

Households in Focus

Spiritual Oikos: A Kingdom Perspective on Ecclesial Identity

by John Kim

Editor's Note: In this article the author has combined two presentations, one delivered at the International Society for Frontier Missiology, Dallas, TX, USA, in October 2016, and the second at the Asia Society for Frontier Mission, Bangkok, Thailand, October 2017.

Paradigm shifts can radically change our personal journeys in mission. I want to share my own, as a humble proposal for how we might come to view the kingdom of God in the world today. Mine is not really a remarkable story, but it involves remarkable people from a different socio-religious context. And it's their experience of ekklesia (church) amidst emerging Jesus movements that has prompted my own paradigm shift. That change of perspective is crucial for understanding the reality of the kingdom on the frontiers of mission today, but it requires I begin with my own story.

A Journey from the Secular World into God's Kingdom: A Paradigm Shift

I was born into a Christian family and grew up in Korea where I finished my PhD in Physics. It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I met Jesus personally and confessed Him as my Savior. During that time, I was exposed to the powerful Word of God, and it explained how I myself should have the image of God within me. But I became aware of the absence of God's image in my life. When I examined myself, I found myself in a hopeless and sinful condition. During an overnight prayer session, Jesus came to me and ministered to me in my broken state. Since then, my life has become a pilgrimage, seeking after his kingdom on this planet.

After my conversion experience, my daily life became literally church-centered. This was a major reorientation for me, for my life no longer revolved around the secular world and its practices. I became very church-centered as I lived out my faith on a day-to-day basis. Because of this big gap between my church-centered life and the life I used to live, I began to think about becoming an ordained pastor so I could serve and be more relevant to the church.

After finishing my master's degree, I worked as a researcher at a scientific institute. During this time, I attended a seminar and came across the term "tentmaker" or "professional worker." These were exceptional missionaries who worked in professional jobs with a certain expertise while seeking

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to serve God’s kingdom. This role seemed to fill the gap between my professional job and a desire to be a full-time minister to church communities. At the same time, awareness about the great commission and world mission was also growing in me. This was when my life changed from being centered around the church only to being centered around God’s kingdom around the world.

Three main words kept hovering over my head with this growing awareness of world missions. They were *Indonesia* (the biggest country in the world in terms of Muslim population), *professional worker*, and *Muslim*. Finally, in 1994, I was sent by a local church as a professional worker but also as an official missionary. This was the first time in the history of Korean churches that a local church adopted a UPG, an Unreached People Group. Since then, I have been involved in this world mission effort, focusing on spreading the gospel to Muslim areas.

While I was serving as a professional Christian worker, I went through a paradigm shift in understanding missions. I became aware of differences in lifestyle between local Christians and Muslims. I had been sent to serve among Muslims, but my life only revolved around my involvement with the activities of the local Christian community. This church situation was not much different than in Korea: The more I was involved with Christian community, the rarer the chance to build relationships with local Muslims. Local Christians struggled with the same issue. Those two religiously affiliated people groups, Christians and Muslims, were living in cultural proximity but in almost totally different worlds. I had to go back to the Bible for guidance on this; and I shared these issues with fellow workers in similar fields.

During this state of struggle, two terms particularly enlightened me: the incarnation of Jesus (the Word among

us) and contextualization. It was then God led me to take a totally different kind of journey, one I had never experienced in Christian circles. As a result, we witnessed group conversions among many Muslims villages—just as is evidenced in the Book of Acts. The workers also sensed the strong work of the Holy Spirit.¹ These new believers did not join the local church communities; they decided to live a Jesus-centered life within their own Muslim communities. They were not recognized as “Christians” but rather became known as “strange Muslims.” They decided to remain inside their inherited communities (as “insiders”) and became witnesses among them. They are faithful to Jesus and the Word of God, and maintain their religious identities as Muslims.

This was a part of the paradigmatic shift for me. In Korea, there is no inherited Christianity as a status. In other words, Koreans are not born into any a religious identity. However, Muslims are born as Muslims, more like a Korean is born as a Korean, no matter where they are born. When this point sank in, I realized for the first time that in God’s kingdom, his citizens are those people whose lives are directed by Jesus

and who are living Jesus-centered lives. I was not offering another bounded religion to the Muslim but an identity centered on Jesus.² This is the kingdom paradigm as I came to understand it.

The Kingdom Paradigm in World Mission

I am still on my journey to know more fully the kingdom of God. I recall one of my insider friends witnessed about Jesus to an imam who was surrounded by many curious Muslims at a big local mosque. He said he lived his life as a citizen in the kingdom of God where Jesus rules as the king; and he experienced Jesus in his everyday life. I noticed that in witnessing about Jesus, he preferred to speak of “experiencing” Jesus rather than speaking of “believing in” Jesus. According to this insider, believing in Jesus is often regarded merely as a matter of knowledge in his Muslim context. After listening to him, surprisingly, the imam asked him to perform *azan*³ (a call to prayer) in the name of *Isa Al Masih* (Jesus the Messiah) as it was the time of evening prayer!

When I look back on the journey I’ve taken after my conversion, I can clearly see a shift between two paradigms. It’s a

Table 1. Key Areas of Conflict in Mission Paradigms

<i>Issue Area</i>	<i>Christendom Perspective</i>	<i>Kingdom Perspective</i>
Missional Goal	Planting/transplanting churches	Implanting/sowing the gospel
Methodology & Identity	Extracting to make Christians in Christendom	Staying within their contexts as followers of Jesus
Working Epistemology	Christian positivism with cultural absolutism	Pragmatism with culturally relativistic appropriateness
Religion & Culture	Two separable entities There is Christian culture of the Christian religion	Inseparable complexity There is biblically-appropriate culture in the kingdom of God
Church	Should be planted, mostly in the form of individuals gathering in an artificial place or structure	Pre-existing networks shared by groups of people become churches
Mission Practice	Christianization	Contextualization

transformation of life I call *from Christendom to the kingdom of God*. I have written of this comparison in a previous article.⁴ The tensions between these two paradigms are reflected in table 1.

Testimonies of the Kingdom

By sharing some case studies of those who have turned to Christ, I want to illustrate how the identity we have in the kingdom of God can be distinguished from all other identities on earth, including religious ones. My own life journey has already been given as an example previously. All the cases I share in this article are directly or indirectly connected with my own field experience.⁵

1. Som's case

Som comes from one of the most pious Muslim people groups in Southeast Asia. Religious identity is not an option, it's inherited, and people cannot choose their faith. But, quite interestingly, he was actually born as a Christian. His mother's lineage is connected to a local sultan's family on his mother's land. A long time ago, the sultan met Jesus miraculously and his extended family moved to a town where they settled and started to live a new communal life on land provided by a local major Christian denomination. His extended family with this strange and unique background has been living as Christians now over some generations. Som grew up as a nominal Christian, and he was not active in church activities at all until he met Jesus during a crisis in his life.

After enjoying a successful university graduation, he experienced a powerful transformative vision. In the vision, he saw a bleeding man on a cross and heard a voice saying,

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.⁶

It was the very same image and the very same words that he recalled seeing on a piece of trash when he was

T*he suffering was different this time.... He was no longer an ordinary Muslim: he glorified Isa (Jesus) too excessively.*

six. This vision was given to him at the very moment when, in deep desperation, he was attempting suicide. He was trying to shake off the shame he felt due to a secret immoral act. In that crisis, he met Jesus through the same image he had remembered from kindergarten; but, now, it was revived by the real voice of God. He immediately repented of his sin and felt living water purify his heart. He threw a bucket of water over his body which he had made dirty by having intentionally cursed himself. Since this miraculous encounter with Jesus, he has experienced a total life change.

Since he had been a nominal Christian (which is exceptional for the 99.9% of his people group who are Muslims), he committed to live his new life for Jesus. He officially registered as a member of a local evangelical church. He got involved in Christian NGO services and became a passionate evangelist. However, the more passionate and earnest his way of doing evangelism became, the more serious the challenges and suffering which resulted. But he thought those sufferings were not worthy to be compared with the glory of God. He was stoned and even put in jail many times because of his daily evangelizing activities. On the one hand, he thought all kinds of trials and suffering were normative for followers of Jesus, but on the other hand, he was curious why his people didn't want to accept the good news that had been so real for him.

Whilst in his puzzled state, he met a close Christian friend who was very much interested in worship styles among the Syrian Orthodox. His friend suggested some reasons for Som's suffering that were not just theological, and encouraged him to consider a new congregational form

much like the Syrian Orthodox, whose worship style was almost the same as that of Muslims. At this point, he gave up trying to extract his people from their culture and then enculturate them into local church structures. He started to realize that the issue was not his sincerity toward gospel evangelism, or even the gospel as good news. The issue was that his people saw him as a betrayer who had thrown away his own heritage and had joined the Western Christian crusaders. Realizing this and coming to understand that God called his people to be effective witnesses within their own communities, he decided to go further back in his heritage and identify with his own Muslim ethnic heritage.

However, even much greater sufferings awaited him when he and his family began to live within Muslim communities as followers of Isa (Jesus). But the suffering was different this time. It was no longer because of his ethno-religious identity, but because of his kingdom identity found in Isa Al Masih. He was no longer an ordinary Muslim: he glorified Isa (Jesus) too excessively. Because he praised Isa too much as a Muslim, he was taken to court and given a three-year sentence.

Through his new gospel evangelization activities carried out as a Muslim, twenty-five Muslim adults in a village turned to the Lord. They had listened for four hours to his message from the Torah (the books of Moses), to the Injil (the New Testament), and then raised their hands to accept Isa as their Savior and Lord. After being released after 2.5 years of his sentence in prison, his passionate evangelism still continues. (His wife's ancestors are Yemeni, known to have come from Muhammad's lineage. His grandmother-in-law, who passed away some years ago,

was a very committed Muslim. She and her extended family members all accepted Isa as their Savior and all of them experienced miraculous peace in their lives.)

I know many other cases like Som's, but let me try and summarize some unique features of his case:

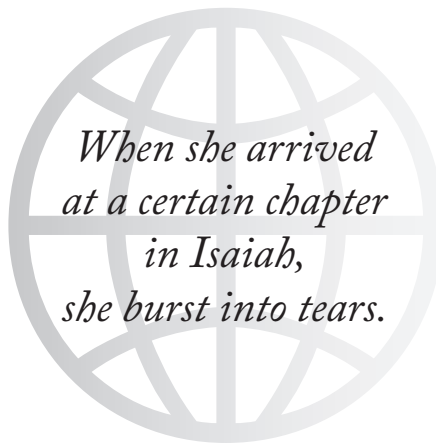
- Even though ethnically Som belongs to a pious Muslim people group, he was reborn as a Christian. There was a conversion in his life from this world to Jesus and he began to practice a Jesus-centered life by registering as a Christian and by belonging to a local church. At this stage, he seemed to equate his new identity in Jesus with being an officially registered Christian who was actively involved in Christian (church or NGO) activities.
- He was engaged in passionate gospel evangelization. He began experiencing sufferings, but he later realized they were mostly caused by the general sense of antagonism toward Western Christianity that had been formed in Muslims' hearts since a young age. He realized that his people's religious identity as Muslims could not be separated from their ethnicity and at that point he decided to stay within the Muslim community. In fact, he became a Muslim officially and legally.
- When he decided to stay within his people's community, he found he could lead many people to Jesus. Furthermore, this decision allowed him to structure a creative mission effort through heads of households among his people.

2. Latina's Case

Latina was born as a Muslim into a very pious Muslim family. Her father was a respected leader in a Muslim community. She was smart, memorized many Quranic verses, and got used to following everyday Muslim practices. She was cheerful and open-minded in character. She didn't mind having friendships with foreigners.

Due to her openness towards a more globalized world, she took advantage of Western education opportunities. She had the drive and ambition for success. She was smart and received all A's in her academic studies. She was the top student of all the public universities on her main island.

During her university life, she became friends with some foreign Christians. They dialogued many times about the issues of truth and genuine faith. One of the foreign Christians was a young woman named Stephanie who had come from America and who shared a genuine faith in Jesus. Latina was quite impressed by Stephanie's faith. Latina also met an Asian man, Joe, who was a Christian from overseas



doing doctoral study at her university. One day, Joe gave her a Bible. She was very scared when she received this forbidden book for the first time. However, as she respected the man who had given it to her, she kept the book and left it on her desk for several months. She had been taught one thing about the Bible in her Muslim community—that it was a dangerous book. Thus, even possessing a Bible was quite a sensitive issue.

Eventually, one day, with great curiosity, she opened the book and read some random pages. One afternoon as she was talking with Stephanie, they began to share opinions regarding the kind of thoughts atheists might have. And,

naturally, they started to share their own faith in God. Latina mentioned the book that she had received and had tried to read. Surprised, Stephanie also started to share her own life's journey, and how God had worked in such a special way in her life. Latina was very impressed and promised to continue this conversation. One day, when they met again at a fast food restaurant, Stephanie brought a Bible that had been translated with Muslim-friendly terms.⁷ She found the name *Isa Almasih* (Jesus the Messiah) instead of *Yesus Kristus* (Jesus Christ) in the Bible. Because this Bible looked good for Muslims to read, she read through the whole book in a month.

After reading the Injil (New Testament), she wanted to read the Old Testament too. She discovered great similarities in the contents of Genesis and Al Qur'an. She read the Old Testament quickly, and when she arrived at a certain chapter in Isaiah, she burst into tears. She had a strong unexplainable feeling. Instantly, she realized it was Isa (Jesus) who had come to meet her. At that very moment, the Bible verse, "I love those who love me, and those who seek me will find me,"⁸ reverberated in her mind.

Latina was meeting Jesus as she eagerly read the Bible and she decided to follow Jesus. She realized that the Old Testament was full of stories about the Messiah who would come to save His people. It was an astonishing new discovery that became a new foundation in her life.

She felt very sorry when she found out that her own people did not have the Bible translated into their mother tongue, so she decided to commit herself to Bible translation for Muslims.

She got married to a foreign Asian man and choose to maintain her Muslim identity. They agreed that they were both citizens in the kingdom of God, but they had different heritages, different ethno-religious identities on

this earth. They presently are doing studies and research for future work in Bible translation for Muslims.

What can we learn from Latina's case?

- We can see here how a natural Muslim can meet Jesus through the power of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Because of her genuine desire to be a witness for Jesus to her own people, she decided not to change her religious identity. She was able to overcome the religious identity issue through faith in Jesus, which was instead to become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.
- Sharing the good news by genuine friendship and fellowship can overcome the prejudice that has formed between Muslims and Christians.

3. Naya's Case

Naya is a typical example of someone from a folk-Islamic background. Even though he had been practicing folk Islam as a witchdoctor, he had a religious identity as a Muslim. He continually sought spiritual power in order to help people by healing them or by resolving any of their troubles. However, at the same time, he diligently tried to improve his family's financial situation by engaging in any kind of money-making business, because his healing ministry was not enough to support his family's needs. (Surprisingly, one of his businesses was the hunting of wild pigs.)

One day, he heard a very strange rumor that a group of people in a village in the mountainous area where he was hunting, had received new faith in Jesus (Isa). What really surprised him was that many people who had suffered from serious diseases had been healed when they received prayers in the name of Isa Al Masih. It was proof of the effectual faith of their baptism. The rumor interested him, so he wanted to check and see if it were true. Interestingly, the name of Isa Al Masih was

The name of Isa Al-Masih was not unfamiliar to Naya, but was a legacy from his father. He used it as a kind of charm for healing.

not unfamiliar to Naya. It was not because he knew of Isa in Al Qur'an as a Muslim; but the name Isa Al Masih was a legacy from his father, which was used as a kind of charm for healing. Many other names of the prophets were also included in the same spell.

Naya wanted spiritual power, so with great curiosity he decided to attend a meeting in the village planned by the new believers of Isa. There was a communal baptism ceremony which was also planned by the Muslim believers themselves. No expatriate workers were involved in the event. After carefully listening to the good news of Isa Al Masih, he decided to join the baptismal ceremony and he committed himself to become a follower of Isa.

He immediately returned to his own area and witnessed about the Isa Al Masih he had met to his family. He baptized eleven members of his extended family the following year. He got a Bible and spent much time reading and meditating. He started *oikos* fellowships and held prayer meetings among the family members. He continued to attend local mosque activities but he was focused on the home-based fellowships. He has never stopped talking about the Injil (the good news) to his neighbors.

People in his village persecuted him in various ways; they criticized him as having become a Christian. However, he claimed his identity was that of a pious Muslim and one who had never attended any churches his whole life. Many villagers observed his daily life. And just as Naya claimed, there was no evidence of him having become a Christian believer except his talking about Isa Al Masih. Some villagers began to share their experiences of healing when Naya prayed for them in the name of Isa. In time, he was

accepted as a professional man who could interpret the Injil and who healed people suffering from diseases by praying in Isa's name. People began to recognize him as "the Injil Expert" (or "Injil technician").

Naya's case demonstrates some different aspects from the previous ones:

- In terms of his religious identity, he has never left his Muslim identity but has kept it as his legal and official one.
- When he put his faith in Isa (Jesus), the villagers accused him of having become a Christian and even persecuted him in various ways. However, to Naya, Christianity was just one of the legal and official identities which he had never adopted. He didn't accept the term Christian as his new proper identity, but he applied a spiritual meaning to his new faith in Isa. Even though there were troubles in his own community due to his new faith in Isa, he remained within his own community. In the end, villagers recognized him as a Muslim but also as someone who had expertise in the Injil. (This naming of Naya as "Injil-Expert" recalls the way the name "Christian" was given by non-believers in Antioch.)⁹
- By remaining in his community, he was able to lead many people in his community to Jesus. All of his extended family members were subsequently baptized by him.

4. Mir-Ibn-Mohammad's Case

This final case study is already in print and I refer the reader to this story online, and for that reason, I will not repeat all the details here.¹⁰ I include this case because it is really astonishing. Even though this man was a Muslim by birth, when he believed in Jesus, he changed his religious identity to that of a Christian at the very beginning.

However, after hearing God’s command, he decided to go back to his tribe as a Muslim, and eventually he became the chief leader of his tribe. A great Jesus movement numbering in the thousands arose from his deep conviction and strong commitment to Jesus. He ruled the tribe according to biblical principles, and he ruled as one commanded to love even his enemies. He was almost killed by other Muslims who hated his way of ruling the tribe. His story also gives us some tips for understanding this perspective of a kingdom paradigm:

- This man was born as a Muslim and brought up in an Islamic educational system. But, when he met Jesus, he decided to live his new life in Jesus by changing his religious identity. He appears to have equated the new spiritual identity he had gained through faith in Jesus with the religious identity of being a Christian. He began his new life in Jesus by adopting Christianity.

- There was a strong calling from God to go back and be a minister to his own tribe. In responding to the calling from God, he decided to return to his own tribe as a “Muslim follower of Jesus.” In the end, he was asked to become the top leader of his tribe, the tribal chief.
- Returning to his own tribe as a Muslim wasn’t a big struggle for him due to his strong calling to be a witness among his people. This strong sense of calling from God led him to accept the role of tribal chief. His walk with God was so vivid that the average Muslim couldn’t accept his way of leading the people. He was much too dependent on biblical truths. However, eventually, his strong commitment to following the commands of Jesus resulted in a huge Jesus movement in the thousands.

A Comparison of the Testimonies

I have introduced these case studies to illustrate how people may come to faith from different socio-religious

backgrounds. As I mentioned earlier, the cosmic event that happened in my own life was my miraculous conversion from this secular world to God through Jesus and as a result, I am now living out my life as a kingdom citizen under the king’s reign and as a witness to Jesus in this world. Being a kingdom citizen is my real identity and there is nothing in the world that can separate me from that reality. My new identity, however, doesn’t belong to this world, and I continue to live in this world with a dual identity: both the socio-religious one I was born with, and the even more real spiritual identity as a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven.

I’ve come to understand that it’s all about incarnating the gospel, for we are sent just as Jesus was sent by Father God into this world.¹¹ Verses from John 17 speak to this duality of identity:

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world. (v. 11)

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. (v. 16)

Table 2. Comparison of Identity in the Case Studies

	In the world (they exist in the world)	Not of the world (they are not of the world)	Into the world (they were sent into the world)	Only Jesus: the king
Author	A Korean born in a Christian family. A science teacher and missionary.	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus among Muslims.	Kingdom citizen
Som	Born as a Christian but from an ethnically Muslim background. After his conversion to Jesus, became a legal Muslim to be a witness about Jesus to his own ethnically Muslim people group.	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus among his own people group.	Kingdom citizen
Latina	Born as a Muslim and brought up in a Muslim community. Became a follower of Jesus while remaining a Muslim even when married to an Asian Christian.	Accepted Jesus as her Savior and committed her life to Him as her Lord.	Witness about Jesus in Muslim communities through Bible translation work.	Kingdom citizen
Mir	Born as a Muslim but after his conversion to Jesus, he became a legal “Christian.” To be a witness to his tribe, he restored his original Muslim identity.	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus to lead his tribe to Jesus.	Kingdom citizen
Naya	Born a Muslim and remained a Muslim even after committing himself to follow Jesus. Given the name “Injil Expert.”	Accepted Jesus as his Savior and committed his life to Him as his Lord.	Witness about Jesus to lead all his extended family members to Jesus.	Kingdom citizen

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (v. 18)

Jesus knows we still live in the world even though we have already been invited to be people who don't belong to this world. All of these who have been introduced in these testimonies have a common spiritual identity that they share with me, even though they maintain a different socio-religious identity when belonging to this world. Our common identity is the kingdom identity found in Jesus as the king. A chart may bring some clarity to these identities. See table 2:

Oikos: A Picture of Kingdom Identity

My experience with these believers who turned to Christ began to shape how I understood the expansion of the kingdom of God. In both Som's experience and in Naya's, I saw the strategic emergence of oikos-based fellowships. This household structure was often more vital to the movement than a gathering of believers for fellowship and communal worship in specific places. In Som's case, there emerged a coordinating mission structure of local leaders, each who had their own oikos fellowship. Their purpose was to obey and put into practice what Jesus commanded. Activities like self-initiated Bible studies, leadership training, and community development projects are generated by these coordinated oikos structures.

This concept of oikos as a structural and familial reality challenges our image of the church as a local Christian structure/building where believers congregate. So many of my fellow Korean missionaries tend to start their field ministries by planting and organizing church structures (with decisions regarding land, buildings, number of the members, denominational affiliation, Sunday traditions, etc.). The structure of the movement I was seeing clarified that these matters should be the initiative of the indigenous believers, not the decisions of expatriates (whose

Peter's awareness of the way oikos is woven into ekklesia can help us understand how the kingdom of God is at work.

decisions can often consume huge resources). If we release these matters to the local believers themselves—matters of worship style and ways of meeting—then a people with a kingdom identity will emerge who then will be our partners in seeking the coming of his kingdom all around the globe.

More recently, my own oikos perspective has been biblically shaped by the apostle Peter, both in sections from the book of Matthew and from Peter's first epistle. I'm impressed by the fact that Peter heard directly from Jesus, and that he experienced Jesus' understanding and orientation towards ekklesia. When we address the subject of ecclesiology, it's usually Paul's perspective that immediately comes to mind. The terminology of ekklesia is all throughout Paul's epistles; but, by contrast, we see no use of the term by Peter, but rather we see a picture of ekklesia that is valid and vital for today. It's Peter's awareness of the way oikos is woven into ekklesia that can help us understand how the kingdom of God is at work in the contexts of people like Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya.

This drove me to the study of oikos and ekklesia in the scriptures. For instance, I had yet to perceive the way oikos and the kingdom were woven into Matthew 19. There Jesus communicated with various classes of Jewish culture using this dynamic reality of oikos: the marital husband-wife relationship intended by God (vv. 3–12); the acceptance of children (vv. 13–15); the properties possessed by a household (vv. 16–28); and, then, in vv. 23–30, Jesus incorporates the oikos dynamic into his teaching on the kingdom of God.

And everyone who has left *houses* or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or *fields* for my sake

will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. (v. 29)

I began to see that oikos as a social unit was in line with God's providence when He planned the expansion of his kingdom. In other words, the oikos is not only part of the natural order God assigned to mankind even before the fall, but it should be our orientation even to this day. Reflected in my experience with Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya was God's plan that oikos be a fundamental social unit until the ultimate fulfillment of God's kingdom.

But it was 1 Peter that helped me recognize the relationship of oikos, ekklesia, and the kingdom of God. It was to Peter, when he confessed to Jesus, "You are Christ, the Son of the Living God," that Jesus said,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church (*ekklesia*), and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matt. 16:17–18)

I believe Peter's fellowship with Christ would give him a special sense for ekklesia. And in the first chapter of Peter's letter, Peter addresses the ecclesial identity of believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. In his own reflective way he uses extensive terminology to clarify aspects of their character, their internal being-in-Christ. See table 3.

A Spiritual Oikos

Established in this identity, Peter encouraged them to keep growing: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Pet 2:2).

And how then do they grow? It is here that Peter is inspired to use a unique

Table 3. Ecclesial Identity of Believers in 1 Peter 1.

1 Peter	Contents	Names and Concepts
1:1	<i>strangers</i> in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,	The strangers
1:2	<i>who have been chosen</i> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.	The chosen people
1:3, 23	In his great mercy he has given us <i>new birth</i> into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (3). For you have been <i>born again</i> (23).	People who are born again
1:4	New birth into an <i>inheritance</i>	People who have inherited
1:5	<i>who through faith are shielded</i> by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.	People who are shielded by God
1:7	your faith . . . may be proved genuine and may result in <i>praise, glory and honor</i> when Jesus Christ is revealed.	People who will be glorified in the end
1:8	Though you have not seen him, <i>you love him</i> ; and even though you do not see him now, <i>you believe in him</i>	People who love and believe in Jesus
1:9	you are receiving the goal of your faith, <i>the salvation</i> of your souls.	People who are (will be) saved
1:14	As <i>obedient children</i> , do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.	Obedient children
1:15	But just as he who called you is holy, so <i>be holy in all you do</i>	Holy people
1:18	<i>you were redeemed</i> from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,	People who are redeemed
1:21	Through him you <i>believe in God</i>	People who believe in God through Jesus
1:22	Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have <i>sincere love for your brothers, love one another</i> deeply, from the heart.	People who love one another

image, one that endorses what I see happening in new movements among other socio-religious communities. In 2:4–7 Peter says that they are *being built into a spiritual house*, one in which Jesus is the living capstone, and they the living stones.

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house [*oikos pneumatikos*] for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (v. 5)

Here Peter also suggests that this spiritual oikos is a holy priesthood. This is crucial for how we understand the identity of followers of Jesus like Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya. Peter is giving us new language in which to envision the ekklesia. It is very apparent from Peter's picture that the spiritual oikos is not a physical place (a church) where

the followers of Jesus are invited for a worship service. They are primarily understood to be a holy priesthood, a *spiritual oikos*, whose identity Peter describes with rich biblical imagery:

you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet 2:9)

Peter elaborates on their identity in Christ, to whom they belong, and then in the second half of the verse he moves to the purpose of their being in the world. They are *to declare the praises of him*. This is indeed the mission.

He gives a further explanation of this spiritual house, these living stones, when he states that Jesus *called them*

out of darkness into his wonderful light." Ekklesia, that spiritual house, includes those who are "called out" (*ek/keleo*). Though Peter doesn't use the term ekklesia directly, he captures the concept clearly and distinctly as he understood it from Jesus.¹² Peter had an awareness of ekklesia that stretched back to his interaction with Jesus, and here he offers us a way to picture the scattered movements of believers we see today in other socio-religious contexts. The households of Som, Mir, Latina, and Naya are being called into a spiritual oikos with new identity and purpose.

Peter's use of spiritual oikos creates a new awareness of oikos as a God-given social structure in movements to Christ today. It must be God's providential plan in fulfilling his will on earth. Oikos

is everywhere, but it is also in crisis. A modern world makes many indifferent to family, and an individualistic way of life erodes oikos. People are suffering from the bitterness and trauma of broken families. These natural households need to become the spiritual oikos, as those called out of darkness into the ekklesia. It is here that the life of God can flow, mend, and restore the broken oikos. It is our role as a priesthood, as living stones, to declare his praises to a world desperately needing a spiritual oikos.

Again, I am reminded of how great was Peter's astonishment when he said,

I *now* realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. (Acts 10:34-35)

Peter witnessed the Holy Spirit at work in the oikos of Cornelius. That oikos, in such a different socio-religious tradition than Peter's, became a spiritual one. Do we now realize that God has no favoritism but accepts men from every nation in other socio-religious traditions? This is indeed what God tells us today: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).¹³ If we can abide in this Spirit of Jesus, then the great commission will be fulfilled through the global cooperation of the spiritual oikos that exists all over the world. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ For more details on this movement, please refer to a couple papers of mine published elsewhere: in Greenlee (2006, 2013) and my article, John Kim, "The Anatoc Story, Continued: the Role of Group Dynamics in Insider Movements," *IJFM* 27:2 (2010), 97.

² Hiebert explains the missiologically difference between a bounded-set and a centered-set in dealing with the great commission by addressing whether it is the matter of Christianity as a religion or one of discipleship towards Jesus. This is also related to a membership or identity issue (Hiebert 1994). Rick Brown used this concept in explaining what he calls biblical Muslims (Brown 2007, 69).

³ *Azan* is an Arabic word, meaning "to listen," a rhythmical Islamic prayer call.

⁴ Kim, "The Anatoc Story," 97.

⁵ John Kim, *Jesus Coming Into Muslim Communities*. Seoul: Insiders Book Publisher (2015, in Korean), Chapter 16.

⁶ Isaiah 1:18.

⁷ "Muslim-friendly" means that a Muslim term is used in Bible translation when references to biblical figures and ideas have a corresponding term in the Muslim's cultural and religious world.

⁸ Proverbs 8:17.

⁹ Acts 11:28.

¹⁰ See "http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/a-muslim-tribal-chief-is-bringing-jesus-to-his-people."

¹¹ John 17:18.

¹² Neither does Peter mention the term ekklesia when he refers to another spiritual oikos in his greeting in 5:13: "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark." Again, he doesn't use the term ekklesia; however, "she who is in Babylon" was his way of alluding to the spiritual oikos in Rome.

¹³ Now we see what God promised, "I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore" (Jer. 33:22).

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