all members of God’s kingdom are of equal value before him, regardless of their cultural or socioreligious labels.

4. The C-Spectrum is not intended to be exhaustive. It highlights six types of fellowships, but other expressions or variations are entirely possible. When I used the word “spectrum” I had in mind a range of colors placed side by side, with theoretically infinite shades between them. Many have understood this, often describing a particular fellowship as being between or similar to some point on the C-Spectrum (e.g., “between C2 and C3” or “like C4 but…”). For some, however, there has been misunderstanding when they could not find a direct correlation between a type of fellowship they knew of and one of the six basic C-Spectrum descriptions.

In practice, many have noted that individual Jesus-followers have two or three different types of identity used in different social contexts.

5. Points along the C-Spectrum are not to be seen as static or unchangeable. Over time, a fellowship could change, taking on a different socioreligious identity from what it held previously. C-Spectrum descriptions are only snapshots of the moment and do not reflect change or direction.

6. The C-Spectrum was designed to describe groups, not individual Jesus-followers. This is an easy mistake to make (I have done it myself), since fellowships are made up of individuals who presumably reflect the characteristics of the group. It is therefore quite natural to refer to someone as a C4 believer, meaning that person displays the characteristics and socioreligious identity associated with a C4 group. However, this has caused some to misunderstand the model since individual Muslim-background believers they know do not fit perfectly into any particular point along the C-Spectrum.

In practice, many have noted that individual Jesus followers have two or three different types of identity used in different social contexts. It is my opinion that groups, on the other hand, are more likely to have a single identity as they negotiate who they are collectively with the larger community. It may be possible, however, that groups also have more than one identity,
which would show a limitation in the use of the C-Spectrum. Individuals, in fact, may have more than one socioreligious identity. For example, a Muslim-background believers group may be linked to a C2 church, clearly C2 in its identity and forms. Yet in certain situations, individual members may still identify with the Muslim community, even at times feeling culturally or socially Muslim themselves. Additional, more detailed, models are needed to bring out nuances such as dual or multiple identities.

7. The greatest misuse of the C-Spectrum is the way some have added to or redefined the meaning of C5 to include Islamic practices and beliefs that they assume Jesus-following Muslims must be retaining. This has created a straw man that critics can then attack. The following are examples I have heard of altered descriptions or additions to C5 that clearly depart from my original definition: viewing Muhammad as on par with Jesus, viewing the Qur’an as having higher authority than the Bible, using only the Muslim holy book for discipleship, and forcing frequent mosque attendance. No C5 group I am acquainted with holds to any of the above beliefs or practices.

The reality on the ground is that as C5 groups engage the Bible under the guidance of the Spirit of God, they come to their own convictions about Muslim beliefs and practices. Some are rejected, some are reinterpreted, and those not in conflict with the Bible are generally continued. As serious disciples, they are learning how to navigate their new faith in Jesus in the midst of being part of the religious community of their birth. Because particulars of how this happens vary from group to group, the original description of C5 focused only on their allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Savior and the Bible as God’s word, and not on what they reject or retain from Islam.

**Limitations of the C-Spectrum**

All models have limitations and can only approximate reality. I see two limitations in particular with the C-Spectrum.

1. **The first is in what it does not describe.** It addresses language, culture, religious forms, and group identity, but does not describe intangibles such as the motivations, life experiences, or aspirations of those in the groups. Why do some groups of Jesus followers form or join C1 or C2 churches while others join or form C4 or C5 fellowships? Or what political, cultural, and legal factors and pressures might influence certain groups toward a C3 expression of faith but others toward C6—the latter becoming what some have described as “catacomb believers”? I am sure many of the criticisms people have for one or another expression of faith along the C-Spectrum would be greatly reduced if they could walk for a while in the shoes of others, understanding their hearts and life stories.

2. **A second limitation is that this flat, linear model, while helpful in showing variety, can also be limiting if understood as portraying six distinct categories positioned side by side, without overlapping, shar-
ing, or blending of characteristics. As many have noted when trying to use the one-dimensional C-Spectrum as a means of classification, some fellowships defy description and contain elements from a number of points along the C-Spectrum.

Four Recommendations in Using the C-Spectrum

In spite of its limitations, the C-Spectrum is commonly used worldwide. I offer four recommendations for those who use it.

1. It is best used among colleagues who have a clear and common understanding of what descriptions within the C-Spectrum mean. It can serve as a convenient nomenclature and starting point for discussion. To use it between different ministries and organizations, however, is risky due to the variety of ways in which one group or another understands it.

2. Because it can be misunderstood or misapplied, it is often more helpful, as long as appropriate security measures are set in place, to employ narrative and story when discussing ministry in Muslim contexts. Narratives, case studies, and longer descriptions, given by those actually on site and involved, help unpack some of the complexities of context (legal, political, and social) and can bring out the motivations, hopes, and life experiences of Jesus-followers. In addition, by avoiding C-Spectrum labels, the emotional baggage those terms carry for some can be eliminated so that parties can hear and not talk past each other.

3. Better graphics could avoid the appearance of rigidity and static categories that a one-dimensional graphic might communicate. (The original article on the C-Spectrum did not show any graphic—it only presented in a list the six basic types of fellowships.)

4. The effectiveness of the C-Spectrum would be greatly enhanced if augmented by other models and tools now being developed.

Conclusion

The C-Spectrum has been commonly used as a heuristic tool to describe certain types of Christ-centered fellowships found in Muslim contexts. It focuses on the outward forms of some of these fellowships as well as their socioreligious identity. While helpful in some ways, the C-Spectrum has also been misunderstood or misused.

Hopefully, future use of the C-Spectrum can be augmented by other
models and descriptive tools. Narratives and case studies, with appropriate anonymity and safeguards, can bring out nuances and complexities that a spectrum or scale cannot.

In the spirit of the original intent of the C-Spectrum, let us acknowledge the wide variety of expressions of life in the kingdom that groups of Jesus-followers choose. Since God’s wisdom and the creativity of his people will certainly yield still more variety in the years ahead, we would do well to rejoice in all that God does in the lives and families of Muslims, whom he loves.

Endnotes

1. Among Muslims, the terms “Christian” and “Christianity” often denote ethnic or political realities associated with Western peoples and cultures, including immoral Hollywood films, immodest dress, alcohol misuse, anti-Islamic sentiments, and certain political agendas. These terms are not generally used by Muslims to refer to someone who truly believes in Jesus and follows him any more than Christians use the term “Muslim” to mean “someone submitted to God.”

2. Father Jean-Marie Gaudeul (1999, 264-265, 288) coined the phrase “catacomb believers” to refer to Muslims who follow Jesus privately or underground, even as many early Christ followers did, meeting in the catacombs of ancient Rome.

References


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Questions for reflection

1. What was the author’s original hope for the C-Spectrum?

2. What insights have you gained about the C-Spectrum and its usage as a result of reading this article?
Our own approach is C4, but we’re not against C5ers...”
If you’ve been ministering among Muslims for any length of time, you’ve probably heard a colleague say something similar before. And you probably even understood exactly what was meant!

However, this statement actually reflects a misunderstanding and misapplication of the famous C-Spectrum (Travis 1998), which was originally proposed as a descriptive tool for classifying different types of indigenous “Christ-centered communities” in the Muslim world.¹ As John Travis himself notes, the C-Spectrum “is meant to show how groups of people born Muslim express their faith in Jesus, not how cross-cultural workers express theirs” (2015). (See all of Travis’ reflection of the C-Spectrum on pages 358-365 of this issue.) It was never intended to prescribe approaches for expatriate workers.

While significant progress has been made in evangelical missiology on general contextualization, and much debate has swirled around the degree to which a Muslim-background believer can remain an “insider,” less attention has been placed on workers’ practices—and the connection to their view of Islam. Hence, in this article we seek to augment the overall dialogue by focusing on the worker.
Recent Attempts at Delineating Worker Paradigms of Contextualization

While workers have been on the periphery of many discussions, they have not been forgotten. Martin Accad and Scott Moreau both make notable efforts to consider workers’ paradigms (see also Schlorff 2006).

Accad provides a worker assessment tool and argues for a “kerygmatic” paradigm in *Christian Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach* (2012). His article classifies Christian-Muslim interaction along a SEKAP scale of approaches: Syncretistic, Existential, Kerygmatic, Apologetic, and Polemical. Not limiting the discussion to the evangelical family, Accad differentiates five mindsets that determine the interaction. He seeks to identify the theory that will offer the most useful praxis given certain contextual factors.

On the other hand, Moreau’s *Contextualization in World Missions* (2012) surveys and categorizes ministry philosophies to create a map of worker presentation methods and styles. In contrast to Accad’s focus on Muslim-Christian engagement, Moreau incorporates issues among all ministry contexts to map the broader contextualization terrain. Moreau discovered “six readily distin-

**It is important to note** that the W categories do not correlate with the C-Spectrum. Instead, each segment of the scale corresponds to a general view of Islam.


Both Accad and Moreau provide valuable insights beneficial to this discussion. Accad provides a “big picture” theory of general attitudes in Muslim-Christian interaction which intentionally includes a syncretistic approach. Moreau extends to general cross-cultural issues by providing “official” examples from the published positions and advocated procedures of mission agencies, prominent practitioners, and academics.

In contrast, by analyzing data from “on-the-ground” workers to test a spectrum of contextualization practices and views, the proposed ‘W’ (Worker)-Spectrum could fill a niche that these earlier authors have not explored. Additionally, the W3 category might fill a gap between Accad’s Apologetic and Kerygmatic approaches (which are closely related to W2 and W4, respectively).

This scale is a tool that classifies four snapshots of evangelical cross-cultural workers’ approaches to Muslim ministry. Our prayer is that the W-Spectrum will encourage missiological reflection and constructive dialogue, sharpening ministry effectiveness (Prov. 27:17). We earnestly hope this tool will not be used to define battle lines and attack others, as has often been the case with those who misuse the C-Spectrum.
The W-Spectrum Proposal

The W-Spectrum offers a scale around clusters of ministry mindsets and practices within eight areas of contextualization: (1) Self-Identification, (2) Muslim’s Perception of the Worker, (3) Discussion of Muhammad, (4) Use of the Qur’an, (5) Women’s Attire, (6) Ramadan Fasting, (7) Prayer Forms with Muslims, and (8) The Relationship between the Father of Jesus and the God of Muhammad. These eight areas are each examined through four hypothesized groups that form a ‘Worker-Scale’: W1, W2, W3, W4 (see Table 1 on page 370 & 371).

It is important to note that the W categories do not correlate with the C-Spectrum (i.e., W3 is not analogous with C3, etc.). Instead, each segment of the scale corresponds to a general view of Islam. This is important because “every attempt to evangelize Muslims necessarily rests on a particular understanding of Islam” (Skreslet 2012, Kindle 2878, cf. Accad 2012, 31).

On the whole, W1 represents the most critical position: Islam is an idol that needs to be crushed and triumphed over. Since it is a lie and Satan is the father of lies (John 8:42-43), Islam is destructive to humanity, an oppressive spirituality. The Christianity presented in W1 is also the most confrontational, although W1 workers still care deeply about humility and compassion (as in each position). W1 aims for Muslims to become Christians who completely disassociate from Islam and join churches like the denominational or theological tradition of the worker.

The W2 position is less aggressive in open interactions, but still seeks to undermine Islam by replacing it with Christianity. Apologetics are valued and used to show that Islam is an inferior system that diverts Muslims from knowing God. W2 believes Muslims should become Christians and join the established church whenever possible.

The W3 position is more positive, although still critical of the various forms of “Islam.” Thus, previously held religious practices and beliefs are not just rejected and replaced (as in W1 and W2), but some are even retained and repurposed as Muslims become transformed by faith in Christ. A term similar to “biblical faith” is preferred over “Christianity,” since the W3 position deems that the latter is ill-defined and produces many misunderstandings among Muslims. In W3, workers aim for Muslims to become followers of Jesus who begin a process of transformation that eventually ends in indigenous fellowships.

The W4 position has the most positive and affirming view of Muslims in their various contexts, as “religion” is often regarded in a neutral or pejorative sense.
sense. Muslims, in general, are seen as people who have positive spiritual impulses, but are missing the One who ultimately completes all those impulses. The result is a dialogical invitation to follow Jesus inside one’s context. It is hoped that Muslims would become believers in Christ and form groups based on the Bible but are still socially and culturally “Islamic.”

While there are distinctions between the views, there are important points of commonality. All positions believe in the necessity of the workers’ love, godly character, and theological integrity. All workers want Muslims to love and obey Jesus. Additionally, all approaches affirm some form of subversion of the Muslim’s worldview coupled with some form of exclusive fulfillment that only the gospel offers. The differences are found in emphasis and application of specific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W1</th>
<th>W2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Replacement Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Description</strong></td>
<td>“Christianity triumphs over Islam”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Christianity replaces Islam”</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worker’s Self-identity</strong></td>
<td>“I belong to such-and-such denomination”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“I am a Christian”</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muslim Perception of Worker</strong></td>
<td><strong>Christian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anglican/Protestant / Baptist/Pentecostal, etc.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Christian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of Mohammed</strong></td>
<td><strong>Oppose Mohammed (he was false and evil)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ignore Mohammed as much as possible (he is irrelevant)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Qur’an</strong></td>
<td><strong>Avoid. The Qur’an is a threat and an opening for demonic influence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimize the use of Qur’an in evangelism since doing so may affirm to Muslims that the Qur’an is inspired</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women’s Dress</strong></td>
<td><strong>Women dress as they would in their home culture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women dress modestly, but hair is usually not covered</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ramadan Fasting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fasting like Muslims during Ramadan is syncretistic and sinful</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fasting like Muslims during Ramadan is misleading (but not sinful)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prayers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Continue to pray as they would in their home / denominational tradition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May change prayer style, but no Islamic style praying</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of ‘Father of Jesus’ &amp; the ‘God of Mohammed’</strong></td>
<td><strong>They are not the same; the god of Mohammed is a satanic deception</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>They are not the same; Muslims are gravely misled about God</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1: The W Spectrum

Views and Practices for a General Islamic Context
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W3</th>
<th>W4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformation Model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Completion Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Biblical faith transforms Muslims”</td>
<td>“Biblical faith completes Muslims”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am a Follower of Jesus/Isa/al-Masih”</td>
<td>“I am like a Muslim (‘one submitted to God’) but one who follows Jesus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A kind of Christian (or Monotheist)</td>
<td>A kind of Monotheist or Christian or Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree with Mohammad when he agrees with the Bible (although do not acknowledge him as a prophet)</td>
<td>Tentatively affirm that Mohammad is a kind of “prophet” (although not in a biblical sense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some. Use Qur’an as a bridge to the Bible, which is biblically warranted and sometimes advantageous</td>
<td>Read the Qur’an alongside the Bible, but only the Bible is authoritative and the Qur’an is not inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women dress in the local modest Islamic style and hair covering (if prevalent in host culture)</td>
<td>Women dress in the local Islamic style, including veiling (if prevalent in host culture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May fast during all or part of Ramadan</td>
<td>Observe Ramadan in the same fashion as Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May use Islamic forms during prayer with seekers</td>
<td>May pray with Muslims, but prayers directed to Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are sort of the same, but the focus is on knowing Jesus in order to know God</td>
<td>They are the same, although Jesus is the only way to truly know God and love him better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is, however, outside the scope of this proposal to outline a biblical case for each approach. Through both narrative examples and normative instruction, it would not be difficult to construct a scriptural framework supporting each position on the spectrum (this partly explains the reason for disagreements between workers). Two additional relevant issues include: (1) the extent to which the New Testament authors had variegated yet complementary models for mission (e.g., Bosch 1991; Nissen 2006) and (2) the extent to which contextual factors and spiritual giftedness determine the paradigm of witness. The W-Spectrum is only intended as a description of four observed approaches.
found among evangelical workers in the Muslim world today: the two poles of W1 and W4, with two positions, W2 and W3, in between.

In reality, there are numerous positions workers take, but for the sake of practicality, only four are synthesized. At the least, it is helpful to understand that there are not just two sides in the debate. In any case, each category should not be thought of as a tightly-defined set. The W paradigms are only approximations, with a lot of space for variation in between each.

**Testing the W-Spectrum**

But is this synthesis valid? Are the practices and views in each of the paradigms consistent with one another? Does contextualization in the Muslim world justify a four-part spectrum of W1, W2, W3, W4—or are the issues too complex and the approaches too diverse to classify with this tool?

To answer these questions, more than two hundred workers serving Muslims around the world responded to an online survey. (For a detailed description of the research methodologies and results of the project, see Meeker 2014.) The hypothesis is that since people operate from beliefs (that is, the ideas one embraces surface as identifiable actions), the data will critique the W-Spectrum, showing whether or not there is correlation with the proposed scale.

The eight areas of contextualization were addressed in the central part of the survey, and each topic provided four possible responses that correlated with the hypothesized four-part scale of the W-Spectrum. To assess the consistency of responses, a standard deviation was calculated for each respondent. For example, if a respondent answered all questions within the same paradigm (all from the perspective of W1, W2, W3, or W4), the standard deviation would be zero, indicating no departure from the scale in their responses. A standard deviation of zero is the best-case scenario for supporting the W-Spectrum hypothesis.

The worst-case scenario for supporting the W-Spectrum would be for a worker to report as widely divergent responses as possible for the eight lead questions. If the responses were evenly distributed between the extremes of the spectrum (four for W1 and four for W4), then the standard deviation would be 1.6.

The lower the standard deviation, the better the W-Spectrum represents the worker’s paradigm. When the results were analyzed, the vast majority of respondents’ standard deviations were closer to zero than to 1.6. With 88.9% recording a standard deviation of .8 or lower, the W-Spectrum shows promise as a tool to describe an individual’s ministry paradigm.

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**The W-Spectrum** provides evangelical workers with a synthesized approximation of their theology of religions.
Potential Benefits of the W-Spectrum

The W-Spectrum provides evangelical workers with a synthesized approximation of their theology of religions. It is a popular-level attempt which uses concrete, familiar, and practical examples. Theology of religions can be an extremely complicated topic for workers to investigate (e.g., Kärkkäinen 2009). The W-Spectrum offers a simplified tool for self-examination of one’s own approach and also a way to understand others.

This descriptive scale could also provide teams with a template for discussing their ministry philosophy. How do they plan to interact with Muslims in their context? If they find that others on their team view issues differently and act in accordance with those views, what subjective response might that realization generate? How might this understanding impact the specific team and its interaction with other teams on the field? How respectful is the team to differing ministry positions?

The W-Spectrum could help expose areas of agreement and disagreement regarding ministry praxis. Then, ministry mindsets could be discussed to build team understanding and team unity.

Clarifications and Limitations

With support from the research, the W-Spectrum has promising, but limited potential. First, a clarification is in order. The scale is a descriptive tool for indicating what workers do, not a prescriptive template for dictating what workers should do. Explicit commands in scripture provide a black-and-white of praxis. Love, yes. Hate, no. Give generously, yes. Engage in adultery (spiritual or otherwise), no. But where exact parallels are not as straightforward, the implicit telos of the scriptural storyline needs prayerful, thoughtful, and communal attention to navigate the greys of praxis. A robust, biblically grounded, and culturally astute worldview is needed.

Additionally, some of the categories could overlap and mix, and workers are encouraged to examine why they would be W2 in some categories, while W4 in others, for example. Contextual factors play a large role in witness, so “inconsistency” would be expected in many cases.

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Additionally, some of the categories could overlap and mix, and workers are encouraged to examine why they would be W2 in some categories, while W4 in others, for example. Contextual factors play a large role in witness, so “inconsistency” would be expected in many cases. Specific practices, such as women’s dress, were selected as general representations across the Muslim world, but are not consistent in every context. A W4 mindset may look very different (literally) when applied to women’s dress, depending on the local cultural expectations. Labels are helpful and often necessary in communication, but they can easily cause harm if misused as stereotypes. The point is to
inspire missiological reflection and Christological clarity, not to harden the positions or paradigms. Since there is a lot of space in between the paradigms, we encourage workers to identify nuanced positions such as W1.5 or W4+, for example, if they feel it would be helpful.

Since the W-Spectrum was written for workers in a “general” Muslim culture, it did not take specific cultural and regional conditions into consideration. In addition to the basic socioeconomic and political differences, cultures and regions exhibit identifiable variations that differentiate between serious adherents and nominal adherents, between those knowledgeable about the Qur’an or Islam and those who view Islam as cultural tradition, between men and women, or between Muslims who live with the visible presence of churches and unreached Muslims who live beyond the witness of a Christ-following community. The static nature of the W-Spectrum is therefore to be used discerningly with regard to context and the dynamics of communication.

Conclusion

Reflection on contextualization, theology, and philosophy of ministry is a healthy exercise. Multiple barriers impede cross-cultural witness among Muslims today. The importance of abiding in Christ and the biblical goal of increasing the worship he alone deserves necessarily influences the integration of workers’ faith into Islamic contexts.

Yet this is true in all settings, whether “Muslim” or “Christian” or “secular.” The radical call of Christ makes us uneasy in every culture (John 15:18-19; 1 Cor. 8-10; 1 Pet. 2:11-12). If it doesn’t, we need to reevaluate our understanding of culture, or Christ, or both.

In the midst of this tension, God calls us to be on mission with him in order to minister for his fame and the good of others. Because of the cross and resurrection, we have bold assurance and humble expectation of God’s redemptive mission continuing to all peoples. If the W-Spectrum assists workers to reflect on this mission among Muslims, it has served its purpose.

Endnotes

1. The C-Spectrum still has value today, but is too simplistic and one-dimensional for the current discussions of socioreligious identity (see Green 2013).
2. Compared to the W-Spectrum tested (Meeker 2014), slight modifications in phrases have been made to aid in clarity.
3. The ‘subversive fulfillment’ perspective on other religions is articulated in Strange (2013).
4. For a more simplified approach, see Tennent (2010). The W-Spectrum does not, however, deal with the issues of salvation in “exclusivism” and “inclusivism.”

References

1. Considering your context and spiritual giftedness, does any position on the W-Spectrum represent your approach to Muslim ministry? Why or why not?

2. How can you better understand and respect another worker who has a different view of Islam or Muslims?

3. Share some specific examples of why taking context into account would make you answer in different categories on the W-Spectrum. Is there another position that should be represented or reworded?
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Modes of Mission in New and Established Churches

By Ed Stetzer
To help clarify, challenge, and encourage church leaders (and their churches) towards missional effectiveness, it may be helpful to consider three modes of mission as embodied by the Petrine Mission (1 Peter 2:9–12), the Johannine Mission (John 20:21), and the Pauline Mission (the life of Paul). In doing so, we can discern that a missional people, embodying “sentness,” are on a mission of multiplication.

The reality of these modes is that an in-depth study of each would reveal elements of one another. However, below I intend to stress the major foci of each in an effort to build a visual of the enactment of the message and movement of mission, which results in missional effectiveness.

**Petrine Mission—A Missional People**

When God saves people, he doesn’t save them only from their sins and themselves, but also saves them to himself and to his people. For instance, when God called out Abraham, it wasn’t merely for Abraham, but also for the people who would descend from him. Thus, God’s mission includes forming a people for his glory and his purposes. In the New Testament, the Petrine mode of mission establishes “community” as a missional impulse, for it emphasizes that God’s mission involves God forming a people, or a community, for himself.

The basis for the Petrine mode of mission is found in 1 Peter 2:9–12, where Peter writes,

> [Y]ou are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. . . .Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation.

In this passage, Peter draws from Exodus 19, where God established his covenant with Israel. According to Christopher Wright, the covenant God established with Israel was a missional covenant, which made Israel a mission-
al community (2006, 324-340). Given that Peter connects the Church with Israel, the New Testament missional “community” should also be a community that (1) exists for God and for the good of the world, (2) is shaped by the gospel, and (3) serves as a centripetal “attractional” force by which God draws people to himself.

1. A missional community exists for God and for the good of the world. Peter uses the term “possession” to communicate the idea that the Church doesn’t exist for itself, but for the very one who brought it into existence. Just as Israel was a people created by God and for God, so too is the Church. Just as Israel had a High Priest who functioned as priestly head and entered the Holy of Holies, we have a High Priest in Jesus who functions as head of his Church.

In addition, Peter uses the term “priesthood,” which speaks of the Church as a community living in the presence of God and mediating between God and the world. Just as Israel was to be a people standing in the presence of God, reflecting his glorious light, and being a mediator for the nations living in darkness (Beale 2004, 115), so too is the Church.

As the Church exists for God and for the good of the world, and is shaped by the gospel, God uses us as an “attractional” mechanism to draw others to himself.

2. A missional community is shaped by the gospel. Peter describes the Church as a “holy nation” that “proclaims the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” In other words, the Church is to be a “community” marked by Jesus’ life and way. Jesus saves his people; Jesus sanctifies his people.

It seems that longing for the word (1 Pet. 2:2) and coming to Jesus (1 Pet. 2:4) are prerequisites for the “community” of God to be holy. If so, the community is shaped by the gospel. Therefore, the Petrine mode of mission seems to call for a gospel-centered community. This means everything about the community—including its structure, strategy, ministries, programs, and processes—should center on Jesus and his word.

3. A missional community should be “attractional.” As the Church exists for God and for the good of the world, and is shaped by the gospel, God uses us as an “attractional” mechanism to draw others to himself. Peter shares that by observing our good works, those far from God will come to glorify him. Thus, as the Church embodies and enacts the life of God, we become an “attractive sign” to a watching world (see Goheen 2011, 25).

The church in Jerusalem exemplifies the Petrine mode of mission. When Luke describes the early church in Jerusalem, he reveals that they were strong
in unity, togetherness, and service to those inside and outside the fellowship (Acts 2:42–47) as a result of their gospel transformation. Because of this, they attracted (drew in) many Jews to their faith family. In addition, they had many leaders who sought to protect the integrity of the ministry and mission (Acts 4, 5, 6, 7, 15) as well as add structures to enhance ministry and community effectiveness (Act 6:1–7). In short, the church in Jerusalem excelled as a faith community in its locale.

In each mode of mission, however, there can be unintentional and unhelpful consequences. Although space does not allow exploring the downsides of each mode, perhaps one example can be illustrative to the broader challenge. For example, there were some in the church in Jerusalem—including Peter (Gal. 2)—who had difficulty crossing cultural, ethnic, and racial boundaries. In fact, some struggled theologically and practically with a multiethnic, multicultural church (Acts 15:1–35; Gal. 2:11–14). Many wanted to cling to their Jewish traditions and practices (e.g. circumcision) and teach Gentiles that in order to be fully part of the faith community they needed to do likewise.

In short, they didn’t stop at being a community focused on protecting and preserving the integrity of the gospel; instead, they moved towards self-protection and preservation by creating a [syncretistic] church culture—blending aspects of Judaism with Jesus. Eventually, the syncretistic church of Judaism and Christianity became known as the Ebionites (Jewish Christians) (see Stetzer 2002).

Using a more contemporary description, a key lesson in the Petrine mode of mission is to build a gospel-centered community, but one that is able to discern when gospel-centered ministry and mission become self-centered ministry and mission. On the one hand, it’s perfectly normal (and actually necessary) to preserve and protect the church as it relates to contending for the gospel and advancing the mission; however, it’s counterproductive to preserve and protect those things that prohibit the faith community from being on mission in ways and places God has called them.

In short, the Petrine mode of mission, community, speaks of a missional people. Thus, churches must be intentional about teaching their people that church, or “coming to church,” isn’t about them consuming elements from a religious vending machine, but about being conformed into the people of God, for his glory and the good of the world. In doing so, God uses his missional people as an eschatological movie trailer that draws people into being part of his story—to being part of his people.

Johannine Mission—A Missional Posture

One of the active characteristics of God’s mission is the notion of “sentness.” God establishes this pattern early in redemptive history. He goes to Adam and Eve, but sends Abraham to the Promised Land, Moses to Egypt, Jonah to the Ninevites, Jesus to the world, the Spirit to the Church, and the Church to the nations. Clearly, God’s mission involves sending. In the New Testament, John stresses the “sent” theme more than any other. Other than de-
scribing the sentness of Jesus and the disciples, John also references John the Baptist being sent (John 1:6–7, 15; 3:28, 34) and the Holy Spirit being sent (John 14:26; John 16:7–8). Thus, the Johannine mode of mission establishes sentness as a missional impulse.

The missional impulse of sentness is found in John 20:21, where John records Jesus saying, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” It may seem on the surface that sentness means going. While sentness certainly implies going, the Johannine mode of mission stresses something far deeper and richer given that it connects the sentness of the disciples to that of the Father sending the Son. (See the following on the “sending” terminology in the context of Jesus: John 4:34; 5:23, 30, 36–38, 43; 6:29, 38, 39, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28–30; 8:14, 16, 18, 29, 42; 9:4; 11:42; 12:44–45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18; 20:21.) The depth of sentness as a missional impulse of the Church is understood in light of Jesus’ sentness.

The richness and depth of Jesus’ sentness was that the Father sent him into the world. In Jesus’ name, the Father sent the Spirit as the indwelling presence of God to live among the people so that God may shine Jesus’ glory and bring salvation and healing to people (John 1:4, 14). Broadly, Jesus was sent to take up residence among God’s people so that they could behold God’s glory. But, more specifically, God’s glory would emanate from Jesus’ life through his faithful obedience to what God sent him to do. What was Jesus sent by the Father to do? According to Andreas Köstenberger (1998, 108), Jesus was sent to:

- Bring glory and honor to the sender (John 5:23; 7:18)
- Do the sender’s will (4:34; 5:30, 38; 6:38–39) and works (5:36; 9:4)
- Speak the sender’s words (3:34; 7:16; 12:49; 14:10b, 24)
- Bear witness to the sender (5:36; 7:28)
- Exercise delegated authority from the sender (5:21–22, 27; 13:3; 17:2; 20:23)
- Know the sender intimately (7:29; cf. 15:21; 17:8, 25)
- Live in a close relationship with the sender (8:16, 18, 29; 16:32)
- Follow the sender’s example (13:16)

The Father sent Jesus into the world to be faithfully present with him—which consisted of Jesus obeying the Father in all areas of life—so he would reflect the Father’s glory and as a result bring salvation and healing to the nations. John seems to understand Jesus as the fountain (or river) of life that flows from the presence of God (Gen. 2:10–14; John 4:14; 7:38; Rev. 22:1) that brings salvation and healing to the nations.

With regard to the sentness of the disciples, Köstenberger notes that the references to Jesus’ mission “are arguably recorded with a view toward the sending of the disciples” (1998, 108). Thus, if Jesus was sent by the Father to be the incarnational presence of God radiating his glory to the degree that God brought healing and salvation to people, then this describes the essence of the disciples sentness. They, too, are sent to be the incarnational representation of God so that God may reflect his presence and glory through their
lives—through both sharing and showing the gospel—and in doing so bring salvation and healing to the nations. Since God is a sending God, sentness simply means we respond to his nature by living sent lives.

The missional mode of “sentness” speaks of the Church (and individuals) having a missional posture. Thus, missional effectiveness requires churches to move from being distributors of religious goods and services to equipping a people sent on mission.

**Pauline Mission—A Missional Practice**

Thus far, I have attempted to outline the missional modes, or impulses, of “community” and “sentness” when the *missio Dei* is enacted. But there is one more missional mode that is enacted when the Church embraces the totality of God’s mission—and that mode is “multiplication.” Multiplication is used by God to advance his mission throughout the world. While the impulse of “multiplication” is hinted at in the Old Testament in places like Genesis 1:28 (“be fruitful and multiply”) and Genesis 15:5 (Abraham’s infinite number of offspring), it becomes very clear in the New Testament.

The Pauline mode of mission enacts the missional impulse of “multiplication.” Paul saw God’s global mission connected to an aspect of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8). Thus, in light of Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 1:8, Acts 9:15, and Romans 15:20, Paul saw his mission to the nations, multiplying believers and churches.

By understanding the mission of God as being directed toward the nations, Paul implemented a mission strategy that included: (1) targeting populated urban centers, (2) evangelizing the city, and (3) planting and establishing churches. This strategy makes the Pauline mode of mission one of “multiplication.”

According to Eckhard Schnabel, there are at least fifteen phases or locations of Paul’s missionary work that took place in the thirty-five years between his conversion (31/32 AD) and his death in Rome (67 AD) (2008, 40). During those years, Paul went on three missionary journeys (see Bolt and Thompson 2000, 102; Schnabel 2008, 40) where he engaged the cities, evangelized, and planted churches.

1. **As Paul went to the nations, he would go to their cities.** Tim Keller asserts that part of Paul’s mission strategy included going to the largest cities of the region (2002, 29). Seldom do we see Paul navigating away from cities. It seems Paul believed that cities had the greatest potential for gospel impact and gospel multiplication.

2. **Once in the city Paul did at least two things. The first was to evangelize people.** Paul evangelized through preaching at the local synagogues, participating in small group Bible studies, meeting people in the marketplaces, renting halls and lecturing, and engaging people through tent-making, his profession (Keller 2002, 355).

3. **The second thing Paul would do when he arrived in a city was to plant multiplying churches.** As Paul made disciples, he planted and estab-
lished churches. Keller summarizes Paul’s missional engagement with the cities in this way:

When Paul began meeting with them [converts], they were called ‘disciples’ (Acts 14:22), but when he left them, they were known as ‘churches’ (see Acts 14:23). To put it simply, the multiplication of churches is as natural in the book of Acts as the multiplication of individuals. (2002, 356)

As seen in the life of Paul, “multiplication” requires intentionality. It requires going where people are, sharing the good news of Jesus, and planting and establishing self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches.

In short, the Pauline mode of mission, “multiplication,” became the missional practice of the Early Church. The end result of the missional practice of the Church is found in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, where John sees a vision of God’s people being from every tribe and language and people and nation. Thus, for the Church to be missionally effective, we must participate in God’s missional intent of multiplication—going where people are, making disciples (micro multiplication), and planting churches (macro multiplication).

**Application**

By outlining the Petrine, Johannine, and Pauline modes, I have aimed to hypothesize an approach describing how churches can be missionally effective by describing and considering all three modes. Once again, although these are distinct aspects of how God’s mission shaped the New Testament churches, they are nevertheless connected.

How do these modes of mission apply to churches today? Like most things, wisdom comes from knowing the current situation and what it takes to get to a future, more balanced, state. In other words, all such modes are important, but there is also a recognition that different phases of church life reflect different modes and different times. Let me share just two examples: newer churches and established churches.

**Newer churches.** Church plants and newer churches tend to be strong in Pauline evangelism and multiplication. They may need some Johannine sentness, but often are in need of a Petrine community. Thus, new churches often exude a passion and vision to reach out to those who are unbelievers and unchurched.

Many seek to live on mission in their community by becoming part of the local rhythms of life and looking for ways to serve those around them. However, this tends to be an area where they need to develop a stronger Johannine missional focus.

Primarily, however, new churches often lack a Petrine mode of mission. Many new churches struggle with developing the community of mission—the teams, leaders, systems, and processes that help facilitate ministry and mission. They struggle with foundation and the established community, and therefore are in need of creating centered-set primary theological boundaries.
as well as a solid structure that includes governance, systems, and processes.

**Established churches.** Older churches tend to be more Petrine, using my hypothesized distinctions. Such churches have a stronger inward pull to the foundation they have laid—usually through their programs, systems, processes, and structures. Many have created a theological and practical culture and have become financially stable. Many have given years of faithful service to their community. Their longevity, in some cases, leads to trustworthiness in the community.

Yet, established churches tend to lack a Johannine and Pauline mode of mission. They are often inwardly focused and lack a passion for sentness, hence the growing movement to help established churches be more missional. The need is evident.

However, they also often lack a Pauline approach to multiplication. Stagnation has become more common for they have difficulty multiplying in both micro (disciples) and macro (churches) ways. Thus, they need more elements of the Johannine and Pauline modes.

Although not all established churches are unhealthy, most of the healthy ones would still benefit by building on Petrine modes with a greater Johannine sentness and Pauline multiplication. Statistically, most established churches are plateaued or declining, becoming the inward version of the Petrine mode (which didn’t end well for the Ebionites). Such churches tend to be inwardly focused—having lost sight of the mission.

Rather than being motivated by mission, many times established churches are motivated to maintain their traditions, preferences, culture, and systems. They fall into the same trap as the church in Jerusalem; they go overboard on their foundation and end up protecting and preserving their culture and homogeneity at the expense of mission. Unfortunately, many churches often choose maintenance over mission.

**A Fully-orbed Mission**

The goal is well-grounded and developed people (Petrine), living sent by their very nature (Johannine), and multiplying believers and churches (Pauline)—a missional people, embodying sentness, on a mission of multiplication.

These are not three different paths of doing mission, as if you could do one and not the other. Rather, they are all aspects of our mission pulled out here for consideration, with the recognition that our tendency can be to emphasize one over the other. Thus, there are three modes, but they need to work together for fully-orbed mission.

Certainly, my synthesis, though limited, can be a helpful reminder that the New Testament patterns of mission can teach God’s people today. As such, churches seeking to be missionally effective will need to embrace their nature as a missional people in “community” (a Petrine mode of mission), embody a missional posture of apostolic “sentness” (a Johannine mode of mission), and enact a missional practice of “multiplication” (a Pauline mode of mission).
Ed Stetzer is executive director of LifeWay Research. He has planted, revitalized, and pastored churches, trained pastors and church planters on six continents, holds two masters degrees and two doctorates, and has written dozens of articles and books. He also is senior fellow at the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College and serves as lead pastor of Grace Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee, a congregation he planted in 2011.

**Questions for reflection**

1. What’s your understanding of the mission of God? Is it too narrow?
2. Does your church exhibit both movements of mission? If not, which one is lacking?
3. Does your church exhibit the three modes of mission? Which one is more dominant? How can you incorporate the other mode(s)?
4. What are some practical steps you can take to become more missionally effective?
See what God can do with five of your little dollars.
A church member had seemingly made an incredibly unwise decision. No he hadn’t hurt anyone, and it was an area of personal freedom, but it appeared he had clearly put his own desires above his commitment to God, and it would no doubt have an adverse impact on his spiritual walk for years to come.
I was convinced the person needed to be confronted. He needed to be shown how he had cut God out of the decision-making process and would reap consequences as a result. But as I brought my concerns to Japanese colleagues and mentors, they cautioned me to bite my tongue. His decision was no doubt a foolish one. But confrontation in this case, they all agreed, would be neither wise nor helpful. I faithfully submitted, but was left confused. What was I missing? Was their response merely born out of cowardice? Or had they seen something I didn’t? And was this just a mystery of culture, or would Jesus have responded in the same way?
I want to share three things I have had to consider when communicating with my Japanese friends.

1. Assess Where You Stand in a Person’s Relational Boundaries

As I interviewed Japanese people about this situation, everyone agreed it would have been unwise to force a confrontation. In fact, in their responses, they all used the word “boundaries” at some point. “Most Japanese people are very sensitive about their personal boundaries,” one person explained. Japanese society can be very regimented and hierarchical by North American standards. Just about everyone has a boss or a teacher or a coach or an in-law who can exert fairly extreme levels of authority and control and expect silent submission in return. And while there are set relationships where this kind of authority is accepted, Japanese are often very sensitive to people crossing the boundaries of influence that they feel a certain relationship warrants.

What determines those boundaries? The people I interviewed cited factors such as the person’s spiritual maturity and the length as well as the depth of the relationship. When I explained that the person was a first-generation Christian, and shared how long we’d known each other and the level of interaction we’d had prior to this decision, they said I simply hadn’t yet earned the right to cross such a personal boundary. Without a relational foundation upon which to base my interaction, the person wouldn’t be able to really hear what I was saying. The offense against their personal boundaries would overwhelm any good I hoped to bring from the conversation.

2. Nurture Virtues of Harmony, Patience, and Restraint

One person shared that not confronting the person about his decision in this case was not only a necessary evil, as I was tending to perceive it, but a virtue. He explained, “When I chose to bear someone’s actions with patience and restraint, out of love for them and concern for our relationship, I feel that I’m choosing the unselfish path.” My need to get things out on the table would have been perceived in this case as selfish, impatient, and insensitive to this person and the relationship we had. I was reminded of Proverbs 17:28: “Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.”

While I understood what I was learning about boundaries, I still didn’t understand why silence and indirect communication were so highly valued in Japanese interaction. One of the biggest insults you can pay a person in Japan is that he or she can’t “read the air”—he or she isn’t able to flow with the harmony of the group. The people I interviewed explained that reading the air was a basic sensitivity to the consensus and direction of the group. Someone who doesn’t get it or who throws out seemingly random opinions kills the mood and threatens the honor of the other stakeholders.

But there’s a balance. Always agreeing with the group is the safe but muted course. And being too quick to give your opinion is a quick path to being expelled from the group. But, as one person shared, “Someone who is able to discern and affirm the consensus of the group, and at the right time offer opinions and ideas...
that will advance the flow and direction of the group, is perceived as leader.”

Nine parts harmony and one part personality may be the Japanese formula for influence. But nine parts personality and one part harmony is a sure recipe for disaster. As one Japanese person with extensive international experience shared, “My daughter told me one day, ‘When you come to pick me up, just try to act like a regular Japanese person, okay?’ And by that she meant, keep quiet about your opinions and just do whatever you’re told.”

I recently had dinner with a Japanese Noh actor. Noh is a traditional Japanese theater form involving masks. I was intrigued by the idea of trying to act while having your face covered in a mask and so I asked him, “What’s the most important characteristic in being a Noh actor?” He replied,

Completely restraining any individuality and intricately copying your mentor. I started as a young boy, training under my father. And I’ll continue to copy and master the intricacies of his style until he dies. At that time, when I’m 60 or 70, I’ll be expected to take all that I’ve learned and only then combine it with my own innovations and personality.

Whatever can be said for this career path, the patience and restraint is astounding. For me to ignore the priority of this Japanese virtue of patience in my speech or relationships with people will be to present a Jesus who is selfish, impatient, and rude.

3. Understand Pastoral Authority in Cultural Context

I want to learn to read the air more effectively. I want to consider the harmony of the group and affirm and demonstrate patience where I need to. But isn’t there a time and a place to deal with the tough issues? Aren’t there scenarios where Japanese will confront an issue? I asked one person,

If a high school baseball coach only ever patted all the players on the back and never addressed their absence from practice, the problems in their swing, and their lack of effort in running drills, would people look to him as an example of patience and virtue?

Of course the answer was no. Such a coach was not fit to lead. But what gave him the authority on the baseball team? And what other rules dictated levels of authority in society? And what model determined the perception of authority in the church?

What I learned is that the rules of Japanese society have largely been set in place by hundreds of years of tradition. Sports of all kinds are modeled at least in part on the dynamic that existed among samurai masters and their disciples in ancient Japan. The top-down control experienced in Japanese companies, too, has its roots in feudal times. Families traditionally have been ruled by a dominant father. And the rules of general society are dictated by the maintenance of harmony and the rule of the group. But these systems are in flux. The influence of American education theory has restricted the authority of teachers from what it was, and cases of physical punishment exerted by coaches on players are now reported.
Globalization is slowly creating more flat corporate cultures and as more women are working outside the home and asserting their influence, egalitarian family models are gaining in popularity.

**Conclusion**

In the midst of these many societal structures and changing dynamics, the Church’s authority is unclear. Older Christians respect strong pastoral leadership and authority rooted in a position. Younger Christians expect more sensitive family-style leadership rooted in relationship. And non-Christians often approach the Church very cautiously, fearing the control and abuse that has been reported all too often since the 1995 sarin gas attacks on Tokyo subways by the Supreme Truth cult.

While the Church’s future role in Japanese society is unclear, it would seem unwise to assume pastoral authority rooted in a title when dealing with Japanese individuals. Rather, the trend is toward more relationally-based leadership, rooted in shared history, spiritual input, and depth of fellowship. As a missionary, I need to learn to read the air, understand the context, discern the boundary lines that have been established in each of my relationships, and above all, demonstrate patience and perseverance as I try to shepherd people to the Savior. As one Japanese pastor once said to me, “The growth and development of the church is borne on the patience and perseverance of the pastor.”

**Questions for reflection**

1. How would you evaluate the depth of relational trust in your key ministry relationships? How is this trust nurtured in your setting?

2. When is silence seen as a virtue in your people group? What dictates when people decide to address an issue rather than avoid it? Are there other alternatives that are more culturally acceptable than confrontation or avoidance?

3. How is pastoral authority understood in your culture? Are there parallels to other roles in your society that might give you insight into the perceived boundaries?

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Christians are charged with taking the gospel to all nations, and therefore inevitably work in cross-cultural situations. But the current prominence of English as an international language creates potential problems in our approaches to missions and to communicating the gospel. Most importantly, neglecting to speak people’s local heart language may prevent us from connecting deeply with them. We believe English can be a blessing in sharing the gospel, but that there is also great potential for it to cause harm. So should native English-speaking Christians use English as our primary means of communication in missions? In this article, we consider relevant issues and suggest several principles to help formulate a useful perspective in moving forward.
a **Curse** in Missions?

As Christ-followers, we’ve all received the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), challenging us to go and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them, and teaching them all Jesus commanded. In Greek, the term “all nations” is foundational and refers to people groups united by a common language and culture. So in responding to this commission we will find ourselves reaching out to people who speak a mother tongue different from our own.

**Blessings**

Yet how are we to connect with such people if we can’t understand and communicate using their native language? According to Zoltán Dörnyei, the answer often lies in the fact that “Global English is becoming the *lingua franca* of Christianity in the twenty-first century” (2009, 156). Linguist David Crystal estimates that approximately two billion people, nearly one-third of the world’s population, have some level of English language proficiency. In addition to being learned at a rudimentary level in many educational systems, English is used in over sixty countries as an official or semi-official language (Crystal 2010, 370). In the last several decades, English has established itself as the world’s predomi-
nant *lingua franca*, or common language.

It seems that with so much of the world’s population being able to communicate with each other in English, we are at a unique point in history. Just as *Koine* Greek, the *lingua franca* of the first century AD, was vital to the spread of early Christianity, so too is English the main vehicle for doing so today (Dörnyei 2009).

To mention just a few blessings, people from different languages now serve together around the world on short and long-term missionary teams, and English is often a main language of communication. As Cheri Pierson (2003) discusses, many missionaries and others training for church work can access wonderful aids and theological resources available only in English.

Cecil Stalnaker (2005) similarly describes training church and other leaders for whom English is not a native language, and offers suggestions for doing so in English. Finally, Lonna Dickerson (2006) outlines ways to help members of multi-national teams learn English to better equip them for their service. And we must not neglect the wonderful potential for fellowship and support in English available to missionaries around the world, through prayer, worship, and social media.

All this is possible because English is a *lingua franca* of Christians in the twenty-first century. By using this global language as our primary means of communication, Christians can carry the good news of the gospel even further as we continue to reach all nations. However, at the risk of sounding pessimistic, we believe it is not that simple.

**Challenges**

English has been remarkably influential in making communication possible between people who previously had no practical means of doing so, but this is not without challenges. One of the main criticisms against the globalization of English is the championing of Western ideals that can harm native cultures. Qiang Niu and Martin Wolff, for example, state that English as a foreign language (EFL) “is a modern day Trojan horse filled with EFL teachers/soldiers or missionaries, armed with English words rather than bullets, intent upon re-colonizing the world to remake it in the image of Western democracy” (2005, 59).

Although writing specifically about teaching English in China, this is representative of negative views toward English’s recent spread across the globe. Unfortunately, westerners have often failed to separate our own cultural values from the heart of the gospel. This is unacceptable, and just one issue that needs to be addressed.

Another pressing, and often overlooked, issue is that using English as the primary means of communication in missionary outreach can be impersonal. Doing so fails to recognize that language is foundational to a person’s identity and self-worth. As William Smalley points out:

> English is everywhere a language of international relationships and of advanced learning... But it tends to be impersonal when it is not the mother-tongue, not usually the language of close friendship. (1994, 484)
The language we speak influences who we are and helps define us. By not communicating with others in their mother tongue, or heart language, we fail to show people that they are worth getting to know on a deeper level. As a result, we are kept from connecting with them in ways that establish a foundation of true friendship. It is crucial to address this problem if we ever hope to share with others the gospel that has transformed our own lives.

English has unquestionably shown itself to be an invaluable means of communication for connecting speakers of other languages, so it would be silly to suggest that the gospel cannot be shared by using English as a lingua franca (ELF). But it’s also important to note that there are several challenges inherent in doing so that demand our attention. How, then, can we reconcile our calling to share the gospel with all nations with the global spread of English and the issues it presents? The answer may not be clear cut, but there are several foundational principles that help in formulating a useful perspective for moving forward. They demand our attention, and require changing the way we think as mostly monolingual westerners, leading as Christ led through servantship, and engaging in mutually-edifying dialogue with those who may have other views.

A Cultural Conversion

To begin, why are so many North American missionaries not concerned about learning the languages of others? The answer seems to be two-fold. First, we’re native speakers of the world’s current lingua franca. So learning another language isn’t on our minds; we can already communicate what we want with much of the world. Second, we’re predominantly monolingual, since English is the only language many of us know. The idea of speaking multiple languages is often foreign to us. We think we wouldn’t be able to learn another language, or we don’t need to.

What is crucial to note is that even though we may be able to communicate adequately with others using ELF, we are actually saying much more by only using English. As Smalley (1994, 487) states, “Instead of servanthood, we signal authority. Instead of identification, we signal alienation. Instead of solidarity, we signal condescension. Instead of warmth, we signal coolness and distance. Instead of incarnation, we signal alien incursion.” He thus concludes that we need a “cultural conversion” if we truly want to connect with others about the gospel.

Yet before significant change can occur, changes in our thinking are required. We need to be reminded of Romans 12:2, not to conform to worldly thinking, but to let God transform us and help us determine “his good, pleasing and perfect will.” If what we believe determines how we act, then a change in action depends upon a change in thinking. What then needs to change? We’d like to propose three things.

1. We must realize the importance that language has in defining one’s self-image and self-worth (Joseph 2004). In order to truly connect with people, we need to meet them on a personal level of knowledge, which includes understanding their language and culture. As Smalley astutely declares, “To speak a local language instead is to say, ‘I want to talk to you where you live, the way you
are, where your feelings are. I want to be allowed into your life’” (1994, 484). If we commit ourselves to learning the language and culture of our hosts, we show them they are worth the time and effort to do so, and that we truly want to get to know them.

2. **We must acknowledge that English is not the native, and therefore heart, language of the majority of the world.** Language is for communicating with others and expressing thoughts and emotions, so for most people who have to do this in a foreign language, it can be likened to performing a task without the normal tools. In ministry, if we want others to be able to express themselves accurately, we cannot always expect them to do so in English. We can guard against this by devoting ourselves to seeing others as whole persons and by learning their heart language in order to show people God loves them on a deeply personal level. As Rick Brown says, “Use of a people’s heart language affirms their personal worth and opens hearts and minds to hear the message” (2009, 85).

3. **We need to realize that Christianity is not limited to being a religion of English or even the Western world.** The good news of the gospel is relevant to people of all nations. It’s important to be reminded of this in order to avoid bringing our own cultural presuppositions and customs into the world of others. We want others to see that God is fully relatable, and that he can be worshipped in their own language and in the context of their own culture, as Eleanora Scott (2013) so beautifully outlines. All nations may receive life in Christ and bring glory to God.

   God is much bigger than Western Christianity, from our acoustic guitars to the sharing of wafers and wine. He can and wants to be worshipped in the cultural contexts and heart languages of all peoples. A beautiful picture of this is found in Revelation 7:9, with the “great multitude...from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” God wants to bring people of all nations, ethnic groups, languages, and cultures into relationship with him, and we have the privilege of joining with him in this process.

   It’s encouraging to remember that this cultural conversion comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit. We don’t rely on our own skills and strength. And as Jesus declares in Matthew 28:20, he is always with us in fulfilling the Great Commission. Yet this doesn’t mean that God will change our thinking overnight or magically grant us the ability to speak another language. Instead, we need to rely on his power and be good students of language and culture, using effective means that the Lord provides (Dickerson 2004). May we
realize the need for cultural conversion, so that by learning the heart language of others our actions might change as well.

**Servant Leadership**

Having examined how to communicate with others cross-culturally, we now turn to how to live alongside them. The model for us is how Christ lived during his time on earth.

Jesus is the perfect example of servant leadership, living by putting the needs of others before his own (e.g., John 19:25-27). If we find our identity in Christ, we must also model a life that leads by acts of service. Our focus in living life with others, then, is not just the proclamation of the gospel, but also the demonstration of it. But what does this look like in learning to communicate in another’s heart language?

1. **We must remember that the source of our value as human beings is rooted in having been created in the image of God, the author of all creation (John 1:3).** The implications of this are significant. Kathleen Winslow notes, “We should be especially conscious of respecting our fellow image-bearers. Our faith should lead to faithful witness, not to manipulation of them as objects to be dragged into the Kingdom of God” (2012, 10). By respecting others as fellow image-bearers we will see beauty in God’s creation of them, including the language with which they define and express themselves. So we commit to learning heart languages out of respect for, and as a way of serving, them, and we avoid manipulating others as we value them and the diversity they bring.

2. **We must remember that in addition to learning the language of others, we must also learn their culture.** The two are not mutually exclusive. Language is defined in the context of culture, and culture is most often communicated through language. Culture learning is also a form of servanthood, to meet the needs of others by validating the way they see the world and live their lives. As long as cultural practices don’t contradict a proper understanding of God and what it means to be in relationship with him, we can value the lifestyles and traditions of those we serve. This means we engage with them in their everyday lives, by serving alongside them and learning from the wisdom they have to share. By doing so, we may not only learn their language more quickly and thoroughly, but we will also honor them as reflections of the One who created us all.

3. **We must remember to be vulnerable with them.** This is fundamental to servant leadership, as it shows people that we are not above them due to prestige or privilege. In fact, there is much we can learn from them. Being vulnerable means admitting when we are wrong and that we do not have all the answers. We are blessed in knowing the God who brings salvation (Ps. 68:20), but we are no less human than anyone else. Showing others our humanity allows them to relate to us.

As Smalley states, “People who regularly laugh with us in our vulnerability more easily identify with us, and with the Christ we represent, than do ones who laugh at us as elevated preachers and teachers” (1994, 486, emphasis added). In learning a new language, there are surely moments of confusion and correction...
that lead to laughter. Our choice is in how we respond. So let us join with them in laughter and develop a deeper sense of friendship and mutual understanding. In short, we need to respect others and embrace vulnerability so that we might move closer towards those we are there to serve.

4. In serving cross-culturally, we must remember that we will encounter individuals who have views different from our own. They may be the people who we have committed to serve by learning their language and culture, or they may be academics and others who we engage with through the exchange of information. In servant leadership, we engage in dialogue with others, hopefully mostly in their heart language, realizing that by doing so we come to a better understanding of what we both believe.

Yet, as servants, we also need to be open to correction. Suresh Canagarajah states, “It is possible to be open-minded for correction, but also share one’s well-researched and reflected opinion on matters” (2009, 85). Failing to recognize this can hinder us from seeing areas that require change in ourselves. When we are unwilling to accept correction or unaware of needing to do so, we miss opportunities to build friendships and establish trust. Committed to foundational Christian truths as servant leaders, we are first and foremost representatives of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as we serve, we must remain open to correction from those whom we hope to build up.

Conclusion

We have considered several issues related to the recent spread of the English language. In communicating the gospel to others in missions we must make it our priority to learn their heart languages. We should also devote ourselves to servant leadership through learning their culture, and be humbly open to correction as we build relationships in cross-cultural ministry.

Through how we think and act, we can show that Jesus and Christianity are not just relevant to native English-speaking westerners. God is real and relevant to all people. Let’s live out the gospel as we work to reach all nations, communicating with them in their heart languages. By doing so, may they see that God wants to be known and worshipped in their languages and cultures as well.

References


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Questions for reflection

1. Reflecting on the authors’ views, how have you seen or used English in missions in positive and/or damaging ways? In the future, how might you ensure such use is helpful, rather than harmful?

2. Which of the seven principles outlined in the article is currently most relevant to you and your cross-cultural ministry? What steps might you take to put it in practice where you work?

3. What are additional areas for cultural conversion and servant leadership in cross-cultural situations? How might you address them and help others to become more aware of their importance?
Let’s Leave Shahada to Real Muslims

Fred Farrokh
I write as a follow up to Gene Daniel’s important contribution on shahada confession, which appeared in the July 2014 issue of EMQ. The author notes that among Christian missionaries “there is disagreement about whether a believer in Christ can, with a clear conscience, say the second half, that Muhammad is his [God’s] messenger.” Daniels contends that missionaries who encourage Christ-worshippers to confess shahada are “reinterpreting Muhammad” (p. 306) by presenting him in the mold of an Old Testament prophet or perhaps even a contemporary Charismatic Christian prophet.

Daniels does well to conclude that if believers in the biblical Jesus declare the Islamic shahada, then it “miscommunicates” to Muslims, since Muslims view Muhammad as the greatest and final prophet, and an exemplar for all humanity.

Much of Daniels’ piece is balanced and sensible, yet certain key information is left out on this all-important subject. In this article, I seek to provide those missing links and come out much more strongly against shahada confession by those who worship Christ.

First, I will provide actual examples of this reinterpretation of Muhammad by Christian missionaries. Second, I will show how this reinterpretation of Muhammad is part of the Insider Movement paradigm which affirms perpetual shahada confession. Third, I will present Muhammad’s view of Jesus, which should be the primary criterion used in assessing the prophet of Islam. Fourth, I will conclude that Muhammad rejected and sought to destroy the biblical narrative regarding the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, those who seek to worship and serve Christ should refrain from affirming Muhammad by confessing shahada.

I write as a Muslim-background Christian myself. Much of the comparative Christological material in this article appears in my recently published PhD dissertation on Muslim identity. I refer interested readers to that document. I should clarify at the outset that I am only addressing the issue of shahada confession by those who believe in the biblical Jesus. I expect, of course, that Muslims will continue with shahada confession until and unless their beliefs about Muhammad and Jesus change from an Islamic paradigm to the biblical one.

The Christian Reinterpretation of Muhammad

Gene Daniels mentions the reinterpretation of Muhammad by Christian missionaries. While a full treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this article, a number of highlights will allow the reader to connect the dots. Geoffrey Parrinder, a Methodist missionary to West Africa, broke new ground in 1965 with his attempt to reconcile the Bible and the Qur’an:
It has often been thought that the Qur’an denies the Christian teaching of the Trinity, and commentators have taken its words to be a rejection of orthodox Christian doctrine. However, it seems more likely that heretical doctrines that are denied in the Qur’an, and orthodox Christians should agree with most of its statements. (1965, 133)

Charles Kraft, who would become the spiritual father of what has become known as Insider Movements, pushed hard for the rehabilitation of Muhammad in the eyes of Christian missionaries: “I believe that this is what Muhammad himself was trying to do: to combine an allegiance to the Judaeo-Christian God with Arabic cultural structures” (1979, 118). Kevin Higgins carries this torch in the twenty-first century by declaring:

I do, however, think it is quite possible that there is an ‘original Islam’ in the Qur’an, an Islam that has been lost through the misinterpretation of what became the ‘orthodox’ versions, and that this may well be in closer (if not complete) harmony with biblical truth. (2007, 40)

All of these missiologists reinterpret Muhammad’s mission to bring it into line with the Bible.

How Perpetual Shahada Confession Undergirds Insider Movements

The shahada comprises the singular entry point into Islam. A non-Muslim who wants to become a Muslim must declare with sincere intent that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger (Arabic: La illaha illal-lah, Muhammadan rasool Allah). A coerced shahada confession (for example, through torture) is considered invalid under Islamic Law.

Georges Houssney observes: “The Shahada has a powerful impact on Muslims throughout their lives” (2010, 53). Mark Durie, a long-term missionary to Aceh, Indonesia, explains: “Reciting the shahada is a covenant declaration that Muhammad will be your guide for life” (2010, 1). Every time Muslims gather for prayer, the mu’adhin (the one who calls the people to prayer) calls out the words of the shahada, “I bear witness there is no God but Allah. I bear witness that Muhammad is his messenger.” Moreover, when Muslims gather inside the mosque, a shorter form of the call to prayer, called iqama, is corporately uttered. This also affirms that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

Therefore, it is impossible to participate in Islamic corporate worship without affirming the prophethood of Muhammad, or at least giving the impression to all present that one does. In mosques, one will see the name “Allah” written in Arabic on the front wall, top-right, and the name “Muhammad” written in the same size and font, on the front-wall, top-left.

Christian missionaries who have positively re-interpreted Muhammad’s message and mission likewise promote that Muslims who come to believe in the biblical Jesus should continue declaring shahada and attending the mosque. Since shahada declaration is the indispensible Muslim identity mark-
er, disciples of these missionaries are free to, and even encouraged to, publicly identify themselves as Muslims. Thus, these new believers are known as Muslim Insiders, even as they remain inside traditional mosques.

Rick Brown of Wycliffe Bible Translators supports *shahada* confession among Christ-followers. He impugns those who disagree with him as indifferent to the eternal fate of Muslims:

If I had the choice (as only God does) between seeing a growing movement to Christ in which biblical Muslims were willing to say the *shahada* under duress with a biblical interpretation or seeing no movement at all, I would prefer to see the movement to Christ ... It is hard for me to understand those who abhor the *shahada* so much that they would rather see no movement to Christ at all among Muslims than see biblical Muslims following Christ without refusing to say the *shahada*. (2007, 73)

Brown exhibits two faulty foundations in his thinking. First, his unit of analysis in ministry to Muslims is the “movement,” not the individual soul. He so strongly wants to create a movement among Muslims that he is seemingly willing to take a short-cut from that indispensible process of a Muslim leaving Islam behind and becoming a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, he excuses ongoing *shahada* confession by “biblical Muslims” who are under “duress” (and Daniels takes the same position in his article: “I am more than willing to extend grace to those who recite Shahada under coercion or threats...” [2014, 311]). When Muslims enter the mosque with the words of the *shahada* echoing above them, or when they declare the *shahada* during the *iqama* in the *masjid* (mosque), they are not under duress or coercion. No one is pressuring them. What Daniels and Brown really allude to is the internal duress of conscience a true believer in Christ will feel when he or she knows he or she is denying Christ by declaring *shahada*.

Obviously, a Muslim who is seeking Christ may continue to attend mosque and declare *shahada* in an interim or transitional period. I am not judging such a person; he or she needs our prayers to be birthed through into the Kingdom of God. However, when this individual really wants to come to living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he or she must put away the affirmation of Muhammad, who declared that Christ was neither Lord nor Savior.

There are times when Muslims will put to the test a Muslim whom they suspect of apostasy. In these cases, the Muslims or their imam will ask the suspect to recite the *shahada* as an affirmation of his or her Islamic faith. This constitutes a tremendous test, since in many Muslim contexts apostasy can be punishable by death. Individuals in this situation need prayer that their love of Christ would shine through courageously during this ordeal. This type of ordeal repeats itself throughout Church history. Early Christians were tested on whether they would burn incense to Caesar, thus denying Christ as Lord.

In the Muslim context, this test comes about because of the intolerant and expulsive nature of Islam. The responsibility of the Muslim-background convert to Christ is to faithfully testify of Christ, as difficult as this may seem. It is beyond
the power of the convert to determine how the Muslim community will respond when he or she replaces *shahada* confession with a confession of Christ as Lord.

In 2008, I traveled to Bangladesh to train Muslim-background pastors. Some shared that Western Christian missionaries previously came in and shared the Bible with them. Because these were Insider Movement missionaries, they told the Bangladeshis to continue to identify themselves as Muslims and to attend the Islamic mosque, even after they had come to believe the biblical narrative regarding Jesus.

While they continued with these Islamic practices, they lived in perfect peace with their communities. When they decided to discontinue identifying as Muslims and attending mosque, the wrath of the Muslim community came down on them. Specifically, they and their families were forbidden to draw water from community wells, which could be a life-threatening punishment as there was no running water. In our first question and answer session, these Muslim-background pastors asked for our help in preparing them to answer questions from their communities about their position on Muhammad, who is the subject of the *shahada* confession.

**Assessing Muhammad’s Christology**

In assessing whether those who believe in the biblical Jesus should simultaneously affirm Muhammad as a divinely-appointed messenger, it is critical to examine what Muhammad taught about Jesus. This content remains conspicuous by its absence in Daniels’ treatment of *shahada*. My summary statement is that Muhammad had as one of his primary objectives the destruction of the biblical narrative regarding Jesus Christ. Muhammad sought to divest Jesus of his Lordship, his Sonship, his Divinity, and his redemptive mission. In the Qur’an and Islamic literature, Jesus plays the role of a supporting actor to Muhammad. Muhammad even superimposes a prophecy into the mouth of Jesus that Muhammad will come after the Nazarene rabbi (Sura 61:6).

Muhammad also rejected the divinity of Jesus. He has Jesus rebuke Christians in Sura 5:72 for considering him a god:

> They do blaspheme who say: “God is Christ the son of Mary.” But said Christ: “O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” Who-
ever joins other gods with God, - God will forbid him the garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong-doers be no one to help. (5:72, A. Yusuf Ali translation throughout).

In the same sura, Jesus appears crestfallen that some humans have erred by worshipping him, insisting that he is not complicit in their idolatry:

And behold! God will say: “O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?” He will say: “Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart; I know not what is in Thine.”

The unpardonable sin in Islam is *shirk*, associating partners with Allah. Sura 4:116 clearly expresses this doctrine: “God forgiveth not (The sin of) joining other gods with Him; but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins than this: one who joins other gods with God, Hath strayed far, far away (from the right).” This verse strongly condemns any deviation from *tawhid* (Divine Unity) as the singular unpardonable sin in Islam. As such, the Qur’an rebukes the Christian concepts of divine Incarnation and plurality within the godhead. Sura 17:111 targets Christians by associating belief in the Son of God as shirk: “Say: ‘Praise be to God, who begets no son, and has no partner [Arabic, *shareek*] in (His) dominion; Nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation.’”

Muslim scholar Tarif Khalidi makes an astute observation regarding the differing roles of Jesus in the Bible and in Islam:

Clearly there is something about Jesus which makes his Qur’anic image so utterly different from the Jesus of the Gospels...He is the only prophet in the Qur’an who is deliberately made to distance himself from the doctrines that his community is said to hold about him. (2003, 11-12)

Muhammad, according to his authoritative statement recorded in Sahih Bukhari (Volume 4, Book 55, Number 657), has the Islamic Jesus rebuking Christians upon his return to earth because they wrongly promoted him to a status above that of a mortal man.

Another Muslim scholar, Smail Baliç, properly assesses the mistake Christian missionaries have made by re-interpreting Muhammad’s Christology in a more biblical light:

It is primarily Christian missionaries, or certain Orientalists who are either themselves theologians, or who are well disposed to Christian theology, who overestimate the role of Jesus in the Koran. They are misled by the way of understanding Jesus which they retain from their Christian Tradition. It is no surprise that, under such circumstances, they arrive at false conclusions and evaluations. (1979, 3)
In conclusion, the biblical Jesus and the Islamic Jesus are two different and mutually exclusive identities. If Muhammad was confronted with any aberrant teachings about Jesus in his lifetime, he had ample opportunity to refresh the biblical portrait of Jesus. Instead, Muhammad left Jesus shorn of his divinity by denying the Crucifixion (Sura 4:157-158), and reduced Jesus to the role of his personal forerunner.

We are obviously unable to travel back in time to listen in to the deliberations Muhammad and the early Muslim community may have had regarding Jesus Christ. Muhammad could have rejected Jesus outright as an imposter who claimed to be God. Instead, Muhammad reduces Jesus to the role of a mere mortal prophet, and co-opts him to serve the Islamic theological agenda. Tarif Khalidi explains: “Jesus is always identified as a Muslim prophet—and this must be constantly borne in mind, for he is, after all, a figure molded in an Islamic environment” (2003, 44).

The Perils of Shahada Confession for Christ-worshippers

Based on the previous section, confessing Muhammad as God’s prophet constitutes a repudiation of the divinity of Christ, his Lordship, and his atoning work on the cross. Thus shahada confession is never compatible with the Bible, nor can it be uttered with a clear conscience by those who believe in the veracity of the Bible. Brown concedes that he is unsure of the true implications of shahada confession:

Personally I think the second half of the shahada should be avoided whenever possible and said only under duress with an interpretation that is compatible with the Bible. But as an outsider I am not immersed enough in these situations to judge accurately what the impact of saying it would be. (2007, 73)

Hopefully, this section provides the material from which Brown and others like him can clarify their judgments about shahada confession.

Gene Daniels does well to discourage Muslims who have come to faith in the biblical Jesus from confessing shahada. He has, however, largely failed to explain his decision other than expressing it in communication theory. The simple reason Christ-worshippers should not declare shahada is that shahada affirms the prophethood of a man who forbade the worship of Christ.

People who believe in Muhammad—Muslims—are free to declare shahada. Those who have come to believe the biblical narrative regarding Jesus, on the other hand, deny Christ by declaring shahada. Moreover, their presence at Islamic prayers indicates to all present that they reject the Lordship and divinity of Jesus. In fact, the mosque was established by Muslims specifically to exclude Christ-worshippers.

Muslims who come to believe in the Divine Savior, Jesus Christ, are no longer Muslims in the eyes of the Muslim community since they have de facto rejected Muhammad as their prophet. While non-observant Muslims
may still be considered Muslims by their own communities, Muslims will not continue to accept as Muslims those who believe the biblical narrative that God visited the earth in the person of Jesus, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. Such persons have no business worshipping in the mosque, for Muslims will rightly castigate them as hypocrites if they discover their true beliefs. More importantly, how will God feel if his children whom he saved through the blood of his Son testify simultaneously that they affirm belief in the prophet of Islam who categorically rejected this narrative?

Field Research on Muslim Identity

In my own PhD research, I asked forty Muslim-born persons, hailing from 18 different countries but now currently living in diaspora, to respond to a vignette in their home countries in which a hypothetical Muslim strayed from the Islamic faith and came to believe in the biblical Jesus. Eventually, that straying Muslim began to fellowship with other like-minded believers. The individual was introduced to the gospel through the Internet; no direct missionary involvement was mentioned.

It is hypocritical to continue affirming Muhammad through shahada on an ongoing and permanent basis, while simultaneously believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Half of the interviewees were Muslims and the other half were Muslim-background Christians. Thirty-five of the interviewees were foreign-born; all of the U.S.-born interviewees had lived in or visited their respective ancestral homelands. It is likely therefore that such a sample of Muslims and Muslim-background Christians could respond reasonably accurately to a situation occurring in their home countries.

Both groups of interviewees overwhelmingly reject the Insider Movement premise that believers in the biblical Jesus retain Muslim identity. Many of those who have come to trust in Christ as Savior have experienced the same excruciating dilemma regarding ongoing affirmation of Muhammad. It is a choice between community affirmation and the presence of Christ. A Turkish believing woman sums it up this way: “You can’t have it both ways.” It is hypocritical to continue affirming Muhammad through shahada on an ongoing and permanent basis, while simultaneously believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Shahada belongs to real Muslims. Christian missionaries would do best to leave it to them.
Final Thoughts

Mark Durie provides invaluable insights into the perils of continuing *shahada* confession for disciples of Christ:

> If the status of Muhammad as a Messenger is not explicitly renounced, then the curses and threats of the Qur'an, and Muhammad’s opposition to the death of Christ and the Lordship of Christ can be a cause of spiritual instability, causing someone to be easily intimidated, and breed vulnerability and a lack of confidence as a follower of Jesus. (2010, 76)

Paul concurs: “Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves” (Rom.14:22).

In conclusion, I thank Daniels for his important contribution on *shahada* confession among Christ-followers. His ultimate decision that this practice should be avoided is correct. I have sought to build on Daniels’ article by providing contextual factors that may assist those who are serving Muslims with the gospel.

References


Fred Farrokh is an international trainer with “Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples.” He is an ordained missionary with Elim Fellowship, and holds a PhD in Intercultural Studies from Assemblies of God Theological Seminary.
I have been asked to respond briefly to Fred Farrokh’s article, “Let’s Leave the Shahada to Real Muslims.”¹ I will begin with two aspects of what I think is the author’s main critique of insider movements (IMs): the reinterpretation of Muhammad and Islam by Christian missionaries.

First, relative to the reinterpretation of Muhammad, two examples are noted: Muhammad as similar to an Old Testament prophet, or similar to a “charismatic” prophetic gift. While it is true that some advocates of IMs suggest that one or both of these approaches may be possible, the more common argument has been to look to examples in the Old Testament, such as Balaam, of men who were given true things to say by God but who also got things wrong. This is an important distinction.

The second type of reinterpretation critiqued by Farrokh is the more general rethinking of Islam in light of the Bible. He takes specific issue with one of my comments speculating that there may have been an original Islam closer to the Bible. But the citation is a footnote which comes at the end of this fuller statement in the body of my article:

I do, however, believe that authentic Jesus movements within Islam will bring transformation (and indeed reform) in the light of God’s Word and Spirit as applied from the inside….and many other elements of Islamic faith and life will change within and through such movements to Jesus.

While this is my opinion, the fact is that there are Muslims who have come to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and in the Bible as the final authority over all other books. They are thinking through how to understand the religion of their birth in light of this new set of faith convictions. I know that Farrokh disagrees with their conclusions, but my point is that they are doing this consciously as part of the Muslim community and in the end it will be the wider Muslim community which will (and does) determine whether their reinterpretations are accepted or not. My own opinion is that in the end acceptance will be very rare and will come at great cost if it does come. The believers I know are well aware of this and prepared to face it.

There is persecution for those who refuse to say the shahada. And there are also insider believers who have faced persecution and death because they remained in their communities as witnesses, and because of their convictions about Jesus and about Muhammad.

Finally, the 40-person interview results are important. And I know that many more could be found who would support Farrokh’s thesis. But many other believers in Jesus, vibrant in biblical faith, would answer very differently if interviewed.
It will ultimately be the wider Muslim community that will decide whether the reinterpretations (including their views of shahada) that insiders are making can be accepted or not. Meanwhile, because insider believers are sharing their faith with other Muslims, Muslims are hearing the gospel and also being challenged as to whether to consider this new way of understanding things they were taught as Muslims. So I agree with the title: let’s leave the shahada to real Muslims.

Endnote

1. I do want to make one minor comment on the reference to Charles Kraft as the spiritual father of the Insider Movement. While several of us have made use of Kraft’s thought as one input, I have drawn equally from Paul Hiebert, who could hardly be said to be an IM guru.

Kevin Higgins is international director of Global Teams. He has lived and worked among Muslims in four countries since 1992, and has been part of seeing several movements to Jesus emerge in those contexts.

Fred Farrokh’s Response to Kevin Higgins

I thank Kevin Higgins for his response to my article on shahada confession. I also appreciate the opportunity given me by the EMQ editors to clarify several points. I see from Higgins’ response that two terminological misunderstandings exist which I will address from the lens of a Muslim-background Christian.

The first misunderstanding hinges on the term Muslim. Higgins states, “The fact is that there are Muslims who have come to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and in the Bible as the final authority over all other books.” I am unaware of any Muslim scholar whose understanding of the term Muslim includes someone who worships Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. My own research and experience indicates that the Muslim umma views a person who comes to believe the biblical narrative regarding Jesus as an ex-Muslim, since he or she now de facto rejects Muhammad. If Higgins knows of independent, indigenous Muslim scholars who consider a Christ-worshipper to be a Muslim, then he should encourage them to enter this discourse.

The second misunderstanding again surrounds ill-advised linguistic flexibility — this time regarding the use of the term prophet. Muslims testify in shahada that Muhammad is their prophet (rasool Allah). This testimony includes affirmation not only of his prophetic utterances on behalf of Allah (the Qur’an), but
also Muhammad’s own words (the Hadith), his lifestyle (the Sunna), and his integrity.

Higgins suggests that Muslims may believe in the Bible and continue to hold to Muhammad as a prophet along the lines of Balaam. Yet I am skeptical that this will be a viable explanation in nearly any Muslim context. The Bible paints a detestable picture of Balaam, who, though, he got the prophetic words right, counseled King Balak of Moab to ensnare the children of Israel in fornication in the Sin of Peor (Num. 25:1-3; 31:16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14), whereby the Israelites would incur God’s wrath. Balaam refused to ever identify with God’s people, and ultimately is slain by them (Josh.13:22) when they finally enter the Promised Land.

Rather than attempting this type of hermeneutic gymnastics to affirm Muhammad as a prophet of Balaam’s order, would it not be simpler to state we don’t accept Muhammad as a prophet because of his anti-biblical teachings regarding Jesus?
Fifteen years ago, I met with a group of missionaries, five families who were living and working in Dakar, Senegal. With a team leader facilitating the meeting, they came together every Wednesday for a team meeting and prayer. Each member gave a report of his or her projects. None of the ministry activities were related. No decisions were made at these meetings. There were suggestions, perhaps, on how a problem might be resolved within a particular work—but little to no integrated effort in any of the programs throughout the city. At the conclusion of our time in Dakar, we collectively agreed that they were not a team at all, but a group. A good group to be sure, as they clearly supported each other and enjoyed getting together, but they were certainly not a team.

The concept of North American missionaries serving overseas as part of a team is popular. The present generation of missionaries feels more comfortable working with others rather than launching out on their own. Mission agencies have picked up on this phenomenon and recruit people to be a part
of a **team** for their organization as a mission strategy. *While the idea is admirable, what is the difference between a team and a group?*

More recently, I visited an agricultural venture called the Beersheba Project (BP) that is located outside of Mbour, Senegal. Although I have been acquainted with this project for three years, the study was just three weeks in length and conducted through interviews and attending team meetings. I acknowledge that this assessment is limited in scope and may have some chronological disparities. Further, my classifications of the dynamics of the team may also need refining. In spite of these limitations, I believe this analysis provides a good overview of the dynamics of how this teams function. Hopefully, this study will provide insights for other cross-cultural workers on how teams work.

**Historical Overview**

The Beersheba Project (BP) began operation in 2011. Ten years prior, Eric, the founder and leader of the project, secured one hundred hectares in a remote area approximately forty kilometers outside the coastal city of Mbour. A former director for a large aid organization, Eric believed that if he could build a fence around a piece of land then the natural habitat would be restored from overgrazing and cutting down of trees. His theory worked, and he hoped that one day he would be able to develop the land into a functioning farm.

Over the course of time, through Eric’s discussion with other workers in the country, a shared vision of what could be accomplished with this one hundred

Photos courtesy Richard G. Lewis
hectors formed the initial team of the BP.

The stated goal of the BP is to teach appropriate technology agriculture to Christian men and women in the community. The Sereer people in this region of Senegal are comprised of Muslims and nominal Christians. The strategy behind BP is a realization that the evangelical churches in the area are not sustained due to economic hardships, and many young people leave their home area for the capital city of Dakar to seek employment. If the area could be developed through sustainable farming, then fewer people would leave for the city and economic growth would obviously be a benefit for the communities as well as the church. Further, through a successful model of farming, this would provide outreach opportunity for witness to non-believers.

Over the past three years, the BP has instituted several training programs including Foundations for Farming Principles, animal husbandry, and daily Bible study. In addition to these regular classes are modules which range from financial management to butchery and other appropriate technology classes. The students or interns recruited for training are recommended from local churches. The student body is approximately fifteen in size and takes residence on the farm for one year. Although the program is relatively new, there is a concentrated effort to follow up on the graduates in their home districts to see how they are using the training they have received and offer assistance in helping these graduates on their own farms.

**Team Dynamics**

The BP is in its initial stages of formation with the present team made up of various tier members. The titles of these members are entirely my own and not used within the team.

**Tier One: Stakeholders**

a. The leader, visionary, and founder
b. Operations officer, who takes care of finances as well as helps coordinate activity
c. Operations farmer

**Tier Two: Shareholders** (they share, but may not have as much at stake in BP as the founding team members). Two families joined the BP within the past year, giving added value ministry service. The two men give direction to biblical studies. Another single man, who came earlier into the BP, provides discipleship to interns and coordinates class activity on campus.

**Tier Three: Limited Contributors (short-term project specialists)**

a. Electrical technician
b. Agricultural developer
c. Three nationals providing ministry, language, and cultural imperatives

**Tier Four: Contract Staff**

a. Campus staff
b. Any volunteer for limited ministry activity (a visiting teacher on finance management and any other person or groups that does not have a stake or long-term investment in BP)
It is important to note that the graph above does not have a top-down structure. What separates the different tiers of the team have more to do with position based on time—their past, present, and future commitment to the BP. Although the tiers do represent positional ownership, I have tried to describe the structure as an egalitarian unit (discussed later) in which each member of the team has an equal role in the function of BP.

I define **stakeholders** as people who were part of the foundation development. Certainly, the founder was and is a major stakeholder as he began the process. The operations and farm manager both joined the founder to launch the project. Each of these stakeholders is committed to the project both by obligation to the work, as well as finances for the ongoing budget of BP.

**Shareholders** are as vital as the stakeholders of the BP, although their involvement came about as a result of the already-established program. Their membership into BP is with equal commitment, being a part of the whole rather than their individual interests (though their interests and giftedness is what made them attractive and attracted to BP). They also have some financial commitment to the project, although not at the same level as the stakeholders.

**Limited contributors** are those who are committed to the BP, although the membership is perhaps not as long term as the stakeholders or shareholders. Their roles and responsibilities are in direct relation to their skills and/or service. Limited contributors are part of team meetings and decisions.

The Senegalese co-workers I have placed in this category are vital to the success and growth of BP. They no doubt embrace the vision and purpose of BP, but, like other limited contributors, their role is possibly transient due to other future interests or financial opportunities.

**Contract workers** are involved in BP because of a specific task, either in
teaching a modular course or as paid staff. Their loyalty to the group is on a contract basis, and they are not a part of the decision-making process.

**Grid/Group and Classification**

In analyzing a social environment, whether it is a church, business, religion, or family, I use the culture theory model devised by British anthropologist Mary Douglas. Her classification of social structure is through sorting environments based on *grid* and *group*.

**Grid** is defined by **roles**. Many roles in an environment mean that it is high grid (the military, large corporation of maybe even a family of twelve children). Low grid social environments mean there are fewer roles (a special forces unit, a small business or family with one child). All social environments have a grid based on roles.

**Group** is defined by **membership** in a social environment, how they enter into a community and the loyalty to that group. In a high group environment, loyalty to the group is more important than even their role, often because of family ties or a cause that is seen as vital to society (political activists, environmentalists, clans). Low group social environments are less loyal to the group or community (nomadic herdsmen, salaried employees).

The matrix of grid and group is identified in the graphic on page 419 (Lingenfelter 1998). **Low grid/low group** social environments are classified as **Individualists**; **high grid/low group** are **Bureaucratic**; **high grid/high group** are **Corporate** (hierarchical); and **low group/high grid** are **Collectivist** (egalitarian).

General examples of social environments classified broadly are North Americans and some European countries as Individualist, holding strongly to independence and autonomy. Russia and many Eastern European countries are Bureaucratic, with high structure, and each person in the society relegated to tasks within that structure. In India and other Asian countries, people lean toward the Corporate model, with high hierarchy based on family, kin, and caste. People who are inclined toward Collectivism are found many times in African tribal societies.

**Analysis of Beersheba Project Based on Grid and Group**

In its present structure, BP is a low grid/high group Collectivism based on these observations:

1. **BP is a multinational team, comprised of people from France, Canada, the United States, the U.K., and Senegal.** Team meetings are conducted in French (the official language of Senegal), as well as English. Although having a similar outlook from each particular country, being a multinational means that no one culture dominates how the project is structured (i.e., it is not done the French or American way).

2. **The theological makeup of the BP team is comprised of people of different denominational backgrounds.** Although all members are evan-
geliicals, the BP team does not stress any one denominational teaching. This allows each person to hold on to his or her own beliefs but not allow his or her doctrinal differences to be an obstacle in the overall goal of the project.

In blending a team with different doctrinal positions, it is important for each member to agree on the foundational doctrines and to see other denominational teachings as secondary. For example, if the issue is speaking in tongues or immersion baptism, a team member cannot insist that belief will be a part of the curriculum. The BP team is committed to keeping the main thing the main thing in their training and not allow personal theological preferences to hinder them from their objective.

3. **It is the task that brings people to be a part of the team.** Some on the team are agriculturalists; others are Bible teachers, while others have expertise in business development. Each member of the BP has a role, not by decree or assignment, but because of giftedness, which compliments the functioning of the project. Task is one of the reasons the team remains relatively small. People are not invited to be a part of the team unless they have a specific task that compliments the goal of BP.

4. **Objective, present and future, is through vision.** “What is the purpose of Beersheba?” is a reoccurring theme among team members. In team meetings, ideas or new programs are regularly brought up. This is in part because BP is becoming known as a successful program in and out of the country. Outside church groups, missionaries, and foundations want to be a part of a successful program in a difficult part of the world. The BP receives requests monthly from others to join. While enticing, some of the ministry proposals are outside the original intent of the vision. Doing one or two things well is more important to the BP than having fifteen projects done poorly.

While in the country I had occasion to visit another project that allowed
activities to define the ministry. What started out to be a small water project, providing clean drinking water in villages, has now established schools, building churches, feeding programs, and a four-story hospital. Outside donors drove the vision to “add one more thing.” Unfortunately, all of the projects are in jeopardy and some are no longer in operation. The hospital has limited staff, broken equipment, and virtually no medicine. Opportunity is not always a sign of God’s leading. The BP recognizes this and therefore guards its vision and purpose.

4. **With the egalitarian BP team, decisions are made through consensus. Eric is both the leader and the visionary.** Whenever a new opportunity is proposed, his immediate response is generally, “Yes. Let’s do it.” In the team meetings, however, nothing is decided until it is discussed and there is general agreement. Consensus is neither fifty-one percent nor one hundred percent agreement. It’s usually in the seventy-five percent range. Recently, a new member was being considered. Eric was very enthusiastic to bring this person on board. However, there was opposition, as some of the team did not believe this person was a good fit for the program. It took over six weeks of discussion about this person before a decision was made. Because three-quarters of the team felt okay about the addition, this person was invited to the team with clear guidelines for her participation. If she only gained half of the support, then she would have never been accepted. Any decision within the BP must have broad consensus before things can move forward and not even the team leader takes on the authority to make unilateral decisions.

5. **Although the BP social environment is egalitarian, the team is made up of individuals who have their own values and ideas.** Individualism is both a strength and weakness. Individualism allows each person to use their gifts, creating an atmosphere of creativity and dynamic activity. However, multi-individualism also can lead to dissention if individual interests become more important than group values. The difference between a team and a group is multi-individualism working toward the same goal.

The snapshot of analysis on page 421 demonstrates how decisions are made.

**Going Forward: Suggestions and Cautions**

Let me suggest three reminders for us as we move forward.

1. **High group social environments have a tendency to be closed and exclusive.** (This was the problem with Judaizers desiring the first church to function as a Jewish extension sect). There may be a tendency, even fear, in both the stakeholders and shareholders to remain small so that they will not become a bureaucracy. That is a legitimate and valid concern, but as God can and does use a boutique ministry, he also can and does use large bureaucratic institutions.

2. **Cultural understanding always requires attention.** Through the years, I have observed missionaries, social workers, and government officials who worked with nationals, but never really understood the people they interacted with on a daily basis. Western development has a propensity to teach subjects and programs without truly understanding the context of those they seek to serve. Although all of the members of the BP team are familiar with West Af-
American culture and no doubt understand much of what people do (traditions, rituals, and practices), how much study has been dedicated to understand why people do what they do? Perhaps a study of social structure once a month would be helpful to enhance the teams teaching and training in context.

3. Facilitators are not pioneers. The main function of the BP is to facilitate a better way to farm and promote spiritual growth in the students. It is not the role of the team to do pioneer church planting. Although it is critical that the team understands the Senegalese culture and not be isolated within the confines of the farm, to become too engaged in the community with hands-on involvement could result in losing focus on the main purpose of the project. This is not to suggest that an expatriate cannot or should not do pioneer work; it’s just that this is not the purpose of the BP.

Conclusion

Every member of the BP team is a seasoned cross-cultural worker. Many have lived or served in West Africa for several years, having already had they’re cultural shins skinned in other ministries, and all have a good command of the language. For the members of the BP, my report is perhaps a reminder as well as a category for how they work as a team.
For outsiders reading this study, BP is a model (not the model), for how a team environment works. In missions today, team is trend concept. As I noted earlier, most missionary and secular organizations I have observed are not teams at all, but groups of people who may belong to the same organization but for the most part function either through a bureaucratic structure or as individuals. Although the members of the BP team are individuals, they work as a team, sharing resources, including vehicle and tools, and coordinating tasks. Sharing property is not easy for individualists and this is another unique quality of the BP team.

The Beersheba Project is a success story. But like the Early Church, it will have growing pains that will present challenges in the future. Will they retreat and be closed and exclusive, or will they grow with a bureaucratic structure? Perhaps they will find the elusive balance that is not typical of many new ventures. Apple computers and some megachurches started small and expanded without losing their identity. The Beersheba Project has the potential to find that balance and contribute significantly to the cause of Christ.

(Acknowledgments: My appreciation to Eric and the entire Beersheba team for allowing me to sit in on the team meetings and asking questions. Prior to submitting the article, it was presented to the BP team for their comments.).

References

Richard Lewis is president of Lewis Cross-Cultural Training, Inc. His ministry experience includes pioneer church planting in Kenya, trainer of national missionaries in over forty countries. He holds a DMiss from Biola University. More information on Richard can be found at http://Lewis-Training.com.

Questions for reflection
1. Identify the issues that keep your group from being a team. Is it the task, leadership, or something else?
2. Where in the grid and group matrix would you place your team? Why?
3. How well does your team understand the host culture? Does your team intentionally study the host culture, or do they merely teach (discipleship, leadership, theology, etc.)?
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Imagine for a moment that you have received an invitation to attend a meeting that is to be held in January 1985 in the office of the dean emeritus of the School of World Mission at Fuller School of Theology. Several other people have also received invitations. In attendance with you will be the following: a foremost educator with a PhD in education from a
highly-respected university, an evangelist who personally led over one thousand people to faith in Christ, a church planter who established fifteen churches in the span of seventeen years, a linguist who translated the Gospels into a new dialect, an administrator who directed the work of a mission agency in one of the world’s largest countries, a world-renowned mission strategist, and a well-known author whose books and articles have changed the course of his discipline.

Of course, you accept the invitation, and after traveling to Pasadena, you make your way to the campus. After introducing yourself to the secretary in the School of World Mission, she leads you into the office of the dean emeritus. However, once inside, you are surprised to find there are only two people attending the meeting—you and Donald McGavran. It suddenly dawns on you that the educator, evangelist, church planter, linguist, administrator, mission strategist, and author are all the same person—McGavran, the premier missiologist of the twentieth century.

McGavran was a prolific writer of letters, articles, and books, as well as a world traveler. No one, to my knowledge, has visited as many mission fields, conducted as many interviews, or researched the growth and decline of Christian churches as widely as McGavran. He influenced mission theory and practice internationally and the movement he started continues to move forward, empowered by appreciative followers.

Unfortunately, during the twenty-five years since his death in 1990, McGavran has almost disappeared from the writings of some missiologists. Even those who do have an awareness of him often discount the impact he once had (and continues to exert) on church life and ministry. No doubt part of the reason for this relates to the fact that his last published book, *The Satnami Story*, was released twenty-five years ago.

Without publications, it is easy to be forgotten. It is the proverbial “out of sight, out of mind” scenario. However, it is curious that a good number of today’s researchers ignore McGavran’s work. Below I present a brief overview of his life and a reminder of his ongoing legacy.

**No one, to my knowledge, has visited as many mission fields, conducted as many interviews, or researched the growth and decline of Christian churches as widely as McGavran.**
Brief History

Mission was the natural expression of Donald McGavran’s heritage. His story cannot be separated from that of the generations of faithful Christians and missionaries who came before him. James and Agnes Anderson, McGavran’s maternal grandparents, went to India in 1854 as missionaries with the Baptist Missionary Society. His father journeyed there in 1891 as a missionary with the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, and the two families—Andersons and McGavrans—were united in 1895 when John married the Anderson’s daughter, Helen.

In 1923, Donald and Mary McGavran also went to India and served there until 1954. Counted all together, the three generations of Anderson and McGavran families—grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins—committed a total of 362 years to missionary work in India.

Donald Anderson McGavran was born on December 15, 1897, in Damoh, India. He was homeschooled for most of his early education, while his father worked as an evangelist and supervised an orphanage for boys. In 1910, the family returned to the United States for a furlough, but it turned into an extended stay so the McGavran children (Grace, Donald, Edward, and Joyce) could complete their secondary education.

McGavran attended junior high school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, then high school in Indianapolis, Indiana, graduating in 1915. He enrolled at Butler College that fall, but his college years were interrupted by service in World War I. Following a brief time in France, he returned to Butler and graduated in 1920. Two years later, he received a BD in Christian education from Yale Divinity School (1922) and married his college sweetheart, Mary Howard on August 9, 1922. The couple took classes at the College of Missions in Indianapolis, with McGavran receiving a MA degree (1923).

Donald and Mary McGavran sailed for India in November 1923. Beyond them lay a future that was unimaginable at the time—the tragedy of a child’s death, the pain of rejected leadership resulting in a demotion, the strain of struggle to evangelize a low-caste tribe, and the loss of a dream to train leaders on how to see greater growth in the Church. Yet as God would script it, the ministry of McGavran was destined to be one of the twentieth century’s glittering triumphs.

A Missionary in India

From 1923 until 1932 McGavran worked as director of religious education for the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS). His primary job was to oversee and improve the teaching in the mission schools. Then, following a furlough where he completed work for a PhD in education at Columbia University (graduated 1936), McGavran was elected secretary-treasurer of his Indian Mission (1932-1935).

It was during this time that he was introduced to the work of Methodist Bishop Waskom Pickett and became interested in the growth of churches, especially the mass movement phenomena. He worked with Pickett on a
study of churches in mid-India. The study found that the group movement approach to evangelism produced healthy church growth since it encouraged groups of families to come to salvation without social dislocation. The study called for a redirection of mission energies and was published in 1938 as *Christian Mission in Mid India: A Study of Nine Areas with Special Reference to Mass Movements*.

However, McGavran’s fellow missionaries refused to employ some of the new insights that were discovered, and when his term as secretary was up, he was not reelected. Instead, he was appointed as an evangelist among the low-caste Satnami people (1935-1954).

During the remainder of his missionary years, he worked among the Satnamis trying to start a people movement. He was fruitful in winning around one thousand persons to faith in Christ, and planted fifteen small churches, but a people movement never developed. However, the years of evangelism and church planting produced numerous insights regarding effective evangelism, which were published in *The Bridges of God* (McGavran 1955). Reviews of the book lauded McGavran’s courageous thinking. No one knew it at the time, but the *Bridges of God* was destined to change the way missions was practiced around the globe and it became the *Magna Carta* of the Church Growth Movement (CGM), the primary document from which the movement grew.

**A World Traveler**

When the McGavrans returned to the United States in 1954, they fully intended to return to India when their furlough was over. The leaders of the UCMS recognized, however, that McGavran was a world expert on mission practice and theory and felt that sending him back to his old mission work in India was not the best move.

Providentially, the UCMS decided to send McGavran on several tours of Puerto Rico, Formosa, Philippines, Thailand, Congo, and India to study the growth of the church in those lands. Those studies, and many to follow, provided the data and background for a number of books, articles, and reports that he would write over the coming decade. From 1955 through 1960, he was also engaged as a peripatetic professor of missions, where he rotated among Butler University (Indianapolis, Indiana), Phillips University (Enid, Oklahoma), Drake University (Des Moines, Iowa), and Lexington College of the Bible (Lexington, Kentucky) teaching future missionaries.

**A Dean of Missiology**

The years of travel and teaching provided a laboratory for the study of church growth throughout the world, and McGavran began to envision the starting of a graduate Institute of Church Growth. After receiving rejections from several seminaries, he was invited to start an Institute for Church Growth at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon, and the new institute opened on January 1, 1961.

During the next four years, fifty-seven students—primarily mid-career mis-
sionaries—studied the new science of church growth. The years provided time to develop curriculum, develop reading lists, and publish studies of growing churches. However, as 1965 began, the board of Northwest Christian College determined that it was financially unable to continue supporting the Institute and it looked like it was going to close.

God had other plans, and in the spring of 1965 Fuller School of Theology asked McGavran to move the Institute for Church Growth to Pasadena and become the founding dean of the School of World Mission. Thus, at age 67, McGavran took on what was to become his most well-known work—the founding of an influential school of missiology. He brought together some of the most influential researchers and writers on mission theory at that time—Alan Tippett, Ralph Winter, Charles Kraft, C. Peter Wagner, and Arthur Glasser. Together, they changed the face of mission strategy during the last part of the twentieth century.

*Understanding Church Growth* (McGavran 1971) attained wide attention. It established Church Growth Theory as an orderly, systematic science. The book answered the question *How is carrying out the will of God to be measured?* It was broken into five major sections: theological considerations, growth barriers, growth principles, understanding social structure, and establishing bold goals. The book presented McGavran’s missional theories (e.g., receptivity, people groups, homogeneity, discovering the facts of growth or decline, setting bold goals, and understanding social structure).

However, it was at the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism that the CGM came of age. Some 2,700 participants from about 150 nations gathered in Lausanne, Switzerland, for the Congress on Evangelism in July 1974. Approximately 512 attendees were from the United States, and the Fuller faculty played key roles in gathering data, as well as presenting papers and leading sessions.

Tippet, Winter, and McGavran presented plenary papers, and Wagner led a four-day workshop on church growth. The great success of church growth at Lausanne was due in part to the numerous missionaries who had been trained at the School of World Mission. Over one hundred of the attendees at Lausanne were Fuller alumni. This, along with the fact that McGavran and other faculty members had input into the design of the Lausanne agenda, put church growth on the map internationally.

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**The great success of church growth** at Lausanne was due in part to the numerous missionaries who had been trained at the School of World Mission.
Final Years

McGavran retired from the deanship of the School of World Mission in 1971, but he continued to teach part time until 1985. In those years, he collaborated with Glasser on Contemporary Theologies of Mission (Glasser and McGavran 1983). This 250-page book focused on the most controversial missiological questions of the 1980s. Perhaps his major accomplishment was the publication of Momentous Decisions in Missions Today (McGavran 1984). Speaking from the vantage point of more than a half century of personal involvement in missions, he addressed the major questions of the 1980s under four headings: theological, strategical, organizational, and methodological. He reaffirmed the primacy of gospel proclamation, conversion, and church planting. More importantly, he focused on the importance of the cities and urban evangelism.

McGavran passed away on July 10, 1990, at the age of 92. Kent Hunter, editor of Global Church Growth, wrote in "So Ends a Chapter of History":

With the death of Dr. Donald McGavran, an entire chapter of Christian history comes to a close. His life, work, writings, teachings, and his influence on countless thousands of Christians throughout the world represents a unique era.

Throughout history, God raises up Christian leaders who have a specific task and direction. When they are gone, their movements often continue. Their influence is not buried with their mortal remains. Their vision continues to spark generations who follow. Their presence, unique as it is, is gone from this earth forever. There will not be another McGavran. Not now—not ever. An epoch represented in the life and work of our dear friend and “comrade in the bonds of the Great Commission” (as he so often signed his letters) comes to a close. (Hunter 1990)

Legacy

By the time of McGavran’s death, the CGM was widely accepted and highly influential in informing mission theory and practice around the world. However, during the 1990s the movement began to wane. No doubt a number of factors led to a reduced visibility, such as the modern hunger for the next new thing. Yet McGavran’s own death was a major contributing factor, as the movement lost its primary promoter and apologist with his passing. Yet, even with the reduced public acceptance of Church Growth Theory, McGavran’s insights continue to impact missionary strategy and practice today. The following are just a few aspects of his continuing legacy

1. While the study of mission had been around for some time, McGavran gathered the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary who significantly developed the field of missiology for American evangelicals. The founding of the School of World Mission provided for the development of a missiological curriculum that informed the basic core curriculum of missiological studies at many American evangelical institutions for the remainder of the twentieth century. He coined and defined many missiological terms and
2. McGavran observed that Western missionaries who came primarily from individualist cultural backgrounds regarded one-by-one decisions for Christ as the only acceptable method. Yet in most of the world, group (collectivist) decisions were preferred. This led him to see the need for including anthropology and sociology as components of missionary training to study social structure. His first faculty hire was Alan Tippet, who had a PhD in anthropology. Even though the conservative evangelical branch of the Church viewed anthropology and sociology with critical eyes, McGavran saw their importance and included them as key aspects of his Church Growth Thought.

3. McGavran stressed a return to Great Commission mission and compelled Christians to recognize that the day of mission was not dead. He brought back the revolutionary idea that churches ought to be growing (i.e., making disciples) rather than remaining static. He promoted the classical understanding of mission as being the proclamation of the gospel of salvation and the planting of churches, and spoke of this so often that critics often complained that he had only one string on his violin. But this was part of his genius. A leader must have a clear and simple message that can be understood and embraced by the constituency he or she is trying to lead. Great leaders must keep saying the same thing over and over again, which is precisely what McGavran did throughout his life.

4. McGavran recognized the demise of colonial missions and pointed the way to the post-colonial era, which called for new contours of missionary practice. He challenged the mission station approach that was pleased with slow growth, and promoted a people movement approach, which looked for a greater harvest. By doing so, he provided a positive voice for missions when voices were saying God was dead, the day of missions was over, and that missionaries should go home. His positive perspective continues to be heard in many corners of the missionary world today.

5. In a time when most church leaders thought people came to Christ primarily through mass events, church revivals, camp meetings, home visitation, and cold calling, McGavran discovered that the main bridges to Christ were family and friends. The idea of household evangelism was not new (it is found throughout the Bible), but McGavran demonstrated the fruitfulness of this approach through research.
fruitfulness of this approach through research. By doing so, he set fire to a new movement of evangelism. Whether labeled friendship evangelism, lifestyle evangelism, web evangelism, network evangelism, or oikos (household) evangelism, each owes much to his initial research.

6. McGavran highlighted the fact that receptivity to the gospel rises and falls among different peoples in different circumstances and in different times. He argued that peoples’ openness to the gospel should control the direction of resources (i.e., receptive people receive greater resources, while less receptive ones receive fewer resources). Although everyone does not agree with this principle, it is a common part of evangelistic practice today and guides deployment of personnel and expenditure of budgets (e.g., church planting is most often focused on receptive populations).

7. McGavran’s continuing influence is observed in numerous other themes that continue to impact the decision-making of church and mission leaders. For example, (1) the importance of assimilating newcomers into the social networks of a local church, (2) the necessity of making disciples rather than just getting decisions, (3) the need to multiply disciples and churches in all ta ethne (the nations), (4) the significance of understanding context, and (5) the requirement of planting indigenous churches.

Donald McGavran’s legacy lives on. His insights, perspectives, and approaches continue to inform mission theory and practice across numerous cultures and in most countries of the world. Whether the Church Growth Movement will continue, I do not know. However, it is likely that McGavran’s principles of church growth will continue to influence mission theory and practice for the foreseeable future.

References

Gary L. McIntosh is a speaker, author, and professor of Christian ministry & leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. His forthcoming book, Donald A McGavran: A Biography of the Twentieth Century’s Premiere Missiologist, was recently released.
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As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.” (Josh. 1:5-6)

I have a baton sitting on my desk in my office with the verses above etched into it. It reminds me daily of the challenge and responsibility to carry forward the legacy of mission at Eastbrook Church, where I serve as senior pastor. Throughout our thirty-five years as a church, a strong sense of mission has been upheld not only by our founding senior pastor, Dr. Marc Erickson, but also by the ownership of our entire congregation. A courageous group of spiritual giants stand within the memories of Eastbrook’s history of mission like a local version of Hebrews 11.

When I took the helm just over four years ago, we entered a season of leadership transition, weathering it well by God’s grace. In the midst of this transitional time, we have worked at keeping the calling to mission central in this new era of ministry. I want to share four characteristics I have come to believe are essential for building on legacy to strengthen churches to move forward powerfully for mission.

History
The Psalmist encourages his readers with these words, “Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story” (Ps. 107:2). One important aspect of our life in the church is to tell the stories of what God has done in our midst. As time goes on in the life of a church, particularly in leadership transitions, we risk losing our sense of history.

But retaining historical awareness of the church’s mission is especially important in moving forward. Some churches are stuck in the past, or at least attempt to move forward while engrossed with what is behind. This, of
course, is not constructive. Yet neither is it helpful to ignore the past, lurching thoughtlessly for the future without at least considering the value of what has come before. Every church has a story, and that unique story must be understood in order to build for the future.

When I came to Eastbrook, there were many stories of what had come before, but two loomed large. One story arose from a relationship with house church leaders in Asia. When a couple from Eastbrook went to live in that country, it quickly became apparent that there was a huge ministry opportunity for orphan care. Through the orphan care work, our congregation stepped forward to adopt children who otherwise would most likely never find homes because of challenges they faced. A deep heart connection with these children developed as they became part of families within Eastbrook. It certainly changed the children’s lives, but it also changed our church.

One other gripping story within Eastbrook’s history of mission came through relationship with a Somali believer, Ahmed Haile. Haile relates his own story in his book *Teatime in Mogadishu*, which in itself is well worth the read (2011). Eastbrook had the chance to send a team to develop and sustain a hospital in the Horn of Africa during a very tenuous time there. Stories of

Retaining historical awareness of the church’s mission is especially important in moving forward.
courageous ministry continue to echo down the halls of our church from those days, inspiring others to step out with risky faith.

Those stories are more than just dusty anecdotes of bygone glory. They are powerful milestones in the life of our church that have shaped us into who we are today. I do not have time to detail stories from Guatemala, Belarus, Lebanon, and even our own city that have shaped our missional identity. During our leadership transition, a critical need for us was to stop, listen, and reflect upon our history as a church. As we did that, we began to consider where God was leading us into the future.

When we know our church’s unique history of mission engagement, we can honor the past. Even more, this historical awareness becomes an important piece of discerning the present calling of God upon each church, enabling us to build upon the strengths of our history for a new era of ministry. Without recognizing these foundation stones, we would have missed a huge opportunity for ministry.

**Relationship**

The stories mentioned above demonstrate that relationships are central to Eastbrook’s approach to mission. This confirmed what I saw during my time working with World Relief—that meaningful relationships not only facilitate effective work, but also form the bedrock of trust by which gateways of ministry that otherwise might remain closed are flung open.

One of the great legacies that Pastor Emeritus Marc Erickson and his wife, Nancy, established at Eastbrook was a wealth of friendships around the world that led into ongoing ministry partnership. I intentionally place the words in that order because I believe that the friendships were primary and the ministry work followed. When I joined Eastbrook’s staff, Marc introduced me to friends in Jordan, Kenya, India, China, and other settings. The relational introduction served as my education in Eastbrook’s missional endeavors.

Now, those same people are my friends, even as we continue to serve together on mission. The work of mission happens best through relationships. Jesus speaks to this when he tells his disciples, “I have called you friends…I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 16:15-16). Where relationships are strong, mission is fruitful.

As church leaders, we should consider the key relationships God has developed between us, our church, and others, both here and around the world. What ministry leaders, partner churches, or field workers has God brought into your path? How might those relationships become pathways for vital ministry in the years ahead?

In recent days, like many urban pastors, I have been wrestling in thought and prayer about how to respond to the racial tensions in the United States. In the midst of this wrestling, I reached out to a local pastor from across town, Bishop Walter Harvey, to talk these matters through and pray for God’s guid-
ance in our own city of Milwaukee. It was this budding friendship that un-
expectedly led us into an initiative in Milwaukee aimed at bringing pastors
and ministry leaders together to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to
which I have carried you into exile” (Jer. 29:7). Friendship was the furnace
that warmed our hearts to pray and set the blaze of ministry in us together.

God is a relational God, and we too are relational beings. What better way
to gain momentum for mission than by strengthening existing relationships,
being available, and pursuing new relationships? While I would never say
this is my strength, what I have learned to do is to slow down and take time
with others, open my home to guests passing through, and intentionally
plan my international travel with space to simply be with others.

Vision & Strategy

Our history and relationships are vitally important, but the missional
impulse of a church will plateau if the overall vision and strategy for mission
is not clear. Based on the history and relationships that God has woven into
the life of a church, we should ask the questions that Will Mancini (2008)
offers in Church Unique: “What can your church do better than 10,000 others?”
and “What does your church uniquely bring to the kingdom?”

Jesus’ words to the first disciples at the beginning of Acts serve as a help-
ful guide toward vision and strategy: “You will receive power when the Holy
Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all
Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Clearly, this out-
lines our purpose as God’s people. Within the New Testament, however, we
see individual churches—whether those in Jerusalem, Antioch, or Corinth—
working out this purpose uniquely. The distinctive imprint of each of these
churches gives us clues to the vision and strategy they were living out in
response to the mission of God.

The Jerusalem church shared all things in common, later struggling with
having enough to get by, perhaps because of social status or ostracism within
the Jewish capital. The Antioch church, sitting at a social and economic
crossroads of the empire, became a multiethnic community reaching the
diverse ethnicities walking its streets. The Corinthian church grappled with
the raw issues of devoting the whole of life to Christ, including food, con-
flict, legal issues, and sexuality. Each church found its unique vision and
strategy that matched its calling and setting.

We continue to wrestle with this at Eastbrook. With the increased move-
ment of global diaspora peoples to North America, we ask questions about
how we should adjust our ministry models to meet this current scenario.
We ask ourselves, “How has God uniquely positioned and gifted us to reach
international students, refugees, and immigrants in Milwaukee, and how
might we strategically aim toward that end?” We look at the opportunities
before us and grapple with the hard questions of which ones God is calling
us to say yes to and which he is calling us to say no to. We listen, consider, establish plans, and set clear goals with the aim of reaching people for Jesus. Without a clear sense of vision and strategy, we will fail to build toward effective ministry in years to come.

**Responsiveness**

In Acts 13:1-3, we read of Paul and Barnabas’ commissioning for ministry by the church in Antioch. While the multiethnic leadership of the church were “worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (Acts 13:2). In the midst of worship, the Holy Spirit interrupted God’s people, redirecting them for a new mission. The Antioch church’s responsiveness to the Holy Spirit’s interruption is an essential characteristic for churches desiring to move forward into a new season of mission.

If all we do is listen to our history, foster existing relationships, and develop strategies, we may lose our edge for mission because of limited human understanding or the boundaries of our experience. Like the Antioch church, effective missional churches hold all things open to the Holy Spirit’s movement, no matter where that takes us.

This reminds me of a time when we sensed God was directing us as a church toward renewed engagement in the Horn of Africa. As we explored opportunities based on our history, relationships, and a focused strategy, we hit some apparent dead-ends. During this season, we continued to pray and explore, finding that God was opening a doorway into an unplanned location with an unexpected group of people. Through surprising links with the local government, unforeseen business opportunities, and connections with key people, God has continued to surprise us by doing things we never could have strategized. We responded, haltingly and trippingly, taking one step after another as God led us forward.

The difficulty of this responsive stance is that it is uncomfortable. We cannot control when or how the Holy Spirit interrupts us. When our hands are open, God may disrupt our strategies. We begin to learn that taking the risks often leads us on long and circuitous routes, like Paul and Barnabas on that first missionary journey. When we stand open and responsive, we struggle to release control, which is never easy for driven, organized, North American Christians.

Yet control is an illusion, particularly when we are talking about the Kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit’s missional impulse. Jesus himself reminded the religious leader, Nicodemus, that “the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with one born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). We, too, need to recover our spiritual calling within the church to be responsive to the Holy Spirit if we are to unleash a dynamic and risky missional movement.
Conclusion

In 1159, John of Salisbury wrote,

Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to [puny] dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature. (1955, 167)

Too often, we miss the opportunity to stand taller, see more clearly, or reach further because we miss the chance to build upon the legacy of ministry that has preceded us. Legacy does not have to be something left behind. In truth, it can propel us forward into a more fruitful and dynamic season of ministry if we stand on the shoulders of those giants who have gone before us.

References


Questions for reflection

1. What is the unique story of your church or organization in terms of mission? What are the special stories that have shaped who you are? What does this tell you about the unique calling your church or organization may have?

2. Who has God connected you with personally or organizationally for mission? What might it look like for you to lean into those relationships more deeply for ongoing, enduring mission?

3. What do you think the interplay is between vision/strategy and Holy Spirit flexibility? Is there an inherent contradiction here, or can this tension bring greater fruitfulness for the kingdom?
Four Ways to Improve Field Staff Retention

By James Nelson

If you lead field staff, there are at least four things you can do to improve their likelihood of remaining on the field, productively and with your agency:

1. Give them specific feedback about their work or service.
2. Ask them about their goals in personal development.
3. Ask them for suggestions to improve as a team, department, or organization.
4. Be spiritually vital, reflecting Christ’s compassion and trustworthy character.

There are actually twenty-six things you can do that will help improve worker retention, according to data from the 2015 Engage study of international field workers serving with North American agencies. Engage is a multi-agency workplace engagement and satisfaction survey of international field workers serving with North American agencies. Authorized by the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance in 2006, Engage is an offering of Best Christian Workplaces Institute (BCWI) in partnership with Global Mapping International (GMI).

The first three are easy—you can do them this week. No need to wait for an annual review.

They are also among a group of eleven items most highly correlated with staff retention. Yet, unfortunately, more than one-third of field staff do not agree that their supervisor has given them valuable feedback in the past twelve months. More than a one-third do not agree that their organization seeks suggestions of staff. And more than one-third do not agree that someone has talked with them about their personal goals. This has held true across multiple editions of Engage involving more than 25 sending agencies and nearly 3,500 missionary respondents since 2006.

Retention Is a Kingdom Stewardship Issue

Some agencies spend much more effort and money mobilizing new workers than retaining current workers. One agency leader told me his agency focuses only on inflow to the personnel funnel (mobilization) and makes no
effort to reduce outflow (attrition). “Workers leave,” he said. “and many of those do the right thing by leaving.”

Other agencies consider retention efforts as a losing battle to changing generational values. “No one commits anymore,” is their attitude. One agency that took part in Engage did away with the long-term staff label completely, considering all workers to be on renewable three-year terms.

The time and cost of recruiting, preparing, and placing cross-cultural workers on the field is substantial. Stewardship—as well as compassion for those who serve and support—dictates making an effort to help workers be as productive on the field for as long as they can. This is especially true as experts like Patrick Johnstone note that fruitfulness in church planting tends to be highest between the eighth and seventeenth years of a worker’s tenure (2011, 227).

What You Do Can Affect Retention

Despite changes in generational values, retention can be influenced. What you do makes a difference. Here’s how we know:

1. Retention varies from agency to agency. A decade ago, the ReMAP II study, involving more than sixty North American agencies, showed that long-term staff retention rates vary widely across agencies. One large segment of agencies reported retention rates that, sustained over a decade, would result in more than sixty percent of missionaries leaving. Another large group of agencies was on track to lose fewer than one-quarter of their workers over the same time. The lesson: Some agencies retain staff better than others.

2. Leadership behaviors and agency policies are linked to retention. The Engage survey has consistently shown that the retention rate of an agency can be reasonably predicted (or explained) on the basis of field staff attitudes about their leaders actions, policies, and systems. The lesson: Attrition isn’t just bad-fit people finding the door. It is an indicator of organizational effectiveness. When agencies are well-run, people stay.

Attrition isn't just bad-fit people finding the door. It is an indicator of organizational effectiveness. When agencies are well-run, people stay.
respond to leadership, whether good or bad.

Workers also acknowledge agency influences on attrition. One Engage respondent reflected the following to his/her agency:

Attrition is high. …It seems people feel there is a lack of vision and training for accomplishing the task. A lot of time is spent on secondary issues. Eventually, this lack of vision and skills seems to make people question their calling and purpose, which leads to a lack of excitement about our work, and eventually to burnout and going home.

Eleven Actions Linked to Retention

The challenge for many leaders is knowing how and where to take action. So many issues can influence continuing service. “Make everything better,” isn’t helpful. In which areas are improvements likely to “move the dial?” In which areas is sustained excellence essential?

The Engage study includes seventy-four agreement measures, including sixty-seven job/agency assessment items and seven overall measures (such as intention to stay on staff or recommend the organization to others).

The challenge for many leaders is knowing how and where to take action. So many issues can influence continuing service.

To see which items were linked most strongly to retention, we ran small-sample rank correlations (Kendall’s Tau) for three-year agency retention rate (provided by six of seven agencies in the 2015 study) and mean agreement ratings for each agency. Results showed highly significant (ninety-five percent confidence) positive correlations for eleven of the sixty-seven survey items and moderately significant (ninety percent confidence) positive correlations for fifteen other survey items. Significant positive correlations were also noted for all seven overall measures.

The eleven highly correlated items include:

- Leaders in my organization demonstrate compassion for people at all levels.
- There is a high level of trust in my organization between leaders and staff.
- My organization places the right individuals in leadership roles.
- In my country/area, my organization is well run.
- My organization seeks the suggestions of staff.
- My organization involves staff in decisions that affect them.
- In the last 12 months, my supervisor has given me valuable feedback.
- In the last 12 months, someone in my organization has talked to me about my personal goals and development.
- My organization provides an appropriate salary/support structure.
• My organization has effective guidelines and practices for accounting of finances.
• I am satisfied with my medical or health plan.

How Agencies Are Doing on Key Retention Measures

While all of these items are linked to retention, mission agencies vary on their performance. For some items, there is much room for improvement. For others, results suggest the need for ensuring continued strength.

The chart below shows the proportion of 2015 respondents who “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with each item. These are results from 1,771 workers among seven agencies, including a mix of smaller/larger and denominational/non-denominational agencies.

Retention Issues on the Rise

In the prior edition of Engage, salary and benefits were not significantly correlated with agency retention. But in 2015, both emerged as significant.

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<th>Percentage of Field Staff Who Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>My organization has effective guidelines for accounting of finances.</td>
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<td>My organization provides an appropriate salary/support structure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaders in my organization demonstrate compassion for people at all levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my country/area, my organization is well run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my medical or health plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last 12 months, someone in my organization has talked to me about my personal goals and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last 12 months, my supervisor has given me valuable feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a high level of trust in my organization between leaders and staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization seeks the suggestions of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization places the right individuals in leadership roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization involves staff in decisions that affect them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most field staff are satisfied with their salary structure. Along with financial policies and compassionate leadership, it is one of three items for which workers have high threshold standards—items that are expected to be present and impactful when perceived to be absent.

Satisfaction is considerably lower with medical benefits, an area where costs have skyrocketed and many agencies are seeking or weighing alternatives. Results suggest these decisions are likely to influence field staff decisions about continuing service.

One Engage respondent said to his/her agency:

Current medical insurance has caused a real drain on our finances during furlough times. They have been so slow/absent in reimbursement that we have been very hesitant to avail ourselves of medical attention even if there was a need to do so.

Big decisions like health care are important. So are issues of leadership character, such as demonstrating compassion for all employees.

Making appropriate leadership appointments and involving staff in issues that affect them are key issues. Both were among the twelve lowest-rated survey items in 2015, as they were in the 2006-2007 edition of Engage. In fact, personnel practices as a cluster are linked to continuing service. Related items were moderately correlated with retention, including selection and appointment of well-qualified new staff and provision of opportunities for single staff.

**Having surveyed** with more than seven hundred organizations internationally, the Best Christian Workplace Institute reveals that increased staff engagement and retention are by-products of a flourishing culture.

When the wrong personnel decisions are made or are made in the wrong way or by the wrong people, field staff are deeply affected. One Engage respondent said to his/her agency leaders: “Include teammates in decision making when it comes to matters of a fellow teammate’s life and stop telling us “Trust me in this!”

Having surveyed with more than seven hundred ministry organizations internationally, the Best Christian Workplace Institute reveals that increased staff engagement and retention are by-products of a flourishing culture.

One of the major shifts I have seen in ministry organizations is a focus on creating a flourishing staff culture,” says Al Lopus, president, and cofounder of BCWI. He adds, “The first step is regularly measuring the progress toward that goal on an annual or bi-annual basis.”
Be Willing to Take the First Step

Insights from Engage underscore the issues that are linked to field staff retention. Some of the key items are not difficult to address—yet they can easily fall through the cracks. For globally distributed organizations, effective communication is frequently an issue. Field workers place high value on international leaders intentionally communicating about organizational issues, but they also value personal communication.

In particular, missionaries value having their input sought, receiving specific feedback on their service, and discussing personal development goals. As one worker wrote:

> I have always appreciated (my organization’s) support of personal and ministry development. The conferences we used to hold were so key in stimulating growth in areas I needed for ministry and spiritual vitality.

Each of these items is strongly connected to retention and easy to address. But each requires intentionality and the will to place the important ahead of the urgent.

At the organization level, asking for staff suggestions can be done informally or formally. The Engage study remains available to agencies ready to take the formal route—the survey considers field worker security concerns and questions that have been vetted by mission personnel officers. Deliverables include an agency-specific report, benchmark data compiled from other mission organizations, and a phone consultation from Best Christian Workplaces Institute.

Staff retention is a big matter deserving of small, initially positive steps. The four action points at the top of this article can be a place to begin. While increased field staff retention requires ongoing attention and effort, the research is in key issues that are both identifiable and measurable. That alone is a positive outcome every ministry organization can build upon.

References


James Nelson (pseudonym) is vice president of Global Mapping International and mission research consultant for Missio Nexus. A complete list of all sources used in writing this article is available by emailing jim@gmi.org.
Transition: The Key to Storytelling

By Paul Trinh

Many believers understand the Great Commission which they have been given to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). They would like to share the gospel. Nonetheless, they face a dilemma: how to begin. They worry about offending people or making them feel uncomfortable if they witness to them. Specifically, they have difficulty in transiting a daily conversation into a gospel presentation. Likewise, orality expert J.O. Terry shared with me that a transition remains the most difficult part of Bible storytelling.

Some people call a transition a bridge or pre-story dialogue time. It provides a connecting point between storytellers and listeners. It helps make both parties feel more natural and comfortable in their meeting.

Being the master of storytelling, Jesus presents his stories in various ways. So do other storytellers in the Bible. They offer simple ways to transition a normal conversation to Bible storytelling as soon as possible. In order to tell the story, they use a brief statement, a request of permission, or nothing. Their examples could encourage us to tell Bible stories more often.

A Brief Statement

The opening words of storytelling in the Bible are usually short. A long transition makes the story boring and wastes time. Jesus often introduces his stories with a brief statement. For example, while telling the Parable of the Sower, Jesus begins with the terse word “Listen” (Mark 4:3). It appeals for careful attention from the audience and alerts their mind to understand the truth (Wessel 1984, 648).

On another occasion, while dining with Simon the Pharisee, Jesus teaches him the Parable of the Two Debtors by a simple presentation, “Simon, I have something to tell you” (Luke 7:40). This short statement catches the undivided attention of Simon (Morris 1988, 162). Thus, he answers, “Tell me, teacher.”

Similarly, other biblical characters in the Bible use the same technique to connect themselves with their listeners. They start with a short statement to
intrigue their audience. Then, they transition into the story.

For instance, Joseph lived at home and received favoritism from his father. His brothers, however, hated him and did not talk to him kindly. Despite such a hostile circumstance, Joseph told them his first dream, “Listen to this dream I had.” The dream makes his brothers hate him more. Yet Joseph reported another dream to his father and brothers, “Listen, I had another dream” (Gen. 37:6-9). While Joseph might be unwise and naïve, he does grasp the opportunity to share the divine revelation with his family.

Likewise, the chief servant obeys Abraham to get a wife for Isaac. As dinner is set before him, the chief servant tells Laban, “I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say” (Gen. 24:33). This sudden interruption gives unusual urgency to his testimonies (Kidner 1967, 148). In the New Testament, Stephen and Paul also make a short statement to connect themselves with their audience: “Listen to me” (Acts 7:2; 13:16; 22:1).

Other biblical characters discover different unique ways to tell stories. Some solicit for help from their listeners. Others volunteer themselves to help potential listeners. For example, the Tekoa woman pleads with King David, “Help me, O king!” David asks, “What is troubling you?” It gives her a chance to share her fictitious story from Joab. Eventually, Joab succeeds in his effort to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 14:1-24).

In the New Testament, Philip obeys the Holy Spirit to stay near the chariot on the desert road. Having heard the Ethiopian eunuch reading the Book of Isaiah, Philip proactively asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?” This question prompts the eunuch to express his need, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” Then, he invites Philip to ride with him, and Philip grasps the opportunity to tell him the story of Jesus. Philip leads the eunuch to faith (Acts 8:26-35).
Permission

Often, it is wise for a person to ask a higher authority permission to tell stories. In the Old Testament, while seeking the freedom of his brother Benjamin, Judah begs the Governor Joseph, “Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself” (Gen. 44:18). Recognizing the high position and power of Joseph, Judah respectfully requests permission to explain his family’s tragic story. His sincerity wins their reconciliation.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul waits for the permission of authority to tell his story. In the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, as a visitor, Paul does not tell story until he is invited to speak (Acts 13:14-16). As a prisoner, he always waits for approval to tell his story (Acts 21:40; 24:10; 26:1). Once permission is granted, he courageously shares his testimony.

Without Permission

Although some biblical characters request permission to tell their stories, many others proactively tell stories without seeking permission. Jesus tells many stories without asking for permission. When his disciples pick some heads of grain to satisfy their hunger, the Pharisees blame them for breaking the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-4; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-4). According to the Pharisees, picking grain means reaping and is forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus, however, countered their condemnation with the incident of David eating the consecrated bread (1 Sam. 21:1-6). Jesus recounts the story of David without asking for permission from the Pharisees.


Some people might argue that being a prominent rabbi, Jesus could talk to anyone at any times without requesting permission. Everyone would be willing to listen to his stories. In fact, some biblical characters tell stories to higher authority without asking for permission as well. For example, while speaking to King Saul about fighting Goliath, the boy David proactively shares his testimony of killing a lion and a bear. Saul grants him the permit to fight Goliath, and David wins the battle (1 Sam. 17:31-54).

Likewise, while talking with his father King Saul, Jonathan recounts the victory of David over Goliath. Jonathan does not secure permission beforehand. His father listens and agrees not to kill David (1 Sam. 19:4-6).

Without Transition

As seen above, some storytellers in the Bible transition into storytelling, while others do not. Even Jesus sometimes does not use transitions. In several parables, he simply starts by a brief phrase such as, “A man,” “A certain man,” or “There was a man” (Luke 10:30; 14:16; 15:11; 16; 1; 16:19; 19:12). Then, Jesus continues with his story.
Biblical characters often tell stories to their family without using transitions. The nine sons of Jacob return home after their first trip to purchase food in Egypt. They report their happenstance to their father. Without transition, they directly tell the father about their conversation with the Egyptian governor (Gen. 42:29-34).

While on the sick bed, Jacob wants to rehearse to Joseph about his experience with the Almighty God at Luz and the burial of Rachel. Jacob does not use any transition to tell those stories (Gen. 48:3-4, 7). Also, the wife of Manoah receives the message from the angel of the Lord about giving birth to a son. While recounting the experience to her husband, she does not need any transition (Judg. 13:6-7).

In the same manner, biblical characters in social interaction sometimes do not employ transition when telling a story. When the priests and the prophets condemn Jeremiah to death, some elders recall the prophecy of Micah. Without any transition, they remind the whole assembly about Micah. Like Jeremiah, Micah delivers similar judgmental prophecy. King Hezekiah, however, listens to him and escapes disaster. Consequently, the story of Micah saves Jeremiah from the death penalty (Jer. 26:10-19).

**Transition is important** to connect the storytellers with their audience. Storytellers could decide for themselves which transition is appropriate in their particular situation.

In the New Testament, the ex-blind man shares his testimony with the curious neighbors. He starts straightly, “The man they call Jesus” (John 9:11). Likewise, when Festus recites the story of Paul to King Agrippa, he reports directly, “There is a man here” (Acts 25:14ff.). Both use no transition to tell their stories.

**Implications**

After examining the above storytelling models from the Bible, I believe that each storytelling situation is unique. Transition is important to connect the storytellers with their audience. Storytellers could decide for themselves which transition is appropriate in their particular situation.

According to the discussion above, a few brief transitions could be suggested. Biblical characters have used them successfully. Today, Bible storytellers have also used them effectively. With these transitions, we could reduce our anxiety about offending our listeners. It would make us more comfortable during storytelling. Each of us, however, could supply other similar and related transition statements. These statements include the followings:

- “Listen to this story.”
- “I have a story to tell.”
• “Could you help me to understand a story?”
• “This story might help.”

On rare occasions, we might need to request permission to tell Bible stories. For example, in visits to the sick or to people struggling with deep emotions, we could offer to pray for them. Most people would accept this offer, and God delights to reveal himself by answering prayers (Wiles 2010, 100). Then, we could request permission to tell a story before praying (Senapatiratne 2009, 53).

In addition, in order to tell Bible stories to our friends from other religious background, we could first listen to their stories. Then, we could ask for permission to tell our faith stories (Dillon 2012, 169).

At the same time, it is alright to tell Bible stories without transition. If we have a hard time making the transition, we should not worry about it. We can skip it and just tell the story. We should not let the issue of transition hinder us from obeying the Great Commission.

Conclusion

I realize that the transition might hinder believers to witness. At the same time, I believe storytelling could overcome this obstacle. Following these transition models in the Bible, we can share the words of God in a natural way of life. The Holy Spirit will guide us as we decide to tell Bible stories. In case where we do not know what to say at the beginning, we can still tell Bible stories without transition. I love the motto: “If you can’t do anything else, at least tell the story!” (Terry 2008, 86)

References


Paul Trinh is a Bible storyteller, trainer, and DMiss candidate. Previously, he served as church planter, pastor, and missionary to Dominican Republic.
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A Common Mission: Healthy Patterns in Congregational Mission Partnerships

David Wesley. Wipf and Stock. 2014.

—Reviewed by Alexander K. Zell, adjunct professor, Crown College, St. Bonifacius, Minnesota; former international worker in Brazil with The Alliance.

Portuguese-speaking Christian leaders from Angola asked Brazilian Christian leaders to come and strengthen them through theological education. They were recovering from twenty-seven years of civil war where schooling was all but lost. Brazilian church leaders agreed to help and asked North American seminary professors who spoke Portuguese to join them on this requested mission to a third country. I was one of those teachers. Although everyone involved spoke the same language, there were cultural issues from three peoples to take into account. This experience inspired me to read David Wesley’s book with great interest.

Don’t you wish someone would give you guidelines for mission partnerships with a sister church overseas? People today want to get personally involved. However, as this phenomenon grows, there is a great need to train leaders on how to interact with people of other cultures to make an impact for the Kingdom of God.

This thin book delivers several essential principles to create or maintain a cross-cultural partnership without creating dependency. It is simple enough to be read in one sitting, but complex enough to be studied in groups to apply its principles. Wesley’s responsibilities and travels in South America, as well as his doctoral study of partnerships in Swaziland, equipped him with the experience necessary to focus on connecting through mutual trust, cooperation, and accountability among peers.

Wesley brings some refreshing contributions to the partnership table. He proposes a mutuality of the church on mission, or in the words of the author, to work together for “a common mission.” This is a crucial principle which neutralizes personal agendas from all parties. Wesley is not content with compassionately alleviating symptoms and empathetic helping to meet immediate needs. Instead, he urges his readers to prioritize community development which reforms the deeper structures of the community (p. 46). It takes more time to develop these systems, but they have much more impact in the long run.

Although other authors have dealt with issues of power struggles, Wesley forms the key question of partnerships, which to him is, “Who sets the agenda?” (p. 53). In order to show respect to brothers and sisters of another people group, Wesley recommends that cultural brokers for congregational partnerships be assigned to stay in the host country for two years to concentrate on building re-
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relationships between two or more groups (pp. 58-69). These cultural negotiators are not just tour guides or logistical coordinators, but they should have “theological and missiological understanding” (p. 59).

Wesley even addresses my introductory situation of people from two cultures working together in a third culture (p. 75). Because of all these factors, I would recommend this book to everyone who wants to understand and participate in cross-cultural mission partnerships.

**Cross-Cultural Church Planting for Probies:**
Envisioning and Facilitating Holistic Church Planting among Unreached People Groups from Preparation to Closure


—Reviewed by Gerald Roe, former pastor, missionary, and mission administrator; chair, Intercultural Studies, North Greenville University.

The last three decades have been encouraging for the increased interest in the missionary enterprise. One of the features of this heightened interest is a renewed emphasis on cross-cultural church planting, and especially the commitment to plant churches among unreached people groups. Yet, some agencies report as high as forty-seven percent of their personnel leave the field in the first five years, and many never really succeed in planting a viable church. While politics, religious opposition, and emotional stress are partly to blame, the greatest problem seems to be a lack of developed skill in cross-cultural church planting.

In *Cross-Cultural Church Planting for Probies*, authors and veteran missionaries Roger and Jan Dixon approach the issue of training for cross-cultural church planting with what might be called an “extended view.” The title of the book gives some hint of this approach to training. The key word here is “Probies,” a slang term based on the word *probation*.

The authors teach that in some form or fashion, the planter is always a probationary. Every day brings new challenges and questions to the planter, questions for which there are no ready, available answers. Consequently, learning of every type—biblical, cultural, and daily experience—must never stop; there is just too much to learn. Further, the Dixons make it clear that in addition to lasting a lifetime, the learning process begins long before arriving in the host culture. Time, they insist, must be given to such disciplines as theology, church polity, linguistics, and communication theory. All of which seem dry when compared to field service, but are very necessary once on the field.

The authors have organized their material into what they term as the eight “phases” of cross-cultural church planting, beginning with preparation before deployment and ending with “closure and ongoing involvement.” The material discussed is extensive as well as thorough.

However, many readers, particularly those who have read other books in the genre, might find themselves asking, What is new here? To a large degree, the issues addressed in the book have been discussed by numerous other authors.
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The Dixons, however, do something with the material that few others have done: they offer the information as numerous self-guided lessons that engage and involve the reader as a learner, more than as mere consumer. Engaged properly, the book could easily become both a record of the planter’s self-discovery, and an indispensable, very personal reference guide. Remember, the Dixons are writing with a view to lifelong probies.

This book is one of few that I regard as a must read—and a must have. The Dixons fifty years of missionary cross-cultural church-planting experience, combined with their extensive classroom experience, make it an engaging, informative, and enjoyable reading experience. As one of my students remarked, “It’s like I’m a complete amateur having a conversation with an accomplished and caring teacher who has planted cross cultural churches for a lifetime.” The Dixon’s would insist that even the teacher would have much yet to learn.

Early Christian Martyr Stories: An Evangelical Introduction with New Translations


—Reviewed by Daniel Shinjong Baeq, director, Hiebert Global Center, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Bearing in mind differing theological and ecclesiological stances and controversies, Bryan Litfin’s scholarship carefully guides readers to consider how the implications of martyrdom can be relevant to Christians today.

Litfin first discusses the origin of the Greek word martys, which means “to give eye witness testimony in court” (p. 9). Under Roman law, which called people to worship the emperor, Christians were prosecuted as criminals, charged that they were a political, social, and economic threat to the Roman society. Their noble death, however, bore valuable witness to their eternal hope of God in Christ. Thus, it was due to their witness in the Roman courts under systematic persecution that the Christian community later adopted the term martyr to praise the confessors of Christ who died in defense of their faith.

After an insightful introduction, Litfin carefully selects thirteen cases of Christian martyrdom, also including martyrs from the Maccabean revolt, before the time of Christ. He includes Jewish martyrs such as the Seven Sons of a Jewish mother, who were forced to witness, one by one, the torture of each of their tongues being cut out, limbs amputated, and being fried alive in a pot of oil. Despite this horrific torture, they refused to eat pork but instead bravely declared to the end, “The king of the universe will resurrect us to eternal life because we died for his laws” (p.25).

While Litfin presents the more familiar stories of Christian martyrs such as Apostles Peter and Paul and Church Fathers Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin, Tertullian, and Origen, he also carefully introduces stories of unfamiliar martyrs like Germanicus, Vettius Epagathus, Blandina, and Perpetua. His selection includes Jews and Gentiles, male and female, orthodox and non-orthodox, all the while
presenting geographical and cultural diversity, covering regions of the holy land, Asia (Turkey and Greece), southern Europe (Rome and France), and North Africa (Egypt and Tunisia).

While historical sketches can be devoid of transformative power, Litfin illuminates the lives of Christian martyrs in a way that resonates with contemporary readers. He does this by briefly introducing each martyr, then letting the translations of primary sources vividly recount the martyrs’ unwavering faith and hope in God.

Persecution and martyrdom is more relevant today than ever. We live in a time when countless Christians still die for their faith each day and where the news of the Coptic and Ethiopian Christians being martyred by the ISIS militant group sounds all too familiar. This timely book will help the general readers as well as college and seminary students of Early Church history, biblical studies, and mission, to not only learn about the Early Church martyrs, but also to “reflect on what it may mean to take up their cross and follow in the Lord’s footsteps” (p.2).

**From Every Tribe and Nation: A Historian’s Discovery of the Global Christian Story**


—Reviewed by Paul Borthwick, senior consultant, Development Associates International; professor, Global Christianity, Gordon College.

We owe as much to Joel Carpenter and Robert Hosack as we do to Mark Noll for this descriptive pilgrimage of how a premier expert in Christian history, especially focused on Christianity in the United States, discovered the realities of Global Christianity.

Noll clearly gives credit to Carpenter and Hosack, coordinators of the Baker “Turning South: Christian Scholars in an Age of Global Christianity” series, for convincing him to write (and compile, as some of the material has appeared elsewhere) this summary of his journey. His pilgrimage is rich, readable, and easy to follow.

For those of us who seek to increase the awareness of the North American Church to the realities of our Global Christian family, From Every Tribe and Nation serves as both a description of one scholar’s journey and as a case study in how people become globally interested. Pastors and parents, biographers and missionaries, faculty and statisticians will all be encouraged to read how contributions from their ilk helped shape this brilliant mind.

Unlike many of Noll’s previous books, this one is more autobiographical. He takes us from his upbringing in a “missions-minded” Baptist church to the mindset that led to the book first released in 2009, *The New Shape of Global Christianity* (IVP Academic, 2013). By describing “friendships, schooling, students, local incidents, personal guides, and apparently haphazard connections” (p.194), Noll explains how he came to the realization that Majority World Christianity is an essential subject for the student of Global Christianity.
Readers will see names of familiar influencers—Andrew Walls, Dana Robert, Philip Jenkins, David Barrett, and Todd Johnson—but the list of Majority World authors (like Lamin Sanneh and Jehu Hanciles) is disappointingly brief. Stories and summaries (like the paraphrased “I’ve Been Everywhere” Johnny Cash song [pp. 116-117] in which he lists countries he has visited) illustrate that Noll’s travels and firsthand cross-cultural experiences are extensive, but the descriptions of the impact of these travels could have enhanced the book.

Like missionary historian Andrew Walls (one of the primary influencers in Noll’s pilgrimage towards Global Christianity), Noll is generous in his respect for Christian diversity, and the uniqueness of the multicultural family of God. He freely marvels at the spread of Christianity globally, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but he is not naïve about the global challenges.

Instead, he encourages “sympathetic assessment” of the realities and challenges ahead. He observes that “the ever-expanding numbers who are turning to Christ in the Global South constitute the great marvel of recent history, but also pose real problems of continuity, discipline, endurance, impact, relationships and maturity” (p. 187).

Challenges notwithstanding, From Every Tribe and Nation serves as a wonderful reminder that we’re headed toward that great day when people from every tribe, language, people, and nation will join together in worshipping the Lord Jesus (Rev. 5:9; 7:9).

Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to Radical Mission of the Local Church
Scot McKnight. Brazos Press. 2014.

—Reviewed by Jacob Rosenberg, PhD, leader, Adat HaTikvah Messianic Congregation, Deerfield, Illinois.

According to Dr. Scot McKnight, the term “kingdom” is used in a casual way that has a negative impact on our perception of ecclesiology and therefore our understanding of the character of the Church and its role in society. McKnight creates helpful categories that describe the current polarization between popular views, a thought-provoking biblical corrective, and a vision for the role of the local church as the Kingdom of God.

McKnight’s first two chapters offer unique categorical visualizations: Skinny Jeans and Pleated Pants Kingdom People. The Skinny Jeans people understand the kingdom to be about “good deeds done by good people (Christian or not) in the public sector for the common good” (p. 4) The Pleated Pants people reduce the term kingdom to “redemptive moments” (p. 8). While McKnight acknowledges that both approaches offer important truths about the kingdom, his argument is that both approaches fall short of what the Bible means by “kingdom.”

The main focus of McKnight’s book is on the kingdom story, its mission and context, the people, the mission, and the King. He presents a corrective model he calls “A-B-A.” Plan A extends from Adam and Abraham to Samuel. Plan B
is “Israel doesn’t want to rule for God in this world but wants to be like the world and rule like God” (p. 30). Plan A revised is “Jesus, who is called Messiah (which means king), who is also called Son of God (which also means king), God establishes his rule over Israel one more time as under Plan A” (p. 34).

McKnight then offers his own approach to understanding how the Kingdom of God works today, first with the context, then with the people. His main thesis is that there is no kingdom outside the Church and that kingdom mission is Church mission.

He also brings to light an important discussion of the nature of the kingdom and the expansion of Israel to include the Gentiles. McKnight writes, “The Bible never talks of the replacement of Israel with the church, but rather of the expansion of Israel to include the Gentiles” (p. 89). He then explores the meaning and purpose of the Church and his main argument that scripture does not allow for a kingdom mission without the church, thus the church’s expansion and mission is to bring the world under God’s authority.

The rest of McKnight’s book is a convicting and thought-provoking presentation of how the Kingdom of God plays out in terms of its own mission, the kingship of Jesus, redemption for humanity, the law (as moral fellowship), and the hope the church can bring to this world.

Overall, McKnight offers a valued and useful discussion on mission of the local church while also proposing significant correctives to the misuse of the term “kingdom.” While he oversimplifies liberation theology and the social gospel, he does offer both a thought-provoking biblical corrective and a vision for the role of the local church. Kingdom Conspiracy is useful for both academics and clergy.

The Missionary Family: Witness, Concerns, Care


—Reviewed by Susan Greener, associate professor, Intercultural Studies, Wheaton Graduate School.

The issue of families in missions has attracted debate for over two centuries. Is it better to be single on the mission field so as not to be distracted by family obligations? Or is having a family on the field an asset as a living witness for Christianity? And then there are parents who ask, “How do we do mission without sacrificing our children’s well-being?” Upon reading the title of this book—The Missionary Family—one might expect this book to be an exploration of these types of questions. The collection of essays under review addresses some concerns of missionary family life that are relevant to mission organizations.

The book is made up of three distinct parts. The first part is entitled “Families in Mission” and offers an interesting compilation of three historical case studies of missionary families, a personal and rosier reflection on missionary family life, important research on families’ perceptions of risk on the field, and a report on an alternative care model for elderly parents of Korean missionaries who are not able to fulfill the cultural expectations for filial piety. The chapters
convey the ongoing challenges of integrating family into complex cultural and historical contexts.

Part Two responds to more recent revelations of child sexual abuse scandals within mission organizations, focusing on legal issues for organizational and child protection, investigation techniques, the historical context of child sexual abuse accusations, and controversy surrounding abuse accusations based upon recovered memories. The discussion offers only a partial perspective on a complex topic and, most importantly for the title of the book, does not offer much insight regarding the impact on and experience of missionary families.

This section would be strengthened by perspectives from trauma researchers, therapists for the abused and their families, impacted families, and adult survivors of child sexual abuse in a missionary context. In addition, a more nuanced discussion of the concepts and research positions on recovered, repressed, and suppressed memory would also been helpful. By focusing on the most controversial and questioned scenarios (i.e., recovered memories), the reader may not realize that the majority of the abused never forget. Including the voices of the abused and their families is crucial for a balanced presentation on a contentious subject concerning distinctively vulnerable children.

Part Three centers on Sherwood Lingenfelter’s essay on mission to and with persons who are same-sex attracted. He relates coming to grips with his adult daughter’s identification as a lesbian and her ongoing desire to follow Christ and then outlines what he believes to be the essential questions for mission and church dialogue. Essays by thirteen respondents and a rejoinder by Lingenfelter comprise the remainder of this section, which offers a brief and helpful overview of evangelical positions informing a vital contemporary dialogue for the Church.

In sum, *The Missionary Family* offers illustrations of witness, raises concerns (particularly regarding sexuality), and touches upon care issues important for mission organizations seeking the well-being of families under their supervision.

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**Overturning Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian Industrial Complex**


—Reviewed by Joel Rainey, PhD, strategist for engagement, Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network; professor of ministry, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In a book that will be a shock to the system of many Western mission agencies, Scott Bessenecker describes “the end of world missions as we know it” (p. 20) and seeks to prescribe a path forward that stands on the shoulders of the past while effectively engaging in God’s mission after modernity.

Bessenecker begins the book by contending that Western Protestant missions is too racially, culturally, generationally, and methodologically monolithic. As he unpacks this contention in the first part of the book, he unveils a mission delivery system that is overwhelmingly white, generally older, funded by a corporate structure dependent on large amounts of capital, and consequently, incom-
Bessenecker builds his case via the history of Western missions—contrasting well-known agencies and personalities with those who conducted missions “under the radar.” He then examines how Western Protestant missions became exclusively tied to a corporate mindset, and how that has bottlenecked the Church’s mission. His answer to this dilemma is a wholesale shift from a strategy dominated by commercial individualism “to the communal perspective” (p. 115).

The communal approach, he contends, allows for a more holistic approach to mission, and invites those in the Body of Christ who would be excluded by the corporate paradigm to be full participants in engaging the world Jesus died to save. Bessenecker believes that this will require intentionally moving away from partnerships that look like business arrangements in favor of success assessments that look beyond the “bottom line” of numbers alone. He concludes by challenging the reader to consider an approach more compatible with those most corporate structures would consider unfit outcasts—and to do so for the sake of mission, because our faith builds “a world where prisoners and prostitutes, outcasts and oppressed occupy the seats of honor. These are Christianity’s new architects” (p. 185).

Bessenecker has provided the Body of Christ with a penetrating analysis of our current status, coupled with a keen understanding of how we have arrived at this place. There are a few places in the book where Bessenecker falls prey to the methodological myopia he laments, and this is most evident in his ardent defense of wealth redistribution that sometimes wanders outside the parameters of mission to address society as a whole. But the reader who is able to look past these ancillary perceptions toward the overall future Bessenecker commends will find both an accurate picture of our present, and some solid first steps toward the future we must embrace for the sake of the gospel.

**Sent Forth: African Missionary work in the West**


—*Reviewed by Ezekiel O. Ajani, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.*

Immigration continues to generate debates in the U.S. The 1965 Immigration Act and subsequent reforms have enabled millions of immigrants to relocate to the U.S. Many of these are Christians from Africa. What do Christians in the West think about them?

Owing to the global expansion of Christianity, migrations and the decline of Christianity in the West, Harvey Kwiyani theorizes that the contemporary understanding of missions would differ significantly from the past two centuries. One of the implications of this difference in meaning is that the representative identity of a missionary in this century is not likely to be a westerner serving
somewhere in remote Africa. Rather, such a missionary could be Mexican, Nigerian, or Korean serving anywhere in the world.

Migration and globalization continue to make Christianity experience diversity in culture, race, theology, and so on. For this reason, the author hints that prior to engaging cultural diversity in the world, there is the need for the Church to negotiate cultural diversity within Christianity itself. Unfortunately, Kwiyani noted that Western Christianity is yet to accept Majority World Christianity in the West, owing to the former labelling the latter as syncretic.

In the book of seven chapters, Kwiyani explores the encounter of African Christianity with Western Christianity in the West. Post-colonial African Christianity is said to be unique. Its context, identity, expressions, and theology are different from Western Christianity and this makes it difficult for the two to work together.

In light of this development, the author’s purpose is to “initiate a conversation” to change the present situation by encouraging “a multicultural missionary movement.” Such collaboration is believed to be vital for the identity and mission of the Church. In the phenomenon dubbed “blessed reflex,” the author describes these African churches as instrumental in reinvigorating Christianity in the West since they declare the gospel in the former heartlands of Christianity. As they do this, Kwiyani argues for the need for cooperation from Western Christianity. This is because both Majority World and Western Christians are all “foreigners” on a common mission in Christ.

Kwiyani is to be commended for this epic book based on both personal experiences and scholarship. Also, the audacity to bring to fore discussions concerning the unfriendly relationships between Western and Majority World Christianity in the West is appreciated. He rightly identifies “feelings of superiority,” “race,” and “power” as issues plaguing these groups in the West. He fittingly ends his work by advocating for mutual love between both groups in order to foster God’s mission. In a possible reprint, it would be helpful to delve deeper into practical ways in which African immigrants’ churches and Western churches could cooperate.

**Spiritual Equipping for Mission: Thriving as God’s Message Bearers**


—Reviewed by Benjamin D. Espinoza, community life pastor, Covenant Church, Bowling Green, Ohio.

While missiologists have spilled loads of ink describing effective mission strategies, few have tackled the issue of spiritually forming disciples for the task of spreading the gospel. If we understand the Great Commission to be both a strategic and spiritual endeavor, then we must devote our energies to spiritually forming disciples for the sake of mission. Enter Ryan Shaw’s *Spiritual Equipping for Mission*, which describes essential spiritual practices for equipping ministry leaders who will share the message of the gospel cross-culturally.

For Shaw, there are ten “keys” to spiritually equipping effective gospel agents,
which include embracing humility, being clothed in God’s word, discerning God’s guidance and revelation, pursuing a lifestyle of prayer and fasting, persevering with steadfastness and stability, and pursuing a focused life. These ten characteristics belong in the lives of all disciples; however, they apply especially to the lives of those called to a life of “message-bearing.” Shaw prefers to use the term “message bearers” as opposed to “missionaries” because it more fully realizes the task and universality of sharing the gospel without carrying the baggage of colonialism (pp. 18-19).

An experienced message bearer himself, Shaw’s insight into the spiritual needs of message bearers is exemplary. In describing his ten keys to spiritually equipping message bearers, Shaw draws on thorough biblical analysis, insights from key theologians and missionaries of the past and present, and examples from his own experiences in ministry. Woven together, these ten practices serve to thoroughly equip the message bearer with the spiritual maturity and vitality needed to reach people with the gospel.

While the book applies to anyone with a strong pull toward evangelism, Shaw’s passion is for message bearers committed to reaching the estimated 440 “unengaged” people groups with the gospel. For Shaw, the “unengaged” are those groups comprised of a significant population (over 25,000) yet without a Christian presence or Bible translation in their own language (p. 16).

While Shaw’s insight into spiritual formation is rich, the book could have included specific steps for practicing the spiritual disciplines he describes. His last chapter comes close to achieving this end, however, not to the extent that would be expected from a work such as this. A chapter on integrating these practices into one’s life and training would have been a welcome one.

_Spiritual Equipping for Mission_ is a unique contribution to the field of missionary training and leadership. The book will be a blessing to people beginning their journey into message bearing, seasoned ministry workers, and for Christians seeking to build a missional lifestyle. While not an academic textbook, professors of mission or spiritual formation could use this book in coursework related to spiritual formation and missional leadership.

**The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing**


—Reviewed by Michael Hakmin Lee, adjunct professor, Intercultural Studies, Lincoln Christian University.

According to a survey conducted by Lifeway Research in 2010, seventy-six percent of urbanites in the greater Austin area, where Pastor Jonathan Dodson’s church is, did not regard Jesus Christ as Savior. This book assesses why so many in our contemporary, post-Christian setting find the gospel “unbelievable” (both in content and presentation) and proposes remedies to recover “a believable evangelism.”
The main chapters are organized around three sections. The first explores four “evangelistic defeaters” or reasons why Christians often avoid evangelism and why evangelistic attempts may be unappealing to non-Christians. Dodson chides witness that is “impersonal,” or resembles the performance of a fixed script. Instead, he wisely encourages listening, asking questions, engaging the heart, and seeing evangelism as a process.

Chapter three counters the perception that evangelism is preachy and self-righteous by making the distinction between announcing the good news of the kingdom versus recruiting people to join a particular version of Christianity—what he calls proselytizing. The next chapter addresses current cultural realities whereby the Christian claim that salvation is mediated uniquely through Jesus is often seen as intolerant, naïve, and narrow-minded. Dodson mentions in the endnote that he is addressing a version of religious pluralism “encountered in ordinary conversation” rather than “academic religious pluralism.” A more thorough and conspicuous explanation would have been helpful as those who are familiar with and sympathetic to more sophisticated pluralist perspectives, like that of John Hick, may feel like Dodson is at times propping up straw man arguments. The last deterrent to Christian witness relates to a crisis of confidence. This includes the fear of rejection and ridicule, and feelings of inadequacy.

In the second section, Dodson continues his deconstruction of the messenger-focused, salesman approach to evangelism and the recovery of evangelism that is more sensitive to the communicative and existential needs of the receptor. This entails developing a robust understanding of the gospel, or gospel fluency (chap. 6), alongside greater cultural fluency and attentiveness to personal variations (chap. 8). Chapter seven explains five gospel metaphors, each of which addresses a specific aspect of our human brokenness and describes benefits that God offers.

The third section recounts stories of the author using each of these five gospel metaphors in different personal encounters with seekers. This section also discusses the corporate nature of Christian witness and inclusion into the Kingdom of God (chap. 14). The book carries a casual and conversational style, avoiding technical language and academic jargon. Notes and citations are sparse and a bibliography is not included. Three to six review questions follow each of the main chapters. Though there are other resources that offer more substantial treatment on the ideas that Dodson covers, the strength of this book is in the breadth of timely and important ideas that it covers—sufficient to serve as a good primer on these topics for Christians seeking to reinvigorate this much-maligned ministry of proclamation.