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October–December 2018



## Negotiating the Edges of the Kingdom

The Apostle Paul looms large in any attempt to clarify the frontier mission task; he's our biblical exemplar. We're drawn to his vision statement in Romans 15 where he claims, "I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ" (v. 19). Paul had ministered the name of Jesus from Jerusalem to Illyricum, in synagogues and temples, to Greek and barbarian, in urban hubs and hinterlands. He had established a foundation (v. 20) and communicated this achievement when he says, "there is no more place for me in this region" (v. 23). It was time to move on.

Paul chose the Greek term *pleroo* (to fill, supply, accomplish, finish) to indicate a sense of measurement. The choice of term fascinates me. After reviewing the significant factors in that particular Christian movement, he determined it was "full." He had finished, there was a certain sufficiency, and he could head for Spain. *Pleroo* is a meaningful term for speaking of closure, but perhaps not precise enough for those of us who might study movements to Christ on the frontier. Something unspoken lies behind Paul's determination to move on. What were his criteria for this *pleroo*?

Over the past four decades certain terms have emerged that attempt to measure the frontier task. "Reached" and "unreached" represent a strategic assessment of where the frontier mission task either is—or has yet to be—completed among a people. Likewise, the terms "engaged" or "unengaged" attempt to gauge when a significant enough ministry has begun among these unreached/frontier peoples.

We need to realize that these concepts are negotiable and bear on realities that will constantly be contested. Just when we think they have been resolved, they pop up again. A recent example is Peter Lee and James Park's critique in *Missiology* of the unreached peoples concept.<sup>1</sup> In one sense, this debate is rooted in the rather open and unclear assessment Paul gave regarding the fulfillment of his ministry there in Romans 15. What did Paul imagine as he surveyed the foundations he had laid? It wasn't quantified in any metrics, but he must have had a sense of scale, of movement, and momentum. Whatever those qualitative indicators were, in his heart and mind they clearly indicated *pleroo*—a fulfillment of his task.

Years ago, when I was working in North Africa, I was introduced to a new label for such concepts; the philosopher W. B. Gallie called them "essentially contested concepts." He identified five characteristics that make terms (like "democracy"

Editorial *continued on p. 152*

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### Editor

Brad Gill

### Consulting Editors

Rick Brown, Rory Clark, Darrell Dorr;  
Gavriel Gefen, Herbert Hoefler;  
R. W. Lewis, H. L. Richard

### Copy Editing and Layout

Elizabeth Gill, Marjorie Clark

### Secretary

Lois Carey

### Publisher

Frontier Mission Fellowship

### 2018 ISFM Executive Committee

Len Barlotti, Larry Caldwell, Dave Datema,  
Darrell Dorr, Brad Gill, Steve Hawthorne,  
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---

### Web Site

[www.ijfm.org](http://www.ijfm.org)

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### Editorial Correspondence

1605 E Elizabeth Street  
Pasadena, CA 91104  
(734) 765-0368, [editors@ijfm.org](mailto:editors@ijfm.org)

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### IJFM

1605 E Elizabeth St #1032  
Pasadena, CA 91104  
Tel: (626) 398-2249  
Fax: (626) 398-2263  
Email: [subscriptions@ijfm.org](mailto:subscriptions@ijfm.org)

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and “good Christian”) continually negotiable. Paul’s use of *pleroo*, as it relates to his sense of fulfillment of the frontier task, is surely an essentially contested concept. This fact is reflected in our own modern struggle to clarify this same frontier mission task. Here is how Gallie explains an essentially contested concept:

1. The concept must appraise some kind of valued achievement.  
*Paul appraised this Christian movement and its mature foundation.*
2. This achievement has an internally complex character.  
*Paul’s epistles reveal an internal complexity to that foundation.*
3. The accredited achievement is variously describable.  
*Today, Paul’s achievement is described and valued differently.*
4. The achievement is “open” to considerable modification in changing contexts.  
*Radically different frontier contexts require an openness to modification.*
5. The negotiators are aware of the criteria used by others.<sup>2</sup>  
*Missiologial association increases our awareness of others’ criteria.*

Can we agree on our essential need for negotiation—for gaining a comprehensive sense of Paul and the frontier mission task? Will we welcome contestation as a healthy contribution to frontier missiology? This is the opportunity we have at this year’s ISFM 2018. We’ll be bringing together mission demographers, mission mobilizers, and missiologists to discuss the theme, “Clarifying the Frontier Mission Task.” The new full-color demographic charts, tables, and maps presented in R. W. Lewis’ article (p. 154) will be at the center of our discussions. And there’s a startling focus on South Asia.

In this issue, two other articles encourage us to move beyond reductionist views of the remaining frontier people groups. Warrick Farah’s article is taken from the new book he has edited with Gene Daniels: *Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts*. Farah calls us to a more “adaptive missiology” (p. 171). My own article, “Beyond Groupism,” responds to Peter Lee and James Park’s recent critique of the anthropology of the unreached peoples concept (p. 179). Our fourth

article comes from a great mission anthropologist, Wayne Dye. Dye fuses fifty years of experience with that of a younger colleague, Danielle Zacharia, to offer us the essential questions required of any “cultural apologetic” on the frontier (p. 185). H. L. Richard has written an insightful book review on the role of caste among the peoples of India (p. 197). Finally, another mission anthropologist, Dwight Baker, helpfully reviews Brian Stanley’s comprehensive synthesis of Christianity in the 20th century (p. 194).

Enjoy this cutting-edge missiology.

In Him,



Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Peter Lee and James Park, “Beyond People Group Thinking: A critical reevaluation of unreached people groups,” *Missiology* 46, no 3 (July 2018): 212–225.

<sup>2</sup> W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 157–191.

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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.

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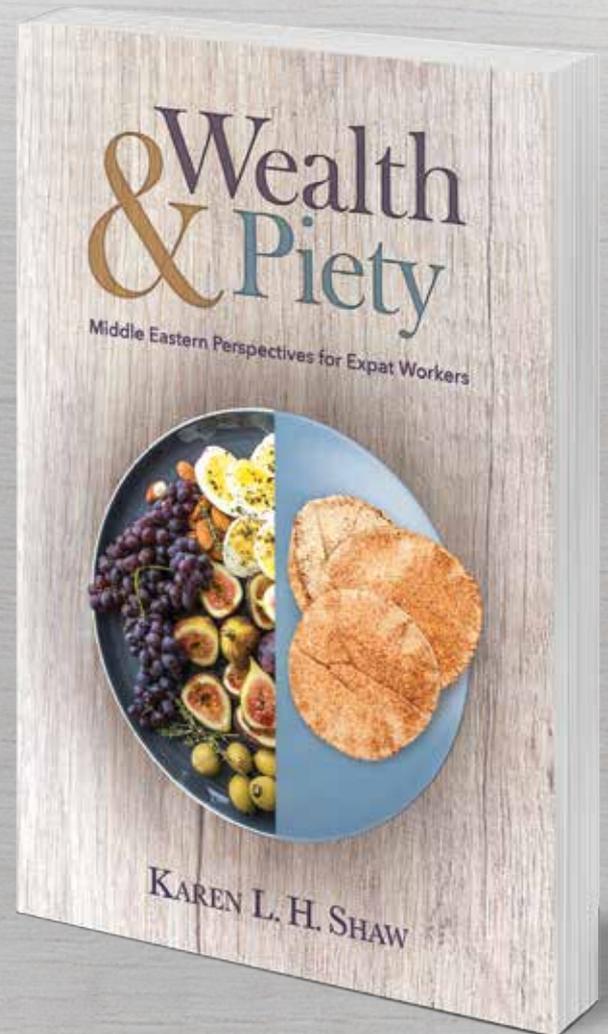
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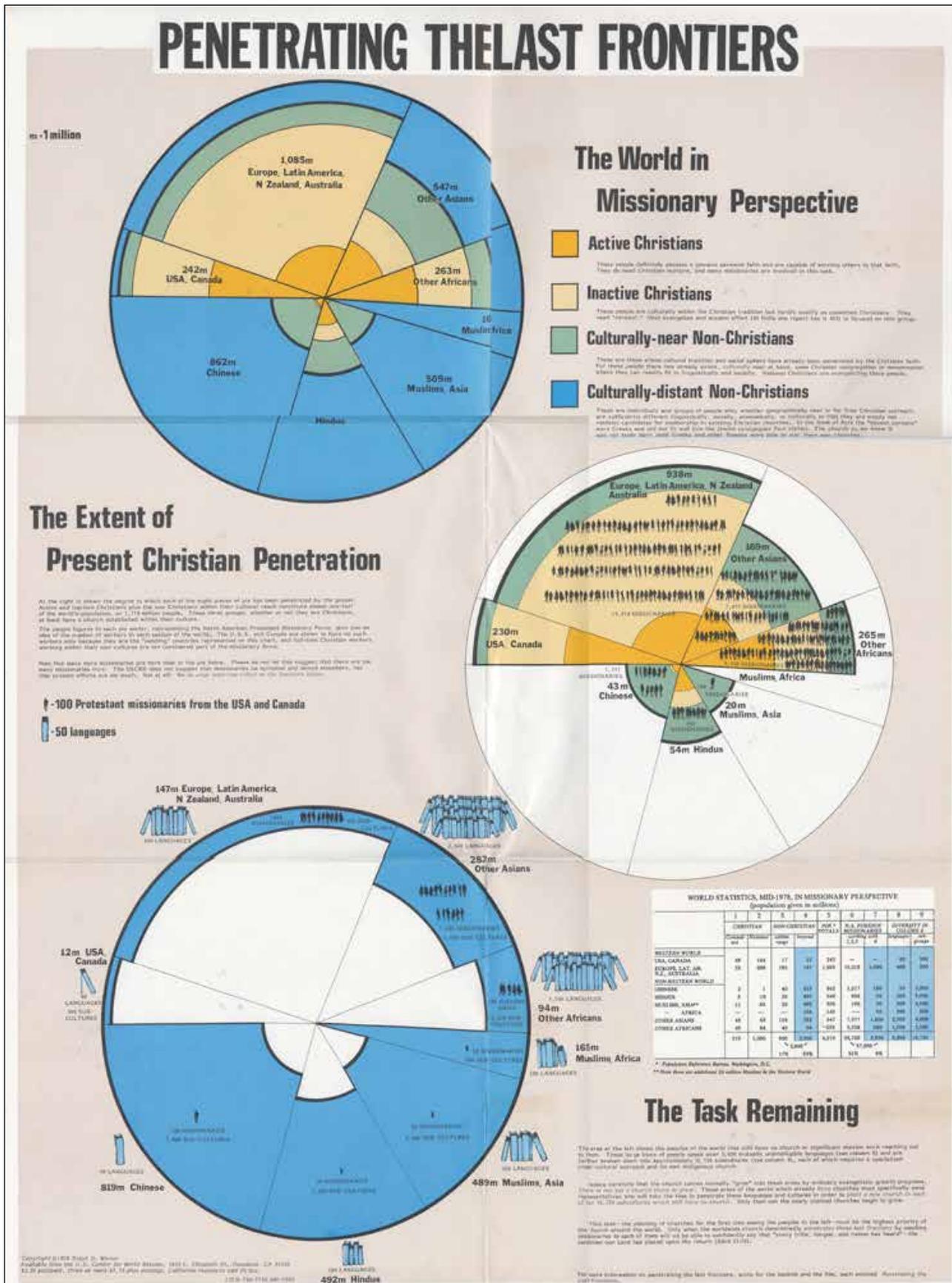
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Figure 1. The Original 1978 Pie Chart, Developed by Ralph Winter



# Clarifying the Remaining Frontier Mission Task

by R. W. Lewis

## *A Chart Makes a Difference*

Charting the frontiers of mission can be a very strategic tool in mobilizing God's people. It happened forty years ago when Ralph Winter chose to use a simple "pie chart" to bring a new awareness of the thousands of people groups being completely overlooked by mission agencies and churches around the world. The success of outreach in places like Korea, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific islands, and Papua New Guinea had given a false sense of completion, and some were insisting that missionaries were no longer needed. The assumption was that national churches were in every country and we simply needed to partner with them in finishing the task of world evangelization.

Winter had done the statistical work on the remaining task. The size and scale shocked him. It was clear to him that some 17,000 people groups had never had a significant witness in their own mother-tongue language, most had no Bible translations, and they had no indigenous worshipping fellowships in their own language. He introduced this new awareness to evangelical leaders on a world stage (1974), and founded a new agency dedicated to reaching these peoples (1976). But he was a bit mystified when evangelical leadership responded with disbelief and resistance. This knowledge was not as easily transferable as he originally had thought, but without this awareness churches and agencies would continue to overlook these "hidden peoples." If the task was unclear, people would not be sent. This is when the original unreached peoples "pie chart" was created (figure 1, page 154). Ralph Winter and his wife, Roberta, had committed their mission organization to awakening one million evangelicals to this challenge, and they believed charting this missiological challenge for "at-a-glance" understanding was necessary for reaching the evangelical in the pew. Winter forged his statistics into a pie chart entitled "Penetrating the Last Frontiers"; it was sent to hundreds of thousands of people (see page 154 for photo of 1978 chart). Over the years, that chart has awakened thousands of churches and

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*R. W. Lewis studied the history of Christian missions for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees, and in the 1970s helped her missiologist father, Dr. Ralph D. Winter, map unreached peoples. She is a missionary scholar-practitioner who has ministered with her husband among the Muslims of North Africa and South Asia for over thirty years.*

hundreds of mission agencies to the plight of the unreached peoples and has encouraged new Western and global South mobilization efforts on their behalf.<sup>1</sup>

So, how are we doing? The *good news* is that significant progress has been made, and movements have been started in a number of these people groups, even those that are still counted as *unreached people groups* (UPGs)—those whose population is less than 2% evangelical. However, the *bad news* is that no discernible progress is being made in more than half of the UPGs, which I will refer to as *frontier people groups* (FPGs). The question of the hour is “Why?”

I believe there are at least eight factors that have impeded the progress of the gospel among the frontier people groups: lack of demographic clarity; difficulty of access; the power of multi-cultural religious systems; fear of shame; extraction conversion of those in diaspora groups; the increasing shift from long-term to short-term teams; increased focus on partnering vs pioneering efforts; and what I see as lack of missiological clarity. I’ll explain these more below, but the lack of demographic clarity is where a new pie chart could serve us well. As Winter found out, when the task is not clear, people are not sent.

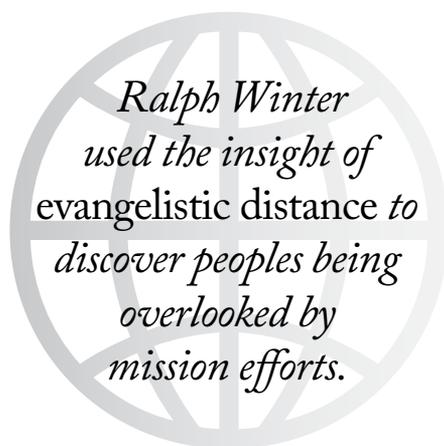
So, over the past year, a number of mission demographers have collaborated to produce a new updated pie chart (on pages 158–159) looking at the frontier people groups, namely *those where there are no movements to Christ, no breakthroughs of indigenous faith, and less than 0.1% of the population is Christian*. I would like to review this updated pie chart by looking at three key components that have been largely overlooked in the mobilization and training of new personnel.

### *Three Key Components Needed for Demographic Clarity*

#### **I. Identifying which non-believers can be reached by believers in their own people group vs. those who need pioneering witness**

In the past 40 years, the organizations involved in mission demographics have sought to distinguish between people groups with sufficient evangelical believers to continue reaching their own people (“reached people groups”) and those groups which lack a critical mass of believers (“unreached people groups” which was set at 2% evangelical in the 1990s.)<sup>2</sup>

However, the original focus was on discerning which people groups lacked an indigenous movement to Christ



and where no progress was being made—those in distinct ethnolinguistic people groups beyond the reach of normal evangelism. These groups need someone to come from other people groups, learn their language and culture, and attempt to communicate the gospel in a way that leads to movement of indigenous faith in Christ.

Ralph Winter used the insight of *evangelistic distance*, in the early 1970s, to discover thousands of peoples being overlooked by mission efforts. Winter distinguished by geographic area those people who could be reached by active believers within their own people group from those who live in ethnolinguistic groups with no or very few believers and who were therefore isolated

from any effective witness. In 1974, he clarified these categories by coining the terms E-0, E-1, E-2, and E-3. In 1978, he portrayed this evangelistic distance in a pie chart entitled “Penetrating the Last Frontiers” (pictured on page 154).

#### *Categories of Evangelistic Distance*

On that original pie chart the “Active Christians” were shown as bright yellow (see page 154). On the updated 2018 pie chart, the active Christians are now called “evangelicals” (due to data collecting constraints), and are an estimate from all denominations, including charismatics and Pentecostals (see pages 158–159). The people these believers can reach fairly easily in their own language, in their own culture, and without having to cross a cultural barrier, are represented by the first two categories, E-0 and E-1.

**“E-0” Evangelism:** Inactive Christians, or “other Christians” (or as some would call them, “nominal” Christians who identify as Christians but have yet to encounter Christ personally), are shown in paler yellow. These *nominally Christian people need a revival* or renewal of their faith. Winter called their “evangelistic distance” from the believers “E-0.” These people identify themselves as Christians already but may never have read the Bible or encountered God personally. E-0 evangelism is most needed in places like Europe with a high percentage of Christians, but a low percentage of evangelicals.

**“E-1” Evangelism:** *Culturally-near* non-believers are the second category of people that active Christians are able to reach in their own culture and language. They are shown in *green* and represent those non-believers in the same people group as active Christians. These people are at a greater evangelistic distance (E-1) because they have not heard about Jesus or are antagonistic to the Christian faith. But, if they decide to follow Christ, *they can become part of the same churches as the active Christians who are reaching them, since an indigenous faith has already been established in their people group.*

The E-1 task is most needed in people groups with strong Jesus movements but where most of the population has not yet come to faith in Christ, such as in China among the Han Chinese, or in Korea. In some places, like Japan, there are many believers, but their faith expression is still very foreign, so it is more difficult for them to reach their neighbors.

**“E-2” or “E-3” Evangelism:** Winter’s core insight was that there were many people groups with few if any believers in Christ among them and little access to the gospel. On the original pie chart, the blue areas represented these *culturally-distant non-believers* living in ethnolinguistic groups (or people groups) with virtually no active believers who could reach them in their own language and culture. Any believer would have to cross significant ethnolinguistic and religious barriers to bring the gospel to these people. The greater evangelistic distance is represented by using the terms “E-2” or “E-3,” the difference being the degree of cultural distance between the witnesses and those they are trying to reach. Evangelistic distance is increased not only by degree of language and cultural differences, but also by things like caste or racial prejudice and historical animosity. An example of an E-2 distance would be a Muslim-background believer from India having to learn Bengali to witness to a Muslim in Bangladesh. If the same witness went to reach Buddhists in Thailand, or Brahmin Hindus in India, it would be an E-3 evangelistic distance.

“Frontier missions” always involves E-2 and E-3 evangelism, because witness needs to happen in people groups where no breakthrough movement to Christ has yet taken place. As a result, *any witness must come from believers who belong to a different ethnolinguistic group.* Most Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist groups fall into this category. The people in these “frontier people groups” were displayed in blue on the original pie chart.

On the 2018 pie chart there’s been a slight change. All culturally-distant non-believers are still shown in blue,

## *Charts reveal some startling missiological realities that have been obscured more recently in the larger unreached peoples databases.*

but those living in frontier people groups are shown as *dark blue*, and a *lighter blue* has been used for non-believers in UPGs where noticeable progress has been made. In these lighter blue groups, there are now emerging movements to Christ resulting in 0.1% to 2% evangelical believers who can minister in an E-1 evangelism to their families and neighbors.

The gospel has made such significant progress in the last 40 years that many former blue areas are now displayed as green. Once a people group has a *self-sustaining* movement to Christ among them, the remaining population of that people group moves from blue (needing pioneer witnesses from other people groups with evangelistic distances of E-2 or E-3) to green (being reachable by E-1 evangelistic efforts of their own people). This shift explains the huge difference displayed in China between the 1978 and 2018 pie charts, a result of the dramatic movements to Christ among Chinese people groups, such as the Han Chinese.<sup>3</sup> (Compare the original and updated pie charts on pages 154 and 158–159.)

*While the pie charts are good for showing how many non-believers are outside of the witness of existing believers, they do not show other important things. In which people groups has no progress been made? With which religions do they identify? Where are the missionaries or witnesses going or not going?*

### **II. Identifying which people groups have no movements of believers (frontier people groups) and their size, location, and religions**

The distinction between “reached” people groups and “unreached” people groups (<2% evangelical and <5% Christian) has not adequately distinguished between the UPGs which now have movements established among

them and those that still have no movements at all. By the time a people group has as many as one or two out of 100 people following Christ (1% to 2%), it is usually sufficiently engaged *by its own people* (E-1) and the gospel is spreading. To show the people groups that still need frontier mission type outreach (E-2/E-3), data bases and mobilizers need to show as clearly as possible which unreached people groups still have no sign of movements to Christ.<sup>4</sup> Some of the databases are moving in this direction.

The new 2018 pie chart separates the non-believers living in “frontier people groups” (shown in dark blue), those requiring frontier mission efforts, from other types of non-believers. But it does not identify anything about who those frontier people groups are, where they specifically live, what religion they practice, or what the population is of each people group. To make progress we need these additional things clarified as well.

### *What Maps of Frontier People Groups Reveal*

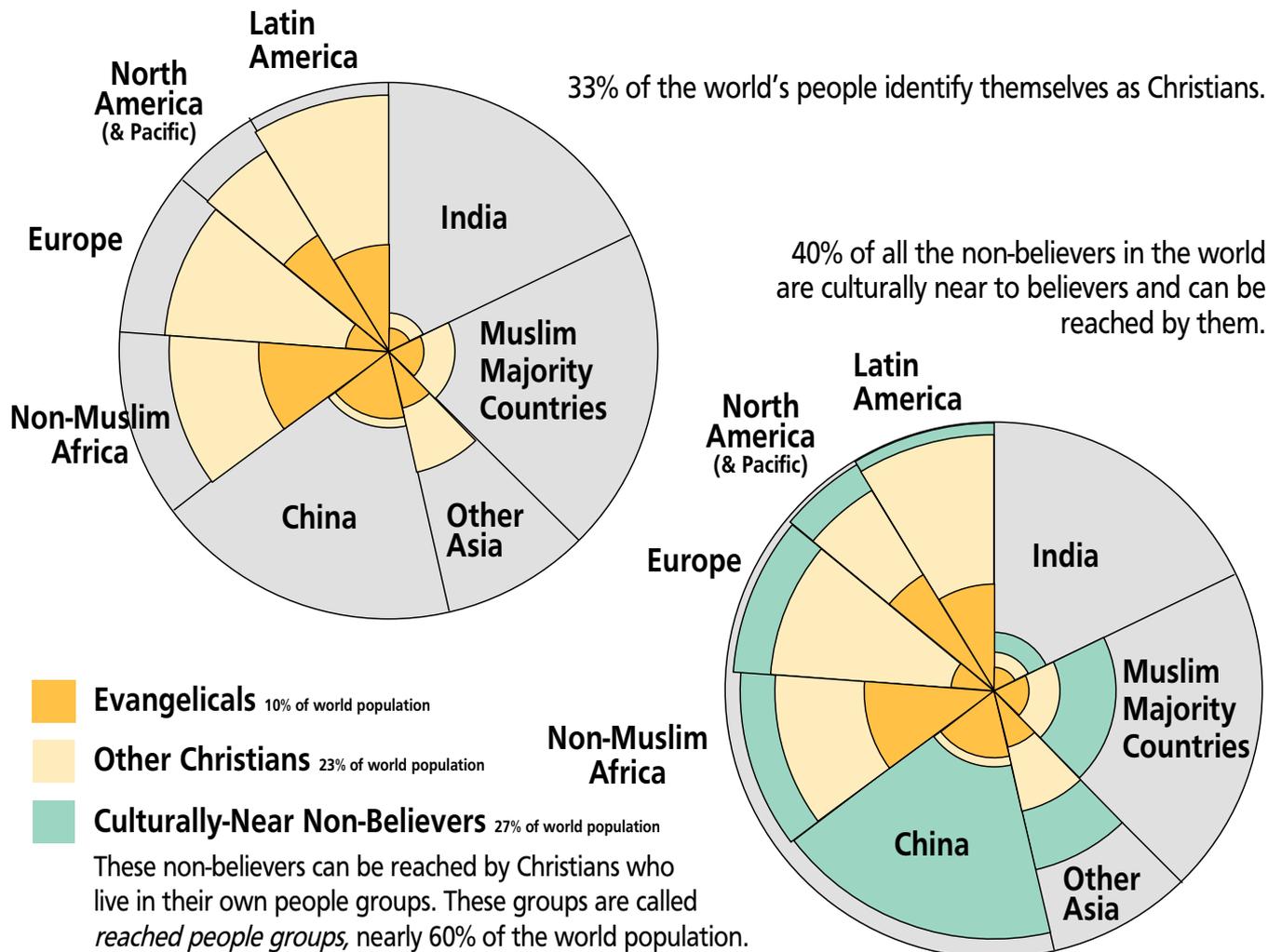
Joshua Project has begun separating these frontier people groups—those with no sign of movements or breakthroughs—by using a rough quantitative measure of *less than or equal to 0.1% Christian* (one out of 1000). They have begun putting these groups onto separate maps, charts, and lists for the purpose of separate analysis. If you look closely at the Joshua Project charts which highlight just the frontier people groups, you will notice some startling missiological realities that have been obscured more recently in the larger UPG databases.

**Religious Breakdown:** *About 85% of all FPGs are either Hindu or Muslim.*

This startling fact is easily seen when frontier people groups are put onto a world map by religion, and shown by religion on “donut” circles. By comparison, Buddhist groups make up

Figure 2.

# The Spread of the Gospel in the World

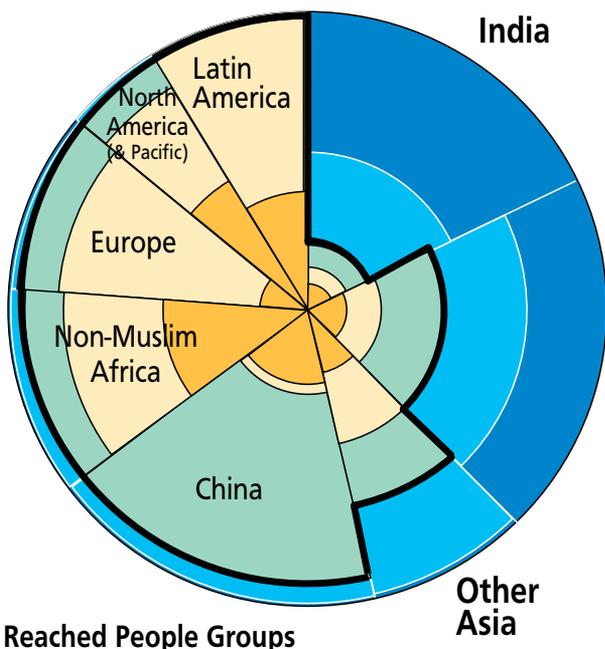


Frontier Mission Pie Chart Data (2018) <sup>5</sup>						
Region (Countries listed in endnotes)	Population	Evangelicals (subset of Total Christians)	Total Christians	Culturally Near Non-Believers (not in UPGs) *	Culturally Distant Non-Believers (in UPGs) *	Non-Believers in FPGs **
India	1,336,000,000	10,200,000	27,600,000	35,300,000	1,273,000,000	961,000,000
Muslim Majority Countries	1,484,000,000	24,800,000	89,400,000	215,000,000	1,179,000,000	689,000,000
Other Asia	647,000,000	29,800,000	135,000,000	165,000,000	347,000,000	30,000,000
China	1,375,000,000	85,300,000	108,000,000	1,082,000,000	185,000,000	40,600,000
Non-Muslim Africa	850,000,000	198,000,000	562,000,000	177,000,000	111,000,000	17,400,000
Europe	736,000,000	18,400,000	509,000,000	191,000,000	36,500,000	11,100,000
N. America & Pacific	402,000,000	103,000,000	307,000,000	81,400,000	13,400,000	1,470,000
Latin America	646,000,000	102,000,000	587,000,000	57,600,000	809,000	89,800
<b>World</b>	<b>7,475,000,000</b>	<b>572,000,000</b>	<b>2,326,000,000</b>	<b>2,004,000,000</b>	<b>3,145,000,000</b>	<b>1,750,000,000</b>
			These 3 columns add up to the total population.			
* UPGs = Unreached People Groups; ** FPGs = Frontier People Groups (subset of non-believers in UPGs)						
Data is derived from Operation World DVD (see operationworld.org) and Joshua Project website (joshuaproject.net).						

# Understanding the Remaining Mission Task (2018)

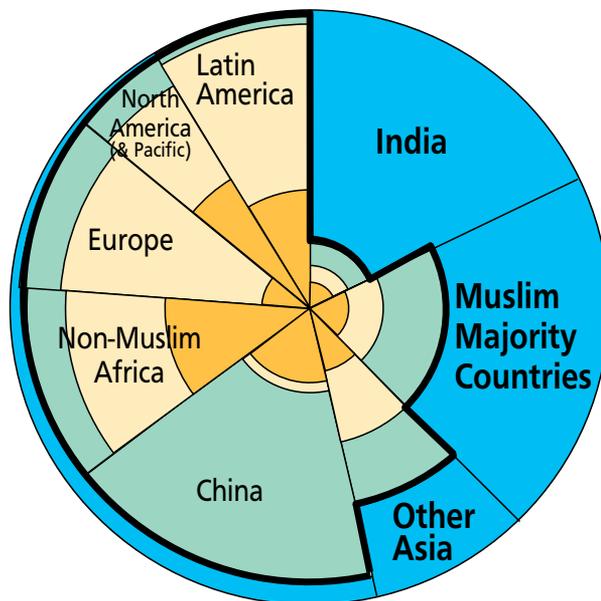
## Culturally-Distant Non-Believers

60% of all the non-believers in the world are culturally distant from believers. They live in *unreached people groups* (UPGs = <2% evangelicals and <5% Christian), which still need missionaries from other cultures.



Reached People Groups

- Evangelicals
- Other Christians
- Culturally-Near Non-Believers



Muslim Majority Countries

## The Frontier Mission Task

These non-believers have virtually no chance of hearing about Jesus from somebody in their own people group:

## Culturally-Distant Non-Believers in Frontier People Groups

If there is no movement to Christ of indigenous faith in a people group, and it is <0.1% Christian, it is a *frontier people group* (FPG). FPGs total 25% of the world population.



## The Mobilization Challenge:



For every 30 missionaries that go to the reached people groups of the world . . .



. . . roughly ONE missionary goes to the unreached people groups, including the frontier groups.



# 30 to 1

Evangelicals are Christians who emphasize and adhere to these four things:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation through faith in Him.
2. Personal faith and conversion by the Holy Spirit.
3. Recognition of the Bible as the ultimate basis for faith and Christian living.
4. Commitment to biblical witness, evangelism, and mission.

Evangelicals are largely Protestant, Independent, or Anglican, but some are Catholic or Orthodox.

under 5% of the total and ethnic and all other religions comprise only 11%. By population, the difference is even more extreme (see map of all frontier people groups, top of page 161), and the “donut” circles showing the percentages of people groups count and population by religion (bottom of page 161).

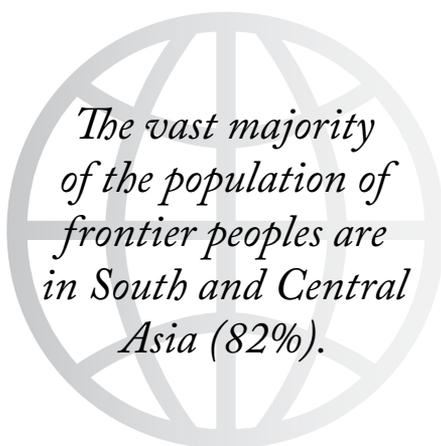
**Geographic Location:** *72% of the people in FPGs live in South Asia.* The frontier people groups map reveals that the vast majority of the population of frontier peoples are in South and Central Asia (82%), fewer than 20 countries. Look at the special table and pie charts showing FPG population by area of the world (page 162). The cartogram on page 163 is a different way of showing where the bulk of the people in FPGs live. Also, note that the FPGs “diaspora vs. homeland” map reveals that less than 3% of the people in FPGs are outside of their homeland in diaspora groups (page 167).

**Population of FPGs:** *One-fourth of the world’s population reside in these FPGs.* Maps showing the frontier people groups by location, religion, and size reveal a startling demography: *almost the total population of FPGs reside in large people groups.* Although half the total number of these FPGs are actually small, less than 0.3% of the total people in the 4700+ FPGs are in small groups (the 2200+ groups with less than 10,000 population). In fact, almost 90% of the population of all FPGs are in just 400 groups with populations greater than 500,000. See the map showing the FPGs over 500,000 in size (page 165). The link to this map and list is located [www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3).

**Half are in Just 31 Groups:** *Almost half of the entire population of FPGs are in just 31 people groups over 10 million in size.* To make significant progress in frontier people groups will require focusing on the largest groups, which may in turn have a considerable influence on the smaller groups around

them. Of the people in FPGs, almost 900 million reside in *the thirty-one largest frontier people groups* (>=10 million in size each). See the map showing just the thirty-one largest frontier people groups (page 165). The recently published prayer booklet entitled “Pray for the 31” indicates that eighteen are Muslim and thirteen are Hindu—and sixteen are in the country of India ([www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5)).

All of these maps and charts from Joshua Project are very helpful in clarifying which of the unreached people groups are still needing “frontier mission efforts” because there exists no indigenous movement of believers to carry forward the evangelizing of



their own people). In addition, they help immensely by showing the people groups by size, religion, and location, as well as a list with names, profiles, and other important facts for people who are praying or going.

*However, these excellent graphics still fail to reveal how the number of “sent” mission workers corresponds to the bulk of this remaining task.*

### III. Identifying where the mission workers are going and what they are doing

In the last forty years, UPGs have been tracked, but most of the demography of UPG sites does not show where the mission workers are going, or not

going. Our charting of the task must communicate this if the global church is going to be able to send people strategically to the most neglected peoples. It has been roughly estimated that over 95% of global missionaries are going to help existing active Christians reaching out to nominal or culturally-near non-believers in their own people groups. (See the first three categories of the 1978 and 2018 pie charts, on pages 154 and 158–159.) The shock of this kind of disparity sparked the *frontier* mission movement forty years ago and it continues to this day.

Notice that Ralph Winter made the problem of unequal missionary distribution clear on the original pie chart. (See the middle circle, page 154.) While more people are aware of and concerned with UPGs, *as of 2018 approximately thirty times as many global missionaries go to the reached people groups, to work with existing churches in training and outreach, as go to the unreached people groups (including the FPGs).*

An organization called Finishing The Task (FTT) was formed after the year 2000 to address this problem and to renew interest in tracking those unreached people groups which have no long-term witnesses<sup>6</sup> whatsoever (“unengaged unreached people groups” UUPGs). Their goal is to make sure each UUPG, no matter how small, has a church-planting witness. But a single witness is not sufficient for the largest groups, so FTT is beginning to track the numbers of workers in each people group, with a goal of 1 per 50,000.

Once there are some evangelical believers within a people group, they can witness even more effectively to their families and friends (E-1) than outsiders can (E-2/E-3). If the number of national believers reaches 1 per 1000, the people group is no longer considered a “frontier people group” because that ratio usually indicates that some kind of indigenous movement to Christ is underway. It is admittedly

Figure 3. All Frontier People Groups

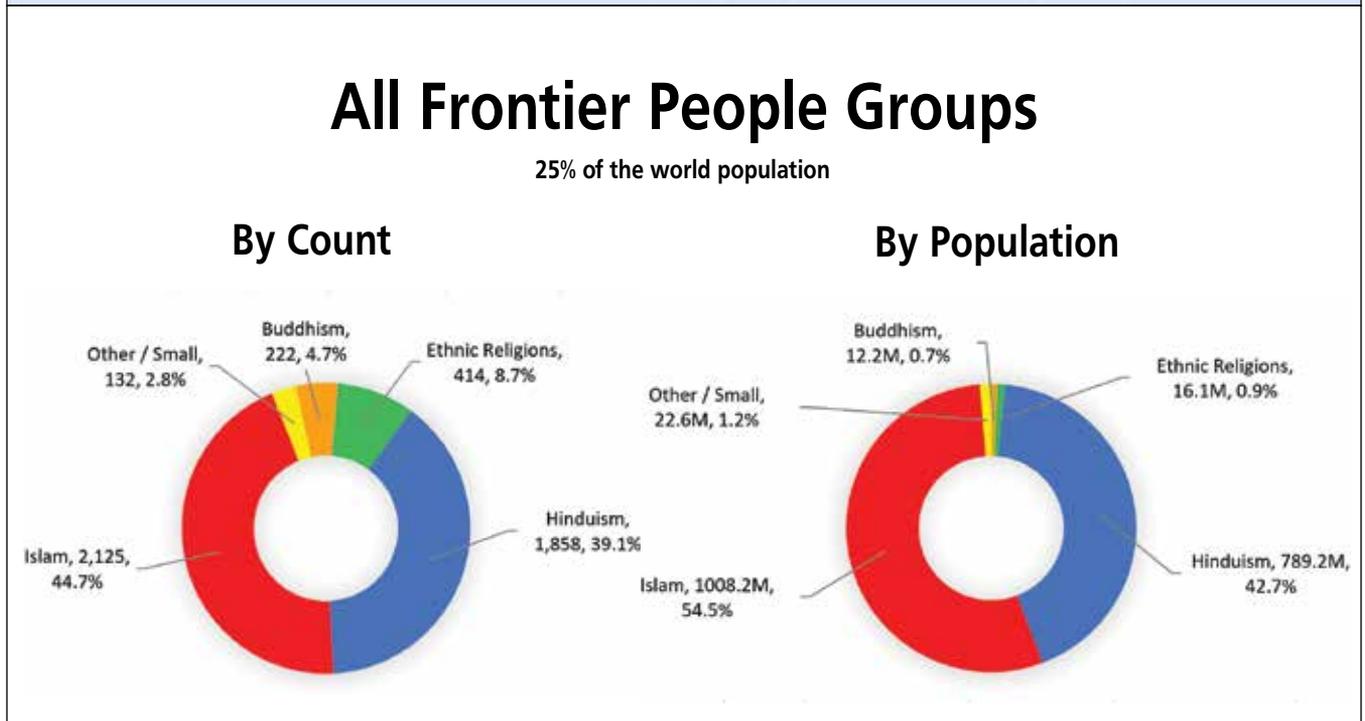
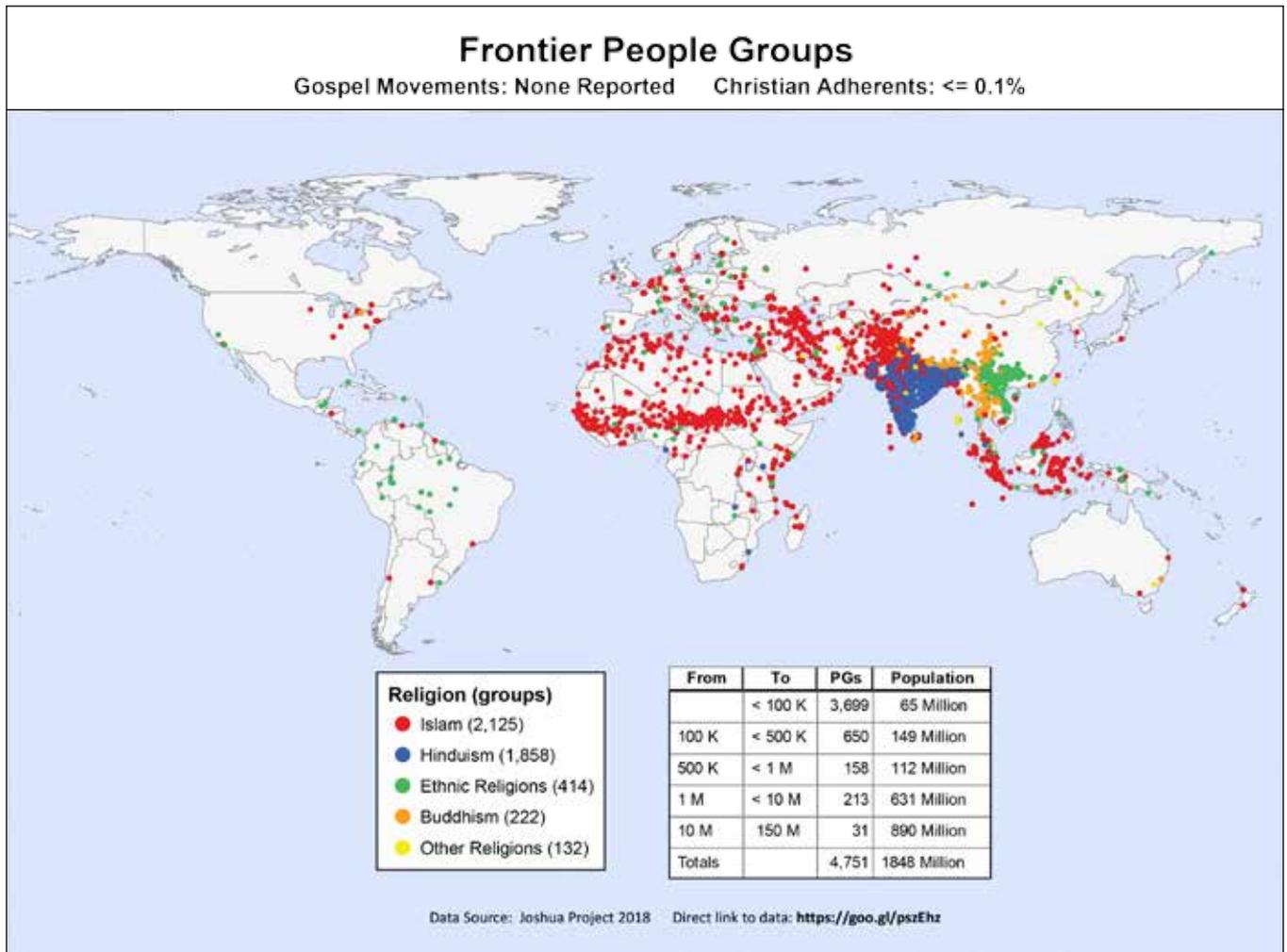
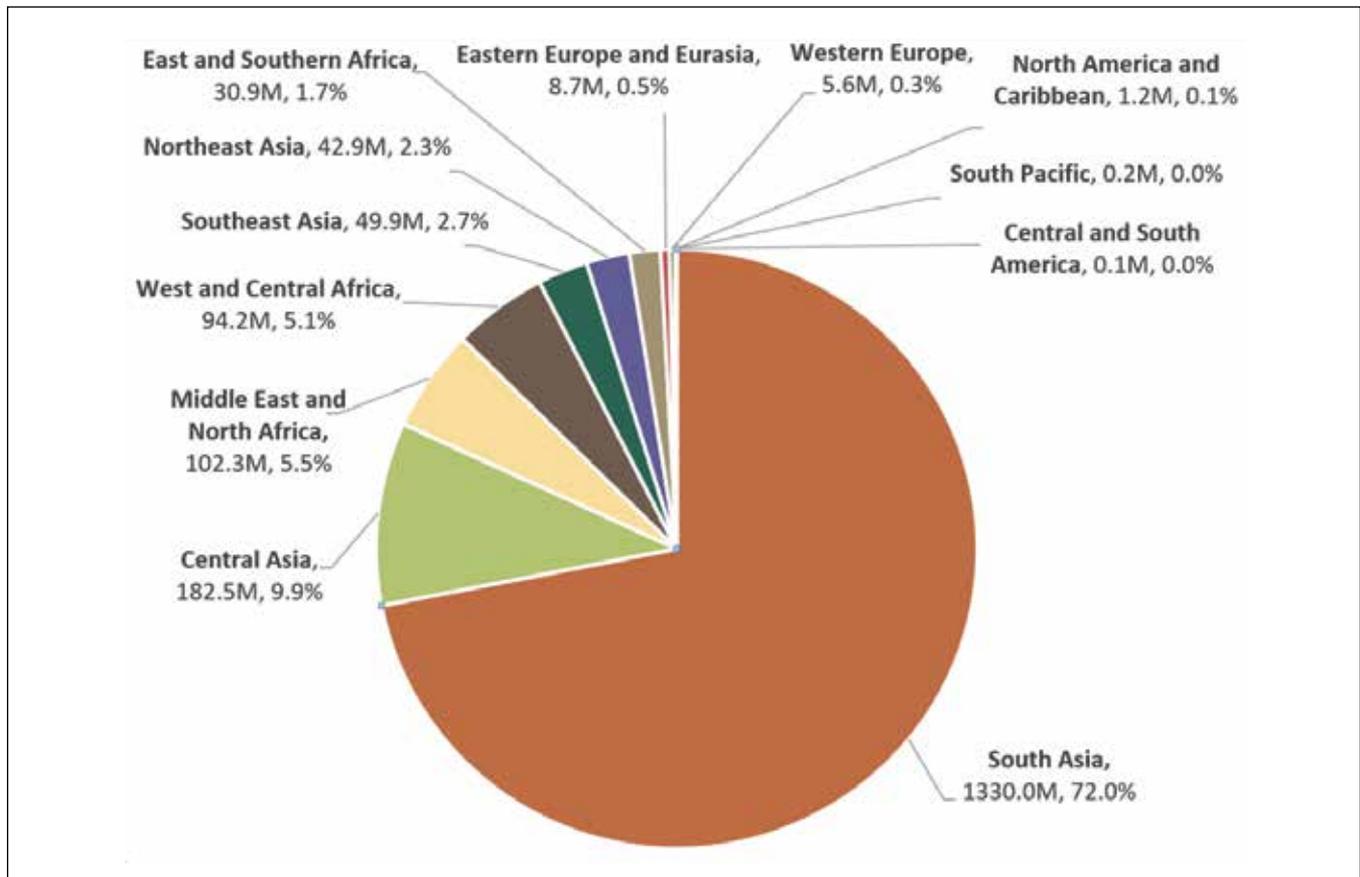


Table and Figure 4. Frontier Peoples Population by Region

Frontier Peoples Population by Region			
Region (# of countries)	Count	Population (in millions)	% Global Frontier Peoples Population
South Asia (8)	2,934	1330.0M	72.0%
Central Asia (10)	267	182.5M	9.9%
Middle East and North Africa (19)	237	102.3M	5.5%
West and Central Africa (24)	205	94.2M	5.1%
Southeast Asia (11)	323	49.9M	2.7%
Northeast Asia (8)	292	42.9M	2.3%
East and Southern Africa (28)	159	30.9M	1.7%
Eastern Europe and Eurasia (23)	145	8.7M	0.5%
Western Europe (28)	107	5.6M	0.3%
North America and Caribbean (30)	40	1.2M	0.1%
South Pacific (27)	15	0.2M	0.0%
Central and South America (22)	27	0.1M	0.0%
<b>All Frontier People Groups</b>	<b>4,751</b>	<b>1848.4M</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Listing of Countries in Regions at: [joshuaproject.net/global/regions](http://joshuaproject.net/global/regions)  
 Frontier Peoples listings and maps at: [joshuaproject.net/frontier/1](http://joshuaproject.net/frontier/1)



a rough estimate, but better tracking of actual movements is becoming increasingly available.

Knowing where the global missionaries are going is a crucial component of discerning the remaining task, and the Center for the Study of Global Christianity has collected this data country by country (although it includes all missionaries, Catholic, Protestant, etc., including those going to another country to work with Christians from their own country who are living abroad). One startling fact their data reveals is that the more Christians there are in a country, the more missionaries they receive from other countries. In fact, the USA receives more missionaries than any other country, some 32,000 in 2010, according to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*.<sup>7</sup> This makes some sense, since most missionaries are sent to help existing believers or to partner with existing churches and seminaries.

*But it is not good enough to know where the missionaries are going. We also need to know what kind of mission work they are*

*doing when they arrive.* Unfortunately, what missionaries actually DO has not been tracked. But estimates from knowledgeable sources reveal that the vast majority of missionaries are being trained and sent to help active believers rather than to pioneer in frontier people groups. Certain questions should be asked:

*Are they working with the active believers to disciple them?*

Many workers teach in seminaries, pastor churches, and serve active Christians. Foreign workers can serve existing churches through short-term teams and training or bringing in requested expertise in theology, business, education, translation, technical, medical agricultural, etc. An example is an American who pastors an international church in a foreign city. These types of missionaries might also work with Christians from their own countries, like Brazilian missionaries going to the United States to work with Brazilian Christians in Portuguese-speaking churches.

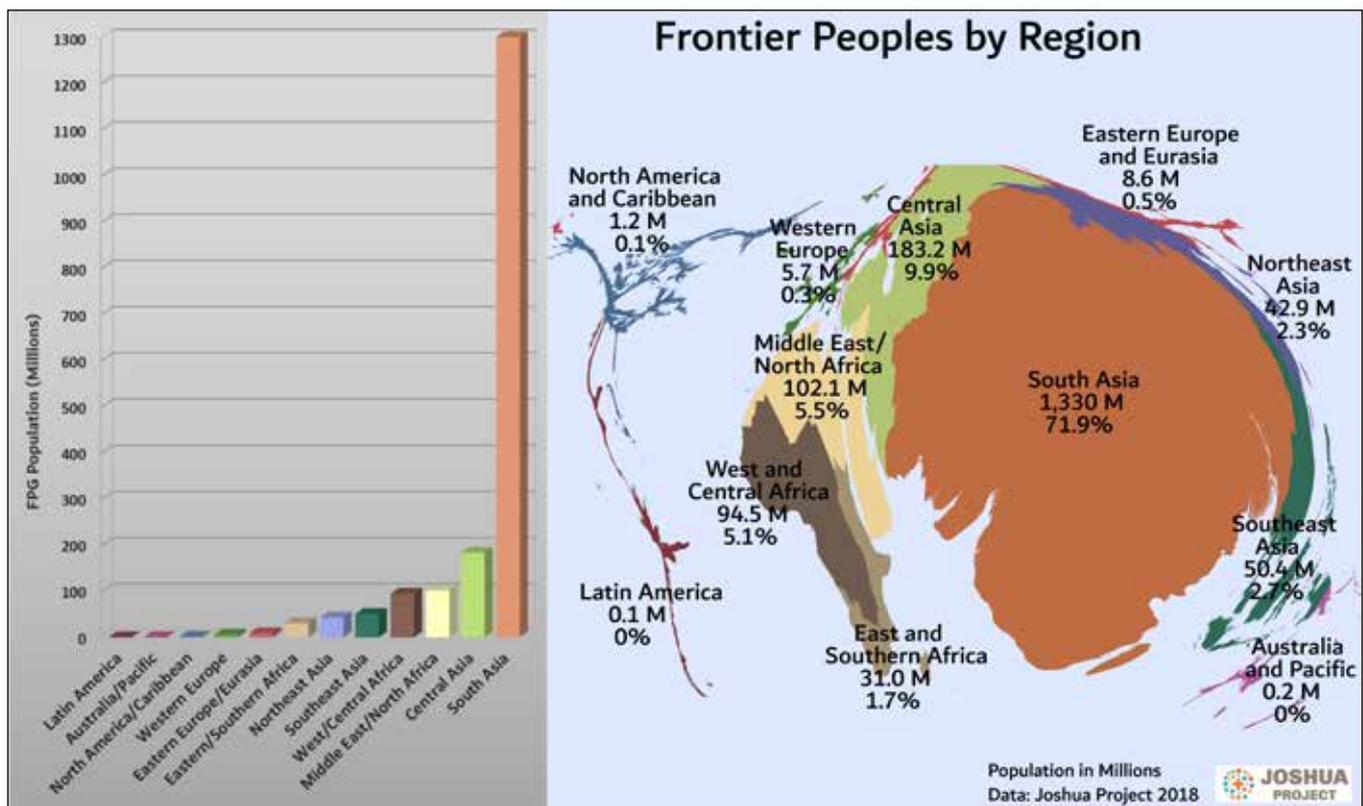
*Are they helping active believers with renewal efforts (E-0 evangelism)?*

Some foreign (either Western or global South) workers partner with existing churches to bring renewal of faith among nominal Christians in people groups with long histories of identification with Christianity, e.g., Europe and Latin America. This category would include a Latin American pastor who helps to plant evangelical churches or run Alpha programs in Spain among Catholics.

*Are they helping active believers with outreach to non-believers in their own culture (E-1 evangelism)?*

Active believers should always be encouraged and trained to reach the non-believers in their own culture, especially their own relatives, neighbors, and co-workers. When foreign missionaries come alongside existing movements to Christ in non-Christian people groups, it can be either helpful or detrimental depending on how it is done. National believers witnessing and doing Bible

Figure 5. Cartogram of Frontier Peoples Population by Region with Proportional Country Sizes



studies among non-believers has led to powerful movements historically—in places such as Korea and China, most notably. Foreign missionaries often partner with existing believers to help in these E-1 outreach efforts. For example, a short-term trainer could show interested French believers how to start Bible studies among the French people who are atheists.

*Are they going to people groups with no believers or churches, pioneering in “frontier” mission outreach?*

Any time mission work goes into people groups “where Christ has not been named,” and where there are virtually no known believers with whom to partner, it is called frontier missions. Roughly thirty times as many missionaries go to “reached” people groups to work with Christians, as go to UPGs. Far less go to the FPGs, where there are as yet no believers.

*Are they trying to train Christians in other people groups to do frontier outreach?*

Some organizations are seeking to persuade believers in proximate people groups to reach out to FPGs, such as training believers in one tribe to reach out to a nearby tribe. This can work; however, it is not easy to train others to do frontier mission outreach unless you yourself have experience doing frontier missions. For example, if someone has been successful in starting Discovery Bible Studies (DBSs) in his own culture, he may be sent to another foreign Christian group to try to teach them how to start DBSs in an “unreached” people group that lives near them. However, the trainer may have never started a DBS in a culture completely different from his own, where the language is different and where he might have been rejected. So, the training he gives would be of questionable value for UPG or FPG outreach. Better for him to try it himself first, at least in diaspora groups, before becoming a trainer of others.

The fact remains that there has been little progress in many very large people groups in understanding that

Jesus is their savior too—this, despite a century or more of attempted outreach. It is also fully possible that once more workers are sent into these very large groups, we will find out that they consist of several smaller people groups lumped incorrectly into one very large group.

### *Responding to the Charts and Maps: A Further Examination of Our Progress in Frontier Mission*

The 2018 pie chart begs a question: *Why are so many of these people groups still dark blue with less than 0.1% Christian?* Hopefully, charting the remaining task has brought clarity and helped to clear up this *demographic confusion*.



But there are seven other reasons I alluded to at the beginning of this article that contribute to the lack of progress. Certain conditions (the first four listed here) are more geopolitical or socio-religious and are generally *out of our control*. However, we can actually change some of the factors (the final four below) that have impeded the gospel in frontier people groups. We would need to shift our church practice and mobilization strategies. I will first list the conditions which impede progress (1-4), and then the strategies we can choose to change (5-8). But I want to give some emphasis to number 8, what I call lack of “missionological clarity,” and “how” we might see a strategic way forward.

## I. Four difficulties we face in this frontier mission task

### *Difficulty of Access*

Frontier peoples tend to be isolated from the gospel witness, because they live in places that are difficult to access politically or geographically.

### *Global Religious Identities*

Most frontier people groups are themselves part of larger multi-people religious identity groups, like Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism that provide a global identity. As a result, Christianity is viewed as an opposing religious and perhaps even a hostile political power, representing Western imperialism.

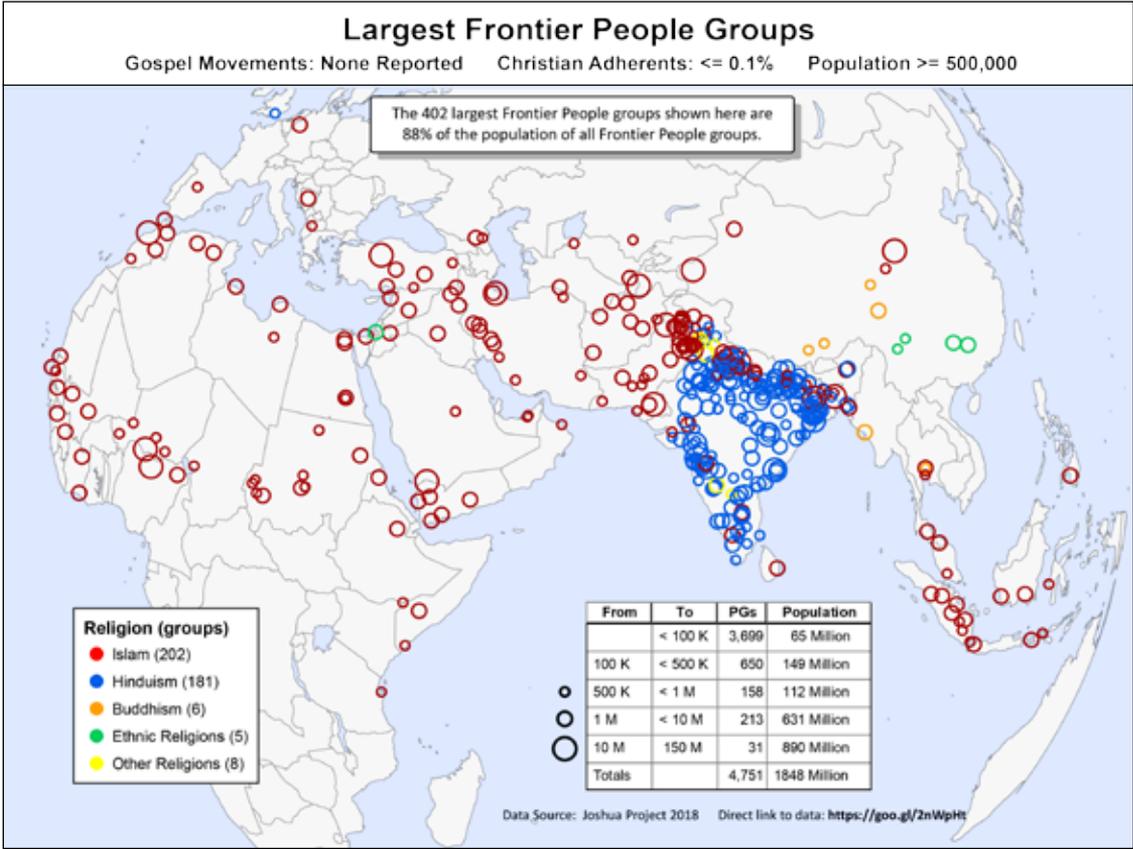
### *Fear of Shame*

Today many families who are part of frontier peoples may be aware of and respect Jesus. They do not see Jesus as the savior of the world, but only of the Christians. They fear that faith in Jesus will cause family members to reject their cultural and/or religious traditions and identity which could cause them to be expelled from their communities. The whole family will be shamed and ostracized from their community as a result, so sometimes believers hide their faith or leave to protect their families.

### *Extraction Conversions of Those in Diaspora Groups*

Frontier peoples tend to stay in their homelands wherever possible. Less than 3% of the total population of people in frontier people groups are in diaspora groups. But individuals from frontier people groups living in diaspora groups who come to faith are often extracted from their diaspora community and enfolded into Western churches with a resulting loss of identity and loss of ties to their family and communities back home. They are perceived to be traitors by their families and are shunned or sometimes killed; or they are forced to be secret believers, which also impedes the flow of the gospel (see FPG Diaspora vs. Homeland Map, page 167).

Figure 6. Largest Frontier People Groups



**The 402 Largest Frontier People Groups**

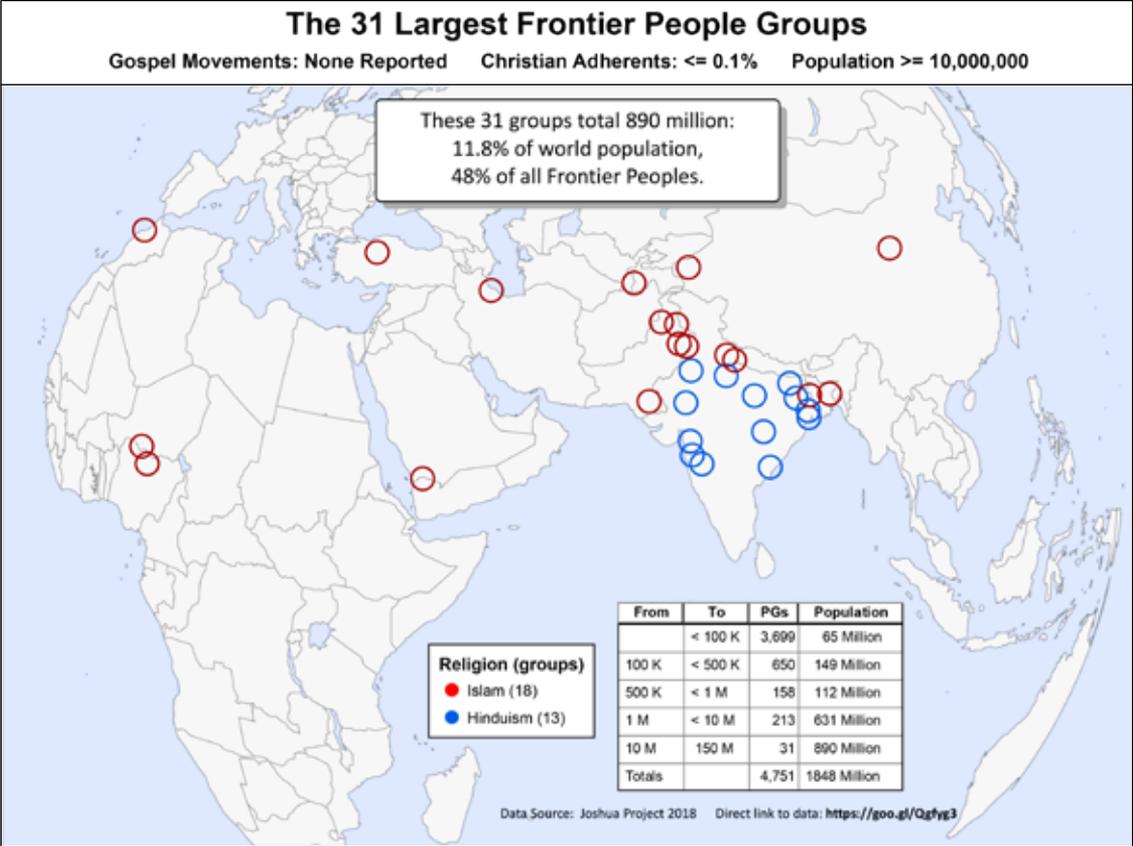
88% of the population of all Frontier People Groups

[www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3)

[www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5)

**The 31 Largest Frontier People Groups**

48% of the population of all Frontier People Groups



## II. Four strategies which must be corrected

### *A Lack of Demographic Clarity*

There has been increasing confusion about the terms and concepts of unreached people groups, unengaged people groups, and what we're now calling frontier people groups. Many mobilization efforts are not making clear which people groups are most neglected. As was discussed in *IJFM* 35:1, it is no longer apparent to the churches which people groups are still waiting to hear about Jesus for the first time in history, versus which people groups have either strong movements underway, or actually have declining churches which need revival. The previous pages have shown some graphics created to help with this problem.

### *The Move from Pioneering to Partnership Strategies*

Emphasis has once again moved away from pioneering in places where there are no believers to partnering with local (national) believers. With the ease of modern travel, mission agencies have been bypassed, and partnering with local believers has become a popular church-to-church "mission" strategy. However, frontier people groups are being ignored by partnership strategies which *automatically direct mission workers to people groups that already have believers and churches*, to help in the various ways listed above (see page 163).

### *The Move from Long-Term Workers to Short-Term Workers*

Mission dollars have increasingly been shifted from supporting long-term workers to short-term teams. But these short-term team members almost never learn languages nor are sent where there are no Christians. Although the number of short-term mission trips has grown exponentially since the year 2000, very few participants go on to work long-term in frontier areas as was initially hoped. Even "career" missionaries now rarely last more than 5-10 years on the field, hardly long enough to become

effective. In fact, some workers now spend more years training to go than they do in mission work once they arrive.

### *A Lack of Missiological Clarity about the Frontier Mission Task*

Distinct kinds of training are required for ministry by pioneer workers to start movements to Christ in groups that are completely untouched by the gospel. However, missionary training has increasingly focused on methods that work in the West such as partnering with Christians to plant churches or Bible studies. In addition, "church planting" strategies have inadvertently shifted the emphasis away from making the gospel fully understandable within the families and kinship networks of specific people groups, as has been done



successfully in tribal areas. Instead, especially in the world's cities, the focus has turned to the starting of Western-style meeting- and program-based churches that promote the aggregation of strangers together. This new pattern has not been shown to lead to indigenous movements in frontier people groups.

## III. Making progress in frontier people groups

Some of these factors were discussed in more depth in my previous article entitled "Losing Sight of the Frontier Mission Task" (*IJFM* 35:1). In that article, I introduced the category of "frontier people groups," defined as people groups still requiring "frontier mission" efforts because no breakthrough or indigenous

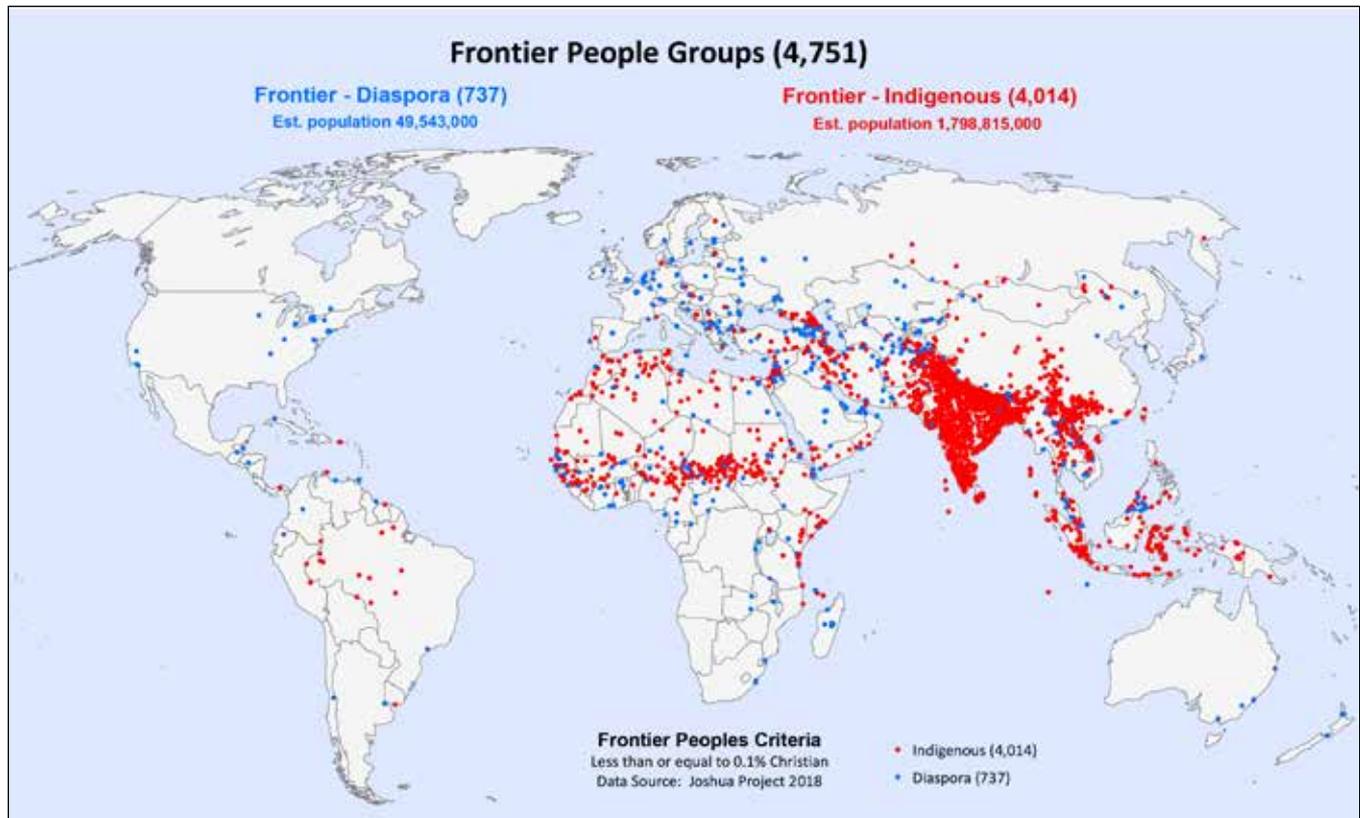
movement<sup>8</sup> to Christ has happened yet. It is unfortunately insufficient to bring clarity to the demographics (where to go) without also addressing the need for clarifying the missiological task (what to do when we get there). Together these two clarifications will hopefully lead to a returning to "frontier mission" outreach—the kind of outreach necessary to make progress toward *indigenous movements* in the remaining frontier peoples. But in my opinion, we cannot use the same methods that are being used within people groups who have populations in which various levels of faith in Christ already exist.

For a frontier people group to be won to Christ, or to be appraised as "reached," at some point *an indigenous movement to Christ must develop within that group*. For this to happen, movements of whole families and clans must come to Christ, enabling the spread of the gospel to overtake population growth.

However, throughout the centuries, movements to Christ have been stillborn in a lot of the remaining frontier people groups, even when missionaries were sent. Why is this the case? I believe a primary reason is that when we got to these particular people groups, mostly Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, *we changed our message and our methods*. We have not continued to introduce the message as "good news" for the whole people group or community, as evangelicals have continued to do with small pagan tribal groups everywhere. Instead, with these very large groups associated with global religions, we have won individuals to Christ and *then removed them from their people group* to identify with a different people group which is "Christian," or to join an aggregate church of people from multiple backgrounds.

Virtually all tribal groups are very religious, but new tribal believers have not been encouraged to leave their families and move to a different Christian tribe, learn a new language, change their name, eat differently, and marry into and adopt the identity of a different tribe, as has so often happened to Hindus, Muslims, or

Figure 7. Frontier People Groups Diaspora vs. Homeland Map



Buddhists who become believers. For example, Sawi believers in Papua New Guinea were not helicoptered out to join the churches in the Dani tribe.

The gospel has been able to permeate and change animistic tribal groups, many of whom suffered from very demonic spirits and were quite violent, because *the believers have continued to be a part of the tribe*. In many cases, whole tribes or whole clans made the decision together as a group to follow Jesus, sometimes after months of hearing about it together.

But we seem to change our message and methods when reaching out to people groups that are a part of vast, transcultural religious groups. Suddenly missionaries have insisted that those becoming believers must leave their families and communities in order to follow Jesus. When Hindus come to Christ, their faith is suspect if they won't eat beef or marry into a community of believers from a different culture and caste. Likewise, Muslims may be expected to prove their faith in Christ by eating pork

or by not fasting during Ramadan. Such defilement insures that their families will be shamed, and that their communities will ostracize them. Sometimes they are even encouraged to change their names from their original family names, which sound Hindu or Muslim, to names that sound "Christian." Is it any surprise that the communities from which they come, have become very resistant to any further wooing away of their relatives? The communities themselves quickly begin evicting or shunning anyone who starts to put their faith in Jesus, making sure the cancer doesn't grow.

I believe we will continue to have little success in these remaining frontier groups if we do not return to the fundamental biblical principles of *frontier* missions that have been demonstrated again and again in people groups throughout history—and as were first put forth by the Apostle Paul. Much more discussion and research is needed on this subject. Suffice it to say, Paul faced a situation similar to the one we now face in these

transcultural religious spheres when he brought the gospel into the Roman Empire. It also had a large transcultural religious system and the presence of unifying religious-identity elements. We need to recognize and recapture Paul's message and methods that have worked in the past and use them when entering these large religious-affinity worlds of the Hindu and the Muslim.

Charting and mapping the unfinished frontier task should force the church to recognize "at-a-glance" that one fourth of the people in the world who live in these frontier people groups have yet to hear about Jesus and the good news of the kingdom of God. Charts need to also make clear that less than one percent of the global missionary force is going to frontier peoples and reveal that, although some frontier people groups have had workers for decades, comparatively little progress has been made. Then we can begin to re-examine and reincorporate the necessary missiological principles of the frontier mission task. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Roberta Winter's book, *I Will Do a New Thing* (originally *Once More Around Jericho*), a story of the initial years of this project, was also a publication that was used to arouse the evangelical churches.

<sup>2</sup> And not more than 5% Christian in the Joshua Project data base. The term "reached" became a problem, because if people thought of individuals instead of groups, "reached" implied "saved." So instead of seeing the 2 evangelicals out of 100 people as being very sufficient to reach out to both the nominal Christians and the non-believers in a people group, without outside help, the 98% that are not committed believers made the group still seem "unreached."

<sup>3</sup> The Han Chinese are technically not one people group linguistically and even culturally, but they have an identity and a written language that unites them.

<sup>4</sup> Note that for security reasons, it is not necessary to make a show of those that DO have movements to Christ, only those that do not.

<sup>5</sup> The Appendix, to the right, is a table listing all the countries used in each section (region) of the 2018 pie charts, on pages 158 and 159. The number of countries is noted in parentheses under each heading. The regions of China and India are each just the one country in their sections of the pie chart because they each contain one fifth of the world's population and have unique demographics. The rest of the countries have been sorted by demographic similarities.

<sup>6</sup> The definition of "unengaged" according to *Finishing the Task* is: "They are unengaged, which means that no church, no mission agency—no one has yet taken responsibility to tell them of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" . . . "Our goal is to remove a people group once it is confirmed that a solid church planting strategy, consistent with evangelical faith and practice, is under implementation."

<sup>7</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Center for the Study of Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 283.

<sup>8</sup> Movements can be variously defined as a self-replicating movement of believers extending to four generations of witness, or David Garrison's definition of a movement in his book *A Wind in the House of Islam*: either 1000 believers or 100 fellowships in a given people group.

## Appendix

Countries Used in Each Section of the 2018 Pie Charts *					
Latin America (47)	Muslim Majority Countries (53)	N. America & Pacific (31)	Non-Muslim Africa (36)	Other Asia (19)	Europe (47)
Anguilla	Afghanistan	American Samoa	Angola	Bhutan	Andorra
Antigua and Barbuda	Albania	Australia	Benin	Cambodia	Armenia
Argentina	Algeria	Bermuda	Botswana	China, Hong Kong	Austria
Aruba	Azerbaijan	Canada	British Indian Ocean Territory	China, Macau	Belarus
Bahamas	Bahrain	Christmas Island	Burundi	East Timor	Belgium
Barbados	Bangladesh	Cook Islands	Cameroon	Israel	Bulgaria
Belize	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Fiji	Cape Verde	Japan	Croatia
Bolivia	Brunei	French Polynesia	Central African Republic	Korea, North	Cyprus
Brazil	Burkina Faso	Greenland	Congo, Democratic Republic of	Korea, South	Czechia
British Virgin Islands	Chad	Guam	Congo, Republic of the	Laos	Denmark
Cayman Islands	Cocos (Keeling) Islands	Kiribati (Gilbert)	Equatorial Guinea	Mongolia	Estonia
Chile	Comoros	Marshall Islands	Ethiopia	Myanmar (Burma)	Faroe Islands
Colombia	Côte d'Ivoire	Micronesia, Federated States	Gabon	Nepal	Finland
Costa Rica	Djibouti	Nauru	Ghana	Philippines	France
Cuba	Egypt	New Caledonia	Kenya	Singapore	Georgia
Curacao	Eritrea	New Zealand	Lesotho	Sri Lanka	Germany
Dominica	Gambia	Niue	Liberia	Taiwan	Gibraltar
Dominican Republic	Guinea	Norfolk Island	Madagascar	Thailand	Greece
Ecuador	Guinea-Bissau	Northern Mariana Islands	Malawi	Vietnam	Hungary
El Salvador	Indonesia	Palau	Mauritius		Iceland
Falkland Islands	Iran	Papua New Guinea	Mozambique		Ireland
French Guiana	Iraq	Pitcairn Islands	Namibia		Italy
Grenada	Jordan	Saint Pierre and Miquelon	Nigeria		Latvia
Guadeloupe	Kazakhstan	Samoa	Reunion		Liechtenstein
Guatemala	Kosovo	Solomon Islands	Rwanda		Lithuania
Guyana	Kuwait	Tokelau	Saint Helena		Luxembourg
Haiti	Kyrgyzstan	Tonga	Sao Tome and Principe		Macedonia
Honduras	Lebanon	Tuvalu	Seychelles		Malta
Jamaica	Libya	United States	South Africa		Moldova
Martinique	Malaysia	Vanuatu	South Sudan		Monaco
Mexico	Maldives	Wallis and Futuna Islands	Swaziland		Montenegro
Montserrat	Mali		Tanzania		Netherlands
Nicaragua	Mauritania		Togo		Norway
Panama	Mayotte		Uganda		Poland
Paraguay	Morocco		Zambia		Portugal
Peru	Niger		Zimbabwe		Romania
Puerto Rico	Oman				Russia
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Pakistan				San Marino
Saint Lucia	Qatar				Serbia
Sint Maarten	Saudi Arabia				Slovakia
St Vincent and Grenadines	Senegal				Slovenia
Suriname	Sierra Leone				Spain
Trinidad and Tobago	Somalia				Sweden
Turks and Caicos Islands	Sudan				Switzerland
Uruguay	Syria				Ukraine
Venezuela	Tajikistan				United Kingdom
Virgin Islands (U.S.)	Tunisia				Vatican City
	Turkey				
	Turkmenistan				
	United Arab Emirates				
	Uzbekistan				
	West Bank / Gaza				
	Yemen				

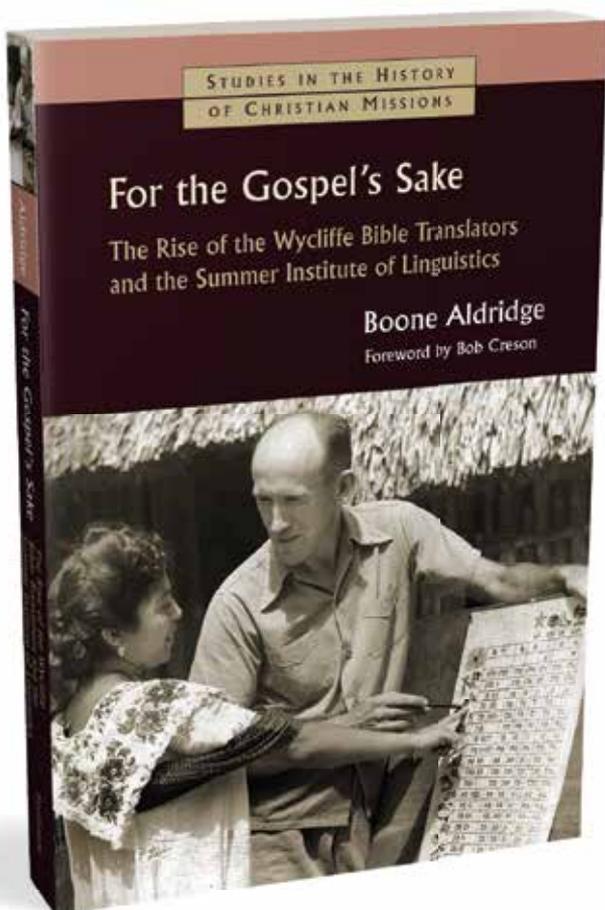
\*The regions of China & India are just one country each.

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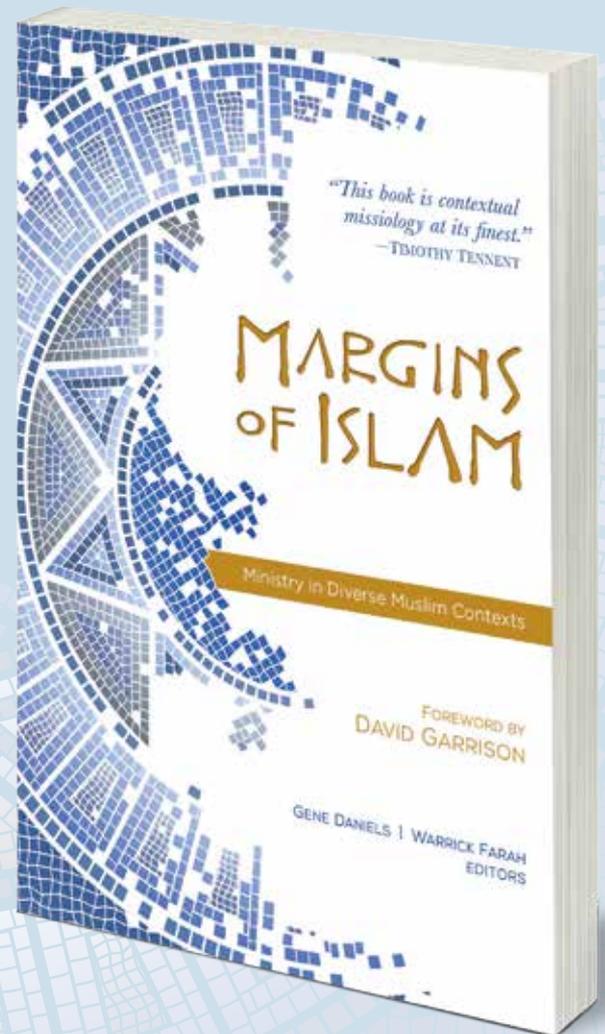
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Clarifying the Frontiers

# Adaptive Missiological Engagement with Islamic Contexts

by Warrick Farah

*Editor's Note: This article is a chapter from the 2018 publication, Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts, edited by Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah. Printed here by permission from William Carey Publishers.*

As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, developing appropriate missiology in a Muslim context takes wisdom, patience, and skill. So how can we, as practitioners who love Muslims, deal with the diversity of approaches to lost people in the New Testament, on the one hand, and the diversity of approaches to Muslims in the mission community, on the other?<sup>1</sup> Why does God seem to be blessing so many drastically different approaches to working with Muslims today, sometimes even in the same context? This chapter builds upon the blueprints for understanding Islam in the introductory chapters and the thirteen case studies in the book to propose an “adaptive” approach to mission. That is, mission in a world full of multifaceted challenges must adapt to the issues it faces within Muslim contexts, following the example of how Jesus and his disciples engaged complex situations in the New Testament. Adaptive missiology is a reflective process that enables us to deal with complexity while discerning gospel-centered responses appropriate for specific contexts.

## *Changing Understandings of Muslim Contexts*

Significant shifts in recent decades have influenced how we conceptualize Muslim contexts and approach reaching them with the gospel. Reactions against colonialism and the influence of postmodernism led to changes in anthropology and religious studies that have played a large and often unexamined role in how we as Christians understand our biblical calling to engage Muslims in Islamic contexts. This section offers a brief survey of these influences as they relate to missiology.

### **Postcolonial Studies: “The Muslim World” versus “The West”**

Several decades ago, Edward Said published a highly influential critique of Western scholarship on Asia titled *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1994 [1978]). Even if Said’s arguments were at times polarizing (or if he, ironically, negatively stereotyped Western scholarship), he exposed the prejudicial and monolithic thinking of some Western scholars in their descriptions of the “Orient” during the colonial period. We cannot provide a full summary of his arguments here, but would highlight how persuasive he is in framing the way

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*Warrick Farah (DMiss) is a missiologist serving with One Collective (<https://onecollective.org>) in the Middle East, where he coaches team leaders working in community transformation and discipleship. He also serves as Assistant Professor of Missiology at an evangelical seminary that trains Arab world leaders for ministry in the region. Focusing on MBBs, Warrick’s research on conversion, theological paradigms of witness, and insidership has been published in journals such as EMQ, IJFM, and Global Missiology. You can follow him on his blog at [muslimministry.blogspot.com](http://muslimministry.blogspot.com).*

some European and American scholars describe Arabs, and especially Muslims, in a generally pejorative construct. The Orientalist narrative created a discourse in the West of a *civilized Western “us”* versus an *uncivilized Eastern “them,”* which was subsequently used to reinforce Western colonialism and imperialism over parts of Africa and Asia.

This is relevant to us in mission studies because some traditional missionary discourse was a form of Orientalism (Swanson 2004, 108). Muslims were often described in a way that dichotomized the world into two antagonistic and incompatible realms—Christian and non-Christian.

Like Orientalism, missionary discourse traditionally has been aggressive, and derogatory in its treatment of Asians of other faiths, expressing attitudes that have frequently also included negative views of indigenous cultures. (ibid., 109)

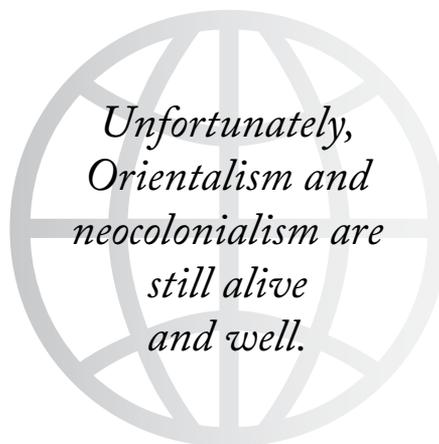
Said’s insights offer critical reflection upon our approaches to understanding Muslims, leading us to ask if we describe Islam in overly negative ways, failing to also see the problems in our own cultures as well (Matt. 7:5). When seeking to describe unknown and seemingly threatening contexts, do we resort to a simplistic “textual attitude” (ibid., 110) by cherry-picking our descriptions of Muslims from the worst texts found in the Qur’an and Hadith? Do we feel superior to Muslims? Or do we approach them with humility and with the attitude of a learner? This kind of missiological reflection is an important antidote for biased and injurious theologies of mission.

Another common assumption challenged by postcolonial studies is the very idea of a unified geopolitical entity called “the Muslim world.” This idea does not come from the Islamic teaching of *ummah*, but instead emerged in the nineteenth century.

Mistaken is the belief that Muslims were united until nationalist ideology and European colonialism tore them

apart. This is precisely backward; in fact, Muslims did not imagine belonging to a global political unity *until* the peak of European hegemony in the late nineteenth century, when poor colonial conditions, European discourses of Muslim racial inferiority, and Muslims’ theories of their own apparent decline nurtured the first arguments for pan-Islamic solidarity. (Aydin 2017, 3)

The “Muslim world” construct is a racial (racist?) product of the colonialist narrative and has been embraced by both Muslims and Westerners to homogenize “Muslims” and the “West” in (often antagonistic) political discourse. In mission, we can learn to recognize the phenomenon without being biased by this worldly understanding of Muslims.



Unfortunately, Orientalism and neocolonialism are still alive and well in some streams of missiology. Two recent articles published in the journal *Global Missiology* highlight this fact. For example, one author displays the objectivist, “textual attitude” to Muslims when he claims,

The one who rationalizes away jihad and other illiberal ideas from the Qur’an is also likely to rationalize away the virgin birth, the resurrection, and other key doctrines of Christianity. (Anonymous-Three 2017, 7)

He further states that only very liberal Muslims infected with Western rationalism will reject the true, violent nature of Islam, thus enforcing the

stereotype that faithful Muslims are incapable of successfully integrating into democratic societies. Placing himself in the seat of Islamic authority, he laments, “Who is going to tell our political leaders, as well as the general public, the true, classical nature of Islam?” (ibid., 9).

Another author advances this same totalizing rhetoric, saying,

Evangelical Christians must understand Islam “as it is,” not as they imagine it to be . . . a medieval and un-reformable totalitarian religio-political system that masquerades as a religion. (Anonymous-Two 2017, 7–8)<sup>2</sup>

Michael Rynkiewich notes the tragedy of when this kind of thinking creeps into the mission world:

Unlike anthropologists, missionaries and mission scholars have been slow to be self-reflective and to rethink what missionaries are doing. Both anthropologists and missionaries have been entangled in colonialism, but missionaries have resisted admitting the entanglement, and slower to do something about it. (2011, 172)

While most current scholarship on Muslims and Islam have been able to move on from this simplistic and prejudicial thinking toward Muslims, some Christians, unfortunately, have not. If we cannot recognize this in our missiology, “We end up being ethnocentric and colonial in ways that we are often unaware” (Greer 2017, 93).

### Cultural Anthropology: Modern Essentialism and Postmodern Relativism

The influences of neocolonialism also call us to reflect critically on our models of anthropology in understanding Muslim contexts. The Bible teaches certain things about humankind and how we relate to God; in systematic theology, this is called anthropology (the study of humanity). Just as everyone has a framework for understanding theological anthropology, everyone also assumes a cultural anthropology—whether

consciously realized or not. One outdated understanding of mission (based on an outdated and inaccurate modernist cultural anthropology) assumed that the missiological task of communicating the gospel was a simple exercise like this: A messenger (evangelist) encodes a message (the gospel) to a receiver (an unbeliever), like sending a letter in an envelope. In this view, individuals within a culture are well integrated and nearly identical to other members of their culture. Thus, one simply interprets the gospel for the “others” in a static process.

This modernist model of anthropology taught that cultures were homogenous and that people in each culture were objectively understandable, basically spoke only one language, and were virtually unaffected by peoples around them. However, “Neither culture nor the missiological situation is like this anymore, and it seems questionable that it ever was” (Rynkiewich 2008, 33). Unfortunately, many missionaries are still attached to this outdated anthropology, and their missiology remains stuck in the 1960s (*ibid.*). Today we should realize that people in their contexts are much more complex and quite different from the simplistic way modernist anthropology often described them.

Postmodern anthropology developed precisely to correct the errors of modern anthropology, but it was an exercise in pendulum swinging and made many mistakes of its own. The objectivity and certainty of modernity was replaced by subjectivity and skepticism in postmodernity. If modernity is characterized by essentialism, then postmodernity is marked by relativism. Unfortunately, both modernity and postmodernity are insufficient for framing our understanding of mission. One way forward is “a post-postmodern missiology” (Yip 2014) that tries to handle the complexity of understanding contexts while rejecting the pluralist theology of religions. George Yip’s proposal for a

*People in their contexts are more complex and quite different from the simplistic way modernist anthropology often described them.*

polythetic and progressive contextualization<sup>3</sup> helps us deal with the variations and cultural exceptions that exist within religious settings, and especially the diverse manifestations of Islam, even within the same context.

### Religious Studies and the Fog of “Religions”

Related to this postcolonial reframing of how we understand the “other” and the challenges of our assumed model of cultural anthropology is the shift found in religious studies. The current consensus in the field is that there is no timeless, transcultural definition of “religion” that is not also a function of political power (Cavanaugh 2009), and that the ability to frame a distinct category in society as “religion” has more to do with the Enlightenment and Protestant Reformation than with how people understand themselves (Nongbri 2013). The “religious” category also fails to adequately tie together dissimilar ritualistic practices in different faith traditions.<sup>4</sup>

However, this critique of the concept of religion does not mean that religion is not real, only that religion itself is socially constructed—it would not exist if there were no people (Schilbrack 2010). Islam, as it is lived and practiced, repeatedly transforms to match the realities of different contexts. Classifying all Muslims (or Hindus, Christians, etc.) into a single category in the “world religions” paradigm obscures many of the most crucial defining characteristics specific to their respective contexts. Martin Accad proposes a way beyond this limitation:

The “world religions” approach has a tendency to view people of faith as prisoners of theological systems, whose every move can be predicted by their communities’ sacred scriptures. Whereas the “sociology of religions” approach offers a dynamic

vision of mutually-influential forces between theology and the practice of religion. I would argue that the latter vision offers us a far richer field of inquiry, engagement, and action than the former. From a missional perspective, therefore, it is far more useful, far more empowering and energizing; it invites us to new possibilities in terms of creative and constructive action required for the mission of God. (2016)

Therefore, as Christians who long for Jesus to be embraced as Lord and Savior in Muslim contexts, we desperately need to be alert to how we use the category “religion” in mission, because “missiology as a discipline has not yet adequately engaged discussions and controversies in the field of religious studies” (Richard 2014, 214).

These monumental changes in postcolonial theory, anthropology, religious studies, and especially with Muslims themselves in our globalizing world demand that today’s cross-cultural worker reject one-size-fits-all strategies for working with Muslims and become able to adapt with the context. But how?

### *A Call for Adaptive Missiology*

The introductory chapters in this volume provide theoretical foundations to explain the diversity of Islam as it is found in various settings around the world, which is further exemplified through the case studies in this book. At this point, it is perfectly natural for us to disagree over the supposed “true nature” of Islam, both historically and ideologically. I do not pretend that we can adequately address that issue in a volume like this. Instead, the topic at hand is specifically about our *missiology of Islam*. That is, how should the church attempt to understand what Muslims in their context believe, love, and do? And how should that contextual understanding inform our

missional impulse, in light of God's mission in Christ to redeem all nations back to himself?

### Toward a Missiology of Islam(s)

Considering all that we have learned about "Islam," this book demonstrates that mission must deal with the plurality of Islams and the diversity of Muslims around the world. In the personal-missional encounter, Islam, simply put, *should be whatever our Muslim friend says it is*. This is not to deny that our friends could be further or nearer to what certain "mainstream" Muslims throughout history have decreed as authentic Islam. This is also not to deny that something called Islam exists, and that our friends could be somewhere on the margins of Islam. Instead, what this means is that we must primarily deal with how Muslims shape and use Islam in their context. This approach moves us closer to an appropriate missiology of Islam. If we don't begin with the local expressions of Islam,<sup>5</sup> we end up assuming something other than what our friends hold to be true, and therefore miss the vital and necessary connection for the power of the gospel to do its transformational work specifically in that context.

Furthermore, in mission through mass media or writing, it is important to be informed through cultural anthropology that there are great variations among individuals in cultures. Even when looking for the broad-based values in a people group, it is still doubtful that one could determine an approach that is properly contextualized for the "Egyptian culture," for example. Any approach focusing on a large grouping of people will have to acknowledge such inherent limitations. This is especially important at a time when the understanding of ethnicity is evolving and peoples are losing the sense of "groupness" in ethnic identity, which questions the very idea of "people groups" common in evangelical missiology (Gill 2014, 90). This further illustrates the need for adaptation.

Consider the biblical support for adaptation according to context. One important observation is that we have no records of Jesus nor his apostles defining and dealing with paganism or Judaism (which were both diverse in the first century), and we have no record of a biblical call to overthrow the Roman cult. Instead, Jesus engaged *people* in their situations. Moreover, concerning debating the true nature of Islam (or any other religious system) and quarrelling over whose understanding is the most accurate, mission historian Andrew Walls makes an important point:

Argument about which is correct, or the more correct, picture of "Hinduism" is beside the point in the light of Romans 1:18ff., for Paul's concern



here is not with systems at all, but with men. It is *people* who hold down the truth of unrighteousness, who do not honor God, who are given up to dishonorable passions. It is upon men, who commit ungodly and wicked deeds, that the wrath of God is revealed. (Walls 1996, 66)

Biblically-based ministry in the Islamic world is not about engaging Islam per se, but rather about engaging Muslims.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Walls continues that our message must not be a religious system in return, for it is "not Christianity that saves, but Christ" (ibid.). If it is best to view "Islam" as simply being what people who profess it actually believe and do (Bates and Rassam 2001, 89), then we begin our

missiological engagement by understanding their worldview in the light of Romans 1:18ff., not some supposed orthodox Islam. We should indeed be good students of Islam, but we should be even better students of Muslims.

To deal with the elastic concepts of religion previously discussed, one possible proposal is to be "supra-religious" in our missiological engagement (e.g., Accad 2012) and attempt to rise above the fray of worldly religiosity. This is not to say that religion is unimportant, but to ensure that we are gospel-centered in our approach instead of clouding mission with flexible concepts like religion. However, instead of bypassing religion in our missiological approaches, I propose that a more fruitful way of engaging Muslims is to deal with idolatry, which, depending on the context, may be a much more specific topic than Islam.

### Idolatry and Mission

Any discussion of idolatry necessarily begins with the theology of God and worship:

As God eternally outpours within his triune self, and as we are created in his image, it follows that we too are continuous outpourers, incurably so. The trouble with our outpouring is that it is fallen. It needs redeeming, else we spend our outpouring on false gods appearing to us in any number of guises. Salvation is the only way our continuous outpouring—our continuous worship—is set aright and urged into the fullness of Christ. (Best 2003, 10)

In this concept of idolatry, as continuous and habitual worshipers in need of redemption, we find a missional hermeneutic that leads toward an adaptive approach to Muslims. In this sense, religion is of no redemptive benefit. No matter what religious identity people claim—Christian, Muslim, pagan, atheist, etc.—they are all lost apart from the gospel (Rom. 3:22–23), and are left clinging to various types of idols instead of Christ alone.

The central theological theme in the Bible is the refutation of idolatry (Rosner 1999, 21), yet expressions of it are quite diverse. In his seminal book *The Mission of God* (2006), Christopher Wright teaches that biblical monotheism is necessarily missional and biblical mission is necessarily monotheistic. The biblical concept that keeps people from honoring God as God<sup>7</sup> is not the wrong religion, but idolatry. Wright describes the motivations behind our idolatrous worship:

Having alienated ourselves from the living God our Creator, we have a tendency to worship whatever makes us tremble with awe as we feel our tiny insignificance in comparison with the great magnitudes that surround us. We seek to placate and ward off whatever makes us vulnerable and afraid. We then counter our fears by investing inordinate and idolatrous trust in whatever we think will give us the ultimate security we crave. And we struggle to manipulate and persuade whatever we believe will provide all our basic needs and enable us to prosper on the planet. (2006, Kindle 2216–19)

Biblically speaking, idolatry is a broad concept that plays a large role in our engagement with lost people. Unfortunately, this concept is often neglected in missiology. But this begs the question—What is the relationship between religion and idolatry?

The idea that religion can be separated from culture or simply reduced to a theological system is an assumption heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, not by biblical theology. Therefore, it is a mistake to assume that the totality of one's so-called "religious heritage" is something that must be "renounced" in all cases and times and contexts as disciples are made. This is akin to equating the ambivalent, modern concept of religion with the biblical category of idolatry. It also ignores some of the positive virtues that religion provides in structuring societies (Netland 2001, 329). It

**W**e can't assume that the totality of one's so-called "religious heritage" is something that must be "renounced" in all cases.

is critical to bear in mind that there are various dimensions to religious contexts, and religion is not monolithic (Farah 2015a; Smart 1996). So instead of "Islam," what should be abandoned, biblically speaking, are idols. Additionally, there are times when people need deliverance from demonic influences—this is true in every context (but too far afield from the topic at hand for us to explore further).

I am not defending Islam nor being naïve to the powerful influence of Islamic ideologies. There are indeed times and contexts in which Muslims who turn to Christ will need to reject the majority of their religious heritage. In that case, the supra-religious approach may be inappropriate and religious change may be a clear way to deal with idolatry. An example of this is that salvation for many Muslims is a "prophetological concept," meaning "the logic of salvation has everything to do with one's relation to the Prophet Muhammad" (Pennington 2014, 198). In this case, Muslims will indeed need to turn from Muhammad as an idol (as previously defined).

However, not all Muslim-background believers (MBBs) feel that they must categorically reject Muhammad, or that they must view him as some sort of antichrist.<sup>8</sup> MBBs who have come to faith have widely diverse opinions about Muhammad, just as they have different experiences of their religion. Some MBBs view Islam as a form of spiritual bondage, some as a culture or set of politics, with many others somewhere between these two poles (Farah 2015b, 73–77). Missiologist L. D. Waterman also testifies to the diverse spiritual experiences that Muslims have of Islam:

In the Bridging the Divide network,<sup>9</sup> through numerous case studies from scholar-practitioners with a wide

range of perspectives and experiences, we have learned of the incredible diversity of contexts within "the Muslim world." We have noted not only differences of social and political contexts, but also of diverse spiritual alignments and experiences among Muslims. Within these very different contexts, God is working in a variety of creative ways to shine the light of the gospel. (2017)

If we come to accept the varieties of the MBB experience with Islam, we can see that there are many diverse journeys on the one way to God, through Christ alone (Greenlee 2007). This strongly suggests that we do well not to assume that all Muslims must reject their "religion"—whatever that means to them. This is too vague to be meaningful, in many cases, and can also erroneously lead some MBBs to abandon their cultures and social networks.<sup>10</sup> Instead, we learn to exegete the context and be adaptive in our approach.

Idolatry can take many forms. As we have seen through the chapters in this volume, potential idols in Muslim contexts (other than those discussed above) can include merit-seeking through good works to appease God, nationalism,<sup>11</sup> pride, intercession of saints, materialism, "prophetolatry," personal reputation, folk religious practices, strict adherence to ritual, or any combination of the above. (Christians are equally prey to such idols.) In the midst of the context-specific encounter with Muslims, adaptive missiology requires Christian workers to discern the form of idolatry in which they are entangled and then offer the appropriate gospel-centered response. Yet this is a dynamic process; we will frequently cycle between our response, the Bible, and the context.

Combating idolatry can take many forms. The Bible itself prepares us to

recognize that different approaches may be relevant in different contexts. Wisdom in mission calls us to be discerning and to recognize that what may be appropriate in one situation may not be so helpful in another. (Wright 2006, Kindle 2337–39)

Taking our cues from the previous discussion on postcolonialism and anthropology, and realizing there is more than one way to deal with idolatry, we recognize how unwise it would be to respond apart from relationships with those who know their own contexts far better than we do.

### Transforming Relationships

Adaptive missiology recognizes that all people everywhere who embrace the gospel experience both a continuity and a discontinuity with their past (Netland 2001, 327). Earlier approaches to contextualization taught that previous practices and beliefs can be either retained, rejected, or repurposed (Hiebert 1986, 188). This reflects how Paul saw his ministry of becoming all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:19ff.), while avoiding harmful syncretism (2 Cor. 6:14ff.). Yet there are clearly limits to the usefulness of contextualization when it is a one-sided exercise, done by the worker for the local community. In such cases, the valuable ways in which indigenous people contribute to the process and the ways in which God is already at work may be overlooked, even before the unique and sufficient message of the cross of Christ is proclaimed (1 Cor. 2:2).

Our focus should not be on envisioning what the church looks like in a context as an end result, and then prescribing a static mission praxis from that assumption. Instead, we need continual missiological inquiry into the nature of the dynamic relationship between ourselves, Muslims, and God revealed in Christ (cf. Shaw 2010, 209). Transforming relationships are key in this process, and will require us to be vulnerable in a postcolonial spirit while walking in humble confidence in the

authority of Jesus. It is, after all, God's mission, and we often get in the way.

The Bible shows that God's greatest problem is not just with the nations of the world, but with the people he has created and called to be the means of blessing the nations. And the biggest obstacle to fulfilling that mission is idolatry among God's people. (Lausanne Movement 2011, 145)

Adaptive missiology aims to get at the heart of how Jesus and the apostles approached "the other" in the New Testament. No single evangelistic address was identical, and they always took the context into account in their witness (Flemming 2005). By understanding the New Testament itself as a missiological document (Wright



2011), we can see Jesus and the apostles taking time to humbly reflect and give an appropriate consideration to their audience; they were continually adapting to the challenge of seeing lives and communities transformed by the power of God.

### Conclusion: An Apostolic Challenge for Our Day

The world adds another thirty-two million Muslims each year, mainly through high birthrates, but some by conversion. The numbers of Muslims coming to Christ in our time are indeed unprecedented, but we are only talking about *thousands* of new believers each year, while *millions* more

are born as Muslims. With all the great things happening in mission to Muslims today, the world is actually getting more and more unreached (Parks 2017). So not only do we need to do more, we also need to do better; and this requires fresh reflection on our missiology.

Yet, in this vein we also need to recover the apostolic spirit of Jesus and the apostles if we want to see our Lord receive the worship he alone deserves among Muslims. One way is to call the church to a renewed *apostolic imagination*. I use "apostolic" in two senses: 1) *extending* the kingdom, and 2) *innovating* in mission praxis.<sup>12</sup> The spirit of adaptive missiology is to take up residence among unreached Muslims in humble relationship and seek to discern how they use Islam, what their idols are, and what a pioneering Christ-centered engagement requires.

Adaptive missiology, like this book, is a conversation and a communal exercise. We need each other. And new contexts need innovative approaches, not quick fixes. As ministers of the gospel, we must adapt to people in the complexity of their contexts. Our job is not to define Islam, but to make disciples. Though decontextualized approaches to Muslim ministry are commonplace, engaging people *as they are* requires embracing their complexity and the complexity of their contexts.

Although great things are happening in mission to Muslims these days, we still have not learned how to reach most Muslims with the love of Christ. Islam is perhaps the greatest challenge the church has ever faced. Yet it is not simply that we do not know the answers; we are also unsure of the nature of the problem. Through seeking to extend and innovate, adaptive missiology stirs up the church, in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, to help Muslim communities discover God in Christ and to see him glorified, even "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). **IJFM**

## Reflection Questions

1. Describe adaptive missiology in your own words. In your view, what are some of the possibilities and limitations of this approach?
2. Integrating insights learned from this book, write out some practical and specific steps you could take to develop an approach to Muslim ministry in your Islamic context.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, “The ‘W’ Spectrum: ‘Worker’ Paradigms in Muslim Contexts” (Farah and Meeker 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Both authors are also unaware of the nuanced role religion plays sociologically in communities and could benefit from the “bottom-up” approach to understanding Islam discussed in chapter 2 in this volume, “How Muslims Shape and Use Islam: Towards a Missiological Understanding.”

<sup>3</sup> For more on polythetic and progressive contextualization, see <http://muslimministry.blogspot.com/2017/06/polythetic-and-progressive.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Evangelicals often reduce religion to a system of beliefs (e.g., Keller 2008, 15), yet one of the major problems in this approach is that “social and psychological research shows that people tend to hold a collection of contradictory beliefs that cannot be put together into a coherent system. In addition, research shows that people’s behavior is often based on something other than their beliefs” (Martin 2014, 7). Additionally, in Muslim contexts beliefs often take a back seat to practices: “For Islam, orthopraxy is more important than orthodoxy” (Ess 2006, 16).

<sup>5</sup> Studying the Qur’an and the history of Islam is also vital for missiology; beginning with our friends’ understanding will only enrich our understanding of the interpretations of the Qur’an and the diversity of Islam throughout history.

<sup>6</sup> I do not intend to imply that the scope of the gospel is merely individualistic, but that it is deeply personal in nature. Indeed, “The goal of God’s rescue operation, the main aim of Jesus coming and dying in the first place, is *the restoration and transformation of all creation*” (Wright 2015, 72).

<sup>7</sup> The related issue, “Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?” is a fallacious and unanswerable question that creates many pseudo arguments in missiology. Instead, I argue that the “only way to know God is through Jesus. A genuine personal

relationship with God can only be Christological and Trinitarian. All other worship of God outside of Christ is ‘in vain’ (Mark 7:7). So, whether or not Muslims believe in a different God is somewhat of an irrelevant issue, because in fact no one knows God apart from Jesus. All conceptions of God, whether they are American, Muslim, Asian, Agnostic, Pagan, Mormon, or even ‘Christian,’ all of them are incomplete and inaccurate without the gospel revelation of the Son (Heb. 1:2)” (Farah 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Space prohibits more discussion on the understanding of Muhammad. But to share one approach, John Azumah tends not to characterize Muhammad as a “false prophet,” but more like a “fallen prophet.” He also demonstrates how various Protestant missionary attitudes in recent decades have “moved away from calling Muhammad an impostor or the anti-Christ to appreciating his positive and admirable qualities and sincerity as a religious figure” without also ascribing to Muhammad a positive “prophetic” role (2016, 211).

<sup>9</sup> <http://btdnetwork.org>.

<sup>10</sup> Space prohibits from going further, but I have previously argued that there are various dimensions to religious contexts, which different MBBs relate to differently (Farah 2015a).

<sup>11</sup> Olivier Roy argues that nationalism is a greater motivating force than Islamism in places like Iran and in groups like Hamas (2003).

<sup>12</sup> I intentionally mirror these two themes with Walter Brueggemann’s concept of biblical “prophetic imagination,” which involves both criticizing and energizing (2001).

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Clarifying the Frontiers

# Beyond Groupism: Refining Our Analysis of Ethnicity and Groups

by Brad Gill

A blunt tool can be frustrating. It can't be used where a task demands precision. And in the complex world of frontier missions, we feel the need for precision tools when we engage unreached people groups (UPG). I was reminded of this when Peter Lee and James Park published their critique of the "unreached peoples concept" in the recent issue of *Missiology*.<sup>1</sup> They claim the UPG concept is seriously flawed and has no place in the tool kit of mission workers today.

Their article reminded me of my first years in the mountains of North Africa, where we lived among a Berber population. French ethnologists had done their research alongside a French colonial government that had tried—and failed—to "divide and conquer" Arab and Berber peoples. Yes, millions of transhumant Berber nomads could still be found across those mountains. Still, in some regions where Berbers were assimilating into the national civic culture, to speak of ethnic Berber identity and tribal affinities almost seemed archaic. In other regions of North Africa, people were holding fiercely to their Berber language and identity, even asserting political autonomy. Berberness was a reality, but the sense of groupness varied greatly according to the context.

Recently, a quick conversation with Lee transported me to that early crucible of trying to figure out the ethnic realities of this particular Berber region. I felt the insufficiency of the UPG concept. That peasant society demanded better social analysis. Paul Hiebert, a mentor, had directed me to the work of Mary Douglas, who had helped him in his own study of worldview and urban anthropology. It was her use of group as a variable in social analysis that offered new insight about the dynamics of my local context.<sup>2</sup> It also helped that my region had been the research haven of prominent anthropologists like Gellner and Geertz.<sup>3</sup> I used their work to sift and sort out how a Berber people might perceive its ethnic identity. I came to understand early on that group boundaries are variable, not a given. "People group," the idea of an ethnic group with a sense of solid social bondedness, was actually more elastic across the Berber world. Ethnicity was real, potentially powerful. That reality simply wasn't locally reinforced in the same way everywhere.

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*Brad Gill is Senior Editor of the International Journal of Frontier Missiology. After assisting in the founding years of the U. S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, now Frontier Ventures, he served in North Africa for 13 years. He is currently President of the International Society for Frontier Missiology.*

It was the anthropologist Lawrence Rosen who identified the social processes of negotiation that were warping ethnic realities in my mountain setting. In his study of Sefrou, Morocco, he was able to push past preconceived notions:

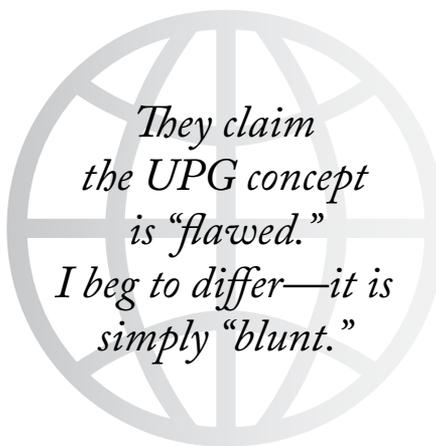
I looked for the social groups to which people belonged, and the categories and principles by which these families, tribes, quarters, and brotherhoods were ordered. In a very short time, however, it became apparent that the presumed subjects of my study, social groups, were far less corporeal and durable than current ethnography and theory had suggested.... It was not that people failed to acknowledge perduring ties with one another, but that their actions could not be contained by a set of limitations associated with familial and tribal affiliation.<sup>4</sup>

His methodology, analysis, and social theory, although specific to a Moroccan context, helped me venture towards a better grasp of the actual barriers to the gospel.

Lee and Park's article is a call for this kind of analysis of mission contexts, for more precise tools that go *beyond* people group thinking. Their concern is that we have too simplistic a notion of culture and society if we hold to the essentialism of "people group." I applaud their concern. There certainly can be a naïve but very popular "folk anthropology" that circulates across the global mission sending base. As they point out, these ideas rest on an exegetical understanding of the biblical terminology of *panta ta ethne* (all peoples). My study here will skirt this very important biblical argument. I wish to point out that our promotion and training can get a bit lazy and accepting of popular terms like "people group" and their commonsense meanings. McGavran used to say, "Promote all you can; just don't inhale." He would certainly understand the spirit in which Lee and Park have written. There must always be a place for a solid critique of the unexamined assumptions that support our mission enterprise.

However, when Lee and Park claim the UPG concept is "flawed," I beg to differ—it is simply "blunt." As their short article makes clear, the concept of "people group" or "ethnic group" gained prominence with Donald McGavran's "homogenous unit principle." This concept synthesized McGavran's observations from India and the "bridges of God" that allowed the gospel to be received by whole peoples in a short period of time. He used that "ethnic group lens" to discover new principles of growth in church movements through history and across the world.

McGavran then wielded these insights like a hammer on an individualistic American evangelical mind. We must recall that in the 1950s and 1960s there



was an emphasis on evangelizing *individuals* all across the world, whether through mass events or one-on-one. This unexamined social assumption had leavened American churches and, by extension, their mission agencies. Their orientation towards *individual* conversion meant they could not easily accept the way God was apparently working in group conversions. McGavran's almost singular focus on groups has drawn strong critique in recent years, especially its implication for racially charged socie-ties. While I appreciate much in the evaluations offered, especially from mission anthropology, I would simply point out the evangelical resistance to cultural groups and the movement of the gospel. McGavran

was a controversial spokesman who would pound away at this granite-like resistance. His instrument was blunt, but we can't deny what it accomplished. The evangelical imagination gradually yielded to a new meta-narrative, one that included how God moves among whole people groups.

McGavran had much to do with this shift. A new cadre of mission anthropologists would emerge to reinforce this focus on groups, cultures, and group decisions. True, a more sensitive or more progressive mission anthropologist today might consider McGavran's usage of the "people group" concept as "crude" anthropology.<sup>5</sup> But let us not forget the context: American evangelicalism carried an ethnocentric individualism until McGavran grafted the realities of "group" into our consciousness.

This shift in American missiology explains the genesis and continuing promotion of what are popularly referred to as the unreached people *groups* of the world. Ralph Winter used the term "people groups" as a residual, but explicit, corrective to the strong individualistic propensity in our mission sending base. The simpler terminology of "peoples" was not sufficient. Those of us in Western societies would continue to see the world as simply populations or aggregates of individuals. As a result, we would continue to ignore the cultural commonalities and connectedness that can determine the flow of the gospel.

There is much to respond to in any re-examination of the UPG movement. I would like to focus on "group" as problematic. I have been cited as one who appreciates the forces of globalization and their impact on people groups across the world. I may have given the impression that people groups are disappearing; in fact, I was actually calling for a more comprehensive understanding of what is happening to the "groupness" of peoples across the world.

### *Ethnicity without Groups*

I offer here the voice of another anthropologist, Rogers Brubaker (I have

previously cited his work in my attempt to understand the anthropology of ethnic diaspora<sup>6</sup>). Brubaker needs to be included in this conversation on the viability of UPGs. A cognitive anthropologist, Brubaker studies the interface of cognition and ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> How does this relate to our discussion? In his discipline he has taken the analytical step of separating the reality of ethnicity and group. He insists that group is a *variable*, not a *given*. This variability is what originally attracted me to Douglas's work—that the boundedness of group ebbed and flowed across a broad ethnic terrain. Brubaker recognizes that the concept of group has remained curiously under-scrutinized in recent years:

“Group” functions as a seemingly unproblematic, taken-for-granted concept, apparently in no need of particular scrutiny or explication. As a result, we tend to take for granted not only the concept of “group,” but of “groups”—the putative things-in-the-world to which the term refers.

Brubaker introduces the concept of “ethnicity without groups.” A rather startling concept. I'd like to isolate two aspects of this anthropology that might refine our understanding and use of “people groups.”

### Groupism

First, Brubaker labels the ubiquitous tendency to mistakenly assume that ethnicity represents an actual group entity. He calls this inclination *groupism*, a very commonsense way of reifying people groups, making them active entities.<sup>8</sup> He describes groupism as “the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life,” and “to treat ethnic groups as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed.”<sup>9</sup> Ethnic groupness is simply assumed, goes unexamined and becomes a kind of folk anthropology.

By exposing groupism, however, Brubaker is not saying that ethnicity is not real. He neither disputes its reality nor minimizes its power. Rather, he probes groupism as a way to rethink ethnicity, to construe it in a different way.<sup>10</sup> A cognitive anthropology

**B**rubaker recognizes that the concept of “group” has remained curiously under-scrutinized in recent years—it is a taken-for-granted concept . . .

that understands “ethnicity as cognition” appreciates ethnicity as a perspective *on* the world, not as an entity *in* the world.

The UPG movement would benefit from Brubaker's assessment, which would force us to address more accurately any deficiencies in our assumptions about ethnic groupness. We certainly want to prevent notions of a popular groupism from oversimplifying our missiological analysis of ethnicity. This is one legitimate concern of Lee and Park regarding UPG thinking. Unfortunately, their critique of the anthropology behind UPG understanding diminishes the value a cognitive anthropologist like Brubaker bestows on ethnicity. They would certainly agree with his definition of groupism and the way a UPG movement may use ethnic groups as “fundamental units of social analysis.”<sup>11</sup> They simply conclude that UPG thinking is flawed, irrelevant and should be eliminated. Yet, it is Brubaker's analytical separation of ethnicity and groupness that allows him to maintain the value of ethnicity, even ethnic groups, as a legitimate path of analysis: “The concept of ethnic group may be a blunt instrument, but it's good enough as a first approximation.”<sup>12</sup>

### Cognitive Processes

Secondly, when a cognitive anthropologist studies ethnicity, an important perspective emerges. That's because his focus is not just on individual cognition, but on how certain cultural representations are diffused across social and relational worlds. He has analytically isolated groupism as a mental process, a way of thinking that “essentializes” ethnic groups, treating them as actual entities in the world. It's a shared way of seeing the world, of “naturalizing” ethnicity as a given. Yes, we can recognize it in any popular UPG thinking that treats ethnic categorizes as though they have a primordial existence.<sup>13</sup>

But a keen anthropologist like Brubaker also recognizes the tenacious hold of groupism in our world. Among participants of other cultures exists the “often observed tendency to naturalize ethnicity.” Analysts of ethnicity aren't the only ones who essentialize people groups. Indeed, this tendency appears to be a commonsense way of understanding others. An anthropology that respects the cognitive side of ethnicity will note

a deep-seated cognitive disposition to perceive human beings as members of “natural kinds” with inherited and immutable “essences.”<sup>14</sup>

This commonsense logic assigns ethnic categories to others; “ethnicizes” others, and creates a kind of “folk sociology.”<sup>15</sup> While Brubaker warns the cultural analyst of the dysfunction of groupism, he cannot dismiss it. It is too enmeshed in the cognitive realities of ethnicity. He thus strikes a balance, maintaining ethnicity as a real and necessary focus in understanding humanity.

He puts the brakes on a more progressive “anthropology of globalization” that emphasizes the melting down of cultural categories. A kind of cosmopolitan idealism emerges today which only sees the flows of global change and ignores this human tendency to assign ethnicity to others. Further, any post-modern ethical sensibility of unity and equality is sure to demand a melting down of all such ethnic boundaries. Brubaker's cognitive approach to ethnicity sounds a lot like what most of us would call *worldview*. He is more tuned to the mental processes at work. Ethnicity is a way of perceiving, interpreting, and representing our social world. Ethnicities are not entities *in* the world (groupism), but perspectives on the world.

These include ethnicized ways of seeing (and ignoring), of construing (and misconstruing), of inferring (and misinferring), of remembering (and forgetting).

They include ethnically oriented frames, schemas, and narratives, and the situational cues—not least those provided by the media—that activate them. They include systems of classification, categorization, and identification, formal and informal. And they include the tacit, taken-for-granted background knowledge, embodied in persons and embedded in institutionalized routines and practices, through which people recognize and experience objects, places, persons, actions, or situations as ethnically meaningful.<sup>16</sup>

That appears to be a classic understanding of a cultural way of thinking. It suggests once again that ethnic groups may be a good place to begin any social analysis. But his focus is not just on a static ethnic worldview. Brubaker runs the gamut between *essentialist* and *constructivist* approaches to ethnic groups by focusing on the mental processes which accompany “group-making”—the cognitive “grouping” processes of classifying, categorizing, and identifying self and others.<sup>17</sup> A shared ethnic vision and division of the social world may exist, but it is dynamic, variable, and in flux. And just how those grouping processes actually add up socially needs to be discovered if we are to have any clear understanding of barriers to the gospel.

### *Anticipating Barriers of Understanding and Acceptance*

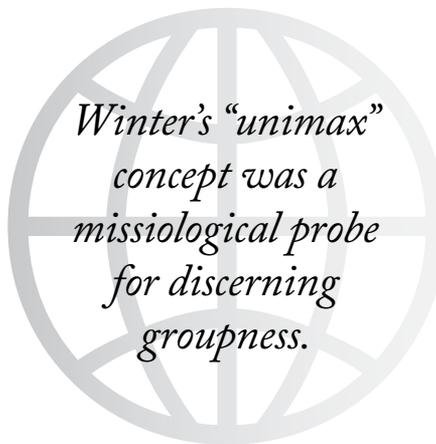
As the UPG movement was beginning to take hold of the evangelical consciousness in the 1980s, Ralph Winter (along with other mission leaders) issued the definitions we now use for understanding people groups:

A people group is a significantly large group of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combinations of these.<sup>18</sup>

Winter himself came from a more functionalist approach to anthropology.<sup>19</sup> Yet, he quickly recognized that a UPG definition of people groups as bounded ethnolinguistic units had to be nuanced

to account for other sociological, economic, and political realities. He had worked in the rural highlands of Guatemala. In this Mayan peasant/tribal world, ethnolinguistic boundaries (thirty-seven mutually unintelligible languages) represented real barriers to the flow of the gospel. But even there, ethnicities were stretching and fracturing with modern realities. He recognized the necessary inductive process of discovering the dynamic groupness of any large bloc of people. Most importantly, he believed this sensitivity, this open exploration, would help us recognize the potential barriers to the gospel.

You would think that this definition would satisfy those critical of the UPG movement; that a groupness that



respected religious, economic, and residential factors would be sufficient. But the more popularly understood concept of UPGs may still promote a groupism that naturalizes ethnicity the same way everywhere—and that is certainly not acceptable. Missiologists will always press for more precision tools for purposes of evangelization—and that’s as it should be. It is interesting that in 1982, Winter quickly amended this standard people group definition by asserting a “unimax” principle (for discerning a “unimax people”).<sup>20</sup> He seemed dissatisfied with anything that represented groups as static. He seemed suspicious of an analytical groupism that would essentialize groups religiously, politically, economically, or according to any other

commonality. In the unimax principle, he was trying to represent the dynamism of groupness that lay hidden among our large categories of unreached peoples.

A unimax people is the maximum-sized group sufficiently unified to be the target of a single people movement to Christ, where “unified” refers to the fact that there are no significant barriers of either understanding or acceptance to stop the spread of the gospel.<sup>21</sup>

Winter’s unimax concept was, we might say, a missiological probe for discerning groupness. For evangelization purposes, we should follow the diffusion of the gospel, study the group affinities, and identify barriers that cause a movement to stop. The principle assumes that ethnicity (ethnolinguistic identity) is a blunt instrument, but it is the best place to begin. As we follow the path of the gospel, as movements to Christ emerge, we will notice what facilitates or hinders the flow of the gospel. When movements stop, we will attempt to identify the barriers.

Winter’s unimax concept pushes us to discover barriers of understanding and acceptance. Can we anticipate those barriers? Should we only wait and see a movement to Christ stop and then identify the barriers? Or can we “specify how ‘groupness’ can ‘crystallize’ in some situations while remaining latent and merely potential in others?”<sup>22</sup>

The Berber world is an excellent case study of how a salient ethnic groupness can influence movements to Christ. More recently, where ethnicity had crystallized in a specific geographic and political setting, the largest movement to Christ since the early Christian centuries has occurred. The movement is diffused among tens of thousands across their homeland and into Europe. But in my former Berber region, ethnic identification is latent; the language is ebbing; the cell phone is lifting persons out of their traditional worlds. And yet a subtle “groupism” still maps out one’s social world, and could still determine one’s marriage partners. In such a place one finds it hard to imagine a virile “Berber” people movement of any sort.

I share Brubaker's conviction that cognitive perspectives can help us anticipate how groups may coalesce. We need to add his cognitive filters to Winter's mis-siological probe in the hope of greater intuition. Any astute mission worker is usually aware of the categories, the commonalities, the connectedness, and the identifications among the people to whom he ministers. Adding a cognitive anthropology, a focus on the social and mental processes that create and sustain the division of a social world, could help us anticipate how groupness might emerge either as a bridge or a barrier to the gospel. We would gain a better sense for what may hinder or facilitate movements to Christ. In a quick synthesis of some of Brubaker's material, we can distill some questions that might help indicate the prevalence of groupness.<sup>23</sup>

1. What appears to be the familiar cultural construct (social division) people use when they process a new issue, a new person, or a new event?
2. Do you notice if people accentuate, maybe exaggerate, their similarities with others of their in-group, or their differences with out-groups? Do they demonstrate an in-group bias?
3. Do you hear any stereotypes or categories proposed, propagated, imposed, or used?
4. What do you hear in their responses to government and its policies? Can they speak about this?
5. How does any crisis or event ratchet up the presence of groups? Is there evidence of organizations dedicated to certain group identities?
6. How do people frame conflict? Are there certain interpretive frames that are prominent, accessible, resonant, and widely understood?

These questions simply indicate a trajectory, a direction that may help us identify the latent groupness which exists among people among whom we live and minister. This inductive

## *Paul did not have the benefit of modern anthropology, but he had a sense for the group processes in his Roman world.*

process would press us beyond any shallow analytical groupism in the popularization of the UPG concept.

### *A Balanced Analysis: The Pauline Way*

In conclusion, this consideration of Brubaker's cognitive anthropology leads me to consider a rather risky biblical conjecture. I suspect that the Apostle Paul had an intuitive sense for what Brubaker is talking about. He did not have the benefit (nor the confusion) of modern anthropology, but he had a clear sense for the *group processes* at work in his Roman world.

Paul could boldly declare—as he considered an entire region that was yet to be entirely evangelized—“I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel” (Rom. 15:19). How could he assert this? For years he had ministered across that empire in synagogues and temples, in cities and hinterlands, and in households and palaces, and my hunch is that he could sense how ethnicity and context create both bridges and barriers to the gospel. Paul could respect how the ethnic realities of Jew, Greek, barbarian, and Scythian framed very real ethnolinguistic frontiers, but he also understood how more dynamic group processes might permit the gospel to move through both an urban and a rural landscape. I may be reading into Paul's sense of completion here in Romans 15, but he seems to balance hard ethnic realities with the fluid infrastructure and flows of a cosmopolitan society. He could not always assume clear ethnic boundaries; instead he often faced barriers of ethnic hostility. He couldn't fall for a superficial cosmopolitanism that minimized these barriers, he had to be alert to how the processes of assimilation were creating new avenues for the gospel. He was confident the gospel would continue to find natural bridges throughout the region. His

frontier task in that part of the Mediterranean basin had been completed and he was moving on.

There's a balance in Paul, and I see it in Brubaker as well. We face similar cosmopolitan conditions as Paul, and it requires a similar analytical dexterity. Any assessment of the UPG movement needs to find a balance. We can't succumb to ethnic groupism, nor can we adopt a sociological reductionism that only sees the global erosion of ethnicity. Ethnicity is real, sometimes salient, often latent, at times disappearing. But latent groups survive and can reconstruct in powerful ways.<sup>24</sup> It's a blunt tool, admittedly, and we require more precision tools in this modern era of globalization. But we could begin by examining ethnicity and then move beyond to look at the cognitive processes by which groups emerge, crystallize and create either bridges or barriers to the movement of the gospel. **IJFM**

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Lee and Park for pressing into this UPG issue once again. It is specifically their inclusion of newer anthropological perspectives that became the single focus of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas introduced this group/grid matrix in *Natural Symbols* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982). I am grateful to another mentor, Sherwood Lingenfelter, for helping me more appreciate and apply the variables of group to my North African context. See Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Their relevant works to our subject matter would be: Clifford Geertz, Hilda Geertz, and Lawrence Rosen, *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1979) and Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Priest gave an anthropological reflection on homogenous unit thinking

in Howell and Zehner's work, *Power and Identity*, eds. Brian M. Howell and Edwin Zehner (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library), 191. As he concludes, he uses the term "crude" for McGavran's anthropology, and I believe by that he means "basic," "un-refined," "rudimentary," and "outdated."

<sup>6</sup> For my editorial reflections on Brubaker's insight into diaspora phenomena, see [http://ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/30\\_3\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_30\\_3-EditorialReflections.pdf](http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/30_3_PDFs/IJFM_30_3-EditorialReflections.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Brubaker's study of groups also includes race and nationality, but I intend to apply it singularly to ethnicity here in this article.

<sup>8</sup> Brubaker calls this "entitivity."

<sup>9</sup> Brubaker, 64–65.

<sup>10</sup> Brubaker, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Brubaker, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Brubaker, 18.

<sup>13</sup> I have skirted the important anthropological debate between primordialism and instrumentalism. Dewi Hughes explains it succinctly: "The primordialists believe that ethnic identity is the essence of what human beings are. It is not something humans create; it is a given, the assumption on which they build their lives. The instrumentalists argue that ethnic identity is a human creation. It is something that societies construct in order to pursue political or economic ends." Hughes, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Brubaker, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Brubaker, 84.

<sup>16</sup> Brubaker, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Brubaker, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Winter and Koch, 536.

<sup>19</sup> Winter earned a PhD in Linguistic Anthropology at Cornell University.

<sup>20</sup> I'm thankful to Dave Datema for pointing this out. I refer you to his excellent article on the history of the unreached concept at [http://ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/33\\_2\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_33\\_2-Datema.pdf](http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/33_2_PDFs/IJFM_33_2-Datema.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Winter and Koch, 535ff.

<sup>22</sup> Brubaker, 18.

<sup>23</sup> These questions were synthesized from portions of chapters 1–3 in Brubaker 2004.

<sup>24</sup> For a more cognitive approach to how latent groups survive, see Mary Douglas's treatment of institutions in, *How Institutions Think*, 31–43.

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Clarifying the Frontiers

# Five Key Questions: What Hearers Always Want to Know as They Consider the Gospel

by T. Wayne Dye and Danielle Zachariah

**W**hen sharing the good news about Jesus, we often want to “get straight to the point.” Frequently, this can be ineffective since people have unarticulated questions and concerns that must be resolved before their hearts become open to hearing a new message. Although culturally relevant answers may vary, there are five key questions that are asked by individuals in every community: “How do I know what you say is true?”; “Why should I listen?”; “If I become a Christian, how will I live?”; “What is this message saying?”; and “What should I do to follow it?” Unless the first three questions are resolved to each individual’s satisfaction, the latter two questions won’t even be asked. It is only once these former questions have been adequately addressed that the individual will listen to the message of the truth of God.

Answers to the five questions do not have to come at the same time nor from the same person. In many cases, an answer might come from a person’s childhood experiences. Some hearers have some of these questions answered simply by the events of their lives or through their own observation of various Christians, or in many other ways. How they find the answers doesn’t matter. What is important is that a Christian witness must take into account that all these questions need to be satisfactorily answered before someone comes to faith, no matter where those answers have come from.

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*T. Wayne Dye has been a missiology consultant with SIL for over 50 years. Soon after earning a PhD at Fuller Seminary School of Intercultural Studies, he became SIL’s first Scripture Engagement consultant. He and his wife Sally have trained missionaries in missiology in many countries. Wayne teaches at Dallas International University.*

*Danielle Zachariah is a recently graduated ethnoartist with a background in theatre, linguistics, and English education.*

## **Question 1: How do I know what you say is true?**

In John 5:31–40, Jesus called upon four witnesses to support his testimony about himself: John the Baptist, the miracles he performed, God the Father, and the Scriptures.

Although three of these make sense, Jesus’s inclusion of John the Baptist seems strange. After all, what need has the Creator for a testimony from his creation? Why use the words of a mere man to support the claims of God Almighty?

John 5:34 provides the answer: “Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved.” Jesus acknowledged that he had no need

for a human witness; he had no need of man's support. Rather, his use of John the Baptist as evidence is a kindness to his listeners. Jesus recognized the kinds of evidence his listeners had been culturally trained to accept and used that evidence *so that they might be saved*.

### Cultural Apologetics

Each culture has its own markers of truth. Western cultures, founded on Greek philosophy and impacted by modern science, tend to trust logical conclusions drawn from "objective" facts. Consequently, Christian apologetics in the West focuses on archaeological finds, historical facts, manuscript evidence, DNA structure, and abstract, logical arguments. This methodology works well—so long as our audience remains Greek-influenced. A substantial increase in the spread of globalization and technology, though, makes this unlikely. Furthermore, as missionaries, we are almost guaranteed to work in a culture with different markers of truth from our own. Not having been born in the community or raised in its language and ways, we are cultural outsiders among people who know very little about us. Locals do not know our parents, grandparents, or siblings. All they know is our lives and the stereotypes attached to our gender, age, race, and nationality. They have little reason to trust that what we say is true.

As in our own cultures, we must supplement our message with cultural apologetics, or cultural markers of truth. In so doing, we do not trust in our own apologetics to save—that is the Holy Spirit's job. We do not rely on "wise and persuasive words of wisdom but on the Spirit's power" since our goal is that people's "faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:4–5). The Holy Spirit, however, actually uses the natural cultural apologetics of the community. Therefore, we partner with the Spirit and what he has already been doing to present the message in a way that signals the truth as true. In the end, though, our trust is not in our apologetics but in our God.

With these principles in mind, let's look at a few cultural apologetics that signal "truth" to different communities.

### Genealogies

Many cultures have an oral tradition that establishes people's position in the world. The genealogy of an ethnic group, clan, or village is often used as proof to track family membership and inner-family hierarchies for the purposes of establishing land rights, determining leaders, and forming marriage alliances. Although biblical genealogies often seem theologically insignificant to Western audiences, in those cultural groups they are crucial in establishing the validity of Jesus's claims about himself and our claims



about the truth of Scripture. In the words of an experienced Papua New Guinean pastor:

I want to take this page of genealogies back to my village because there are people there who question the truth of the Bible. When they see this, they will no longer doubt.

### Dreams

In many cultures, dreams are thought to be messages from God. For example, I was visiting a remote village in Papua New Guinea where the people showed me a round stone the size of a volleyball and told me it had created the world. It was lying on the ground in the middle of the village.

I asked them, "Why do you leave it out here?"

The man who had shown me the stone responded:

Well, we didn't used to have it out there. We used to have it in a special house, but a teenage boy in our village had a dream that we should take it out into the open, so we did that.

They had felt obligated to move the stone that they believed created the world simply because somebody had had a dream.

While many dreams are clearly not from God, he does sometimes speak to humans this way. Many people throughout the Bible have experienced God communicating through dreams: Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Daniel, and Joseph, Mary's husband, to name only a few. God did not limit his gift of dreams to his people, though; Abimelech, Pharaoh, and Pilate's wife were granted dreams as well. Nor did he limit this method to the past; Joel 3:28–29 prophesies that God will

pour out my Spirit on all people [so that] your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

Sally and I saw God use a dream to pave the way for our own work in Papua New Guinea. Before we had arrived in the village to begin our work, a young man had a dream about a white person bringing a book that would have the answers to their problems. Our coming there to translate the Bible was seen as the beginning of the fulfillment of that dream. Workers in many other ethnic areas have observed that dreams were instrumental in guiding believers from strong Muslim and folk religious backgrounds to Jesus. For example, in *I Dared to Call Him Father*, Bilquis Sheikh writes of her conversion experience which involved a dream of John the Baptist.

We do not trust every dream as coming from God, however. Some dreams are in opposition to scriptural truth. Since God does not change nor contradict himself, we can reject those dreams. With other dreams, we must

ask the Holy Spirit to guide us, talk with other mature believers, and listen to our consciences. In this way, what is of him and what is not of him may be clearly seen. With those safeguards, we can and should ask God to give people the right dreams at the right time, true dreams that will lead people to Jesus.

### Power Encounters

Power encounters are times of confrontation between the power of God and other spiritual powers. When Pharaoh dismissed the Almighty God, when Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, when Sennacherib's chief officer defied the Living God—each set the stage for power encounters wherein God showcased his authority and power. A modern example occurred in a rural area in northern India where the people had an ongoing problem with cobras. When a person had been bitten, he or she would be taken to the local shaman for healing with mixed results.

Some missionaries from southern India had been working there for several years with only a few converts. Finally, after much prayer, the missionaries decided to tell the people to bring those bitten by cobras to them instead of to the shaman for the next year. Ten people listened to the missionaries, and all ten lived. However, everyone who went to the shaman instead, died that year. There was not a large and immediate turning to faith, but what God chose to do was the beginning of what eventually became a strong church there. Experiences like this have been reliably reported from many parts of the world. Although power encounters do not lead everyone to follow Jesus, they can be a significant step in convincing people that the message is true.

It is important to note a few key points regarding power encounters. First, power encounters should not be framed as an “us vs. them” showdown between God and humans. God is not pitting himself against the traditional shaman but against the “powers of this dark world and . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” to whom the shaman

## *D*ifferent genres communicate validity in different cultures—in the West, documentaries and encyclopedias are genres considered true.

and others are unknowingly in bondage. Oftentimes, the shaman does his work out of a feeling of responsibility and a sincere desire to help his people. In some cases, the shaman may even later become one of the strongest converts. In Wagu Village, where I worked, the shaman was one of the first converts and became the leading Christian elder.

A second key point is that we must not manufacture power encounters ourselves; God is not One to be manipulated. The missionaries in the above story only initiated the power encounter after much prayer and the seeking of God's will. Sometimes, though, God himself will provide such an encounter. When that happens, we must ask in faith for God to show himself. If we choose not to pray due to fear that God will choose not to respond, we dishonour his name since people will see our fear and say, “That's what we thought. This god has no power.”

### Genres Deemed to Be True

Different cultures use different genres to communicate the validity of the information presented. For example, in the West, documentaries and encyclopedia articles are genres that are considered to be factually true. Using genres that are already trusted as vehicles for truth smooths the path to understanding the message of Jesus. For instance, among the Western Bukidnon Manobo in the Philippines, there is a traditional poetic epic genre that is used to share important truths. With this in mind, one of the local Christians, a talented singer of this epic genre, recorded several passages in this style—including the beginning of Genesis, stories of Jesus, the Olivet discourse, Jesus's death and resurrection, and the final chapter of Revelation—and then sent the recordings with colporteurs on their travels to different villages. These recordings touched people's hearts.

As one old man said upon hearing the recordings, “It is really true about Jesus Christ!” (Elkins 1983, no. 5: 20).

Some genres require a specific artist or creative process; others restrict the time and place where they are valid. Others are constrained to certain times or places. Research is vital to accurately communicate within each specific genre's constraints. For instance, the Rendille people of the northern Kenya desert only believe a message is both true and of great importance if it is first spoken quietly to the elders when they are gathered in the shade of a tree near a waterhole.

Bruce Olson, a missionary to the Motilone of Venezuela, worked for several years with only one convert, “Bobby.” Olson had expected Bobby to share the gospel with his friends and was frustrated by his continued silence. After praying, though, Olson felt the command to wait. One day, the entire community came together for a singing contest. During this event, one person would challenge another person to sing a story, periodically interrupting him with sung questions and comments with the goal of exhausting the other singer. The person who stopped first lost. This time, an older chief challenged Bobby. For the next fourteen hours, Bobby sang the story of the gospel. When it was over, the entire community decided to follow Jesus.

### The Character of Nearby Christians

One of the most effective evidences that the Christian message is worth hearing is the character of the messenger. Jesus said that others would know we belong to him by our love and would know that God sent Jesus by our unity (John 13:35; 17:23). Greg Pruet found this among the Yalunka in Guinea. In a study conducted among the Muslims there, Pruet found that

84.9% of responders answered the following question affirmatively:

If the lives of Christians were holier than the lives of Muslims around them, would that make Muslims want to become Christians? (Pruett 2014: 90)

As one Muslim background believer said:

The reason I followed Jesus [was] because I saw that everything they do is righteous. . . I followed Jesus because of the righteousness of his people. (Pruett 2014: 93)

### *Question 2: Why should I listen?*

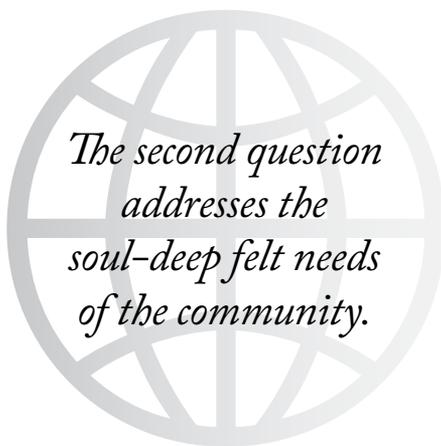
The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is one of the clearer Old Testament gospel messages. It prophesies the coming Messiah in verses 4–5, calls for repentance and shows God’s response in verses 6–9, affirms the efficacy of God’s word in verses 10–11, and shows the fruit of repentance, i.e., joy and peace, in verses 12–13. However, unlike many Western gospel presentations which start with man’s sin, in this chapter of Isaiah, God begins with man’s spiritual hunger.

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. (Isa. 55:1–3)

This second question—why should I listen—addresses that underlying spiritual hunger, the soul-deep felt needs of the community. These felt needs answer the question, “What makes me think that this is worth doing?” Different communities, subgroups within communities, and individuals will be concerned with different needs. Older people may differ from teenagers, higher castes may differ from lower castes, men may differ from women. Towns and villages are different from one another and the people within those villages differ as well. For some in

the United States, the felt need might be for family or community, or the felt need might be the ability to relate better with close friends, or it might be freedom from drug or alcohol addiction. In the Philippines, some of those I interviewed said, “Now I am able to live in a way that brings honour to my family instead of shame.” For some in Papua New Guinea, community peace, especially for enemies to become friends, is a strong felt need. One time, we had a large gathering for Christians in our Papua New Guinean village where people continually remarked, “Here we are, five language groups. We’re all together. We would have been scared to death to do this before.”

This is not a new question for many missiologists, and a clear method for



determining felt needs is forthcoming in a separate *IJFM* article by Sally Dye. Therefore, this important question will not be described further here.

### *Question 3: If I become a Christian, how will I live?*

Hearers of the gospel message have strong reasons (both valid and invalid) to fear that their lives as followers of Jesus might become much worse. This is a powerful motivation to find satisfactory answers to the questions of trust and motive.

In the West, we differentiate between the sacred and the secular, the “important things in life” and the mundane. It is therefore easy for us to imagine, then,

our religion changing and the rest of our life staying essentially the same. In many other communities, though, there is no sacred-secular distinction. As a technology for life, religion provides a detailed framework for how to interact with the supernatural, with other people, and with the physical environment. A change in religion affects every area of life, and listeners want to know if the new religious technology of Christianity will solve the same problems. Will the grain still grow? Will the evil spirits be warded off? Will people still be protected from tigers?

After my lecture on this in a Youth With A Mission course, one of the class members, a man from Nepal, approached me and said, “You know the big question everybody’s going to ask in Nepal? If I become a Christian, how do I drink water?” In his community, each caste had separate drinking vessels. As a member of the Brahmin caste, he was not allowed to touch the vessels of other people. However, all of these rules were tied to Hinduism; thus, new followers of Jesus needed to know how to appropriately drink water.

Christians in every culture must engage in the difficult process of learning how to successfully relive life as a Christian. Parsing out what aspects of culture can be maintained and what aspects must be removed or altered is a thorny task. It was one which Paul and many other apostles had to work through. The epistles are filled with details regarding whether circumcision was required, when to eat or avoid eating food sacrificed to idols, whether to set aside a Sabbath day, how Christians should dress and act, etc., all answering concerns of the new believers in those places.

Practically, and in contextualized detail, Christians need to know how to live. The process of discovering that will require much interaction and feedback, especially from local Christians who will have both the Holy Spirit and an intuitive understanding of their own culture. For example, all over India, people want to know how to make rice grow. Planting

rice the “right way” often involves praying to the rice gods and carrying out certain rituals. Such a method would not do for Christians, but rice must be made to grow. Now pastors pray to God in the fields before planting begins instead of following the old traditions.

### Life Cycle Rituals

Every community has certain very important life cycle ceremonies, whether those are birth rituals, initiation and coming-of-age ceremonies, burial rites, or others. Since many, if not all, ceremonies have religious components, Christians must decide how to perform these life cycle ceremonies in ways that honor God and seem good to them. Even if the ceremony itself is recognized as antithetical to Scripture, avoidance alone is not the answer. If there is no Christian way forward, Christianity will seem empty or even dangerous. For example, some burial rites include aspects that do not honor God. Nevertheless, the dead must be respectfully “sent off.” In Pruett’s study of barriers and bridges to the gospel among the Yalunka, the most prominent barrier was the fact that no one knew how to bury a Christian (Pruett 2014: 81). Therefore, either the old ritual must be altered or a new one created.

### Worship

People want to know how to worship, especially if the culture values worshipping “correctly.” For those cultures, the issue of how to worship changes from important to imperative. For example, in John 4, once the Samaritan woman recognized Jesus as a prophet, she immediately wanted to know how to worship. For her, that was a vital question.

Many other people hold similar concerns since (in their worldview) incorrect worship can incur the anger of the spirits. Local Christians need to understand the basic principles of Christian worship and what God actually desires of them. With those underlying principles understood, they can then worship God using artistic expressions valued by their community. For some, worship might

**I**n Pruett’s study of the Yalunka, the most prominent barrier was that no one knew how to bury a Christian.

look like music that only uses certain musical instruments. For others, worship might look like a communal dance. It is important not to judge other people’s expressions of heart worship by our own artistic standards. The artistry needs to feel worshipful to their hearts, not ours.

While in northern Australia for a workshop, I discussed the idea of local heart worship with some missionaries working at Elcho Island. Earlier, I had visited an Aboriginal church service. It had met at eleven o’clock in the morning, with the sun beaming down on a tin roof and flies buzzing all over. I thought to myself, “It’s a struggle for me to worship in this context. I bet it is for them too.”

Later, I had the privilege of visiting an Aboriginal traditional dance ceremony for the initiation of some young boys. It was set at dusk in the outback, with the sun painting an incredible sunset across the sky. The place was open and big, with a small group of people—it was hard not to sit in awe. There was a completely different ambience compared to the church service.

When I spoke with some of the Western missionaries about holding church services in the evening, one of the missionaries mentioned that they had tried to do just that. They had even tried to encourage some Aboriginal interpretive dancing of Christian teachings. However, in spite of initial success, support quickly fizzled out.

“Why didn’t it work?” I asked him.

“I don’t know,” he responded. “It was strange. They kept up the rehearsals a little longer, but stopped the services quickly.”

“Rehearsals? They were rehearsing first?”

“Yeah,” he said.

We asked the people to rehearse the night before. We knew how casually

they did things, and we wanted them to get the dance dramas right. We thought the rehearsals were pretty funny because they didn’t know how to do it, and they were doing awkward stuff. So that was a good time to get in some laughs.

I asked, “Do they normally rehearse their traditional dances?”

He said:

No, come to think of it, they don’t rehearse them at all; they just interrupt the traditional religious dances and stop from time to time to discuss the next steps.

I had already noticed this principle in that other ceremony. The Aboriginal dancers that I had observed also frequently interrupted their traditional dances to discuss the next steps, but they never rehearsed.

I asked:

Do you think they thought the rehearsals were the worship and that the missionaries were laughing at it? Is it possible that would have discounted the worship in their eyes?

“Yeah, that’s possible,” he said.

Five years after the workshop, I heard about a widespread revival across the outback. The Aboriginals in Elcho Island had started a revival, using their own money to travel across the outback to evangelize people—even people who were trying to attack them for it. The reason they gave was that “we have discovered that God is the God of the Aboriginal and not just the white Australians.” They had resumed the dance dramas, and through them, they had learned that God accepted worship done in the Aboriginal way.

### Dividing Culture and Sin

During the process of learning to live as followers of Christ within their own context, Christians must learn to discern

between culture and sin. Not all cultural practices—even ones not explicitly addressed in Scripture—are sin, but neither are all cultural practices acceptable on the basis of being “culture.” When discipling new Christians, it is important that we, as outsiders, do not impose restrictions that the Holy Spirit has not imposed or teach applications that are based on our own cultural understanding of a passage.

For example, the essence of morality for many communities around the world is to care for their immediate and extended family. If we encourage new Christians to oppose their family and comfort them with the idea that they have a “new family in Christ,” we present a mixed moral message. We might be proud of the new Christian for “taking a stand” but he or she will often feel guilty. The new Christian’s conscience and community teach that the morally right choice is to care for the family, but this “joining a new family in Christ” message teaches the opposite. While there are times when obedience to Christ must be placed above loyalty to the family, we must not neglect the Scriptures that encourage and command respect and care for family members. Matthew 10:37 can be appropriately applied to situations where the family joins together to worship false gods, but we must not expand that verse to encourage new Christians to break kinship ties with their families.

In some societies there is no way to begin following Jesus without being perceived by other family members as disloyal. Even in societies where people are driven out by their families, however, those Christians might be welcomed back into the family through consistent acts of love and respect. Although this process might take twenty years, the important fact is that change often does occur. Once the family realizes that the loyalty remains in spite of the change in faith, their attitude towards the Christian member, and his or her God, begins to change as well. As an older Muslim man told his Christian son, “You know, as a Christian, you’re the best Muslim amongst all my sons

because you support your family.” In spite of following the teachings of Jesus rather than the practices of Islam, this son was seen as behaving honorably due to his maintenance of family ties.

#### *Question 4: What is this message saying?*

Once hearers are satisfied with the answers to the first three questions, they are ready to hear the message, as we more narrowly think of the message. Even then, however, the hearers’ understanding and values must be considered.

Whenever two or more people communicate, and especially when those people come from vastly different cultural backgrounds, the environment is ripe



for misunderstandings. The speaker assumes he or she is communicating one message while the listener understands a different message. This is especially true when communicating biblical concepts; we use one metaphor to communicate a certain message while our audience understands a different one.

Herein lies the brilliance of the all-knowing God, though: Scripture is full of multiple explanations of the same concept. Consider the different metaphors used when discussing the relationship between God and us: father and adopted children, shepherd and sheep, vine and branches, husband and bride, king and subjects, master and slave, friend and friend, potter and clay, and judge,

advocate, and wrongdoer. Each metaphor is vastly different on the surface but nevertheless reveals an important facet of our relationship with God.

Because there are multiple ways to explain the same truths, a Christian witness is free to choose the metaphor that will most clearly communicate accurate biblical truth. Eventually, all metaphors and facets should be introduced and explained, but not all are equally good places to begin. We start with bridges, not barriers.

Consider, for example, what Jesus said when Andrew and Philip brought some Greek visitors before him in John 12:20–26:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Jesus began by looking towards his crucifixion and ended with an application to follow him. His key metaphor, though, is about “a kernel of wheat.” According to E. M. Blaiklock, a renowned Bible scholar, the Greeks of that day had one main annual ceremony which they believed was necessary for their crops to grow in the spring. At the core of this ceremony, the Greeks would say those exact words:

Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Jesus began the conversation with these visiting Greeks by quoting the core of their most important religious ceremony. He then expanded their understanding of this idea to apply it to himself and what would be required of those who followed him. Jesus communicated the same truth to the Greeks that he’d been communicating to the Jews, but he began with what they already understood.

It is important to note that we do not leave people with their original inaccurate beliefs indefinitely. However, those inaccurate beliefs usually have an element of accuracy from which to begin. When speaking to those visiting Greeks, Jesus used the kernel of truth in their beliefs to give them a newer, clearer understanding of divine truth about himself and his work.

### Biblical Analogies

Since there are a variety of Biblical analogies and metaphors used to explain God's relationship with us, we can choose the appropriate one for each context.

For Papua New Guineans, the idea of God as Father and Jesus as Elder Brother is immensely exciting. Kinship relationships in that area center on brothers—older brothers and younger brothers—so verses such as Romans 8:29, which states that Jesus is “the firstborn among many brothers,” speak to the heart. On the other hand, for the Aborigines, the idea of oneness with God is key. Thus, the metaphor of the vine and the branches, wherein the two are so connected that it is impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins, is the “right” starting point.

We still need the other metaphors because people must eventually be led to understand the whole counsel of God. That is why we do Bible translation and not just evangelistic presentations. However, we start with the metaphor that pierces the soul, the one easiest to understand and most meaningful to know.

### Redemptive Analogies from Their Culture

Cultures also have analogies that can be used to explain Scriptural truths. Through paying attention to what is happening and seeking to understand the underlying reasons, it is possible to find redemptive analogies built right into a community's cultural understandings of the world. In many cases, however, creativity is an important component in drawing those connections. At all points, we must seek God's wisdom, and he will provide what is lacking. After all,

**R**edemptive analogies may be built into a community's cultural understandings, but creativity is necessary to draw those connections.

God has been working longer than we have to build an understanding of who he is. Ask him to provide eyes to see the redemptive analogies he wants used and wisdom to use them as he intends.

When Paul Robinson was gathering data for his PhD in ethnohistory, he travelled to northern Kenya to collect stories of a pastoral people group. After he had been collecting these stories for a while, the elders approached him and said:

You've asked us a lot of questions. We have a question for you because there's something we just don't understand. Maybe you can help us.

An elder then told him this story:

Another clan and my clan were camped at the same water hole. We were getting along really well together—usually clans don't do that because we each have to defend our own territory—but this time, we were getting along really well. Their young men and our young men were enjoying time together, and their young girls enjoyed talking with ours. One day, though, the young men got into some horseplay that escalated into a fight, and before we knew it, my son had killed another man's son from the other clan. Both of us were just devastated because we knew that they would feel obligated to retaliate and we would feel obligated to defend. Our friendship was over. We didn't want to see that—more people were going to die.

In desperation, I said to the father of the boy my son had killed, “If we killed one of yours, would you accept it as payback and let it go?”

He agreed.

So, I took my daughter and we tied her to the tree since I was going to kill her in the morning. I came back the next morning with a heavy heart. I didn't want to do this but there was no choice. Many more people were going to die if I didn't. As I came to the tree, my

daughter was sleeping still tied under the tree, and there was an unblemished sheep lying on top of her. The sheep was not tied. As the father of the boy my son had killed came near, I said, “That's not normal sheep behavior. I think God is telling us to sacrifice the sheep.”

He said, “I agree with you. That's the only explanation I can think of.”

So, we sacrificed the sheep.

When the man finished telling the story, he said, “We think God had more to say; we just don't understand what.”

When God is working, we have no need to figure everything out ourselves; rather, we work with the Holy Spirit who has been at work for far longer.

### Explanations of Sin

While God's relationship with us is the most important aspect of the gospel message, an understanding of sin is also important. People can only genuinely repent of the sins which they recognize themselves as sins. It is useless to attempt to convince people to repent of sins they do not yet believe are sins. Instead, we must begin with those sins which their consciences already tell them are wrong. In time, as converts are taught and grow in maturity, they will gain a more biblical understanding of what is wrong with their actions.

Instead of feeling guilty of sinning, though, people may be feeling ashamed or unclean. Both ways to understand the results of sin are equally biblical. In fact, there are more passages in the Bible about sin leading to shame than there are about sin leading to guilt.

### Theological Stumbling Blocks and Moral Quandaries

Other important aspects of the gospel message address a community's world-view issues and theological stumbling blocks. These questions and confusions

must be discussed before the rest of the message can be accepted. Where people have a complex traditional worldview, this can be a major issue. The Ifugao of northern Philippines were just such a cultural area. I watched a leading local evangelist named Ilat talk far into the night, patiently working through each concept that was keeping his hearer, a priest of their ancient rice religion, from coming to faith. I was finally overcome with sleepiness, but they continued all night long. In the morning Ilat told me, “The word of God is stronger than our mouths; this man wants me to baptize him today.”

An almost endless range of questions could, in one group or another, be the hindrance to deal with. In some communities, the problem of evil and suffering is a struggle; for others, following only one God is a challenge. Regardless of the issue, it must be appropriately addressed so that the only hindrances that remain are the demands of the gospel itself.

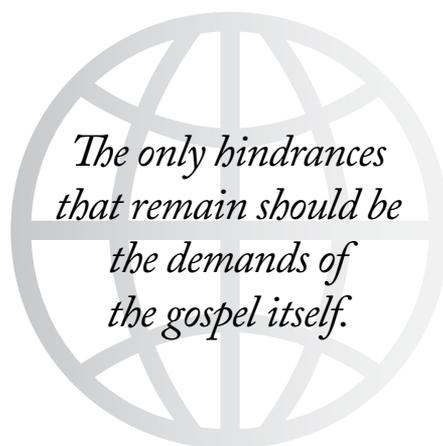
### *Question 5: What should I do to follow this new way?*

At some point, hearers will be ready to become committed followers of Jesus. However, it is equally important to explain what this loyalty excludes, i.e., what they are turning away from. God is a jealous god and those who follow him must understand exactly what that undivided loyalty entails. Furthermore, prospective Christians must be encouraged to think about how to publicly demonstrate their new allegiance to Jesus. This display should be done in such a way that it does not require the individual to break family ties. There is some cultural variation in the answers to this last question, but three elements are universal: turning from alternatives, whether false gods or science or self; turning to God in trust and loyalty; and publicly demonstrating the change.

### *Conclusion*

Evangelism is most effective when it goes beyond cultural relevance to personal relevance, when it speaks to a person's heart. Such an explanation involves answering the questions of trust, motivation, and outcome before the story itself will be seriously heard. It involves explaining the gospel in a way that is easiest for people to understand. In many ways, it involves meeting people where they are, just as God meets us where we are.

Here is how God spoke to a certain people group in Indonesia. They believed that birds were the source of supernatural wisdom and understanding. According to their legend, this people previously had holy books like the Christians and



Muslims on their island. Unfortunately, when everyone had to cross a river, the people in this group had no clothing with which to wrap their books. For that reason, they had left their books behind on the river bank, and the birds had eaten the books that were lost. Therefore, this community listened to the birds because the birds now had knowledge from the lost holy books.

Upon hearing about this belief, the missionaries decided to first tell a set of Bible stories focusing on birds, beginning with creation and culminating with Jesus's baptism when the Spirit descended like a dove. On the day that the missionaries were preparing to tell the story of Jesus's baptism, a group of

people from the same language but a different village arrived to visit their distant relatives. Trekking through tropical forests is exhausting, so the visitors told their hosts that they would rather rest than attend the meeting. Later, when the hosts returned home from the presentation of the story of Jesus' baptism, they told their guests what they had heard, causing a quite a stir amongst the guests.

Curious, the (host) villagers asked why this was so amazing.

The guests responded:

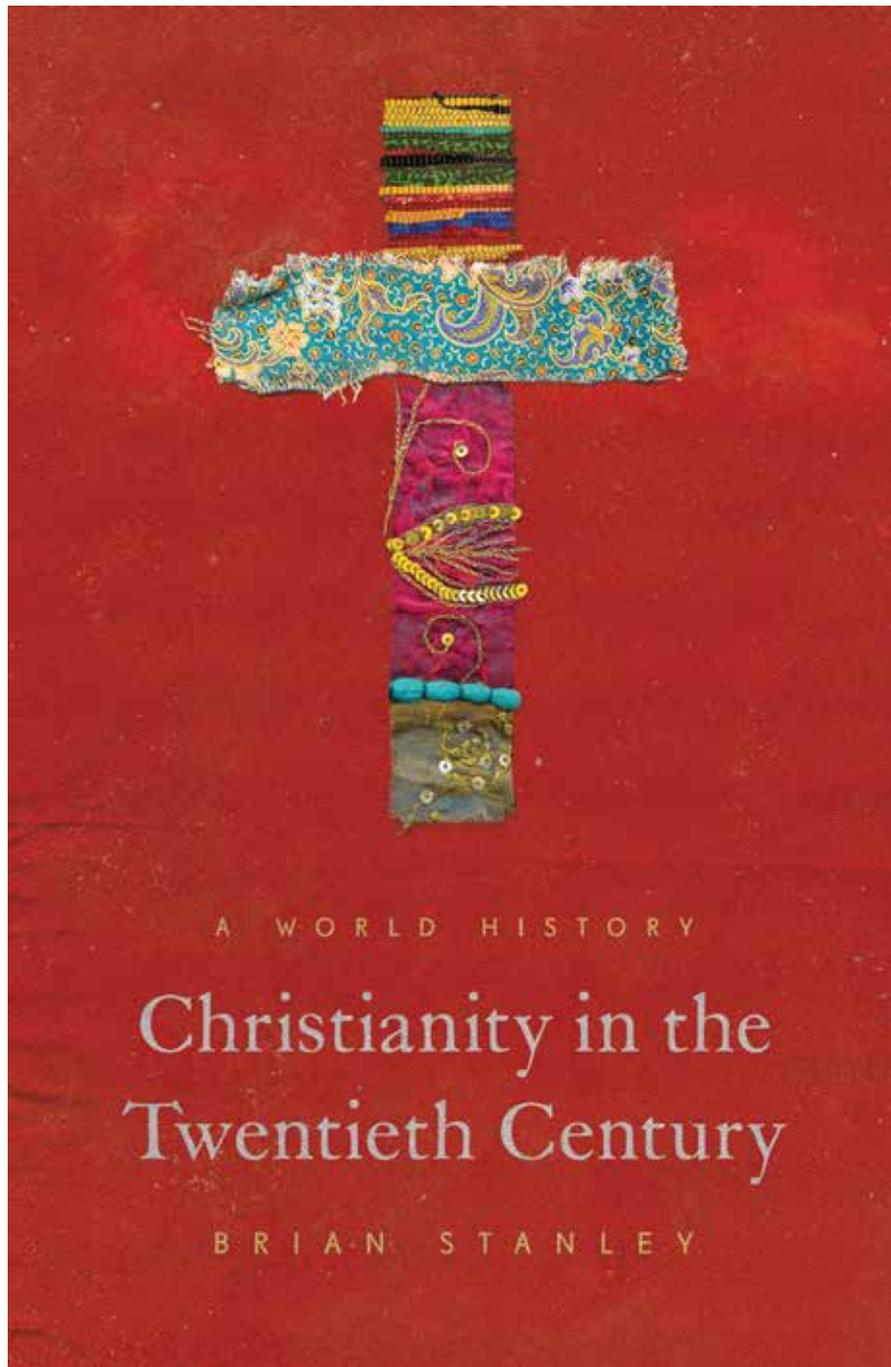
You must not have seen it. All the time you were talking, there were birds—a huge flock of birds, white birds—flying over the house where the meeting was, circling and circling and circling.

When they heard this, the missionaries were as amazed as everyone else. They realized that God was making use of the community's starting point to begin explaining the gospel. He cares about the salvation of peoples and the honor of his name. He knows the lenses through which each person and community views the world, and he communicates through those lenses first. As we seek to be culturally and personally relevant witnesses, then, we must seek him and ask for his help to learn the situation, and his help to partner with what he is already doing. To him alone belongs all wisdom and all power to change hearts and draw people to himself. **IJFM**

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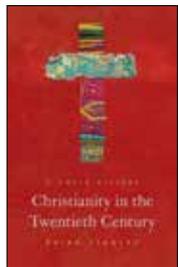
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# Book Reviews

*Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*,  
by Brian Stanley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University  
Press, 2018), xxi, 477 pp.

—Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker



How did Christianity cope with, respond to, resist or draw from, and comport itself alongside the various ideologies, threats, and currents of uplift that swirled through and roiled life in the twentieth century? What trends are observable? What conclusions, even if tentative, can be drawn?

Any book carrying the title *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*, is, on the face of it, a “quite impossible book” (xx). The sweep, scale, and span of time, geography, institutions, personalities, theologies, and ecclesial contexts set any single author an insurmountable task. And to cover it all in a single volume? Utterly impossible, of course. And yet, if anyone is equipped to offer a bird’s eye view of world Christianity in the twentieth century, Brian Stanley is surely that person. Professor of World Christianity and director of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, Stanley has published dozens of articles and book chapters on topics related to Christian missions and world Christianity. As author or editor, he has published eight books related to Christian world mission, beginning with *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Apollos, 1990) and *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (T&T Clark, 1992).

For five years (1996–2001) he was director of the Currents in World Christianity Project at the University of Cambridge. He is editor of the journal *Studies in World Christianity* (Edinburgh University Press) and joint series editor of *Studies in World Christianity* (Eerdmans). His credentials, as a person with his finger on the pulse of world Christianity, are impeccable.

How does he proceed? Before answering that question, let’s look at some of the conclusions he reaches.

- The century [was] one in which the locus of Christianity shifted decisively southward and eastward, a judgment that rests mainly—though by no means entirely—on the remarkable Christian success story of Africa and the no less spectacular progress of Christianity in China since the Cultural Revolution. (357)
- Grotesquely scarred by two catastrophic global wars involving conflict between nations, most of which were professedly Christian, the twentieth century failed to live up to its billing as a century in which Christian ethics were supposed to triumph. (357–58)
- The twentieth century can properly be denominated as the great century of conversion to Christianity. It was necessarily, therefore, a period that also witnessed a radical pluralization of popular understandings of Christianity as the word of the gospel took flesh in innumerable cultural forms in non-Western societies. . . . [For Protestants, this pluralization was] obviously theologically problematic in view of their historic confidence in the perspicacity of the scriptures. . . . The rediscovery of the biblical figure of the prophet was an outcome that the Bible and missionary societies had not anticipated. (359)
- The book adds to the evidence that popular indifference is a more potent enemy of faith than state-sponsored militant atheism. (360)
- By the close of the twentieth century, perhaps the most pressing issue on the agenda of Christian theology was how to encourage Christians to pursue and develop a more irenic approach toward those of other faiths—and Islam above all—in the interests of intercommunal harmony and world peace. (362)
- Perhaps the most far-reaching theological reorientation evident in the course of the century has been in the realm of Christian mission. At the start of the century both Catholic and Protestant missionary thought was almost unanimous in identifying the pursuit of conversion to Christianity as the central missionary goal of the church. . . . By the end of the century, both Catholics and Protestants were no longer so united in their conviction that seeking the conversion of adherents of other religions to Christ constituted the essence of the missionary task. . . . The later decades of the century . . . witnessed impassioned contestation over the Christian understanding of salvation itself. (362–63)
- Human rights ideology proved its emancipatory value not simply to Christian defense of the oppressed in colonial or postcolonial situations, but perhaps even more to the women who in virtually every Christian denomination formed the majority of worshippers while being almost entirely excluded from the leadership of congregational worship and church life. (364)

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*Dwight P. Baker retired as associate director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut, in 2011. He was associate editor of the International Bulletin of Mission Research (2002–15) and has coedited several books, including Serving Jesus with Integrity: Ethics and Accountability in Mission (2010) and People Disrupted: Doing Mission Responsibly among Refugees and Migrants (2018).*

**S**tanley stresses that “World Christianity means world Christianity, and not simply the Christianity of the southern hemisphere.” So he blends his coverage in an attempt to truly offer “A World History.”

- In . . . the last four decades of the century it became steadily more apparent that the clash between invocation of human rights and the appeal to unchanging Christian conceptions of divinely revealed truth touched not simply on the ecclesiological issues of church leadership, but, still more fundamentally, on theological anthropology—the Christian understanding of the identity of human beings. . . . The issue of whether practicing gay and lesbian people should be ordained to the Christian ministry came increasingly to the fore. . . . The argument did not fall neatly along [North/South] geographical lines. (365)
- The most striking single contrast between the face of the world church in 1900 and that of the world church in 2000 is the salience and near ubiquity of Pentecostal styles of Christianity by the end of the century—forms of Christian expression that in 1900 were still uncommon and deemed to be at best eccentric and at worst heretical. (365)
- If the gravest challenge faced by Christianity in the twentieth century was the repeated subversion of Christian ethics by a series of tragic compromises between Christianity and ideologies of racial supremacy, the most serious challenge confronting the religion in the twenty-first century looks likely to be the preparedness of some sections of the church in both northern and southern hemispheres to accommodate the faith to ideologies of individual enrichment. (366)

### *Organization and Process*

The issues identified in the snippets just given, and others like them, provide the thematic nuclei around which the book’s fifteen chapters are organized. An introduction and conclusion act as bookends to the volume. Each chapter contains four sections. The opening section offers an exposition that lays out the topic of the chapter and its parameters, provides background, gives orientation, and identifies two regions of the world church for which the chapter’s topic was particularly salient during the twentieth century. The second section examines the topic of the chapter—for example, racism, Pentecostalism, or migration—in relation to a religio-geographic or ecclesiological domain or region for which it is particularly germane. The third section presents a supporting or contrasting or augmenting case. Sometimes the third section includes comments on a further religio-geographic region as well. The fourth section opens the topic to wider vistas as well as offering integrative reflections and evaluative observations.

Stanley stresses that “World Christianity means world Christianity, and not simply the Christianity of the southern hemisphere” (8). So, the book blends coverage of the

churches of the North and West with those of the South and East. In this way the book attempts truly to offer “A World History.” The following chapter titles and section headings give a flavor of the approach.

### *Chapter 7: The Voice of Your Brother’s Blood: Christianity, Ethnic Hatred, and Genocide in Nazi Germany and Rwanda*

- I. Theories of Race and Vocabularies of Ethnic Hostility
- II. Race and Religion in Nazi Germany
- III. The Church and Ethnic Conflict in Rwanda
- IV. Christian Prophecy and Its Failures

### *Chapter 8: Aliens in a Strange Land? Living in an Islamic Context in Egypt and Indonesia*

- I. Christianity and Religious Plurality
- II. Coptic Christianity in Egypt
- III. The Church in Indonesia
- IV. The Politics of Christian Survival

### *Chapter 11: Doing Justice in South Africa and Canada: The Human Rights Agenda, Race, and Indigenous Peoples*

- I. The Churches and Human Rights Ideology
- II. Apartheid and the Churches
- III. The Canadian Churches and the Residential Schools
- IV. From Civilization to Human Rights

### *Method*

So what sort of book is *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*? Here one could go into a lot of “It is not” disclaimers. It is neither an institutional history of branches of the worldwide Christian movement nor a collection of the life stories of outstanding Christian leaders from around the world and throughout the twentieth century. It is not an attempt to construct a synopsis of the Church as a whole within the bounds of the twentieth century. Neither is it a social history of Christianity in the twentieth century. Facts and historical records play a big role, but figures and statistics are used sparingly and judiciously. Just three illustrations appear in the volume, all maps. No all-encompassing narrative rehearsing the overall story of the church is attempted.

**T**he book is pitched at the level of sociological analysis. It's easy to imagine the volume as the distillation of the author's postgraduate seminars of a very high order over several years.

What the book does provide is a set of critical reflections built around fifteen issues, most of which are broadly sociological in nature—fundamentalism, secularization theory, migration, religious identity, ethnic cleansing, liberation, and others. Its reflections are informed by and constrained by the thirty or so case studies. Stanley attends to the sweep and flow of macrolevel social movements, trends, and forces. He asks what challenges they presented for the existence, flourishing, and character of the twentieth-century church. The result of expounding those issues and seeking to answer those questions is an illuminating and informative book. Stated in his own words, Stanley writes that “history is all about change, and the writing of history seeks to explain processes of change” (313). That conception of history is crucial to understanding the type of historical account *Christianity in the Twentieth Century* contains. It is pitched at the level of sociological analysis and explanation, not of personal vignettes or narrative set pieces. It would be easy to imagine this volume to be the distillation of the author's preparations for offering a series of postgraduate seminars of very high order over the course of several years.

### Two Complementary Books

Two volumes from a decade ago, one by Mark Noll and the other by Dana Robert, could well be read as complements to *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*. If Christianity has a worldwide presence today such that a history can be written of it, the reason is in some measure to be credited to the missionary movement from the West that took place, by fits and starts, over the past five centuries. But as all historians of mission today are avid to acknowledge, missions and missionaries are far from the whole story. They were essential but far from sufficient to account, for example, for the explosive growth of Christianity in Africa during the twentieth century. Indigenous initiative and agency arguably played the far larger part—and certainly did so for the character that Christianity in Africa has taken. Robert's volume, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, provides a concise and highly readable overview of exactly what her title promises.<sup>1</sup>

It is to discussion of indigenous agency versus outside religious hegemony that Noll makes an interesting contribution in his *New Shape of World Christianity*.<sup>2</sup> First noting

David Bebbington's identification of the four key marks of evangelicalism as *Biblicism* (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), *conversionism* (a stress on the New Birth),

*activism* (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement) and *crucicentrism* (a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity),

Noll goes on to examine the question of distinctively US evangelical influence on the shape of Christian thought and practice in other places around the world.<sup>3</sup> What we observe bears a resemblance to US evangelicalism, so are US evangelicals exercising an outsized and undue influence on emerging Christian communities? Are they exercising spiritual overlordship to the detriment of young branches of the household of faith? Noll rules out US religious “dominance” and dismisses the possibility that US evangelicals have “dictated” the character of religious outlook and practice among, for example, South Koreans. South Korean Christians made those choices.

But if “American missionary influence [abroad] increasingly reflects forms of Christian faith that are conversionist, voluntarist, entrepreneurial and nondenominational” as is found in the United States, what conclusions are to be drawn when similar characteristics appear within national churches in various parts of the world?<sup>4</sup> American dominance? American influence? Or might the answer be, as Noll suggests, that similarities found elsewhere have been evoked by social, economic, and political influences and pressures abroad that bear resemblance to the social forces that imparted to US evangelicalism its particular shape? If so, the US might provide an example, but parallel responses elsewhere would be truly indigenous. They would be independent responses in their settings to social conditions structurally similar to those that nurtured the birth of US evangelicalism. Similarities between Christian communities then could be accounted for, not as transplantation or heavy-handed dominance, but as responses to the presence of similar social conditions within the broader community. The proposal is suggestive and, whether one accepts it or seeks to refute it, it moves discussion—and historical analysis—onto the level of broader social currents and forces.

### Appreciation

One of the merits of *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* is that it expands our view of the church. The church is not only bigger than you think (to borrow the wording of Patrick Johnstone's book title); it is also more diverse than you dreamed.<sup>5</sup> And the ways it has sought to respond to the challenges that have confronted it in the twentieth century have been more varied than you, or I at

**O**ne of the takeaways is that there is no one “true” or standard Christianity against which all other versions are to be judged. There are only “Christianities.” Each “edition” falls short.

least, imagined as well. The church may well be the household of God—which implies the presence of diversity and distinctions of character and roles among its members. It is definitely not an aggregation of cookie cutter replicas or carbon copy images of each other. We all have a commitment to follow Jesus Christ; we do not all have an obligation to look or think or act in all ways alike. Without trying to belabor that point, Stanley’s work underscores its truth.

Though not the point of the book or one of its contentions, one among many takeaways for me is that there is no one “true” or standard Christianity against which all other versions of Christianity are to be judged and to which they are to be constrained to conform. There are only “Christianities.” Each version or “edition” falls short. Each needs to be more fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and to be guided by his Spirit. Each has something to offer. Each must be humble enough to learn from while also, in humility, teaching the other.

### Summing Up

As indicated, this masterly volume is the product of a lifetime of study and immersion on Brian Stanley’s part in the field of Christian world mission and world Christianity. He brings historical depth to his consideration of the topic. An astute and exceedingly broadly informed commentator, he offers penetrating observations and characterizations. As he proceeds, his comments constantly cast light on the topic at hand. The volume is a valuable assessment by a perceptive and sympathetic scholar of the diversity to be found in the field of world Christianity. I recommend it strongly.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

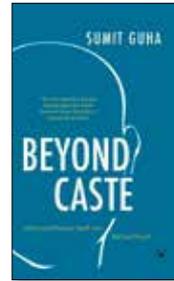
<sup>3</sup> Noll, *New Shape of World Christianity*, 46–47.

<sup>4</sup> Noll, *New Shape of World Christianity*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Johnstone, *The Church Is Bigger Than You Think* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005).

*Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present*, by Sumit Guha (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016), xxiii, 291 pp.

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard



In over thirty years of study related to Hindu traditions the subject of caste has repeatedly arisen and I finally came to a settled conclusion that there is neither a clear understanding of how caste developed historically nor agreement on how it should be understood in its complex practical expressions at the current time. Sumit Guha in his study *Beyond Caste* has changed my position. It seems to me that Guha has presented a case for understanding caste that compels consent. It does not solve the ancient history problems (it does not even address this) and it is neither simplistic nor simple. This review will outline Guha’s case, hopefully convincing some and moving others to study the book.

Guha is a historian at the University of Texas at Austin, but his study shows a deep grasp of the sociological literature related to caste and also adequate familiarity with the influence of treatments from Hindu texts. But it needs to be recognized that Guha has goals beyond just describing caste, as he states clearly in his Introduction:

The book has two goals. Its central aim is to present a new, historically informed understanding of the working of South Asian state and society through the past millennium; the secondary one is to provide the basis for a comparative understanding of the long-run processes of ethnic politics in this area as it came to modernity and experienced modern forms of state power. By attaining these goals I hope to enable us to drastically rethink the “caste system”—that central trope in the popular and scholarly understandings of the Indian subcontinent through the centuries. (1–2)

Guha goes on in his Introduction to make clear that there is no one caste system that explains Indian society, rather there are complex change mechanisms that produced and transform caste:

I will explain caste as an *institution*, as a very stable feature of human interaction, which is nonetheless maintained and

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*H. L. Richard is an independent researcher focused on the Hindu-Christian encounter. He has published numerous books and articles including studies of key figures like Narayan Vaman Tilak (Following Jesus in the Hindu Context, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998), Kalagara Subba Rao (Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005), and R. C. Das (R. C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity, Delhi: ISPCK, 1995).*

**G**uha provides a data-rich history of the development of discussions about caste, and he's cynical towards Western sociology—"the world of Western anthropology was enamoured of grand models and armchair theorists."

reproduced by belief and behaviour. These can and do change over time. I therefore argue that the effort to find a single, unified rationale for the internal workings and external relations of each of thousands of caste corporations is ultimately futile. We should begin by thinking of this society as being, like any complex civilization, multi-stranded or polyadic. (2, italics original)

Not only is there no simple explanation for caste, the modern development of caste is not really unique compared to other societies:

I will show that the bounded, status-ranked ethnic community or "caste" is a social form that frequently appears in multiethnic societies. But in South Asia it became a highly involuted, politicized form of ethnic ranking shaped by the constant exercise of socio-economic power. (2-3)

This gets to the heart of caste; "bounded, status-ranked ethnic communities" where occupation, kinship, and purity and pollution (the latter pair being the "religious" element) are all in play. Guha suggests that purity has taken too large a role in most attempts to understand caste (Dumont's landmark study being a case in point) and wants a focus not just on the markers of caste but also the powers that enforce caste (4), because the political element played and continues to play a major role in the development of ethnic boundaries and the ranking of ethnic communities.

Guha objects to making too large a distinction between "traditional" (precolonial) Indian society and modern India, particularly objecting to suggestions that caste as we know it today is a product of the colonial period. He outlines a compelling case for continuity in the last thousand years of Indian history while recognizing unique elements related to the colonial era.

In arguing his case Guha first (Chapter One) looks at how caste came to be central to the current understanding of India. The term caste is an oddity as there were many English and Sanskrit terms that could have been used, yet the Portuguese *casta* came to prominence (23). Europeans put a focus on "purity of blood" which was not central to Indian thought, in the process creating the odd idea (impossible to Indic understanding) of a "half-caste." Initially caste was seen as "a functional ordering of civil society" (38), but the development of Orientalist textual studies supported by missionary cynicism towards "Hinduism" led to the perception of Brahmanical dominance as the key to caste:

The valorization of textual knowledge foregrounded the Brahmins who had composed the oldest parts of it, and this fitted

well with the missionary current in Oriental studies, which had a natural propensity to see caste as a product of malign Brahman dominance, if not fraud and conspiracy. This went back to St. Francis Xavier, who wrote in 1544 that there was a perverse "breed" (*engeance*) among the Hindus (Gentils) known as Brahmins who controlled all the other Gentils. (39)

Guha provides a data-rich history of the development of discussions about caste up to the present time. He is cynical towards Western sociology ("the world of Western anthropology was enamoured of grand models and armchair theorists" [52]) while appreciating the work of Hocart and Susan Bayly among others who recognized the dynamics of caste and its manipulation politically (49). Bayly documented how "Christian" rulers manipulated converts (the Tamil Paravas) similarly to other political powers (37, etc.). Sri Lankan case studies further show that the dynamics of caste transcend religious identities and India itself.

The second chapter looks at "Territorial Power: The Spatial Dimension of Social Organization." There is again far too much data to attempt a proper summary. Guha demolishes the idea of autonomous unchanging villages, in this chapter particularly attacking Karl Marx's presentation of this idea. Village clusters (*janapada*, but *nadu* in south India) are rather the key locations where political power developed. Guha's opposition to neat theorizing is clear in this comment:

Hence, rather than thinking of social and economic institutions in terms of authentic regions and ancient traditions, it is more useful to view them as continually reproduced and inherently unstable. (62)

This unstable continuous reproduction means that what is called caste today would have had many different manifestations in different parts of India in different historical eras. Ethnic boundaries are the key reality:

So territorial bounding and internal stratification had to proceed alongside each other. In other words, the caste hierarchy and the village cluster or *janapada* grew up together: the one created a social boundary, the other a spatial one. (63)

This chapter contains stimulating analysis of the ancient Arthashastra, the concept and place of the tribe, fighting units for warfare in the village clusters and developed kingdoms, and introduces some of the changes that developed in the colonial era. Strong states and kingdoms developed by weakening and limiting other power networks (*janapada*, fighting units, etc.)

Chapter Three is on "The Political Economy of Village Life" and opens with a romantic statement of Jawaharlal Nehru ("The old Indian social structure was based on . . . the

**T**he harsh realities of poverty and oppression are highlighted in a chapter which shows the centrality of political power in all developments related to caste and village life.

autonomous village community; caste and the joint family system”) which Guha then systematically destroys. Once again Guha marshals data to show the varieties of villages that developed across India, with western India having the most developed structures. The *balutā* system of western India involved hereditary functions with fixed entitlements; the *jajmāni* system of parts of the north involved a patron household overseeing servants and other vassals. Guha comments:

For whatever reason, *balutā*—an institution well known to colonial administrators and Indian historians—was never recognized by the few Western anthropologists who, if they considered the rural division of labour at all, focused on the cultural rationale of *jajmāni*. It is a classic example of the Orientalist producing the Orient. (115)

Readers with interest in this topic need to read Guha’s fascinating documentation supporting his position that “The evidence suggests that both patron-client pairs and village servant systems have existed or been altogether absent at various times in different regions” (135). The harsh realities of poverty and oppression are also highlighted in this chapter which shows the centrality of political power in all developments related to caste and village life.

Chapter Four focuses on the household as the central political unit. The household was more than biological kin, and established state power used the terms and practices of kinship in its developed power relations. Case studies of state power related to kinship, strategies of division, and income generation show how rulers could initiate change into social and economic structures. British colonial power is shown to demonstrate all the same issues that are documented in pre-colonial periods. But British efforts to prevent the rise of alternate power structures are also documented.

Chapter Five comes to the colonial era, the chapter title aptly indicating the contents: “Ruling, Identifying, and Counting: Knowledge and Power in Eighteenth Century India.” The role of the census is a large part of this story; Guha’s dismissive swipe at census errors is worth quoting:

It is not difficult to enlarge upon the fallacies and inconsistencies, tropes and clichés of the censuses province by province through the decades, but I will not lengthen this book with such exercises in post-colonial preening. (204)

While “The pursuit of information was an integral part of the maintenance of power and control well before the colonial state” (178), it is also true that “there can be little doubt that the colonial regime pursued its aim of collecting such information with unmatched persistence, tenacity and success” (173–4).

Central to the story of the development of state power both in precolonial and colonial times is taxation and income generation. Data about peoples and populations was to this end despite different approaches of different rulers. Guha documents this reality and shows continuity rather than discontinuity as the colonial era emerges. A good summary of his case:

We see, then, that in managing both high politics and military manpower resources, knowledge and use of community identities were essential components of political management and military administration; stable governance required both. (188)

Ethnic communities or castes were part of the core data, easily manipulated by the new colonial powers, as illustrated by British classification of Marathas as Shudra while Rajputs, due to their political significance offsetting Marathas and Muslims, were elevated beyond the place assigned by Brahmanical orthodoxy and were defined as Kshatriya (201).

The final chapter is “Empires, Nations, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity, c. 1800–2010.” Guha’s opening statement gives an excellent summary:

We have seen how local political organizations were adapted and modified through recent centuries as intensive political competition, enhanced information flows, and the strengthening of markets (including those for military force) changed their internal structures and external relations. The once-solid frame of the village cluster was sapped by military-fiscal regimes through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and largely dissolved in the nineteenth. (210)

The foibles of British power and the maneuverings of locals to adjust to new realities is presented with compelling case studies. The British managed to “achieve a degree of penetration and control over South Asia that no previous government had ever achieved” (227).

The British were completely dependent on local knowledge and leadership, so various subaltern classes/castes rose with the increasing power of the colonial state. As Guha summarizes,

In a vast and diverse subcontinent there were, not surprisingly, major divergences in the composition of this subaltern class across regions. This reflected both long regional histories and the accidents of conquest. (228)

Guha defines five different regions and the distinctives of which locals emerged as powerful. He proceeds to outline some north and south India differences as the dynamic of Dravidianism also came into play (228–231). This is rich material for understanding modern India, and it is not suited for simple summation.

**C**aste “has been delegitimized as ideology without its presence as a political identity being undermined. . . . its religious strand has frayed away but the one binding it to the exercise of power is thicker than ever.” — Guha

The Punjab becomes a central case study. The British, acting consistently with Indian history, used their power to manipulate people and events for the sake of their own longevity. They carefully segregated the army (Punjab being the center of the British military), creating Sikh, Brahman, Rajput, Muslim, etc. battalions to prevent any wider unity that might lead to revolt. The blatant politicization of their economic policies is acknowledged in a statement from 1901 when “agricultural tribes,” which included Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh peoples, were being defined:

Our decision as to any particular tribe must turn largely on political considerations. . . . it seems proper to consider whether its [any particular tribe/caste/group’s] numbers, position, etc., render it of sufficient political or social importance to be considered an agricultural tribe. (239–240, quoting British officer P. J. Fagan from *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* by Norman G. Barrier, Raleigh: Duke University, 115; emphasis added by Guha)

In the end, “the new caste politics everywhere modified patterns of community boundaries and political action” (235). The rise, and more recently the decline, of the Congress political party is succinctly narrated:

The Congress system always rested on a tacit compromise with the locally dominant. The deepening of competitive politics in India gradually made this arrangement less and less viable. (249)

A brief Afterword (four pages) summarizes the core arguments of the book. At the end of the twentieth century, caste

has been delegitimized as ideology without its powerful presence as a political identity being undermined thereby. . . . In other words, its religious strand has frayed away but the one binding it to the exercise of power is thicker than ever. (252)

Caste as ethnicity has also maintained itself across political and religious boundaries, encompassing all the major faiths and all the five countries of South Asia. More than ever, it can only be understood in terms of the ethnic boundary processes that I invoked in the Introduction. (253)

This book has argued that we need to abandon the futile search for a social essence, for the Indic avatar of Hegel’s absolute spirit. It has shown that social structures, old and new, have been politically ordered in ways that we cannot grasp unless we deploy the concept of caste as a bounded corporate body shaped by socio-political power throughout its long history. (255)

In the end, Guha does not have a neat theory or definition, but he has presented a picture of complexity and how various influences have led to the development of what is often

simplistically referred to as “the caste system.” It is rather multiple systems. The ancient Brahmanical efforts to define and control the complexities of social, economic, and political life succeeded no further than British colonial efforts to understand and control Indian society.

Embracing this paradigm of complexity enables one to wrestle with local dynamics, contextual specificities, rather than resting in “grand models and armchair theories” which inhibit an empathetic grasp of locally-experienced realities. This study leaves one resolved to listen and observe more carefully and discern more wisely just what has been and is significant about “caste” in India today. It thus does a great service to all who want to understand any aspect of life in the archipelago of Indian peoples, where, despite the analogy, no people (or person, or village) is an island. **IJFM**

# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, websites, 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.*

## A Divisive New Statement on Social Justice

Missionaries have historically been at the forefront of concern for social justice on the field. But what about the home front? Mark Galli, editor of *Christianity Today*, writing in response to a controversial new statement on social justice, exposes some vulnerabilities at the base of evangelical mission today. (See his September 13, 2018 article, "[Evangelism is a Work of Social Justice](#).") But Michael Gerson writing in the *Washington Post*, objects strongly to this statement with some forceful examples from history. (See "[Christians Are Suffering from Complete Spiritual Blindness](#).")

## Revival of Religion in a Secular China

"China is undergoing a spiritual revival similar to the Great Awakening" says Ian Johnson, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting and author of the book *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*. In a new article entitled, "[Religion in China: Back to the Center of Politics and Society](#)" (for the quarterly, *Religions & Christianity in Today's China*, vol. VIII, no. 3, 2018), Johnson points out that most Western Christians are only informed about the terrible persecution of Christians in Communist China.

But focusing on oppression can blind us to a greater truth: that China is in the midst of an unprecedented religious revival, involving hundreds of millions of people—best estimates put the figure at 300 million: 10 million Catholics, 20 million Muslims, 60 million Protestants,<sup>[1]</sup> and 200 million followers of Buddhism or traditional religions in China.... Progress is not linear—churches are demolished, temples run for tourism, and debates about morality manipulated for political gain—but the overall direction is clear. Faith and values are returning to the center of a national discussion over how to organize Chinese life.

What drives this growth? I would argue that hundreds of millions of Chinese are consumed with doubt about their society and turning to religion and faith for answers that they do not find in the radically secular world constructed around them.

Johnson goes on to say that despite the fact that China's minorities (10% of the population) number over 100 million people

... the brutal reality of China is that ethnic Chinese, also called Han Chinese, dominate China's economic, political, and spiritual life—even in these border lands. For better or worse, it is the spiritual journey of the ethnic Chinese that will determine the soul of the new superpower.

## "At First They Came For . . ."

It appears that to be a Muslim Uighur is to have an [infectious disease](#) that must be eradicated. (See [chilling excerpts](#) from a 12-minute audio Uighur recording made by Communist officials and broadcast on WeChat.) Conservative estimates place the number of adult Muslims detained at 1.5 million, but [Chinese Human Rights Defenders](#) maintain it could be as many as three million. According to a *New York Times* article September 18, 2018, "[China is Detaining Muslims in Vast Numbers](#)," officials have adopted

methods reminiscent of Mao's draconian rule—mass rallies, public confessions and "work teams" assigned to ferret out dissent. They have also wired dusty towns across [Xinjiang](#) with an array of technology that has put the region on the [cutting edge of programs for surveillance cameras](#) as well as facial and voice recognition.

See the riveting September 10, 2018 *Al-Jazeera* article, "[Escape from Xinjiang](#)." A May 2018 *Washington Post* article "[Former Inmates of China's Muslim 'Re-Education Camps' Tell of Brainwashing, Torture](#)," quotes a German expert on the Uighur crackdown as saying, "China's pacification drive in Xinjiang is . . . the country's most intense campaign of coercive social re-engineering since the end of the Cultural Revolution." [Congressional leaders](#) have written the White House demanding sanctions be imposed for such gross human rights violations.

## Marginalized Ethnic Groups: Lessons from North African Church History

Two Norwegian Lutheran missionaries with field experience in Mali and Ethiopia have written a pertinent article looking at both the early Berber church and the Ethiopian Amharic believers. Their thesis deals with the religious identity of marginalized ethnic groups (surely there are striking parallels today!). Read the Lausanne Global Analysis September 2018 paper entitled "[Lessons from North African Church History: Embracing a Theology of Unity in Diversity](#)."

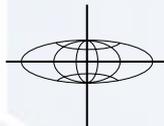
## Crackdown on Dissent, Crack-Up of Democracy?

In a response to the arrests late August of prominent activists on spurious charges provoked by (unrelated) caste violence, India's Supreme Court issued a memorable warning: "Dissent is the safety-valve of democracy. If it is not allowed, the pressure cooker will burst" (the *Economist*, September 13, 2018, "[Ten Indian Activists are Arrested over a Far-Fetched Conspiracy](#)"). Congress party president Rahul Gandhi, the opposition party leader, agreed. He compained in a tweet, "There is only place for one NGO in India and it's called the [RSS](#). Shut down [all other NGOs](#). Jail all activists and shoot those that complain. Welcome to the new India" (the *Economic Times*, August 28, 2018, "There is place for only one NGO in 'the New India'"). **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The number Ian Johnson quotes for Christians refers only to those in the 3-Self movement. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimated in 2015 there were close to [120 million Christians](#) counting both the Han house movement and the 3-Self movement.

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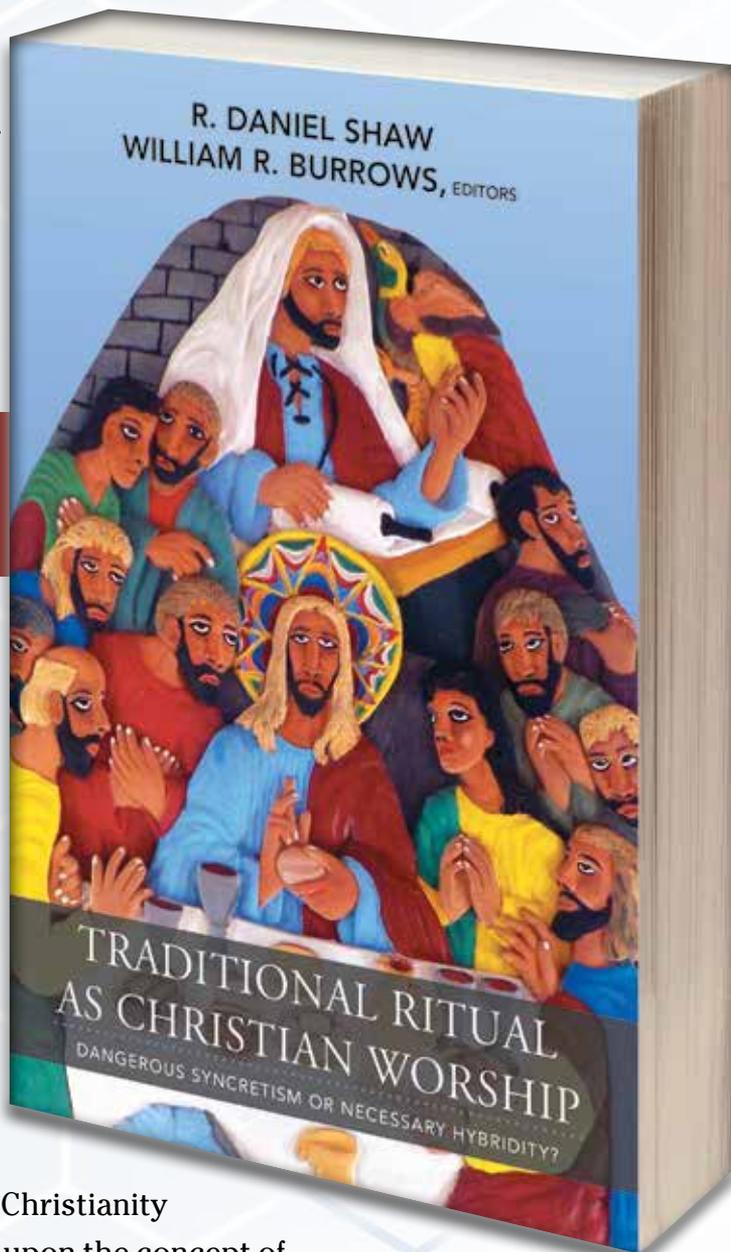
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