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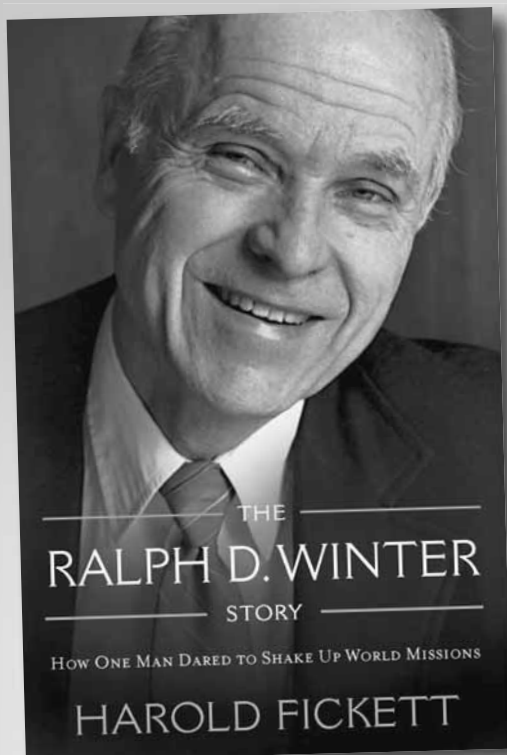
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## NEW RELEASE



### The Ralph D. Winter Story

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Go to [www.RalphDWinter.org](http://www.RalphDWinter.org) for further information.

Ralph Winter was one of the most important and creative mission thinkers of the late 20th century. He was also a fervent supporter of the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. This biography will be inspiring and challenging.

— Lon Allison, Executive Director, Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College

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## *African Missiology En Route*

**I**n 2011, this editorial page highlighted the “African Precedent in Frontier Missiology.”<sup>1</sup> The astute missiological reflections of Bediako, Kalu, and Sanneh from an historic African frontier still seem so applicable to the frontiers we now face across the 10/40 window. They’ve challenged our settled Western notions and created a “missiology en route.”

The upcoming Ghana 2013 Global Mission Consultation is a clear indication that the Africans have arrived in force. African delegates to the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation conference decided to bring that same spirit and vision to Africa this coming September.<sup>2</sup> One could catch this African energy and commitment at MANI (Movement for African National Initiatives) 2011.<sup>3</sup> After three decades of strategic research and continent-wide initiatives into unreached peoples, we can expect our African brothers and sisters to offer some new perspectives under the theme “Discipling the Nations.”

The arc of African missiology is captured in the new autobiography of Lamin Sanneh, the D. Willis James Professor of World Christianity at Yale University, reviewed in this *IJFM* (pp. 148-50). His story makes vividly clear that an indigenous African experience, filtered through the hallowed halls of Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Harvard and Yale can both broaden and sharpen our Western missiological perspective. While not denying a strong critique of colonial mission history, Sanneh places greater value on the emergence of indigenous genius in response to the West. I think we can expect Ghana 2013 to display some of that genius. Rather than just adding new force to already solidified Western mission efforts, this consultation may showcase an African missiology in process. The synergy of African mission leaders and other non-Western participants, most of them schooled in familiar Western mission theory and terminology, might expose the flabby assumptions we still carry in the 21st century.

The ferment created by an African “theology en route” back in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>4</sup> has proved a valuable infrastructure for their emerging “missiology en route.” The vitality and variety of approaches to their African-Christian identity in recent decades is impressive,<sup>5</sup> leading to what Sanneh coins as “frontier Christianities.”<sup>6</sup> You catch a sample of that cultural self-actualization in Part II of Larry Caldwell’s article on ethnohermeneutics (pp. 113-21), where he cites the creative “chicken theology” of the Builsa people of Ghana. It’s an indigenous

*Editorial continued on p. 112*

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interpretation so representative of Africa, and one of the reasons we should anticipate fresh missiological feedback from our African brothers and sisters.

African and other non-Western voices forced Western missions into a half-century of self-assessment. David Taylor, research director of the Global Network of Mission Structures, offers a balanced, honest and vulnerable review of our Protestant mission legacy (pp. 123-28). His posture invites our non-Westerner partners to add their missiological voice to Ghana 2013.

Two other articles reflect two missiological dimensions that can often surface in African missiology. Alan Howell has suggested the need for a "theology of suffering" that takes into account an African cosmology (pp. 129-37). Indigenous African theology has insisted it be free to begin from within its own "world." This is the persuasion of Isaiah M. Dau, whose article in the recent WEA publication, "Sorrow and Blood," is the only indigenous theology of suffering in an anthology of 62 authors on the

subject of persecution and martyrdom.<sup>7</sup> It should be no surprise that it's a new African voice who compares both Western and African perspectives through a biblical lens. The crisis and turmoil of Uganda, Rwanda, Congo and Zimbabwe force any African missiology to address the full scope of evil and suffering.

The African setting of Ghana 2013 might also force us to confront the geopolitical factor in missiology. The mix of the Western nation state and African tribalism is a troubled history. John White feels it's time we compare how the church responds in different national contexts to communism, and he gives an initial analysis of the church in Russia and China (pp. 139-47). Africa has confronted communism, but in the future it's more likely Africans will address the threat of Islam's geopolitical reach out of the north. I suspect a missiology emerging at Ghana 2013 might prioritize how the gospel can survive and flourish amidst brutal and totalitarian anti-Christian regimes.

These articles combine dimensions which create a "missiology en route": Western assessment, cultural sensitivity, hermeneutics, theology, persecution and suffering. We should expect the same at Ghana 2013.

In Him,



Brad Gill  
Editor, IJFM

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *IJFM* 27:1, Winter 2011.

<sup>2</sup> September 25-28, 2013. <http://www.gnms.net/ghana2013>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/mani-2011-abuja-nigeria>.

<sup>4</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, *African Theology En Route* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Lamin Sanneh, "The Significance of the Translation Principle," in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 35.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah M. Dau, "The Problem of Evil and Suffering," in *Sorrow and Blood* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 113.

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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.

# Part II: Reconsidering Our Biblical Roots: Bible Interpretation, the Apostle Paul and Mission Today

by Larry W. Caldwell

## *A Review of Part I*

In Part I (see *IJFM* 29:2, Summer 2012, pp. 91–100), we looked at the hermeneutical methodology that dominates Bible interpretation for evangelicals worldwide—what I call “the Western Two-Step.” The first step responds to the question: *How is a particular Bible passage to be best interpreted?* In this initial step the interpreter attempts to ascertain what the Bible passage first meant to its original hearers, to understand what the passage meant then. Step Two follows as the interpreter attempts to answer the question: *How is that Bible passage best interpreted for today?* In this second step the interpreter applies the results of the first step to the particular audience with whom the interpreter is ministering *now*, being careful to make sure that the second step closely approximates the results of the first step.

I called into question the appropriateness of the international dominance of this “Two Step” approach to Bible interpretation among evangelicals worldwide. I considered the possibility that it might be more appropriate to examine indigenous hermeneutics as the starting point for multi-generational, multi-cultural and cross-cultural mission work today. Building on Kevin Higgins’ work with relevance theory, I examined the role that *cognitive environment* plays on an individual’s “current and potential matrix of ideas, memories, experiences and perceptions.”<sup>41</sup> I maintained that any hermeneutical method, including the Two Step approach, is highly shaped by the cognitive environment of the reader/hearer/interpreter. Furthermore, I argued that we must examine carefully the cognitive environment of ourselves as interpreters, as well as the cognitive environment of the audiences with whom we do

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mission, which would include the various indigenous hermeneutical methods.

Since one's cognitive environment shapes one's hermeneutical methodology, I argued that it's appropriate for both Westerners and non-Westerners alike to use interpretation methods that reflect their own cultural contexts and cognitive environments. I then examined this cultural preference for hermeneutical methods in the New Testament, since the biblical authors model their hermeneutical preference in their interpretation of the Old Testament. Not surprisingly, their hermeneutical methods reflect their own cognitive environments, a tendency especially apparent in the speeches and writings of the apostle Paul. So in Section 1 of Part I we examined the hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environment of the first century AD out of which Paul's hermeneutical methods arose. I gave special attention to the method known as *midrash* (pp. 93–96). In Section 2 I described Paul's use of *midrash* in his speeches in Acts (pp. 96–99).

Now, here in Part II, we will continue our investigation of Paul's hermeneutical methods in the third section. I want to illuminate Paul's use of *midrash* from his letter to the Romans. Section 4 will then give three examples of non-Western approaches to the biblical text that, like Paul's, have arisen out of their own hermeneutical contexts. I'll conclude with some practical suggestions for both Western and non-Western evangelical Bible interpreters on how to use hermeneutical methods that are more culturally appropriate.

### Section 3: The Use of Midrash in the Letters of Paul

The use of midrashic interpretative techniques by the apostle Paul in his sermons in the book of Acts, as demonstrated in Part I, continued throughout his ministry in both oral and written form. His writings available for our study today are all of an epistolary genre, both the letters written to churches and individuals. Paul quotes

from the Old Testament 93 times.<sup>42</sup> Old Testament quotes are found in all of his letters except for Philemon.<sup>43</sup> Since the bulk of these quotations are found in Romans, I will offer two examples from that letter. Though only representative, these two examples amply reflect Paul's use of hermeneutical method across all his letters.

#### Romans 9:6-29

One obvious example of Paul's continued use of *midrash* methodology in referencing the Old Testament is found in chapter 9 of his letter to the Romans, particularly in verses 9–26. Here several Old Testament quotations are strung together by Paul in a very structured way, an example of



what is commonly referred to as the proem *midrash* technique.

This proem form had the following elements:

1. The (Pentateuchal) text for the day.
2. A second text, the proem: the introduction or "opening" for the discourse.
3. Exposition containing additional Old Testament citations, parables or other commentary and linked to the initial texts by catch words.
4. A final text, usually repeating or alluding to the text for the day.<sup>44</sup>

Paul clearly uses this proem *midrash* technique in verses 9:6–29 as seen below:<sup>45</sup>

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

10 Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?

23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 As he says in Hosea: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” 26 and, “It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. 28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

29 It is just as Isaiah said previously: “Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.”

This Romans passage fits the previously mentioned four sections of the proem pattern as follows:<sup>46</sup>

1. Verses 6–8: theme and initial text from Gen. 21:12 (v. 7).
2. Verse 9: a second, supplemental text from Gen. 18:10 (also 18:14).
3. Verses 10–28: exposition containing additional citations: Gen. 25:23 (v. 12); Mal. 1:2, 3 (v. 13); Ex. 33:19 (v. 15); Ex. 9:16 (v. 17); Isa. 29:16, 45:9 (v. 20); Hos. 2:23 (v. 25); Hos. 1:10 (v. 26); and Isa. 10:22, 23 (v. 28)—all linked to the initial texts by the catchwords **kal ein** and **uiöv** (“calls,” “called” and “son,” vs. 12, 24–26, 27).
4. Verse 29: a final text from Isa. 1:9 alluding to the initial text with the catchword **sperma** (“descendants”).

Paul’s argument, moving from one proof-text to another, is interrupted twice in order to deal with false inferences (and possibly an objector in v. 19) that may have arisen from the texts with which he deals. Paul is actualizing

**U**nlike many scholars today, Jewish-Christian readers at Rome would not have been troubled by Paul’s hermeneutical methods.

these Old Testament texts to the current needs of his audience in the proem *midrash* style to which the majority were undoubtedly accustomed. Being familiar with this style, the Jewish-Christian readers at Rome would have understood Paul’s use of the Old Testament quotes relative to the question posed in verses 1–5. Unlike the quandary of many scholars today, they would not have been troubled by Paul’s hermeneutical methods, for it was in keeping with the rabbinic style of that day.<sup>47</sup> Paul (like Jesus before him) was a master teacher intimately acquainted with the proem *midrash* technique.

#### Romans 10:6–8

Another example of Paul’s midrashic hermeneutical techniques can be seen in his use of Deuteronomy 30:12–14 in Romans 10:6–8. Paul writes:

But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming . . .

Since at least the time of John Calvin exegetes have noticed that Paul’s treatment of Deuteronomy 30:12–14 is not in keeping with the general context of that passage. As Calvin expressed it,

This passage may for two reasons cause considerable difficulty to the reader. Paul seems to have not only distorted the proper sense of the passage, but also to have changed the words to a different meaning.<sup>48</sup>

But is Paul really distorting and changing? Could it not be that he is simply following a familiar hermeneutical technique which is unfamiliar to Calvin and many modern exegetes?

What Paul is doing here in Deuteronomy can be better understood by examining the original context. In Deuteronomy 30:11–14, Moses is trying to impress upon his audience that the law is not too difficult to obey:

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Paul, in Romans 10:6–8, takes these same words of Moses and applies them directly to the righteousness which is by faith in Christ. In so doing his hermeneutical methodology exhibits characteristics of *midrash*: he actualizes the Deuteronomy passage and reinterprets it in light of the present context of the historical fact of Christ’s death (“that is, to bring Christ down”) and resurrection (“that is, to bring Christ up from the dead”). Paul simply interprets the “that” of Deuteronomy in light of the “this” of Jesus Christ. The quotation of the Deuteronomy passage, in other words, is actualized and reinterpreted in light of the new context and present situation of those to whom Paul is writing this epistle. The new context compels Paul to adapt this Old Testament quote for purposes of New Testament faith.

#### Section 4: Three Examples of Indigenous Non-Western Hermeneutical Approaches to the Biblical Text

Having examined briefly the hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environment out of which Paul’s hermeneutical methods

arose, and having focused on several examples of Paul's hermeneutical approaches, we now can rightfully proceed to the next question: "How does all of this relate to interpreting the Bible in multi-generational, multi-cultural and cross-cultural situations today?" The answer to this question is found in contemporary indigenous approaches that, like Paul's, have arisen out of their own hermeneutical contexts. We will look briefly at three examples of hermeneutics being done in three different non-Western contexts.

### Hermeneutics Among the Cotobato Manobo of the Philippines

The first example comes from the Cotobato Manobo people of Mindanao in the Philippines.<sup>49</sup> The Cotobato Manobo have four major hermeneutical methods by which they interpret their own vast oral literature: *peligad* (figurative speech that is interpreted according to what it symbolizes); *tegudon* (the re-telling of historical doctrine from their legends that teach Cotobato Manobo what they should believe today); *telaki* (simple stories that end with an application designed to teach younger Cotobato Manobos the Manobo ideals and values in life); and *duyuy* (the expression of emotion through stylized singing). Let's look at a concise example of the first, *peligad*, and how it may be used by the Cotobato Manobo to interpret the Bible.

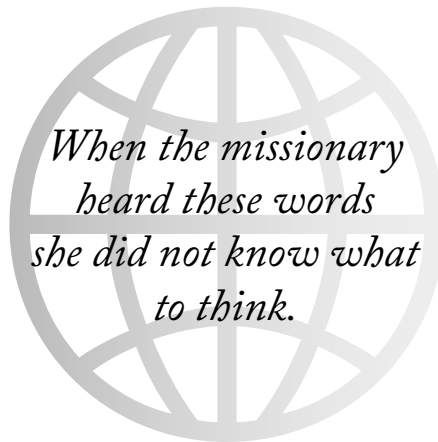
This example involves a newly arrived missionary to the Cotobato Manobo who heard the tribal leader speak the following words while in dialogue with another man:

My friend, a poor man from a far village, about eight mountains away, together with his family, has hiked the long mountain trail bringing with them a precious rice seedling. They are hoping to find a fertile field. Now, outside are the twenty-feet-that-walk waiting to be given as a gift if he is allowed to plant his precious rice seed in somebody's field. And if it is well with you and your family he wants to plant it in your fertile field.

When the missionary heard these words she did not know what to think. She became even more puzzled when the man joyously answered the leader:

I am privileged and honored to be chosen among the many fields. Yes, tell the poor man to do as he pleases and that I will gladly receive his gift. Expect us when the moon first appears in the eastern sky.

The missionary later discovered that the conversation was actually about a wedding arrangement. The poor man was the father. The "rice seed" was the young man for whom the father wanted to find a wife and the "fertile field" was the young maiden who was the daughter of the man to whom the leader was talking. The "twenty-feet-



that-walk" were five horses (the bridal price). The receiving of the gift and the promised visit meant that the man accepted the proposal and would later bring the bride to the groom's village for the wedding.

This cross-cultural illustration from the Cotobato Manobo illustrates how the hermeneutical method of *peligad* is used. Throughout this conversation figurative speech was interpreted according to what it symbolized (a wedding proposal). All of the wedding arrangements were made without mentioning the actual details, but the conversation was understood by the speaker and hearer because they both knew what was being referred to by the figurative speech. Awareness of the

hermeneutical method of *peligad*—something shared in light of a similar cognitive environment—made the conversation understandable to both speaker and hearer, but not to the missionary outsider who knew little about this interpretive method. The fact that both Manobos knew the hermeneutical rules brought the conversation to a successful conclusion.

What literary genre from the Bible lends itself to the *peligad* hermeneutical method? The parables of Jesus should come to mind. While Western interpreters often struggle for the main point of comparison (*tertium comparationis*) in many of these parables, the *peligad* of the Cotobato Manobo helps the interpreter to arrive at essentially the same exegetical conclusion. For example, in Mark 4:30-32 (cf. Matt. 13:31-32), Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God and a mustard seed. The comparison of the two drives the hearer to look for the main point of comparison: the growth from insignificant to significant. The *peligad*, when applied to this same parable, interprets the figurative language in light of what it symbolizes: Jesus uses the figurative language of mustard seed to fully-grown tree to symbolize the kingdom and its growth. Either the method of *tertium comparationis* or the *peligad* allow the interpreter to arrive at the same basic conclusion. In this case, the *peligad* is perhaps a more appropriate hermeneutical method for the Cotobato Manobo culture.<sup>50</sup>

### Hermeneutics among the Builsa of Ghana

The second example comes from the Builsa people of Ghana, West Africa.<sup>51</sup> Many proverbs are useful for expressing Christian truth and these Builsa people have a tremendous number of indigenous proverbs. These old proverbs often express values that have been adopted as part of their Builsa Christian worldview, their cognitive environment. These indigenous proverbs have become effective carriers



of biblical truth, as evidenced in the following story. It concerns a group of Builsa pastors and the missionary working among them:

Twelve Builsa pastors attended the meeting and Pastor Kofi [one of the Builsa pastors] opened with the proverb [that has helped his own faith in *Yezu* (Jesus)], "*Nurubiik a labri ka kpiak kawpta po*" (A human being hides in the feathers of a fowl). Joe [a missionary to the Builsa people] was totally puzzled, while the Builsa seemed to enjoy reflecting on this proverb. Upon Joe's request, the church leaders explained the background of the proverb.

In the life of the Builsa people, fowls are used to hide shame or problems. If someone comes upon a problem requiring money, they can always sell some of the fowls at market and then use the money to solve the problem. In this way, they hide behind the chicken's feathers so that the shame of the problem does not reach the person. The fowl is also commonly used in situations requiring sacrifice to the ancestors or earth shrines for problems such as sickness, infertility, drought, famine, etc. The fowl is sacrificed to the ancestors or earth shrine to solve the problem and cover our shame. In this way, a Builsa will feel safe or protected as long as there are fowls around the house; hence, they feel they can "hide inside the feathers of the fowl."

Joe was catching on slowly, "So the chicken is an essential part of the Builsa culture. It is used to solve problems so that the chicken receives the brunt of the problem and it will not reach us. If we have chickens around our homes, then we feel safe from dangers that may come. Is that right?"

"Yes, Joe, chickens help us to feel safe and protected. They are sacrificed or sold for us. They take our problems upon them and we hide safely in their feathers. They also help us initiate friendships," responded Kofi. "If I want to start a friendship with someone, then I offer them a chicken for us to share a meal together, or I offer them a chicken to take home with them."

**A**re you sure that's in the Bible? Let me read that." The missionary was learning new things from Scripture that he had overlooked before.

Kofi continued, "Now that I am a *Kristobiik* [Christian], I feel that *Yezu* is the chicken that I hide under. When problems come, I can run to *Yezu* in prayer and ask him to cover my shame and protect me. He will bear the full impact of the problem that has come upon me, and I can safely rest in His feathers."

Immanuel added, "When we rest in the feathers of *Yezu*, then we no longer need to have a *jiuk*, *bagi*, or any other black medicine to protect us. The feathers of *Yezu* will cover us—our relationship with Him assures us that He will cover us with His wings. *Naawen Wani* [the Bible] says that *Naawen* [God] will 'cover you with his feathers and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart' (Ps 91:4)."

Joe was stunned. He remembered reading this verse in seminary while studying in the West. The imagery of "hiding under the wings of God" was strange to his ears and it was difficult for him to gain the meaning of the metaphor back then. Now, the meaning was starting to dawn on him. The perspective of the Builsa culture brought out a richer meaning of this Scripture passage. This dealt with protection from harm, shame, and difficulties. It also implied a close relationship with God, who was willing to receive the brunt of our difficulties as we hid under his protection. "What a wonderful metaphor," Joe thought to himself, "and it took another cultural perspective for me to gain this insight." Little did Joe know that the best was yet to come.

Immanuel added, "This proverb has touched me deeply and it helps me to understand the heart of *Yezu*." The earnestness in his voice revealed that this was a deep matter of discipleship for him. Joe was eager to hear more.

"When I hear this proverb and read Matthew 23:37, I can feel *Yezu's*

heart and desire for us Builsa people," continued Immanuel. "*Yezu* says, 'How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.' That is *Yezu's* desire for us: to protect us, cover our shame, receive the brunt of our difficulties. That is a closer friend than I have ever known!"

Kofi's eyes lit up, "Are you sure that is in *Naawen Wani*—Let me see that." He read slowly in Buli how *Yezu* wanted to "*pawbi ni meena a tara ase kpiak ale pawbi ka bias dii la*." This literally means to "wrap you all up like a fowl wraps up her children (under her wings)." Since fowls are a daily part of the life-experience of the Builsa, the picture of a hen wrapping up her chicks under her wings in order to protect them from hawks and other dangers was a very vivid and concrete picture in Kofi's mind. Kofi sat back and smiled as he reflected on this picture of *Yezu* and what it meant to him.

David then added an application from the book of Ruth, "Do you remember how Ruth was a widow? Like our widows here in Buluk, she had little hope for the future. When she placed herself under *Naawen's* feathers, *Naawen* covered her shame and brought about a wonderful blessing. Listen to the praise she received from Boaz in Ruth 2:12, 'May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge'" (emphasis added).

It was Joe's turn to be surprised, "Are you sure that is in the Bible? Let me read that." Joe had read the book of Ruth several times before but he never noticed the imagery of "hiding under the wings of God." He could now feel Ruth's desperation of widowhood, and he also understood the imagery of taking refuge under God's wings. Joe was learning new things from Scripture that he had overlooked before.

For the next month, they chewed on these thoughts. This proverb raised other connections to Scripture. Could this proverb give additional understanding as to the significance of the cherubim's wings covering the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle (Ex 25:17-22) and God's words, "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony, I will meet with you" (Ex 25:22)? This imagery was repeated in Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 8:6-11) where "The cherubim spread their wings over the places of the ark" (1 Kgs 8:7). Again, Joe wondered if it may explain some of the imagery behind God carrying Israel on his wings when bringing them out of Egypt (Ex 19:4), as well as shed some light on the hard to understand passages in Ezekiel 10, etc.

Joe was realizing that Builsa culture offered another perspective from which to see biblical truth that he normally overlooked. The proverb was the window to open this understanding for him; he was eager to learn more.

In the above example, an indigenous proverb engaged the Bible and handcrafted a uniquely Builsa "chicken theology," a theology that works for the Builsa because it fits so well with their cognitive environment. This proverb—as we see it discussed within the Builsa hermeneutical community—shapes their Christianity in terms and concepts that are uniquely Builsa. Notice how the Builsa are essentially using *midrash* ("that is this") to explain biblical truth in light of their own Builsa proverb.

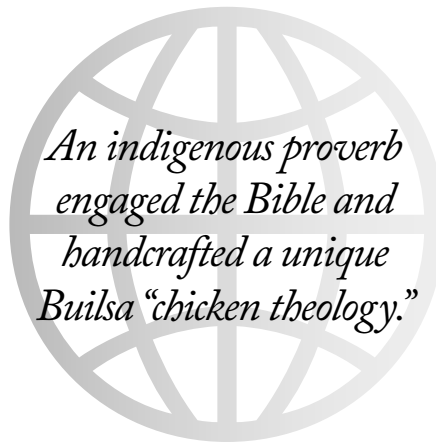
### Hermeneutics among a Multi-Lingual Community of Muslim Followers of Isa

The third example comes from Kevin Higgins and an extended Bible study he participated in with Muslim followers of Jesus from several different people groups.<sup>52</sup> They had gathered together to study Luke's Gospel, and now they were studying the birth account of Jesus. What follows is Higgins' analysis of the discussion that ensued following the reading of the passage concerning

Elizabeth: "After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion" (Lk. 1:24). Higgins recounts the group discussion:

*Why did Elizabeth stay in her home for five months? As [one] respondent went on to say, "No woman would do that. It seems very strange."*

Of all the questions that I might have foreseen or guessed would arise (so-called theological questions, etc.), it was this last question about why Elizabeth remained in her house for five months that prompted the most passionate, heated, intense, and lengthy discussion. Clearly this was something important, though I have never found any other group in my studies in the USA who thought so!



As the groups went round and round three possible answers emerged as the main contenders:

1. Perhaps this was their culture? This took a long time to come to, until one man related how he had become aware that women in peoples within his country other than his own cultural group did have different customs after the birth of a child.
2. I suggested that perhaps since Elizabeth was elderly, she was worried that too much exertion would endanger the baby (it seemed so natural a possibility to me, given my cognitive environment).
3. She remained five months as an offering of special thanks and praise to Allah for this special child.

Suggestion number two was vigorously debated and in the end rejected with great fervor, drawing on the argument that Elizabeth could not possibly be afraid for the welfare of the child. The reasoning proceeded like this:

*Jibril* [Gabriel] had already told Elizabeth what Allah was going to do in this child's future, so that meant that this future would happen. There was no risk.

Answers 2 and 3 are wonderful examples of how our cognitive environment shapes even the things we think are conceivable answers, let alone what we settle on.

In the end they left this as an open question. If we had voted I think #3 would have beat out #1 as the favored answer. It might have been a close vote, but #3 would have won the debate. Again, in a culture where men elect to go on various lengths of tableeq trips in order to fulfill vows or compensate for a sin, or gain favor, or draw near to Allah, and where Sufis travel from one place to another as a part of various rituals and initiations, the idea of someone deciding to remain five months at home for a religious reason would be a natural contender for understanding Elizabeth's actions.

As Higgins observed, suggestion number 2 was the most obvious explanation according to his own cognitive environment. However, as this hermeneutical community of Jesus followers mid-rashed the Lucan text their suggested answers (especially suggestion number 3) reflected their own hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environment. They actualized the text in light of their own cultural experience and in so doing gave a new and significant interpretation to a passage mostly dismissed by Western interpreters like Higgins.

These three examples show the promise of hermeneutics when different peoples use indigenous hermeneutical resources arising directly from their own unique cognitive environments. There should be little doubt that the hermeneutical methods of the Cotobato Manobo Christians, the Builsa Christians, and

the Muslim followers of Isa—as well as other non-Western cultures like theirs—may one day play important roles in the overall hermeneutical task of the worldwide church. The Christian world's understanding of the Bible will be infinitely richer as a result.

### Conclusion

What I have been arguing for in this article is that God not only works through culture—hence the need to communicate the truths of Scripture in culturally relevant forms—but, correspondingly, that *God also works through the hermeneutical processes and cognitive environments inherent in each culture*. This is what the discipline of ethnohermeneutics is all about. Ethnohermeneutics is simply Bible interpretation done in multi-generational, multi-cultural and cross-cultural contexts that, as far as possible, uses dynamic hermeneutical methods which already reside in the culture. Its primary goal is to interpret and communicate the truths of the Bible in ways that will be best understood by the receptor culture.<sup>53</sup>

As we have seen, this sensitivity to interpretive method, indeed, is modeled for us in the Bible itself. That's where the very roots of ethnohermeneutics are found. New Testament writers like the apostle Paul—through the guidance of the Holy Spirit—used their own culturally relevant hermeneutical methods in communicating Old Testament truths in light of the cognitive environment of their particular New Testament audience. The discipline of ethnohermeneutics helps us discover both the hermeneutical milieu as well as the particular hermeneutical method used by the New Testament writers. Such discoveries reveal a direct correlation between milieu (Jewish first century AD) and method (*midrash*). In the case of the apostle Paul, the hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environment of the first century AD directly influenced his method of interpreting the Old Testament text for his audience.

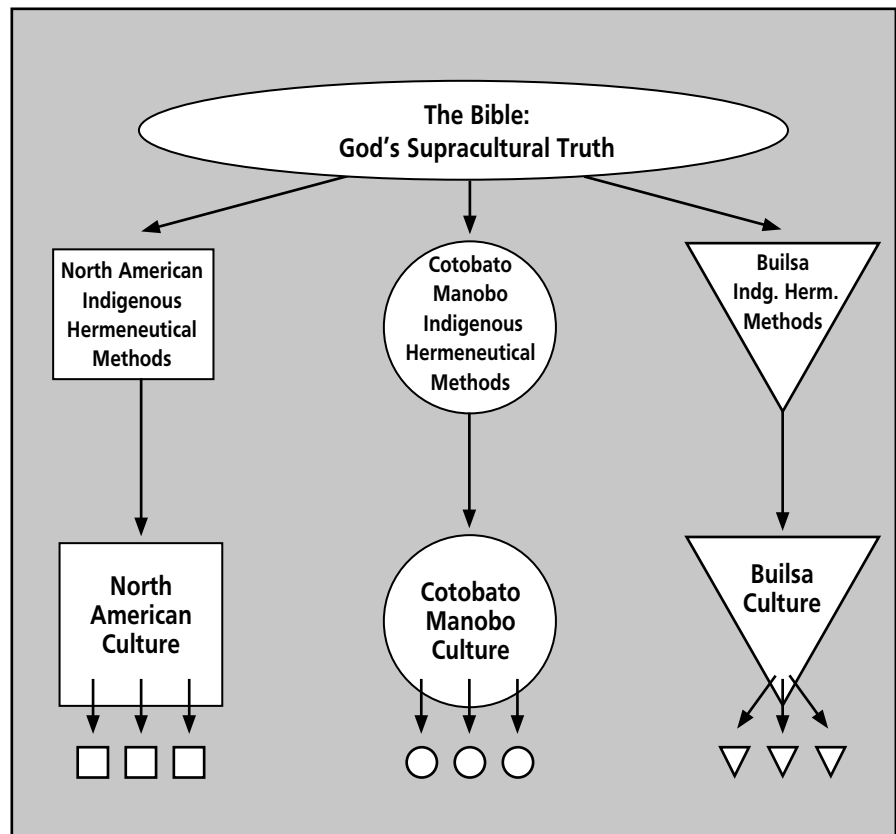
**T***his sensitivity to interpretive method is modeled for us in the Bible itself. That's where the very roots of ethnohermeneutics are found.*

All of this gives evidence to the fact that *what* the New Testament writers wrote is inspired, but *not* their specific hermeneutical methods. This fact is significant for all Bible interpreters today. Why? Because it means that no one hermeneutical method is inspired; each and every method simply emerges from its own unique hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environment. The dominance of one particular method does not necessarily indicate God's favor or that there is a single, Spirit-filled, universal method. Rather, other factors give rise to a method's predominance, like colonization/westernization in the case of the Two Step approach.<sup>54</sup>

During the past two millennia God, in his infinite wisdom and creativity, chose to work through the hermeneutical pro-

cesses inherent in the various cultures within each historical period to make his Word clear and understandable. He used the hermeneutical milieu of the first century AD to impart his inspired message through New Testament writers like the apostle Paul and his use of *midrash*. He did the same during the thousand years of the Middle Ages through the interpretive use of allegory.<sup>55</sup> For twenty-first century North Americans, the Bible is made relevant through the hermeneutical methods inherent in our Western world, which would include historical criticism and the Two Step approach. In like manner, God desires to use Filipino hermeneutical methods to reach Filipino audiences, Builsa methods to reach Builsa people, and so on, as illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2. Different Hermeneutical Methods for Different Cultures

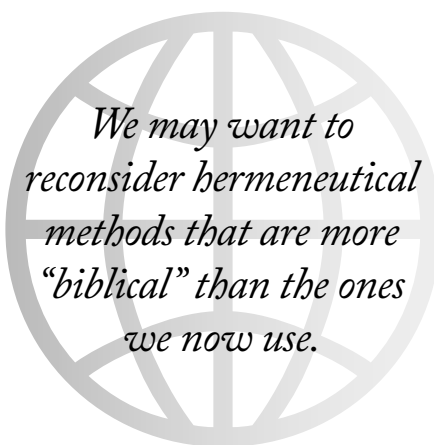


If God wishes to use the hermeneutical methods that are appropriate for each culture, then both Western and non-Western interpreters must seriously consider using hermeneutical methods appropriate for both their own as well as for their target culture. We must reconsider our own biblical hermeneutical roots, and we must return to the Bible as our guide for interpreting Scripture in the multi-generational, multi-cultural and cross-cultural contexts in which we do mission today. The apostle Paul was careful to interpret the Bible in light of his own culture's hermeneutical cognitive environment. Clearly we who are Bible interpreters today can do no less.

With that end in mind, here are five practical suggestions for those who wish to reconsider their biblical-hermeneutical roots in order to facilitate better Bible interpretation in mission today:

1. *Study* the hermeneutical methods that Jesus and the New Testament writers used when they interpreted the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup> If the Bible is indeed the final authority for everything that we evangelicals believe and do, it behooves us, does it not, to at least be familiar with the hermeneutical methods of our Lord and Savior, as well as his servant, the apostle Paul? We may want to reconsider hermeneutical methods that are more “biblical” than the ones we now use.
2. *Know* your own culture's hermeneutical methods. This is a given for those involved in cross-cultural mission, but it is also important for those ministering in the increasingly multi-cultural Western world. The maxim “know yourself” is incredibly important for all Bible interpreters. For until you know how your own hermeneutical method arose from your own culture's hermeneutical milieu you will not be able to see how those methods may influence how you interpret and teach those who are of a different culture from yourself.

3. *Understand* the worldviews and thought processes of those among whom you are working, especially if you are working multi-generationally, multi-culturally or cross-culturally (and, these days, who isn't?). Here are some questions to ask: How do *they* process the meaning of the biblical text from within their own hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environment? How do *they* interpret reality and how can that same hermeneutical thinking process be used to help them interpret the Bible for themselves? How can you both model and encourage them to use *their own* indigenous hermeneutical methods, rather than the rudimentary Western hermeneutical



methods based upon historical criticism and the Two Step approach? I believe that some of our current dialogues concerning “insider movements” and the translation of familial biblical terms<sup>57</sup> would benefit from this understanding.

4. *Train* Christian leaders—both Western and non-Western—in how to best interpret the Bible for their own contexts. This may involve extensive curriculum review and change in theological training institutions in order to really help all Christians use culturally appropriate hermeneutical methods when they interpret the Bible.<sup>58</sup> At the very least it should involve supplementing the

Two Step approach with more culturally appropriate approaches. It should include instruction on how to understand one's own hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environment, as well as how to discover the hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environments of people from a different culture.

5. *Remember* the Holy Spirit wants the Bible understood by others just as much as you do. Rely on the Holy Spirit to guide you, and instruct your hermeneutical communities to do the same.

In conclusion, I reach back one hundred years to a quotation from the eminent missiologist Roland Allen.<sup>59</sup> Allen described the imposition of foreign governmental systems on native peoples in his day with striking candor; however, I believe his words speak just as powerfully to the imposition of hermeneutical methods by one group of people upon another:

Moreover, the systems which we import are systems which we acknowledge to be full of imperfections, the sources of many difficulties and dangers at home....[W]e bind it upon a people who have not inherited it. To us the burden is in a sense natural.... We know its history. It has grown upon us. It belongs to us. It is our own. But it is not the converts' in other lands. They do not know its history, nor is it fitted to their shoulders. They will doubtless make their own mistakes. They will create their own burdens; but they need not be laden with ours.<sup>60</sup>

May we evangelicals of the 21st century, who have applied Allen's warnings across so many aspects of mission today, also hear a voice calling us to greater awareness of our hermeneutical methods. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>41</sup> Kevin Higgins, “Diverse Voices: Hearing Scripture Speak in a Multicultural Movement.” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 27:4, (Winter 2010), 190.

<sup>42</sup> For the number of times Paul quotes the Old Testament cf. Ellis, *Paul's Use of*

the Old Testament, 11 and Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, originally published in 1902 (New York, NY: KTAV, 1968), 392. About one-third of all the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament are made by Paul.

<sup>43</sup> For a more detailed examination of Paul's quotations from the Old Testament see Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 10-37.

<sup>44</sup> Earl E. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 155. Ellis assumes that the proem structure was in fact in use by the first century AD, and thus a structure readily available to the writers of the New Testament including Paul. To assume an early first century date for the proem structure makes sense since this structure is found in many places in the New Testament (see, for example, Jesus' use of the proem form in Luke 10:25-37).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 46, and his *Prophecy and Hermeneutic*, 154 and 219; see also William Richard Stegner, "Romans 9:6-29—A Midrash." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 22 (1984), 37-52.

<sup>46</sup> Adapted from the example given by Earl E. Ellis, "How the New Testament Uses the Old," in *New Testament Interpretation. Essays on Principals and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 155. Jesus also used a modified proem *midrash* technique in the parable of the Good Samaritan as found in Luke 10:25-37; cf. Ellis, 158.

<sup>47</sup> For example, scholars oftentimes are at a loss as to how to interpret the predestinarian texts in this Romans passage—specifically the Hosea quotes in Rom. 9:25-26—and link them to a particular eschatological schemata. However, when these same texts are viewed in relationship to their purpose in Paul's overall proem *midrash* here in the context of 9:6-29, the need to minutely discern what Paul is doing with these two verses from Hosea loses its urgency. These verses simply are supplemental texts used to bolster Paul's overarching argument. Therefore, they should not be viewed as key texts on eschatological doctrine in and of themselves.

<sup>48</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians*, trans. R. Mackenzie, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Originally published in 1540 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 224.

<sup>49</sup> This example has been adapted from a paper submitted by one of my former Asian Theological Seminary students, Mila

Gultiano Cagape, entitled, "The Indigenous Hermeneutical Methodology of the Cotobato Manobo: How Does It Apply to Bible Interpretation?" Cagape worked as a missionary among the Cotobato Manobo for many years.

<sup>50</sup> This example from the Cotobato Manobo reminds those of us steeped in the study of written material that oral cultures (including non-reading peoples in written cultures) use different hermeneutical methods in regards to how they interpret their oral traditions and literature. As a result, since a large portion of the New Testament text was first communicated orally, including the words of Jesus and a large percentage of the writings now known as the Gospels, serious study of oral hermeneutical methodologies is warranted.

<sup>51</sup> This example is taken adapted from W. Jay Moon's *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture. A Narrative Portrayal of Builsa Proverbs Contextualizing Christianity in Ghana*. American Society of Missiology Monograph Series 5 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 111-113.

<sup>52</sup> Higgins, "Diverse Voices," 193.

<sup>53</sup> For further reading on ethnohermeneutics see my articles: "Cross-Cultural Bible Interpretation: A View from the Field." *Phronesis. A Journal of Asian Theological Seminary* 3/1 (1996), 13-35; "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context." *Journal of Asian Mission* 1/1 (1999), 21-43; "A Response to the Responses of Tappeiner and Whelchel to Ethnohermeneutics." *Journal of Asian Mission* 2/1 (2000), 135-145; and "Towards an Ethnohermeneutical Model for a Lowland Filipino Context." *Journal of Asian Mission* 7/2 (2005), 169-193. For an excellent recent application of ethnohermeneutical methodology to Bible interpretation from a Tongan cognitive environment see Nāsili Vaka'uta, *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise. Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). Though Vaka'uta prefers the phrase "contextual hermeneutics" to my term "ethnohermeneutics" (3, n. 8) his first objective is "to develop a theoretical framework or a way of reading that is informed by Tongan cultural perspectives and knowledge in general, and the experiences of Tongan *tu'a* [a Tongan common person] in particular. Tongan *ways of being* (i.e. the ways they act, relate, and behave) and *ways of knowing* (i.e. the way they think, understand, and construct knowledge) . . . provide the ontological and epistemological foundations of this Tongan *way of reading*.

They offer the directions for interpretation and provide the insights for the formulation of methods." His second objective is "to chart a methodology for the analysis of biblical texts based on the proposed [Tongan] theoretical framework. This involves developing new methods and tools of analysis, rather than borrowing and employing existing methods of interpretation," 2 (his emphasis). Vaka'uta then tests this all out with an examination of Ezra chapters 9 and 10 from a Tongan ethnohermeneutical perspective.

<sup>54</sup> For a study of Western colonization in relationship to Asian theological education see my "How Asian is Asian Theological Education?" in *Tending the Seedbeds. Educational Perspectives on Theological Education in Asia*, ed. Allan Harkness (Quezon City, RP: Asia Theological Association, 2010), 23-45. Here I argue that past colonization efforts in Asia by the West—which includes Western missionary efforts—has had profound effects on the way theology is taught in Asia, including the dominance of Western hermeneutical methods.

<sup>55</sup> Rather than ridiculing the use of allegory, as do many scholars today, we would rather do well to understand how it functioned within the hermeneutical milieu and cognitive environments of the Middle Ages and how it helped to bring gospel truths to largely non-reading cultures; indeed, allegory may again prove to be an appropriate method for the non-reading masses of today.

<sup>56</sup> For an analysis and examples of how Jesus interpreted the Old Testament see my *Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics: Reclaiming the Hermeneutical Methodologies of the New Testament for Bible Interpreters in the Twenty-First Century*. Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, Pasadena, CA (1990).

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, *IJFM* issues related to insider movements (e.g., 21:4, 23:3, 24:1, 24:2, 25:3, 26:1, 26:4, and 27:1) and familial terms (28:3).

<sup>58</sup> For the appropriateness of teaching Western methods in non-Western theological institutions see my "How Asian is Asian Theological Education?"; cf. also my "Interpreting the Bible With the Poor," in *The Church and Poverty in Asia*, ed. Lee Wanak (Manila, RP: OMF Literature, 2008), 171-180.

<sup>59</sup> Roland Allan, *Missionary Methods. St. Paul's or Ours?* Originally published in 1912 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962).

<sup>60</sup> Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 145.

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IT USED TO BE THAT WHEN MY WORLDVIEW WAS CHALLENGED, I WOULDN'T KNOW HOW TO RESPOND. INSIGHT HELPED ME ESTABLISH CONFIDENCE; IT PROVIDED THAT BACKBONE OF HISTORY AND THEOLOGY THAT ALLOWS ME TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITHOUT FEAR OF IGNORANCE AT A SECULAR UNIVERSITY.

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# An Enduring Legacy: Reflections on the Contribution of Western Protestant Missions from a Frontier Mission Perspective

by David Taylor

The impact of Western missions towards reaching unreached peoples has been considerable over the last two centuries. From the very outset, the Western missionary movement was cross-cultural in its orientation and frontier-focused, with a determination to go where the church was not. In fact, for the first century of Protestant mission, the exclusive focus of the movement was on the non-Christian peoples of the world. It was only really in the early 20th century that significant church-planting work among “Christianized” peoples such as Orthodox and Catholics commenced, and this was primarily the work of American missions. In this essay, I will examine both the strengths and weaknesses of the last two hundred years of Protestant Western Missions, anticipate what the future may look like for the movement, and finally offer recommendations to the non-Western mission movement with regard to lessons learned.

When examining something as large as Western Protestant Missions it will be necessary to make rather sweeping generalizations, which in many cases may seem to contradict one another. With hundreds of mission agencies and denominations involved in the effort, along with a wide range of missiological practices and theological positions, one can only hope to paint with broad strokes. Even so, it is often helpful to take a step backwards and see what the composite of those broad strokes reveals, to capture in a sense the big picture of what is happening (and has happened) through these contrasting shades of color that can bring definition to the movement.

## ***Strengths of the Movement***

The legacy of Western Protestant missions exists as a living testimony in every continent and country in the world. From China’s 100 million house-church members, to Latin America’s 80 million Pentecostals, to sub-Saharan Africa’s 1,200 majority Christian tribes,<sup>1</sup> this 200-year legacy of blood, sweat, tears and faith has demonstrated the power of the gospel in a way the world has

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never before seen; indeed, the world will never be the same.

Western Protestant missions brought to the missionary tradition five important strengths, among many others, that have had (and continue to have) significant impact in pioneering frontier areas. These five strengths are: 1) an emphasis on Bible translation and study; 2) a push for indigenization; 3) the development of missiology as an academic discipline; 4) the formation of partnerships for world evangelization; and 5) the facilitation of lay involvement<sup>2</sup> in mission work.

### Bible Translation and Study

With regard to Bible translation, it is fair to say that the Protestant mission movement brought about a restoration of the early Bible translation tradition of the Christian church. In the last two hundred years, the Scriptures have been published in almost 2,800 languages,<sup>3</sup> almost all of this work being done by Western, Protestant missionaries. In contrast, fewer than 50 Bible translations were completed before the Protestant Reformation. Though it took the major Protestant groups almost three hundred years to get involved in cross-cultural missions, once they committed to the Great Commission, they brought with them a passion for Bible study and a tradition of translation into mother tongue languages. (Even so, they largely failed to see the need for mother-tongue Bible translators. Thus today, most of the world's Bible translations are actually the work of non-mother-tongue speakers. This unfortunate oversight is only now being remedied, most notably through the work of the Seed Company, a Wycliffe Bible Translators affiliate, which is focusing on training and empowering mother-tongue Bible translators.)

Protestant missions also established thousands of Bible schools around the world, which focused almost exclusively on teaching young people how to preach, teach, and exegete the Scriptures. These Bible schools became the primary engine for church-planting in

many fields, as church-planting itself was incorporated into the program. Indeed, in many schools, in order to graduate, you must start a new church! So we see that the emphasis on Bible study and knowledge contributed to the growth of so-called "parachurch" institutions which ultimately led to church growth in many fields. Interestingly, this pattern of parachurch structures powering church multiplication parallels the Celtic Missionary Movement that evangelized much of Northern Europe. However, one drawback to the contemporary Bible school method is that it has often displaced older people as candidates for leadership in the church, since such schools primarily attract unemployed, unmarried young men.



While this approach has provided the schools with a steady stream of candidates, it may have resulted in marginalizing the real change agents in society, typically older, married men with a family, source of income, and established social position. Interestingly, these were the kind of people that Paul urged Titus to appoint as elders in Crete—not single, unemployed young men.<sup>4</sup>

### Indigenization

The second strength of the Protestant Missionary Movement was the early push for indigenization. By indigenization I mean the process of establishing indigenous churches led by indigenous leaders using contextualized worship forms. To a large

extent, the translation of the Bible into mother tongues provided the basis for indigenization. As early as the mid-nineteenth century we began to see an emphasis on indigenization, championed by such missiologists as Henry Venn and John Nevius. Hudson Taylor's agency, the China Inland Mission, was one of the first to base their entire strategy on working with indigenous evangelists. This is in contrast with Catholic missions, which for centuries imported priests into mission fields such as Latin America and Africa, and insisted that worship services be performed in Latin.

This only began to change in the latter-half of the 20th century following the Vatican II Council. Protestant missions, on the other hand, were much quicker to understand the need for an indigenous clergy preaching in the local language, and were much more efficient in encouraging the development of indigenous leaders. That is not to say that this process was altogether perfect among Protestant missions. Ralph Winter observed that the Student Volunteer Movement of the late 19th century and early 20th century actually resulted in a generational set back towards indigenization because they brought with them a Western elitist standard for formal education.<sup>5</sup> Since they were college graduates from high society, many elevated the requirements for ordination, insisting upon prolonged seminary training. This significantly slowed down church-growth and crippled some movements. In fact, in general every movement throughout history which transitions over to formal education eventually begins to slow down in its growth.<sup>6</sup>

### Missiology as a Discipline

A third contribution of Western Protestant missions was the development of missiology as an academic discipline. Although this took over 150 years to develop, by the late 1960s and 1970s graduate schools of mission were



forming in seminaries throughout the United States, beginning with the Fuller School of World Mission in 1965. Alongside this was the establishment of the American Society of Missiology, the Evangelical Missiological Society, and, later, the International Society for Frontier Missiology.

The importance of this development was twofold: first, it enabled greater introspection and research into mission practice, and second, it elevated the standards for missionary training and preparation. An added benefit here was that schools of missiology began to influence theological studies as well, such that an increasing number of pastors now graduate having taken at least one missions course. However, the ideal of seeing missions integrated throughout the entire seminary curriculum and program is still far from being achieved in the West. Additionally, in the area of frontier missions, such programs still leave much to be desired. Very few mission training programs have courses on reaching Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, or on pioneering church planting movements in frontier regions. Nonetheless, it was at the missiological level, namely from what developed at the Fuller School of World Mission, that the frontier mission focus of the Protestant Western Mission movement was revitalized and is fast becoming mainstream once again.

### Inter-agency Cooperation

The fourth contribution of Western Protestant missions is another more recent development, though its roots go back all the way to William Carey. The area of inter-mission cooperation, or partnerships to finish the task, is one that has seen gentle nurturing throughout the last two hundred years and is now blossoming into a global phenomenon. William Carey was the first to suggest that all the Protestant missions might come together in a global meeting in 1810. It would take one hundred more years for his suggestion to come into fruition. At the

***The successful transfer of this crucial concept will prove to be one of the most important contributions of Western Protestant missions.***

Edinburgh conference in 1910 were representatives of almost all the major Protestant missions and all the major mission fields. Out of this came the International Missionary Council, which facilitated tremendous field-cooperation around the world.

Seventy years later, evangelical mission agencies began to come together around the AD2000 and Beyond Movement. From the momentum of this movement came over 500 partnerships and networks which have as their focus some crucial dimension of the unfinished task. In 2010, the Global Mission Consultation held in Tokyo gave a call for the further development of a global network of mission structures which would bring together the world's sending agencies into a global alliance to finish the task of reaching all the world's remaining unreached peoples.<sup>7</sup> This concept of cooperation to fulfill the Great Commission is one that has now been taken up by the non-Western mission movement. The successful transfer of such a crucial concept to the next great wave of missions in the 21st century will prove to be one of the most important contributions of Western Protestant missions from an historical perspective.

### Lay Involvement

The fifth strength of Western Protestant missions has been their employment of non-ordained laypeople, even from the earliest times. In contrast with Roman Catholic missions (which required that missionaries be highly trained professional priests or monks), Protestant missions sent out many ordinary and even uneducated persons who achieved incredible results on the field. This tradition also opened the door for non-ordained women to serve as missionaries. Their success on the field went a long way towards challenging the

notion back home that women should not preach or teach in the church. Today this tradition has morphed into new areas such as tent-making and "business as mission," which are calling upon professionals and entrepreneurs to use their skills for kingdom advance, especially in restricted-access countries. This tradition of empowering laypeople has enabled the Protestant Missionary force to send out far more missionaries than the Catholic Church, and with little risk of depleting the home ministry personnel. The tradition has also led to the phenomenon known as short-term missions. It is estimated that over 1 million Americans go out on short-term mission trips every year.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the funds spent on these short term trips far exceed the amount spent on long-term church planting efforts, and can often be a drain on long-term field workers who have to service these trips.

### Weaknesses of the Movement

In spite of all the great strengths of the Western Protestant missions movement, certain enduring weaknesses have been a hindrance almost from the beginning. One or two of these weaknesses will appear to be the antithesis of an above-mentioned strength! This reality reveals the great tension within Western Protestant missions between championed ideals and what actually occurs on the field. Four weaknesses in particular will be highlighted: 1) denominational transplantation; 2) unhealthy dependency; 3) cultural imperialism in the form of Christianization; and 4) extravagant missionary lifestyles.

### Denominationalism

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the Western Protestant missions has been the continuation of the Catholic tradition of transplanting denominationalism around

the world, a tradition that continues to the present. Rather than work together to plant united national churches, we have exported our divisions, theological controversies, and ecclesiastical structures in every country in the world. Somehow we have exchanged the command to “go into all the world and make disciples of Jesus” into “go into all the world and make people as much like us as possible.” Yet, was this not the very thing for which Jesus rebuked the Pharisees?<sup>9</sup>

In my own denomination, the Church of the Nazarene, we were asked to rejoice at a recent national gathering in the United States because the “Nazarene church” was being planted in Iraq. Yet no one stopped to ask, Is this what the Iraqi people need? More importantly, what if every denomination in the world decided to plant its own franchise in Iraq? Would this result in the most effective witness to the Iraqi people? Now certainly it is true that denominationalism has lent itself to church growth in the West, following the free-market principles of Western culture. However, it is unfortunate that pride, competition and Christian tribalism would be our motivation for mission. Even so, as the Scriptures say, “We hold this treasure in jars of clay.”<sup>10</sup> No doubt, God takes whatever he can get when it comes to mission, but for His kingdom’s sake, surely we can strive to do better. Indeed, for the sake of the remaining unreached peoples, we must.

### Unhealthy Dependency

A second weakness of Western Protestant missions is in the area of unhealthy dependency, which developed from a two hundred year tradition of conducting mission from a position of power. Unhealthy dependency results from a patron-client mission relationship in which the client only engages in ministry if resources are available. If the money stops, the ministry stops. To a large extent, Western missions have handicapped and retarded the development of many indigenous churches

through saddling them with programs and institutions which they cannot support locally. It is only when indigenous churches are able to break free from the cycle of dependency that significant church-growth and indigenization takes place. One reason for this is that outside funding sends a message to the indigenous population that the church is a foreign entity. This is one of the reasons why the vast majority of India is alienated from the gospel today. Most of India’s missionary force is supported by Western money. One agency, Gospel for Asia, brings in tens of millions of dollars a year from the United States to evangelize Hindus.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, they are only effective in reaching the “untouchable” or Dalit class in India,



which only represents around 15% of the population (in actual fact, they are more likely to be traditional religionists, or animists, than Hindus).

### Cultural Imperialism

A third weakness of Western Protestant missions has been a legacy of cultural imperialism, which has come in many forms. The most important form from a frontier mission perspective has been the tradition of exporting a Westernized version of the church in the form of the Christian religion. At first it may seem quite strange to characterize cultural imperialism in this way. After all, isn’t the purpose of the Great Commission to go into all the world and make Christians out

of people? Remarkably, the very fact that many readers will resonate with this question reveals just how deep Western cultural imperialism lives on throughout the world!

In every mission class I teach, I always ask the question, “Is it necessary for someone to be a Christian in order to go to heaven?” In every case, ninety percent of the class will affirm this statement. Yet where is this in the Bible? It cannot be found! The reason this is significant for frontier missions is that the number one hindrance to our reaching the remaining unreached Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists today is our insistence that they become Christians in order to become followers of Jesus. Thus we unwittingly communicate to people that our faith is simply another foreign religion, and they don’t see the gospel of the Kingdom at all.<sup>12</sup>

### “Rich” Missionaries

A fourth weakness of Western Protestant missions is the common practice of recreating one’s home lifestyle on the mission field. Western Protestant missionaries often live in a manner that far exceeds the lifestyle of those they are seeking to reach. In many ways this is a derivative of the patron-client model and even helps to establish and reinforce it. Such a practice renders incarnational ministry almost impossible. It also hinders the growth of indigenous missions by placing in the minds of people that missions is 1) for Westerners, and 2) an endeavor requiring wealth and power. The relatively “wealthy” Western missionary, who is incapable of truly integrating into the host community, also reflects a culture of individualism, the DNA of which is often transplanted into any kind of ministry the missionary establishes. The missionary communicates to the community, “I don’t need you, but you need me.” However, when Jesus sent out his missionaries in the first century, he encouraged them to go out from a position of vulnerability,

allowing the community to take the responsibility for their care.<sup>13</sup> While this may seem impractical—and almost impossible—for Westerners today, non-Western missionaries who come from a position of powerlessness may find they have a better opportunity to achieve the ideal of incarnational ministry, and thus produce lasting community-owned change.

### *Looking to the Future*

Mission by its very nature is drawn to frontiers, of which there are many. The most obvious frontiers are geographic, cultural and linguistic. But what will happen when these obvious frontiers are gone? When there are no more areas of the world without churches? No more unreached peoples left to reach? Certainly, for some countries this reality has already happened, and hundreds of unreached people groups are being engaged for the first time every year. At some point in this century, it is very likely that there will be no more “obvious” or “classic” frontiers. Every language group will have access to the Bible, every social group will have a witness within them, and every culture will have a contextualized disciple-making movement. At this prospect we can all rejoice.

Will mission then be over? If Christ should tarry, the answer is quite obviously no. The church will always need new forms of mission because new frontiers for evangelism will always present themselves in ever-changing societies. However, without a compelling need to send out foreign missionaries, the vast sums of money and the difficulty required in sending workers to far-away lands will likely result in a change of mission priorities. This has certainly happened in the West. Though the Western Church continues to send out a larger number of missionaries, the overall perception is that the day of foreign mission sending is passing. For this reason, among others, Western missions has leveled-off in its sending of long-term workers for the first time in two hundred years.<sup>14</sup>

**A**t some point in this century, it is very likely that there will be no more “obvious” or “classic” frontiers. Will mission then be over?

Interestingly, this trend probably would have happened much sooner had it not been for the unreached peoples movement (beginning in the 1970s), which revitalized missionary sending. With this in mind, it is imperative for Western missions, as well as other foreign missionary sending nations, to take a second deep look at the role of foreign missions today. What are the priority places and the priority ministry roles for foreign, cross-cultural workers? This has to be thought through very carefully, and a strong case has to be made for why it is better to fund a foreign worker rather than 50 national workers with the same funds. Without such a case, and with the dangers of sending money overseas to nationals becoming more apparent, there is a risk that churches in the West will simply begin to shut down their foreign mission giving altogether.

However, such a view is looking very far into the future, perhaps thirty or forty years down the line, perhaps even further. In the immediate future of the next decade or so, missions from the West will continue to make a significant contribution to the overall global effort. However, it will do so as one player among many. In the last decade, non-Western cross-cultural missionaries surpassed Western missionaries in overall numbers for the first time in Protestant mission history.<sup>15</sup> The West continues to lead in terms of foreign missionaries, but only by a slim margin, and this lead will quickly disappear in the next decade. All this is to the good. The diversification of the global missions movement is the single most important factor that will lead to the goal of world evangelization. The overall impact of the church in the world will be greater as its witness becomes more authentic through diversification. No longer will Christianity be seen as a Western religion, but as a global faith. In many ways,

Christianity is the first religion that can make a real claim to being truly global. Though Islam is predicted to surpass Christianity this century as the world's largest religion, it has not made significant inroads in the Americas, Europe or East Asia. Christianity, on the contrary, will be found in significant numbers in every people group on earth by the end of this century if current trends continue.

### *Recommendations*

What lessons can the non-Western missions movement learn from the strengths and Weaknesses of the West? There are obviously many important ones. Three in particular stand out as especially relevant for our times. I would like to present these in the form of a challenge. The first is a challenge to rediscover incarnational missions, the second is to reintegrate mission into the very fabric of the church, and the third is to seek greater unity at every level in our shared kingdom mission to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation.

I see the first challenge as being of paramount importance because, to a large extent, non-Western foreign missions have followed the same pattern as their Western counterparts. In the early centuries of mission, much missionary activity was from the powerless to the powerful. Today, it is primarily the reverse and, for the most part, we cannot envision mission any other way. Our natural tendency is to go to people who are less economically privileged than we are, thus our heavy reliance on leveraging our position of economic power for the sake of mission. This is often at the expense of supernatural power and cultivating missionaries who are regarded as spiritual men and women of God by the community.

Our missionaries enter cultures more like economic powerbrokers than they

do mystics, faith-healers, and intercessors. Such a missionary paradigm and practice is a lost art. But what if we sent missionaries whose first question is not, "Where can we best spend our money here?" but rather "What can I ask my God for on your behalf?" What if our missionaries were known more for their prayers, their intimacy with God, and their spiritual wisdom than their programs and their resources? Some are calling this the return to the apostolic way of mission, by which they mean the simplicity and the power of the early missionaries of the first century. This was mission from a position of vulnerability (and yet was it not more effective?), mission that had to prove its value to the community over time, not buy its way into acceptance as quickly as possible.

The second challenge has to do with how we view the Great Commission. For many centuries the Great Commission was something we commissioned people to do in far-away places. The Great Commission was out there, not here at home. To a large extent, this derived, I submit, from a misunderstanding of the very nature of the Great Commission, and, somewhat ironically, from mistranslating the final instructions of Jesus to his church. Matthew 28:19-20 is a mandate to "disciple all nations, teaching them to obey everything" Jesus commanded. In other words, the "them" in the Great Commission refers to the nations, not to individuals. Yet, tragically, in just about every modern translation of this verse, it is translated "make disciples of all nations," which puts our Westernized individualistic spin on what Jesus commanded us to do. How presumptuous!

Unfortunately this mistranslation of the Great Commission has found its way into many of the world's Bibles, which have been translated by Westerners. It is up to the non-Western church to rediscover the Great Commission, and when they do, they will realize that the mandate of "discipling" nations is something that has been given to every believer—and that is

the whole point. Without the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world, the Great Commission cannot be completed as Jesus intended.

Finally, with the third and final challenge, it cannot be emphasized enough that today there are still 3,000 unreached people groups without any known missionary work. There are an additional 2,000 unreached groups where missionaries have gone, but no breakthrough has yet occurred.<sup>16</sup> If we are going to reach them effectively we will need to work together in a greater spirit of unity and concerted cooperation than we have ever seen in the past. We need to listen to one another, share resources, and collectively own the responsibility of deploying personnel to fully engage the remaining unreached



peoples of the world. To do this we will need a global network of all the world's agencies working together to gather intelligence, encourage best practices, and fill in the gaps of any missing infrastructure required to see church-planting breakthroughs among every nation, tribe, people and language. I believe we will be the generation to reach this incredible milestone. By the grace of God and according to his providence, we will all reach it together as a global church. What an exciting time to be alive! **UFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Global Mission Database*, USCWM Research Department.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase "lay involvement" is not intended to endorse the lay-clergy divide in

the Church. It is simply a recognition of the historical reality that Protestants began to send "non-ordained" workers to the mission field, unlike their Catholic counterparts.

<sup>3</sup> 1005 portions, 1275 New Testaments, and 518 complete Bibles as of late 2012. See [wycliffe.net/resources/scriptureaccessstatistics/tabid/99/Default.aspx](http://wycliffe.net/resources/scriptureaccessstatistics/tabid/99/Default.aspx).

<sup>4</sup> Titus 1:5-9

<sup>5</sup> Winter, Ralph. "The Amateurization of Mission," *Mission Frontiers*, March 1, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> For more of Ralph Winter's thoughts on this see, "The Largest Stumbling Block to Leadership Development in the Global Church," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 20:3 Fall 2003.

<sup>7</sup> In 2005, over a dozen major mission organizations met in Amsterdam to form a global network of mission structures. The first task of this network was to help organize a global gathering of mission agencies in 2010 to commemorate Edinburgh 1910. Here at this meeting held in Tokyo the global mission community affirmed the need to develop a global network for mission cooperation in the Tokyo 2010 Declaration (see [www.gnms.net](http://www.gnms.net) for the full text).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Priest, "Are Short-Term Missions Good Stewardship?" *Christianity Today*, July 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 23:5

<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor. 4:7

<sup>11</sup> Evangelical Missions Information Service, *2009 North American Mission Handbook*.

<sup>12</sup> This reality reveals a kind of syncretism in our thinking. We attribute "being a Christian" with "being born-again." Thus without realizing it, we are communicating that to be saved you must be a part of the Christian religion.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 9:3-4

<sup>14</sup> Evangelical Missions Information Service (*North American Missions Handbook surveys every three years*).

<sup>15</sup> *Global Mission Database*, USCWM Research Dept. Our research indicates that this took place around the middle of the last decade, with the token demarcation assigned to the year 2005. In the year 2000, Western cross-cultural missionaries made up 59% of the total. Today, almost the reverse has taken place, with non-Western cross-cultural missionaries making up 63% of the global total.

<sup>16</sup> Global Research Department, International Mission Board.

# Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering

by *Alan Howell*

Near the beginning of A. S. Peterson's fictional novel, *The Fiddler's Gun*, a reformed pirate and two young orphans have an interesting discussion about pain and suffering. They open up a wooden case revealing three objects: a fiddle, a bow and a pistol. After examining each of the elegantly crafted items, the former pirate tells them,

"Now, see here, you got to put that hurt someplace, and this is where old Bartimaeus learned to put his." He lifted the fiddle out of the case and caressed it.

"It's beautiful," whispered Fin.

"Aye," he said and crooked it into his neck. He drew the bow across the strings and the instrument moaned a forlorn note. "Beautiful, that's what you've got to do with that hurtin', you got to turn it beautiful."<sup>1</sup>

... "What's the gun for?" asked Peter.

Bartimaeus' face darkened. "That's where all that hurtful stuff ends up if you don't get rid of it. Got to get rid of it. You don't and it might just get rid of you, see here? I keeps it there to remind me. I put it down the day I got this fiddle. Swore I would never take it up again. Done too much hurtin', got to turn that hurt to beautiful, see? Otherwise the hurt turns hateful and the ole hand-cannon there like to wake up and do terrible things . . . terrible things."<sup>2</sup>

This fictional conversation illustrates well the stakes involved in possessing an effective response to pain and suffering. We all end up doing something with our pain. If we cannot frame suffering in an instructive or constructive way, it will become destructive—harming those around us as well as ourselves.

For close to ten years in northern Mozambique I've witnessed the effects of misappropriated pain: family members become isolated, people live in fear, neighbors are cursed, and there is no rest. Years ago, as we first began to learn the language and culture of the Makua-Metto people, there was one word that I was surprised to hear over and over again in conversation: *uhuvva*. It's their word for suffering, and our friends talk about it all the time.

The problem is that their folk religion does not give them tools to deal with suffering constructively. The majority of the Makua-Metto people would consider

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themselves Muslims, but at the core they are shaped by an animistic worldview. This folk religion binds them and their pain to a witchcraft system crammed full of curses, counter curses, spirit possession and divination. To borrow language from the fictional conversation above, they lack the ability to take their suffering and “turn it beautiful.”

Coming from my American cultural framework, I slowly came to the realization that their primary question is not *why* this suffering happens. Instead, they consistently personalize the evil they experience. They want to know *who* did this to them.<sup>3</sup> Their quest to determine the identity of the culprit leads them into divination, which, when indicating a human target, encourages them to reach for that “ole hand-cannon”—directing all that pain and anger at another. Human beings must do something with their suffering. If they are unable to do something constructive, or interpret their suffering in a way that is instructive, then they ultimately will do something destructive.

As an American I could see that there are different ways to pick up “the gun.” Generally those in my home culture tend to turn this destruction inwardly. We self-medicate with drugs, escape into the television or computer screen, experience depression or practice self-mutilation. This contrasts with my experience with Africans, who when unable to do something good with their suffering, generally tend to turn “the gun” on each other. It seems that this orientation affects the way both cultures approach Scripture as well. The American Christian will focus on texts about personal sin and forgiveness (internal), whereas the Africans I know are more likely to concentrate on texts about suffering, deliverance, and protection (external).

### *Two Sides of the Same Coin: Understanding the Driving Forces behind Folk Religion*

In my quest to understand how to engage this people group on a deeper

level I needed to understand the popular hold of Makua-Metto folk religion. This search led to a more fundamental question: What is the nature of folk religion and why are folk religions so influential in shaping culture and behavior? Tweed believes that they exert power in the lives of adherents for two main reasons: these “religions intensify joy and confront suffering.”<sup>4</sup> Or, put another way, we could say that folk religions serve two main functions: they provide (1) guidance in a quest for blessing, and (2) help in response to suffering. These facets are two sides of the same coin. Our Mozambican friends spend their time, talent and treasure in both the quest to find blessing (*iparakha*) and to confront suffering (*uhuva*).



In this article I want to focus on the suffering side of the coin. What role does religion, specifically folk religion, play in responding to suffering? There is a

long tradition of interpreters who have suggested that religions are responses to evil . . . These interpreters, and others, are right in suggesting that religions interpret and ease suffering: disease, disaster, and death.<sup>5</sup>

In writing about the Hispanic community, Espin notes that

popular religion is one of the most fundamental ways through which Latinos deal epistemologically with suffering, and indeed with all reality.<sup>6</sup>

He goes on to say that popular religion forms an epistemological network

made up of four primary components: beliefs, ethical expectations, rites and experiences.<sup>7</sup> I believe that Espin's epistemological framework can be a helpful tool in formulating an assessment of the suffering side of the folk religion coin in a given context.

### *Exploring the Suffering Side of the Coin in the Makua-Metto Context*

In using Espin's categories to understand the Makua-Metto context, it's important to see these categories as part of an integrated system. They do not function independently of each other. Espin states,

The relationship between/among beliefs, ethical expectations, rites and experiences creates a certain configuration that is imprinted and shaped by the 'experiencia' of the people who perceive the former as true and real. But once a plausible configuration is achieved (i.e., a network held to be true and real), it in turn becomes its own justification.<sup>8</sup>

The problem with this system is that it becomes an echo chamber with a demanding internal logic: “because this is how we have always done it then that is the way it is and shall be.”

### **Beliefs**

Overall, the Makua-Metto folk religion is mystical and mysterious as there is not a highly developed and commonly held perception of the spiritual realm. Very little religious information is passed on as the whole system is based on secrecy. If you have information you guard it so it won't be used against you. Because of all this secrecy most people don't have any developed understanding of how the spiritual realm functions—because no one will tell them. But that's not to say there is no generally accepted cosmology. Iseminger describes a cosmology that includes a simple hierarchy of God, spirits and humans (see figure 1).

This Makua approach to religion is very syncretistic, and their assimilation of

Islam and Catholicism did not replace the traditional worldview at all. The Muslim imam uses his Islamic texts to produce magical results, not for the purpose of theological explanation. He is the most powerful type of *feteceiro* (witch doctor) and fits snugly into the magical/mystical system. In this religious system where imam and witch doctor deal regularly in curses and counter-curses, the dominant emotion is fear.<sup>10</sup> Fear is fundamental and universal and is fed by the uncertainty and confusion rooted in the lack of power and control that is accessible to the average person. Thus, in order to deal with the suffering that surrounds him or her, the animist finds in magic at least some “sense of mastery and a capacity to deal with the forces around him.”<sup>11</sup>

### Ethical Expectations

Espin describes this node as covering items

from moral/immoral evaluation of individuals and social behavior, to the manner(s) in which these evaluations are communicated in families and communities (i.e. popular wisdom, sayings, counsel, shame, etc.).<sup>12</sup>

The ethical values that most shape Makua-Metto relationships are shame and honor.<sup>13</sup> In this system, practically that means that personal confession of wrong doing and apologies have little value and the way to make things right is to give honor through gift giving.

**I**n a religious system where the imam and witch doctor deal regularly in curses and counter-curses, the dominant emotion is fear.

As was mentioned earlier, another significant aspect of the Makua culture is their conception of personal/relational causality. This is consistent with the African/animistic assumption that “there is no natural event without a spiritual cause.”<sup>14</sup> The Makua people assume that everything happens because of personal involvement by the living because,

unlike the quasi-scientific worldview . . . the African worldview under discussion has no room for accidental deaths and natural illness. It has no natural cause and effect category; every event has metaphysical etiology.<sup>15</sup>

This causality has important ethical implications. Since a natural explanation is not sufficient, this personalized causality often leads to divination in order that those responsible for the illness may be held accountable.

### Rites

As noted above, this strong sense of personalized causality leads many to divination to determine the source of suffering. Among the Makua-Metto, divination is used mainly in cases of illness, but it can also be used to diagnose the causes of misfortunes like divorce or in the case of theft. People trust in its power to reveal the

perpetrator. Burnett further clarifies the connection between divination, illness and traditional healers:

A primary occasion when divination is used is when a family member is ill. It is necessary in such a situation both to diagnose the cause of the sickness, and to recommend a cure. Sickness is not seen as the result of some natural process, but as resulting from a wide range of antisocial and unseen power . . . In the case of sickness, the diviner may pronounce the cause as being one of several different factors depending on his particular worldview. The sickness could result from sorcery, or witchcraft, or from an offended ghost or ancestor.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, divination—especially in the case of illness—serves as the connecting point for three other types of rites in the Makua-Metto folk religion system: spirit possession, witchcraft and ancestor veneration. First, spirit possession is linked to illness and many will endure inconvenient taboos, participate in daily rituals, and/or construct buildings to appease these spirits, all in the service of being healed. Second, being cursed or having witchcraft done against you can initially manifest in illness. Thirdly, the most common diagnosis of a diviner is that the root of the illness is a problem with one’s ancestors and an offering (*isataka*) must be made.

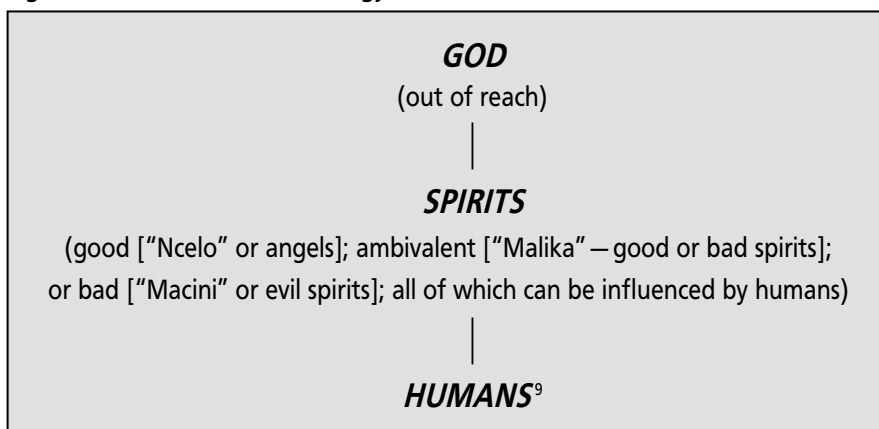
### Experiences

In order to describe the Makua-Metto experiences briefly and effectively I have mapped the following figure as a decision tree, showing the common paths taken in response to illness.

In the process of sharing this decision tree with my Mozambican friends, I encountered the four following reactions:

The first response was typically an “aha” moment. They saw, maybe for

Figure 1: Makua-Metto Cosmology

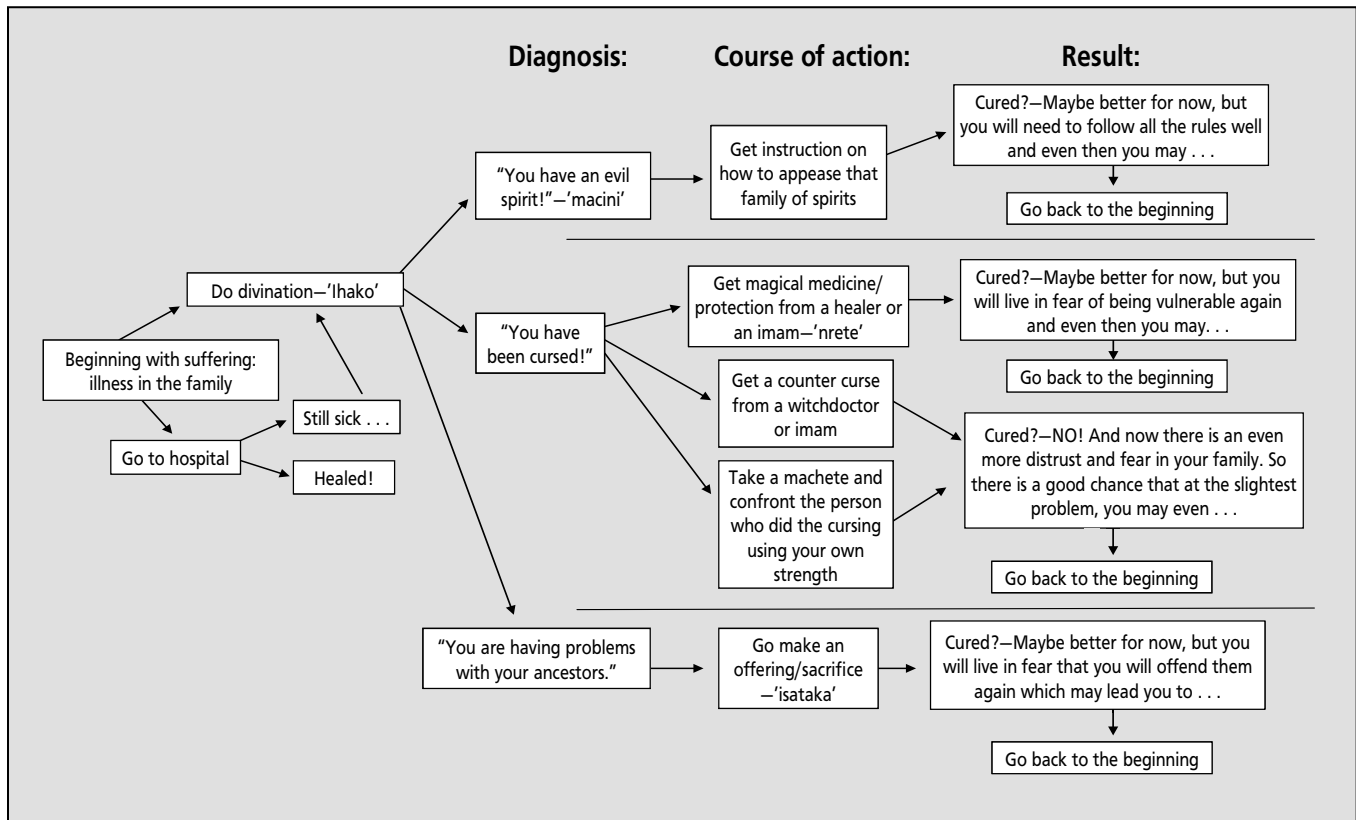


the first time, how the pieces of this folk religion system fit together. As a foreigner, I certainly did not provide any new information, but laying out the whole process in a decision tree like this caused

They were able to see how ineffective and broken their system truly is. They noticed how failure to resolve the illness following one branch of the decision tree leads participants to start over

diagram we see that speaking out against demon possession, for example, without addressing divination is ultimately only addressing one symptom of a larger problem. That would be like trying to

Figure 2: Makua-Metto Folk Religion Decision Tree: Responding to Illness



the connections and deceptions hidden within the system to surface. It brought a system normally hidden by darkness into the light. Remember, in the Makua-Metto context everything regarding the occult is shrouded in secrecy. People don't openly talk about these things, and when they do speak of the occult, they only talk about specific cogs in the machine, those pieces that are relevant to their current situations. The system does not encourage them to look at how each of "the cogs" fits systematically together to form "the machine."

The second response was to the way the map exposed the limitations of their epistemological configuration. Many commented that "no one who is blessed goes and does divination"—so divination is exposed as an act of desperation.

again. People are rarely healed and what relief they receive comes at a cost (both economic and relational). They must live in fear and risk being increasingly isolated from neighbors and family who may be out to get them. One person described the decision tree as a house with divination as the front door. As people enter this satanic house they are shuffled into the dark and depressing rooms of spirit possession, curses, and sacrifices. This person noted that this house is going to fall in upon itself and yet so many people feel trapped inside.

Usually the third response was a realization of the primary role that divination has in this whole system. They recognized how divination serves as a portal or gateway practice that leads to all of the other occult practices. By looking at the

saw off one branch of a dying tree without addressing the sickness at its roots.

The fourth response was usually a question: what should be done about this? Christian leaders who talked through this decision tree with me wondered how the church should specifically respond to this. We looked together at passages like Leviticus 19:26 where the Lord prohibits his people from using divination and magic. And we read the story of King Ahaziah's decision to consult with Baal-Zebub after an accident provoked God's anger (2 Kings 1). But, simply telling people not to do divination will be limited in its effectiveness. The mapping of the occult practices in a decision tree helped leaders understand the systemic nature of this challenge. It was apparent that the church needs to



provide a faithful, comprehensive and effective alternative to divination. In the following sections I want to address how the church can respond to suffering by focusing on “turning it beautiful.”

## *Towards a Christian Theology of Suffering*

One of the reasons that popular folk religion has such a powerful hold on the hearts and minds of its adherents is that it addresses the day-to-day questions of life; it deals with blessing and suffering. How can my business be blessed and successful? What should I do about my sick mother? In order for Christianity to speak meaningfully into the lives of people it must address these kinds of concerns. Otherwise, we end up with a split-level Christianity that deals with the high theological questions but does nothing to answer these middle-level questions that folk religion has claimed as its own.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, we

must provide answers to people's immediate questions, but those answers must be rooted in a biblical understanding of injustice, pain, and suffering.<sup>18</sup>

As we saw earlier, folk religion is a coin with two sides: the search for blessing and the response to suffering. In order for Christianity to reach deep into the lives of people it must respond well to both of these dynamics of life. The Christian coin needs to be made of sturdier and more relevant stuff than the coin of popular religion. Christians need to understand they possess something more valuable to their daily lives than the popular coin traded on the street. Followers of Jesus need to understand being blessed in the context of the Kingdom of God.

Christians need a biblical definition of well-being. Health in Scripture is defined, not in terms of personal well-being, but in terms of *shalom*, which is translated into English using terms such as completeness, soundness, peace, well-being, health, prosperity and salvation.<sup>19</sup>

While it would certainly be fruitful to explore more thoroughly a theology of

**T***he church needs to provide a faithful, comprehensive and effective alternative to divination.*

blessing, this paper intends to focus on the *response to suffering* side of the coin. And that forces us to a question that will be impossible to comprehensively answer here. It is a question that all peoples have asked throughout the ages: If God is all-powerful and all-loving, why does he allow people to suffer? A quick biblical review will need to suffice.

Followers of Jesus believe that evil and suffering came into the world through the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. But,

in spite of its origins in the Fall, suffering is bent to the purposes of the stronger will and higher purposes of a benevolent God. The Bible states this in global terms in Romans 8:28, reminding us that God works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. But it also states this in more personal terms reminding us of the benefits of suffering both in the building of virtuous character (Romans 5:1-3; James 1:3-5) and also in the benefit that our suffering brings to others. For example, the suffering of Joseph paved the way for provision for all of the rest of his family during a famine (Genesis 50:20). Let us think this is unfair, Scripture also reminds us that suffering works in exactly this two-fold pattern in the life of the Lord Jesus. It both contributed to his character in that he learned obedience from the things he suffered, and it also contributed to the good of others because ‘having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation’ (Hebrews 5:7-9).<sup>20</sup>

In Christ, then, God took suffering and “turned it beautiful.” God took the evil plans of men and Satan to kill Jesus and turned them into resurrection and salvation. Jesus took his pain and suffering and entrusted himself to the goodness of God. As followers of Jesus,

it is instructive to look at the way our Lord dealt with pain and suffering. He responded in three basic ways:

1. Christ used his power to alleviate the suffering of those around him (Matthew 9:35-36).
2. Christ submitted his will to the Father and accepted suffering (Matthew 26:36-46).
3. Christ suffered and yet still loved his enemies, refusing to do violence to them—even going so far as to ask God to forgive them (Luke 23:34).

As followers of Jesus we are called to walk that same path—helping those who are suffering, trusting in God, and not giving in to the enemy's tactics of violence. A robust theology of suffering will also highlight the conviction that someday, Christ will return and we will dwell with him in a kingdom of light where there is no death or pain and where he will wipe away every tear (Rev. 21-22). Scripture encourages us that by responding to suffering in a way that is consistent with the example of Jesus, we can trust God to “turn it beautiful.”

Life also testifies that suffering and challenges can make us fruitful. When I first saw holes cut through the middle of coconut trees in our region of Mozambique I misunderstood, thinking that the owners were trying to kill the plant. Then I learned that oftentimes as coconut trees grow taller they may fail to produce fruit until they feel distress. Those holes were designed for a positive stress. As painful as it is, suffering oftentimes leads us to be fruitful.

Life also teaches us that good stories will often include adversity. Finding a place for suffering in our own

narratives provides the suffering with meaning, or at a minimum allows us

to claim the suffering as ours. Every doctor can testify to the importance of indicating the causes of suffering (even if it is cancer) because the patient, knowing the cause of his or her suffering, is comforted by being able to name the affliction. Somehow it domesticated the suffering if we are able to locate it in our world.<sup>21</sup>

By finding the place of suffering in our life stories, we are better able to see the possibilities they hold for shaping a life that flourishes.<sup>22</sup>

The Bible mostly ignores the question of *why* evil exists in the world. Suffering is assumed to be part of the realm in which we live. What the Bible does tell us, on the other hand, is that we serve a God who is working to do something about it. We are invited to join God in his work of redeeming the world and undoing the destruction of sin, death and Satan. While popular religion often isolates individuals, imprisoning them in fear,

Christians can confidently proclaim that God truly does understand human pain, for in Christ he suffered and died. God does not abandon his people in their suffering; he is beside them and grants his Spirit to help them bear injustices (Heb. 4:15).<sup>23</sup>

### *Discernment and Illness*

Allow me to turn from this brief look at our Christian theology of suffering, and examine more specifically our theology of illness. It is helpful to reflect on what the biblical texts have to say about the origin of sickness. The Scriptures reveal five causes of illness that may or may not be related to any particular situation.

One source of illness in the biblical texts is the Evil One.<sup>24</sup> There are a number of references in the gospels to “illnesses as having demonic origins.”<sup>25</sup> In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath who had been “bound by Satan” in an illness for many years. It is clear that demonic forces use “illness as an occasion for oppression.”<sup>26</sup>

A second source of illness recognized by biblical authors is God himself. At some point in the writings of the majority of the New Testament authors, “God is described as the direct or indirect source of infirmity.”<sup>27</sup> Illness is used as

a warning from God intended to produce repentance on the part of those who arrogantly think they are beyond God’s reach.<sup>28</sup>

God used illness as

an instrument of punishment, a source of sanctification, a means of spreading the Gospel, or an instrument of salvation.<sup>29</sup>

Suffering and illness can also be used by God as a “worldview modifier.”<sup>30</sup>



In the story of Job, for example, we see how “God used his suffering to bring him to a more mature and deeper faith (Job 42:5-6).”<sup>31</sup> Thus, God should not be looked to only as a font of healing but also as one who exerts his sovereignty actively and is not shy about using sickness to achieve his righteous and redemptive purposes.<sup>32</sup>

The third cause of illness is human sin. In both the Old and New Testaments there is a link between repentance and healing.<sup>33</sup> One key text for understanding this dynamic is James 5:13-16, which makes clear that there exists some significant connection between sickness and sin.<sup>34</sup> The pain experienced through illness because of sin leads to

introspection, which then should lead to confession and forgiveness.<sup>35</sup>

The fourth cause has to do with illness caused by the sin of another person. In Scripture we see how David and Bathsheba’s child died because of David’s sin (2 Samuel 12:13-23). One current example, one especially relevant across the African landscape, is the population who contract the AIDS virus because of the infidelity of their spouses.

A fifth group are those illnesses that have natural or neutral causes.<sup>36</sup> While our human tendency is to want to assign an origin to every illness, the majority of “infirmities are treated by New Testament writers as neutral in terms of origin.”<sup>37</sup>

As we have seen so far, there are a variety of reasons why someone may experience illness. So, in communities of faith, “Christians must teach and model a biblical response to injustice and pain.”<sup>38</sup> The way we teach this should be suited to address the specific concerns and life situations of the believers. As the Rabbinic advice states: “If a person is visited by painful sufferings, let him examine himself.”<sup>39</sup> The body of Christ is called to gather around the afflicted person and help him or her examine himself or herself.

In the folk religious system described earlier, medicine (*nrete*) played a role in the healing process. How then should we understand the role of medicine from a biblical perspective? The stories of two Old Testament Kings are instructive. When Hezekiah was sick he fervently appealed to God for healing as well as applying a type of ointment as prescribed by the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 20:1-7). King Asa’s illness and subsequent death, though, serves as a warning. 2 Chronicles 16:12-13 tells us that he

was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians.

In the New Testament we find instructions for the leaders of the church to anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14). Oftentimes,

wounds were anointed with oil to cleanse them (cf. Lk 10:34), and those with headaches and those wishing to avoid some diseases were anointed with olive oil for medicinal purposes. Oil was also used to anoint priests or rulers, pouring oil over the head as a consecration to God. Christians may have combined a symbolic medicinal use with a symbol of handing one over to the power of God's Spirit (Mk 6:13).<sup>40</sup>

It seems that the biblical ideal is that when medicine is used it should be in combination with an ultimate trust in God as the Healer. Thus, in the process of discernment the church may see the need to treat an illness with oil or medicine, administering it in the name of the Lord.<sup>41</sup>

Using James 5:13-16 as a foundational text, the following figure shows how the church can use a process of discernment

## By communicating a theology of suffering and practicing discernment, the church can close the door to divination in their community.

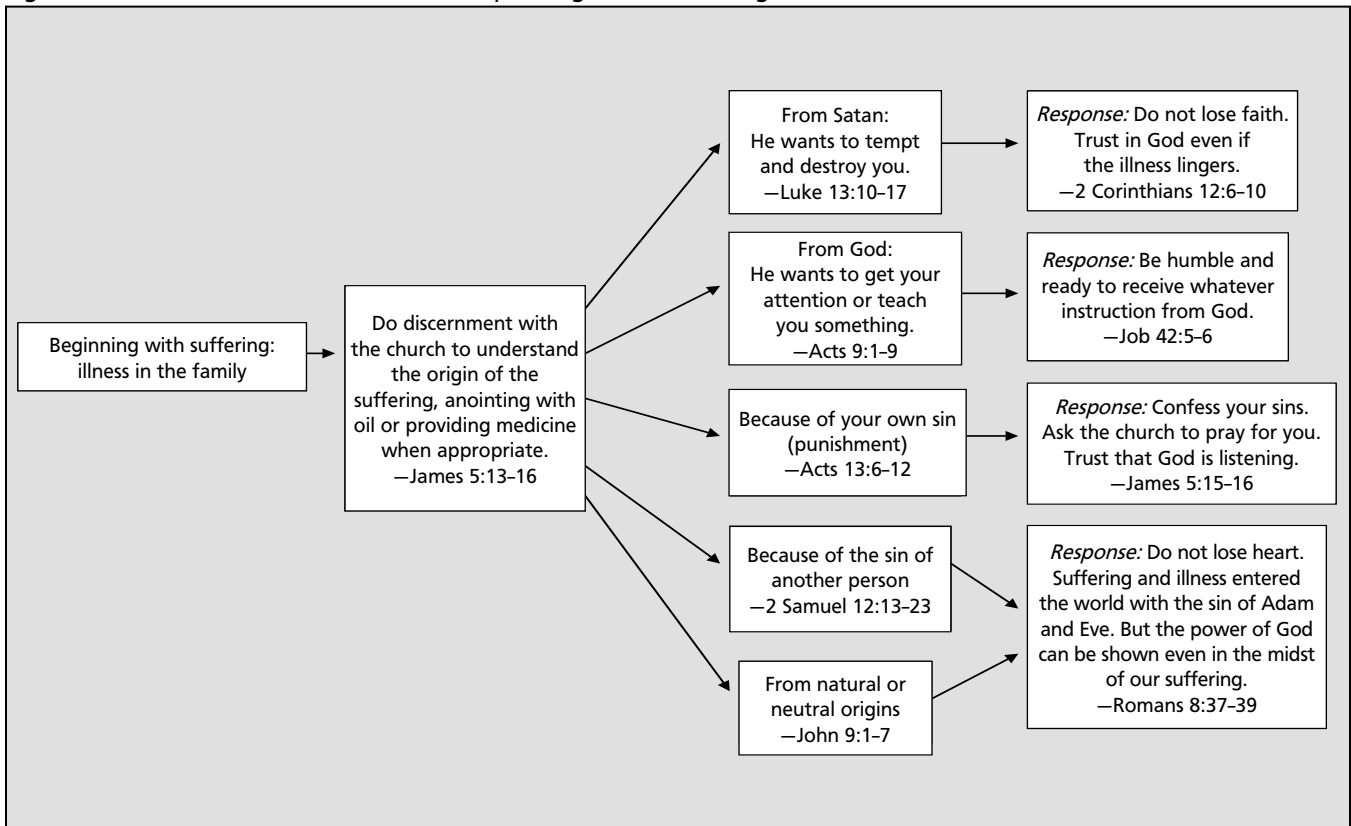
to help those suffering from illnesses. Instead of a decision tree with divination as the portal leading to responses to suffering, this decision tree for the church highlights the role of discernment in confronting suffering.

In sharing this *discernment tree* with our Mozambican friends, especially as a comparison with the *divination tree*, there were generally five responses we observed.

The primary takeaway from this comparison was the way that *a good theology of suffering can help the church short circuit their popular system of magical/occult practices*. By communicating a theology of suffering and practicing discernment, the church provides a more valuable alternative and can close the door to divination in their community, effectively cutting off the path to a host of other occult practices.

Secondly, *in discernment we put ourselves under the authority of the church*. In effect, we are saying that we are open to correction if that is in fact necessary. This humility indicates a radically different posture than those who do divination. In divination, participants don't expect to see that they themselves are at fault. In fact, people will travel a long distance to see a *neutral* diviner. Their preference is not to use a diviner from their own village whose interpretation might be corrupted by his familiarity with their situation and knowledge of their family dynamics. Divination is always about finding someone to blame, whereas discernment opens up the possibility that it may be one's own fault. There is a significant difference, therefore, between the posture of divination and that of discernment.

Figure 3: A Decision Tree for the Church: Responding to Illness through Discernment



A third observation was *the powerful influence of the group in the discernment process*. We may more often imagine divination to be a solitary exercise—the diviner and his client alone. In reality, divination typically involves a community. Often families will push their sick family members to do divination—they want healing for the sick person. Likewise, the church should also be a community that encourages its members to find wellness, but through discernment and not through divination. Having a group of leaders present and active in the discernment process releases the wisdom and experience of the community to bless the one who is sick through instructive counsel.

A fourth reaction was *the importance of teaching the natural causes of illness*. One church member noted that instructing people on the importance of washing hands could limit the popular tendency to blame illnesses on others. It is true that,

many people attribute all misfortune to spiritual or human causes. They need to be taught scientific explanations to help them understand the nature of diseases, but these explanations must be included in a broader biblical understanding of the ways God works in his creation. Misfortunes are opportunities for open dialogue, and for helping people to deal with their problems in Christian ways.<sup>42</sup>

A fifth observation was *the hope that the Church's teaching on suffering can reveal its constructive purpose*. The church can show that, "The role of suffering is not to endure it for its own sake, but for the sake of cultivating the flourishing life."<sup>43</sup> Though painful,

... both suffering itself (Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24) and also the attendant comfort one might receive in the context of suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 7:4-7) contribute to one's union and intimacy with Christ.<sup>44</sup>

If we are willing to be shaped in the crucible of suffering, then adversity has a constructive potential "in providing

the context for the cultivation of enduring, virtuous traits of character."<sup>45</sup> God's ultimate will for us in the midst of suffering is that we would become a people who look like Christ.

### *Conclusion: The Hard Work of Teaching Others to "Turn It Beautiful"*

As we have seen in this study, we must engage people where they are, offering a viable and ultimately a more valuable alternative to folk religions. We must help them see that the Christian "coin" deals with suffering and blessing in a more worthwhile way than the "coin" of popular religion traded on the street. We must help the church see itself



as a community of discernment that helps people interpret their suffering in instructive and constructive ways. In this way we can undo some of the destructive tendencies of the culture. These churches will then be

caring communities in which the fallen, sick, oppressed and needy find refuge, and in which the hostilities and jealousies of life which give rise to witchcraft are handled and forgiven.<sup>46</sup>

Allow me to return to the story from the introduction, where we find Fin, one of the orphans, asking Bartimaeus to teach her how to play the violin. Without waiting for instruction she rakes the bow across the violin, making a horrible sound. The former pirate

then convinces her to let him teach her how to play the instrument.

For the rest of the morning Bartimaeus immersed himself in the long process of teaching Fin to tame wild sound into music. Fin hoped she'd be playing like Bartimaeus by the end of the day but was a little daunted at how hard it turned out to be. Fin wasn't one to give up easily, though. She resigned herself to keeping with it and meant to make Bartimaeus stick to his promise of teaching her—no matter how many mornings it took.<sup>47</sup>

In order to replace divination with discernment we are going to need to patiently instruct Christ-followers in the skill of taking hurt and turning it beautiful. We have to disciple people in this new way of dealing with suffering or they will return to a more popular option of dealing with pain—"the ole-hand cannon." They must, like Bartimaeus, swear off using "the gun" and submit to the discerning community of faith as it develops in them the skill of turning their suffering and pain into something beautiful. It will take work to "tame wild sound into music," but the end product is something more beautiful, more valuable, and more effective in conforming us to Christ. **IJFM**

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Peterson, *The Fiddler's Gun* (Nashville, TN: Rabbit Room Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>3</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 173.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religions* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Orlando O. Espin, "Popular Religion as an Epistemology (of Suffering)" *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 2, no. 2 (1994) 55.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>9</sup> Personal notes of John Iseminger's "Lecture on Makua Culture," SIL, Nampula, Mozambique, March 3-4, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>11</sup> Eugene A. Nida and William A. Smalley, *Introducing Animism* (New York: Friendship Press, 1959), 35.
  - <sup>12</sup> Espin, 69.
  - <sup>13</sup> Isiminger.
  - <sup>14</sup> Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, Theological Perspectives in Africa, no. 5, ed. Tite Tiénou (Africa Christian Press, 1993), 64.
  - <sup>15</sup> Ibid., 66.
  - <sup>16</sup> David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religion* (Eastbourne, England: MARC and Monarch Publications Ltd., 1988), 109.
  - <sup>17</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999 ), 90-91.
  - <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 227.
  - <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 164.
  - <sup>20</sup> M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, Richard Langer, and Jason McMartin, "The Role of Suffering in Human Flourishing: Contributions from Positive Psychology, Theology, and Philosophy," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 2 (2010), 116.
  - <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 120.
  - <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>23</sup> Hiebert, 227.
  - <sup>24</sup> John Christopher Thomas, "Spiritual Conflict in Illness and Affliction," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau et al. (Monrovia, CA: MARC – World Vision Publications, 2002), 41. Thomas goes on to say that "the attribution of infirmity to the Devil or demons is primarily confined to three New Testament documents: Matthew, Luke and Acts. Neither James nor John gives any hint that the Devil or demons have a role to play in the infliction of infirmity." For Paul, his one attribution of illness (thorn in the flesh as messenger of Satan) ultimately identifies God "as the ultimate origin of the thorn." While Thomas is reluctant to place Mark in this continuum, it seems clear that 9:25 places him with the other Synoptic writers in attributing some illnesses to the demonic.
  - <sup>25</sup> Hwa Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognizes the Demonic," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau et al. (Monrovia, CA: MARC – World Vision Publications, 2002), 15. Related texts include: Luke 9:42; Matt. 9:32.
  - <sup>26</sup> L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 198.
  - <sup>27</sup> Ibid. James, Paul, John and Luke all attribute some sickness to God, whereas Matthew and Mark do not.
  - <sup>28</sup> Jones, 198. Related texts include: 1 Cor. 11:30; Rev. 2:21-22.
  - <sup>29</sup> Thomas, 41.
  - <sup>30</sup> Hall, 117-118.
  - <sup>31</sup> Hiebert, 164.
  - <sup>32</sup> Thomas, 41.
  - <sup>33</sup> 2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:15 and Acts 28:27
  - <sup>34</sup> Jones, 198.
  - <sup>35</sup> Ibid, 199.
  - <sup>36</sup> Thomas, 44.
  - <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>38</sup> Hiebert, 227.
  - <sup>39</sup> Berakoth 5a ([www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth\\_5.html](http://www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth_5.html))
  - <sup>40</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 703.
  - <sup>41</sup> Because of space limitations, this discussion of the use of medicine by the people of God is painfully brief. It certainly deserves a full treatment such as Gary Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009).
  - <sup>42</sup> Hiebert, 167.
  - <sup>43</sup> Hall, 111.
  - <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 115.
  - <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 116.
  - <sup>46</sup> Hiebert, 377.
  - <sup>47</sup> Peterson, 38-39.
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Suffering and Persecution

# Growth Amidst Persecution: A Comparison of the Evangelical Church in Communist China and the Soviet Union

by John E. White

In the former Soviet Union one can overhear ministers claim that the Evangelical Church in China grew ten fold under communism, while the Evangelical Church in the Soviet Union shrank ten fold.<sup>1</sup> While these statistics can be disputed to some extent, this stark contrast seems to beg for further investigation. Just what are the factors that have made the difference? How can it be that the Soviet Union gained religious freedom yet it was China that experienced Christian revival? What factors are important for growth when persecution hits the church? This article will begin to explore by way of comparison the various factors underlying evangelical church growth in communist China and the Soviet Union. I would hope that churches and missionaries ministering in places where the government persecutes Christians, or where persecution is anticipated, would find this exploration valuable.

For this study, “evangelical” refers to the denominations of evangelical Christians, Baptists, and Pentecostals within the Soviet Union and to the Three Self Patriotic Movement and Protestant House Church movement in China. I want to compare evangelical growth in these two regions from four perspectives, since it’s my conviction that any fruitful comparison cannot be one dimensional. Those four perspectives (what I will call dimensions) can help us begin to configure the many different factors we might see in any comparison of persecution. They would be (1) culture; (2) the state of the evangelical church before communism; (3) the way the communist government related to the evangelical church; and, (4) the evangelical church’s practices and beliefs during communism. I would hope that sorting the different factors of this particular comparison will provide a grid for discerning how the church might grow under persecution.

## *Russian and Chinese Culture*

In addressing the range of cultural matters that might impact the ability of any church to flourish under persecution I can only be suggestive. While I

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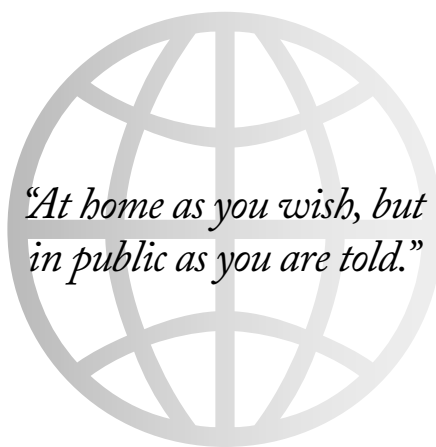
admit to only broad strokes, hopefully these strokes will illustrate how important it is to factor in cultural variables. As two of the largest nations in the world in both population and area, Russia (or the Soviet Union) and China have a number of cultural characteristics in common. Both cultures have been primarily rural<sup>2</sup> and have had a long-established faith—Russian Orthodoxy and Confucianism, respectively.<sup>3</sup> With national self-images of “Messiah” and “The Middle Kingdom,” it is clear that both cultures think well of themselves. Both are suspicious of outsiders (like missionaries) who offer help of any kind.

Yet, any understanding of a church’s growth amidst persecution must discern the differences between these cultures. For instance, Geert Hofstede’s cultural study of “uncertainty avoidance” establishes the Russian preference for stability, scoring them seventh among 74 countries. In contrast, China ranked 68th, indicating that any need to “be in control” is not as vital.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally the Chinese have viewed life as cyclical, with a tendency to “look forward to the past,”<sup>5</sup> making the future less worrisome (it’s behind them!). Russians, on the other hand, tend to be pessimistic about life, yet they take pride in their ability to endure.<sup>6</sup>

This cultural comparison of “uncertainty avoidance” indicates the need for historical or socio-economic aspects of cultural life. Russians come from a European feudal system in which “a family permanently retained its status in the social order.”<sup>7</sup> This stability contrasts with a system in China that was more based on achievement. Positions in the Chinese bureaucracy were gained by successfully passing exams<sup>8</sup> and merchants were able to accumulate wealth that led to influence.<sup>9</sup> Much of farmers’ success was based on their own work in the rice fields, due primarily to the collection of fixed rents by landlords in central and southern China since the fifteenth

century.<sup>10</sup> This combination of success through intellect, work, and the use of wealth is a salient comparison with Russia. The Chinese people are quite entrepreneurial as opposed to Russians who value caution and stability.<sup>11</sup> One captures this cultural comparison in proverbs: Russians say, “If God does not bring it, the earth will not give it,” while the Chinese say, “If a man works hard, the land will not be lazy.”<sup>12</sup>

We would also have to explore the Russian tendency to compartmentalize their private and public lives, which seems to contrast with the Chinese who are more holistic. One Russian proverb suggests, “At home as you wish, but in public as you are told.”<sup>13</sup> This compartmentalization



includes religion as well, and could have a dramatic impact of how Russians handle faith publically under fire. (Only the Americans rival Russians in the minimal social function of religion in everyday life.<sup>14</sup>)

And the Chinese seem to put greater emphasis on practicality; even ancient Chinese religions focus more on ethics than on spirituality. One wonders if this would make Chinese culture more open and tolerant to spiritual ideas. One author suggests, “Chinese culture is tolerant because it does not know what is the ultimate reality beyond life, nature and the universe.”<sup>15</sup> In my experience Russians tend to perceive themselves to be sufficiently

spiritual, and with their value on religious stability, it’s difficult to convince them to believe the gospel as opposed to just following Russian culture. Russians usually see religion as being communal (from their Russian Orthodoxy<sup>16</sup>) and value individual spirituality far less. If a church doesn’t have a large beautiful building (like the Orthodox), it’s not a real church. This was a grave disadvantage to unregistered evangelical churches in Russia during communism.

So it appears that the Chinese had cultural advantages. The tendency of Russians to compartmentalize their faith under the horrors of persecution seems to have inoculated them against spiritual pursuit, whereas persecution led many Chinese to seek new spiritual answers. The Russian understanding of spirituality as communal and associated with a building made them less prepared for underground church life. Russians tended to prefer stability, whereas Chinese practicality and entrepreneurialism equipped them well to develop an unregistered church.

### *The Evangelical Church before Communism*

In discerning the potential response to persecution, one must also consider the status of the church. In China the evangelical church had already existed for 100 years when Communists took over in 1949. A key event was the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, which led to the death of several hundred missionaries and thousands of Chinese Christians. Many Christians’ witness during this terrible event powerfully affected the Chinese people,<sup>17</sup> and the evangelical church grew consistently until communism was declared (see table 1). In 1925 there were over 8000 missionaries, although this was reduced radically in 1949 with the change of government.<sup>18</sup> These missionaries helped prepare thousands of national ministers, so that “in terms of Chinese leadership, only a small number



of churches were actually not staffed adequately by well-trained Chinese.”<sup>19</sup>

The evangelical church had existed for almost as long in Russia as in China when communism took over that government in 1917. Evangelicals had moved from Germany to Ukraine in the 1820s, a movement of Baptists had grown in the Caucasus, and evangelical Christians had emerged among the elite in St. Petersburg.<sup>20</sup> This growth happened despite the fact that there was significantly less mission work in Russia than in China. After full religious liberty was granted by Tsar Nicholas II in 1905,<sup>21</sup> the evangelical church experienced consistent growth until communism came (see table 1).

What factors contributed to this growth? In Russia, the church seized upon this more open era.

The evangelicals were quick to capitalize on the new situation and organized systematic expansion. At a Congress of the Evangelical Christians in 1910, (Ivan) Prokhanov set as a goal the organization of one congregation in each of 70 regions of the empire. From this one congregation five more were to be started.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, despite official religious liberty, the government and Russian Orthodox Church interfered. Some evangelical worship services and denominational congresses were banned, the evangelical Christians' Bible school was closed, and some pastors were exiled.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Chinese Evangelical Churches actually received some praise and help from the government.<sup>26</sup>

There were other negative aspects that the Russian Evangelical Church faced which the Chinese Evangelical Church did not. In Russia, many Baptists were German, so that at the onset of World War I many Russians associated Baptists with the enemy. Furthermore, most Baptists were pacifists, and thus unwilling to fight the Germans.

We should not underestimate the impact of the centuries-old traditional

## **A** *movement of Baptists had grown in the Caucasus, and evangelical Christians had emerged among the elite in St. Petersburg.*

Orthodox Church on the Russian mentality. There were numerous conversions to evangelicalism that happened, not for the sake of the gospel, but from dissatisfaction with the Orthodox Church and/or the government to which it had long been tied.<sup>27</sup> The Chinese Evangelical Church also was negatively associated with a foreigner missionary force, but the horrors of the Boxer Rebellion seem to have shaken off much of the previous negativity.

During this entire period, both churches in these two regions had significant evangelistic ministries. In Russia, evangelicals used many methods of witness, including literature, music concerts, and Bible studies for soldiers and factory workers.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the outreach work of foreign missionaries in China, evangelists John Sung, Wang Mingdao, and Watchman Nee had very successful ministries.<sup>29</sup> Churches in both countries reached out to youth, in Russia under the leadership of Prokhanov,<sup>30</sup> and in China through the YMCA and YWCA.<sup>31</sup>

The focus on Christian education in China (a natural extension from Confucianism) was much greater than in Russia. There were 58,000 Christian schools in China in 1906. Many of these schools baptized the majority of their children by graduation.<sup>32</sup> In Russia, only a handful of cases of Christian education can be found.<sup>33</sup>

Both Russian and Chinese churches produced Christian literature, but it was the demand for Bibles in China that increased significantly in the years before communism.

In the fore part of the 1930's a decline was noted in the demand for discrete portions of the Scriptures, but sales of entire Bibles and especially of New Testaments markedly rose. This trend seemed to indicate a serious reading of the Bible which was not content with single books.<sup>34</sup>

This increased Bible reading was certainly a blessed preparation for days to come when the church would be denied Bibles.

A final important difference was the development of decentralized churches

*Table 1: Evangelicals before Communism (All figures are approximate)*

Year	# of Evangelicals in Russia <sup>22</sup>	# of Evangelicals in China <sup>23</sup>
1902		100,000
1905	106,000	
1910		200,000
1912	144,000	
1914		257,000
1917	150,000-200,000 (communism begins)	
1936	_____	567,000
1949	_____	927,000 (communism begins)

in China. The best example of this was Watchman Nee's "Little Flock" ministry. They stressed the importance of close fellowship in small group meetings, Bible study, and freedom from foreign control. Thus, they were ready to survive under communism.<sup>35</sup> Considering the Russian cultural trait of associating the church with a building, this sort of group would be very unnatural for Russians. However, it was exactly the sort of ministry needed for the coming of communism.

So, before the crackdown of communism the Chinese Evangelical Church was healthier and more flexible than the Russian Evangelical Church. In addition to having greater numbers, Chinese Christians had learned many important lessons from foreign missionaries, not the least of which was to minister through suffering. They had benefited from a good system of Christian education, the availability of and interest in Bible reading, and the development of some decentralized churches.

### *How the Communist Government Related to the Evangelical Church*

Christopher Marsh points out that, "the area of religion policy appears to be the one area where the Chinese *did not* draw many parallels between their experience and that of their Soviet comrades."<sup>36</sup> When communism came to China, all Western imperialists (including foreign missionaries) were asked to leave. The Chinese government established the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) in 1951,<sup>37</sup> and over the next decade churches and ministries were shut down or brought under control of the TSPM.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast, the Evangelical church in the Soviet Union was given freedom and experienced revival during the first decade of communism. Because the Communists considered the Russian Orthodox Church to be their biggest threat, they gave evangelicals greater freedom in order to draw converts

away from the Orthodox.<sup>39</sup> A parallel might be drawn between the 1920s in the Soviet Union and the first half of the 20th century in China (before communism) in terms of religious freedom and evangelical growth.

However, the Soviet government's kind treatment in the 1920s gave the evangelical church a false sense of security and allowed some government agents to gain influence over the church. According to Christopher Marsh, "we can see the Soviet tactic of projecting an image of toleration publicly, while agitating for the church's destruction to insiders."<sup>40</sup> It was discovered after the fall of communism that nearly a third of those in the church in Communist Eastern Europe had collaborated as informants.<sup>41</sup> Even



evangelical Christian church leader Ivan Prokhanov had cooperated with the communist government.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, the Soviet Union effectively combated faith with atheist propaganda. In contrast,

China's paltry efforts in promoting atheism...left the Chinese people more open to religious belief than if they had been indoctrinated in scientific atheism for decades.<sup>43</sup>

Both the Soviet and Chinese governments conducted periods of intense persecution against the evangelical church.<sup>44</sup> Each of these periods of persecution reduced the size of the evangelical church, although it is unknown to what extent in China (see table 2, facing page).

It's important to recognize that the way the churches were persecuted varied significantly. In 1929, Stalin made a five-year plan to convert the Soviet Union into a communist state. This included church registration (which could be denied), making it virtually impossible to print religious materials, confining ministers to certain geographical areas (which limited mission work), and forbidding meetings for children, youth, or women.<sup>47</sup> The week was made six days long between 1929 and 1940, with 1/6 of the work force off each day.<sup>48</sup> This made attending "Sunday" worship difficult, if not impossible. Also, many evangelicals were arrested and put in labor camps (an estimated 22,000 were sent to Siberia<sup>49</sup>). When pastors were arrested, the government often closed their churches, sometimes turning church buildings into movie theaters or museums.<sup>50</sup>

The evangelical Christians, Baptists, and Pentecostals in the Soviet Union joined to form one denomination over the course of 1944-1945, and became the Evangelical Christian Baptists. Although this seemed to be done freely, the government actually "guided" the decision.<sup>51</sup> A centralized system of religion could be more easily and effectively infiltrated by the government.<sup>52</sup>

Later, persecution under Khrushchev made a significant impact as he promised to "show the last Christian on TV."<sup>53</sup> Children were sometimes taken away from "unfit" Christian parents and put into orphanages for the government to raise.<sup>54</sup> Youth organizations indoctrinated children and youth into communist atheism.<sup>55</sup> China's policies were nowhere near as effective at influencing children through these same years.<sup>56</sup>

But in China, persecution during the Cultural Revolution became more direct and severe. All churches—even the TSPM churches—were shut down in 1966. No evangelism, public worship or even singing of hymns was allowed. Bibles and hymnbooks were burned. The last seminary was closed. At that time, "Christians dared not

show recognition of each other in public...Whispered prayer in secret with one or two others became the only Christian fellowship still possible.”<sup>57</sup>

Yet, the unregistered “house church” movement survived and grew. In 1982, the Chinese government officially started

allowing home Bible studies, worship and prayer.<sup>58</sup> Later, the massacre of students at Tiananmen Square in 1989 led to a great growth of interest in the Christian faith, especially among young people. As one person said, “When that happened, I knew the government had lied to me.”<sup>59</sup>

In addition, Communists did several things which unintentionally helped the Chinese evangelical church. The government standardized the language of Mandarin, improved literacy and transportation.<sup>60</sup> Although native Chinese religions were not eradicated,<sup>61</sup>

*Table 2: Evangelicals during Communism (All figures are approximate)*

Year	# of Evangelicals in the Soviet Union <sup>45</sup>	Government Persecutions	# of Evangelicals in China <sup>46</sup>
1917	150,000-200,000 total		_____
1922	100,000 Baptists, 250,000 evangelical Christians		_____
1929	400,000 Baptists, 400,000 evangelical Christians, 80,000 Pentecostals	< Stalin: 1929-1939	_____
1935	250,000 Total		_____
1947	350,000 Evangelical Christian Baptists (ECB), including 25,000 Pentecostals		_____
1949			927,000 total
1958	530,000 ECB	Mao: Anti-Rightist Campaign & Great Leap Forward 1957-1960 >	
1959		< Khrushchev: 1959-1964	
1966	250,000 ECB, 155,000 unregistered	Mao: Cultural Revolution 1966-1976 >	0 registered (unregistered?)
1980	350,000 ECB, 100,000 unregistered		
1983-1984		Deng: “Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign” >	
1986			3,300,000 registered
1989	237,000 ECB, 140,000 Pentecostals (unregistered?)	Tiananmen Square >	
1991	End of communism		
1994	_____		7,000,000 registered
1996	_____		10,000,000 registered
2004	_____		21,000,000 registered, 40,000,000 house church (unregistered)

communism weakened these religions and left people feeling a spiritual vacuum. Furthermore, the Cultural Revolution forced people to renounce their failures and change their lives, creating a “culture of confession” that may have made an evangelical confession of sins much easier for the Chinese people.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, the Soviet Union did similar things in standardizing Russian, improving literacy, transportation, and weakening the Russian Orthodox Church. Horrors like the Cultural Revolution also occurred under Stalin. Yet, here again, one wonders whether the Russian tendency to compartmentalize might have caused the non-Christian population to continue to reject God.

In review, the communist government’s attacks on the Chinese Evangelical Church were less successful than those on her counterpart in the Soviet Union. By forming the Chinese government-sponsored TSPM right away, many Chinese Christians were immediately driven underground, making them more difficult to control. By allowing the evangelical church to grow during the first decade of communism, the Soviet government more successfully infiltrated the registered church. Although the Chinese

government shut down all churches during the Cultural Revolution, the Soviet government’s manipulation and propaganda were more effective in the long run.

### *Practices and Beliefs of the Evangelical Church during Communism*

Soviet and Chinese Evangelical Churches both had Bible-based beliefs and valued individual repentance. Both churches believed that God would provide for them through suffering.<sup>63</sup> Both churches sought greater unity, but ended up with registered and unregistered churches that disagreed over the question of submission to the government.<sup>64</sup>

Both Soviet and Chinese Evangelical Churches conducted evangelism under communism. In the 1920s, the Soviet Evangelical Church had great success using many forms of public evangelism.<sup>65</sup> After the 1920s, the Soviet churches limited their evangelism to personal outreach and evangelizing during weddings, funerals, and other holidays.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, a “subculture” was also formed, teaching that survival and personal holiness were more important than outreach.<sup>67</sup>

Chinese house churches, however, continued to do public preaching, even during the Cultural Revolution. For example, the Fangcheng Church Network trained young evangelists to go out in pairs all over China. They were sometimes arrested and tortured, but they continued to spread the gospel.<sup>68</sup>

Chinese Evangelical Churches placed a great emphasis on Christian education. As of 2004, the TSPM had 12 seminaries and 12 Bible schools<sup>69</sup> and there were over a hundred underground seminaries across China.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, there was very little training and Christian education in the Soviet Evangelical Church. The 1920s saw the most training, a continuation of what had been done before communism.<sup>71</sup> Yet even this failed to produce well-trained leadership, which, according to Walter Sawatsky, is one reason churches lost ground during the persecution of the 1930s. Interestingly, the Soviet Union’s evangelicals were the only ones in Eastern Europe not permitted to have a seminary.<sup>72</sup>

The Chinese church had more access to Bibles than the Soviet church. Bible smuggling into the Soviet Union had some impact, but nothing like the one million Bibles that Brother David smuggled into China in 1981. This led

*Table 3: Comparison of Evangelical Churches under Communism*

	China	Soviet Union	Both
<b>Culture</b>	Entrepreneurialism, holism	Stability, compartmentalism	Dislike of foreigners
<b>Church</b>	More foreign missionary support, decentralization, underground church established immediately	Communal, connected to a building, underground church established much later	National leadership
<b>Conditions</b>	Government persecution more direct: shutting down all churches	Government persecution more indirect: church infiltration, propaganda	One language, improved literacy, good transportation, weakened traditional religion
<b>Christian Ministry</b>	Christian education, more access to Bibles, more direct evangelism and mission work	“Survival” subculture, indirect evangelism during weddings, funerals, etc.	Bible-based, belief in God’s provision amidst suffering, personal evangelism

to the Chinese government allowing Bibles to be printed in China, with more than 30 million Bibles printed from 1987 to 2003.<sup>73</sup> This greater availability of Bibles in the last 30 years has coincided with incredible Chinese church growth.

Another key difference between the Soviet and Chinese Evangelical Churches was their mission work. Whereas Soviet churches' main outreach to minority groups within the Soviet Union was confined to the 1920s<sup>74</sup> and the last years of Glasnost from 1989-1991,<sup>75</sup> "...virtually every house church Christian in China... has a passion for mission work outside of China."<sup>76</sup> The "Back to Jerusalem" movement aims to send 100,000 Chinese missionaries to evangelize the 10/40 window from China back to Jerusalem. Only a few hundred such missionaries have been trained so far, but there are already many Chinese missionaries working in minority areas within China.<sup>77</sup>

It's apparent that the Chinese Evangelical Church had more growth than the Soviet Evangelical Church due to its evangelistic boldness. Even during the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Christians found ways to evangelize, disciple, and train people for ministry. The Chinese also had more access to Bibles. In contrast to the Soviet Christian subculture that focused more on survival and personal holiness, the Chinese Evangelical Church dreamed, planned and developed initial outreach into the 10/40 window.

### **Conclusion: Critical Dimensions for Discerning Growth**

Considering the above analysis, how can we explain the church growth that occurred under communist persecution? I believe we need a grid of discernment to capture the answer. So I have introduced what I believe are four critical dimensions to frame a multitude of factors in this comparison of China and the Soviet Union (see table 3). We must consider

**Y***et even this failed to produced well-trained leadership, which is one reason churches lost ground during the persecution of the 1930s.*

the *culture*, the status of the *church*, the exact *conditions* of persecution, and the forms of *Christian ministry* for a proportionate assessment of evangelical growth. More thorough and comprehensive research on these dimensions, whether digging into government records or gaining better information on the church under communism, may balance the tendency to romanticize the apparent successes of the Chinese Evangelical Church.

So, this study is more than an historical assessment of these communist contexts, but offers a tool, a grid, which may assist the mission worker who is presently witnessing or might anticipate persecution in their context of ministry. I believe we need to see beyond our tactical responses to the four contextual dimensions that I have outlined. Culture makes a difference, as does the nature of the church at the onset of persecution. And we can't be naïve about the nature and intensity of the persecution itself. The differences in governmental strategies make a difference. Ultimately, however, the church's response can be determinative. Developing decentralized churches, having a good Christian education system, and having access to Bibles are vital factors. Boldness in evangelism and a missionary vision in the face of suffering can help spur church growth as well. But we must not focus too quickly on the character and method of ministry if we wish to gain a full appreciation of how any church might grow under persecution.

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- <sup>72</sup> Sawatsky, 1981.
- <sup>73</sup> Aikman, 2003.
- <sup>74</sup> Savinskii, 2001.
- <sup>75</sup> Rowe, 1994.
- <sup>76</sup> Aikman, 2003, p. 111.
- <sup>77</sup> Lambert, 2004.

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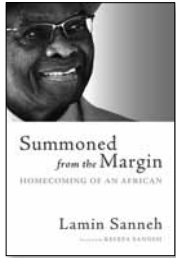
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# Book Reviews

*Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African*, by Lamin Sanneh (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 2012)

—Reviewed by Karl J. Franklin



Lamin Sanneh is the D. Willis James Professor of World Christianity at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. He has written widely on Islam, African Christianity, and the history of mission. This new autobiographical work reflects two polar perspectives that function much like two bookends with many other books in between. The first bookend (Part I) is mainly concerned about Islam, centered in Gambia where Sanneh grew up in a devout Muslim family. The second bookend (Part III) concerns his conversion to Catholicism and all the related polemics. Between the two bookends (Part II) are his rigorous and sometimes confusing academic and religious journeys. As Sanneh pointedly says, “This book is about my spiritual and intellectual journey, and tracks the path of my career from its unlikely beginnings in a traditional African Muslim society to its eventual culmination in the world of academia” (p. 19).

Chapter one of Part I, “What God Wills,” is Sanneh’s masterful brief history of Gambia and his story of how God’s will permeated everything in the society: “The statement ‘This is the accustomed way of doing things among us’ is the law of collective immunity... That is, it is the will of God” (p. 12). According to Sanneh, the manners, customs, duties and blessings of the sacred text allow Muslim people to have faith on the basis of perceived benefits. Money permeates the conversations, showing the materialistic nature of the Muslim religion.

Sanneh was challenged by the writings of Helen Keller to “burst the chains of my intellectual confinement” (p. 17), teaching him that education was the key to overcoming any handicaps he had. He had never seen a Bible and there was no church in his town—he never heard anyone preach or teach about Christianity: “More than a thousand years of Islamization had contributed to making Christianity virtually invisible to us” (p. 19). Helen Keller is but one of a long list of people and books that Sanneh refers to throughout his autobiography.

Chapter two, “Negotiating Childhood,” takes us into his polygamous household where “Children came in bunches and went out as confederates. In a crowded home with competing factions, life was a high-contact sport, and so it paid to forge alliances of the preemptive kind, with built-in checks and balances” (p. 24-25). But children learned that friends were more important than things and in Gambia women “would weep if they saw a child alone, even if not their own” (p. 26). Sanneh outlines the benefits and dangers of a family life that largely excludes the father, who had other wives to care for, and offspring learned that “those children who want to wear adult trousers must tie them at their throats” (p. 34).

“Second Wind” (chapter three) refers to Sanneh’s beginning “to live life from choice rather than on terms dictated by circumstances” (p. 63). He recounts how traditional festivals, circumcision, famine and Qur’an teaching were interwoven with his own curiosity about nature that “was leading to curiosity about God” (p. 60). He realized he would have to make choices and live life with risks because “I had to believe that the will of God left room to strive, to labor, and to embrace the reward” (p. 62). He began to live in hope and “was haunted by a sense of impending change in which I knew I had a meaningful role to play” (p. 63). He began to explore ways to bring it about.

Chapter four, “Exile at Home,” is an introspective view of how turning one’s back on one’s own religious language has negative outcomes. Arabic reigned supreme and “multilingual skills proved merely our addition to heathen tongues” (p. 71). Nevertheless, even at Armitage, his secondary school, Sanneh was able to find books, including Pilgrim’s Progress, Vanity Fair, and many others, that impressed and challenged him to believe that someday “I would visit other places, learn a new language, and make friends” (p. 80).

Chapter five, “Knocking on the Door” describes Sanneh’s somewhat torturous path to the Christian faith. He moves to Banjul, the colonial capital with amenities new to him—paved roads, phones, electricity, cars, an international airport, even the headquarters of Catholic and Protestant missions. He lodges with a Creole family who were practicing Anglicans but, due to mental and psychological conflict, moves to a one room apartment with a friend. During this time he is working for the government and begins to reassess the Christian religion. However, “What I observed of Christians did not make me stop and think” (p. 88). He believed that many Europeans had turned their backs on Christianity, so he fancied himself “a flag-bearer of Islam.” In general, the Bible’s exhortations seemed to make little difference to how Christians lived. In his own case, however, by musing on the life of the prophets he reasoned that “If God accepted Jesus’ suffering and failure, it would



require us to judge him and God by a different rule, thus giving hope to suffering humanity" (p. 90). Sanneh was in a quandary and reasoned that if Jesus' suffering had divine merit, then Jesus would vindicate it by his ministry. Christianity was not what he was seeking "yet Christianity's slain founder had risen from the grave and was threatening to pursue me in my thoughts. When and where might I find the answer?" (p. 97). Sanneh had let his guard down and during a stroll "the next thing I knew I was tumbling to my knees in prayer to Jesus, pleading, imploring, begging for God to forgive me, to accept me, to teach me, to help me—everything a child looks for" (p. 102).

Chapter six, "Challenged," outlines the two challenges Sanneh faced: (1) to slip away from the old moorings of life without causing a storm and (2) to find a community of followers of Jesus (p. 103). Regarding the former he continued to respect and appreciate his Muslim friends. This proved somewhat difficult because "Muslims honor and celebrate their converts as trophies of faith, while Christians take their [Muslim] converts as charitable rations with a pinch of shame" (p. 105). In other words, "Christianity has the status of a lower caste in Muslim lands" (ibid). Sanneh soon found this out when he tried to join a Protestant church and be baptized. However, in a series of events over a period of time he was politely ignored by Catholics, Methodists, and even Presbyterians (in chapter 7), although he was baptized by a Methodist minister. At the end of his High School he was awarded a scholarship that took him to the U.S. Thus ends Part I, the bookend on his Muslim context.

Part II begins with chapter seven, "New World" (p. 125). Sanneh arrived in the U.S. in the middle of 1963, when the country was in the throes of political unrest, shortly culminating in the murders of Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. His comments on America as he experienced it are understandably somewhat negative. The focus on money, entertainment, feminism, profanity, Sunday as "hangover day," musical lyrics, racial tensions, and affluence were puzzling to him. Sanneh enrolled at a college in Virginia but after one year, at the invitation of an academic colleague, moved to Union College in Schenectady, NY. His attempts to find a church community and fellowship were fraught with racial overtones, despite being accepted for some ministry at an Episcopal church. It was at Union, however, that he also had some support and mentoring that he might not have expected

there. (Union was chartered in 1795 during the French Enlightenment and "saw itself as a rampart against religion" (p. 139). The professors had no time for religion nor did many of the students either.) His studies at Union focused on the eighteenth-century abolitionist movement whereas most students were trying to find the easiest subjects to take so that they could finish college in the easiest manner. He decided to continue with Islamic Studies so that he could combine history and religion.

Chapter eight, "Intercontinental Vistas," is a hectic record of Sanneh's travels to Nigeria (studying Arabic), Gambia (to visit his father), Britain (Edinburgh and Birmingham Universities studying classical Arabic and Islam). He concludes that the academy has a particular approach to Islamic studies and that he "was hitting [his] head against a brick wall regarding the Western approaches to Islam" (p. 156).

Chapter nine, "Boomerang" begins with Sanneh's return to Birmingham, England, where he interacts with an Anglican rector named Bryan. Bryan wants Sanneh "to stress the rarity of Muslim conversions" (p. 159), even though one of the officials of the church opposed his joining the Anglican church! There were some Anglicans who criticized the slowness of transferring control of the local churches to the Africans, but in general this was not the case. Sanneh enrolls at the University of Birmingham in the theology department and continues to study Arabic and Islam. In his advanced degree studies he realizes the "vehement controversy on the religious front, which expressed itself in Muslim opposition to the Western missionary movements" (p. 167). His next stop would be in Beirut for further studies in Arabic.

The title of Chapter ten, "Clipped Cedars" is a metaphorical reference to his time in Lebanon. At the time Lebanon was recognized "as a multicultural, multi-religious communal democratic system [that] made it an oddity in the region" (p. 175). Sanneh reports that a Muslim scholar once said "Muslims wish to dialogue, but they don't know how, while Christians know how to dialogue, but they don't wish to" (p. 178). A scholar with whom Sanneh had conversations pointed out that Muslim scholars regarded the Western colonial administration as infidels and therefore their ordinances "carried little weight unless they reflected Muslim demands" (p. 186). "The differential outcome of colonial rule was that Islam prospered while Christianity faltered. Christianity was quarantined." (p. 187).

**T**he next thing I knew I was tumbling to my knees in prayer to Jesus, pleading, imploring, begging for God to forgive me, to accept me, to teach me, to help me—everything a child looks for." (p. 102).

**T**he name of God can (and should be) a vernacular name. Sanneh declares, “I do not know of documented cases of Christian conversion occurring in societies where the indigenous name of God is unknown.” (p. 233)

Chapter eleven, “Beyond Jihad,” outlines Sanneh’s hands-on experience in West Africa where he worked with an organization that introduced “church leaders to the study of Islam and to a Christian theology of dialogue and mutual engagement” (p. 191). He notes that “The Muslims wanted vigorous debate, while the Christians seemed to be tiptoeing around the differences between the two faiths” (ibid). Christians seemed to ignore theology and rely on proof texts. During his work Sanneh “stumbled into the Suwairan pacifist tradition,” causing him to “wonder why jihadists allowed clerical pacifism at all, and how pacific clerics related to their jihad opponents” (p. 198). The significance of such Islamic pacific clerics is that it allowed dialogue on the basis of their shared heritage and faith such that “the earthly magistrate has no power to give or to withhold it” (p. 205).

The second bookend begins with Part III, Chapter twelve, “Native Tongue,” and is a powerful argument for the use of the vernacular, with his claim that “Christianity is a form of indigenous empowerment by virtue of vernacular translation” of the Bible (p. 217).

Chapter thirteen “Turning Point” continues the emphasis on the vernacular and takes place while Sanneh was at Harvard. The following are some of his observations on the native tongue in Bible translation: (1) it is unique as a missionary religion because it is not transmitted in the language of Jesus; (2) it is transmitted in a kind of “basic” Greek that is utilitarian; (3) it highlights the fact that the Qur’an is untranslatable in the vernacular because it thereby would have no canonical status; (4) the Muslim claim, therefore, is that translations must yield to the Qur’an and not displace it; and (5) the name for God can be (and should be) a vernacular name. In fact, Sanneh declares “I do not know of documented cases of Christian conversion occurring in societies where the indigenous name of God is unknown” (p. 233). His book, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (1989, 2009) is an earlier enlargement on these points.

In Chapter fourteen, “Homecoming,” Sanneh and his family move to Yale University where he has “a chance encounter with a colleague, Fr. Jerry, a Catholic priest” (p. 241). In retrospect, he notes that despite being a regular church attendee at Protestant churches, he was still treated as a visitor. Even at the Yale Divinity School he felt that “without a New England pedigree one was on a cultural watch list” (p. 243). Because of such attitudes Sanneh studied and wrote on issues that distinguished “between a cultural and a theological

reading of Christianity. I concluded that the cultural interpretation has become the dominant intellectual position” (p. 248). He believes such narrowness of thinking contributes to the self-interest of many Christians.

In “Rock of Ages” (Chapter fifteen) Sanneh converts to Catholicism—he considers it more as a natural conclusion to his journey—and moves to Washington, D.C. for his sabbatical. He observes the nature and interests of policy makers and the U.S. political system. However, he seems to be a Catholic with a difference: “Being Catholic does not assume anything about my cultural attainment, not even about whether I practice the Catholic faith, scandalous as that may sound” (p. 267).

Sanneh’s book is an autobiography that is also different: it does not tell us anything in depth about his wife, for example, although we know that she is a South African and competent in her own right. We know he has children and that Kelefa and his sister are accomplished professionals, but we don’t know anything about his family life that is not a part of his philosophical ruminations. In fact, we read in the preface that Kelefa “had only dimly perceived [of] the curiosity and restlessness that propelled my father out of the Gambia, and have propelled him ever since” (p. xii).

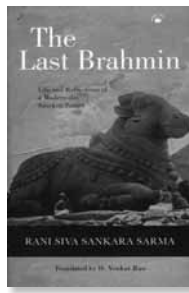
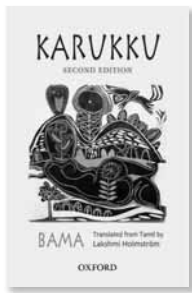
Despite the recorded discussions and deliberations with his academic colleagues, as well as in his other writings, it is not easy for the reader to know what kind of a person Sanneh is. This is partly because what he does reveal about his life, even when growing up as a Muslim in Gambia, takes place inside the perspective and story of a gifted academic.

*Summoned from the Margin* offers profound suggestions on a continuing and necessary dialogue between Christians and Muslims, with Sanneh showing sympathy toward the attitudes and concerns of both. We will have to wait and see what Protestant missionaries and churches have learned from his experiences.

**Three Indian Vernacular Novels: *Karukku*, *Untouchable Spring*, and *The Last Brahmin: Life and Reflections of a Modern-day Sanskrit Pandit***

—Reviewed by H. L. Richard

Publishing continues to boom in India and English continues to be functionally the national language. Many important



works are published in the various regional languages, and the best of these are increasingly being brought out in English translation, primarily for Indian readership but with internationals enabled to listen in as well.

*Karukku* by Bama, second edition (translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 142 + xxv.

**K***arukku* by Bama must be given pride of place in this review of three important Indian novels. Bama is a Tamil Dalit woman and is considered the originator of the field of Tamil Dalit autobiography. Her story was written in Tamil in 1992, appeared in an English edition in 2000 and now a second English edition with new forewords appeared in 2012.

Bama's story of caste oppression is a bit unconventional, as it focuses on caste in the Roman Catholic Church. Bama overcame caste prejudice to receive an education, then became a nun in order to encourage other Dalits to move ahead in education. But she found the caste culture of the church to be stifling, so she left the convent to enter a frightening state of limbo.

The Tamil word in the title, *karukku*, means the sharply edged leaves of a palm tree. Bama explained the significance of this title in the preface to the first edition:

There are many congruities between the saw-edged and my own life. Not only did I pick up the scattered *palmyra karukku* in the days when I was sent out to gather firewood, scratching and tearing my skin as I played with them, but later they also became the embryo and symbol that grew into this book.

The driving forces that shaped this book are many: events that occurred during many stages of my life, cutting me like *karukku* and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break away, throw away, destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was spilt—all these taken together....

Although the author of *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New Testament) described the Word of God as a two-edged sword, it no longer stirs the hardened hearts of many who have sought their happiness by enslaving and disempowering others.

In order to change this state of affairs, all Dalits who have been deprived of their basic rights must function as God's word, piercing to the very heart. Instead of being more and more beaten down and blunted, they must unite, think about their rights, and battle for them. (pp. xxiii-xxiv)

This review cannot do justice to such a powerful book, which has received both Indian and international awards. Anyone involved with Indian Christianity, which is primarily Dalit, needs to read and feel the pain that comes through this outstanding work.

*Untouchable Spring* by G. Kalyana Rao (translated from Telugu by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar), Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2010, pp. 285 + vii.

**T**his remarkable novel traces multiple generations of Dalit life in the southeastern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, presented as the oral recollections of an elderly woman telling what she had heard from her husband. The oral style at times gets a bit complicated, with the weaving of various generations of the tales, but the message comes through with great power.

Official Brahminical culture and history are harshly critiqued through the first hero of the tales, a gifted village artist who left the oppression of village life to be a wandering minstrel (each generation's story is remarkable in its own way). This artist's son converted to Christianity in the great famine when people movements to Christ stirred among the Mala and Madiga Dalit castes. (Mission records were used as background to these stories, which claim to be genuinely autobiographical of this Dalit Christian author.) The central story-teller in the book is Ruth, the wife of Reuben, the son of the first convert. Reuben is introduced amidst a caste-based atrocity and the story of oppression runs on from generation to generation. Reuben became a pastor in the mission hospital and made a happy life with Ruth. Their daughter Rosy married into the church and proceeded to court international contacts through the leadership of church and mission. But Reuben considered Rosy and her husband to be like Judas, and broke all relationship with them.

The generational story continues as Reuben and Ruth's son Immanuel turns to violence in the fight against caste oppression, and suffers a violent death. Rosy's daughter Ruby followed her grandfather Reuben out of the church, and in a fresh revolutionary mode, married Immanuel's son. Reuben dies tormented by the history of his people, and Ruth's own relation to this agonizing narrative is captured in a couple of sentences: "... Ruth says that her memory is not past. She says it is an untouchable spring" (p. 5).

For anyone wanting to feel the depth of Dalit stirrings in India today this book is highly recommended. The message

**W**hat it means to be Brahmin, what Hinduism is or should be, what lies ahead for traditional Indian culture, are crucial questions just below the surface of this impressive novel.

of the irrelevance of institutional Christianity and the appeal of violence is deeply troubling, but is best faced and grappled with in candid detail. A brief but very instructive concluding note by the translators situates this work in relation to Telugu literature and other Dalit writings (including Bama, reviewed just above), especially with reference to the problematic support of armed struggle and the right of non-Dalit translators to be involved with this type of publication.

*The Last Brahmin: Life and Reflections of a Modern-day Sanskrit Pandit* by Rani Siva Sankara Sarma (translated from Telugu by D. Venkat Rao), Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012; pp. 197 + vii.

**T**he last Brahmin is the father of the narrator of this story. The narrator is thoroughly modern and has little respect for traditional Brahminical ways, seeing egalitarianism as a superior ideology. The last Brahmin's worldview is especially highlighted in comparison with that of his oldest son, the elder brother of the narrator. The elder brother had converted to Hinduism, abandoning the true Brahminical tradition of the last Brahmin.

The opening paragraphs of chapter 8 illustrate this point.

Recently, a friend of mine told me of an incident which had fascinated him; he had read it in a book. That fifty-page book, written by Perugu Rami Reddy from Aditya Nagar of Karnool, has the title *Are Brahmins Hindus?* The incident that fascinated my friend is as follows.

Once, the writer was travelling from Rayalaseema to Konaseema. At Ravulapalem, some people helped an aged Vedic pandit to get into the bus. He came and sat next to the writer in the bus. Watching the pandit's clothing and appearance, the writer, just to begin a conversation, asked him, "Are you a Hindu?" "No! Can't you tell I am a Brahmin?" said the old man. "Aren't Brahmins Hindus?" asked the writer. "No. True, some say that there is something called 'Hindu religion' or 'Hinduism.' But this term, this so-called Hinduism, is nowhere to be found in the Vedas or Puranas or anywhere else. I am surely only a Brahmin," said the Veda pandit. (p. 45)

The last Brahmin remained true to the old tradition ("the ancient order") of teaching Sanskrit from pandit to student. He was deeply dismayed by the betrayal of his eldest son, also an expert in Sanskrit, into Hinduism. He was less concerned about the younger son, the narrator, who was never a good student.

The last Brahmin views the centuries of Islamic rule of India quite passively; Brahminism was allowed to flourish with its traditional pattern of teaching. It was the colonial era that brought the great disruption into Brahminical life. The newly developed monstrosity of Hinduism wants to homogenize and promote Brahminical ways among non-Brahmins. This is a total violation of "the ancient order."

With fascinating reflections and interactions among the varying worldviews of the family, the problems of modernity, Hinduism and Brahminism are powerfully portrayed. This novel takes one to the opposite end of the social spectrum of the two Dalit novels also reviewed here, but it shows that the crisis of identity is widespread in modern India (as indeed across the world). What it means to be Brahmin, what Hinduism is or should be, what lies ahead for the traditional Indian culture, are crucial questions just below the surface of this impressive novel.

The knowledge explosion of the modern world presents massive challenges for those who wish to remain broadly informed across cultures and fields of study. The growth of English as an international language now opens up, through translation, insights into vernacular visions that otherwise remain isolated except for the multi-lingual.

The reviews here only scratch the surface of a rich source of cultural learning, a source that must be seriously engaged by those who wish to develop a deep understanding of India. **UFM**

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# In Others' Words

*Editor's Note: In this department, we point you to resources outside of the JFPM that we hope you'll find helpful: other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, YouTube videos, etc. We welcome suggestions, but cannot promise that we will publish each one we receive. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes just give the title of the article and the main web address or a suggested Google search.*

## *Endangered Languages: Digital Media (and Hip-Hop) to the Rescue?*

What do YouTube, Facebook, texting and hip-hop have in common? For one thing they may actually help save endangered minority languages from dying out, according to the following reports by the BBC ([bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-17081573](http://bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-17081573)) and [McClatchy \(mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/27/116595/hip-hop-texting-may-help-save.html\)](http://mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/27/116595/hip-hop-texting-may-help-save.html).

In addition to YouTube, videos from National Geographic's Enduring Voices project to preserve such languages for posterity can be found at [languagehotspots.org](http://languagehotspots.org). The interactive map of "language hotspots" on this site is worth exploring, as are their Talking Dictionaries. For more on language endangerment, see SIL's [ethnologue.com/endangered-languages](http://ethnologue.com/endangered-languages). Finally, [scoop.it/t/world-languages](http://scoop.it/t/world-languages) has yet more links on this and other language topics, including a fun one that depicts the most "unendangered" languages of the world as a Tube Map (not YouTube, but the London Tube).

## Save Maryam or Save Udin?

Here's an interesting window into the use of social media in Indonesia. Last year a Muslim group concerned about evangelism in Indonesia launched a campaign called "Save Maryam." The campaign's well-done video begins: "This is Maryam. She is sixteen years old, an Indonesian Muslim living with her parents and younger brother. In the next fifteen seconds, she is going to leave Islam." Then as church bells begin to ring, the narrator continues:

“This is why.” The video claims that over 2 million Muslims are converting to Christianity every year, an assertion explained in a second video, both of which are available in 📺 YouTube’s #Save Maryam channel.

Save Maryam has not been without critique. Some Indonesians unhappy with the campaign's message and (mis)use of statistics have launched a counter-campaign entitled Save Udin (👉 [www.saveudin.org](http://www.saveudin.org)).

## Pew Studies Aplenty

🔗 [Pewforum.org](http://Pewforum.org), the web site of the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, offers readers access to scores of Pew studies related to religion and American society/world affairs, such topics ranging from issues with a religious component (e.g., abortion, gay marriage, bioethics, social welfare, and government) to beliefs and practices, religious affiliation (e.g., Christian, Jew, Muslim, etc.) and demographics.

Interested in demographic trends in the Muslim world? You can access a short summary at [pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx](http://pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx), download an 18 page executive summary, or even the entire 221 page report. All for free. Other reports include “Resources on Islam and Christianity in Sub-saharan Africa,” “Religious Affiliation of Asian Americans,” “Sikh-Americans and Religious Liberty,” “The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity” and many, many more.

## Fun with Statistics: Gapminder

For a different kind of demographic experience, check out Dutch sociologist Hans Rosling's TED Talk on "Religions and Babies" at [📺 gapminder.org/videos/religions-and-babies](https://www.gapminder.org/videos/religions-and-babies)—the results may surprise you. And if you enjoy his highly visual approach to displaying data using animated statistics, you can have some fun yourself offline by downloading his free Gapminder software at [📺 gapminder.org/world-offline](https://www.gapminder.org/world-offline). **IJFM**

*Note: Our thanks to Leith and Andrea Gray for alerting us to some of the sites mentioned in this In Others' Words.*

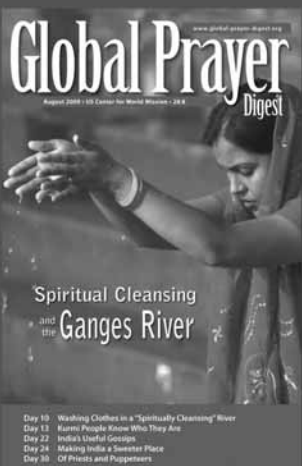
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 On the World Christian Movement

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

Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

	Lesson 3: Your Kingdom Come (B)	Lesson 4: Mandate for the Nations (B)	Lesson 5: Unleashing the Gospel (B)	Lesson 7: Eras of Mission History (H)	Lesson 9: The Task Remaining (H)	Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)	Lesson 13: Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches (S)
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people around the world will  
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people group.

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