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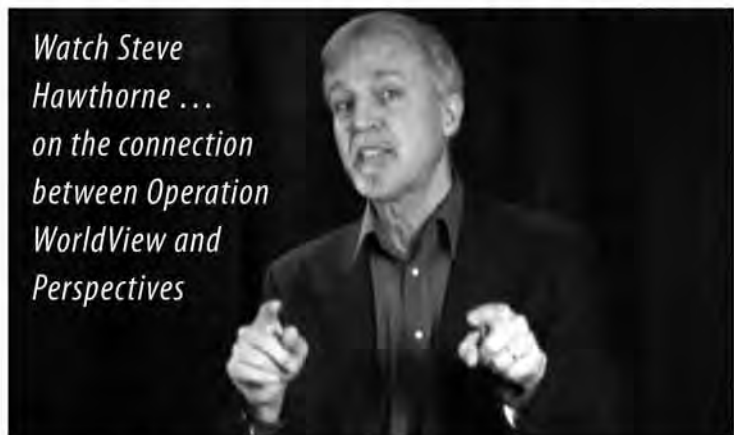
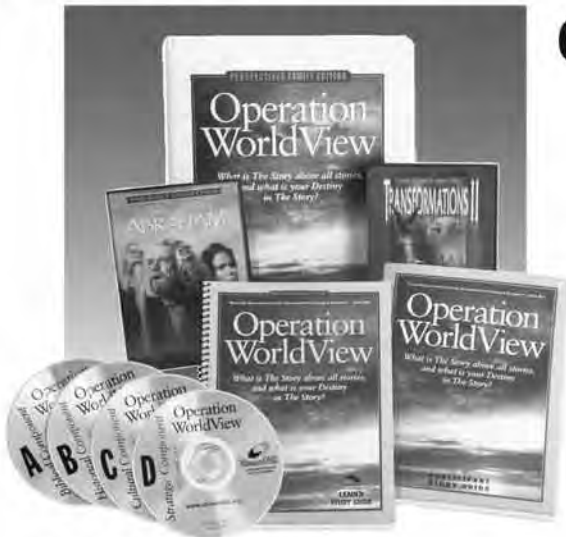
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EDITORIAL COMMENT



Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist Followers of Jesus: How Should We Respond?

Rick Wood, Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

Can you have genuine members of the Body of Christ who do not consider themselves “Christian” but do consider themselves Bible-believing followers of Jesus? Is it possible to have people who faithfully study the Bible in order to follow and obey Jesus but who also consider themselves to be Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews...culturally?

In this issue we will hear from a number of people who are following Jesus with biblical faith but who have chosen to remain within the cultural contexts of their birth. When they came to faith in Jesus, they did not leave the cultural heritage of their birth to join a “Christian” cultural community, contrary to what some expect they should do if they are genuinely saved. Instead, they have remained in their contexts to tell their family and friends about the Jesus who loves them, can answer their prayers and can save them from their sins. These people are part of what are called Jesus Movements.

This can all be very confusing and controversial to those who were born into “Christian” cultural contexts and who believe that there is little difference between their cultures and genuine biblical faith in Jesus. For some Christians, accepting Jesus means also accepting the cultural forms that accompanied the presentation of the gospel they received. It is also hard for many of us—especially those in the West—to fathom how someone can remain a “Muslim” or “Hindu” and still faithfully follow Jesus from a solidly biblical foundation, not to mention growing in his or her relationship with Jesus.

The answer to this apparent contradiction in terms comes down to the

distinction between genuine faith and the cultural/religious forms and practices that surround a person because of the family and community into which he was born. It is what is in the heart that counts, not what can be seen on the outside. The cultural/religious behavior on the outside may look alarmingly similar to those who have no faith in Jesus, thereby obscuring the heart transformation that Jesus has accomplished on the inside. The article on Syncretism on page 20 illustrates this point.

To be sure, these followers of Jesus confront unique challenges that make their lives more difficult. Even though outwardly remaining a Muslim, Hindu, etc., they often face persecution from those both inside and outside their culture who do not understand or accept the choice they have made to follow Jesus from within the culture of their birth.

No Easy Choices

Because of the long history of conflict and animosity between “Christian” com-

We worship a risen Savior who is King of Kings, before Whom the religious and cultural barriers of the world present no insurmountable obstacles. His Kingdom continues to break forth in places and in ways that defy our best efforts to control and quantify.

Each person who chooses to remain within the culture of his birth must be led by the Holy Spirit as he studies the Scriptures with others into choosing wisely which aspects of his culture contradict biblical teaching and must be left behind and which may be retained or given new biblical meaning. But this is the task that every believer faces each day, including those who come from “Christian” cultures. All of us as Jesus followers are called to discern what must be rejected from our surrounding culture, no matter where we are born. Even within a “Christian” culture, if we are truly faithful to follow Jesus, we will be seen as a peculiar people who will be “encouraged” to fit in with the surrounding culture or face persecution for our obedience to Jesus.

communities and other competing cultural/religious communities in various places around the world, there are no easy answers for those who come to faith in Jesus from non-Christian cultural/religious backgrounds. If they leave to join a traditional Christian church, they are seen as traitors to their family, friends and community. At this point, simply following Jesus is not perceived as the problem so much as having joined a foreign, even hostile, community.

Upon joining a “Christian” cultural community, the new convert is often greeted with suspicion. “Is he a spy? Is his new faith genuine? Can we really trust him?” No matter how hard he tries, his behaviors don’t fully match the new culture he has joined, and to many he will never truly “be one of us.” The convert is often

One day, when we stand before the throne of God and worship Jesus along with people from every other tribe and tongue, I do not think we will worship God out of the uniformity of one “Christian” culture but out of the unique cultural expressions of every people. In this way God will be most glorified.

not trusted to marry into the families of the church. This is a very serious problem for anyone coming to faith in this way. It can be a very lonely existence for the new convert and a not-so-subtle warning to anyone else who would think of leaving the culture of his birth to follow Jesus

The Good News

While many may be uncomfortable with the idea of Muslim or Hindu followers of Jesus, and while there are legitimate concerns about whether the biblical faith of these people can survive in such hostile cultural contexts, one thing seems clear. We worship a risen Savior who is King of Kings, before whom the religious and cultural barriers of the world present no insurmountable obstacles. His Kingdom continues to break forth in places and in ways that defy our best efforts to control and quantify. (See Rebecca Lewis’ article starting on page 15.) God’s purposes within every tribe and tongue will not be thwarted by these man-made limitations nor by our inability to understand what He is doing. While God’s people have wrestled with the problem of how to bring Muslims, Hindus, etc. to faith in Jesus, God has been at work in unexpected ways to overcome these cultural barriers and introduce people to the Jesus of the Bible. We should all rejoice when the biblical Jesus is exalted and followed by people of any background and culture.

If these people remain faithful to Jesus, the potential for impacting the major blocs of unreached peoples with biblical faith is enormous. The gospel has the potential to move rapidly from person to person within these cultural contexts and to transform them from the inside. Donald McGavran taught about the potential of whole people movements where the gospel travels rapidly along

the natural lines of family and community relationships. Over time the study of the Bible in search of the real Jesus could become an accepted practice within these cultures.

In many cases the message of Jesus is not the initial or primary obstacle to people coming to faith, but instead the foreign cultural connections of the messenger and the expectation that a Jesus follower must join a foreign cultural community. These kinds of obstacles can be reduced when the gospel is presented by someone within the culture, thereby making rapid growth possible.

How Should We as Outsiders Respond?

To say the least, the phenomenon of Bible-believing followers of Jesus identifying themselves as Muslims, Hindus, etc. has become a hot topic of discussion in mission circles and beyond. In some cases it has led to persecution of these Jesus followers by those in the Church who believe that this phenomenon is a corruption of the faith. Some have even appealed to governmental power to suppress such expressions of faith. As Rebecca Lewis explains in her article starting on page 21, this has been a common practice over the centuries by those trying to maintain what they feel is the “correct” expression of the faith. Tragically, it has led to the martyrdom of tens of thousands of people who were seeking to follow Jesus. In our day, such practices should not be tolerated by any follower of Jesus.

Whether we think that Jesus Movements are a good or bad thing, I hope that we can all agree that these people have the right to follow Jesus according to their conscience and should be free to do so without harassment by people who claim to know the better way to follow Jesus. It is their choice to make whether they stay within the culture of

their birth or not, and we should respect their choice.

Jesus Movements are indigenous movements that need to be left to flourish on their own without the kind of outside influence or control that could rob them of their indigenous character and even endanger lives. The members of these movements need to be the ones in charge of the contacts they have with believers and ministries from other cultures. History has shown that even well-meaning endorsement of Jesus Movements can be dangerous. Mission organizations, no matter how well intentioned, need to allow Jesus Movements to take the lead and not try to claim ownership of or authority over these movements.

As followers of Jesus from different cultural backgrounds, we must be willing to allow God to establish biblical faith in other cultures in ways that looks very different from our own. One day, when we stand before the throne of God and worship Jesus along with people from every other tribe and tongue, I do not think we will worship God out of the uniformity of one “Christian” culture but out of the unique cultural expressions of every people. In this way God will be most glorified.

Join the Mission Frontiers Support Team

With this issue we are initiating a renewed effort to be good stewards of our finances. We are asking all of our readers who believe in what we are doing to consider giving a yearly gift of \$180 or a monthly gift of \$15 to help us further the vision of reaching the unreached peoples. Our initial goal is to have 1,500 of our readers join our support team. You can read the details on page 6. If you cannot afford that much, please consider giving whatever you can. If you can’t afford anything at this time, but enjoy reading MF, please consider your ongoing subscription as our gift to you. We already have 14 people who have sent in \$180 or become monthly givers. I will let you know in each issue of MF how we are progressing. Go to www.missionfrontiers.org/donate to give or to the next page to learn more. f

MISSION FRONTIERS

NEEDS YOUR HELP

BY RICK WOOD

The vision of *Mission Frontiers* is to foster a global initiative to establish a church planting movement within every people group. We are a vision-casting ministry, but we also share with you the best strategic insights and resources available so that together we can accomplish this vision.

The reality is that we can only succeed with your help. We need you to come alongside us and partner with us.

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Three, you may also go online to www.mission-frontiers.org/donate to give. We will let you know in each issue how we are doing. **We already have 14 people who have signed up to be one of the 1,500.**

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Jesus Movements:

Discovering Biblical Faith in the Most Unexpected Places

GAVRIEL GEFEN

There is a growing phenomenon taking place concurrently within at least every sizeable region of the world today. People within numerous different tribal cultures and also people within the cultures of each of the major world religions are increasingly accepting Jesus without converting to Christianity and without joining churches. They are encountering Jesus in ways that change their lives forever, without them leaving one group for another. They are learning to discover for themselves what it means to be faithful to Jesus within their own cultures and within their own birth communities. Conversion for them is believed to be a matter of the heart and not one of joining a different, competing cultural community.

It is usually the case that after a number of these individuals within the same community are following Jesus, they begin meeting regularly as a small group. Over time this expands into multiple

HOW DID JESUS LIVE AS A SON OF ISRAEL? DID HE CREATE A SEPARATE AND COMPETING COMMUNITY FROM THE ONE THAT WAS ALREADY THERE? DID HE TELL PEOPLE TO LEAVE THEIR SYNAGOGUES? DID HE START HIS OWN SYNAGOGUES? DIDN'T HE SEEK TO BRING TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE TO THE COMMUNITY THAT WAS ALREADY THERE?



Praying Shacharit, morning prayers, on a visit to Hawaii.

small groups among the same people group or within the same country. Eventually, it becomes established as a full-fledged movement of believers in Jesus that is outside of Christendom. It becomes a Jesus movement within another tradition. Does this mean they are living their lives outside the boundaries of biblical faith?

Or, are they merely living beyond the boundaries of Christendom as a competing community?

How did Jesus live as a son of Israel? Did he create a separate and competing community from the one that was already there? Did he tell people to leave their synagogues? Did he start his own synagogues? Didn't he seek to bring transformation and new life to the community that was already there?

The first followers of Jesus did not leave their synagogues. They began meeting regularly in small groups for fellowship, study, and prayer centered around

Jesus while remaining part of the synagogues they were already in. These small group meetings were not under the auspices of the wider community; yet, the people within them remained relationally and culturally loyal to their wider community. Some new customs and expressions of prayer and music developed among the followers of Jesus, but these were

Gavriel Gefen (gavriel@sblichut.com) is the founding director of Keren HaShlichut, an Israeli association of Jewish emissaries taking the message of Jesus to many peoples of the world. www.sblichut.com



practiced in addition to, not in place of, established Jewish traditions. There were a number of circumstances that led to the above dynamics changing, but this was the original model.

Jewish believers in the first century faced the Roman occupation, the acceleration of Jewish exile, the increasing threat of assimilation of Jews among the Gentiles, and growing numbers of non-Jews embracing new covenant faith. These circumstances led to Jewish followers of Jesus being both pushed out and pulled out of the traditional Jewish community.

Two thousand years later, Jews in Israel today finally have the conditions necessary to be able once again to confidently and wholeheartedly accept Jesus as Israel's Messiah while remaining firmly within the traditional synagogue community.

This is not a reference to what is called the Messianic Jewish movement. This is referring to a growing phenomenon of Jews following Jesus within Judaism. Increasing numbers of Jews are learning to follow Jesus faithfully within their traditional synagogue communities. Upon accepting Jesus, they begin meeting regularly in small groups for fellowship centered on Jesus while remaining loyal members of their synagogue communities.

The meetings of these small groups usually take place mid-week, as each family already prays in their respective synagogue on the Sabbath. When they come together as devotees of Jesus, they seek to avoid duplicating or replacing activities or traditions which they are already upholding in the synagogue. With each of them



Celebrating a bar mitzvah in Jerusalem at the Western Wall.

THESE BELIEVERS ARE FAITHFUL TO JESUS AND ARE ALSO FAITHFUL IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THEIR BIRTH COMMUNITY OF FAITH. THEY ARE NOT UNDERMINING THE PRE-EXISTING COMMUNITY AND ESPECIALLY NOT CREATING A NEW SEPARATE AND COMPETING COMMUNITY. THEY SEEK TO BRING TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE TO WHAT IS ALREADY THERE, SERVING FROM WITHIN.

engaged congregationally in synagogues, most of the dimensions of congregational life are already fulfilled there. Some of the mid-week small group meetings are separate for men and women, as this has been found to be more intimate and more helpful in their lives. These meetings often operate similar to a talking circle which is more like a support group than a formal congregation. There is an intimate time of discussion and prayer explicitly centered around Jesus, and everyone in the circle participates.

Involvement in these small groups connects each of these believers to the worldwide community of new covenant faith, which Christians call the Church or the Body of Christ. Yet, members of these groups have neither converted to Christianity nor joined a church, nor even joined the Messianic Jewish movement

which has its own structures and organizational agendas. Also, being spiritually connected to the much larger worldwide community of believers in Jesus does not replace their membership or service in their local synagogue community. They simultaneously have larger and smaller group relationships



that obligate them to overlapping responsibilities and also to other responsibilities which are unique and different to each group.

Relational faithfulness within this dynamic is not a zero-sum game of all or nothing on one side or the other. These believers are faithful to Jesus and are also faithful in their relationships within their birth community of faith. They are not undermining the pre-existing community and especially not creating a new separate and competing community. They seek to bring transformation and new life to what is already there, serving from within.

A Jewish Emis-sary of Jesus

I am a Jewish Israeli who follows Jesus. When I was growing up, my family accepted Jesus. As a teenage boy, I became convinced that there was a calling on my life to go to many nations with the message of Jesus. For most of my life since then, I have lived out two parallel journeys. One journey has been discovering and learning by experience how to follow Jesus as a Jewish Israeli. The other journey has been discovering and learning by experience how to take the message of Jesus from Jerusalem out to the nations of the world.

In my travels I have mostly focused on going to indigenous tribal peoples. My experiences of serving indigenous peoples within their own cultures have inspired me to embrace more of my own traditional Jewish heritage. Also, the more I have embraced my own heritage and lived more naturally within the traditional community of my people, the more I have learned how to bring Jesus to indigenous peoples.

When I am with indigenous people, I am inspired to be more faithful to the heritage of my own people. When I am at home within the religious Jewish community, I am inspired as to how I might more effectively serve among other peoples, by affirming who they already are. These parallel walks in my life are synergistic, each one informing the other and propelling the other forward.

I have discovered we must first embrace who we and our own people are, and live within that, before we are then able to truly release others to do the same. If we lack respect for our own heritage, we will not be able to fully respect the heritage of another people.

Learning to be faithful to Jesus within our own cultural heritage is not only for the sake of effectively serving our own people, but also for the sake of preparation toward effectively bringing the message of Jesus to other nations. This faithfulness within our own cultures enables us to assist other peoples and nations to discover for themselves what it means to be faithful to Jesus each within their own heritages. This faithfulness results in the incar-

nation of the life and message of Jesus in the midst of their people.

Movements to Jesus are springing up among Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and many other cultures of the world. When these peoples accept the fullness of who Jesus really is and then learn to faithfully follow him while remaining socially and culturally within their own communities, they do a similar thing to what Jewish followers of Jesus are beginning to do in



Being welcomed in the Philippines by a tribal chief.



Hosting indigenous tribal people in Jerusalem.



Israel once again. It is not exactly the same, but it is similar. Most of the dynamics at play and the issues that they encounter in creating Jesus movements among their peoples are the same dynamics and issues that are encountered by Jews following Jesus within the traditional Jewish community.

I recently visited one of these movements to Jesus in the Muslim world. This particular movement was initiated by a Muslim follower of Jesus who is a tribal chief. This movement has since spread throughout his country. Also, Muslim visitors from other countries have embraced Jesus through the work of this movement and have gone home to start similar movements in their own countries.

During my visit, I met a number of Muslim religious leaders who are fervently devoted to Jesus. I also witnessed some of them teaching publicly about the forgiveness of Jesus to large groups. It was very powerful.

One Muslim training center I visited had thousands of men. One of the senior teachers there follows Jesus. He teaches openly about Jesus every day. He is so traditional that it is understood he is not seeking to convert anyone to Christianity. He is challenging them to reclaim Jesus as the Word of God, the renewer of their faith, and the one without whom their people have no hope.

The vast majority of Muslims in that training center do not follow Jesus; yet, a good number of them do. Many of those men who follow Jesus also serve in village mosques throughout the region. During my visit, a number of men returning from their service in different villages shared reports with each other of teaching in the villages about the forgiveness of Jesus. In some of these villages, those who have

accepted Jesus now meet together in small groups focused on Jesus while remaining within the Muslim community.

It was clear that these men know Jesus in all his fullness. The testimony of their lives is not one of compromise. It is not their objective to avoid persecution. The way they live out their faith is not an easier, less authentic way, as some people might accuse. Rather, their path of following Jesus is a harder one and a higher one. By remaining within Islam, they are not seeking acceptance for themselves. They



In West Papua.

WHEN A MOVEMENT TO JESUS LIKE THIS IS BORN WITHIN ANOTHER CULTURE, THE BELIEVERS THERE WILL GO THROUGH THEIR OWN PROCESS OF CONFRONTING THEIR CULTURE WITH THE MESSAGE OF JESUS.

seek to express to their people that Jesus accepts them right where they are, and that they can

faithfully follow him within their community and their family of birth.

When a movement to Jesus like this is born within another culture, the believers there will go through their own process of confronting their culture with the message of Jesus. There will be some cultural expressions and traditions in which they can rightly continue only by redirecting the focus and giving them new meaning. In this process of renewing their culture, they may discover that there are some cultural expressions in which they can no longer engage as followers of Jesus.



A Muslim woman in prayer.

I believe that the message of

Jesus was never intended to be spread by means of cultural conquest. I am convinced that Jesus' message will increasingly spread among peoples of other faith traditions only as God's kingdom grows like yeast from within. By the grace of God and the discernment of his Spirit, growing numbers of Jesus followers within various Christian traditions are increasingly coming to recognize the work of God through Jesus within other cultures.^f



Jesus

Living and Discipling Among the Lost

JOHN RIDGWAY

In the Gospels we have recorded for us four distinct movements of the gospel of the kingdom. Two of them were among the Jews. Matthew's Gospel gives the details of a movement in Galilee that had become at least 5,000 men (Matthew 14:21), and this did not include women and children. The other Jewish movement was in Judea. John's Gospel describes this movement by saying that many people were believing in Jesus (John 2:23, 8:30, 10:42, 11:45, 12:11 and 12:42).

However, there were two other movements outside of the Jewish mainstream. One was among the Samaritans, and the other was among the Gentiles. Both of these movements offer guidance for us as we seek to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to the Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Shinto-Buddhist, Secular and other mainstreams of the world today.

Among the Jewish people, Jesus often taught in their synagogues, but in the case of these two movements

HOWEVER, OUR TENDENCY HAS OFTEN BEEN TO DRAW INDIVIDUALS OUT OF THEIR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY AND ASK THEM TO JOIN ANOTHER COMMUNITY THAT PROFESSES CHRISTIANITY RATHER THAN TO DISCIPLE THEM IN THEIR OWN CONTEXT WHERE THEY CAN REACH THEIR OWN FAMILY MEMBERS AND RELATIVES AND FRIENDS AND WORK COLLEAGUES.

among the Samaritans and the Gentiles, telling of the good news of the kingdom started through a significant personal encounter with an individual.

In the case of the Gentiles living in the Decapolis, it started when Jesus healed the man who apparently had thousands of demons (a "legion" of them) living in him. In Mark 5:1, we are told that the disciples and Jesus crossed the lake to the region of the Gerasenes and that Jesus got out of the boat. This area was known as the Decapolis. Due to it being a Gentile area with high Greek culture, it was not a place that Jews would readily visit. Also, this specific spot was a place of pigs and a place of the dead.

This may explain why there is no record of the twelve disciples getting out of the boat. Yet in the midst of this very uninviting context was a man in extreme need. Night and day he cried out and cut himself with stones. The internal pain was so great that relief came only when he cut himself externally. He was alive but not truly living, and his existence was only possible among the dead.

Jesus came to this distraught man and removed the huge burden in his life that he was never meant to carry. After this extraordinary encounter, the man wanted very much to go with Jesus. But Jesus said to him, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

John Ridgway is an international consultant engaged with various multinationals in the area of cross-cultural communications and managing cultural and linguistic diversities. He is also a consultant for various Christian organizations in the area of pioneer missions. He and his wife and two adult children currently live in Denver, Colorado after living 30 years in Asia. You may contact him by email at: jwr2010@q.com



We most likely would not have given Jesus' advice but would have rather suggested the course of action that the healed man wanted. We probably would have told him to join the team of disciples with Jesus and be trained and grounded in the faith in a "safe" and separate place before facing his family.

Jesus understood that it took a Gentile to reach the Gentiles and that immediate family and friends and relatives are the first priority. Indeed many times in the New Testament we see the good news coming to an individual and his family. One primary example of this is of Cornelius and his relatives and close friends as mentioned in Acts 10:24.

However, our tendency has often been to draw individuals out of their family and community and ask them to join another community that professes Christianity rather than to disciple them in their own context where they can reach their own family members and relatives and friends and work colleagues.

In the case of the healed Gentile man, it seemed that he not only went back to his own family but "he began to tell in the Decapolis (literally, ten cities) how much Jesus had done for him." And his testimony had quite an impact as the verse states, "and all the people were amazed" (Mark 5:20).

Several months later, when Jesus revisited the area of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31), it is recorded that now at least 4,000 men were showing interest in what Jesus had to say (Mark 7:31-8:9).

In like manner Paul advised the Corinthians to remain in the situation they were in when God called them (1 Corinthians 7:20). He advised them not to change their context or place in life but to focus on their relationship to Jesus with a desire to obey Him (1 Corinthians 7:17-24). Paul indicated that this was his practice in all the situations where he was ministering. By people remaining in their contexts, the good news of the kingdom could spread throughout their communities, and this would eventually lead to the nations being discipled (Matthew 28:19).

In the case of the Samaritan community, Jesus again sought out a needy individual who in this case was a woman with a history of immorality. The disciples were surprised that he would be talking to such a

person, as in those days the two communities had no dealings with each other. Also, a religious leader did not normally talk with a woman in public. However, this woman had an encounter with Jesus that changed her life. She raced back from the well to the Samaritan town and caused many of the Samaritans to come and listen to Jesus.

The Samaritans then invited Jesus to come and stay in their town. There is no record of the twelve disciples going, as it may have been outside their comfort zone. But Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days. We do not read of him criticizing their lack of understanding of God's purposes or their temple at Mount

Gerizim. He presumably ate their food, slept on their beds and used their washing facilities in the midst of their particular context. He literally lived and discipled amongst the lost, and there was a great response. (Note John 4:39, 41-42.)

As they listened to Jesus, they responded, "We have heard for ourselves,

and we know that this man really is the savior of the world." They discovered that he was not only a Jewish prophet but was someone who really loved them just as much as he did his own Jewish people.

Our tendency has often been to pull people out of their messy circumstances or what appear to be difficult contexts and disciple them in safe environments where we are comfortable. In contrast, Jesus chose to go to the lost in their own contexts and relate to them right where they were. Following his example, these people in turn impacted many of their relatives and friends in their own community. If the Samaritan woman had been extracted out of her own community, it is doubtful that such an impact would have occurred.

Today, the great need of the mission workforce is that we die to our own plans and strategies. We need to listen to the voice of God leading us to needy people who want to respond to the good news of the kingdom of God. We need to help those people to influence their own families and relatives and friends and work colleagues in their own communities so that they in turn will disciple their own people. In this way we will see the fulfillment of the Great Commission taking place in our generation and the generations to come. f

JESUS CHOSE TO GO TO THE LOST IN THEIR OWN CONTEXTS AND RELATE TO THEM RIGHT WHERE THEY WERE. FOLLOWING HIS EXAMPLE, THESE PEOPLE IN TURN IMPACTED MANY OF THEIR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITY. IF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN HAD BEEN EXTRACTED OUT OF HER OWN COMMUNITY, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT SUCH AN IMPACT WOULD HAVE OCCURRED.



All Things Are Yours

H. L. RICHARD

In a classic text on cross-cultural ministry Paul stated his policy of becoming all things to all men so that by all means he might save some (1 Cor. 9:22). This is sometimes treated as a specialist approach for experts in cross-cultural encounter, but the Bible presents it as a model for all ministry. It is exemplified in the incarnational pattern of Jesus who, due to the Father's great love for the world, was sent as a true human being into a specific historical and cultural context to announce and effectuate salvation for the world.

Paul's readiness to live like a Jew among Jews and like a Gentile among Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:20-21) was also rooted in a fundamental principle spelled out earlier in his first letter to the Corinthians. There had been factionalism among the Corinthian believers; some sided with Paul, some with Apollos, some with Peter. Paul rebuked this in various ways in a discussion covering the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians, coming to a climax at the end of chapter three. There he completely turned the tables and said that rather than the apostles owning factions of the believers, the entire Body of Christ owned all of the apostles.

In a typically Pauline flight to the highest elevations and deepest recesses of theological thought, Paul then jumped from the Corinthian ownership of the apostles to the stunning affirmation that "all things are yours" (1 Cor. 3:21). That sounds hyperbolic, but Paul spelled it out so it could not be dismissed as a mere rhetorical flourish; the world is yours, life and death are yours, the present and the future are yours, so yes, indeed, I really mean that "all things are yours" (1 Cor. 3:22). This of course is through Christ the Lord (1 Cor. 3:23).

The commentarial tradition of the Church has not applied this Pauline emphasis on the possession of all things to cross-cultural situations, but it clearly is an underlying principle that allowed Paul in practice to

become all things to all men. What many commentaries do point out is that in affirming this possession of all things by the disciples of Christ, Paul was adapting a truism of some of the philosophical schools of the time, which had particular relevance to the Corinthian context, where wisdom was a hot topic of discussion. The wise man among the Stoic philosophers was one who rose above all situations and problems by remaining in control of his thoughts and actions rather than being driven by external events.¹ Paul brought this Stoic concept into submission to Christ, where it was transformed into a larger and more profound theological truth that he affirmed to weak and immature Corinthian believers who were failing in some very basic aspects of spiritual life.

The possession of all things by the disciples of Christ was spelled out as a fundamental missiological concept by the Dutch missiologist Johan Herman Bavinck. He did not tie his exposition to Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 3:31, but the relation of the two is unmistakable. Bavinck was concerned about syncretistic tendencies in the Roman Catholic theology and practice of accommodation wherein non-Christian practices are adopted by the Church. He wrote,

Here note that the term "accommodation" is really not appropriate as a description of what actually ought to take place. It points to an adaptation to customs and practices essentially foreign to the gospel. Such an adaptation can scarcely lead to anything other than a syncretistic entity, a conglomeration of customs that can never form an essential unity....We would, therefore prefer to use the term *possessio*, to take in possession. The Christian life does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new....Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand and turns them in an entirely different direction; they acquire an entirely different content. Even though in external form there is much that resembles past practices, in reality everything has become new. The old has in essence passed away and the new has

H. L. Richard is a research scholar currently focused on issues in South Asian culture and religion.



come. Christ takes the life of a people in his hands, he renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction. Such is neither “adaptation,” nor accommodation; it is in essence the legitimate taking possession of something by him to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth.²

The profound implications of Paul’s teaching and of Bavinck’s concept of *possessio* need to be at the center of biblical discussions of cross-cultural ministry, especially with regard to other religious traditions. These insights point to a positive approach to other religious traditions rather than a blanket renunciation or repudiation of them. Rather than renouncing the Buddhist heritage, a Buddhist who comes to Christ needs to be oriented towards taking possession of that heritage. Clearly there is a necessary discerning and sifting process in taking possession of truths and practices from other faith traditions; Paul after all was rebuking false wisdom in the Corinthians, and Bavinck clearly calls for a reorientation towards Christ.

Careful nuancing of this truth is essential in a number of directions. First, the missionary movement is still emerging from the shadow of colonialism, and nothing stirs anti-Christian emotions quite as much as a triumphalistic or domineering attitude. Can a Christian disciple of Jesus take possession of another faith tradition without straying into this offensive mindset? It is a delicate procedure to be undertaken with deep humility, yet Paul did not shirk from stating this truth into a complex situation in Corinth. Cross-cultural workers will rarely have the insight, sensitivity or humility to successfully negotiate this terrain even with guidance from local believers, yet they must not draw back from the implications of Paul’s teaching. J. H. Bavinck recognized the inadequacy of the cross-cultural worker as well; “the newly formed church is usually a better judge in such matters than we [missionaries] are” (ibid. pg. 177).

It is not possible for every part of the Body of Christ to take possession of every aspect of life; rather, some parts of the Body will more particularly be related to different aspects of God’s profoundly diverse world. It is particularly those who come to faith from Buddhist families who must wrestle with the meaning of *possessio* in Buddhist contexts, while people from Hindu and Muslim and post-modern contexts seek to apply this insight in their particular worlds. Cross-cultural workers will of course join as servants in the engagement of these issues in the various contexts.

It must be affirmed again that there can be no facile embracing of anything and everything taught or practiced in other religious traditions. All is brought

under Christ, and a sifting and filtering is necessary. Yet teaching new disciples of Jesus in other faith traditions that “all things are yours” and that it is your responsibility in Christ to take possession of your religio-cultural heritage challenges some assumed paradigms. Primarily challenged is the necessity of “conversion to Christianity.” If Buddhists who turn to Christ are taught that Buddha is theirs, are they really called to renounce Buddhism? Obviously they are called to discern and sift much that is unbiblical among the many traditions that are currently called Buddhism, but if they take possession of that heritage, how or why can or should they also renounce it? The same applies to the other major faith traditions, all of which are as much about culture as they are about theology, and all of which are multi-cultural as well as multi-theological.

The problem of neo-imperialist triumphalism is trumped by a missiology which rejects “conversion to Christianity” as an essential aspect of the gospel. The new disciple of Jesus is under a mandate from Christ and the New Testament to live within (take possession of) their birth community and religio-cultural heritage. This kind of surrender to the Lordship of Christ leading to *possessio* of one’s heritage in conformity to Christ can be viewed from another angle as well. To the birth community of the new disciple, be it Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or other, it is not a rejection of the old or transfer to the new, but rather citizens of the original community taking possession of the truth of the Gospel. Thus hegemonic religious imperialism is avoided and the interpenetration of the Gospel among all civilizations and faiths is accomplished.

It is surely obvious, but will be stated here in closing, that this is not a simple process. J. H. Bavinck recognized this as well: “It is naturally much easier to speak theoretically of taking possession, than it is to give practical advice. The question of *possessio* leads to the greatest problems throughout the entire world” (ibid. pg. 179). Redefining the problems and complexities of cross-cultural encounter and contextualization in terms of *possessio* rather than of conversion and repudiation seems a helpful first step towards affirming in a fresh way the multi-cultural nature of the gospel and of its call for all peoples to surrender to Christ within their own heritage.

“The nations will walk by the light of the Lamb, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into the eternal city” (Rev. 21:24). †

To see the End Notes, please go to the article posted at www.missionfrontiers.org.



Can the Kingdom of God Break Out of Christendom?

Expecting the Unexpected

REBECCA LEWIS

In Hawaii we visited a volcano famous for its red-hot streams of flowing lava. As soon as the hot lava hits the air, it cools rapidly, forming black crusts so hard it can be walked on while molten rock flows inside. But the heat and pressure builds relentlessly until the powerful sizzling red lava breaks unexpectedly out of its casing here or there, forcing its way to the ocean.

When I saw it, I was reminded of the history of God's Kingdom on earth. When Jesus announced the coming of God's Kingdom, He revealed the coming of a powerful movement of God that has worked its way relentlessly around the world ever since.

First it burst the bounds of Judaism, shocking the disciples who expected the Messiah's Kingdom to overthrow the Romans and re-establish the rule of their people. Instead, it burst out of the hardened strictures of Mosaic Law, bringing its transforming power into the Greco-Roman world—toppling no governments, except those ruling people's hearts.

Paul called this amazing move of God into the Gentile world "the mystery of the Gospel," hidden in prophetic writings but revealed in his day. Peter exclaimed, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right!" (Acts 10:34).

In the first century, the Kingdom of God broke out in unexpected places, from Rome to Ethiopia to Persia to India. As each expression of the Kingdom of God took form and hardened into casings created by mankind, the movement would slowly grind to a halt.

But, as Jesus predicted, the power of God is not so easily tamed and contained. While the Roman believers co-opted their empire's government structure and cultural strengths to organize and try to manage this phenomenon, God was establishing His Kingdom

in Celtic Ireland, far from their control—through a former slave boy! Meanwhile, the blacklisted Nestorian believers carried the message of the coming of God's Kingdom as far as China.

Far from being a history of God establishing His Kingdom through man-made ecclesiastical structures, we find the living power of Jesus has not ever been effectively contained by the best efforts of His followers. The invention of the printing press ripped the Bible itself from their control, producing a red-hot reformation complete with the radical reaffirmation that through Jesus all believers are priests with direct access to God. Do we still believe this?


Modern transportation and Internet communication has broken down the last barriers isolating people groups from this amazingly Good News. And we are finding that once again God's Kingdom is refusing to be limited to "Christianity-as-we-know-it"!

It is our turn to be shocked, like Peter, that God would bestow His Spirit on those outside of our acceptable religion. It was inconceivable to him that pagan households, like Cornelius', could receive God's Holy Spirit (even while uncircumcised and as yet unbaptized!). Likewise, we cannot fathom that God would have "no favorites" today and bestow His Spirit on Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and, in fact, *all* who through meeting a living Jesus "fear Him and do what is right." But His Kingdom is breaking out of the boxes we try to keep it in, again, and He seems to be inviting the least-expected people to His banquet, without our permission.

Indeed, once again God is doing the scarily unexpected. But will we perceive it?

Jesus is alive and building His own kingdom in the hearts of people in many religious contexts. Just like in the New Testament, He does not seem to be concerned that religious structures or forms be established in His name. Once again He has bypassed the competition between religions to go straight to the hearts of all people everywhere who are seeking to truly know God.^F

Rebecca Lewis studied Christian history at both the BA and MA level, and taught it at the university level for over 10 years. She also has 30 years of experience with the Muslim context and currently lives in India.



Living and Disciplining

In the Hindu World

K. VENKATESH

My name is Ventakesh and my home is India. I was brought up in a strict, high caste Hindu family, and we had our own pooja room where we had daily prayers to the Hindu gods. We maintained all the Hindu festivals and were very diligent to fulfill all the requirements of our Hindu faith and religion.

My father was a highly-placed government official and very orthodox in all his practices. He treated with disdain the religion of the Christians because of their habits of smoking, drinking and dancing. He viewed them as unclean. His overall impression of the Christianity of the

West was molded by what he saw in the Western movies, especially from America.

Because my father occasionally had to travel to America on behalf of the Indian government,

he observed the values and practices of the Americans directly. He was very impressed with the technological advances of the West but felt they were quite inferior when it came to their lifestyle and personal values. He did meet one man who was very kind to

K. Venkatesh is an international scientist with experience in both the USA and India. He is an aeronautical engineer by training and is also a very committed believer who follows Jesus.

him, and he explained that he was a Christian. But generally my father was very skeptical of Christianity.

After I completed my undergraduate studies in one of the top Institutes of Technology in India, I got a scholarship to study in America. My father was reluctant, but he agreed that I could go on the basis that I stayed away from religious cults and weird groups. I was happy with that arrangement and proceeded to start my postgraduate studies.

Upon my arrival at the university, I met a group of Christians who were very nice to me. They helped me

to get furniture for my new apartment and introduced me to many of the facilities on campus. I appreciated this very much. Then they invited me to a discussion group where they talked a lot from the Bible. I felt they were trying to convert me. But I continually argued with them and that got tiresome for everyone.

Then I went on to my PhD studies in aeronautical engineering, hoping to work in one of the top research labs when I returned to India. However, at the beginning of my PhD program, tragedy struck my family. My sister's marriage had been arranged to a young man, and it was all going well for a few months. Then the young man became abusive towards my sister and began to beat her. Then he became very demanding about money as my family was quite well off. My sister wrote to me that she was very unhappy and did not know what to do. My parents were distraught and began to visit many temples and made many prayers

to the Hindu gods. I also did the same in the Hindu temple in Atlanta and prayed every day to many of the Hindu gods. But things got worse. Then my parents came to find out that the family of the young man had lied about him and his credentials and that they were really after our family wealth. My parents were distraught and could only think of divorce. But that is a very slow process in India and the other party has to agree, which seemed very unlikely.

Several of my Christian friends had continued to have discussions with me. Now I told them of my family problem and explained that I would have to go back to India as divorce would be a huge family embarrassment and my family had spent so much money on the wedding. They were humiliated and did not have very much financial resources left as they were hoping that I would get a good salary when I graduated.

My Christian friends said that they would pray for me and they continued to inquire about our family situation. Although I had not been

I COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT MY SIMPLE PRAYER WAS ANSWERED SO QUICKLY. THEN I BEGAN TO READ THE NEW TESTAMENT WITH GREAT EAGERNESS. THIS PERSON JESUS NEVER SPOKE ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION BUT ONLY SPOKE ABOUT FOLLOWING HIM.

particularly impressed about their arguments for Christianity, I was overwhelmed with their love and interest in me with my family crisis.

I went back to India to help with the divorce proceedings of my sister, hoping to expedite the process. But it did not look very hopeful, and all the family members were very depressed, especially my mother, who wept all the time.

I decided one day to look at the New Testament that my Christian friends had given me in America and began to read through the story. It was a bit hard to follow as I had no idea about the actual story of Jesus. But I got to Matthew 7:7 and read Jesus' words, "Ask and it will be given you." I decided to try praying to Jesus. The Hindu gods had given no answers and I thought at least I can try praying to Jesus. What could I lose? So I prayed to Jesus that he would make the divorce proceed quickly.

The next day, we heard from the other party that they were ready to agree to a divorce. The following day we were able to proceed with the legalities and before long the matter had been settled. I could not believe that my simple prayer was answered so quickly. Then I began to read the New Testament with great eagerness. This person Jesus never spoke about the Christian religion but only spoke about following Him.

When I returned to the USA, I met another Hindu man who told me that he also followed Jesus. He was not a practicing Christian who went to church, but he maintained his own Hindu culture and social habits, and he loved Jesus and read the Bible and he knew it very well. He explained to me that he was a Hindu by his first birth and was proud of this heritage which was from God and showed me Acts 17:26, where God is explained as the one who determines where and when we are born. Then he explained how he had experienced a second birth, when he became one of God's children and a member of His kingdom. This second birth was not a physical birth but a spiritual birth and as God's Spirit lived in us we would gradually become very attractive people who cared for others and helped them in their troubles. He showed me John 1:12 and so I decided to believe in

Jesus. As a result I became one of His children and knew that my past was forgiven and that I had a great hope after I died.

Immediately I Skyped my sister in India and told her what was happening to me. She was also very interested as she had witnessed the answers

to all the prayers that I had made to Jesus regarding her divorce and how Jesus had answered every prayer. She too has now experienced Jesus in her life and no longer prays to the Hindu gods. The changes in her attitude have touched my mother and father, who are now showing a lot of interest.

I have since returned to India, and I am very much part of our Hindu community. I am engaged in all the activities of our family and extended family. There are many discussions about Jesus, and I am sharing the Bible with many people in our community. Because of my academic qualifications and the good job I now have, I have a very good standing in our community, and so people listen to me. I continually explain to them that I am not trying to "convert" them to Christianity but to "convert" them to Jesus as they live out their lives in the Hindu community. Now I have quite a few friends who are also following Jesus, and we meet regularly to pray together and share the Scriptures and to encourage each other. We sense that God is going to cause many people in our community to know and love Him. We are claiming the verse Isaiah 60:22 that a little one shall become a thousand and that a small one will become a mighty nation and that God will hasten all this in His time. This is already beginning to happen. f



Muslim

Tribal Chief

is Bringing Jesus to His People

MIR-IBN-MOHAMMAD

Like most people in my tribe, when I was a young boy I went to the madrasah (Islamic school) for training in the Quran and preparation for jihad (holy war). As I read the Quran, I noticed that it talks about Jesus in ways that are different from other prophets; I was curious and confused. I left the madrasah and went to another city. There a friend of mine introduced me to a committed follower of Jesus who taught from the Bible. I liked his stories about Jesus and saw that he prayed to God in Jesus' name, but I didn't really think that it was for me. I didn't see how Jesus could be for Muslims.

A couple of years later, my school class went on a picnic outing by the sea. As part of the field trip, we went out boat-

ing, and many of the students were jumping in the water to swim. I didn't know how to swim. But I thought, "My

people are from the mountains; we are the bravest people. Why are all these other, weaker students not afraid to go in the water, but I am?" To prove my bravery, I jumped in the water, too. Because I didn't get too far away from the boat, I was fine. Then I decided to jump in a second time. This time I jumped farther. I quickly realized that I wasn't okay—I was sinking! I called out, praying in the way I learned as a boy, and nothing happened. Then I remembered how that teacher prayed in Jesus' name, and I thought, "I have nothing to lose; I'm about to drown." So I cried out "Jesus, save me!" Then I

blackened out. When I woke up again, I was back on the boat. My friends said that they had seen me sink, but they knew they couldn't reach me in time. But then they said that something had held me up until they could get to me. I knew that was Jesus.

As soon as possible, I went back to meet the man who taught about Jesus and told him what had happened to me. I said I wanted to commit my life to Jesus. I studied more in-depth about Jesus and the Bible with him for two years and even changed my religious identity. I liked my new life, but I felt like God wanted more for me. As I prayed and sought the Lord, I felt him calling me, "Go back to your own people and village to tell them about me." I explained

to a friend how God was calling me, and he agreed to pray for me. I went back to my home village, my tribe. I shared about Jesus with many in my tribe on various short trips. At first, it was hard work. Then,

after I had shared many times with the tribal leader, he finally had a dream about Jesus and decided to follow him. Later, when this leader was on his deathbed, he called me to his bedside. He took off his turban from his head and put it on mine in front of everyone there, which meant that I was the new tribal leader. I was shocked. I thought the next leader would be one of his sons. But, after the period of mourning was over, the other leaders confirmed that it was me, so I accepted the responsibility.

I wanted to lead the tribe in a way that everyone could see that devotion to Jesus had made a difference in my life. So, whenever there were issues that came up, I used the Bible in my rulings. One time a woman was brought before me who was going to be

I WANTED TO LEAD THE TRIBE IN A WAY THAT EVERYONE COULD SEE THAT DEVOTION TO JESUS HAD MADE A DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE. SO, WHENEVER THERE WERE ISSUES THAT CAME UP, I USED THE BIBLE IN MY RULINGS.

Mir-ibn-Mohammad is a Muslim tribal chief in the Middle East who is devoted to Jesus.

stoned for adultery. I based my ruling on a passage from the Gospel, and challenged her accusers, "If any of you are without sin, you be the one to strike her down." None of them could do anything, and the woman was saved.

Over time, the other tribes heard that I was using the Bible to lead my tribe, and that I was telling others to trust in Jesus. Some of the other leaders were very upset, and they set an ambush for me. When I walked by where they were waiting for me, they began shooting at me with machine guns. I started to run. I could feel bullets hitting my body, but I kept running until I was far away. When I stopped, I saw the holes in my shirt, and felt pain where the bullets had hit me. But, as I looked closer, I saw that the bullets had only wounded the surface of my skin. Only one had fully entered my body, into my leg. I understood that God had protected me. I was also reminded so clearly that it is only because of the God's work in my heart that I am not violent like the men shooting me. It made me so grateful for His protection and His provision.

THERE ARE NOW THOUSANDS OF HOME GROUPS OF THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES TO JESUS, WITH EACH GROUP SERVING ABOUT TEN FAMILIES. IT IS MY PASSION TO SEE ALL MUSLIMS FOLLOWING JESUS WITHIN ISLAM.

While I was recovering in the hospital, the men who had set the ambush found out that I had survived. They became afraid for their lives. They knew that I had the right in our tribal culture to send men after them to kill them. But I knew that the Bible teaches that you should forgive your enemies. After I had left the hospital, I called them to me and told them, "Because I follow the teachings of Jesus, I forgive you." They were so relieved. Through this, I was able to share more with them about Jesus. Today, their tribe is one of our most passionate groups of Jesus-followers.

As I have continued leading my tribe in a biblical way and share with others about Jesus, we have seen more and more put their trust in him.

There are now thousands of home groups of those who have given their lives to Jesus, with each group serving about ten families. It is my passion to see all Muslims following Jesus within Islam. Starting from our tribe, we have shared our story with many other tribes in our country, and are trusting God to continue to spread the good news about Jesus throughout the rest of the Muslim world. We want to see Jesus welcomed into his rightful place within Islam. This is my greatest dream. f

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Syncretism

TAWEEPORN SARUN

On Saturday, Dow and I were working to translate Bible study materials from English to Thai. We hit the word “syncretism” and had to work hard to find and to understand the meaning. The best we came up with was, “A bird with two heads.” (From *L sun*, “with” and *kres*, “group, party”, thus “merging two parties”.)

If a new believer has clearly understood the gospel, and is free to remain in his/her old religious context, and attends all the religious activities, and appears to be involved in all the traditions and practices of that religion, isn't there a great danger that he or she will slip into syncretism, resulting in the worship of two or more gods? The answer is yes.

This is true of every context. A Western believer in Christ is in danger of loving God and also money (Matt. 6:24). Or, as was present in Judaism and is maybe present in the Church today, there was the syncretistic behavior of, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’” (Mark 7:8-10).

Here in Thailand, one of the greatest detriments of Christianity is the negative effect it has on the extended family who are Buddhists. So I have chosen to continue to live within Buddhism even though I am a loving, devoted follower of Christ.

Am I in danger of syncretism? Yes. Wednesday, before seeing Dow, I was with friends at a temple. I went into the temple and engaged in an activity called “tamboon.” Translated, it means to make merit. You carry two joss sticks and a lotus flower and verbalize your desires. It might be thought of as a form of prayer,

Taweeporn Sarun (geomc@ureach.com) is a Buddhist disciple of Jesus in Southeast Asia.

though you are not praying to someone, hoping to change or improve your karma, good luck. I entered the area of tamboon with the joss sticks and flower and asked the God of heaven to bless my family and specifically to help my sister-in-law financially. She is struggling to keep her daughter in school. Because the economy is bad, her sales are down.

Friday was Macha Bucha day, a very important Buddhist holy day. I was walking a long distance to the market to buy some food. It was very hot. As I walked, many cars passed me by. The people who own these cars are not wealthy, they are just regular middle class

Thai people. I asked myself, “Why don't we have a car?” Then I thought, “When I get to the market I will do tamboon at the Chinese temple there. It is a very highly regarded temple and tamboon there would be very good.” Then I heard a clear voice in my heart say, “You do not need to go anywhere or do anything, your father in

Heaven will take care of all your needs.” This made me very excited for a moment. But then I thought that it might just be wishful thinking. Maybe I did not really hear God speak. So I went to the market and went to the very entrance of the temple, and I heard the voice again. I chose to believe God and did not seek the “good luck” of tamboon.

After talking with Dow I recognized that both these events were very similar on the outside but very different on the inside. On the outside they both look to the observer's eye as possibly syncretistic. But on the inside, where it matters, only the second event was syncretistic. I trusted something other than God my Father for my well-being.

On Saturday evening, my sister-in-law called and told me that a man had entered her shop, bought all of the product in the shop and also bought all the inventory in her warehouse. She was very excited that God heard and answered my prayers. f

I RECOGNIZED THAT BOTH THESE EVENTS WERE VERY SIMILAR ON THE OUTSIDE BUT VERY DIFFERENT ON THE INSIDE. ON THE OUTSIDE THEY BOTH LOOK TO THE OBSERVER'S EYE AS POSSIBLY SYNCRETISTIC. BUT ON THE INSIDE, WHERE IT MATTERS, ONLY THE SECOND EVENT WAS SYNCRETISTIC. I TRUSTED SOMETHING OTHER THAN GOD MY FATHER FOR MY WELLBEING.



Possible Pitfalls

of Jesus Movements:

Lessons from History

REBECCA LEWIS

The Jesus movements that are springing up these days in non-Christian religious contexts seem radically different from anything we have seen before. The questions many are asking are, *Will these movements result in syncretistic or heretical faiths? Will they connect people to God through Christ, or will they keep people from eternal life?*

One way to foresee possible pitfalls in these movements is to look at similar movements in history. The first movements to Christ began inside well-developed religious contexts before the emergence of Christianity as a distinct religious system. The Jewish Jesus movement, called “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22), grew inside the Jewish religious structure, and these believers continued to follow the extensive religious behavioral and dietary laws of their religious culture. The Greco-Roman Jesus movement, whose followers were called “Christians” (from the Greek word for the Messiah: “Christ”), spread within a religious context with a highly defined pantheon of gods (not unlike Hinduism) and respected tradition of philosophical literature. Some believe the Apostle Thomas started a Jesus movement in India, where the believers were called Nazraani Margam (Nazraani meant Nazarenes in Syriac, and Margam means “the Way” in Malayalam), which developed into what is called the Mar Thoma church today.

In the 4th century, the Emperor Constantine’s sponsorship accelerated the development of the Greco-Roman Jesus movement into a religious institution, complete with Greek and Roman cultural, religious,

and political forms, such as icons, solar/lunar holy days, and the diocese structure. Other contemporary Jesus movements were either isolated from this process or chose to reject the political, ecclesiastical, theological and creedal control of the developing Papal Christianity.

These, and many later movements, show us the potential pitfalls associated with movements to Jesus that either are isolated from, or refuse to be associated with, the main forms of Christianity during their times.

Potential Pitfall #1: Inadequate discipleship or insufficient access to Scripture can lead to syncretism.

Examples from history: The Greek movement to Jesus had the Old Testament in Greek, the Septuagint, and many believers were literate in the Greek language, a huge advantage when discipling with written text. However, the Greek believers, for many reasons, did not enter into the Jewish believers’ religious stream or take advantage of well-developed Jewish training and synagogue structures. Paul’s letters reveal the problems that faced the Greek believers as they tried to live out their faith in an entrenched pagan religious context. The New Testament books became the foundational discipling documents of the rapidly multiplying fellowships of the 2nd century, and itinerant multi-ethnic apostolic teams helped to spread the message while empowering local elders and local believers that the Lord was gifting as pastors, teachers, administrators, and so on.

Did this model prevent syncretism and heresy from happening? No. Some groups in the Greek Jesus movement were syncretistic, combining their faith with Greek philosophies which elevated asceticism and

Rebecca Lewis studied Christian history at both the BA and MA level, and taught it at the university level for over 10 years. She also has 30 years of experience with the Muslim context and currently lives in India.



celibacy on the one hand, or hedonism and promiscuity on the other. Other groups rejected all things Jewish, even the Old Testament. Yet other groups combined their faith with occult or mystery religions or Gnosticism. Even those groups which became the orthodox mainstream adopted Greek religious practices such as the use of icons and philosophical disputation, elements that were not present in the simultaneous Jewish Jesus movement. As heresies arose in this movement, they were fought off by well-disciplined Greek believers from inside the Jesus movement, not by Jewish believers, who were busy with other problems in their own movement. In this way, they maintained the integrity of the central message for three centuries in an environment with entrenched religious beliefs and hostile political forces.

What lessons can we learn from this? It is highly unlikely that movements can completely avoid syncretism, but correction can come when local apostles, leaders and apologists extensively study the Word in their heart language.

But what about movements to Jesus in non-Christian religious contexts—those that have no effective and accurate Bible translation into their language, those that are illiterate, or those making their own translations without adequate linguistic, theological and exegetical understanding? Such movements often come up with new or variant understandings, in some cases touching on important theological issues.

Examples from history: As the Gospel expanded beyond the Greek-speaking world, having the Bible only in Greek became inadequate. Early translations in other languages were the Syriac/Aramaic translation of the Bible (old Syriac and the Peshitta), Latin (Old Latin and the Vulgate), Armenian, Georgian, Nubian, Ethiopian and Egyptian Coptic translations. These early translations were done by people fluent in the local language and culture, as well as Greek language and culture.

Because these cultures were significantly different from the contexts that the Greek New Testament was revealed in, theological differences arose almost immediately. Most problematic was different understandings from the Greek view concerning the nature of Christ, with the Armenian, Ethiopian Coptic believers concluding Jesus had only a divine nature (the Monophysite position) and the Syrian-Nestorian believers concluding He had two natures, one human/non-eternal and one divine/eternal. This latter perspective led the Nestorians to conclude that Mary could not be the “mother of God” as the Greek councils insisted, but only the “mother of Christ,” a position that led to them being dubbed heretics by the Roman church.

History shows that translating the Scripture into

various languages inevitably ignites theological debates, no matter how carefully it is done. Even when a word or phrase, such as “Son of God,” is translated in a word-for-word fashion, it can have significantly different connotations or meanings in different languages. Some translators try to add footnotes to words or phrases that help maintain the original meaning.

Some may conclude that it is safer not to translate Scripture, and simply rely on the Greek, or on existing translations. This choice can be even more problematic. When Islam arose, the communities that had the Bible in their own languages proved largely immune to its advance, and many of them continue to exist to this day. When the Nestorians evangelized distant lands, they took the Syriac Bible with them; however, only bits and pieces, plus some liturgy and hymns, were translated into local languages. By the time Islamic, Turkic and Mongol invasions cut off communications with Western missionaries, believers in these Persian, Turkish, or Mongol people groups were still worshipping in Syriac, which most did not understand. Likewise, those communities that only had the Bible in Greek or Latin, but no local translations, had a faith that was not deeply rooted and indigenous. During the Islamic conquest of North Africa, it seems that the Latin and Greek believers fled to other regions, and the local people groups with no scriptures of their own abandoned their faith.

What lessons can we learn from this? It is crucial that all Jesus movements have an effective and accurate translation in their local language, which is ideally done by bi-lingual, bi-cultural people.

Potential Pitfall #2: Attachment to community customs and identity can lead to syncretism and/or conflict with community leaders.

Believers in Jesus movements maintain their community identity and often continue to follow the same customs as their family. They are not like “secret believers,” who have told neither friends nor family of their faith. Such secrecy does not lead to movements. Nevertheless, by continuing local customs, many of which are religious to some extent, these Jesus movement believers might revert to relying on legalistic or occult religious practices or local gods to help them, rather than maintaining trust in Jesus alone. In addition, it is possible that leaders in the community could object to these believers reinterpreting or partially fulfilling local customs, and eventually initiate persecution of them.

Examples from history: In any culture, believers are subject to syncretism to the extent that they continue

to live by the worldview, not merely the religious practices, of those around them. However, throughout history, believers have managed to continue to participate in the celebrations or even religious practices of their culture while transforming their meanings.

For example, the Council of Nicea determined that the resurrection of Jesus Christ should be celebrated at the time of the spring equinox, which fell at the same time as the pagan fertility feasts of the goddess Eostre (Easter). Even today we still have vestiges of these pagan religious rites in the form of painted eggs and Easter bunnies, which were associated with fertility. However, most believers do not misunderstand the meaning of the resurrection because of these pagan religious accretions, nor is the goddess of fertility still worshipped by nominal Christians and secularists. But it is likely that confusion existed for some time between the pagan religious meaning of the festival and the newly instituted celebration of the resurrection, because initially the majority of the population was still pagan. There are many other historical examples of the Church continuing local religious and other practices while infusing new meaning into them, with the old meanings eventually disappearing.

Nonetheless, early Jesus movements did suffer persecution from their own communities in spite of their adherence to most local customs. Many Jewish believers, like Stephen and James, were martyred by fellow Jews in spite of keeping the Law and other Jewish customs. Non-Jewish followers of Jesus also faced persecution for refusing to worship the Emperor. Jewish believers in Jesus, like other Jews, were exempt from this requirement. The Romans accepted Judaism as the religion of a distinct ethnic group, encompassing all Jewish sects. But followers of Jesus who were not ethnically Jewish or officially converts did not enjoy the Jewish exemption. So Paul notes in Galatians 6:12 that some Greek believers were being persuaded to convert to being Jewish believers-in-Christ to avoid persecution. Today, Jesus movements that stay inside their socio-religious contexts similarly experience waves of persecution. So believers may be tempted to leave their communities, and even move to other countries, to avoid persecution.

What lessons can we learn from this? When believers use local cultural practices and even religious rites, but infuse them with new meanings, they are largely successful in bringing godly transformation to their communities. However, these believers may be persecuted by others from their local communities for the changes they are introducing.

Potential Pitfall #3: Believers can be pressured to act against their conscience.

When believers from different areas end up with different practices, they can find it difficult to accept each other. Furthermore, in today's world with significant diasporas and easy travel, people from the same people group can come to Christ in different ways and develop a variety of expressions of their faith. John Travis tried to express some of this complexity in his C1-C6 scale describing varieties of practice and identity of Christ-centered Communities from Muslim contexts.

The biggest problems arise when those expressing their faith in one form try to force or pressure other believers from similar backgrounds to conform to their own version of the faith. This pressure goes both ways. Sometimes those who have rejected all religious forms of their birth culture insist that all believers must do the same. On the other hand, we sometimes find that believers who express their faith through many of their birth religious forms, and maintain their birth identity, try to force all believers to do the same.

Examples from history: When Jesus movements in different areas maintain local practices, and these movements come into contact with believers from other backgrounds, their practices (such as forms of prayer and special holidays and feasts) can be unacceptable to each other. The historical record shows that each group tends to condemn the other group or try to get them to conform to their own practices. For example, in the third century, after the Greek movement to Christ had gained a large following, it began to condemn those who were in the Jewish movement to Christ, even though the original disciples had like them remained fully practicing Jews. In the 7th century, after 200 years of isolation, the spreading independent Celtic movement to Christ started by St. Patrick was forced by the Roman church to change the way they did their Masses, celebrated Easter, and cut their hair in order to be acceptable. Likewise, the Mar Thoma believers in India survived many centuries using the Aramaic/Syriac hand-copied scriptures, only to be condemned by the Portuguese Catholics arriving in 1500 because they refused to accept Romanization, which included switching to Latin, celibacy of priests, transubstantiation, prayer to Mary and to saints, use of icons, and other practices the Mar Thoma church had never embraced. Thankfully, the idea that all believers must agree on external rites and holidays has been put to rest; however, believers still have the tendency to judge which religious forms are acceptable based on their own cultural expectations rather than the Bible.



Paul faced a situation where some Jewish followers of Jesus were putting intense pressure on Greek believers to leave their pagan socio-religious communities, and join the kosher, circumcised, Law-keeping community of Jewish believers. Paul strongly condemned this practice.

But Paul also dealt with Greek believers who were continuing to eat meat in idol temples (1 Cor 7:10), who were in conflict with other Greek believers who refused to eat meat that might even possibly have been sacrificed to an idol. This situation was a conflict between believers coming from the same religious and ethnic background. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul defends both positions as valid, but makes clear that each believer should be careful to follow their own conscience, while taking into consideration the consciences of other believers. Paul says a believer should not force other believers to act against their consciences nor behave in their presence in ways that wounds their consciences.

What lessons can we learn from this? Believers should not force other believers to act contrary to the dictates of conscience, whether those believers are from other socio-religious contexts or whether they are from the same context. The New Testament makes clear what kind of moral and theological issues are not merely matters of conscience and individual conviction.

Potential Pitfall #4: Christian leaders can undermine a movement, even unintentionally.

There are two main ways that leaders of institutional Christianity have historically undermined Jesus movements happening in other socio-religious contexts. The most common way is that they have become alarmed by what is happening, causing such an uproar that the governments in those areas ban the movements and any Scriptures they may have translated. The second way happens unintentionally when movements to Jesus spring up in countries with significant antipathy toward self-identified “Christian” nations. If leaders in these Christian nations put pressure on rival governments to treat followers of Jesus in their territories kindly, implying “they belong to us” even when the Jesus movements are insisting they are not, persecution or massacres may follow.

Examples from history: There were mass movements to Jesus in northern Europe during the time of Constantine. However, their Arian theology was deficient. Unfortunately, Christian leaders did not respond to these movements with concern, praying for northern Europeans and working to see that they had scriptures they could read. Instead, they

convened church councils that condemned them and backed harsh measures, even military violence, against them. This was the pattern for hundreds of years in Europe, where those coming to Christ in mass movements (including many we would not consider heretical, such as Protestant groups) were lined up against certain church criteria and blacklisted or killed if they fell short.

This happened outside of Europe as well. Unfortunately, Christian leaders persuaded even non-believing rulers to stamp out Jesus movements. In Japan in the 16th century, hundreds of thousands of Japanese came to faith through the ministry of Francis Xavier and the Jesuits, who used the Japanese name for the Most High God in their outreach. When Dutch Protestants arrived, they protested so vehemently against such practices that the Japanese emperor banned all Jesus movements, and thousands were killed, dispossessed or subjected to government torture until they recanted. The survivors of the movement, who became known as Kirishitan (“hidden Christians”), chose to practice their faith secretly, using only Buddhist forms and having only oral Latin scriptures. Over time they added their martyred saints to their objects of worship. In China a similar Chinese movement to Christ emerged, which the Pope opposed after a “Chinese Rites” controversy in the early 18th century, in which critics labeled their use of Chinese religious rites as syncretistic. After the Papal Bull was issued, the Chinese Emperor in turn sent out edicts banning the Christian faith in China. The Catholic Church reversed their decision on this in 1939 after a full investigation!

The second way of undermining movements was modeled by the Emperor Constantine, infamous for getting a Jesus movement massacred because he approved of it. Though Rome and Persia had been enemies for centuries, when Constantine decided to favor the followers of Christ that had been formerly persecuted by his government, he sent a polite letter to the rulers of Persia encouraging them to do the same. The Persian authorities feared that believers in Jesus would now become a fifth column favorable to Rome, especially if they came under the developing papal structure. So they began a massacre of Jesus followers in which over 50,000 believers ultimately perished.

What is the lesson to be learned from this? Attempts to judge and control Jesus movements by Christian leaders residing in other cultures have almost without exception been ill-informed and have had disastrous consequences. This has been the case whether leaders decided to condemn the movements or decided to express approval in a way that implied ownership of or authority over them.†



Godly Disagreement in an Age of Slander

Dave Datema, General Director, Frontier Mission Fellowship

One of my favorite books published by William Carey Library is the 1977 release of *The Night Cometh: Two Wealthy Evangelicals Face the Nation*. It was written by Rebecca Winter (now Lewis) and tells the fascinating story of Lewis and Arthur Tappan, evangelical millionaires of early nineteenth-century America who were tremendous social reformers.

Those interested in the theme of this issue of *MF* would do well to read this short book. Not only will you be amazed by these two men and their associates, you will also learn a lot about how sincere believers should disagree. Christian and mission history bursts with disagreement, dissension and difficulty that occur when believers come to different conclusions on an issue. While the focus is usually on what the disagreement is, or why it exists in the first place, little is said about the all-important how disagreements should be handled. The Tappan brothers have something to say to us in 2011 about the way we engage each other with relation to the legitimacy of “Jesus movements.”

One of the Tappans’ biggest reform issues was abolition. Yet they had very serious disagreements with, you guessed it, other abolitionists. On the one hand, they had a problem with William Lloyd Garrison, a popular abolitionist of the time. Though they worked hand-in-hand at first, divisions rose when Garrison became increasingly denunciatory and accusatory toward slave-holders. The Tappans did not feel this approach was best, and they ended their close working relationship with Garrison. On the other hand, they also had a problem with the great revivalist/reformer Charles Grandison Finney, also an abolitionist. Finney was as fearful of the Tappans’ approach

as the Tappans were of Garrison. Finney was convinced that conversion to Christ must happen first before any headway toward abolition could be realized. The Tappans in turn considered Finney a traitor to the abolitionist cause because he refused to pray for abolition in public.

What we are experiencing today in the back-and-forth, at times vitriolic, dialogue between those who favor highly contextualized “insider” or Jesus movements and those who do not is nothing new. Yet what I find most gratifying is how these men of long ago, men of great zeal, opinion and conviction, dealt with others in the same cause whose opinions and convictions they could not tolerate. Please allow me to quote extensively from the book to give you a feel for the high level of appreciation, respect and honor they displayed toward those with whom they disagreed.

In 1870, after the Civil War and nearly forty years after they had first met, Garrison wrote to Lewis Tappan: ‘Be assured, I shall always very gratefully remember your early friendship, your generous hospitality, your courageous and whole-souled espousal of the Anti-Slavery cause, in the midst of trials serenely met and nobly endured. Whatever may have been the unhappy causes which, at a later period, led to our estrangement, or at least to our different methods of acting for the deliverance of the oppressed, nothing shall blind me to the fact that, during the long protracted struggle, no one evinced greater zeal, persistency, and disinterestedness [unselfishness] in resting the immediate and total abolition of slavery than yourself’... (73) Lewis later affirms in his journal, ‘Differing from brother Finney as I do on the slavery question, I love him for his many excellent qualities.’ In the midst of this conflict Arthur continued to support Oberlin (the college Finney founded), and later Lewis encouraged and aided Finney in the writing and publication of his autobiography... (74)

In 1842 he (Lewis) wrote to his orthodox brother John, after some conflict over anti-slavery procedures: ‘... let us watch over our hearts, and pray much that they may be sanctified, and that all our faculties of mind and body may be consecrated to the Lord. So far as we can, let us think alike and act alike, but where we do not do this let us not slander one another nor advise one another, and most of all do not let us misrepresent the gospel of our divine Lord. If we have not his spirit we are none of his.’ (72)

While I’m not privy to all the correspondence that transpires between proponents and opponents of insider thinking (public or private), I would be surprised if the above sentiments are often expressed. Unfortunately, what the Tappans had with those with whom they disagreed is something often missing in present-day missiological divides: relationship. Instead, we are writing articles like I’m doing right now. We are focused on principles, not people; positions, not relationships. And we are the poorer for it.

In his book, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, Edwin Friedman writes, “The differences in any system, whether it is a marriage or a legislature, rarely determine the nature or the intensity of the differing. Whether one is baking a cake or examining an institutional mix, the interaction of ingredients is almost always a function of the temperature and pressure of the environment. When troubled couples, for example, make a breakthrough, often the issues that they differed over have not gone away, but the two sides have become less reactive to the differences” (39). How we disagree affects the “environment.” Perhaps if we relate more, we will react less and both come to a greater understanding of God’s purposes. ¶

Church Planting MOVEMENTS

FROM ONE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Robby Butler

Why don't most ministries produce the kind of fruit evident in the book of Acts? How is it that "all of Asia" heard the word of the Lord in just two years (Acts 19:8–12)? How can the house church movement in the West complement effective congregational models like that of Real Life Ministries (featured in the Jan-Feb 2011 issue of *MF*)?

A network of leaders in India offers fresh insight through their integration of knowledge and power.

As in the West, "post-harvest loss" is still a major issue, and some controversy surrounds these movements. But we can still learn a great deal from the fruit our Indian brothers and sisters are seeing as they seek to multiply NT churches with spiritual power, rescuing Christ's *Ekklesia*¹ from the barrenness and impotence common in today's "church."

While the Mar/Apr 2011 *MF* on Church Planting Movements (CPMs) was being finished, Gene Davis² invited me to join him in meeting CPM leaders in India. Thus I was privileged to spend four weeks interviewing and learning directly from leaders of rapidly growing CPMs. These leaders, along with their expatriate colleagues, provided invaluable feedback throughout the development of this article.

One highlight of my trip was the *Global Summit on Market/Workplace Ministries*³ in Bangalore, where 160 leaders from 21 countries met to learn how to develop self-funding CPMs in their own lands.

Field Insights into Luke 10

(This analysis of this chapter isn't uniquely Indian; Rick Warren recently offered similar observations on this passage.⁴)

Send with Power (v. 1, 19)

Empower all disciples to do all that we are to do: proclaim the Kingdom, perform miracles, baptize new

believers, and serve the Lord's table. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21).

Work with Others (v. 1)

George Patterson and Galen Currah list ten reasons to work in pairs.⁵ Here are three:

- Traveling in groups is consistent NT practice.
- There is more power when a group agrees in prayer.
- Groups bring a wider variety of giftings.

Prepare by Prayerwalking⁶ (v. 1–2)

Summit testimonies particularly emphasized prayerwalking—claiming the land, listening together to God's Spirit, and agreeing on-site with Jesus' plans.

In one instance, prayer was focused on just one of two adjacent, identical apartment buildings. In subsequent outreach, 75% of the residents in this building welcomed visitors offering to tell them about Jesus, compared with only 25% in the other building.

Beg God to Thrust Out Workers (v. 2)

Jesus highlighted the vast need and commanded his disciples to *beg* for more workers. Then He sent them to look for "persons of peace" (v. 5–6). As many have noted, "The resources [laborers] are in the harvest."

Be Wise Amidst Opposition (v. 3)

Those going to new villages to preach and hand out tracts used to frequently be beaten up and rejected. Since learning to prayerwalk until the "person of peace" is revealed, they seldom have this experience.

Go Empty-Handed (v. 3–4)

The resources we bring may attract a crowd, but they can also inhibit local ownership and multiplication. God's power is most evident when ours is absent. Our testimony is strengthened when God works ahead of us and provides through those who receive us.

Seek out the Person of Peace (v. 5–6)

The hospitable homeowner will generally be a person of local credibility, whose acceptance will encourage others to respond positively as well.

Establish Relationships (v. 7–8)

First enjoy fellowship with the person of peace, staying in one place and relaxing over food, eating and drinking "whatever is set before you."



Robby Butler served at the U.S. Center for World Mission from 1980 to 2004. He now serves as a consultant to church and mission leaders, and an occasional writer for Mission Frontiers.

Show God's Care and Power (v. 8)

My Indian friends have great insight into the essential components of effectual prayer for healing—holiness, faith, the Spirit's leading, laying on hands, etc. (God began answering my own prayers for others' healing in India in a way I had not previously experienced.)

Proclaim God's Kingdom (v. 9)

Once the person of peace has experienced God's Kingdom through relationship with someone who demonstrates God's power, they will want to learn more and be trained to reproduce.

Continue Mentoring (v. 17–24)

When the 72 reported back, Jesus redirected their priorities. Church reproduction stalls without ongoing mentoring which generates plans, and teaching to support those plans.

Rapidly Multiplying Churches commonly...

- cultivate *scattering* to family, friends and workplace (for multiplication), as well as gathering (for edification). *Scattering* maximizes the church's *local engagement*.
- equip *reproductive disciplers* rather than entertaining passive church audiences. This leads the church to *rapid multiplication*.
- focus on the *Great Commission*, and not just local needs. This makes the church *obedient*.
- emphasize both *Word* and *power* (instead of just right doctrine), so that disciples proclaim God's Kingdom effectively. *Power* confirms the *truth* of God's *Word*.
- prioritize *going* where Christ is not yet named. This leads the church to disciple *all peoples* in *every place*.

Key Principles

Obedience Begins with Listening

Tarry daily with God as before the king of highest authority—until He releases you. Wait for guidance and power, then obey in faith. Resist the urge to rush into self-assigned activity, or to ask God to bless plans made solely on the basis of available resources.

Goals Multiply Fruit

Prayerfully develop increasing annual goals for baptisms, disciples baptizing others, self-funding, giving, etc. Measurable goals fuel multiplication, and deliver us from “bump into” guidance.

Baptism Initiates Laborers

Emphasize obedience to all of Christ's seven basic commands, starting with baptism as the first step toward teaching others to obey.

Swift Obedience Fuels Rapid Growth

Baptize new believers immediately (even if with just a bucket until immersion is practical), then urge immediate obedience in witnessing to and baptizing others.

Multiplication Involves Everyone

Teach everyone, including women and children, to reproduce, and give them the same authority to make disciples which Christ has given you—to go, to baptize, and to teach others to obey.

Ministry Should Happen Everywhere

Coach believers to start discipling others wherever they gather—in their own home and workplace, and in the homes of family, friends and co-workers.

Local Witness Deepens Consecration

Witness first to family and friends, even when it seems easier to witness to strangers who don't know your faults. Witnessing to family and friends deepens God's work in your own life. You are also usually the best person to win and disciple those closest to you.

Surprises

No Buildings, Payrolls, or Labels

Gary Edmonds⁷ observes, “The naive manner in which US funds are deployed globally is not helping the global church. We have created an international welfare system that undermines the faith and interdependence of the people of God.” These bivocational leaders have broken this cycle by recognizing labels, buildings and salaries as an impediment to church multiplication. The financial assistance they accept is for travel, training and literature to accelerate the spread of CPMs throughout India, and to other lands.

Christ Only Has One Body

The NT refers only to one “church” in each locality (believers meeting in homes *and* more public venues), with traveling elders sharing responsibility for both the saved and the unsaved in their locality. God's Kingdom suffers when “church” buildings come to represent divisions between believers. All who seek together to obey Jesus are *His* Church.

Buildings May Slow Multiplication

Jesus' Church is found wherever a few believers gather in His name to obey all that the NT specifies (especially commands that cannot be fulfilled by a lone individual). Multiplication stalls when “church” comes to revolve around a building or a person, to which we go and bring others. Jesus didn't tell us to build buildings, but He did command us to disciple all nations. When we focus on going and making obedient disciples (our job), Jesus builds His *Ekklesia* (His job).

These Movements Reduce Persecution

As God is bringing large numbers of Hindus and Muslims to Himself in these movements, obedience to all of Christ's seven main commands is encour-

aged in ways that respect the birth communities of the new believers.⁸ This reduces the frequency with which “conversions to Christianity” trigger intense persecution which hinders others from responding.

Jesus’ Presence Accompanies Obedience

Reminiscent of William Carey’s *Enquiry*, one rapid movement among Muslims holds that Jesus’ promise to be with us depends on our obedience to Mt 28:19–20.

The Whole Church Must Be Engaged

The recognition and valuation of women—in anything and everything that is done by the men, from apostolic leadership to the baptism of new believers—is vital to the rapid spread of Jesus’ Kingdom in India and many other nations around the world.

Americans Often Aren’t Learners

Many Americans visiting India are so eager to teach that they miss the opportunity to learn from leaders who are seeing greater fruit than they are. These humble Indian leaders generally defer to the Americans’ agenda until invited to share what God has taught them.

Rapid Growth Generates Suspicion

The faster these movements grow, the more difficult they become to track—especially if they lack buildings and other obvious Christian trappings. And David Garrison tells me the leaders I met are leading “some of the biggest harvests in the world today.”⁹ Professional researchers I met in India are developing new methods of verifying and correcting the growth estimates. Yet any reporting of big numbers, especially from India, prompts some to simply dismiss these movements as wild exaggeration. Until research can verify the numbers involved, let us test and learn from these movements, and rejoice in growth that outpaces our ability to measure it!

Adoption is Better than Orphanages

These leaders are increasingly opening their homes to needy children, and their example could lead toward the placement of all needy children in families. David Platt’s church (see the Nov/Dec 2000 *MF*) has modeled a similar dynamic in providing homes for all the foster children in their county.¹⁰ May God do something new in our day for neglected children!

Pentecost Celebrations Fuel Growth

This network of CPMs has seen tremendous growth as individual leaders disciple throughout the year toward an annual goal of 3,000 or more immersions on or by Pentecost.¹¹ This vision is now spreading into the 10/40 Window.

From Driven to Disciplemaker

The effective Indian leaders I met have abandoned the “driven-ness” common among Christian workers

to become relaxed, relational disciplemakers. Instead of living to “prove” their worthiness and need for a building and a salary, these leaders are becoming bivocational and discipling just a few, who disciple others, in more generations than they can track. The result is a more effective testimony to the abundant life Christ offers now:

- One man has a disciple in each of twelve districts of his state. Each month they all meet in a different district for five days of prayer and planning, learning from and supporting one another in their oversight of rapidly multiplying house churches. Together they estimate that 100,000 people have been baptized through this network, and they expect to see half of their state baptized over the next few years!
- Another pastored seven small churches for 14 years, each day of the week spent serving a different church. A year ago he quit pastoring to focus on making reproducing disciplers through house churches. Now he estimates 40,000 baptisms in one year through the generations of disciplers within his network.
- A third once worked 16-hour days overseeing a region for his denomination. After learning to multiply disciples through house churches, he encouraged 100 fellow pastors to start house churches; 619 were started in three months’ time! Now he estimates that more than 100,000 have been baptized through his generations of disciples, while he also enjoys fruitful work with his wife and children among their high-caste, land-owning Hindu neighbors.

Major Influences

Dr. Victor Choudhrie, a Senior Fellow of both the American and British College of Surgeons, resigned in 1992 as Director of Christian Medical College to take up full-time training of house church leaders.

Choudhrie’s parents were baptized by Dr. Donald McGavran, who later founded the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary.

However where the *growth* McGavran promoted became inaccurately associated with increasing the size and number of churches dependent on buildings and salaried pastors (and producing mostly “spectator” Christians), Choudhrie pursued *multiplication* of more reproducible churches, with bivocational pastors and in which everyone is equipped and expected to engage in ministry.

Gene Davis, the American with whom I traveled in India, has assisted Indian leaders for decades in applying George Patterson’s principles of *Obedience Oriented Discipleship*. (This is central to *Perspectives* lesson 13—*Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches*.¹²)

Neil Gamble¹³ is another American who spent more than half his time over nine years training house church leaders in India, and has worked closely with Choudhrie.

Choudhrie's *Starfish Alliance*¹⁴ parallels the *Starfish Vision* and *Starfish Manifesto*¹⁵ of Wolfgang Simson, who had previously worked with Jim Montgomery in DAWN Ministries.¹⁶ In isolation from one another, God led Choudhrie and Simson simultaneously and independently to very similar conclusions and appreciation for the prophetic biology of the starfish.

Next Steps

In light of unfolding world events, Dr. Choudhrie has scheduled another *Summit* this October specifically for those working among Muslims. Practitioners from any country are welcome, but help is needed to underwrite travel costs for those coming from Asia and the Middle East. One Campus Crusade worker in Kazakhstan, who brought a Kazakh leader to the Summit in Bangalore, wants to bring to this next training friends and mission workers from "Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and maybe Turkmenistan too."

Interested in attending, praying or assisting? Contact me through my "author" link at the *MF* website.

Digging Deeper

Throughout this article I have footnoted links for further study and exploration.

George Patterson and Galen Currah's materials are helpful for learning to multiply.¹⁷ To address concerns, study Currah's *Five Fears of Pastors*.¹⁸ To learn spiritual power, work alongside those who demonstrate it. Here is one suggestion from the field:

- Help each believer plan and make five "gospel contacts" with each family member, even at the risk of persecution. Pray and practice with them their message, first approach, and appeal for faith.
- Expect God to work as you lay on hands and pray together in Jesus' name for healing and other needs of those with whom you share.
- Aggressively promote "persons of peace" to become disciples, baptizers and equippers.

Regarding the model of Acts 19:8–12, through which "the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (Acts 19:20), Choudhrie adds this insight:

Paul was in Ephesus for three years, of which he spent a fruitless three months in the synagogue; one year and nine months in the Hall. The NT does not report what he did in the third year, but it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that he visited and strengthened his

disciples all over Asia. No wonder he had little post-harvest loss.

The hall of Tyrannus was situated in the middle of the fish market. (My wife recently visited the site.) Paul made tents inside the hall, as he taught to an audience who were his clients—itinerant people who needed the tents, such as the shepherds, the fishermen and petty business people who itinerated.

This captive audience not only heard teaching with their ears but also saw mighty miracles with their own eyes. This mix triggered the CPM, simply because his disciples would go and share the radical teachings as well as describe and perform signs wherever they went. (Talk to any one of our grassroots workers and he or she will tell you the latest miracle that has happened to accelerate growth.)

There are more dynamics for the success of this model: In the synagogue Paul was dealing with Jews only, once a week on the Sabbath. In the marketplace, he interacted with both Jews and Gentiles, and on a daily basis.

It does not matter how well crafted your discipleship materials are, the essential ingredients are:

- supernatural acts that catalyze CPMs, and
- continuous mentoring and monitoring of disciples to minimize post-harvest loss.

Without both components in place, any model will falter. ^f

¹ See *God's Government and the Church in the Modern West* at TellAsia.org/media/resources.php

² Gene Davis is a former board member of the U.S. Center for World Mission who has worked tirelessly to build a movement to reach the Banjara (gypsies) of India. He has spent decades serving Indian leaders in developing CPMs.

³ GlobalMarketSummit.com. The title reflects the self-supporting nature of this work, and the recognition of the marketplace as an important place of ministry.

⁴ Blog.GodReports.com/2011/03/rick-warren-issues-call-for-greater-collaboration-partnering-in-missions

⁵ Paul-Timothy.net/mentornet/pdf/mentornet38.pdf

⁶ See *Prayerwalking* by Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick (Creation House, 2003).

⁷ Gary Edmonds is former Secretary-General of the World Evangelical Alliance, and now President of Breakthrough Partners.

⁸ cf the addendum to Kevin Higgin's article in the Jan/Feb *MF* MissionFrontiers.org/issue/article/discipling-the-nations.

⁹ David Garrison is the author of *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*, Wigtake Resources (January 2003), and guest editor of the Mar/Apr 2011 *MF* on Church Planting Movements.

¹⁰ News.SBTS.edu/2010/02/27/afi-2010-live-blog-david-platt

¹¹ Find the web-exclusive "Pentecost as a Global Day to Harvest Souls" at MissionFrontiers.org.

¹² Paul-Timothy.net/pages/perspectives/lesson_13_rev.pdf

¹³ FathersHand.net

¹⁴ 4shared.com/document/UreR1atk

¹⁵ en.StarfishPortal.net/downloads

¹⁶ DawnMinistries.org

¹⁷ Paul-Timothy.net. See also Patrick O'Connor's *Reproducible Pastoral Training: Church Planting Guidelines from the Teachings of George Patterson* (William Carey Library, 2006).

¹⁸ Currah.info/pages/dis744/five_fears_of_pastors.pdf



RAISING LOCAL RESOURCES

The Tragedy in Japan – A Personal Statement

Glenn Schwartz, Executive Director, World Mission Associates

I was young and single when I went to Africa for the first time as a missionary volunteer. After spending two years there (1961-63), one thing became clear to me: I did not want to return to Africa as a missionary. Instead, I asked our mission to be assigned to Japan. However, my request was not accepted; so in 1966 I ended up returning to Africa and have been serving there off and on for the past 50 years.

What was behind my desire to be assigned to Japan as a missionary? In short, my desire was to be a church-planting missionary, introducing people to Christ. During my two years in Africa I saw that project after project kept missionaries and church leaders preoccupied. Many of those projects were only marginally related to building the church and could be sustained only by outside funding and outside people.

The recent earthquake in Japan reminded me of my earlier desire to serve Christ there. As I watched television reports of the devastation following the recent earthquake and tsunami, photos would sometimes show a Japanese person looking out over a devastated city where all the houses had been reduced to piles of broken sticks as far as the eye could see. Sometimes the reporter would ask a man or woman what they were doing, and with tears in their eyes they would reply that they were searching for a lost member of their family.

These scenes brought tears to my eyes as I realized that many others, like that man who had lost so much, do not have a relationship with our Lord to help see them through such a crisis. I tried to think how I would feel if I were in his place and had no knowledge of God's love to sustain me when my world fell apart in such a devastating way.

So, how do I justify my returning to Africa so many times over the past 50 years? After all, I have been working in places where people have heard the Christian gospel over and over again, yet some of them are still unable to sustain themselves and their churches without outside assistance. In reality, I do not regret my decision to spend my life on behalf of the African church, because I am convinced it is a sleeping giant that must be awakened for God's service. But, for the past 50 years, I have been working largely among the "reached," knowing that they have received a disproportionate amount of the world's missionary resources while millions in Japan and elsewhere are still waiting to hear the gospel in their own language for the very first time. What comes to mind are the words of the Apostle Paul, who said that his desire was to preach the gospel where it had not been preached (Romans 15:20).

That image of a Japanese person looking for a lost relative breaks my heart. How Christ's heart must ache as He looks at so many in this world who have not yet made a commitment to Him! This tragedy reminds me that many Japanese have either not heard—or have resisted—the Good News that they could find the Rock of Salvation—Jesus—in times like these.

As long as I have health and strength, I will continue to go back to Africa since that is my calling. But I will deliver the message God has given me with increasing determination, reminding my African brothers and sisters that they can mobilize their own resources—both people and funds—so the gospel can be preached where it has not yet been preached. Africans are welcome in Asia. But, just like the rest of us, they need to

be awakened, trained and mobilized to participate in the harvest.

I have a further word for those who are church and mission leaders or those who serve on church mission committees. The tragedy in Japan should be a reminder to all who have missionary resources - anywhere in the world - to take a serious look at how those resources are being used. Are those resources being used to perpetuate unhealthy dependency in places where the gospel has already been preached? If that is the case, are they willing to redirect those resources to places where so many have yet to hear the invitation to become part of God's family through faith in Christ? Remember, the justification to go where the gospel has already been preached is for the purpose of mobilizing the Church for God's kingdom.

I do not regret going back to Africa to fulfill the ministry of mobilization that God has given me. He knows my heart, and He knows that I do not pine for what might have been. But Japan's current heartbreak is a reminder that many in our world still need the Savior and that without Him they are deprived of the eternity which is so much a part of the hope that lies within us as believers (1 Peter 3:15).^f

Glenn Schwartz is author of *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement*. This book along with other materials can be ordered on the World Mission Associates' website at www.wmausa.org. He can be reached by e-mail at glennschwartz@wmausa.org.

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A rosebud has been used to symbolize the life of the girl child. Rosebuds can be broken and trampled or allowed to bloom into beautiful roses. The challenge for us is to learn how we can help girls to bloom in spite of the obstacles, empowering them to embrace their full, God-given potential.



SHAPING THE FUTURE PHYLLIS KILBOURN, EDITOR

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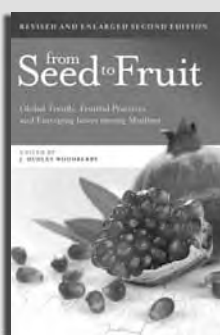
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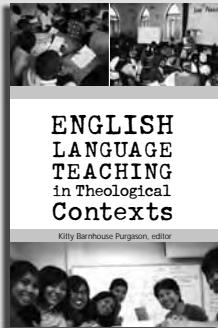
The Global Trends Research Group has continued to update the demographic materials on Muslim people groups, their access to Christian witness, and when and how Christian groups covenant to provide meaningful access. This is included in the updated CD-ROM that accompanies the new edition.

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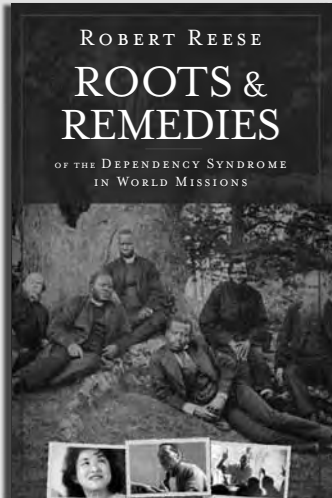
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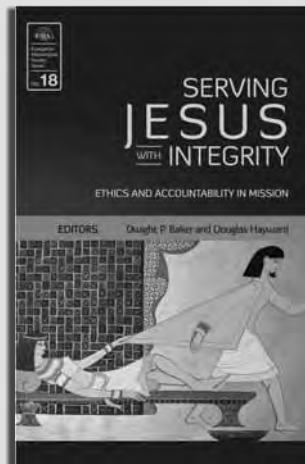
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Roots and Remedies of the Dependency Syndrome in World Missions

The Christian movement is entering a new post-colonial era with centers of the faith on all continents. American Christians have often felt uniquely qualified to lead this growing movement because of a long history of sending missionaries and funding mission projects. Yet something is hampering the relationship between Western and non-Western churches, preventing the dynamic synergism that Christians might expect.

In Roots and Remedies of the Dependency Syndrome in World Missions, Robert Reese identifies this hindrance as the Dependency Syndrome, a relic of colonial mission methods. With three decades of experience in Zimbabwe, Reese explains the roots of dependency and how this continues to cloud the vision of many well-meaning Western Christians. He documents the tragic results of relying too much on foreign ideas, institutions, personnel and funding that sideline non-Western churches from fulfilling the Great Commission.

Reese addresses remedies for dependency, examining healthy mission models tried and tested since the days of the apostle Paul. From issues that arise from globalization to best mission practices in the 21st century, *Roots and Remedies* aims to achieve what most Christians are seeking but find elusive: how all parts of the diverse Body of Christ around the world can cooperate productively to bring Christ where He is not now known without creating dependency.



ISBN 978-0-87808-0236

Dwight Baker and Doug Hayward, editors

Pages 438 | Paperback, 2010

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Serving Jesus with Integrity Ethics and Accountability in Mission

The word “ethics” carries an aura of countervailing views, overlapping claims, uncertain footing, and seductive attractions. Some issues are as clear as the horizontal versus vertical axes in Sawai Chinnawong’s striking painting, Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, that graces the cover of this book. At the same time—because we are involved, because our interests, our inclinations, our plans and relationships are at stake—the issues that engage missionary practitioners can be frustratingly labyrinthine, curling endlessly back on themselves.

Evangelical missionaries and mission agencies are concerned about personal morality—and rightly so. But as the chapters in this volume attest, evangelical mission’s ethical engagement extends far beyond simply avoiding compromising sexual situations and not absconding with the finances. How should we talk about others’ beliefs and practices to ourselves? To them? How should we represent ourselves to others? What role does tolerance for ambiguity play in missionaries’ mental preparation? How should accountability be structured in intercultural partnerships? Are there ways to enable organizational justice to flourish in mission institutions?

Limited and fallible and marred by the Fall, we need both guidance and admonition—and deep reflection on the conduct of evangelical mission such as is provided in this volume—so that we may serve Jesus with true integrity.

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FURTHER REFLECTIONS



How Is Missions Working Out For You? Part 2

Greg H. Parsons, Global Director, U.S. Center for World Mission

In the last issue, I asked the question: Since 86% of the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists of the world do not know a Christian personally, what should we do?

Or better, what should we do *differently*?

The point from Ralph Winter's Lausanne 1974 presentation that most people remember now is the concept of the unreached. Winter was "raising the flag" of cultures without churches. It became a rallying cry of mission efforts since then. More recently, people have put a new twist on it, in part because Christians want something "new" and exciting...not something from the 1970s or 80s.

But, the problem *is*, that the problem *is* ... still there.

In 1974, a part of the "shock" was that there were some 2.3 billion individuals in thousands of Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist (and other) people groups without a church. But the bigger surprise was that current efforts were 1) not touching this need at all, and 2) it would take a whole new kind of evangelism—cross-cultural evangelism—to reach them. Winter said that when people come to Christ it:

... inevitably take(s) place as the result of some Christian witnessing to a near neighbor, and that is evangelism. The awesome problem is that the additional truth that most non-Christians in the world today are not culturally new neighbors of any Christians, and that it will take a special kind of "cross-cultural" evangelism to reach them.¹

In other words, the evangelism task almost always occurs within cultures where the church exists. Most believers in good churches know about evangelism (at least theoretically!). But they

don't know—and aren't expected to know—what it is like to have the gospel break through into a *new* culture, what we call "frontier missions."

So, those who become global workers from our churches have few experiences to prepare them to understand how evangelism and church planting might happen in a totally new, different culture. They have never seen it in their own culture! Nor do they usually have much experience in understanding their own culture enough to know which elements of that culture and church life are biblically based and which are culturally based.

What Winter went on to say in 1974 was that no matter *where* the missionary was coming from—America, Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America—the difference in culture between them and the unreached was so significant that it required a special kind of evangelism. This "cross-cultural evangelism" would take into account a deep understanding of the receiving culture and also take seriously evaluating and understanding the sending culture—both secular and cultural elements.

Certainly, today, more and more workers have experiences that make it easier to do this difficult work. Sometimes it is merely that they know how to work hard in life (like farmers!). Or perhaps they already know more than one language, which can make learning another easier. Perhaps they are bi-cultural, and thus understand more than one culture in depth.

But no matter what, there are new things to learn about the unreached. Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist cultures are distant from anyone who was not raised within them. So, what Winter was saying was

that we need a whole new kind of cross-cultural evangelism that goes deeper than what we have needed to do in most mission work up to this point.

In the last paragraph of his talk in Lausanne 1974, Winter added suggestions about what this "new" kind of evangelism might look like:

Jesus died for these people around the world. He did not die to preserve our Western way of life. He did not die to make Muslims stop praying five times a day. He did not die to make Brahmins eat meat. Can't you hear Paul the Evangelist saying we must go to these people within the systems in which they operate? True, this is the cry of a cross-cultural evangelist, not a pastor. We can't make every local church fit the pattern of every other local church. But we must have radically new efforts of cross-cultural evangelism in order to effectively witness to 2387 million people, and we cannot believe that we can continue virtually to ignore this highest priority.²

How serious are we to see the "obedience of faith" among all the Gentiles on behalf of his name (Romans 1:5)? Are we serious enough to be sure that 1) we are careful to follow the Scriptures, and; 2) we are willing to let our culturally-bound understanding of Christ and the Bible go if necessary, for the sake of the gospel itself? Are we willing—even desirous—to encourage those coming to Jesus Christ from radically different cultures to determine themselves how they will follow the Scriptures in their context?^f

1 Winter, Ralph D. 1975. *The Highest Priority: Cross-cultural Evangelism*. In *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, edited by J. D. Douglas. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 213.

2 *Ibid.*, 241.

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