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## Athens Redux

Some of you may have caught the subtitle of Ian Johnson's new book on China: *The Return of Religion after Mao*. The *kairos* moment we're witnessing in the growth of the church in China is part of a broader phenomenon: old religions are renewing in the vacuum of Mao's massive secularization. Johnson describes in vignette after vignette a fresh dynamic across this old frontier.

*Frontier Missiology*. It's a crucial modifier. A dynamic modifier.

We publish on the assumption that mission frontiers present *boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go—yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly*. Those boundaries may even be *disputed or denied*, and require *study, evaluation and reevaluation*. But, most crucial for today, those barriers are not just evaporating in an age of globalization. They are intensifying and renewing as global conditions shift. Barriers make a difference—not necessarily the same difference over time—but overcoming them has everything to do with the advance of the gospel.

The theme of this issue is “frontier theologizing,” which reflects the theological challenge of these barriers. The articles range from Africa to Asia, across Buddhist and Islamic contexts, and from the 7th to the 21st centuries. However, such a small collection can only begin to portray the theological exercise required in frontier mission.

Consider the biblical precedent. When the Apostle Paul was hauled up the hill called the Areopagus there in Athens (Acts 17), he faced no small challenge. His own theology may have been clear, but its transmission demanded translation into the mental maps of the Greek philosophers—and idols were everywhere in the wake of a new religious pluralism. Luke's summary of this strange sermon is a wonderful example of “frontier theologizing.” Andrew Walls has reminded us that, again and again throughout history, we've witnessed this same challenge—an “Athens Redux”—where the gospel encounters the accumulated wisdom and coherent thought of an unreached civilization.

That same exercise is reflected in David Cashin's missiological interpretation of Martin Palmer's work on the Jesus Sutras (p. 175). These 7th century documents were initially translated by Nestorian missionaries to reach into a Taoist Chinese world. While others may respond to them differently (p. 190), Cashin has done us all the favor of tying this significant piece of mission history to the discussion of insider movements today.

Editorial *continued on p. 148*

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The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal's editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology or the society's executive committee.

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John Kim has also dipped back into history with his analysis of the Korean movement to Christ (p. 167) that emerged in the 19th century. While not theology per se, Kim calls the church to reconsider the essential groundwork laid during that early movement. Kim's concern is one heard across the global church, especially in the West where a "stained glass barrier" calls for a re-contextualization of the gospel into new ecclesial forms. Proximate but resistant populations, often representing other religions, will demand the same theologizing we witness with Paul on the Areopagus.

The conditions of these frontiers are dynamic, not static. Globalization goes before us, creating new predicaments, moods, and reactions that complicate the way we theologize. Howell and Thompson have looked at the way honor/shame in both Africa and among American millennials requires us to draw upon another historical slant on the atonement (p. 157). Their thesis demonstrates the speculative nature of our frontier theologizing—like Paul we pull from any and every corner of truth to present the gospel.

Our systematic theologians may get nervous with all these uses of religious concepts; any Athens Redux threatens our established categories. Todd Pokrifka gets it—he teaches systematic theology and empathizes with those who may take offense. His work among Buddhists has pressed him to discern ever more carefully just how the fluid worlds of the Christian and the Buddhist can intersect in the identity of a believer (p. 149). He felt the need to coin the term "frontier theologizing" for this crucial exercise. He calls both the systematic theologian and the mission practitioner to collaborate with indigenous voices and select indigenous concepts to see the gospel transmitted.

These articles are being published just before the 2017 joint gathering of the Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS) and the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM) in Dallas, TX, September 15–17 (see [emsweb.org](http://emsweb.org)). This year, the focus is on majority world theology, theologians and theological education. William Dyrness, systematic theologian at Fuller Seminary and author of *Insider*

*Jesus*, will be the plenary speaker for the ISFM portion of the program (see Duerksen's review on p. 184 and Warrick Farah's commentary on p. 190). And Henk Prenger's three sessions on his recently published theological analysis of insider movements will certainly frame the challenge of frontier theologizing in the Muslim world. We hope to see you there, but if you can't make it, we intend to publish many of the papers in the upcoming issues of the journal.

Frontier conditions are dynamic and call us to deepen and expand our editorial reach, to stay ever more vigilant and alert to the realities of globalization, and to find ways to make substantive missiology more available to a rising generation in mission.

In Him,



Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

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The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.

# Prospects for Indigenous People Movements in the Buddhist World: A Call for Collaborative Local and Global Theologizing

by Todd Pokrifka

## *Introduction*

For several decades, missiologists have emphasized the importance of people movements to Jesus as a primary way in which God expands his kingdom in the world. More recently, there has been a great deal of missiological and theological reflection and debate concerning one kind of indigenous people movement, namely “insider movements.” These are movements to Christ among those who, in some way, remain identified with a non-Christian socio-religious community. Most of the published discussions on this topic have focused on Islamic contexts, with significantly fewer looking at Hindu contexts. Very little discussion has related to the prospects for insider movements in Buddhist contexts.<sup>1</sup>

This article will begin to fill this lacuna by offering theological reflections on the prospects for legitimate people movements and specifically insider movements in the Buddhist world. Buddhism stands in much greater “worldview conflict” with Christianity than does Islam. Accordingly, if insider movements are controversial in Islam, then they will likely be even more controversial in Buddhism. Wouldn’t such movements have to embrace an unbiblical syncretism?

Not necessarily. Our answer to these questions depends on how we define some key terms, on how we assess the degree of truth in Buddhism, and on how we understand the nature of social and religious identity.<sup>2</sup>

I will argue for two points that are in some tension with one another: (1) *On the one hand, insider movements cannot retain the complete traditional theology and spiritual commitments of Buddhism and at the same time be faithful to Christ and Scripture.* (2) *Yet, on the other hand, one can speak of indigenous Spirit-led movements among those who stay within their Buddhist communities and who critically evaluate and reinterpret Buddhism in light of Christ and our authoritative scriptures.*

As a professor of systematic theology, I am vitally interested in the cooperative theological discussions that must take place in our encounter with Buddhism

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*Todd Pokrifka is a professor of systematic theology at Azusa Pacific University. As a member of Frontier Ventures he also is the national director of the college-level INSIGHT program.*

at the grassroots.<sup>3</sup> I believe that for faithful insider movements to emerge, indigenous believers from a Buddhist background need to be included in a collaborative venture with missionaries who are alongsiders to successfully develop biblically-based, culturally relevant theology and practice. This joint project of local, indigenous, and intercultural theologizing would be one of the most significant ways that people movements in the Buddhist world could demonstrate biblical discernment, faithfulness and fruitfulness.

### Definitions

In this paper, a people movement refers to a communal movement to Christ among a people group. As Donald McGavran first defined it, a people movement is a series of multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversions in which there is a “joint decision” that normally enables the relevant individuals to “become Christians without social dislocation.”<sup>4</sup> The people in these movements do not experience social dislocation, but they are switching religions by becoming “Christians.”

The term “insider movement” is a kind of people movement that has come to have a fairly specific definition in most missiological discussions. In the words of Jay Travis and Dudley Woodbury, an insider movement is

a group or network of people who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior and the Bible as the Word of God, but remain a part of the socio-religious community of their birth or upbringing.<sup>5</sup>

Some controversial questions in understanding and evaluating insider movements, defined thus, are:

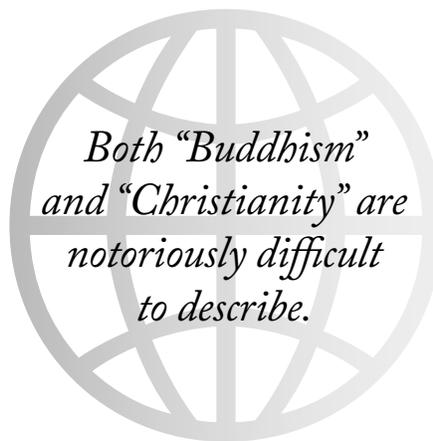
1. What is the meaning of “socio-religious” community? Can or should social and religious identity be distinguished?<sup>6</sup>
2. Who has the right to determine if a particular group of Jesus followers are insiders? Is it the Jesus followers themselves

(“self-identification”) or is it others in their native cultural or religious setting (“other-identification”)?<sup>7</sup>

I will not answer these questions definitively in this paper, but I will show some of the implications of different ways of answering them.

### Comparison of Buddhism and Christianity on Basic Worldview Questions

If we are to accurately describe and analyze the prospects for insider movements in the Buddhist world, one of our tasks is to summarize ways in which “Buddhism” overlaps and conflicts with “Christianity.” However, both “Buddhism” and “Christianity”



are notoriously difficult to describe, since each is marked by much internal diversity. There are “Christianities” and “Buddhisms.” There are Theravada Buddhists and Mahayana Buddhists. There are classical Buddhists and folk Buddhists.<sup>8</sup> And so on. This makes the task of comparing the two problematic.

At the same time, some kind of provisional characterization of the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism is helpful to discern the main challenges that people would face who claim to be both “Christian” and “Buddhist” in different respects, like those in insider movements. What are some worldview factors that need to be considered as such persons negotiate their dual identity?<sup>9</sup>

### Worldview Question 1: What is the ultimate reality and what is the nature of this reality?

For Christians, the God revealed in the Bible is the ultimate reality. God is personal, morally good, and eternal. For (classical) Buddhism, the ultimate reality is the realm or state of *nirvana*. This reality is in many ways beyond description since it is completely different than the transient life in this world. *Nirvana* is not understood as a personal divine being (contra all forms of monotheism), although some forms of Mahayana Buddhism affirm a kind of non-ultimate polytheism (or theism). On the question of ultimate reality, Christianity and Buddhism give mostly contrasting—yet possibly complementary—answers. However, both recognize that there is an unchanging reality (God or *nirvana*) that transcends the changing reality that we experience—which leads to the next question.

### Worldview Question 2: What is the nature of the “world,” or all that is not the ultimate reality?

For Christians, the world is the good, dependent creation of the one true God. It includes both material and spiritual entities. For Buddhists, the world is made up of various changing and perishable entities that make up the sphere of *karma* (Sanskrit).<sup>10</sup> Most Buddhists, who are folk Buddhists, believe that the *karmic* entities in this world include spiritual beings like the spirits of ancestors and other spirits, both good and evil. On the question of the world and its entities, then, Christians and Buddhists give answers that are partly contrasting (created vs. “uncreated”) and partly similar.

Before I go on to the next worldview questions, let me pause to say that these first two questions concerning the nature of ultimate reality and of non-ultimate reality were not the direct focus or concern of the Buddha. His concerns lay elsewhere. For that reason, he would regard definitive answers

to these questions as speculative and therefore inadvisable. This perhaps is the best one can do with access to only general revelation and without (biblical) special revelation. This observation opens up the possibility of special revelation complementing or even fulfilling the underdeveloped areas of Buddhist worldviews, much as the revelation of Christ and the New Testament does in relation to the limitations of wisdom books like Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament (see below). In any case, we now turn to the 3rd and 4th worldview questions—questions about which Buddha’s central teachings provide some answers.

### Worldview Question 3: What is the nature and cause of evil and suffering?

On the question of what is wrong with life in the world, Christians believe that the creation has become corrupted by evil through the sins of humanity and of other fallen agents, fallen angels or demons. The creation and humanity were originally created good, but then there was the fall of humanity—brought about by sinful desire and disobedience to God. This led to various negative effects of sin, including suffering and death. Buddhists believe life is inherently marked by *dukkha*, which is variously translated as “suffering,” “unease” or “dissatisfaction.” “All is *dukkha*” is thus the first of Buddha’s four noble truths.<sup>11</sup> All that we can experience in the karmic realm is marked by *dukkha*, a sense of things being both transient and not quite right. Buddhists go on to believe that the cause or origination of this suffering and death is desire or craving, which is the second noble truth of Buddhism. Folk Buddhists also emphasize that many instances of suffering or misfortune are brought about by the curses or malevolent actions of various invisible spirits (including ancestors or demons). There is a large degree of similarity between Christian and Buddhist views of suffering and evil and their causes, while some (important) differences remain.

**T**his observation opens up the possibility of special revelation complementing or even fulfilling the underdeveloped areas of Buddhist worldviews.

### Worldview Question 4: What is the remedy for evil and suffering?

Christians and Buddhists both believe that salvation or escape from evil and suffering is possible, but conceive of it differently. For Christians, God graciously acts to save and restore fallen creation. Humans receive salvation by grace through faith or trust in God, which includes deliverance from evil powers (demons) and the transformation of the person. For Buddhists, the remedy to suffering is the cessation of desire (the third noble truth). Cessation of desire is made possible by following what Buddha called the noble eightfold path of “rightness” (the fourth noble truth). This enlightened way of right thinking and living ultimately can lead one out of *karma* and *dukkha* into *nirvana*, a permanent state free of suffering and death. Classical Theravada Buddhism regards this salvation as possible only by self-effort, although folk Buddhists have often thought or acted inconsistently with this belief.<sup>12</sup> In any case, there are strong contrasts between Christian and Buddhist beliefs about the nature of the remedy for evil and suffering.

On the whole, then, although there are some areas of overlap or similarity, there are significant and strong clashes between the basic worldviews of (biblical) Christianity and Buddhism. For someone to follow Jesus but also remain Buddhist, then, would be challenging, to say the least. But is it possible?

### *Levels of Identity, Insider Movements and Frontier Theologizing*

Can a group of people learn to follow Jesus faithfully and still remain Buddhist insiders? The answer cannot be simplistic, since a group of people

can be both insiders and outsiders on a number of different levels. At the risk of oversimplifying a bit, I will talk about two options for how to conceive of Buddhist and Christian identity:

*Option 1:* When Buddhism and Christianity are considered as *distinct belief systems expressing one’s fundamental spiritual allegiances*, as Modern “essentialists” have usually understood them, then there cannot be authentic, biblical insider movements to Jesus among Buddhists. If one remains committed to Buddhist self-effort and the doctrine of rebirth, then clashes with essential biblical beliefs are just too great.<sup>13</sup> Again, one cannot follow Jesus without believing wholeheartedly in a Creator, but Buddhism in all forms tends either to deny the existence of such a Creator or at the least to render such a belief insignificant and speculative.

*Option 2:* When Buddhism and Christianity are considered as *spheres of socio-religious and cultural identity*, however, then there can be authentic, biblical insider movements to Jesus among Buddhists, i.e. among those who remain devoted to a particular community and most of its values and practices. Jesus-following, Bible-believing insiders can retain relationships with Buddhist family and friends, participate in many of the rituals and religious festivals of Buddhist social and religious life—yet with a new way of interpreting them, of course. According to their conscience, then, they could use many of the forms of Buddhist religious culture like worshipping in a temple, giving alms, or using Buddhist language and thought patterns. One could do all these things in a way that expresses one’s newfound faith in and love for Jesus. Of course the believers will reject or revise some Buddhist beliefs or practices, but one

can imagine such people still seeing themselves insiders within the Buddhist community and culture. In some cases, such people might even be considered by the surrounding Buddhists as insiders.

These two distinct ways of understanding Buddhism and Christianity correlate to two different ways of understanding a person's (or group's) identity. The first can be described as a person's "vertical identity, based upon their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ" and related theological beliefs. The second can be described as the person's "horizontal identity, in which they relate to and share the cultural values in which they were raised."<sup>14</sup> I believe faithful followers of Jesus in the Buddhist world could be horizontal insiders but vertical outsiders. That is, they would inwardly be spiritual-theological outsiders in their core identity, but potentially be social-cultural insiders in their communities (in their social and collective identities).

Are these Buddhist horizontal insiders *religious* insiders also? Yes and no, depending on the way we are using "religious." When we refer to Christianity and Buddhism as "religions," it can be ambiguous. Religion can refer either to their vertical identity or their horizontal identity.<sup>15</sup> If one understands religion as primarily concerned with vertical identity (core spiritual and theological identity, faith commitments and beliefs), then one will likely reject the prospect of Buddhist insider movements. By contrast, if one understands religion primarily as concerned with horizontal identity, then one will likely affirm the prospect of Buddhist insider movements.<sup>16</sup>

But the debate about insider movements is not only a matter of arbitrary semantics. We must go on to ask which approach to religion is more *appropriate* to describe the reality of lived Buddhism? Should we see a person's or group's Buddhist religious identity as primarily vertical or horizontal? My

tentative view is that *in most Buddhist cultures it makes more sense to see a person's Buddhist religious identity as primarily horizontal. This inclines me to accept the prospect of Buddhist insider movements, understood rightly.* Why do I incline towards this view? The main reason relates to the observation that the vast majority of Buddhists are folk Buddhists with unreflective, underdeveloped belief systems. Except for a few Buddhist monks and scholars, there are very few actual Buddhists who are devoted to the formal beliefs of higher Buddhism (say, atheism or even the necessity of self-salvation). This does not mean that there will not be a shifting of beliefs and paradigms for the ordinary (folk) Buddhists who come



to Christ, for there likely will be. But it does mean that they would understand Buddhism primarily as a horizontal socio-cultural identity. For example, in Thailand there is a common belief that "to be Thai is to be Buddhist." Accordingly, among the greatest barriers that would keep most Buddhists from becoming a Jesus-follower are social or horizontal barriers, not vertical barriers concerning fundamental theological beliefs about God and reality.<sup>17</sup> The average Buddhist Thai or Lao person, for example, would probably be willing to consider believing in a creator God if they could be confident that such a Creator God could enable them to escape from *karma* and suffering.

Again, a simple folk Buddhist would be open to following Jesus as savior if they experienced his delivering power from evil spirits.<sup>18</sup> However, they would be less willing to convert in these ways if they would have to break relationship with their family and community and become a "Christian"—which they typically view as replacing their old social identity with a basically Western social identity. For this reason, it seems that being open to "insider movements" within the horizontal social world of Buddhism would reduce unnecessary barriers to conversion to Christ.

Of course, by taking this stance in favor of Buddhist insider movements, I open myself to certain risks. There is the much vaunted danger, for instance, that this stance could allow for syncretism, a compromise of biblical truth. Also, it is very difficult to separate the horizontal and spiritual elements of Buddhist belief and practice. However, such tricky problems can be overcome on the ground through appropriate discipleship.<sup>19</sup> Discipleship in contexts in which the gospel is new involves what I call "frontier theologizing."

Frontier theologizing is simply theological reflection and development that occurs on the frontiers of Christian mission. In this case, it would be theologizing that takes place as the gospel advances from reached territories and people groups into unreached Buddhist people groups. Good frontier theologizing in this setting would involve a mutual collaborative partnership between two groups in Christ's body, namely between (a) the cultural "insiders"—the new, indigenous "Buddhist Background Believers" (BBBs), and (b) the missionaries or "outsiders." Missionaries who start as outsiders can become "alongsiders" that rightly aid the developing indigenous church.<sup>20</sup> That is, there is a collaboration between the native church's task of indigenous local "self-theologizing" and the missionary church's cross-cultural task of local,

“contextual theologizing.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, insiders and missionaries can work together in producing complementary aspects of an increasingly global theology. Developing such a theology is part of the growth and discernment process that believers experience in the process of discipleship that follows an initial acceptance of the gospel.

### *A Strategy for Frontier Theologizing: a Biblical Way of Handling Contradictions Between Local Buddhisms and the Gospel*

One important aspect of frontier theologizing in a Buddhist context would be to find a way to understand and interpret the contradictions or tensions that exist between local forms of Buddhism and the gospel. Dealing with such contradictions is a crucial part of discipleship.<sup>22</sup>

#### Contextual Contradictions in the Bible: A Model for Handling Contradictions Between Full Biblical Faith and Other Faiths

Can the Bible itself suggest ways of rightly handling contradictions between local forms of Buddhism and the biblical gospel? Is there a biblical way to allow for a somewhat harmonious relationship between them (avoiding inflammatory “anti-Buddhism”)? I believe the answer to these questions is “Yes.”<sup>23</sup>

What if Buddhism were seen as partly true (due to general revelation and/or common grace), or true within a limited sphere of reality, while the gospel and biblical theology were seen as true in a far fuller and more complete sense? If this were the case, then some of the apparent contradictions between Buddhism and “Christianity” would not be substantial or fundamental contradictions but what we might call “contextual contradictions.” In the words of biblical scholar John Goldingay, a *contextual contradiction* is “a difference reflecting the variety in circumstances

## *Can the Bible itself suggest ways of handling contradictions between forms of Buddhism and the biblical gospel?*

which different statements address” but in which one cannot say what the two speakers would say if they were confronting similar circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

Speaking of contextual contradictions in this sense is a way of handling apparent contradictions between different parts of the Bible, especially between parts of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>25</sup> It enables us to explain how some of the Old Testament writings are true within a limited perspective, but not finally or fully true in the same way that the claims of the New Testament are. What if we could treat limited truths in Buddhism in a similar way?

#### The Role of Ecclesiastes in Scripture Compared to the Role of General Revelation in the Buddhist World

More specifically, let us consider typical Christian approaches to that rather unruly book of the Old Testament that we know as Ecclesiastes. Just as the Buddha made a number of specific statements that would contradict parts of the Bible, so also does the Teacher or Preacher (Heb., *Qoboleth* in Eccl. 1:1) in Ecclesiastes (whether or not this Teacher was the historical Solomon is a matter I will not address here). Consider, for example, the Teacher’s oft-repeated statement that “all is vanity” or “vapor” or “breath” or “everything is meaningless” or an empty “chasing after the wind” (e.g., 1:2, 14). Certainly, Jesus and the gospel are not vanity? Certainly, the Teacher’s statements here would contradict Jesus’ claim to be “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Indeed, if taken as a final statement of truth that applies to all things literally and comprehensively, the Teacher’s statement would contradict his own claims elsewhere in the book (e.g., such as his concluding statement in 12:13 that “the end of the

matter” is to “fear God and keep his commandments.”<sup>26</sup>

But Christians have generally understood these “contradictions” in a particular way, namely, to say that the statements of the Teacher are true (and even inspired), but only from a limited perspective. The statement that everything is vain and transient (Eccl. 1:2, 14, 2:17, etc.) is true of what life is like when understood *apart from* special revelation of God’s purposes for life and for the afterlife. Although life can seem meaningless and “grievous” (2:17), the Teacher suggests that the best approach is to enjoy the temporary pleasures of life (see 5:18, 8:15 and 9:9) amidst awareness of much suffering. This represents the best that human reasoning can offer, based on a careful analysis of human experience. As such, it only applies to the realm of understanding “life under the sun” (Eccl. 2:17, 5:18, 6:12, 8:15, 9:9).

Accordingly, Christians are able to embrace the partial truths of the Teacher as ultimately compatible with the fuller truth of Jesus. The Teacher’s reflections are true only within a limited frame of reference and need to be placed within the wider frame of reference provided by the Grand Narrative of the Bible that culminates in Jesus Christ and the gospel.

The Teacher’s conclusions are similar to those of the Buddha about the transience of all things and how this leads to suffering and dissatisfaction. One could say that these shared conclusions are partly the result of general revelation and that they both need supplementation from special revelation. Accordingly, without affirming that the Buddha’s writings are inspired or canonical like the book of Ecclesiastes, we can fittingly treat his teachings as a set of partial truths within a limited

frame of reference. The Buddhist scriptures, then, contain wise human observations of how life is, based on general revelation. The situation is similar in Ecclesiastes (or Proverbs too), except that in the Bible we have an element of special revelation at work as well, including the infallible, inspired records of the Teacher's observations, which are based on general revelation.

To clarify, this does not mean that we should regard Buddhism as the "Old Testament" for Buddhists, or that the Old Testament is only relevant to Jews, two beliefs that I firmly oppose.<sup>27</sup> But it does mean that there is an analogous way in which incomplete truths of the Buddha and the Teacher of Ecclesiastes (or many other parts of the Old Testament) can be affirmed, "relativized," and "contextualized" within the wider, canonical, biblical truth of God.<sup>28</sup> This is one example of the kind of theologizing that alongside and indigenous believers could do together in particular contexts.

### *Conclusion: A Call for Collaborative Local and Global Frontier Theologizing*

I have argued that indigenous, insider movements are possible within Buddhist contexts, but I am also arguing that such movements can only be faithful with much biblically-based, Spirit-led discernment. This discernment process requires a process of theologizing that takes place on the frontiers of the gospel's advance.

Despite the significant clash of worldviews that exists between Christians and Buddhists, then, there are ways in which authentic indigenous or insider people movements can take place in Buddhist contexts and communities. There is evidence that such movements—both biblically faithful and contextually fitting—are already taking place. In a church planting movement in Myanmar set apart by its indigenous Buddhist-sensitive approach, there have been many thousands

(some say over 40,000) of Buddhist Background believers following Jesus and spreading the gospel.

This movement began with one people group but has since spread to many other people groups.<sup>29</sup> Among the approaches to evangelism and teaching that this movement employs is to present the gospel in terms of the "Four Noble Truths of Christ," in a manner that recalls—but also supersedes—the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha.<sup>30</sup> That is, Christ followers use an existing, familiar teaching model, but substitute the truth taught with the teachings of Christ. Again, despite the alleged dangers of syncretism, is it not possible that such people movements among Buddhists are the work of God's



Spirit? If so, then we should tentatively support and promote such movements, while still calling for wise discernment. One of the key ways in which such discernment can take place is through a collaborative process of frontier theologizing in the Buddhist world. By responding to this call to discern and theologize, God's people will catalyze kingdom breakthrough among the unreached, both in the Buddhist world and beyond.<sup>31</sup> **IJFM**

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> More recently the voice of Peter Thein Nyant has been heard on the implication of contextualization and movements within the Buddhist world with the publication of his *Mission Amidst Pagodas: Contextual*

*Communication of the Gospel in Burmese Buddhist Context* (Langham Partnership, UK 2014). Also, the systematic theologian, William Dyrness has dedicated a section to theological reflections on movements in the Buddhist world in his recent publication *Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements* (IVP Academic, Downers Grove, 2016), 90–93.

<sup>2</sup> Kang-San Tan has developed a theology of religions approach which respects religious identity and multi-religious belonging in the Christian-Buddhist context. *The Inter-Religious Frontier: A Buddhist-Christian Contribution* (Mission Studies, Volume 31, Issue 2, 2014), 139–156.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Chan has recently addressed the concern that Western theological models have over-shadowed our ability to hear important cultural themes necessary in our theological encounter with grassroots religious contexts in Asia. See *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (IVP Academic, Downers Grove, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> McGavran 1970 and McGavran 1980, as cited in Smith 2005, 285.

<sup>5</sup> This definition is adapted from Travis and Woodberry 2010.

<sup>6</sup> I will return to this question especially in section 3 below.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper I lean towards understanding insider movements as those groups whose members self-identify as being inside the cultural or religious tradition of their birth (i.e. Buddhism or Islam), even if others in that cultural or religious tradition do not recognize them as such. This way of defining insider movements (prioritizing self-identification) coheres with the point I will make later about the importance of self-theologizing within indigenous people movements.

<sup>8</sup> Consider the situation in Thailand, for example. According to Paul De Neui, although Thailand is often considered one of the most faithful custodians of Theravada Buddhism, Buddhism is perhaps more animist than classical Buddhist (De Neui 2015, 188). Wan Petchsongkram argues about the Thai Context that although Buddha originally taught his followers to depend on self, "they are now feverishly trying to find something outside themselves as a foundation for their lives . . . Wherever there is some miracle or sacred things, people will rent a taxi and go by the hundreds and thousands" (Petchsongkram 1975, 3). John Lambert comments, "[M]ost Thai are deeply enmeshed in various forms of "popular" devotion that is tied to Thai Buddhism, such

as astrology, spirit devotion, spirit houses, monk veneration, fortune-telling, amulets, power tattoos, and merit-making schemes such as the wildly popular Dhammakaya movement. All the while, Theravada Buddhism struggles to stay relevant to modern culture” (Lambert 2013).

<sup>9</sup> To clarify, in this section I aim to describe the basic contours of “scriptural” versions of Christianity and Buddhism, focusing on the beliefs that would most naturally emerge from their respective sacred writings (although I will sometimes point out notable exceptions to these beliefs among folk Christians or Buddhists). These worldview questions are stated in my own terms, although they are the product of compiling and synthesizing the questions used by several Christian books on worldviews (most notably Sire 2009 and Burnett 1990; for a copy of a document containing additional questions about knowledge, ethics, history and time and sub-questions under each of the major questions presented in this paper, please contact the author (pokrifka@gmail.com). I am aware that the selection and form of the questions could be considered biased in the direction of a Christian worldview or set of worldviews, but I believe that the worldviews of humans—together with human societies and cultures—are sufficiently commensurable and share sufficiently overlapping concerns that these questions do not unduly distort the nature of the various worldviews they are designed to understand. Further, I am aware that worldview is not an adequate category to understand the depth and fullness of human culture or religion, although I think worldview should be employed in a way that is much richer than its intellectual connotations might suggest. Understood rightly, worldview can include matters of the heart and of social structure and practice.

<sup>10</sup> Bauer 2014 emphasizes the “opposite attributes” of the two spheres of the dualistic view of reality of the Buddha; “all that is absent in *nibbana* is present in *kamma*, and it makes our lives miserable.”

<sup>11</sup> For a clear statement and analysis of the four noble truths and other aspects of classical Buddhism, see Siderits 2011.

<sup>12</sup> There are some forms of Buddhism (most notably the “Pure Land” form of Mahayana Buddhism) that believe that faith or trust in the name of the Buddha can enable one to experience nirvana, but this is a relatively rare form of Buddhism.

<sup>13</sup> With folk Buddhists also, following Jesus would involve a shift in a number of basic beliefs and practices.

<sup>14</sup> Garrison 2014, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Daniels & Waterman 2013, especially 62–68 (see diagrams on 63 and 65 in which religion overlaps with both culture and theology. The two authors agree that using the term “cultural insiders and theological outsiders” would be accurate to describe many believers in insider movements in the Muslim world. I tend to think this would apply to the Buddhist context also, if terms are defined rightly and “theological” includes “spiritual” and “faith” (as personal trust) as well.

<sup>16</sup> This observation about the ambiguity of the terms “religion” and “religious identity” has some interesting implications. It means, for example, that even if two people have exactly the same theological convictions about what is necessary for a person to believe to be saved, and about what beliefs within Buddhism need to be affirmed and rejected, they could still be on opposite sides of the insider movement debate. It would all depend on how these two people define religion.

<sup>17</sup> Paul De Neui expresses basically the same point like this: “for most Thai Folk Buddhists, the strongest barriers to Christ they experience are not religious but social. The so-called ‘religious tenets’ of their faith are relative” (De Neui 2003, 134). Notice, however, that De Neui is using “religious” here to refer to something related to fundamental worldview beliefs—which I connect, with vertical identity—rather than social identity. I would be more inclined to express his something like, most barriers are social rather than concerned with worldview beliefs.

<sup>18</sup> A leader in the main Protestant church in Laos recently told the author that the majority of converts from Buddhism in his community resulted from power encounters involving deliverance from demons. This points out that other significant barriers keeping Buddhist people are the spiritual barriers of demonic bondages, but I am not addressing these in this paper.

<sup>19</sup> In any case, syncretism can emerge just as readily if we call new believers to adopt a new, Westernized cultural form of Christianity, making them outsiders in their own native culture. The reason of course is that missionaries too can be capable of uncritical syncretism, as when we “baptize” individualism even when it runs against the communal themes of the Scriptures.

<sup>20</sup> See Travis 2013 for an explanation of the role of an “alongsider.”

<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, this distinction and relationship relates to the connection between local theologies and global theology.

Missionaries are generally more in touch with global theology, although they also possess and are shaped by the particular local theology in which they were raised.

<sup>22</sup> One promising way forward is to find ways of handling these conflicts that appear within the resources of the biblical canon itself, rather than requiring extensive scholarly knowledge of Western theology or even of Buddhism. By focusing on what the Bible contributes to the discussion, we can expect indigenous believers themselves to participate in the theologizing process—with their own indigenous biblical interpretations. I realize that I am assuming here that the local or indigenous believers in question have a decent Bible translation in a language they can understand, a state of affairs that is sadly often not the case for many of the unreached.

<sup>23</sup> What follows is an attempt to explain one way that this could be possible, despite the significant “clash of worlds” between Christianity and Buddhism. This effort is intended as an initial attempt at bridging from a Western Christian perspective to a Buddhist one.

<sup>24</sup> See John Goldingay 1987: 19; see 15–25.

<sup>25</sup> I realize that in speaking of “what has become a common way,” I am appealing indirectly to certain Western Christian theological traditions or ways that Western scholars have handled apparent contradictions in the Bible. But at the same time I think that virtually every Bible reader around the globe will notice some of the tensions between parts of the Bible and have their ways of handling them. Accordingly, various kinds of indigenous believers who possess a Bible can thus relate to the discussion and be helped by this tradition.

<sup>26</sup> Likewise, some have pointed out the “contradictions” in the Buddha’s teaching, such as between his “no-self” doctrine and his teachings on “rebirth.”

<sup>27</sup> Even the rather “liberal” K. Koyama opposes these claims, affirming that there is a “blood relationship” between the Old Testament and the New Testament in which the Old Testament cannot be replaced by the Hindu *Upanishads* or the Buddhist *Tripitaka* (1999, p. xii).

<sup>28</sup> For further reflections on this kind of approach within biblical studies and biblical theology, in relation to “problematic” texts about women in the Old Testament, see Pokrifka 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Judson 2014, 10–12. This movement is probably not best classified as a pure “insider” movement (“C5”), since it draws

from what we might call Western-style church planting methods and includes some Western leadership, but is certainly highly contextualized or indigenous (perhaps C4).

<sup>30</sup> Judson 2014, 11–12.

<sup>31</sup> This collaborative process of critical and creative theological work will help to produce and cultivate movements that are marked by both biblical faithfulness and cultural fit. It would lead to a collaborative connection between local theologizing and global theologizing—theologizing that connects and draws from communities from various parts of the world. I must leave reflections on the concrete features of such a theological process to another writing project. Originally, this paper included a second portion that offered those kinds of reflections. Contact me at pokrifka@gmail.com to obtain a document with these reflections in it.

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Frontier Theologizing

# From Mozambique to Millennials: Shame, Frontier Peoples, and the Search for Open Atonement Paths

by Alan B. Howell and Logan T. Thompson

*“Sharing about how Jesus paid my sin debt with God won’t connect with them at all.”*

**T**he realization that concepts of sin and guilt do not resonate strongly with our African neighbors marked the beginning of an important shift in my (Alan’s) thinking. Our mission team arrived in Mozambique in 2003 with the goal of encouraging a church-planting movement among the Makua-Metto people, a people group whose religious identity has been predominantly shaped by Islam and Animism. Because of their lack of exposure to the Bible, we initially used a chronological storytelling method to prepare the way for people to hear the story of Jesus. In those first villages, however, I was unsure of what path to take to talk about the atoning work of Christ in ways that made sense to rural Mozambicans. I remember one of them saying, “We hear this story you are telling us—but why is Jesus’ death so important?”

Rather than sin and guilt, they most desire a way to deal with fear and evil. I learned that Jesus as “Christus Victor”—seeing him as the Lord who defeated Satan and the demonic powers—was the message that best connects with a Makua-Metto audience.<sup>1</sup> That understanding changed me personally as I journeyed into a more robust picture of Christ’s work on the cross, recognizing that Jesus did not simply address our sin problem with his death, but he also addressed humanity’s other big enemies: Satan and Death itself.

In this article, we will begin by looking at how these three enemies of ours and how their corresponding emotional motivators fit with certain atonement metaphors. Because of globalization and other significant shifts within cultures, Christians who want to meaningfully engage their world must possess greater competency in multiple atonement theories. We will then show how recapitulation and theosis themes create open paths for explaining the meaning of the work of Christ in both the shame-influenced cultures of the Makua-Metto of Mozambique and in the culture of American youth.<sup>2</sup> Along the way, we will

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also briefly explore how competency in a variety of different atonement metaphors provides a more holistic, integrated, and ancient understanding of the doctrine.

***Guilt, Shame, and Fear: How Culture Shapes Atonement Perspectives***

Eugene Nida observes that there are three different types of cultures, each with its own “reactions to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: fear, shame, and guilt.”<sup>3</sup> Jayson Georges expands on this distinction to divide the world into three primary types of societies. See our chart below (figure 1).

- **Guilt-Innocence:** “individualistic societies (mostly Western), where people who break the laws are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong”
- **Shame-Honor:** “collectivistic cultures (common in the East), where people shamed for not fulfilling group expectations seek to restore their honor before the community”
- **Fear-Power:** “animistic contexts (typically tribal or African), where people afraid of evil and harm pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals”<sup>4</sup>

Georges recognizes that cultures are “a blend of guilt, shame and fear,” but that most every culture has a single, primary orientation.<sup>5</sup> In order to communicate effectively in Mozambique, I (Alan) had to intentionally set aside the guilt palette<sup>6</sup> (the color set I grew up with in North America) and become comfortable teaching the message of Christ with themes and vocabulary that would

connect with our African friends who grew up in a fear-based culture. That does not imply, however, that I should completely jettison any language of guilt and shame. Even though each culture has a primary orientation, they are all still a hybrid of guilt, shame, and fear. Therefore, in order to communicate the gospel effectively, ministers will need to experiment and learn how to shape the message properly to help it resonate with their particular culture’s unique mixture.

These three categories correspond with different enemies facing humanity: Guilt-Sin, Shame-Death, Fear-Satan & Evil Forces. This unholy trio appears together in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) and remains humanity’s antagonists throughout the story until the Creator finally brings them to an end (Rev. 20).<sup>8</sup> 1 John 3 shows how God, in Christ, addresses all three of these enemies.<sup>9</sup> So, Jesus’ death and resurrection saves us in three dimensions, not just one; Christ’s atonement effectively addresses our past, present, and future.<sup>10</sup>

As ministers present the story of Jesus in their contexts, they need to adapt the message to address the primary and secondary problems in that setting. Furthermore, cultures are not static; because of shifts and changes over time, they are moving targets. I (Logan) believe that American culture is shifting from a guilt-based to a more shame- and fear-influenced society. I (Alan) have come to realize that while fear is the primary motivator in Makua-Metto culture, the language of shame and honor is relevant as well and should shape the presentation of the atonement in Mozambique. In both of our ministry contexts, we have seen the

need for increased competency with multiple atonement metaphors. We foresee the forces of globalization resulting in one of two outcomes in cultures around the world. First, cultures may become more complex as they incorporate other colors into their palette, becoming more “three-dimensional.” Second, and adversely, cultures may retreat back into “their own corner” and become more entrenched in their primary color. Regardless of the outcome, all Christians would benefit from being prepared to walk down different presentation paths in order to speak effectively about the atonement.

***Recapitulation, Theosis, and Athanasius: How Christ Addresses Shame and Death***

One model for understanding the atonement that we may be less familiar with (and one that historically has greatly influenced the Eastern Church) is called “recapitulation.” In recapitulation, Adam is the lens through which we see Jesus. Christ undoes death by becoming the second Adam and rising again.<sup>11</sup> By identifying with humanity in the incarnation,

Christ recapitulated, or “summed up in himself,” all of humanity, so that what humanity had lost in Adam (the perfect image of God) could be recovered in himself.<sup>12</sup>

Athanasius (Bishop of Alexandria) argued that

the Word takes on a human body capable of death so that he could die for all and enable all to be saved from corruption by the grace of the resurrection. By participation in his death and life, humanity has overcome death and received incorruption.<sup>13</sup>

*Figure 1. Cultural Orientations and Atonement Approaches*

Problem	Response (Culture Type)	Time Dimension	Atonement Approach
Sin	Guilt-Innocence	Past	Penal Substitution
Satan and Evil	Fear-Power	Present	Christus Victor
Death	Shame-Honor	Future	Recapitulation/Theosis <sup>7</sup>

The “companion doctrine” of recapitulation is known as theosis.<sup>14</sup> Theologians have defined theosis in a variety of ways,<sup>15</sup> but simply put, it refers to the process of human beings becoming like God.<sup>16</sup> Although he never uses the term, Athanasius is traditionally considered the champion of theosis. For him, recapitulation is “more or less taken over” by the doctrine of theosis.<sup>17</sup> He takes the thinking of Irenaeus further by stating, “[Christ] became man that we might be made God.”<sup>18</sup> Pugh, commenting on Athanasius, writes,

So then, Christ travels the path of the first Adam, with whom all humankind has been walking in inescapable solidarity. But Christ’s solidarity with Adam is transformative. By being obedient where Adam was disobedient, Christ opens up a new kind of solidarity, releases a “new ferment” into human nature. This new solidarity is forged by the Spirit through whom, out of their union with the new head of humanity, Christ’s image is imprinted on his people so that they begin to live his resurrected life.<sup>19</sup>

Athanasius describes humanity’s root problem (why recapitulation is necessary for theosis) as ultimately related to *death* and *shame*. Athanasius’s most famous quote—“God became man so that man might become God”—is surrounded by comments about both the enemy (the problem) and the emotion (the response) associated with it. This is an important, early example of the connection between recapitulation/theosis and shame/death.

As, then, he who desires to see God Who by nature is invisible and not to be beheld, may yet perceive and know Him through His works, so too let him who does not see Christ with his understanding at least consider Him in His bodily works and test whether they be of man or God. If they be of man, then let him scoff; but if they be of God, let him not mock at things which are no fit subject for scorn, but rather let him recognize the fact and marvel that things divine have been revealed to us by such humble means, *that through*

## **A** *thanasius’s path of theosis and recapitulation is well-suited for traditionally Eastern cultures where honor/shame is linked to death.*

*death deathlessness has been made known to us, and through the Incarnation of the Word the Mind whence all things proceed has been declared, and its Agent and Ordainer, the Word of God Himself. He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God. He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality.* (emphasis mine)<sup>20</sup>

Athanasius’s approach outlines a path for theosis and recapitulation thinking that is well-suited for traditionally Eastern cultures where honor/shame is the primary issue and linked to the problem of death.<sup>21</sup> But this path for presenting the atonement also has value in other cultures where shame<sup>22</sup> is a less often recognized but nonetheless a powerful motivator.

In the following sections we will explore how the doctrines of recapitulation and theosis connect with shame/death elements in the frontier cultures of Mozambicans and Millennials. Since the language of “path” resonates with both American youth and the Animistic Makua-Metto people, that will be the frame we will use in our application sections for those contexts.

### ***Walking the Recapitulation/Theosis Path in Mozambique: Shame and the “Death Rituals”***

I (Alan) have found that fear is the primary motivator for the Makua-Metto people, but the rhetoric of shame also plays an important role.<sup>23</sup> The phrase *woona ihaya* shows up regularly in everyday language and literally means to “see shame.” Two key values of the Makua Metto people are *dependency* and *conformity*, and the language of shame is used to reinforce these values. This shaming speech is especially prevalent in what I group together as the

three major “death rituals” in Makua-Metto culture: funerals, initiations, and (for Christians) baptisms.

“Many cultures intuitively associate . . . death with shame.”<sup>24</sup> And to understand the strong link between them in our Mozambican context, one must appreciate that death is “up close and personal.” Death is a part of everyday life and is not relegated to nursing homes, hospitals, or funeral parlors. People die in their homes if possible and want to be buried in their villages.<sup>25</sup> Funeral rituals and ceremonies among the Makua-Metto people are the main (or only) mechanism for grieving. In this context, both churches and mosques function like burial societies.<sup>26</sup> Funerals are significant for a number of reasons: Funerals bring honor;<sup>27</sup> Funerals change status;<sup>28</sup> Funerals have serious religious significance.<sup>29</sup> Worth noting here, however, are five aspects of how the concept of shame is woven through the preparations for burial and the funeral itself.

1. When news of a death is sent out and family and neighbors gather together, women will cry and tell the story of the death as a “wail song” inside the house, but men are *not* to cry. If a friend, relative, or neighbor does not go “to cry” and participate in the funeral activities, it is shameful, insulting, and seen as suspicious.<sup>30</sup>
2. The head of the family or king is in charge but typically does everything by consultation and in close collaboration with religious leaders. His task is to make sure the burial proceeds in a way that shame for the deceased and their family will be avoided.
3. While the grave is being dug, others prepare the body for burial by washing the body, drying it, and dressing the deceased in

their nicest clothes. There is a lot of discussion during these activities in order to make sure they are carried out in such a way that will not bring shame.

4. At the gravesite a small number of men will climb down into the grave. A sheet is extended over them so that their work of positioning the body will not be seen.
5. Traditionally, there are other funerary rituals on the third and fortieth day after the burial that involve beautifying the gravesite, and weak participation by the community is seen as shameful.

These are just a few of the connections between shame and the rituals surrounding death and burial in Makua-Metto culture. I have found that 2 Tim. 1:8–10, a passage that highlights the connection between shame and death, is a powerful preaching text for graveside sermons.<sup>31</sup> Verse 8 references the concepts of shame and suffering,<sup>32</sup> and the following verse talks about how God saves people not by merit but by mercy and grace (a helpful corrective to the popular presentation of following Islam's pillars in this context). Then in verse 10, we hear Paul's assertion that Christ saves us through his destruction of the weapon of death that Satan wields against us. This passage and its recapitulation/theosis themes have provided a helpful way of addressing the concepts of shame and death.

The funeral ritual in the Makua-Metto context is naturally the one most associated with shame and death, but it should be noted that shame language also appears at initiation and baptism. Makua-Metto adolescents (both boys and girls) traditionally go through an initiation ceremony around the time of puberty, and shame is woven through the rhetoric of that ritual. Initiates are instructed on how to live once their old way of life (childhood) is put to death and are exhorted—even shamed—into not going back to that former way of life. One of the harshest insults in the Makua-Metto language is to shame

an adult male who is acting immature by calling him *luukhu* (which means “uncircumcised” or “uninitiated”).

Since initiations are an important part of Makua-Metto culture, they are the most natural frame in which to present the concept of baptism. As a “death ritual” where the initiated buries his or her old life, it should not be surprising that the Makua-Metto use language of shame to instruct believers in the way they should now live and challenge those who have forgotten to walk that path. Beck's comments on the place of baptism fit well within this understanding:

Baptism is a renunciation of Satan, sin and the evil powers at work in our hearts and minds. But many have a



thin view of what this renunciation looks like—we tend to think of it as an act of willpower, as simply resisting cravings and temptations. [But]... the problem is much deeper and more pervasive. Sin... is less about hedonic *craving* than it is about our *slavery* and *bondage*. The issue isn't *temptation* as much as it is *identity* and how we ground our sense of self-definition and self-worth. So... our baptismal renunciations are less focused on willpower (i.e., saying “no” to temptation) and more concerned with a deep reconfiguration of our personhoods.<sup>33</sup>

Claiming our identity as baptized people who have passed through a “death ritual” into a new state of personhood allows Makua-Metto believers to respond differently to the

shame of death by following the path walked by Christ (recapitulation) and find their place in the life of God in his Kingdom (theosis).

### *Walking the Recapitulation/Theosis Path with Millennials: Shame and Social Media*

A defining development of the millennial generation<sup>34</sup> was the technological boom of the 1990s and 2000s and the rise of social media. The rapid development of millennials' adolescence was paralleled by the rapid advance in communication technology, particularly the internet and cellular phones.<sup>35</sup> It was during this time that using portable communication devices and staying connected to others online was no longer “seen as a subcultural practice [but instead] became normative.”<sup>36</sup> The rise of the internet, personal cell phone use, and social media has played a significant role in shifting the traditionally guilt-based worldview of the West to a more shame-based one, especially for those under the age of 30—a shift that continues with the youngest generation today.

Language is a primary indicator of cultural shifts. Georges provides vocabulary lists for the three dimensions of culture—guilt, shame, and fear—and even a cursory comparison yields great insight. Words associated with *guilt* include: rules, debt, judge, personal, penalty, pardon, commands, and sacrifice.<sup>37</sup> Words associated with *shame* include: worthy, identity, approval, face, inclusion, public, community, humiliation, and acceptance.<sup>38</sup> The latter set resonates much more than the former within the hearts of millennials whose participation in networked communities is an integral part of their daily lives. Learning how to avoid and address shame is of utmost importance for today's teenagers who strive to create impressive public profiles on Facebook, who quantify their self-worth by counting their “followers” on Twitter and Instagram, and who, at the end of the day, are simply “passionate about finding their place in society.”<sup>39</sup>

Establishing meaningful friendships and becoming part of a wider community is not a new phenomenon: it forms a vital component of any person's social well-being, no matter his or her age, and it is particularly important for the coming-of-age process. Boyd observes that for teenagers

social acceptance depends on the ability to socialize with one's peers at the "cool" place. Each cohort of teens has a different space that it decides is cool. It used to be the mall, but [now], social network sites... are the cool places.... Social media has enabled them to participate in and help create... *networked publics*. (emphasis hers)<sup>40</sup>

These communities, however, form in the midst of a larger culture that is almost entirely individualistic. The West (and particularly the United States) has placed heavy emphasis on the personal accomplishments of the individual, not on the achievements of society as a whole (e.g., climbing the corporate ladder).<sup>41</sup> The rise of social media and the increasing influence of networked publics, however, have brought communal dynamics closer to the forefront of the Western worldview, especially for millennials. According to Georges and Baker,

When social reputation is the basic foundation of life and identity, people's pursuit of respect, honor and status frames every facet of life.<sup>42</sup>

In short, the social change caused by the technological boom of the last twenty-five years is driving Western culture toward becoming more shame-based. As this cultural shift from guilt to shame relocates and reemphasizes a sense of emptiness, those who minister to millennials must become conversant in how the Gospel addresses the shame that they feel.

Guilt and shame are typical emotions experienced as a result of transgressions, especially those against the social or moral expectations of a community.<sup>43</sup> But, practically speaking, does shame function in a significantly different way

**T**he heart language of younger generations is now one of shame and our presentations of the Gospel must reflect that shift.

than guilt? A recent study sought to investigate the effects of both guilt and shame on individuals, as well as how those two emotions did or did not motivate these individuals to change their lives.<sup>44</sup> Researchers found that the difference between guilt and shame is that guilt "arises when a person focuses on what specifically he or she did wrong," while shame "has a more dispositional focus in which people attend to negative aspects of the self."<sup>45</sup> That is, guilt can promote external change; whereas shame, at its best, calls for internal transformation.<sup>46</sup> Lickel et al. conclude that shame "is an important motivator of a desire to change oneself for the better"<sup>47</sup> and that it can "elicit stronger desire for lasting self-change than guilt."<sup>48</sup>

Having observed the cultural shift taking place in the millennial generation, it is clear that these findings are invaluable for those who minister to young people in the West today. Preaching and teaching the Gospel using guilt-based language and metaphor no longer connects like they once did for individuals in the West. The heart language of younger generations is now that of shame and our presentations of the gospel must reflect that shift, especially if shame has the potential to be a better catalyst for self-change than guilt. Pugh argues that recalibrating the way we preach and teach the atonement to highlight recapitulation and theosis could be helpful in reaching younger generations in North America. He writes:

When we speak of Christ's work to eighteen- to thirty-year-olds, it seems we should accent the representative corporate Christ as the hero of the piece and, perhaps, soft-pedal the substitutionary sin-bearer.... We should talk of the bigger picture of a new people of God reflecting his image into the world, and not harp on about the fulfillment of individual needs that we all

once found so compelling. Simply telling the story of the cross is as appealing to this generation as the previous one, but when we come to interpret and apply the story, it seems we should un-learn some of the familiar language and try a different emphasis.<sup>49</sup>

Christ's work on the cross is not only about changing external behaviors that cause guilt before God (though that is important). It is ultimately about transforming individuals more and more into the image of Christ through their union with him in his body, the church. The psychological and theological findings outlined above show that this latter aim of the Gospel—which will undoubtedly accomplish the former can best be achieved in members of the emergent shame-based culture through recapitulation and theosis.

When I present the significance of the Gospel to the teenagers in our congregation, my go-to text is the book of Romans. Many Christians consider the book of Romans—with its lengthy discussions on human culpability for sin (1:18–32; 3:22–23), justification (3:24–25; 5:1–9, 18–21), the law and grace (4:13–15; 6:13–14; 7:1–25; 8:2), and the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice (5:10–11; 6:1–4; 8:1, 34–39)—to be a robust presentation of a guilt-based Gospel.<sup>50</sup> But is this all there is to Paul's letter? Romans may not be a "compendium of Christian doctrine," but Gorman argues that there is more than meets the eye to this epistle, calling it "the first Christian treatise on *theosis*."<sup>51</sup> He writes,

The West's fixation on sin and guilt has sometimes hampered us from seeing how central to Paul's anthropology and soteriology are the themes of glory, life, and immortality—both their absence in Adam and their restored presence in Christ.<sup>52</sup>

As mentioned above, both recapitulation and theosis affirm that Christ redeems humanity by walking the path of Adam, who represents all of humanity. This idea is seen most clearly in Rom. 5:12–21. So, Christ’s work does not stop at justifying human beings and removing their guilt. Paul goes on to write in chapter eight, the concluding chapter to “the most majestic set piece [he] ever wrote,”<sup>53</sup> that through Jesus’ recapitulation, believers have received “adoption,” making them “children of God” and “fellow heirs with Christ” who will one day “be glorified with him” (vv. 15–17). All along, this was the final aim of the atonement. Paul writes in vv. 29–30,

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Through Christ’s recapitulation, believers now walk the same path, replacing their shame with his glory by becoming more and more like him.<sup>54</sup>

Although the West has experienced a recent shift from a guilt-based to a more shame-based context for teenagers, employing the metaphor of “life as a path” in order to cultivate spiritual growth in the lives of adolescents is nothing new. The language of this metaphor—seen repeatedly both in recapitulation and theosis—goes back to church fathers like Athanasius and Irenaeus, as well as the apostle Paul. Yet even they were not the first of God’s people to use the path metaphor as they taught and encouraged others along life’s journey. As Fox observes, this is the primary metaphor<sup>55</sup> used by the implied speaker in Prov. 1–9, a father whose “ostensive audience [is] a youth who is nearing adulthood and must choose his course of life.”<sup>56</sup> This is made clear in chapter two: if the son treasures up his father’s words (v. 2), he “will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous” (v. 20). What is true of teenagers today was true for adolescents

in the days of the sages as well. The decisions individuals make during their transition from childhood to adulthood have a lasting effect on the rest of their lives, and many of the paths available to them will surely lead to shame—both personal and public. It is ancient wisdom, repeated throughout the history of Israel and the church, that those who minister to adolescents are speaking to individuals who face a life-or-death decision.

Teenagers in all times and cultures need a guide who will point them toward the path that leads to life. But more than that, adolescents need to know that someone has walked this path before them, someone who has done so without guilt, fear, or shame and empowers them to do the same. This is none other than



Jesus Christ. Continuing the wisdom tradition of ancient Israel, Jesus also used path language in order to call his disciples to follow his lead.<sup>57</sup> By encouraging millennials to choose Jesus’ path of recapitulation and theosis, we are speaking to them about the atonement in a way that directly addresses the shame that they feel, pointing them toward the abundant life to be found in God’s Kingdom.

### ***Conclusion: Converging Paths and Atonement Metaphors***

From what we have explored above, one might gain the impression that all Christians, regardless of their particular cultural contexts, should stop speaking about fear and guilt with those in their

communities and instead speak only of shame and the salvation Jesus provides through the path of recapitulation and theosis. But that would miss the point. Instead, the more robust take-away is this: the resurgence of these Orthodox atonement theories are timely, given the inroads that the church is making among the Makua-Metto and the shifting heart language of millennials in the West; however, we must also remember that what God has done in Christ is much more than recapitulation or theosis alone can describe.

Like a mighty river that diverges into many smaller streams as it courses through a valley, the way that Christians have described the redemptive work of the one true Lord throughout history spreads in different directions as the Gospel traverses the vast, diverse terrains of human cultures. Human beings need these divergent streams because they contextualize the salvation event into specific times and places. But to focus exclusively on one stream can cause us to lose sight of the whole picture. A mature perspective on the atonement, therefore, holds on to an awareness of how atonement metaphors emerged from a common source and a knowledge that, in following them downstream, we can see how they converge again.

The ways that Christians speak about the atonement will no doubt be shaded by the heart language of the culture in which they find themselves—guilt, shame, or fear. Although people in various cultures may primarily recognize the need for Christ to deal with only one of these effects of sin, that does not mean that they do not need Jesus’ saving power to redeem them from the other two. Those in guilt- or fear-based cultures still need Jesus to bring them out of the shame of death, and those who have a fuller awareness of their shame do not live without the weight of guilt and fear upon their lives. In the midst of a rapidly-changing world where cultures have increasing influence on one another, missionaries, youth ministers,

and indeed all Christians must be willing to explore other paths of the atonement that may not be tinted with the particular hues with which they are most familiar. Through an awareness of cultural shifts and a fluency in other heart languages, Christians will be able to present the Gospel in such a way that allows those of all cultures to connect to its message and begin walking the true path to human flourishing, new life in Christ. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I argue that the Christus Victor metaphor helps contextualize presentations of the Atonement among the Makua-Metto people and is the one that best resonates with Animists in Howell, “Through the Kaleidoscope: Animism, Contextualization and the Atonement,” *IJFM* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of the article we will use the following definitions of these doctrines. Recapitulation—the work of Christ to become the new head or captain of humanity. Theosis—the process of human beings becoming like God. We are certainly aware that recapitulation and theosis are much broader theological concepts with wider implications than addressing merely the atonement. But, for ease of use and clarity in this article we will use those terms as a shorthand to talk about their implications for the atonement.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 150. This idea was expanded by Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame and Fear Cultures* (Timē Press, 2014), 10–11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Muller uses this idea of the color palette effectively. One can think of the three types “like the three basic colors from which artists create thousands of colors. How much of each color is used determines the final type of color that emerges” (14).

<sup>7</sup> With this chart we do not want to give the impression that the various atonement approaches are limited to a specific time dimension. This is merely to help us see that certain metaphors are better suited for different contexts (e.g., Recapitulation also suggests that Jesus has redeemed the shame of Adam’s past). Also, we are focusing on “objective” presentations of the atonement and we recognize that while the Moral Influence approach

can be helpful, it is outside the scope of this article. Weaver refers to Moral Influence as a subjective approach: “Jesus died as a demonstration of God’s love. And the change that results from that loving death is not in God but in the subjective consciousness of the sinners, who repent and cease their rebellion against God...It is this psychological or subjective influence worked on the mind of the sinner...” that brings about change. J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Hendrix notes that, for Martin Luther, “Humanity was ruled by sin, death, and the devil—Luther’s unholy triumvirate—and their rule would persist, in Luther’s eyes, until the gospel weakened their hold and faith set people free.” Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 83.

<sup>9</sup> In 1 John 3, we are told that Christ “appeared in order to take away sins” (v.5); that the “reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (v. 8); and that Christ’s love and example has facilitated our passing “out of death into life” (v. 14–16). Direct quotations from Scripture in this article will come from the ESV.

<sup>10</sup> One helpful way to think about this is to picture oneself in the driver’s seat of a car. Sin is in the rear-view mirror and Christ’s atonement deals with one’s guilt in the past. But the effects of Christ’s work exceed the forgiveness of sins—Christ also addresses Satan’s efforts to work evil in one’s current surroundings (present with you in the car). And finally, Christ also deals with the death we will experience down the road. A serious problem in guilt-based societies (like North American cultures) that focus on sin is that that perspective provides such a limited view. To use our car metaphor again, it is incredibly difficult to drive by looking primarily in the rearview mirror!

<sup>11</sup> Variations of this view “appear in the tradition of the Greek Fathers from Irenaeus (120–203) to John of Damascus (c. 675–c. 749).” Recapitulation terms and images occur in “Origen (185–254), Athanasius (296–373), Basil the Great (329–379), Cyril of Alexandria (376–444), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–386), Gregory of Nazianzus (325–389), Gregory of Nyssa (?–386), and John Chrysostom (c. 347–407).” R. Larry Shelton, *Cross & Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Tyrona, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 165.

<sup>12</sup> Shelton, 162. Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart defines recapitulation as “the restoration of the human image in Christ, the eternal image of the Father after whom humanity was created in the beginning...the

recovery of a concrete form...the restoration of an original beauty”; in David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 318.

<sup>13</sup> Shelton, 160.

<sup>14</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories: A Way through the Maze* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 31. Although most modern Westerners are unfamiliar with the doctrine, Pugh notes, “It seems likely that something very like theosis was held to by a number of (early, pre-Schism) Western thinkers using different designations for it” (33). Theosis themes are found in the NT in John 10:34, 2 Cor. 5:21, and 2 Pet. 1:4.

<sup>15</sup> “[Christ] became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5, Preface); “Christ becomes what we are, that we through his death may become what he is” (Wilhelm Wrede, *Paul*, trans. Edward Lummis [London: Green, 1907], 110); “[Christ] became like human beings, so that we would be like him,” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 4 [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001], 285); “Christ became what we are—*adam*—in order that we might share in what he is—namely the true image of God,” [Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19]. See also Michael J. Gorman, “Romans: The First Christian Treatise on Theosis,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5.1 (2011): 13–14, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Russell describes theosis as “our restoration as persons to integrity and wholeness by participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit, in a process which is initiated in this world...and finds ultimate fulfillment in our union with the Father” [Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*, Foundation Series, bk. 5 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 21]. The first person to use the term was Gregory of Nazianzus in 363 (*Oration* 4.71; see Russell, 22).

<sup>17</sup> Pugh, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: The Treatise – De Incarnatione Verbi Dei by St. Athanasius*, trans. and ed. A. Religious of C. S. M. V. with an introduction by C. S. Lewis (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003, originally published 1944), p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Pugh, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54. In section 9, Athanasius beautifully connects honor/shame themes to the way Christ deals with the problem of death.

<sup>21</sup> In talking about the story of Adam and the Fall, Georges and Baker note,

“Death is the ultimate shame; humans return back to the lowly dust they come from.” Jayson Georges and Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 69. One example of the connection between honor/shame and death in Scripture is from the story of the Philippian jailor who is stopped by Paul in his attempts to reclaim his honor and deal with his shame through killing himself (Acts 16). An example from eastern cultures in more recent times is that of a Japanese warrior who through a ritual death can deal with his shame and reclaim his honor. Jackson Wu uses this type of framework to argue that we could speak of Christ’s work on the cross as an “honor death,” not an “honor killing” as Jesus sacrificed himself for the sake of God’s honor (and ours). Jackson Wu, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, 2012). In personal conversations with Gary Jackson, a longtime missionary in Russia and China, he noted that while this remains true in other Eastern societies (Japan, Taiwan and the Middle East), Chinese culture actually seems to be shifting away from honor and shame to a greater emphasis on guilt.

<sup>22</sup> In its broadest terms, shame simply means that others “think lowly of you and do not want to be with you” (Georges and Baker, 42). We will unpack the meaning of shame for Mozambicans and Millennials in the following sections.

<sup>23</sup> While fear and shame play a strong role, guilt is not a major motivator. There’s not a unique word for guilt in the Makua-Metto language (only derivatives of the word for sin or lie), so to even talk about that concept, people end up borrowing the word from Portuguese (Mozambique’s national language).

<sup>24</sup> Georges and Baker, 177. This connection between shame and death is also found throughout Scripture; see 1 Sam. 20:30–32; Job 11:13–20; Ps. 83:17; 89:45–49; Isa. 65:13–16; Jer. 9:19–21; 20:18; Ezek. 7:15–18; 32:24, 25, 30; Rom. 1:26–32; 6:21; Phil. 1:20; 3:19; 2 Tim. 1:8–12; Heb. 2:9–15; 12:2.

<sup>25</sup> Life expectancy in Mozambique is 51 years while the USA averages almost 79 years. Malaria and diarrhea are everyday realities (and people are very familiar with cholera, AIDS, tuberculosis, etc.). Although Mozambique has seen economic improvement in recent years, over 80% of the population still live on less than \$2 a day. In 2013, Mozambique was #178 out of 187 on the UN’s Human Development Index (Haiti and Afghanistan ranked #168 and #169 respectively). For

more on Poverty in Mozambique see, Howell “Recognizing Poverty Rules: Addressing the Causes and Patterns of Absolute Poverty Among the Makua-Metto People,” *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Praxis* 6, no. 2 (August 2015).

<sup>26</sup> If a religious group does not bury people well, it will suffer the same fate as its adherents . . . it will not survive. For more on the funeral as a powerful time for the church to be a blessing, see: Howell, “Building a Better Bridge: The Quest for Blessing in an African Folk Islamic Context,” *IJFM* 32, no. 1 (Jan–Mar 2015), 50.

<sup>27</sup> At Christian funerals, it is often commented that “the day of death is better than the day of birth” (Eccl. 7:1).

<sup>28</sup> As my friend and missionary teammate, Chad Westerholm, has observed: “While a Westerner may view a funeral as a mere burial, to an African it is a major event where roles are radically altered.” They move from one type of status within the community to another.

<sup>29</sup> Both formal and folk religions provide answers to death, but the questions are different. Formal religion addresses where the dead have gone. Folk religions deal with questions of death that confront the living. Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tié-nou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 78.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., “Could it be that the absent person was ashamed to come because they used witchcraft to murder the deceased?”

<sup>31</sup> Although it may seem strange to Westerners, our Makua-Metto friends think it is very appropriate for the funeral sermon at the burial site to be an evangelistic one. There is a captive, quiet audience, (remember the uninitiated are not allowed to be present so there are no crying or talking children) and we are standing around a powerful, visible sermon illustration of our own mortality.

<sup>32</sup> For more on “suffering” language in the Makua-Metto context see Howell, “Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering” *IJFM* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Richard Beck, *The Slavery of Death* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 81.

<sup>34</sup> This generation, also known as “Generation Y,” is the demographic cohort born between the early 1980’s and the early 2000’s. One of the significant aspects of my (Logan) ministry is that I am a part of the same generation as those to whom I minister.

<sup>35</sup> Danah Boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Georges, 58.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Boyd, 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> According to Georges, Western philosophy has explained “a person’s essence apart from their relationships or community. Consequently, Western civilization dismisses communal dynamics (i.e., honor, shame, and face) in favor of guilt, innocence, and justice” (19).

<sup>42</sup> Georges and Baker, 15. For scientific evidence, see Naomi Eisenberger and Matthew Liberman, “Why it Hurts to be Left Out: The Neurocognitive Overlap Between Physical Pain and Social Pain,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 8, no. 7 (2004): 294–300.

<sup>43</sup> Brian Lickel, Kostadin Kushlev, Victoria Savalei, Shashi Matta, and Toni Schmader “Shame and the Motivation to Change the Self,” *Emotion* 14, no. 6 (2014): 1050.

<sup>44</sup> Lickel et al., 1049–61. It is worth noting that the median age for their study was 20 years, and is particularly representative of millennials.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Examples of external reparations as a response to feeling guilt include apologizing for, attempting to fix, or trying to undo the social or moral transgression; internal reparations as a response to shame may include somehow distancing oneself from a situation and hiding from public view, attempting to cover up the transgression, or working to change one’s identity. See Lickel, et al., 1050; and June P. Tangney and Rowland S. Miller, “Are Shame, Guilt, and Embarrassment Distinct Emotions?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, no. 6 (1996): 1256–1269. Some readers may question the validity of the claim that shame can lead to positive change. In his exploration of the use of shame and the criminal justice system, Braithwaite distinguishes between “disintegrative” shame (which makes one into a social outcast) and “reintegrative” shame (whose aim is to restore the individual back into the larger society). See John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Lickel et al., 1059.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1058. Lickel et al. theorize two reasons for their findings. First, “Guilt’s strong link to apology and reparation might, in some circumstances, moderate the extent to which people feel they need to change”; second, “Guilt is particularly likely to be evoked by behavioral appraisals (‘I did a bad thing’), whereas shame is linked to a dispositional appraisal (‘I am a bad person’)” (1058). For an exploration of how shifts in the use and

perception of honor and shame were used to bring about positive change (examples: dueling, Chinese foot binding, the Atlantic slave trade, and honor killing) see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: Norton, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> Pugh, 40–1.

<sup>50</sup> See Richard N. Longenecker's discussion in *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 305–7.

<sup>51</sup> Gorman, 16; 13–34. As Gorman argues, this designation is *not* anachronistic; it is, instead, both “retrospectively appropriate [and] accurate” (18, emphasis his).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> N. T. Wright, referring to Rom. 5–8, in *The Resurrection of the Son of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 48.

<sup>54</sup> One could argue that since Paul never writes that believers become like God he is only writing about “Christosis” and not theosis. As Gorman notes, however, “Paul avers that God’s eternal plan is to create a family of siblings who resemble the firstborn and definitive Son, namely, Jesus. What Paul does not state explicitly is the obvious: that the Son is like the Father and that the siblings will ultimately be like the Father because they are like the Son. Christosis, therefore, is ultimately *theosis*” (27).

<sup>55</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 18A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 128.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 92; 6–12. See esp. the lecture in Prov. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Matt. 7:13–14: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

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# A Reflection on Insider Movements in Korean Church History

by John Kim

## Introduction

The missiological term “insider movements” is often used to describe people movements to Christ from within socio-religious communities. New believers in these movements take initiative to bring their own problems to the word of God to get appropriate solutions. The people who live in these distinct socio-religious communities are called insiders. When insider movements occur they can give us a unique glimpse into the Kingdom of God and perhaps a better understanding of how that Kingdom can expand as Jesus movements in a context where a group of people shares space and time in a homogeneous way. It’s within this homogeneous context that the dynamics of group conversion and social transformation can occur.

This article reviews the Korean people movements to Christ in Korean church history from an insider’s perspective. Reflecting on Korean church history is important in order to revive the insider spirit and develop a self-theologizing/self-missilogizing approach in world missions amongst Korean churches. This might also give us some clues as to how to reverse the decline of Korean church growth. The underlying purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, the revival of Korean churches resulting in a genuine nationwide social transformation for the sake of the Kingdom; second, to illustrate the decisive role model in world mission of Koreans as the 11th hour workers. This understanding is tremendously important as Korea now faces both a critical spiritual and socio-political crisis.

Because Koreans have been insiders themselves for a long period of time, this paper is a retrospective evaluation from an insider’s point of view for the purpose of understanding the status quo and of meaningfully advancing the development of the Kingdom.

## *Insider Movements in the Dawn of the Early Korean Church*

The year 1884, when Dr. Allen was sent as an official missionary from the US, is usually accepted as the first year of Protestant mission to Korea.

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However, as is commonly known in the history of Korean Christianity, Roman Catholicism had already been introduced a long time earlier and some of the scripture translation had already been made. The gospel was spreading throughout the Korean diasporas in Manchuria and in Japan (overseas Korean students), despite the turmoil on the Korean peninsula due to the competition of world powers. There are parallels in the book of Acts where in many cases the initial breakthrough for spreading the gospel was made by bicultural or intercultural indigenous people.<sup>1</sup> The main thrust of the Protestant mission force towards Korea began in the late 19th century when colonial powers including Japan, China, and Russia were aggressively competing for political and trade advantages. During that time, many of the Koreans who would later become believers were concerned about the fate of their home country, were living outside of it in multicultural contexts, and were open to accepting the gospel as good news for their own country.

Now let's look through some examples relating to what I would call insider movements during the early stages of the Protestant mission effort in Korea. As I mentioned earlier, Korea had to struggle with external colonial powers (especially Japan) which were not regarded as Western nor Christian. This was why the gospel was seen as very good news by Koreans. It was natural that the early Koreans who would later become believers had a strong motivation and took initiative to fight against the unwanted (and evil) forces outside of their country—in large part because of their understanding of the good news. I believe this happened because Koreans understood what they needed as insiders in the Korean context. David Cho explains the initiative the early Korean believers took:<sup>2</sup>

I believe that the Korean mission history needs to be explained in a distinctive way, different from the general missions understanding of Western missions initiatives in the other countries where the gospel was introduced mostly by

expatriates from the beginning. For example, some Koreans in Uijoo, Pyoungando put their lives on the line by bringing the Christian faith into Korea, even in violation of their country's laws, in order to introduce their people to life.... Korean mission movements had already dawned in 1870 when the first Korean Protestant Christians such as Lee Eung Chan, Paek Heung Joon, Lee Sung Ha, Seo Sang Ryun and Kim Jin Ki crossed the Amnok River (Yalu River) which divides Korea and China in order to bring the good news.... In 1882, Lee Eung Chan, Seo Sang Ryung and Lee Sung Ha took the gospel in Chinese with them back into Korea and translated Luke and John into Korean. In this way, an indigenous Korean mission began to take its own path in 1876 and continued on until 1882. And in the next year, i.e.



1883, the first two indigenous churches were established by Koreans in Uijoo, Pyoungando and Sorae, Hwanghaedo. The timing of the first foreign missionary from the US to come into Korea was ten years after the Koreans' indigenous mission initiative had already been established and three years after a couple of books in the gospel had already been translated by Koreans themselves.

A Korean church historian, Jeon Taek Bu, deals with Korea's mission initiatives in a similar manner:<sup>3</sup>

It is said that the Protestant mission in Asia was pioneered by the London Missionary Society and the Netherlands Missionary Society. They approached Korea too, but the major initiative was later on by the American Board

of Commissioners for Foreign Mission. However, mission thrust within the mainland of Korea was made by Koreans themselves.... This is so peculiar because we rarely observe similar phenomena in any other countries. In other words, even before foreign missionaries came to Korea, the gospel had already been sowed not by an expatriate missionary force but by Korean indigenous believers. At that time, Korea was so dark and extremely closed towards anyone and anything coming from outside of the country. And various challenges were causing the Korean people to go through serious sufferings.... How then was the Christian mission possible under such barriers? How then could the Korean church experience so unprecedented a growth and development as it did in the history of world Christianity? Whatever the answer is, the truth is startling: foreign missionaries came to Korea not as the gospel sowers but as harvesters.

As we have briefly reviewed, the initial mission thrust correlated with the contemporary situation the Koreans faced at that time, and it was started at the initiative of Koreans themselves.

### ***Can Such Rapid Growth be Ascribed to the Nevius Mission Method?***

There were two major mission policies practiced by mainstream American missionaries in Korea: the policy of comity (or the division of geographic areas by denomination) and the Nevius mission method. In this section, by looking at the contextual situation of Korea at that time, we will try to see if the Nevius mission method was detrimental to the rapid growth of Korean churches as we often think it is. The Nevius mission method is understood as the indigenization of the local churches in three ways: self-support, self-governance, and self-propagation. However, in understanding the dynamics of rapid Korean church growth, the Nevius mission method is not as valid since the growth was not just an indigenization process. Rather, it was the result of the nationwide spreading of the self-initiated Bible study movement.

The Nevius mission policy was introduced when seven Presbyterian missionaries invited John Nevius and his wife (who were serving in China) as the main speakers for a two-week retreat in Seoul, Korea, on the seventh of June 1890. After long discussions, they decided to adopt the mission policy that had been introduced by Nevius. This was a valid and appropriate mission method for an initial breakthrough in Korea during which time there were not yet any comprehensive church structures.<sup>4</sup> Its essence is the “three selfs” mentioned earlier. However, what happened in Korea through the method was the spreading of what became nationwide self-initiated Bible study. As a matter of fact, China was the main country where the Nevius mission method had been intensely practiced, but its effectiveness was really proven only in Korea. The difference was the self-initiated Bible study.<sup>5</sup> Harvie M. Conn who served in Korea for many years examined its success as follows:<sup>6</sup>

The central theme of Nevius’ method is neither self-supporting nor self-governing. It is indeed an emphasis on the Bible as the foundation for all sorts of Christian ministries and training through the Bible study meetings. By doing so, the Bible was studied and applied to the hearts of the believers.

It is interesting to know that the Koreans were culturally self-aware and that they did the Bible studies at their own initiative. It was a conviction based on their belief that Koreans could become much more complete—more fully Korean—than ever before through the Bible study meetings. This principle was applied also to the education circles as a means to overcome the contemporary challenges faced by many Koreans at that time. Lee Man Youl states that this was the goal of Korean Christian educators. According to him, many Christian founders of educational institutions claimed the purposes of their establishment was either to “Make Koreans Better Koreans,” or to “Make Koreans Proud of Being Koreans,” or to “Make Korea Great Through Christ and His Teachings.”<sup>7</sup>

## **T**he effectiveness of the Nevius mission method was really proven in Korea. The difference was the self-initiated Bible study.

This self-motivation and awareness resulted in consecutive Korean-initiated movements in the areas of Bible translation, Bible study, and Bible distribution. When those movements spread, social transformation naturally followed. Christians were motivated to learn the Korean alphabet, Hangeul, for the purpose of Bible study. Because of their strong motivation to learn the Word of God, Korean women, who were limited in their educational opportunities, were motivated to improve women’s rights in the male-dominated society. Thus, the need for fair educational opportunities for women resulted from the self-awareness of Korean women which emerged through Bible study movements.<sup>8</sup> I will share an example of an insider movement where the women’s role is decisive in the latter part of this paper. This example is an active model that is still alive in Korean communities.

The early Korean mission was carried out by ordinary believers. In other words, during the period when there were no denominational structures or seminaries, the early breakthrough in the spreading of the gospel was accomplished by so-called laymen. They must have known what to do as Korean insiders. Here at this point, we can also introduce “oikos movements.” The earliest churches in Korean church history were established by Koreans themselves. They were actually just home-based Jesus movements. In 1882, Kim Chung Song started his own “oikos” at a Korean village in the West Manchuria area. And in 1883, Paek Hong Jun offered his house as a gathering place with Lee Sung Ha and Seo Sang Ryun as founders. The church that was started at Seo Gyung Jo’s house in the Sorae village in 1884 is another example. This was the result of the indigenous evangelizing effort on the part of Seo Sang Ryun. Seo Gyung Jo’s fellowship was one of the first fruits of his work. In this way, Koreans

spread the gospel through their natural networks and started believers’ gatherings in their homes.<sup>9</sup>

It was November 1884 when Lee Eung Chan and Seo Sang Ryun were baptized by a western missionary, John Ross, from Scotland. They helped John Ross to learn the Korean language. John Ross, who was involved in Bible translation, recalls his experience of visiting a Korean village in the West Manchuria area as follows:<sup>10</sup>

... we arrived at the first Korean village by sunset. Around thirty Koreans wearing white traditional robes welcomed us. We stayed at the chief villager’s house. I feel there is no way to express their hospitality.... A big change had taken place since something happened two years ago in this village. The gospel was introduced to this village in the valley two years ago. Since then, some hundreds of Koreans now enjoy their lives while following the way of the gospel. We cannot but be surprised when we think about their motivation, the growth of their faith in Christ, and the results. No missionaries had ever been in the village but just some Korean gospel messages and tracts.

### **Gospel Transformation Spreads Through Whole Classes of People**

According to Jeon Taek Bu, the early Korean Protestant believers were not called Christians, but they were called *Yesu-jaengi* or *Yesu-kun*. Suffixes like “-jaengi” or “-kun” (attached to *Yesu* or *Jesus*) were commonly used in Korean society to identify those who had certain expertise in their professional areas. At that time, Korea (the actual name of the country was *Chosun*) had a social or class hierarchy with classes called *Yangban* (the scholar-officials), *Joongin* (literally “middle people” or technicians and administrators subordinate to the *Yangban*), *Sangmin* (farmers, craftsmen,

and merchants), and *Chunmin* (literally “despised people” or slaves and “unclean professions” such as leatherworkers, butchers, shamans, etc.). This system is not exactly the same as the caste system in India, but there is a great similarity. During this time, the gospel was spreading in Jesus movements among the lower classes such as the Sangmin and Chunmin. These were grassroots Jesus movements. Jeon Taek Bu said that Protestant Christianity had taken root among the lower classes and when faith in Jesus entered a village it spread like an epidemic. And those who accepted Jesus began to commit their lives to rescue their country (through the gospel) from the widespread suffering and hardship it was undergoing. Because of the Jesus movements, many Christian leaders later became the patriots who fought against the Japanese colonial force to achieve independence.<sup>11</sup>

While the gospel was taking root and spreading among the lower social classes in Korea with names like Yesu-jaengi or Yesu-kun, at the same time there were also many high class national leaders who were concerned about the fate of the country. They established the *Dongnip Hyeophoe* (Independence Club) in 1896, and through this club, Seo Jae Pil (Philip Jaisohn) fostered the independence movements. He proclaimed the “Self-Reinforcement Spirit as the Sovereignty of People” and “Self-Reinforcement Movements for the Sovereignty of People.” In the editorial message of his bulletin dated 26 Jan 1897, he outlined his thesis about the gospel in a very positive manner by saying that the leading countries in the world had all adopted Christianity passionately and they were civilized and enjoying great blessings from God. When he was forced to leave Korea because of a conspiracy plot by the Russian Consular Officer Weber, and pro-Russia Korean politicians, his role was taken over by Yoon Chi Ho. Yoon Chi Ho publicly honored Seo Jae Pil in “An Honest Confession” which was his response to Pil’s farewell

message and which appeared in the newspaper *The Independent*:<sup>12</sup>

I cannot stress too much his work through the Korean and English editions of *The Independent* newspaper.... He educated Koreans with something special as follows: “All people are equal human beings when they are born. This truth didn’t come from Anglo-Saxon or Latin people, but from God to every one.... And the personal right and prosperity that foreigners enjoy are not gained accidentally but achieved by long term research, struggle, and even fight. If Koreans really want to achieve such right and prosperity, then they should do the same thing.”

In fact, the leaders representing the Independence Club such as Seo Jae Pil, Yoon



Chi Ho, and Lee Sang Jae were all believers—laymen who could also represent Korean church communities at that time. They were the initiators of grassroots movements based on the gospel when the fate of Korea was in such a vulnerable state. During the independence movements, a transformational change began to take place in Korean social hierarchy. As an example, a butcher who was from the lowest class called Chunmin, made an opening address where tens of thousands of Koreans gathered for the movement event. Those were grassroots movements indeed.<sup>13</sup>

Jeon Taek Bu stressed some characteristics of the nationwide revival movements that Korean churches experienced in the

early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1903–1910).<sup>14</sup> While expatriate workers were really struggling in a foreign cultural context and suffering from serious self-doubt, defeatism, frustration, and loss of pride, early Korean believers experienced the special work of the Holy Spirit in a Pentecost-like event while praying collectively. This kind of Pentecostal experience was not strange to the early Korean Christian believers as they had already observed spiritual phenomena such as demonic possession in folk beliefs relating to the practice of shamanism. The well-known honored early Korean church leaders like Jeon Gye Eun and Kil Sun Joo were greatly impressed by the Pentecostal experience. It is interesting to note that they had all previously been deeply involved in Korean folk religion, Confucianism, the practice of Taoism, and animism (the belief in the spirits of mountains, etc.). However, in the crisis of the downfall of the country, the Pentecostal movements spread rapidly.

Kil Sun Joo is known as an early Korean church leader who ignited the fire of revival movements in the Pyoung Yang area. It is said that he became a man with superpowers at the age of 23, who mastered a secret form of spiritual concentration called “Charyeok.” But after becoming a Christian believer at the age of 28, in 1896 he became a Pentecostal and started early-morning prayer meetings with his fellow elder Park Chi Rok in 1905. These early-morning prayer gatherings have become a tradition of Korean Christianity.

### *A Brief Analysis of the Early Breakthroughs of the Gospel in Korea*

Foreign missionaries came to Japan and China much earlier than to Korea. In terms of geographical and cultural proximity, we cannot find a big difference. However, a meaningful breakthrough of the spread of the gospel took place only in Korea. Jeon Taek Bu analyzed the difference by looking at four factors:<sup>15</sup>

- 1) a patriotic spirit of self-defense for

the motherland arose among Koreans due to the occurrence of frequent invasions by other countries such as China and Japan;<sup>16</sup> 2) an awareness of the need for a more progressive civilization dating from the 1700s; 3) a unique sense about a “Supreme Heavenly God” which existed in Korean traditional folk religion;<sup>17</sup> and 4) a consciousness of and a pride in the Korean language which was based on Korean ethnicity.

Agreeing with this analysis, Lee Man Youl goes on to raise the issue of true independence with Korean churches nowadays. It has been a long time since Korean churches celebrated the 100th anniversary in 1984 of the introduction of Protestant Christianity in 1884. However, since that time, dependency on the West has become very common in almost all forms of Korean Christianity including theology, doctrinal faith confessions, worship forms, Christian lifestyles, and even gospel songs and hymns. Many Korean Christians are now merely recipients and consumers of those Western forms of Christianity in a passive way.<sup>18</sup>

Reflecting on the early spread of the gospel in Korea, I have come to believe that a strong awareness of the spirit of being Korean, including a sense that they as insiders were spreading a Korean gospel—was the main cause for this breakthrough. Koreans at that time were facing a real political crisis and had to be ready to cope with rapid change and external challenges. They had firsthand awareness that the gospel was good news. Even before the American missionaries had begun official missionary work in Korea, Bible translation and the establishment of church fellowships or home gatherings had been already initiated by Koreans themselves. And the earliest Christian communities extended their influence to the grassroots level of Korean lives without any assistance from Western theological seminaries or Christian institutions. The gospel-spreading movements had an intrinsically Korean dynamic, as Koreans, who were insiders, took initiative and recognized the need for social forms and patterns

**B**efore official American missionary work began, Bible translation and the establishment of church fellowships had already been initiated by Koreans.

which would ensure their survival against the backdrop of the diminishing power of the rulers of the country. In fact, revival movements broke out which clearly showed their spiritual vitality. The early-morning prayer meetings, their fasting and overnight prayer practices, and the unique Pentecostal spiritual gifts are all part of Koreans’ indigenous religious traditions. These strongly correlated with each other and were regarded as the evidences of God’s special intervention on behalf of all Koreans. This is truly an insider’s perspective.

It is true to say that Korean Christianity experienced amazing growth in a relatively short time in mission history. Over time, an organizing process came naturally. However, at the present time, when we are observing a worrisome decline in Korean Christianity, I am concerned about the loss of the insiders’ perspectives and initiatives because Korean Christianity has become so dependent on Western forms. In my conclusion, I will try to discuss a little bit more about this retrospective reflection and I will attempt to suggest appropriate corrections for the future.

### *The Yang Sil Community: A Living Example of an Insider Movement*

Although the intrinsically Korean dynamics, central to the spreading of the gospel among Koreans, seem to be declining, there has actually been an amazing church growth in Korea since the Korean War in the 1950s. The growth has come along with industrial and economic development not only in the modality structures—mainstream Christian denominations—but also in sodality structures—student/campus Christian movements like CCC, Navigators, UBF, ISF, YWAM, etc. However, in almost all of those cases, the movements and the

structures were imported from Western countries, mostly from the US. In a sense, whenever true contextualization has not occurred in the Korean context, the foreign and Western-initiated structures and movements have not really successfully penetrated the hearts of Koreans. The situation and context in Korea have been changing. The kind of motivation and initiative that drove many early Koreans who later became believers is not present any longer.

However, here in this section, I will gladly give an example of a current Korean insider movement that is still ongoing. Here is the short story of “Yang Sil Hoi.” In fact, under the name “Yang Sil Hoi,” the people formed a legal entity in 1991. The name means a community where people live their lives according to their consciences and based on their faith. The story goes back to the time before the Korean war.

In (North Korea) before the Korean war, there was a woman called Cha Young Eun. She was just an ordinary wife but a woman of prayer. She had been committed to praying every day for ten years early in the morning for the independence of Korea from Japan (which had occupied Korea since 1905). One day while praying, and in a vision, she heard a voice saying that she should leave (North) Korea as there would be serious trouble in the near future. She realized it was a vision given by God to help women. In 1946, she came down to Seoul, South Korea, with around 100 people accompanying her and settled in a village. It wasn’t long before the number of the community members grew to 300. She emphasized the role of wife was that of being a helper to her husband. She taught that playing the right role of a wife was the first step in loving the country.

Even though there has been some degree of breakthrough in women’s rights

since then, at that time, women were an unreached people group and were isolated from the main society. After settling down in the village, she continued the prayer fellowship among women. The leadership mantle was passed on to a woman called Park Geum Jung. Park Geum Jung adopted the passion and prayer style of the fellowship but also started to make her own leadership decisions. After Cha Young Eun passed away in 1967, Park Geum Jung continued on in the same role

In 1967, Park Geum Jung started a new community where most of the members consisted either of women from broken families or of women who had suffered painfully from a male-dominated society. She helped those women through prayer and faith counseling. Many women were moved by her committed service and began to experience recovery which was demonstrated by changes in their lives. As a result, many husbands and children joined the women to try to recover their family relationships again and the community began to grow. These families in the community took it upon themselves, according to their faith in Jesus, to help other women in trouble and other families in crisis by establishing “Yang Sil Hoi” in 1978. And the first woman lawyer in Korean history, Lee Tae Young, became involved in the community life and advised opening the Sindang branch of legal counsel for families in 1983. Then they established a children’s day care center and offered to support careers for women. Volunteers and supporters joined the community and the community continued to move up into the society. In 1991, “Yang Sil Hoi” became a registered legal entity and a community church was also established. This church and community don’t belong to any denominational structure; however, their social service and community life is very active. Now they are also actively involved in social service activities including family health and multicultural family care programs.

Through a beautiful commitment of a woman of prayer motivated by a

vision from God, many Korean women experienced restoration of their broken families and they determined to serve others in similar trouble. Eventually Lee Tae Young (the woman lawyer) came to work with them for social transformation through faith in Jesus, and the community is still actively serving Korean society as it faces challenges in a more multicultural context. Three generations of Koreans have been part of this Jesus movement, have been involved in the community’s life dynamics, and, as Korean insider believers, continue to share the spirit of Jesus with other Koreans.

I believe that this is a beautiful example of a Korean insider movement that is still active. When they continued to take initiative to deal with their problems and



reflected on their faith in Jesus through prayer, they had the momentum to keep maintaining their faith traditions and their community life dynamics. Since they didn’t belong to any one denomination, their impact on women and families with problems was much more straightforward and positive than that of denominational Christian institutions.

### **Conclusion**

A brief review was presented in this short article of how the early breakthroughs of the spread of the gospel took place in Korea . . . We have seen that the local indigenous people (the Koreans) were determined as insider believers to face the crisis together regarding the fate of their country. They desired to

find ways to resolve their contemporary problems through a Korean style of prayer and of Bible study movements. The impact was nationwide and even the barriers from the social class structure were overcome. Even though there had been expatriate workers who had tried to influence the local Koreans, many of them were really in great confusion due to the huge cultural gap.

Parallel to the economic growth, the modality and sodality structures seemed to become great Christian movements throughout the whole country. However, such movements which were fostered in Western organizational forms and Western denominational structures are already stagnating, or even declining. The problem is most of these movements still feel very foreign and have Western styles. At this point, I strongly feel that Koreans need to find their fully indigenous identities as Korean insiders in the Kingdom of God again.

As an example of a Korean insider movement that is still ongoing, I introduced “Yang Sil Hoi.” As they have not been connected with any westernized denominational structures or mission organizations, when they dealt with social problems such as women’s rights or the issues of broken families, they were able to approach the local people without any prejudice. Because of that, many local people have joined the community and have been willing to serve others in the same way that they themselves have been served.

In conclusion, here are some suggestions I would like to share for how to possibly overcome the declining situation of Korean Christianity—something about which many Christian leaders have been concerned.

First, Bible study meetings and fellowships need to be encouraged to be in an “oikos form” of family and community life. Koreans have an intrinsic spirit of community. This is very clear as we see how Koreans enjoy holidays and seasonal festivals with their extended

families. Many times, Christian westernized organizational structures have interrupted or even halted family life rhythms and dynamics when husband and wife have not been part of the same faith in Jesus. An institutional church-oriented Christian life may not be the best way to lead families in present-day Korea into the Kingdom of God.

Secondly, there is another point that continues on from the first one: examples of Korean insider movements that are not related to existing Western structures need to be identified more. “Yang Sil Hoi” is just one example. The institutional church-oriented life which does not result in social transformation can be a great hurdle for the majority of currently unreached Koreans.

Third, while Korean churches enjoy many holidays brought over from Western countries and denominations, Korean traditional festivals in different seasons are regarded as non-Christian. This means Korean faith communities have not really yet gone through a genuine contextualization process. In many ways, Korean church communities look like miniatures of American church communities. Korean Christians need to be encouraged to redeem their own Korean traditions themselves.

Fourth, the present political situation that Korea faces looks similar to that which confronted the country during the early stages of the spreading of the gospel in the late 19th century. After the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, colonial Japan started ruling Korea in 1910. Even though independence from Japan was achieved in Korea in 1945 after the Second World War, the Korean peninsula was forcefully divided into two countries, North and South Korea, by other countries like the US and the Soviet Union. In these days, Koreans need to be motivated to take the initiative once again, to come together through prayer and indigenous Bible study movements, and to seek the Lord for the right direction for the fate of their country.

**T**hey were able to approach the local people without any prejudice when dealing with social issues such as women’s rights or the issues of broken families.

Accomplishing world missions might include the issue of the unification of the two Koreas, but any new growth of Korean Christianity will require the recovery of Koreanness in our own Korean context through the Good News once again. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this world of globalization, we may expect the acceleration of the expansion of the Kingdom as we see so many people living in multicultural situations. Many of those in the Korean diasporas who were scattered throughout Central Asia and China during the period when the Communists came to power may become the seeds for a new Korean world missions thrust.

<sup>2</sup> David Cho (조동진), *People and Religion – An Analysis of Mission History during the Western Colonial Period* (민족과 종교 - 서구 식민사에 얽힌 선교사의 해부) (Star Book Pub. 도서출판 별: 1991), pp. 315–317 (in Korean; the given English translation is mine).

<sup>3</sup> Taek Bu Jeon (전택부), *History of Korean Church Development* (한국교회발전사) (Korea Christian Book Publisher 대한기독교출판사: 1987), p. 14 (in Korean).

<sup>4</sup> Young Jae Kim (김영재), *Korea Church History* (한국교회사) (개혁주의신행협회: 1992), p. 92 (in Korean).

<sup>5</sup> Yong Gyu Park (박용규), *History of Korean Presbyterian Philosophy* (한국장로교사상사) (Chongshin University Press - 종신대학출판부: 1992), pp. 110–120 (in Korean).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 113 (This English translation is mine. You can see the original English sentences given by Conn, *Studies in Theology of the Korean Presbyterian Church*, 29).

<sup>7</sup> Man Youl Lee (이만열), *Korean Christianity and Historical Perception* (한국기독교와 역사의식) (지식산업사: 1981), p. 18 (in Korean).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 21 (in Korean).

<sup>9</sup> Taek Bu Jeon (전택부), *History of Korean Church Development* (한국교회발전사) (Korea Christian Book Publisher 대한기독교출판사: 1987), pp. 98–103 (in Korean).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 99 (The contents are re-translated from the Korean in the book into English by the author of this paper).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 117–118 (in Korean).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 136; Lee Gwang Lin (이광린), *Research on the Christian Civilization Idea* (기독교개화사상연구: 일조각; 1979), p. 139 (in Korean).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 137 (in Korean).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 159–160 (in Korean).

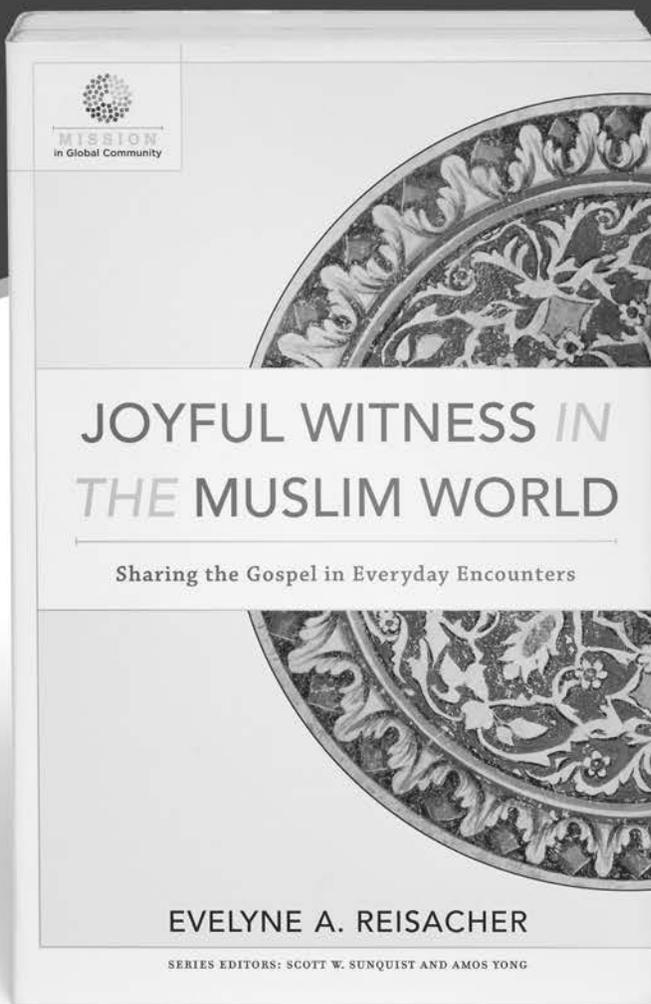
<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 163–165 (in Korean).

<sup>16</sup> This spirit of self-defense is probably related to the situational contexts in which Korea has found herself throughout her history. Around 1300 years ago, Korea defeated an invasion by China (Su Dynasty) with a united front led by the general Euljimunduk. Later on, Korea had to fight against Mongolia during the period of the Korea Dynasty and then later yet against Japan during the Lee Dynasty (Chosun). Throughout all these invasions by other countries over the centuries, the spirit of self-defense has only grown stronger in the minds of all Koreans. Especially in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, when the ruling power of the Korean leaders was declining and the people had to become ready to fight against foreign powers again, the spirit of self-defense was purposefully revived by remembering the historical incidents. Koreans got used to reacting collectively to crises created by external causes. In the modern age, when the foreign monetary crisis threatened the economic stability of Korea, they overcame the crisis by the nationwide collaborative action of collecting gold. This ability to pull together and act collectively for the common good seems to be rooted in the spirit of self-defense that has been formed in the minds of Koreans throughout their long history.

<sup>17</sup> Yoo Dong Sik asserts that Koreans could accept the biblical God who has a relationship with humans without serious difficulty due to an existing consciousness about the Heavenly Being found in Koreans’ folk shamanistic beliefs. (*Korea Religion and Christianity* [한국종교와 기독교] Daehan Christian Book Publisher [대한기독교서회], 1973), p. 93 (in Korean).

<sup>18</sup> Lee Man Youl (이만열), *Korea Christianity and Historical Consciousness* (한국기독교와 역사의식) (지식산업사, 1981), p. 135 (in Korean).

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# The Early Church in China: A Case Study of an Insider Movement

by David G. Cashin

The concept of reaching people within their cultural and religious contexts is a biblical one. Indeed, the incarnation of Jesus provides the primary example for reaching mankind in his context. What that means for us in Christian mission has been tried and tested throughout history. This paper is one more historical case study of contextualization which gives focus to the missional adaptation of the Church of the East in China to the Taoist school at Da Qin beginning in the 7th century. It should offer perspective to the debate regarding one type of adaptation known today as “insider movements” (hereafter abbreviated IM).<sup>1</sup> There are now insider movements and their advocates within peoples who identify with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, African tribal religions, and indeed, probably any religious identity. There are different types of IMs in Christian history,<sup>2</sup> and this article will attempt to supplement the broader historical record by giving further illustration to adaptive efforts that tend towards syncretism and an unfaithfulness to God and his revealed Word.

## *The Church of the East*

Kenneth Scott Latourette, in his foundational work on the history of Christianity, mentions the arrival of “Nestorian”<sup>3</sup> missionaries in China under the leadership of Alopen in 635 AD. Alopen led a mission to China that was positively received in the court of the Chinese Emperor. Latourette notes their spread, the coming of persecution in 835 AD, and that the movement had entirely vanished by 980 AD.<sup>4</sup> Over roughly a 200-year period this Christian mission effort was able to establish itself in the epicenter of China. This article is primarily an analysis of the Jesus Sutras, early Christian documents of this movement and of the commentary and translation provided in the groundbreaking work of Martin Palmer in *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*.

Three preliminary observations are in order as we begin to evaluate the strategic efforts of this church movement, and particularly the characteristics of these Jesus Sutras.

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First, the movement was dependent on state support, and one of the reasons for its downfall was when state support was finally withdrawn.<sup>5</sup> This approach involved building the central Christian monastery on the site of Lou Guan Tai, the Taoist monastery where Lao Zi supposedly wrote his classic work, the Tao Te Ching:

The significance of the Christian influence in this Taoist stronghold would be comparable to a new religion being allowed to build a temple within the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral in the Middle Ages, or a new faith being given financial aid and support to build a monastery on the grounds of the White House today.<sup>6</sup>

Later documents from the 10th and 14th centuries seem to indicate that segments of the Church survived underground and experienced something of a revival in the time of the Mongols.<sup>7</sup> All the texts we will use in this case study were hidden in a cave around 1005 AD, so clearly Christianity was still extant at that time. But, as you will see in this study, its form was so similar to Taoism that Christian travelers to the area during this period (and later) would perhaps not have recognized followers of this “religion” as distinctively “Christian.”

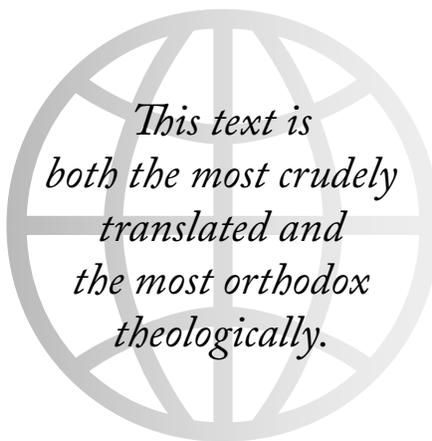
Secondly, this movement was also dependent on secondary literature and did not have the New Testament in Chinese. The first copies of the New Testament reached China perhaps in either 719 or 742,<sup>8</sup> but these texts were in Syriac and do not seem to have been translated into Chinese (as were the earlier documents we will examine here).

Thirdly, another aspect to these early documents is that they are essentially philosophical treatises. There is no historical narrative of the coming of Jesus and his teachings as presented in the New Testament. Without a strong historical record of an authoritative scripture these teachings are de-contextualized (or de-historicized), and they can become primarily expressions of any local culture.

They are relevant to the issues of this Chinese context and eras but, as you will see in my analysis, are less than faithful to the transcendent message of the gospel.

### *The Translation of the Jesus Sutras*

I would like to focus most of this case study on the work of Martin Palmer. In his book, *The Jesus Sutras*, he both translated and revised earlier translations of Chinese Christian documents of that period and examined archeological evidence (which includes the famous stone stelae and ruins of the central Christian monastery in China).<sup>9</sup> He suggests that these documents and archeological evidence



indicate that this Christian approach virtually became a new school of Taoism. It is this corporate sense of identity that distinguishes this movement as a certain type of insider movement. With regard to the Christian documents discovered from this period, Palmer states:

These scrolls were Christian books written in Chinese, telling a story of Christianity that is unique and surprising... The best way to describe these books is collectively, with the term they themselves use: the Jesus Sutras.<sup>10</sup>

In Palmer's opinion these early Christian books

united the wisdom and moderation of Taoism and the humanism and

compassion of Christianity—the Path of the Buddha and the Way of Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

This fusion appears to have been a deliberate strategy by the Church of the East at the epicenter of Chinese Taoism from its earliest Christian sutras (dating between 640–660 CE).

The earliest sutra is entitled the Sutra of the Teachings of the World-Honored One (hereafter referred to as STW). It borrows a title from a translation of a text called the *Teachings of the Apostles*.<sup>12</sup> Palmer considers this text to be both the most crudely translated and yet also the most orthodox theologically. The second sutra, entitled the Sutra of Cause, Effect, and Salvation (hereafter abbreviated SCES) presents Christian ideas in the light of Buddhist thought and parallels a popular Buddhist text of the time. The third sutra, entitled the Sutra of Origins (hereafter abbreviated SO) is indeed concerned with origins, but also utilizes Taoist terminology in describing the spirit of life (*qi*) and the “way” of Christianity (*Tao*).<sup>13</sup> The final book from this early period is entitled the Sutra of Jesus Christ (hereafter abbreviated SJC), is “Buddhist in tone” and borrows ideas from Tibetan Christianity and Hinduism.<sup>14</sup>

### *The World-Honored One*

Adaptations of a theological nature are apparent from the beginning in these texts. In the earliest sutra, the Christian writers relate the teachings of Christ in Mt. 6:26 and God's provision to the birds of the air by adding:

At birth everyone is given a heavenly soul and the Five Attributes and at the appropriate time food, drink or clothing is provided.<sup>15</sup>

These “Five Attributes” are a clear reference to the five Buddhist *skhandas* or “aggregates” that lead to consciousness. Montalvo states, “the five aggregates present a comprehensive typology of experience,” and this leads to the desire for material goods and meeting physical needs.<sup>16</sup> In Buddhism

this experience creates the original sin of desire. STW cleverly connects this desire for material goods to Jesus' teaching concerning the birds which neither sow nor reap but are provided for (Matt. 6:26). There is an appeal to Buddhist conceptions here.

This concept of "five qualities" seems also to be related to the Buddhist idea of "conditioned arising." Through these five attributes consciousness arises and with it desire. Another portion of the text also refers to Jesus' teaching on taking the log out of your own eye, stating, "Be aware of your own qualities and how they relate to others." These "qualities," which are a by-product of conditioned arising, seem to correspond to the concept of "the flesh" in New Testament thinking.

Is this example a legitimate and appropriate theological bridge between Christ and the Buddha, or is it syncretism? It's clear that the text does not draw a one-to-one correspondence between Buddhist and Christian theological concepts as in the example above. It also displays Christian discernment, for it rejects Buddhist conceptions like *anatma* (or "no-self") by stating "everyone is given a heavenly soul." In a manner quite foreign to Buddhism, the text is thoroughly ontological with God at the center of the text as the "World-Honored One."<sup>17</sup> He is also called "the One Sacred Spirit," "Father," and "the Compassionate One." The Christian concept of "forgiveness" is primary to the message of this sutra rather than the Buddhist wheel of *samsara* and *karma*.

There is also an implicit critique of the Chinese temple with its gods of prosperity, progeny, and longevity. The text intones that "people think there are two important things under Heaven. The first is God and the second is money"<sup>18</sup> reflecting again on the birds of the air from Matthew 6. God as "Compassionate" and as "Father" sometimes does not give what we ask because "you cannot be given

**I**n a manner quite foreign to Buddhism, the text is thoroughly ontological with God at the center as the "World-Honored One."

things that are wrong for you."<sup>19</sup> There is a relational component here that is absent in Buddhism.

One may also note the format of these reflections. They are proverbial adaptations from the teachings of Jesus that bear a strong resemblance to the Analects of Confucius. The resemblance of Proverbs in the Old Testament to the Analects has been noted<sup>20</sup> and Jesus often follows that literary pattern in his teaching. This would actually be cutting edge missiology in our modern era with our increasing emphasis on wisdom traditions in the scriptures and their relevance in other cultures.<sup>21</sup>

Some portions of STW show the influence of monophysite Christology. Without going into the details, monophysite Christology posited the "single nature" of Christ, tending to downplay his human nature. After dealing with the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, the text reads:

Anybody who says "I am a god" should die. The Messiah is not the honored one. Instead, through his body he showed the people the Honored one.<sup>22</sup>

This is also referred to as "the one sacred Spirit took a body."<sup>23</sup> The text goes on to explain "what he brought was not being human, but came directly from the Honored One." This clearly denies the concept of the dual nature of Christ which characterizes Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christology. This hints also towards the reincarnation of the Buddha, who is often spoken of as the "provisional manifestation" through an illusory body or *nirmanakaya*.<sup>24</sup> In this text Christ's death on the cross is presented as a release from "his five attributes," a statement that seems to associate Buddhist nirvana with Christian atonement and salvation. Consider this statement in its longer context:

Out of love he suffered so that what Adam had caused should be changed

by this. While his Five Attributes passed away, he did not die but was released again after his death. Thus it is possible for even those who fail to live after death.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the body that died on the cross was not God but merely a manifestation through which the divine nature was revealed. This seems to be an intentional bridge to Buddhism, but a heretical one. Jesus did not really die; his resurrection was merely a further manifestation. Monophysite Christology is combined with Buddhist conceptions of the unreality of the body. Though this is the most orthodox of the texts according to Palmer, it has a fatal weakness at its core. It goes one step beyond the "use of the analogy of the union of soul and body to explain the unity of the Godhead and humanity in Christ."<sup>26</sup> This becomes the doorway to Buddhist conceptions controlling the Christology rather than scripture being determinative. This is Buddhist contextualization flowing into Christianity. This has relevance to the culture but lacks faithfulness to the scriptures.

STW goes on to say that through this union of soul and body we receive qi (the Taoist "life force") as the Holy Spirit. This is an interesting contextualizing bridge, but is "life force" synonymous with the Holy Spirit and what issues does this connection raise?

The concept of the three treasures—jing, qi and shen (are) an internal alchemy... A well-known concept basic to Daoism as well as Chinese culture in general, the three treasures are differently interpreted in various contexts, and the specific ideas associated with each of them shape the views of human nature and immortality in which they play a central role.<sup>27</sup>

Two important aspects of this Taoist conception come to mind. First, qi is an impersonal force related to the natural

origin of the universe. Second, it is something progressively gained and cultivated through occult practices. Any association with the gospel message can introduce some significant distortions, for it indicates that human effort based on the use of occult rituals rather than a relationship with God can lead to immense personal power. An example of this kind of thinking is found in a medieval Chinese text:

... (the) Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber, which explains how the Spirit Mother of the West, originally an ordinary human being like anyone else, devoured the life [Qi] force of numerous young boys by copulating with them, and thereby transformed herself into a famed goddess.<sup>28</sup>

The potential for misunderstanding when the Holy Spirit is viewed as a life force is immense.

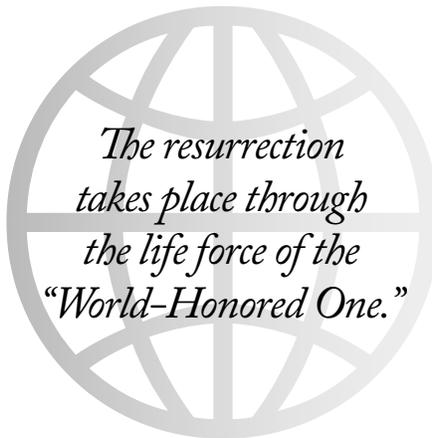
The text goes on to state that the message of salvation is that “through the holy wonders of the Messiah all can escape becoming ghosts.”<sup>29</sup> The concept of the “hungry ghost” was common to both Buddhism and Taoism in China. Those who died having lived an unfulfilled life could return to haunt the living. This was particularly true of children and young men and women who had died having never married and their ghostly nature is described as:

Phantom-like creatures with withered limbs, grossly bloated bellies, and long, thin necks, the Hungry Ghosts in many ways represent a fusion of rage and desire. Tormented by unfulfilled cravings and insatiably demanding of impossible satisfactions, the Hungry Ghosts are searching for gratification for old unfulfilled needs whose time has passed.<sup>30</sup>

This raises some very interesting questions about what sort of salvation the STW text anticipates or if it even understands what indigenous concepts it has related to the Christian message by using this terminology. When Buddhism came to China it utilized the Taoist concept of hungry ghost to make

the point that desire is the original sin. This actually did fit quite well into the Buddhist concept of samsara and reincarnation. Desire is not the original sin in biblical Christianity, but rather rebellion. Further, associating deliverance with the release from “hungry ghost” status takes us far afield from biblical notions of the soul and judgment.

The remainder of STW tells the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and concludes with a rendition of the Great Commission. The resurrection itself takes place through the qi or life force of the “World-Honored One.” Again, this is deeply problematic, for it plays upon impersonal occult concepts of power attained by human effort.



Some of the STW material is enigmatic and possibly refers to the distant context of the Near East where a great war had just concluded between the Byzantines and the Persians, a war that was “throwing everything to the ground, destroying everything that had been gained.”<sup>31</sup> This is reinforced at the end of the text where the author states that “in Bethlehem and in Persia the believers were killed.”<sup>32</sup> This does help to establish the time frame of the text.

Amidst the creative use of Buddhist and Taoist terminology, the STW also evinces a strong exclusivist sentiment when it states that “there is no other true way that people can walk. Any other way is judged to be false.”<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, heaven is presented as a place where “nothing will pass and nothing change.”<sup>34</sup> The Buddhist worldview, to the contrary, posited change as the essential reality of this world and this impermanence was their justification for denying ontological permanence since the Buddhist believed no permanent unchanging self could be identified. Thus, Buddhism maintains: “This is the goal of Human beings—to have no existence.”<sup>35</sup> By contrast, STW introduces what is an interesting and, I think, effective apologetic point against Buddhism. The realm of the spirit in heaven is unchanging and not subject to samsara, thus it constitutes a permanent ontological reality. STW concludes with a picture of the universal fires of the “earth prisons” for those who reject the message. This vision of hell is also common to Buddhist conceptions of the afterlife in this period.

### *Cause, Effect, and Salvation*

The second sutra, entitled the Sutra of Cause, Effect, and Salvation, is clearly a Christian reflection upon Buddhist notions of karma and reincarnation.<sup>36</sup> Palmer states of SCES:

It uses no classical Christian terminology or imagery, but weaves a Christian message through Greek and Buddhist philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

As the sutra describes creation, Taoist ideas of yin and yang are apparent:

Everything under heaven has these two qualities created by the Sacred Spirit. The one Sacred Spirit made the two. Everything under heaven has two natures, and everything is united under heaven. The two natures are body and sacred spirit. These two reside in all existence under heaven.<sup>38</sup>

The bodily form is described as resulting from the “five skhandas,” a Buddhist concept, but these five skhandas “will be perfected” in the heavenly kingdom in permanent “complete happiness.” This SCES apologetic is a radical departure from the Buddhist concept of nirvana, where the skhandas

and all desires are ultimately deconstructed and extinguished.<sup>39</sup> Heaven in the SCES is conceived of as a union of perfected soul and body that “creates happiness,” not suffering. This seems to turn away not only from Buddhism but from the Manichaeism/gnostic dualism of pure spirit/evil body which Palmer posits as a primary influence (monophysite) within the Church of the East.<sup>40</sup> SCES denies this Buddhist dualism and seems fully in keeping with a Hebrew doctrine of both body and soul as creations of “the Sacred Spirit.”<sup>41</sup> This is essential to the biblical view of the surpassing value of the suffering of Christ. “That the world is full of suffering is recognized everywhere, but Buddhism denies that suffering has any relevant role.”<sup>42</sup> The biblical position affirms the value of suffering as a means of redemption, and the actual physical body of Christ as a means of redemption is affirmed in this text.

The text conceives of Jesus as “the Visitor” who “brought the five skhandas and the soul together.”<sup>43</sup> The Soul is seen as the “sculptor” refining the five skhandas of the body like modeling clay, and human life can be “enhanced if the soul is rich with karma.” The text affirms that “whatever you do in life will have its karmic impact upon your soul.” Karma here seems to reflect the contrast within a humankind made in the image of God that is both capable of refinement yet affected by the evil karma of sin. But, on this matter of karma we must pay attention to the historical context. Early Buddhism in China sought to popularize its own viewpoint by connecting the idea of karma with a more *positive* impact on the physical body:

The motivations for being involved in the accumulation of karmic merit in early medieval China were diverse, but one frequently mentioned goal was the health of the physical body.<sup>44</sup>

While the perfected karma is declared to be “eternal,” and the transformation of karma to something positive occurs

*I*s the “next life” reincarnation or heaven? The text asserts that “this world is the only place to decide your next birth.”

through being “born again,” this positive experience (salvation) is attained “by living properly in this world.” Here the text departs radically from the gospel message. “All creatures should know that the karmic consequences of what is done in this life will shape the next life.”<sup>45</sup> The section concludes, “do good in this world to enter the next. It cannot be done elsewhere.”<sup>46</sup> Is this “next life” reincarnation or heaven? The text simply asserts that “This world is the only place to decide your next birth.”<sup>47</sup>

The SCES text falls short of a biblical viewpoint on three counts: first, it seems to affirm reincarnation; second, it affirms a thoroughly works-based salvation. Thirumalai, in his study of Buddhism and Christianity, affirms one great difference in the latter, that “*doing good works does not lead to salvation; neither does it ensure a better life in the future.*”<sup>48</sup> Third, the text affirms the improvement of the body which is not an important aspect of the Christian message.

The next section of SCES expounds on works salvation and then introduces the story of the sufferings of Christ. But the “sufferings” become a means to complete the good deed: “A benevolent act done in the knowledge of this suffering is the only truly benevolent act.”<sup>49</sup> The reader is encouraged to “be grateful for the grace you have received.” But exactly what that grace is or how it is received is not clear other than that one must strive to do what is right.<sup>50</sup>

The final section notes the yin/yang balance of sacred time and calls people to worship God. People are led astray from the true path by “evil spirits” or “ghosts” which “oppose their good nature.” Those who are led astray by the evil spirits will be “trapped in the 10,000 kalpas from which there is no escape from rebirth.”<sup>51</sup>

SCES offers a remarkable apologetic opposing certain Buddhist ideas of karma and nirvana and uses a terminology very familiar to Taoists. However, rebirth through reincarnation is assumed to be true, rather than final judgment. Contrast this with Paul’s message to the Stoics in Acts 17. The Stoics were cyclic pantheists who believed in a form of reincarnation. Paul’s message of good news to them was that reincarnation would not occur but rather the final judgment that Christ would accomplish (Acts 17:31). Further, the message of the cross of Christ is muted, spoken of solely as “sufferings” of the “visitor” and conceived as a means primarily to sanctify good deeds. The “sufferings” do not seem to be the means of deliverance from the “evil spirits.” The message, aside from a strong works theology, lacks the kind of clarity on the salvation message which is available in the New Testament. It is clearer on Buddhist thought than it is on Christian.

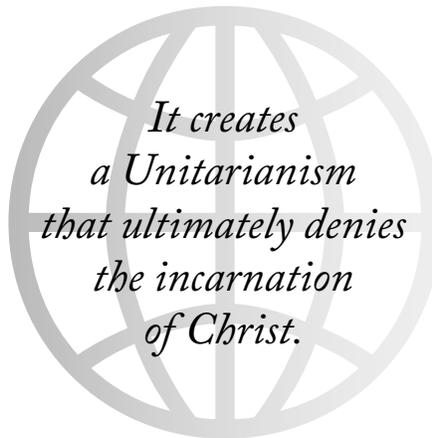
### Origins

The third work, the Sutra of Origins (SO), follows a similar pattern, though it is much shorter. The text follows a Romans 1 style argument that the universe indicates the reality of an unchanging God behind it. It seems to attack the Buddhist idea that the transitoriness of the world is an indication of the unreality of the world. The world *is* because of the unchanging nature “of the ‘One Sacred Spirit’ who made it.”<sup>52</sup> This phrase, “Great Holy Intelligence is as the Void” is synonymous with the Buddhist concept of *śūnyā* (Void), which is “emptiness and thus invisible.” “The view that everything is empty (*śūnyā*) is a central metaphysical plank of Buddhism.”<sup>53</sup> Priest argues that there is a potential ontological value to this Buddhist conception.<sup>54</sup> In this text the

nature of this omnipresent unchanging “being” turns the void concept back to ontology, which despite Priest’s argument, seems a clear denial of Buddhist teachings. “Heaven and earth are stable and nothing changes.” But associating the reality of a thoroughly ontological God (who brings stability to the world) with this Buddhist philosophy of “emptiness” is problematic. “Creation is like this also—no beginning and no end.” This is really a major departure from biblical notions of creation and bends the text towards monism—a thoroughly unitary view of the universe. The text associates this monism with *Wuwei* (non-action) and this ultimately negates the possibility of relationship. For instance, it asserts that there is no differentiation between the first and second spirit (the latter I take to mean Christ). “The other spirit came but with nothing to differentiate it from the One Sacred Spirit—like hands and feet.”<sup>55</sup>

The constant emphasis on “One” Spirit and “not two or three” in the text, actually creates a Unitarianism that ultimately denies the incarnation of Christ. This would fit monophysite conceptions of the “Spirit” putting on a body in Jesus. It also fits the Taoist view of the void. The text seems to find its framework primarily in Taoism, and is reacting against Buddhism. In the SO text the Taoist concept of *Wuwei* is specifically mentioned as the nature of the Sacred Spirit: “the One Sacred Spirit is the embodiment of *Wuwei*, originless origin and unsubstantial substance.”<sup>56</sup> The concept of *Wuwei* is normally translated “non-action” but it could also mean unchanging. Moon explains, “a sage leader should take and explicate the paradox of non-action: By not doing, everything is done.”<sup>57</sup> The unchanging nature of *Wuwei* is in distinct contrast to the Buddhist concept of “Void.” The appeal to Taoism and finding fault with Buddhism is clearly stated: The Sacred Spirit which is “existing in *Wuwei*” is “never extinguished into non-being.”

The SO text fits the missionary strategy of working within the Taoist movement, native to China, and rejecting Buddhist ideas that were not native to China. Taoist monism is thoroughly ontological, whereas Buddhism denies the reality of ontology. SO affirms Taoist monism maintaining a strongly unitary view of God. Further, it raises the issue of whether the God of the Bible is truly an ideal of actionless action. This state is really an expression of a monistic reality where “actions” are ultimately absurd. Quiescence is the pathway to salvation. All of this is very sophisticated philosophy and clearly these early Christian writers were deeply acquainted with the philosophical viewpoints of their



interlocutors. But almost every line of what they write raises issues concerning their grounding and faithfulness to the biblical revelation.

### *Jesus Christ*

The final document, the Sutra of Jesus Christ (SJC), is a catechism dealing with various aspects of Christian faith and living. It is borrowed fragmentarily from various sources so I will focus mostly on its points of contact with Buddhism and Taoism as well as its theological innovations. The book opens with Christ in the heavenlies “orbited by the Buddhas and Arahats” and looking down on earth. Moved by the sufferings of “all that have been

born” he begins to teach.<sup>58</sup> People “call upon the Buddha’s name” and “it is in the Buddha’s nature to bestow grace.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, “all existence is an act of grace.”

The sacred Boddhisattva of Chinese Buddhism was *Guanshiyin* who

illuminates the Dharma Realm, where she sees all beings; she protects them and brings them to resolve upon Awakening, she teaches them to keep in mind the perfect spiritual mantra.<sup>60</sup>

Christ is presented in a very similar way as one who teaches to bring about “awakening” which is the nature of his compassion. It should be noted that *Guanshiyin* is female, so the imagery is confused. The imagery is Buddhist but the content is Christian. “Only the virtuous can enter into the presence of God.”<sup>61</sup> From here the text begins to reflect on the nature of sin.

The “disobedience of the fruitful garden” has led to the result that “all that lives is affected by the karma of previous lives.”<sup>62</sup> But “God suffered terrible woes so that all should be freed from karma, for nobody is beyond the reach of this Buddha principle.”<sup>63</sup> This text seems much more in dialogue with Buddhism than the previous three and seems to be contextualizing the gospel for a Buddhist audience.

The concept of karma is pervasive and is closely connected to salvation; “someone who fears punishment does what is right.” Fear of God is essential to this salvation: “If you do not fear God, even if you live by the law of the Buddha, you will not be saved.”<sup>64</sup> The name Buddha seems to be a cipher for either God or Christ. This attitude is then illustrated through the story of the Ten Commandments. The text concludes with the story of the conception, birth, ministry, execution, and resurrection of Jesus. He is referred to as Messiah and it is unclear in SJC what the relationship of Messiah to Buddha is. Having described Jesus’ early teaching and miracles the text opines, “those who do evil and do not recognize the true

way . . . can never be truly saved.” This leads into an extensive description of the judgment of Jesus, Pilate washing his hands and killing the Messiah. “The Messiah gave up his body to the wicked ones for the sake of all living beings.”<sup>65</sup> He was hung “upon a wooden scaffold . . . on the sixth cleansing vegetarian day.”<sup>66</sup> This final phrase is obscure and seems to combine concepts of cleansing from sin and vegetarianism with non-violence (*ahimsa*). The text concludes abruptly shortly after this.

### Conclusions

These documents reflect an age of pluralism in China where the Christian faith sought to make a place for itself in an environment of Taoism and Buddhism. The Church of the East had already dealt extensively with Buddhist thought, and this is pervasive in the texts. One may say that these texts seek to contextualize the gospel through Buddhist concepts while at the same time correcting the non-ontological viewpoint of Buddhism. These texts take a very conciliatory attitude towards Taoism, using its terminology in a way that illustrates Christian concepts and denies Buddhist concepts. That orientation, coupled with the centering of Christianity’s most important monastery in the very heart of the resurgent Taoism of the time, would seem to indicate a deliberate strategy. Later sutras, in the form of Christian liturgy from the 8th century, would continue these adaptations, moving away from concepts of original sin and adopting a more thoroughgoing trinitarianism.<sup>67</sup> The later texts reinterpret the salvation of Christ as the product of the karma of previous lives, Jesus as the Tao, and similar conceptions.

These contextualizing efforts would seem to me to represent a particular kind of insider movement. This is a Christianity which adopted the garb, language, and philosophical terminology of both Taoism and Buddhism but in a way that put Christianity in the

## **T**hese texts take a conciliatory attitude towards Taoism, using its terminology to illustrate Christian concepts and deny Buddhist concepts.

Taoist framework. Lost in that framework was a clear biblical conception of what salvation is and how one receives it. Why does Messiah die? Is salvation merely deliverance from ghosthood? What does it mean that he dies for “all creatures”? If humankind is essentially good and salvation is a product of good karma, how is this message any different than the Buddhist eight-fold path of ethical behavior or the Taoist quietist lifestyle? What is the relationship of Messiah and the Buddha? Is the great cloud of witnesses a group of *Arahats* (enlightened beings) in the heavenlies? Why would anyone cling to this ethical message of living a good life in the face of persecution? This Christianity seems to be preaching religious perspectives that already existed in China with slight modifications. Is there a distinctive Christian identity in these documents? The impression these documents give is of a Christianity with a very weak sense of separate identity, more comfortable in the context of Taoism than with the distinctives of the Christian faith. **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Don McCurry defines IM within the Muslim context as “you can still call yourself a Muslim . . . even though you believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior.” The phenomenon, however, is broader than just Muslims believing in Jesus; it is consistently understood as an issue of religious identity.

<sup>2</sup> I note seven different types of Insider Movements in Christian History (I focus entirely on the first type in this article).

1. The missional adaptation of the Church of the East in China to the Taoist school where they built their central monastery at Da Qin within the central monastery of the Taoist faith. One might call this Christianity seeking to make itself one of the schools/sects of the local religion.
2. Christian movements subsumed under dominating religions due to

religious persecution. An example of this would be the survival of the Catholic Church as secret believers under Shinto domination in Japan during the 17th–19th centuries to escape annihilation. This movement did re-emerge to a modified identity when persecution came to an end.

3. Developing secret believers in contexts where immediate persecution/execution is assumed. An example would be F. A.’s approach to reaching Saudis in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 80s, sometimes referred to as C6 evangelism.
4. Christianity adapting sociologically to become an accepted social subgroup in the culture. The Mar Thoma Church in India became in essence a new caste within the overall Hindu structure. This seems to be a pragmatic reaction to Christian “caste identity.”
5. Churchless Christianity, a term coined by Herbert Hofer, describing Hindus who follow an individualized or very small group adherence to Christ while remaining culturally Hindus in a pragmatic reaction to Christian “caste identity.”
6. C5 Muslim evangelism which is the archetypical “IM” where missionaries call themselves Muslims or Isa Muslims and encourage Muslims to stay within the Muslim religious structure. In contrast C4 Muslim evangelism seeks to stay within the confines of Muslim cultural structures but maintains a more overt Christian identity.
7. Conversion movements into a religion that seek to introduce elements of the Christian faith into the religion, very similar to point 1 and 2 but with the difference that these movements sought to both mollify the dominant religion and also purchase a greater measure of tolerance towards an on-going existing Christian movement. I find this primarily in the world of Islam.

Movements 2, 4, 5, and 7 are not the result of a direct missionary strategy but are based on pragmatics; the experience of persecution and adaptation or rejection of a sociological identity. Movements 1, 3, and 6 are specific strategic attempts to plant the gospel in new contexts.

<sup>3</sup> “Nestorian” according to Palmer is a pejorative term and throughout this document we will use the term “Church of the East.” Based on an online lecture of Palmer on the Church of the East, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tifK5SUdSq0>, accessed July 21, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Latourette, Kenneth Scott, *A History of Christianity*, New York: Harpers, 1953, pp. 324–5.

<sup>5</sup> Palmer, Martin, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, New York: Ballentine, 2001, pp. 234–6.

<sup>6</sup> Palmer, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Palmer, p. 241.

<sup>8</sup> Palmer, p. 215.

<sup>9</sup> The documents come from a cave in Dunhuang, China, sealed around 1005 AD, Palmer, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Palmer, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Palmer, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Palmer, pp. 51–2. Palmer notes that this document, written by Tatian in the second century, was very popular in the eastern churches. It is generally referred to in the West as the Diatessaron, a work that harmonized the four Gospels into a single narrative text. Only fragments of it remain in its original Syriac version.

<sup>13</sup> Palmer, p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> Palmer, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Palmer, pp. 61–2.

<sup>16</sup> Montalvo, David, “The Buddhist Empiricism Thesis: An Extensive Critique,” *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1999, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> There are those who argue that Buddhism’s concept of “no-self” is “more of a practical strategy than a metaphysical doctrine.” Cf. Albahari, Miri, “Against No-Atman Theories of Anatta,” *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Palmer, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> Palmer, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Nyrose, Eric, “Pursuing Wisdom: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Some Ancient Religious Concepts of Wisdom and Current Notions of Critical Thinking Within Information Literacy,” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 2009, Vol. 8, Issue 3/4, p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> An example would be a recent doctoral dissertation approved at Columbia International University by Dr. Bonnie Aebi entitled “A Comparison of Biblical and Tamajaq Wisdom Traditions: Insights for Christian Communications.”

<sup>22</sup> Palmer, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> Palmer, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=Nirma%E1%B9%87ak%C4%81ya>. Accessed July 23, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Palmer, p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> Chestnut, Roberta C., *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, cited by R. A. Norris, Jr., in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 83, Issue 2, 1978, p. 411.

<sup>27</sup> Van Enkevort, Paul. “The Three Treasure: An Enquiry into the Writings of Wu Shouyang,” *Journal of Daoist Studies*. 2014, Vol. 7, pp. 117–145.

<sup>28</sup> Goldin, Paul R. “The Cultural and Religious Background of Sexual Vampirism in Ancient China.” *Theology & Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity & Sexuality*. May 2006, Vol. 12 Issue 3, pp. 285–307.

<sup>29</sup> Palmer, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Epstein, M. *Thoughts without a thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective*. New York: Basic Books, 1995, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Palmer, p. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Palmer, p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> Palmer, p. 68.

<sup>34</sup> Palmer, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Thirumalai, Madasamy, *Sharing Your Faith with a Buddhist*, Bethany House Publishers, 2003, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Palmer, pp. 137–8.

<sup>37</sup> Palmer, p. 138.

<sup>38</sup> Palmer, p. 140.

<sup>39</sup> Thirumalai, p. 145.

<sup>40</sup> Palmer, pp. 92–3.

<sup>41</sup> Palmer, p. 141.

<sup>42</sup> Thirumalai, p. 145.

<sup>43</sup> Palmer, p. 141.

<sup>44</sup> Salguero, C. Pierce, “Fields of Merit, Harvests of Health: Some Notes on the Role of Medical Karma in the Popularization of Buddhism in Early Medieval China,” *Asian Philosophy*. Nov 2013, Vol. 23 Issue 4, pp. 341–349.

<sup>45</sup> Palmer, p. 142.

<sup>46</sup> Palmer, p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> Palmer, p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> Thirumalai, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> Palmer, p. 143.

<sup>50</sup> Palmer, p. 144.

<sup>51</sup> Palmer, p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> Palmer, p. 148.

<sup>53</sup> Priest, Graham, “The Structure of Emptiness,” *Philosophy East & West*. Oct 2009, Vol. 59 Issue 4, p. 467.

<sup>54</sup> Priest, p. 477.

<sup>55</sup> Palmer, p. 148.

<sup>56</sup> Palmer, p. 149.

<sup>57</sup> Moon, Seungho. “Wuwei (non-action) Philosophy and Actions: Rethinking Actions in School Reform,” *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, May 2015, Vol. 47 Issue 5, p. 456.

<sup>58</sup> Palmer, p. 159.

<sup>59</sup> Palmer, p. 160.

<sup>60</sup> Buddhist Liturgy, “The Great Compassion Repentance,” *Religion East & West*. Jan 2014, Issue 12, pp. 33–34.

<sup>61</sup> Palmer, p. 161.

<sup>62</sup> Palmer, p. 161.

<sup>63</sup> Palmer, pp. 161–2.

<sup>64</sup> Palmer, p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> Palmer, p. 167.

<sup>66</sup> Palmer, p. 168.

<sup>67</sup> Palmer, pp. 175–180.

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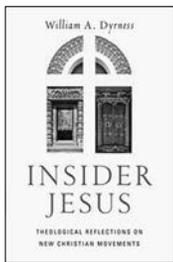
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# Book Reviews

*Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements*, by William A. Dyrness (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016, pp. 165 + ix)

—Reviewed by Darren Duerksen



Insider movements have sometimes been used as examples of what missionaries and missiologists call “contextualization.” However, there have also been those who, in looking at these movements and other new realities of mission have sounded the need to move “beyond contextualization” in our think-

ing.<sup>1</sup> Dyrness’ book *Insider Jesus* is a welcome addition seeking to advance the conversation regarding contextual understandings of the gospel, particularly as it relates to insider movements.

As a brief background, many readers will be familiar with Dyrness’ contributions to contextual theology. Two of his early works on the topic, *Learning about Theology from the Third World* (1990) and *Invitation to Cross-Cultural Theology* (1992), continue to appear on seminary recommended reading lists. They also established Dyrness as a sympathetic and attentive theological interpreter of Christianity in various cultural settings. In subsequent work Dyrness has offered important critiques of missions (*Changing the Mind of Missions*) and developed a theology of aesthetics (*Poetic Theology*), as well as a theology of religious aesthetics (*Senses of Devotion*). With *Insider Jesus* Dyrness again turns his focus to global theology with the added insights provided by his ongoing work in theological hermeneutics, religion, culture, and missiology.

Contextualization as a concept has been defined and critiqued in numerous ways. In my estimation perhaps one of its strengths was to provide missiologists with some conceptual frameworks with which to critique colonial mission postures towards culture. Some of this critique is still sorely needed, but for others this is no longer the crucial debate. Because the questions and debates have necessarily shifted over time, an understanding of “contextualization” as a concept has had to shift as well. There is a sense among some, myself included, that perhaps “contextualization” is now being asked to do conceptual work it is no longer adequate

to handle. In a similar way, Dyrness begins *Insider Jesus* in chapter 1 by acknowledging that contextualization has been a helpful framework in some ways, but falls short of being able to explain or analyze Christ movements among other religious communities. The main fault, he claims, is that contextualization “does not adequately capture the hermeneutical and dialogical character of mission whereby various accounts of God’s presence (or that of the gods or spirits) are exchanged and evaluated” (4). It is this principle question—how God works in culture and its religions—that he seeks to answer.

Western Protestants and Evangelicals have often been open to the idea of God at work in other cultures. Don Richardson’s “redemptive analogies,” for example, helped some Christians entertain the possibility that God was at work in other cultures. However, these have often viewed cultures (though not usually their religions) as simply conduits for the gospel. Dyrness continues his argument in chapter 2 by challenging this way of viewing God’s work in culture and religions. He does this first by theologically defining culture and religion. Culture he says, is “all that we humans make of God’s good creation” (36). Similarly, religions are peoples’ response (however imperfect or misguided) to the call of the biblical God. Though each of these are primarily human activity, at the same time God is everywhere active and present in these activities “calling by the Spirit those who will worship him” (36).

Dyrness also sketches a theological view of God’s intent for cultures and religions. The grand sweep of the biblical narrative is often characterized, as many of us know, by the progression of creation-fall-redemption. Dyrness reanalyzes parts of the narrative and contends that such a view obscures a key part of God’s work: re-creation. In light of this he proposes the progression of creation-disobedience-re-creation. And, of course, it is the work of re-creation that holds the keys for our understanding of cultures and religions. For this would mean that God’s project is not to replace (or even “redeem”) a culture or religion, but to re-create or renew them. This means that the whole created order was and is being brought to a new place “where the goods of culture (and religion) are given fresh valuation” (34). Thus, to come back to the concept of “contextualization,” if God is already at work in re-creating and renewing, then perhaps contextualization is asking the wrong question. Rather than seeking to understand how to place the gospel in a culture, we should ask what our response should be, in the light of Scripture, to what God is already doing.

But, as we’ve mentioned, Christians have normally been more willing to see God at work in culture than in religion.

**C**ontextualization has been a helpful framework in some ways, but falls short of being able to explain or analyze Christ movements among other religious communities.

Because of this Dyrness makes a special focus on religion in the biblical narrative (chapter 3). In this chapter, Dyrness analyzes ways in which God used and renewed existing religious practices and understandings throughout the biblical narrative. Select examples from Israel, Jesus, and Paul demonstrate that, at least in the initial stages, God's renewal always "accommodated itself to the religious realities on the ground" while also challenging aspects of those realities that were contrary to his purposes (62). But this is not to glorify religion, for it cannot offer salvation, and can even be an obstacle to embracing God's salvation.

However, the larger point is that religions can also be a witness to God's work, point people towards his salvation, and help them understand the gospel in the logics and values of their own religious traditions. It is this latter point that could be the most troubling for some Christians. But Dyrness' discussion of scriptural examples shows that a people's cultural context, including their religious beliefs and practices, always provided for them the means by which they understood God. Dyrness refers to this as "hermeneutical spaces." Religions and cultures are "spaces" by which people have always, even in the biblical narrative, interpreted and made sense of God's work amongst them.

With this theological framework established, Dyrness in chapter 4 briefly examines several case studies of insider movements in Latin America, Africa, India, Philippines, and among southeast Asian Buddhist communities. Though diverse in location, religion, culture, and time, each of these share some common characteristics, including a focus on Christ, the centrality of the Bible, and a desire to differentiate themselves from other Christians and Christian churches. The reasons for the latter vary by location, but often revolve around a desire to make Christ-following less "foreign" and more authentic to them and their context. All of these movements also share the use of "local hermeneutical tools" (quoting E. Acoba, 97), or aspects of their religious heritage, to understand Christ, and the Bible.

But what are the implications of this for our understanding of mission and the Christian faith? It is here (chapters 5 and 6) that Dyrness makes some of the more important contributions of the book. In terms of mission, Dyrness again argues that Christians (particularly Western, Protestant Christians) should see religions as "places where people are working out the possible meaning of God's

presence there" (104). If this is the case, perhaps the goal of mission is not to displace other religions, but to help people incorporate the stories and practices of their longings, spirits, traditions, values, etc. into that of the Christian gospel. However, though mission should, even must, value peoples' religions and what the existing work of the Holy Spirit is within them, religions are not a privileged space. Religions do not save people, and the gospel certainly counters certain religious beliefs and practices. In the end, as Dyrness says, "the goal of God's work is not a perfect religion, nor merely a functioning church, but a new heaven and earth where righteousness reigns" (130).

All of this has implications for the project of mission, particularly amongst other religions. But it should also help Western Christians better understand our own lived Christian faith. As Dyrness observes in his final chapter, the idea of "hermeneutical spaces" in the Bible and insider movements should prompt Western Christians to see more clearly how our own faith has been profoundly shaped by our own prior cultural, philosophical, and religious interactions. This, as Dyrness notes periodically throughout the book, does not mean that Western Christianity has the Christian faith completely wrong; only that we don't have it completely. Our Christian faith is a particularized faith. It has been shaped by and interpreted through past and present hermeneutical lenses, and because of this it speaks to many of our past and current realities. And, just as Plato, Aristotle, the Enlightenment, and many other influences have helped Western Christians interpret Christ and his work in ways relevant to our contexts, could not and should not the traditions of other religions also help Christ-followers in those places interpret and shape a Christian faith that is relevant to theirs? Dyrness' book provides a compelling argument that such should be the case.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, R. Daniel Shaw, "Beyond Contextualization: Toward a Twenty-First-Century Model for Enabling Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 4 (2010).

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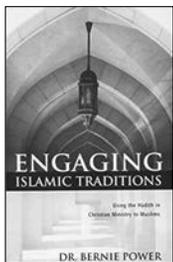
Shaw, R. Daniel

2010 "Beyond Contextualization: Toward a Twenty-First-Century Model for Enabling Mission." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 4 (2010): 208–15

**A**lthough Islam and the Qur'an are said to reject human atonement, the hadith do not. . . . The hadith affirm the sinlessness of Christ, the concepts of ransom and sacrifice, and other pictures of Christ's salvation.

*Engaging Islamic Traditions: Using the Hadith in Christian Ministry to Muslims*, by Bernie Power (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016, pp. 267 + xxi)

—Reviewed by Harley Talman



**W**hy bother with the hadith? The collections are massive, their authenticity dubious, and reported accounts often contradictory. Having spent a score of years living and serving among Muslims in the Middle East and Asia, Bernie Power wrote a doctoral dissertation to answer

this question which he shares in his lectures at Melbourne School of Theology and in this volume.

Bernie Power notes that the hadith (reported stories about the words and acts of the prophet Muhammad and some of his companions) are widely utilized in mosque preaching and play a major role in Islamic law and everyday life of Muslims, but he observes the neglect of this body of literature in Christian outreach. While certainly true, his bibliography fails to include Edward Hoskins' *A Muslim's Mind* (Dawson Media, 2011). The aim of *Engaging Islamic Traditions* is to seek out constructive avenues of approach to Muslims. He lists the various collections of the hadith, but due to the immense amount of material, his focus is on al-Bukhari's collection, one of the two most authoritative for Sunni Muslims.

This volume has four parts totaling eighteen chapters. Part 1 introduces us to the hadith, their classifications and potential use. Part 2, "Finding Concord," seeks out points of agreement of the hadith with biblical teaching as a preparatory step toward enabling Muslims to better apprehend the gospel. Power affirms positive features of Muhammad's life (chapter 4), comparing him favorably to Moses in bravery and zeal in obeying and applying the law. Also traced are Muhammad's generosity, care for others, humanness, humility, forgiveness, and tolerance. He also notes parallels in his experiences of inspiration (e.g., dreams) and charges of demonic possession (like John the Baptist and Jesus). Chapter 5 highlights those hadith which positively depict and deal with women (negative depictions appear in another volume). Theological and devotional material that is common with Christian teaching includes: (1) God's

attributes (omniscience, emotion/anthropomorphism, desire for human repentance); (2) prayers for worship and submission, forgiveness, guidance, and thanksgiving; and (3) eschatology (providing a chart with parallel teaching on the end times, heaven, and hell). Chapter 7 charts *some* parallel moral instruction.

Part 3 goes beyond the points of agreement in Part 2 to "springboards" to the person and work of Christ. God's character and actions (chap. 8) include his beneficence, holiness, initiative, nearness, and hints of theophany: "Allah created His creation, and when He had finished it, the womb got up and caught hold of Allah..." (116). Not surprisingly the hadith mention both positive and negative attributes of humans, but also that the consequences of Adam's sin fell upon his offspring: "You are the one who made people miserable and turned them out of Paradise (Buhkari 6.260)." Human identity is comprised of both individual and corporate aspects: just as individual Muslims are "in the Muslim Umma" so they are "in Adam" (132).

Good works and sin (chap. 10) are accounted as credits or debits. Power asserts that the hadith reckon other sins beside *shirk* (polytheism) as unforgivable (i.e., they exclude one from Paradise). While faithfulness in prayers will result in forgiveness of all sins, only 1 in 1,000 persons will be plucked from the fire, and assurance of salvation is quite uncertain even for 'Umar and Uthman. Some hadith indicate the inadequacy of works: "Your deeds will not make you enter Paradise" (B. 8.471), yet neither is there certainty even for Muhammad (153).

Interestingly, although Islam and the Qur'an are said to reject human atonement, the hadith do not (chap. 12). Chapter 13 outlines six principles in the hadith that point to biblical truth. The hadith affirm the sinlessness of Christ, the concepts of ransom and sacrifice, and other pictures of Christ's salvation.

The task of intercession is much wider in the hadith than in the Qur'an (where it is restricted to angels, God, and Muhammad—and the latter is quite limited). Several hadith also assert the supremacy of faith and love over good works but that faith should result in a changed life (198–200). Yet the lack of assurance of salvation in the hadith is one of the greatest differences from biblical teaching.

Part 4 discusses practical implications for using the hadith in ministry in opening doors to dialogue. Power outlines three types of dialogue: (1) *discursive* dialogue aimed at

**W**hile he acknowledges that some hadith are quite contrary to Christian beliefs, Power encourages appropriating those which are compatible with—or could be launch pads to—biblical truth.

convincing of beliefs, (2) sharing *religious experience* for the goal of understanding, and (3) secular dialogue for the purpose of cooperating in action. The author offers advice about what promotes proper dialogue. While exploitative or coercive “proselytization” are to be rejected, proclaiming one’s faith in respect and gentleness must be a given. Appropriate use of the hadith and other Islamic sources can convey respect and acceptance of Muslims. The hadith can also help Muslims to understand biblical inspiration. In contrasting Christian and Muslim views, (1) the primary revelation is Christ vs. the Qur’an, (2) witnesses to the revelation are the apostles vs. Muhammad, and (3) the record/explanation of the revelation is the Bible vs. hadith (213). Power affirms some validity to a functional comparison of Jesus to the Qur’an (not Muhammad), but he notes differences: the apostles were not merely witnesses, but also recipients, and even writers, of revelation. Also, the textual history of the Bible is vastly superior to that of the hadith.

As far as a dialogue of religious experience, Power is cautiously open to interfaith dialogue and possibly interfaith worship, based on Samuel and Sugden’s understanding of dialogue: “being open to other religions, to recognize God’s activity in them, and to see how they are related to God’s unique revelation in Christ” (217). Power endorses secular dialogue and cooperation on issues of social justice and morality.

“Discussion with Muslims” (chap. 18) outlines key topics in which the hadith can engage with scripture. Power responds to the criticism that his approach imposes meanings which are not in these texts: “every text is subject to interpretation, and each interpretation draws a different trajectory from the others, resulting in diverse conclusions,” as is evidenced by feminists, jihadis, and Sufis (232). Power then presents various ways to use the concepts and connections in his material (academic or public forums, journal articles, seminar papers to cross-cultural conversations to oral forms.) While he acknowledges that some hadith are quite contrary to Christian beliefs, Power encourages appropriating those which are compatible with—or could be launch pads to—biblical truth.

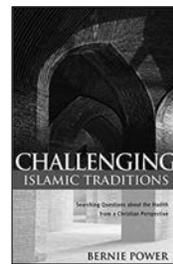
*Engaging Islamic Traditions* is an important resource for any Christian in outreach to Muslims, first of all, in the cause of understanding Muslims. While the Qur’an is their sacred scripture, the hadith function as the authoritative interpreter of the Qur’an; but probably more significantly, they provide the basis for Islamic orthopraxy in everyday

living. Secondly, the hadith can provide some tools to engage in conversation and stepping stones to biblical truth.

This volume is accessible to a general audience, yet scholarly documentation of sources is provided in endnotes following each of the short chapters. A number of diagrams, charts, and pictures protect the work from appearing as a heavy-text tome. A disadvantage of using the hadith is that many of them do not point to or parallel biblical teaching. For this reason, many like myself prefer to use Qur’anic material where there is more common ground than with the hadith. However, Power does address problematic hadith with a more confrontative approach in his second volume.

*Challenging Islamic Traditions: Searching Questions about the Hadith from a Christian Perspective*, by Bernie Power (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016, pp. 278 + xviii)

—Reviewed by Harley Talman



**I**n contrast to the first volume, Bernie Power purposes to convey the widespread differences between the hadith (al-Bukhari’s hadith collection) and the Bible. He also thinks that the hadith can “help Christians and others comprehend some of the reasons behind Islamic violence, its lack of progress, and the so-called ‘clash of civilizations’ with the West and other countries” (xvii).

Again, Power structures his work into four divisions. Part 1 is entitled “Critical Issues.” The earliest extant anthologies of hadith date no earlier than mid to late 2nd century AH. Early hadith collections lacked complete chains of transmission (*isnads*) and with later ones it became easy to fabricate complete chains. Fictitious accounts multiplied (one apostate confessed to fabricating 4,000 of them). Biased political patronage was involved in the collection and even fabrication of collections, and the six collections accepted as authoritative by Sunnis today were not viewed as the only authorized ones by early Muslims.

Chapter 2 sketches the wide range of scholarly attitudes toward the hadith: non-Muslims typically being more critical. Some Muslims reject their authority as denigrating the

**S**kepticism over the reliability of the transmitters is not limited to non-Muslims: “All the Islamic authorities agree that an enormous amount of forgery was committed in the Hadith literature.” (Siddiqui)

sufficiency of the Qur’an, their historical unreliability, their doubts that the Prophet’s life was to be normative (e.g., the rarity of the term *sunnah* in Muhammad’s earliest biography). The relationship between the Qur’an and the hadith (chap. 3) is convoluted and inconsistent, in some measure reflecting the later widespread aphorism “the Sunnah decides upon the Qur’an, the Qur’an does not decide upon the Sunnah” (42).

Chapter 4 reveals some of the many contradictions between hadith, indicating that either Muhammad was inconsistent in his actions and/or the sources were contradictory. Some hadith belie Muslim claims to the infallibility of the Prophet:

I am a human being, so when I command you about a thing pertaining to religion, do accept it, and when I command you about a thing out of my personal opinion, keep it in mind that I am a human being. (58)

Sometimes he told them to do as he did, other times gave them the option, and at others forbade them to do so. The results of these inconsistencies (chap. 6) are uncertainty, a culture of randomness, fear of questioning, beatings, frustration, division, reluctance to innovate or experiment, and disregard of his advice. The leadership in the generations that followed often departed from Muhammad’s practice so that Power concludes, “no single standard way of being a Muslim has ever existed, even from the earliest days” (88).

Chapter 7 details the debate over whether the hadith should even have been recorded, given that in one instance Muhammad commanded it and in another forbade it. But “people of the hadith” generally triumphed over “people of the Qur’an (e.g., Caliph ‘Umar) and “people of the opinion” (rationalists). However, their commitment to emulating the life of the Prophet was not really a cornerstone for living until the late 2nd century. That then led to sanitization of hadith, as reflected in Ibn Hishām’s admission that he removed from Ibn Ishāq’s biography “things which it is disgraceful to discuss [and] matters which would distress certain people” (95).

Chapter 8 excellently outlines transmission issues. Discussion of the origin, types, and classification of the *isnads* is valuable. Skepticism over the reliability of the transmitters is not limited to non-Muslims: “All the Islamic authorities agree that an enormous amount of forgery was committed in the Hadith literature (Siddiqui).”

Part 2 contrasts the teaching of the hadith with that of the Bible in their views of God, the lives of Muhammad versus

Jesus (e.g., vengeance and violence), women, history, heaven, and hell. Many readers may already be acquainted with this material which has often been utilized by Christian apologists and polemicists. The author’s emphasis on contrasting Muhammad and Jesus seems to weaken the point of his first volume where the Qur’an (not Muhammad) functions as the revelatory equivalent to Jesus in Islam.

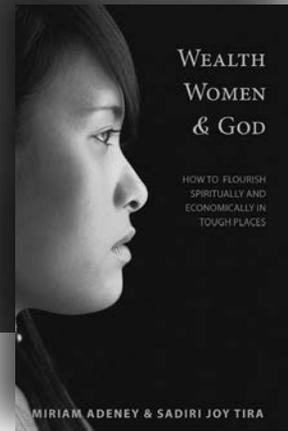
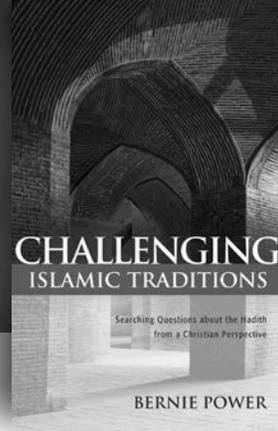
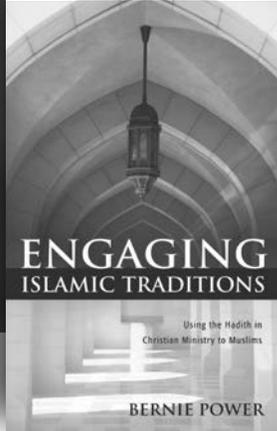
Part 3 provides negative evaluations of the hadith from modern perspectives: numerous scientific problems (chap. 14), departures from political, social, financial, and legal notions in the Bible (chap. 15), and human rights concerns (chap. 16).

Power concludes in Part 4 with practical implications of his study. He advocates challenging and confronting Muslims about the problems with the hadith which his book lays out, but with an irenic approach that balances truth and love. Power insists that regardless of one’s view of the hadith as largely compatible/incompatible with the Bible, discussion about its content must take place. However, this assertion needs to be qualified. Since even some Muslims are “Qur’an only,” then Christians may take the same position and engage in dialogue that is limited to their respective sacred scriptures. Nevertheless, in seeking to better understand the majority of the world’s Muslims whose lives are influenced by the hadith, Christians will find this book to be a great resource. **IJFM**

Note: There are some difficulties in the Arabic script used. A couple of words (*zaita* and *raiba* in note 42, p. 102) were not properly written and should have employed connecting forms of the letters used in Arabic script.



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# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase. Finally, please note that this October–December 2016 issue is partly composed of material created later in 2016 and 2017. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience caused by such anachronisms.*

## Warrick Farah on *Insider Jesus*

In our last issue, we mentioned Warrick Farah's blog posts reviewing chapters 1–3 of William Dyrness' *Insider Jesus* (see Darren Duerksen's review of this book in this issue, p. 184). Since then, Farah has blogged about the last three chapters <http://muslimministry.blogspot.com/>. In his *Insider Jesus 5* post, Farah takes up what he calls Dyrness' "meatiest" chapter on the subject of religion. Quoting Dyrness:

what if we thought of religion, or religions, including Christianity, not as fixed entities with clearly defined borders but as fluid spaces that reflect particular cultural situations, where people have developed various ways of responding to God (or gods or the spirits)? Further, what if we understood those spaces as places where people are working out the possible meaning of God's presence there, "so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him" (Acts 17: 27), as Paul puts it—that is, as hermeneutical spaces where people are not only open to God's voice but also prepared (by the Spirit) for that word? (Kindle 1955–1959)

Farah concludes:

I agree that the gospel must be incarnated into local contexts so that it feels like home, at least [with] both the pilgrim and indigenous principles (Walls) in play[;] (there must be some discontinuity as Dyrness also states). But religion is really conflated with cultural practices in Dyrness' framework. Or perhaps in my framework they are too easily separated? These assumptions/presuppositions on the difference between religion and culture are probably [at] the heart of evangelical disagreements on insider movements.

## Victoria Emily Jones on Martin Palmer's *The Jesus Sutras*

Jones' ten posts on "The Jesus Question" blog both review and illustrate (with beautiful photographs and Chinese art) the main theses of Martin Palmer's *The Jesus Sutras: Re-discovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*. Her posts nicely supplement David Cashin's article (pp. 175–182, this issue), which looks at early Nestorian Christianity in China as a prototype of (in his opinion) what eventually became a syncretistic insider movement.

Jones is clearly intrigued by these truly remarkable sutras. She begins by introducing [the Stone Stela](#), a 12-foot by 3 1/2 foot

by 1 foot engraved stone found in 1623 near Xi'an at what was known as the Da Qin pagoda. The Chinese officials who found this enormous stone took rubbings of it and sent them off to the Jesuit priests in Beijing (almost certainly Jesuits who had worked with Mateo Ricci.) As she goes through these sutras one-by-one, extensively quoting from the newly translated documents themselves, she attempts to explain how these sutras teach Christian theology garbed in Chinese worldviews (whether Buddhist or Taoist). For example, she quotes from First Sutra on the death and crucifixion of Jesus:

As a lamb goes silently to be slaughtered so he was silent, not proclaiming what he had done, for he had to bear in his body the punishment of the Law. Out of love he suffered so that what Adam had caused should be changed by this. (4:18-19)

For exact quotations from the most theologically orthodox sutras, see "[Orthodoxy Established](#)" (search terms: "thejesusquestion orthodoxy established"). Does the incarnation make more sense to a Chinese—Buddhist or Taoist—mind if it incorporates the five skandhas (or attributes) as part of Jesus' humanity? See [The Jesus Sutras' account of the incarnation in Jones' Part V](#) (search terms: "thejesusquestion five skandhas").

## 69% of Yemenis Don't Know Where Their Next Meal is Coming From

Yemen is facing a [colossal humanitarian disaster](#) (*New York Times*, Aug 23, 2017). More than [ten million people](#) "urgently require immediate life-saving assistance." Failing sewage systems and lack of clean water mean

the world's worst cholera outbreak in the midst of the world's largest humanitarian crisis. . . . [Yemen] is on the brink of famine, with over 60 per cent of the population not knowing where their next meal will come from. ([From a joint statement by the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and the WHO.](#))

## Advice from a Chinese Christian

On China Source, there is a useful column that routinely translates Chinese Christian blogs and articles into English. A recent article translated from the *Gospel Times* came from a Chinese Christian in Fujian province after the devastating 7.0 earthquake on August 8 in Jiuzhaigou, Sichuan province. He brings a timely piece of advice to Westerners about [how to pray and what not to say when disaster strikes](#): <http://www.chinasource.org/blog/posts/what-not-to-say-when-disaster-strikes>.

## EMQ to Continue Publication

[Justin Long](#), in his free Weekly Roundup Newsletter (Aug 25, 2017), under New Data and Resources, mentions some wonderful news for all of us in the missions world: [EMQ will not cease publication after 2017](#), but will now be published by MissioNexus. **IJFM**



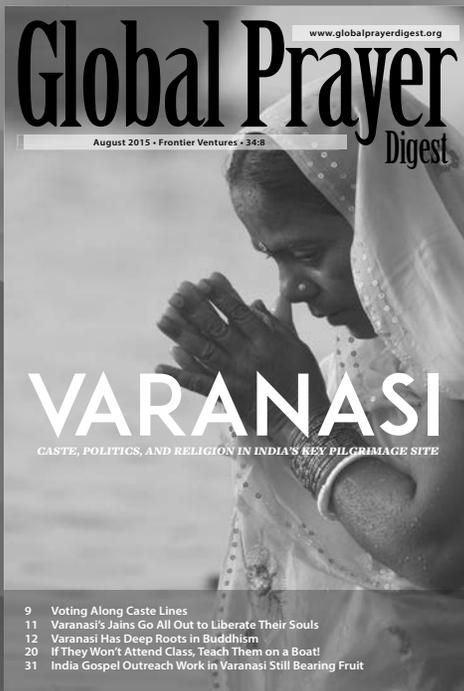
**Perspectives**  
On the World Christian Movement

Whether you're a Perspectives instructor, student, or coordinator, you can continue to explore issues raised in the course reader and study guide in greater depth in **IJFM**. For ease of reference, each **IJFM** article in the table below is tied thematically to one or more of the 15 Perspectives lessons, divided into four sections: Biblical (B), Historical (H), Cultural (C) and Strategic (S). *Disclaimer: The table below shows where the content of a given article might fit; it does not imply endorsement of a particular article by the editors of the Perspectives materials.* For sake of space, the table only includes lessons related to the articles in a given **IJFM** issue. To learn more about the Perspectives course, including a list of classes, visit [www.perspectives.org](http://www.perspectives.org).

Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

**Articles in IJFM 33:4**

	<i>Lesson 6: The Expansion of the World Christian Movement (H)</i>	<i>Lesson 7: Eras of Mission History (H)</i>	<i>Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)</i>	<i>Lesson 13: The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches (S)</i>	<i>Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)</i>
<b>Prospects for Indigenous People Movements in the Buddhist World: A Call for Collaborative Local and Global Theologizing</b> Todd Pokrifka (pp. 149–56)			X		X
<b>From Mozambique to Millennials: Shame, Frontier Peoples, and the Search for Open Atonement Paths</b> Alan B. Howell and Logan T. Thompson (pp. 157–65)			X		X
<b>A Reflection on Insider Movements in Korean Church History</b> John Kim (pp. 167–73)		X		X	X
<b>The Early Church in China: A Case Study of an Insider Movement</b> David G. Cashin (pp. 175–82)	X		X		X



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