SEEDBED

Practitioners in Conversation

October 2022, Vol XXXIII, No 2

Diverse Co-Laborers Reaching Diverse Peoples

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Seedbed is a digital journal by and for thinking practitioners who plant churches and make disciples among the least reached. It is a forum for the exchange of ideas. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the editors or of Pioneers.

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By S.T. Antonio

S.T. Antonio (pseudonym), lead editor of Seedbed, is a church planter with Pioneers in the Middle East, where he and his wife have served since 2015. He is a graduate of Biola University and a perpetual member of its Torrey Honors College, and he holds MDiv and ThM degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Antonio is author of Insider Church: Ekklesia and the Insider Paradigm (2020, William Carey Publishers). He is an American with a Hispanic mother and an Asian wife.

The face of global missions has changed. Not only is the Global South sending more laborers, many ordinary disciples in least reached places are taking ownership of the Great Commission. People from many tribes and tongues are engaging people from every tribe and tongue.

The potential is mind-blowing and the challenges plentiful. How ought we adapt to this new reality? Should we embrace multi-cultural teams and organizations as the "new normal," or should we conserve our energy by prioritizing partnerships which have greater cultural and theological alignment? How might we effectively navigate the challenges of making disciples alongside co-laborers from different ethnic heritages, life stages, and church backgrounds?

These topics deserve careful, prayerful attention to the voices and perspectives of the global mission movement. A diverse array of church-planting practitioners offer modest proposals from different angles on the challenges and opportunities presented by our diversifying community of harvest laborers.

- A Korean missiologist with years of church-planting experience in North Africa with a diverse organization synthesizes his experience and research into a groundbreaking proposal for reimagining "culture" and "multi-cultural teams."
- A Taiwanese scholar-practitioner with a breadth of cultural experiences and research in Asia, the U.S., and the Middle East offers honest reflections and insights from her personal journey as an Asian in a majority-Western organization.
- A trainer and mobilizer of Middle Eastern missionaries interviews a South Asian mobilizer and mission leader, discussing the challenges and opportunities of sending missionaries from the Global South.
- An African leader of a vibrant, diverse team offers practical advice and stories to equip teams to help single women thrive on church-planting teams among Muslims.
- An Anglo-American leader who has fruitfully led and overseen multiple teams in challenging fields in Africa presents a provocative yet practical proposal for navigating theological differences in frontier church-planting teams.

Each article includes discussion questions to stimulate transformative dialogue with teammates and colleagues.

In addition, our book reviews offer a church-planting practitioner's perspective on the relevance and helpfulness of nine books on an array of topics. Some reviews relate directly to our theme of diverse co-laborers. One review honors the life of missions-statesman Andrew Walls, who entered his reward earlier this year. A couple reviews look at significant books in Muslim ministry, while another review analyzes a recent, controversial book critiquing CPM practice.

The *Seedbed* editorial team warmly welcomes your feedback, pushback, and questions (online or by email)—we are all learning together. Our team offers this issue to encourage you and your colleagues toward spirited, charitable dialogue around these challenging, practical topics.

We pray new vistas of understanding, love, and fruitfulness will be opened amongst God's beautifully different co-laborers at the ends of the earth.

Your fellow servant in Christ,

S.T. Antonio
Lead Editor, *Seedbed*

Articles

Building Thriving Multiethnic Ministries in Global Missions: Three Critical, Overlooked Issues

By Peter Lee

Peter T. Lee (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) serves as Associate Director of the DMin Korea program, Associate Director of the Paul G. Hiebert Center for World Christianity and Global Theology, and Affiliate Professor of Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He also works with Operation Mobilization (OM) as a missiological researcher. While living in North Africa for ten years, Peter led a multiethnic ministry team and trained international business and development workers in cultural adaptation. Peter is a Korean American who immigrated to the US when he was fourteen. He is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and a graduate (MDiv) of Fuller Theological Seminary.

Introduction: Globalization of Missionary Personnel[1]

It is no secret that Christians in the Global South outnumber Christians in the Global North, and they do so by more than two-fold in 2021. In fact, by the year 2050, the number of believers in the Global South is projected to be more than three times the number of "Western" Christians (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2021, 23). That's not all. Already, Global South missionaries are reported to make up nearly half (47%) of

1 I would like to thank David Greenlee, Esther Theonugraha, Juan Carlos Téllez, James Park, and Elizabeth Rauchholz for providing helpful feedback on an early draft of this article. Their insights sharpened and refined the thoughts presented in this article. If there are any shortcomings in this article, I am solely responsible for them.

all missionaries in the fields (ibid, 16–17). The growth and emergence of the younger churches in the Global South have been so phenomenal that the global missionary movement is yet to catch up to these enormous changes. These shifts in the global church are also increasing mission complexity. In the 21st century, Christian mission is not simply "from everywhere to everywhere" but perhaps more accurately, "from everywhere to everywhere *through* everywhere" (Lee 2020, 218). The "through" part here signifies the complexity of missions under the triple phenomena of accelerated globalization, urbanization, and migration.

In light of all these rapid changes, the needs of the global missions movement of the 2020s and beyond are challenging us to rethink and reshape some of our dearly held assumptions. One such area has to do with increasing cultural diversity in global mission organizations and teams. The world has always been gifted with cultural diversity, and today, people of different races, ethnicities, cultures, and languages are increasingly living and working in proximity to one another, even as nationalist and xenophobic sentiments are growing worldwide. At the same time, aided by new technologies, people are seeing new kinds of instant connections across the globe through various apps and virtual spaces. Despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, the hyper-globalizing world is not slowing down but teeming with movements and flows of various individuals and groups, goods and capital, ideas and ideologies, media and aesthetics, data streams and technological advances. While we are far from being borderless, these forces both blur and redefine various boundaries in our world in new ways.

Amid all these, people are receiving and mixing various elements from various cultural sources. The rate of blending of these elements seems to be increasing as well. Globalization scholar Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2015, 67) sees "globalization as a process of hybridization" that heightens cultural mixtures. All these processes have an enormous impact on Christianity as a global faith, and specifically on Christian mission as a global movement. In an era of globalizing, hybridizing realities everywhere, we can hardly overstate the significance of cultural diversity

for Christian mission in today's extremely connected and yet highly fragmented and polarized world.

At this juncture, it is a welcome sight to see more mission organizations founded in the West attempting to internationalize and recruit missionary personnel from diverse cultures. Several large mission organizations had a head start in globalizing their missionary personnel. I have been privileged to work with one of them since 1997. Operation Mobilization (OM), with which I work, is a global missions movement that had international personnel from the very beginning. When I attended an OM regional meeting a few years ago, I counted at least 20 birth countries, 19 current countries of service (mostly different from the birth countries), and 16 native languages represented by the 40 participants in the room. Such diversity in a single meeting is not that unusual for OM.

While cultural diversity in global missions is a huge blessing and perhaps needs to become an important consideration in intercultural discipleship going forward, it also involves complicated challenges. Even those organizations that have had multiethnic, international teams for decades struggle with developing adequate means and strategies for establishing strong ministries with integrated cultural diversity among all members. There is also more work to be done in developing a solid biblical theology of multiethnic ministries and getting a good grasp of the realities involving cultural diversity. These global mission organizations have looked for that holy grail of effective multiethnic leadership and teamwork for decades and tried various means and methods, such as appointing leaders from the Global South in significant international leadership positions and adopting intercultural communications theories in mission practices, with limited success.

So, how can we build thriving mission teams that are culturally diverse? How can we develop teams for church planting in frontier mission contexts in the 2020s and beyond that honor and reflect the global diversity of the Church? What should we do to see more thriving multiethnic global mission movements? For sure, there is no magic bullet. But are there principles or insights that may help us go

further than where we are today? Over the past two decades, I have spent much time and effort learning, thinking about, and researching multiethnic missionary teams and organizations. Through many hours of conversations with missionaries, leaders, and missiologists, I identified three critical issues related to cultural diversity in global missions that are often overlooked or inadequately dealt with. I suggest mission leaders, teams, and organizations consider the following three issues as they embark on multiethnic ministries.

Unity through Diversity: Developing a Biblical Theology of Cultural Diversity

First and foremost, we need to think biblically and theologically about cultural diversity. We must not only think about how to operate multiethnic missionary teams but also consider what the Bible teaches about cultural diversity. This is obviously a big topic that needs serious biblical and theological work. In this space, I want to highlight the fact that diversity weaves throughout the biblical narratives from the beginning to the end.

Seeing Unity in Diversity in the Bible

The Bible emphasizes unity in diversity from its opening pages. Let's take creation as an example. Theologian Tite Tiénou once explained how the beginning of Genesis illustrated God's intent for human unity in diversity.[2] God said, "*... they may rule...*" (1:26). God did not intend he or she but they to rule. Genesis also says, "*male and female he created them.*" Being united and diverse is fundamentally a divine design; unity and diversity are essences of humankind. Adam reacts to the creation of his helper by saying, "*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*" (2:23). According to Tiénou, Adam is essentially saying, "She is me!" It shows the profound unity God intends for us through diversity. If we can

2 This content by Tiénou comes from one of the lectures given in his Ethnicity course at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School on January 14, 2015.

live out Christian unity in diversity by faith, we may be able to say to one another within the body of Christ, "You are me! I am you! We are one!"

Mission with All Our Diversities, to All Nations

The theme of unity in diversity among the people of God continues to run deeply through biblical narratives. We see God's work of transforming and healing the nations as they gather and come toward the light of God's people in Isaiah 60. We see God's holy intent for unity in diversity when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Jesus' disciples at Pentecost and they speak in other tongues in Acts 2. We also read about this biblical truth being lived out in tension by the early church in Jerusalem in Acts 6 and in surprising dynamism in the church in Antioch in Acts 11 and 13. There is Paul's strong declaration, *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile... for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28). And of course, the bible ends with a powerful imagery of unity in diversity in Revelation 7:9 where a great multitude of people from every *"nation, tribe, people and language"* gather together and stand before God's throne and the Lamb in marvelous worship.

These biblical accounts and others speak powerful truth about God's desire for human diversities in culture, language, and ethnicity. In today's increasingly polarizing world, nationalism and racism seem to be on the rise everywhere. Exclusion and discrimination are more visible in many places. Even in Christian settings where cultural diversity is affirmed, people often treat cultural differences as something to be merely tolerated and managed. Instead, as followers of Jesus, we are reminded to live out both unity and diversity. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to say that we attain unity through and via diversity, not over and against it. When we participate in the mission of God in the world, there is no other way around it; theologically speaking, it is difficult to fathom that true unity in a biblical sense can exist without diversity since this is by God's original intent and design as Scripture beautifully illustrates for us.

We understand that Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28 is a call for all peoples, all nations, and all everyone and anyone to be included in God's Kingdom. As we strive to make disciples of panta ta ethne, calling all peoples and nations to follow Jesus, we bring honor to Christ's name by living out in faith God's desire for us to be one with Him and with one another. We do this, not *despite* cultural diversity and cultural differences, but perhaps precisely because of them. As all of God's people from all the nations, the whole body of Christ, embrace one another in all the diversity that exists among us, we are fulfilling God's command.

Diversity is not an obstacle to be overcome in missions, which is how it is often seen, but a blessing to be received with gratitude. For global missions, this way of thinking about our diversity helps us envision a more well-integrated cultural diversity that is only possible through Christ. It stands in contrast to the uninspiring multiculturalism that is unfortunately too widespread in the world today.

Cultural Hybridity: Updating Our "Culture" Model

Secondly, if we want to see more well-integrated, cultural diversity reflected in global missions, we need to revisit how we understand and use the concept of culture in missions.

Culture, a Concept Borrowed from Anthropology

The notion of culture has long formed the fore- and background of missionary training. Many missiologists who made significant contributions to mission studies for the past half a century have been anthropologists by training who studied other cultural groups around the world.[3]

3 This list of anthropologists who contributed to a North American missiology between the 1970s and the present may include Alan Tippett, Charles Kraft, Paul Hiebert, Louis Luzbetak, Daniel Shaw, Sherwood Lingenfelter, Robert Priest, Darrell Whiteman, Michael Rynkiewich, Enoch Wan, and Stephen Ybarrola (Priest 2008, 27–28).

However, as an academic discipline with its own intellectual history and theoretical development, cultural anthropology seems to have its strengths and flaws. Mistakes of the past, colonial influences, and changing perspectives are all part of any academic discipline's past and present, and certainly anthropology is not an exception. Not only were its bright points carried over into missiology, but its past shortcomings as well. Sometimes missiologists hold onto some of the older anthropological ideas too long, even the ones abandoned by anthropologists long ago. A prime example may be how the concept of culture is used.

"Culture" is a term often used by social science disciplines to provide a generalized, concise version of traits and commonalities found among certain groups of people. For example, some people may think that Koreans would behave in certain concrete ways because of the Korean culture, Germans would behave in different ways because of the German culture, and so on. This culture model assumes that culture is a stable, coherent, and bounded whole used by insiders of that culture to navigate life and social relations. It tends to assume that cultures are isolated systems that do not change much over time. Let's call this way of understanding a "bounded culture model." It assumes that one could learn and become an expert on a certain culture by diving deep beyond the surface level to its core values and worldview. Many people involved in intercultural life and ministry may be fascinated and convinced by this bounded model. However, it may be surprising to hear that anthropologists no longer subscribe to this way of describing culture. This model is based on a structural-functionalist view popular in the social sciences until the 1950s; in the ensuing decades, social sciences moved away from this model (Rynkiewich 2002).

However, 70 years later, this bounded culture model is still widely used in missions today. There certainly are benefits of using this model. It can help make the world appear more understandable and fit into neat, manageable categories. However, it is far from the reality of the dynamic social world that we inhabit. It does not do justice to any of the actual cultural contexts. There is a reason that anthropologists departed from this way of thinking about cultures. Simply put, it did not help

them understand people. Instead, it perpetuated cultural and ethnic stereotypes, obscured their view of the world, and imprisoned them in a rigid understanding of societies and people, none of which is helpful for missionaries working in multinational, multiethnic organizations.

Not Keeping Up with Changes in Anthropological Perspectives

It should be noted that cultural anthropology, along with other social sciences, went through a major paradigm shift, sometimes called "a reflexive turn" during the 1980s and 1990s (O'Reilly 2012, 212–13). Some anthropologists began to look critically at how they were studying cultures and became aware of their own biases ingrained in the works they produced. They recognized that their view of different people and societies was historically positioned and socially constructed, influenced by their own history, past and current biases, where and what they studied, and who they mostly hung out with. During the past 40 to 50 years, anthropologists left this old model of culture that used to define and provide an explanation for people's behaviors.

Anthropologist Michael Agar (2019, 2) helpfully summarizes the dilemma with the bounded culture model when he writes, "'Culture' is a frequently used mess of a concept with more meanings than there are cars on the LA freeways. It usually travels in partnership with a 'problem' in today's discourse, unless you're an anthropologist, in which case it's a word you try to avoid because it's not clear what it means anymore." Agar (2019, 87) argues that a description of another "culture" is inevitably "my mental model of your perspective" or "*our* model of *them*, not *their* model." So, if you are not a French and you are describing "the French culture," according to Agar, what you are doing is presenting your mental model of some French people, not necessarily the actual perspectives of all French. Unfortunately, many mission leaders and workers still use this old bounded culture model in mission training and give the impression that it was sound and true.

Updating Our Culture Model—Culture as a River

Today, cultural anthropologists do not talk about any specific culture as if it exists as a monolithic entity. Indeed, there is no such thing as a single American, Korean, or German culture. There are certainly some broad values and tendencies shared among a large group of people that may differ from other groups, but these broad trends are not fixed in time. They continually shift and change, and the imagined boundaries between these groups are socially imagined, usually blurry, and always on the move. This way of seeing "culture" is called a constructivist model of culture. Because it grew out of a postmodern turn in scholarship that attacked and attempted to relativize Christian convictions and faith claims, it seems many evangelicals chose not to engage with this kind of postmodern, postcolonial thinking. Perhaps they did not want to incorporate such a view in their teaching about cultures. However, staying many decades behind in a discipline from which we heavily borrowed might not be a good option either.

Instead, we should pay attention to what anthropologists have been saying for the last few decades and learn from them once again, just as we did half a century ago. Missiological anthropologist Michael Rynkiewich (2002; 2011a; 2011b; 2016) summarizes recent anthropological discussions and states that *culture is contingent, constructed, and contested*. Swiss anthropologist Hans-Rudolph Wicker (1997, 39) gives an excellent metaphor for culture—"the river, forever changing within given perimeters of space and time, and eluding the grasp of science because of its liquid nature as a process." As these and other scholars point out, people are not machines that constantly run on some pre-determined cultural program. While they might follow established cultural and social norms, they also constantly accept, reject, and blend various cultural elements at their hands in the context of their human interactions. They build new hybrid cultural and social forms and apply them to their lives.

Therefore, the idea that cultural elements mix over time to produce new things, or the concept of "cultural hybridity," is needed to better understand various cultural contexts as well as the people from all over

the world who may join and mingle within our missionary teams and organizations. The widely used concept of "national" cultures does not necessarily help us understand the diverse people whom God calls into fellowship with us. It tends to create stereotypes and prejudice about people who come from other countries. It makes more sense to base our understanding of people on our teams as continually changing their habits and social life to meet their needs and aspirations, than to base it on an unchanging, timeless thing that defines its members. It is even more important in culturally complex settings such as international mission organizations and their multiethnic ministry teams where people from all over the world form a new community and work together toward evangelization and church planting. Are these teams culturally Western, Asian, Latin American, or African? Or are they to be a mixture of various things and form something new? I believe the latter would be a better way to look at cultural complexity present in global missions today.

Authentic Community: Going beyond Pragmatism of Business Models

A few years ago, I had a chance to survey some of the missionary training materials used in three well-known international mission organizations. These materials were imported and adapted from the business world. Among them was the "forming, storming, norming, and performing teams" model.[4] They also included Belbin Team Roles, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Culture Map, the Cultural Intelligence (CQ), and Geert Hofstede's dimensions of national culture.[5] For sure, these tools can be useful to an extent for certain purposes, but they cannot be the only source for learning different cultural values in intercultural mission teams. While these may give some helpful ideas about how to operate a project team in a corporation, they are far

4 This is a model first proposed by an American psychologist Bruce Tuckman (1965).

5 These are popular tools used by business consultants and human resources departments to improve organizational effectiveness, teamwork, and working relationships among a diverse workforce.

from adequate for building thriving multiethnic ministries in intercultural contexts. An obvious gap exists between these management materials and the actual experiences of our mission teams. This became clear when I went to a country in North Africa in 2018 to conduct research for my doctoral dissertation.

I was trying to learn how workers on multiethnic mission teams in a country in North Africa were experiencing cultural change. I didn't set out to learn about their teams per se. I interviewed 47 workers who were members of seven different international mission agencies. I also met with dozens of other mission workers. When I asked them to share challenges in their multiethnic teams, many participants opened up about their disappointments and frustrations with their teams. I noticed that most of these frustrations were caused by differences between what they expected and what they actually experienced in their teams. After reviewing all the materials I collected in North Africa, I saw a pattern of what these workers desired from their teams and organizations.

My interviewees helped me identify the gap that existed. The aforementioned business and management materials are limited to one aspect or function of mission teams—the workplace, but there are other aspects of teams that these mission workers desired. Eventually I came to see four aspects that these workers wanted their teams to fulfill. So, what are the four functions of a multicultural team most desired by our mission workers?

Mission Team like a Family and a School

One, mission workers on multiethnic teams wanted their team to function *like a family*. We all need intimate, close relationships. When we join a mission organization and go overseas, we leave everything and everyone behind. We are uprooted from our ongoing social connections with our families, friends, church members, neighbors, etc. We are replanted in new soil. When we first arrive, we are like little children who need emotional and relational support from parents and siblings. But lo

and behold, when we arrive on the field, the people on our multiethnic teams appear strange to us. They are from different countries. They speak different languages. They don't behave or talk like we do. They don't laugh at our jokes and even worse, laugh when it's not funny! The team is all we have when we first arrive. Naturally, it needs to become like a family that meets our relational needs. Eventually, as we grow in the local knowledge and learn to do ministry in the new context, we too become like parent figures to other new workers.

Two, the team needs to function *like a school*. Initially, we have a lot to learn. We must learn and develop basic survival and ministry skills in the new country. The team functions like a school where we learn and grow in different cultural skills and knowledge. We learn the local customs and social norms. We receive training on simple things like going grocery shopping to ministry skills like how to share our faith with a local person. In a school, we don't just receive content or materials. We are put in a learning structure. The team gives us the structure that supports our development as skilled missionaries. Apart from any formal training program, the team needs to provide mentoring, modeling, and coaching. Just as schools have teachers and classmates, mission team members serve as teachers, mentors, and classmates for new team members.

Mission Team like a Church and a Workplace

Three, the team needs to be *like a church*. The team provides spiritual input and nourishment for its members. Some teams I visited in North Africa were very intentional about worshipping, doing Bible study, and praying together. Discipleship was happening in those teams as they met regularly. In a sense, the team is like a church fellowship. Different gifts of members are used to build up the team as a spiritual community. It's not just the leader's job to serve in a pastoral role. Everyone contributes. Especially in a frontier mission context where spiritual fellowship is limited, this church function is vital for the health of the team members.

Four, the team needs to be *like a workplace*. As mission *workers*, we need *work*! Most of us need an organized work, project, or ministry

platform that gives us an authentic identity, credibility in the local society, and a sense of fulfillment. The need for a well-functioning workplace seems stronger for those with a professional or corporate career background. This is a tricky part for many teams in ministry contexts where there is strong religious opposition and persecution. In these settings, mission workers often need to maintain a low profile and cannot engage in ministry in public. In these settings, mission workers must find other avenues to maintain residency in the country.

However, building a well-functioning business, non-profit organization, educational institution, or healthcare establishment is very difficult and time-consuming work. This is the reason that many workers in these settings tend to work separately, apart from their mission teams. Many teams in frontier mission contexts simply cannot provide a meaningful, organized workplace. If the team can provide such a workplace, it would be a tremendous blessing to its members. In my observation, many missionaries who come to a place like North Africa for the long term but end up leaving after only a few years almost always have difficulties with getting involved in a viable workplace.

Mission Team as an Authentic Community

In a perfect world, we would have teams that provided everything our missionaries needed in each of these four areas. The reality is that no mission team can completely meet all four areas of needs for every team member. This is especially true for multiethnic, multicultural teams which have a wide variety of needs that are not easily filled by their culturally diverse teams. In a sense, it takes far more energy and effort for multicultural team members to reach out to their teammates, build relationships with them, get to know and trust them, communicate with them, and enjoy each other's company. When they seemingly have so little in common with their teammates, it is very taxing to invest in working and relating with them.

We need to remember that everyone on our teams, especially multicultural teams, may have a different level and shape of need in each

of the four areas at any given time. The type of need in each area for each person also changes over time. When I set up a business in a North African country some years ago, my need for "school" changed. I more urgently needed knowledge in marketing and sales, which my team could not really provide. However, in my first few years in the country, I had a bigger need for "school" in language and cultural learning, with which the team had resources to help me.

We need to recognize that no workers need their team to fulfill all four functions all the time. It's not one person's responsibility. The team leader or field director cannot simultaneously serve as everyone's parent, teacher, pastor, and manager. The teams and their members should seek to provide in these four areas of need, not any single person. Every team member needs to become aware of their own current need level in these four areas and communicate their needs with the team. It is also important for mission organizations and their teams to identify the current level of support they can provide for each need area and communicate it clearly to team members. If some needs cannot be met within the team or the organization, we need to find help from outside to meet our workers' needs. Mission organizations should strive to build an ecosystem, a network that supports their workers in these four aspects.

In summary, our multiethnic teams must be multi-dimensional, multi-layered, and multi-functional. We cannot do teamwork and training sessions for our mission workers as if they are business project teams. These needs become especially acute for missionaries in pioneering, frontier mission settings even as the team's ability to meet these demands decrease as its internal diversity increases. This is the reason that we must strive to build teams that support its members like a family, equip them like a school, spiritually nourish them like a church, and provide meaningful roles like a workplace. Our workers long for and need a holistic, authentic community of missionaries who together make disciples of one another and the unreached. Thriving multicultural mission teams would provide their members with these four functions at various levels as it becomes a symbol and metaphor for unity *in and through* diversity.

Conclusion

Some years ago, I was part of a multiethnic mission team with a dozen members in a city in North Africa. With many countries and denominations represented by seemingly incompatible personalities on the team, I was afraid that our diversity and differences might undo us. We had difficult incidents between team members resulting from miscommunication and misunderstanding. Team meetings were at times contentious. The "baggage" each of us brought would lead to uncomfortable interpersonal dynamics.

Nevertheless, we were committed to sharing life in Christ and doing ministry together. We continued to worship, pray, and read Scripture together. We not only shared tea, coffee, and meals but also our concerns and struggles with one another. Weeks, months, and years went by. Some members left the team and others from different countries joined. As time went by, we began to see changes in our team. We felt a little more comfortable with one another. We still had our differences and felt tensions among us, but each of us felt better known and understood by the others. We began to talk less about our "German-ness" or "Korean-ness" and more about our shared experiences over the years, both struggles and triumphs. As flawed and frail as we were individually and corporately, we were becoming a community in a biblical sense. I would not have seen our team this way had we all come from the same country or had similar backgrounds. Diversity among us was hard, but it taught us the spiritual reality of being one, *not despite* our diversity but *precisely because* of it.

I presented three critical issues that mission organizations often overlook but should seriously consider as they try to build thriving multiethnic ministries. There are surely many other pitfalls and challenges involved, and it is no secret that building strong multiethnic ministries is difficult and tiring. Sometimes, it may seem easier to just give up. However, in the current reality of a globalizing missionary movement, doing ministries together with and among a culturally diverse body of

Christ is no longer an option but a necessity. The tensions and challenges involved in multiethnic ministries may never go away. Nonetheless, by committing to building healthy communities of diverse mission workers, reflecting critically and constructively on our past and present practices, and seeking to bridge any existing gaps with persistence and resolve, I am confident that we will bring honor to Christ and get to experience the fullness of the *global* body of Christ.

Questions for Conversation

- How does Dr. Lee's vision for multicultural teams relate to your own experience relating to diverse co-laborers?
- Is cultural diversity an obstacle to biblical unity? Or do "we attain unity *through* and *via* diversity"?
- What do you think of Dr. Lee's proposal that we should view culture as a "river"? How would his model change the way we think about and relate to people of other cultures?

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"Who Is My Neighbor?" Showing Hospitality to Fellow Workers Who Are "Strangers" Among Us

by J. Wu

Jeanne Wu was born and raised in Taiwan. She met her husband at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where she completed her PhD in Intercultural Studies. They have been serving in the Middle East, where she occasionally writes articles and contributes to books on global missions. Before living in the Middle East, Jeanne was also active in Chinese Diaspora ministries in Germany and the United States, and refugee ministry in Chicago. She currently serves on the board of a Chinese Diaspora mission organization and the Seedbed editorial team.

A few years ago, when my husband and I were seconded to a different organization, we were invited to their organizational conference. The weather was lovely, and dozens of workers were mingling on the green lawn, enjoying the sunshine, coffee, and good conversation. A Western worker, probably in his late fifties, was standing with help of crutches outside of the crowds—alone. Most of the workers chatting on the lawn were young adults in their twenties and thirties, both singles and marrieds. A grey-haired single man with crutches seemed to be so out of place there. No one noticed him, and no one asked him if he needed help to get a cup of coffee or tea. He was standing far from the crowds by himself. But this scene was familiar to me and caught my attention—I knew how he might feel at that moment. Thus, I asked him if he needed anything, and urged my husband to talk to him.

It is human nature that we prefer to talk and make friends with people who look like us, think like us, or speak like us. It is safer and easier. We do not need to take the risk of feeling uncomfortable, being offended,

or causing offense. Sometimes we are stretched when we mix with people from a different ethnicity or nationality. And on other occasions, like the conference I mentioned earlier, we might encounter people of a different age group and life stage (almost all the workers in that conference were Westerners, including the older man with crutches).

A colleague of mine, who is a widow from a Western country and in her sixties, has often expressed a sense of isolation and loneliness on the field. Though there are many Western workers in the place where she serves, many of them are significantly younger than she is. One time she commented to me, "I am not sure if they are good with older people."

I can understand her concern. Single young workers often only like to hang out with cool young singles like themselves, and workers who are married and have children usually connect with other families who have children of a similar age. But interestingly, this older female worker connects well with Asian workers on the field, including me. Almost all her close worker friends are Asians from different countries. Perhaps it is because Asians tend to respect and value elderly people much more than Westerners do. Asians are more willing to spend time with older people and listen to them.

My Own Journey

Some of my Western colleagues feel bad for me or other Asian workers because we are stereotyped and discriminated against in some Arab countries. However, this sentiment of my Western colleagues gives me mixed feelings. It is not only in Arab countries that we are treated differently because of our cultural background and appearance. The reality is that in almost all countries I have been to, including the United States, everyone is treated differently based on their appearance or ethnicity—some are treated more nicely and others worse. Perhaps in some countries it is more subtle than others.

I was born and raised in Taiwan, and I had cross-cultural experiences in Germany and China before moving to the States in 2005 for seminary. As an international student, I probably experienced most of the hardships that new cross-cultural workers might experience on the field. After I married my American husband and became an immigrant in the States, I constantly sensed the difference in how people treated me as opposed to how they treated my husband. Many people whom we encountered—mostly American Christians, both men and women—would often only look at and talk to my husband and ignore me, as if I were invisible or could not understand what they were talking about. When we joined an international Christian organization, which sent thousands of workers around the world, I thought the experience would be different. Unfortunately, things were not as I expected.

About five years ago, when my husband and I were relatively new in our organization, we attended a large regional conference. We did not know many colleagues at that time. One day at the conference they had separate events for men and women. Women had a ladies' gathering in one of the banquet halls in the resort hotel where the conference was held, while men went on an outing to do other activities. At that conference, I was one of the few Asians since most of the workers in our organization are Westerners.

When the gathering started, I found myself sitting in a seat surrounded by ladies I did not know, all of whom were Westerners. After the lady speaker finished her short talk, it was the mingling time. I sat in my seat on my own for several minutes. Every lady already had their chatting partners, so no one came to greet me or talk to me. No one even noticed me. I felt like a complete *outsider*. I do not remember how long I stayed in that banquet hall, maybe five minutes or longer. Since I remained invisible in that hall, I decided to go back to my hotel room on my own. When my husband came back to the hotel room from his men's outing, I told him what happened at the ladies' night, and tears started to fall.

A couple of years later, I shared my experiences with several of my colleagues from my organization. They all felt sorry for what happened to me. I appreciated their empathy and desire to improve the culture of our organization. I also started to think what kind of culture and Biblical teaching was missing or lacking in our large international organization with a majority of Westerners.

And Who is My Neighbor?

> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
>
> "What is written in the Law?" *he* replied. "How do you read it?"
>
> He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"
>
> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."
>
> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:25-29, NIV)

I think most Christians know this passage well, and we may be even more familiar with the illustration that Jesus gives to answer the law expert's infamous question. Sometimes we are so familiar with the Good Samaritan story that we forget the original reason Jesus is telling it. After narrating the whole story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks the expert of the law again, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replies, *"The one who had mercy on him."* Then Jesus tells him, *"Go and do likewise"* (Luke 10:36-37), which is another way of saying, "Go show

mercy and love your neighbors who are not your people, just as the Good Samaritan did."

Jesus' illustration was very counter-cultural for his time. From various passages in the New Testament (e.g., John 4), we learn about the racial and religious tensions between Jews and Samaritans which caused them to discriminate against each other. If we contextualize this parable to the present day, the parable may be something like, "A white evangelical was robbed on a road trip, and a couple of white evangelical ministers passed by him and did not help him. In the end, it was a black Muslim who helped him and paid his hospital bill."

Why did Jesus tell a lengthy and culturally offensive story to answer the expert in the law's simple question: *"And who is my neighbor?"* Is he not trying to say, "Your neighbor is the one who has mercy on you, and it does not matter what ethnic, religious or political background they are from?" And the most important thing is that he told us to do likewise: show mercy to those who are from a different ethnic, religious, or political background.

In the same gospel, just a few chapters after the parable of Good Samaritan, Jesus also challenges us, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid" (Luke 14:12, NIV). In the New Testament, the Greek words for hospitality and hospitable are philoxenia and philoxenos, and the roots of these words literally mean "love for strangers/ foreigners." These Greek words may remind us of a terminology we use more frequently nowadays: xenophobia, which means exactly the opposite of "love for strangers/ foreigners," i.e., hospitality. I believe that the hospitality taught in the Bible is not the kind of hospitality we show to our friends and family members, or people who are "like us." Being generous, kind, and hospitable to the people who are already "one of us" or from "our side" is not biblical hospitality; it is human nature.

Implications on the Field

When my husband and I were in our previous country of service, we partnered with many Brazilian workers in a refugee ministry. One time when we had a meal together, we asked a single female worker—the leader of the ministry—about her experience with American workers. This Brazilian sister shared with us that many years ago when she was still a language student in an Arabic school for workers, she observed that American workers only liked to hang out with other Americans.

Then she told us this story. One day, she saw her young American male classmate passing by her. She wanted to greet him, but he just ignored her. Later, when she asked him why he did not greet her, he replied that he did not consider her as a friend. She was shocked and offended. After hearing this story, I could not help wondering how this American worker was doing in his ministry on the field. His behavior was quite against the local culture—in our Arab context it is so important to greet everyone, or else local people will assume you have something against them. Perhaps he was very warm and friendly to the local people, but just not to the workers who were from cultures different from his own.

As cross-cultural workers, most of us have received trainings in culture to help us establish relationships with the locals to whom we would like to witness. We study their cultures and languages, we eat their food, and we try to practice hospitality in the local way—so the door of the Good News will be open. But when we face our other neighbors, our fellow workers who are from different cultures or life stages, we may ignore them or avoid making an effort to have a relationship with them. On the other hand, I understand every worker has limited time and energy and must prioritize their family and ministry and set boundaries. But showing hospitality to those who are different from us does not mean we have to be their "best friend forever." It is simply being inclusive and kind to "outsiders"—showing philoxenia.

I have also talked to some fellow workers who are skeptical about the idea of culturally diverse organizations and teams. They believe it takes

too much effort and it is not worth the time and energy. A while ago, I had a conversation with a Christian leader in China who has been actively mobilizing cross-cultural workers there. He expressed his concerns about monocultural agencies since he has seen such organizations and teams in Chinese and Korean contexts. He believes the most ideal workers in his context are those Chinese believers who have lived or studied in Western countries for several years and have a broader worldview, who can think and do things outside the Chinese box, and who are able to work with global workers from a different cultural background.

I agree with his insight. We all have blind spots from our own cultures. Working with people from different backgrounds may not be as comfortable, but it helps us to learn and approach ministry in different ways. This not only applies to cultural differences, but also generational or denominational differences. For example, I have learned much from our fellow workers from Latino countries. I have observed them to be so warm, inclusive, and relational. One Latina worker I know is especially effective in drawing believers from a Muslim background to her because she is so loving.

In addition, an inclusive and hospitable team itself is a great testimony of the Good News. Sometimes I wonder, if we as Christian workers do not even know how to practice hospitality towards our fellow workers, how can we show real and genuine hospitality—the welcome of non-believers to the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9)—to the locals to whom we desire to witness? As Jesus Himself said, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son"* (Matt. 22:2). And sadly, sometimes the non-believing local people do a better job than we Christian workers do in welcoming strangers. At least, this is the case in our Middle Eastern context.

More than five years ago, when we still served in a previous field, my husband's local friend invited us to attend his brother's wedding. This local friend is from a middle-class family, and his brother was an engineer, so the wedding banquet was quite grand and held in a nice hotel wedding hall. According to their conservative Sunni tradition, it was a

segregated wedding banquet, so my husband went with his guy friends to the men's hall, and I went alone to the ladies' side.

When I walked into the hall, I saw that more than one hundred Muslim women were sitting there. I did not know anyone and might have been the only foreign guest there. However, as soon as I walked in, I saw a middle-aged lady, covered by a hijab (head scarf) of course, waving to me and saying I could sit at her table. The lady started to chat with me, and other ladies at that table also talked to me from time to time. Though I did not know any of them, I felt welcomed there, and they did not seem to be bothered by my funny Arabic accent.

When it was dancing time, the ladies there also tried to include me and encourage me to join them. I had fun spending the night at the wedding banquet, even though I did not know any of these local ladies at all! I especially appreciate the lady who waved to me when I came in, though it was the only time I spent time with her in my life. I do not even remember her name, but I will always remember her hospitality and inclusiveness.

The irony is that this wedding actually happened in the same year I attended the aforementioned large regional conference when I was a relatively new worker. It was also held in a grand banquet hall in a nice hotel with more than a hundred women who did not look like or speak like me, and most of whom did not know me. It was like a deja vu moment, but the outcome was the opposite. To me it almost felt like another Good Samaritan parable, but now the passersby were the female Christian field workers, and my Good Samaritan was a hijabi (covered) Muslim woman. It felt like Jesus was also asking me, "Which of these do you think was a neighbor to you?" And then he said, *"Go and do likewise."*

Perhaps due to these experiences, I am sensitive to those who may feel left out, neglected, and excluded. Perhaps this is the reason I spotted the older gentleman on his crutches who was excluded by a group of younger workers in a more recent conference of a different organization.

Extend Grace and Empathy

After these things happened, my husband and I moved to another field—a war-torn country where some Western countries, especially the United Kingdom and United States, have historical baggage. Thus, it has been more challenging for Western citizens to live and serve there. One of the main reasons we felt we might be able to live and serve in this place was our heritage—I am Asian, and my husband is half Hispanic, so people do not assume that we are Americans. This has probably been the first time I have felt that being an Asian is an advantage.

My husband and I do not own a car in this country, and when we go out, we just take taxis. We rarely worry about the numerous checkpoints in our city because we almost never get stopped. When we have asked our fellow workers, who are Egyptian and Brazilian, about their experiences, they say they have felt similarly to us. They have rarely been stopped at checkpoints when they drive in the city, and the few times they have been stopped, the police were nice to them.

In contrast, a Caucasian American worker in our city and his family have had a completely different story to tell. They have been stopped often, and the police do not treat them nicely. It almost sounds like reverse racism to me. One day, when this American family gave us a ride, my husband and I were sitting in the back seat. When we were about to pass by a checkpoint, I could tell they started to feel anxious and stressed, and the wife scrambled to grab a scarf and cover her hair. As they expected, the soldier stopped them at that checkpoint and asked for their passports. Eventually, the husband found a way to pass without handing the soldiers their passports. Witnessing all this shocked me because this has never been our experience here. This scene somehow reminded me of my African American friends' story—their dread and anxiety whenever they were stopped by policemen in the States. But here in our host country, it is Caucasian Americans who suffer from more scrutiny.

Through this experience, I have realized that the way people treat those who are of other ethnicities or nationalities is mostly based on their personal experience. And we all have our own limitations and bias. If I was raised under the same circumstances having the same upbringing or national history as another person, I might think, feel, and behave the same way they do. No one is better than anyone else.

I have been able to forgive those who have neglected, excluded, or discriminated against me in the past because through these experiences I have been able to identify with and understand those who have had similar pains. I can give thanks to God for creating me as an Asian, and even for the negative experiences I have had.

Final Thoughts

Years ago, my husband and I had the privilege to be part of a multicultural congregation in our previous country of service. We were among Arabs, Africans, Europeans, North Americans, Latinos, and Asians worshiping together. When I sang worship songs with them, I felt an inner joy that I could not describe. Perhaps I experienced a small foretaste of Revelation 7:9—worshiping with *"a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."*

My hope and prayer for Christian organizations is that we would show philoxenia and would be inclusive of brothers and sisters who are different from us or the majority of our organization's members. I believe diversity in unity is a strength and witness of the gospel. Diversity in God's kingdom is also the result of God's mission, which he revealed in Revelation 7. In other words, our mission work is, by definition, aiming to make heaven a more diverse place. Perhaps we as workers should start getting used to diversity and learn to enjoy being with our brothers and sisters from *"every nation, tribe, people, and language"* here now on the earth.

Questions for Conversation

- What stood out to you most in Dr. Wu's story?
- How should teams and organizations with a dominant culture relate to members of different cultures and life stages?
- Reflect on the concept of *philoxenia*. What keeps us from loving the "strangers" among us? What can we do to grow in *philoxenia*?

From the Harvest to the Harvest: An Interview with a South Asian Mobilizer

Interview by M. Johnson

M. Johnson (pseudonym) serves with Pioneers in the Middle East, where he and his family have served since 2013. He directs an internship program for local disciple-makers and church planters and co-leads a launch team for expatriates learning Arabic. He has a Master of Divinity and is a Doctor of Ministry student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Premkumar, a native of Sri Lanka, was raised Catholic and discipled by an evangelical youth organization as a teenager. He founded a Sri Lankan mission organization which mobilizes South Asians to plant churches among unreached people groups inside and outside Sri Lanka. After 15 years in leadership, Premkumar founded another Sri Lankan mission organization, called Chisel, which focuses on training and mobilizing South Asians for a least-reached South Asian country.

From the Editors: *Our current missions era is characterized by traditionally "receiving countries" now sending missionaries. Teams and field partners are becoming more and more diverse. Many Westerners are investing more focus on training and sending locals, and indigenous sending structures are emerging.*

Seedbed *editor M. Johnson is involved in training and sending local missionaries from the Middle East. He interviewed Premkumar, a Sri Lankan mobilizer, about the challenges and opportunities of mobilizing from the Global South. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

JOHNSON – *We are excited to hear about your experiences of training people from your country to go out to the nations. We are interested*

to learn more how we Westerners can serve alongside people from the Global South to reach the lost.

How did you get involved in mobilizing South Asians to work among the unreached?

PREMKUMAR – Some foreign missionaries came to Sri Lanka and were trying to mobilize the Sri Lankan church to reach Sri Lankans, but they were unsuccessful.

When the local believers were meeting to discuss why the attempts had not been successful, we came to two conclusions. First, we always thought of missions as something we received. Whenever we talk about a missionary we think about a foreigner coming to Sri Lanka. Secondly, we didn't have a mission organization to send people. So we launched a mission agency.

It was tough to mobilize Sri Lankans for missions. People gave different excuses. For example, "We are a poor country, unlike the Western missionaries who have the money." And they said, "No, no, we have so many needs here and so many unreached places here. Why should we consider going overseas?" For the first 8 to 10 years, it was very discouraging.

During this time we held some informational conferences. And we dealt with the challenge of local pastors releasing people to do ministry elsewhere. We were able to send some missionaries to north India, Bangladesh, and several other least-evangelized countries.

We want churches to become missional to get actively involved in God's great commission and we want to send workers to least evangelized countries. This year our goal is to send 50-100 workers to 50 places within the next nine years.

To do this, we have a focus on discipleship and disciple-making. Discipleship has been one of the weaknesses of the Sri Lankan church.

Some people, even some pastors, think a disciple exists to assist the "master" in running the church.

But we say discipleship should affect all areas of our lives. It should affect our families. It should affect our workplace, society, church, how we manage finances, and our responsibility to the environment. So we teach how to be disciples of Christ in all areas of life.

Sometimes we come to Christ but our values have not changed, right? Racism is still there and also a kind of caste system. Sometimes we go after money, power, and positions of honour. We don't have an eternal perspective, although we have become believers. So we want to really bring about a change of values.

The second thing is multiplication: making disciples who in turn will make disciples reproducing disciples.

The third thing is the marketplace. It is common for the Sri Lankan church to divide people in the sectors of sacred and spiritual. We believe in the priesthood of all believers. That doesn't mean there shouldn't be a pastor or anything; we don't say that. But we believe every believer is called to be a servant of God. And he needs to make an impact while he's at work and at home.

I'm facing similar challenges in my context in the Middle East. What has been your approach now in helping create or cast vision for mission among the churches?

After people commit to go, the challenge is to get the churches to support them or release them to serve.

When they hear the word "missions," they think of a small army of a few people who are called full-time and have a special kind of calling. People don't understand that missions is the responsibility of the whole church.

So we are rethinking everything. Initially we had big missions conferences which were a huge investment. Then we decided to focus regionally. Now we focus on youth centres, youth conferences, and youth camps.

We don't want to call what we are doing a "missions" conference, but really, it's a missions conference! We use different titles like, "Beyond My World," or "Global Shakers"— something different. A lot more people come if it isn't called a "missions" conference.

Our mobilizing strategy is two-fold. First, we lay a strong biblical foundation about God's heart for the nations. People need to be clearly convinced that the basis of mission is biblical. Secondly, we raise awareness about the need for the gospel in other nations. People tend to think other countries are like Sri Lanka, so we need to inform them.

We share information to mobilize, like missionary stories or short profiles of unreached countries. We send out a weekly prayer request for a target country with information about the country and a brief update on Bible translation. We are creating prayer groups as well as promoting prayer for missions at conferences and churches. We basically want people to pray. Some of them have never prayed for another country or people group, so we want to foster that habit. When we present a country, we tell them about it and pray with them in hopes of changing their frame of mind about the nations.

We also try to serve the churches by offering them other kinds of training in order to build relationship and trust. For example, I developed a course on discipleship, which I taught for pastors and churches who had a tendency to not trust our missional ideas. In that course, we talk about our failures and our struggles—this touches people's hearts. Afterwards when we ask if we can come and do a missions seminar, they say yes.

We also help them to go beyond their borders. Churches imagine that if a person leaves to go overseas, they've lost a member. We teach that

this is a partnership, and the church owns the missionaries. We don't pull a person out of the church. They're your missionary. The church commissions them and receives reports.

We raised awareness of God's love for all people among the church children so that the next generation will be mission-minded. We've done training for Sunday school teachers and had children's ministry experts come out to teach. We've used the platform of a carnival to appeal to the children, and we had dramas of famous missionaries like Hudson Taylor and Amy Carmichael.

Often I've thought that we are doing something for the Lord, but God convinced me and broke me so that I realized it is God doing the work. And our role is to join him. We can do nothing without him. So the mission is impossible without prayer.

I believe that ministry is a byproduct of our relationship with God. And ministry belongs to God as he's already at work. All we need is to be sensitive to him and join him.

And also one of the things I learned was always go to the leadership.

Here in the Middle East, there is an expression of a "bent palm." And so pastors say, "I raised up a person, but now you're telling me that his fruit is going to fall in a different garden." And so pastors don't want "bent palms." They want straight palms that drop fruit in their own church. And so there becomes this sense that the mission agencies are in competition and are taking away the best fruit from the churches. How do you navigate that with church leadership?

First of all, I would assure them that I'm not pulling the missionary out of the church. It's their missionary. We are partnering with them by helping them send and expand their mission. But also we teach about stewardship and that the members of the church, and the church itself, belong to God. Pastors are simply stewards. When God calls, who are we to prevent?

If a young person wants to go but the pastor says no, we have a policy that we will not encourage them to rebel against their leaders. The pastor has to approve the application and send it directly to us. This is a small country, and we don't want to upset one pastor. He may tell a few other pastors, and we will have a problem.

One time, a pastor said no, someone couldn't go to the mission field because he played important roles in their church. But a few years later, that person left the church and isn't working in ministry anymore. Now, the pastor says that the next time a person that wants to go to the mission field, he will support them.

We also talk about the missionaries who came to Sri Lanka, how they died on the way to the field, how they died in this country, how they lost their children, and how they started schools. And they have given us the baton. Are we going to keep the baton or drop the baton?

In my context, many of the local Christians are coming from churches that were established generations ago by Western missionaries. So the churches themselves have a lot of Western practices and Western theology. They're Baptist or Presbyterian churches. Are a lot of your missionaries coming from those kinds of churches? And, what are you doing to help the nationals avoid importing foreign cultural baggage?

We do emphasize in our training the importance of taking only the essence of the church to the mission field. We want them to plant a seed in their soil, rather than taking some soil along with the ground and planting there.

Every culture has its good and bad. Every culture is tainted by sin, whether it's Western or Eastern. The Bible is the means for measurement. So anything that the Bible doesn't condemn, we can adopt. We begin with classroom training and then placing them in a cross-cultural setting in Sri Lanka to see how they adapt. But even after the training and experience, sometimes missionaries blend their own culture into their ministry. It is a challenge.

As an organization, we encourage them not to condemn the culture they are in, but rather appreciate it. Appreciate their food, learn their music, learn their culture, and go as a learner. When we go as a missionary, sometimes we think we are going to change them, but sometimes God changes us. As workers we need to have the humility to understand that locals know what is best for their culture.

So when we teach, we say that we put up a scaffolding. Once the building is done, we remove the scaffolding. So we say to our missionaries, "You're temporary there, right?" When we enter the country, we must have an exit plan. Once you've planted the church, once you've developed the leaders, you must move out. You shouldn't be their leader forever. We are trying to help local believers to express their faith according to their own culture.

What advantages do South Asians have when serving among the least reached?

There is an advantage to being local or from a "near" culture. It is more cost effective to send people from "near" cultures than sending someone from the U.S. or another place. You can send 10 workers from Southeast Asia to Southeast Asia in place of 1 from the West. Also, a Southeast Asian can get a normal job and doesn't have to worry about raising money for support. They are less scrutinized in the least-reached places, where it is strange for a Western person to come and live.

There are difficulties with mixing Western and Eastern cultures. Generally, Westerners are more concerned about truth; Easterners are more concerned about relationships. Both are important. It is not just one or the other. Sometimes I feel that for Westerners everything has to be black or white. But in our culture things can be neither black nor white. In Western culture things are a bit individualistic. But our culture is community based. For example, when someone is making a decision for Jesus, or trying to get a job, even though they make the final decision,

they first get consent of their family and their spiritual leaders. I'm not saying this is right or the other way is right. It just is.

I would say that we always must see ourselves as equal partners. It has happened before that a western organization became dominant over a non-western organization. The non-western organization gave and gave and gave. Then the foreign organization made mistakes and damaged people, until we finally had to take a stand and say, "No, this is not right."

So we have a different way of handling things. We agree that we have different ways. Both of us should reach the lost, but in how we reach the lost, we differ.

Some agencies are very good. But some agencies arrived with money and damaged some of our ministries. They didn't practice mission or work ethics. They have to face their superiors and show results. They have to spend the money before the end of December. So they do all sorts of activities in order to appear as though they are performing, but it has damaged some of our ministries. So I think when you are working in a different culture you must focus on efforts, not results. We believe that God brings the results.

What are the best ways that Western missionaries like myself can partner together with local and near cultural missionaries?

As I said previously, the first thing is that I feel you must see the different cultures as equal partners. Never think, "Our culture is superior to theirs." It's also important to get input from locals. In one of our experiences, an organization talked about how they were reaching Muslims. But a local person said, "If you do that in Bangladesh and Pakistan, we will end up in trouble." You know, every context is different. So it's always good to go through the locals and their leadership. Also, some organizations single out one person, finance him, invite him to attend conferences, and employ him, but without the approval of his leadership. I think these are not very good practices.

Many people have come to me and say, "I want to do something for this country, we want to help," or, "we want to do something like this." I respond saying, "No, that will not work." Once a donor from a Western organization had some agendas and they wanted to fund us to do a certain project. I said, "I don't want the money, because they want to give money to a project that I already have money for." So Western organizations need to hear from the people and our leaders to understand the needs of the people.

For example, one organization came, got to know the believers through us, and then offered them large sums of money and housing. That affected our relationship with the believers. After that, they no longer listened to us and instead listened to the people who were giving them money. So that upset us.

I think it is always good to go as learners and receive input from the people. If I go as a learner, I learn from unexpected people. I'll give you an example. A missionary was serving among Muslims and thought she had something to offer them. She felt bad to ask them for help. She was living in an apartment with the Muslim family, and when she became very sick, she felt bad to ask them for help. It came to a point where she could not do anything and was desperate. Then she asked for help, and it changed their whole relationship. The people felt, "They are also like us," and they developed a better relationship.

So it's good for us to also say that we are not perfect. We know we have our own failures and struggles, but we need to ask help of local people. I think that type of approach is more healthy.

If you could give one piece of advice for people who are trying to mobilize local missionaries, what's one big insight or secret that you've learned over the years that you would want to share with someone else who's doing the same work?

I would say what I said before, which is to cast the vision to the leadership. Leadership are ghosts; unless you deal with them, you can't

do anything. So what we do now is go to an area and conduct training for pastors and leaders.

So get the leadership, and make that your first priority. When we organize a conference, we go to the church leadership and tell them, "So why don't you send a representative?" They also have a part to play in mobilization. When they have a representative, the representative will update the pastor and the pastor will decide to send people.

Before mobilizing, the churches should feel that they have some benefits from you. Your involvement with them is beneficial to the church. It doesn't need to be that they are always expecting some money or support from you. I'm not talking about that. You can get some good, near-culture speakers, or some mission-minded speakers.

We have tried different things. We have tried mission conferences, a youth conference last year, seminars, and young couples' seminars. We take them to a decent place. You talk about a lot of related subjects, but we also share and challenge them to consider serving as missionaries, as a couple in an unreached place.

We also seek out a personal chance to chat with pastors and leaders. We also hold a forum for pastors, where we give some information and give them a chance to ask their questions. So they will sometimes ask you some tough questions. And when we go there, we can say, "We need your help in this new work." If you do something they don't like, they will speak out about it. So we allow them to ask all those tough questions beforehand, and we will gradually answer them.

And when we organize the program, we show respect to those leaders. We ask them to pray, or welcome the attendees, or do something in the program. We want them to be part of it. That way, when they come and experience the program, they may get the vision. So that's the way we get their support; when the pastors and leaders are involved.

Thank you so much for your time. You have challenged my own thinking regarding mobilizing local and near-cultural workers to go to the unreached. I was particularly challenged by your call to honor and work through the leadership of the local, established church. We don't want to use our resources and influence to undermine the church and cause long-term relational damage. I also hope we can be humble and listen to the insights that near-cultural partners bring as we engage with the culture of the people we are trying to reach. As mobilizing from the non-Western world becomes a bigger part of our work, I hope we will continue to learn from and listen to voices like yours.

Questions for Conversation

- What stands out most to you from Premkumar's experience in training and mobilizing South Asians?
- What are the biggest challenges in training and mobilizing local laborers in your context? How are they similar or dissimilar to the challenges in Premkumar's South Asian context?
- How should Western organizations and missionaries relate to indigenous organizations and missionaries?

Helping Female Single Teammates Thrive amidst Challenges in Muslim Society: A Case Study

By John Idoko

John Idoko, a CAPRO Nigeria missionary, has been a church planting team leader for two decades in two major contexts. He led a multinational church planting team among a local Arab tribe for 10 years, alongside his wife, Dr. Hayat (her adopted name in the community), in medical missions/church planting. As a writer, he has authored several books on church planting, and is a visiting lecturer at Global Institute for Transformations (GIFT). In 2013, he pioneered CAPRO diaspora church planting and currently leads teams planting migrant churches among northern migrants, who are from unreached tribes in diaspora, living in southern regions of Nigeria. He is also an IIPEC Chaplain..

Our team was diverse in many ways. We had newly married couples, those married with kids, single males and females, indigenous and expatriates, all from different church backgrounds, pursuing the same goal in a different culture. As a multi-cultural, multi-lingual team we faced numerous challenges. But none was greater than those faced by women on our team. While accomplishing lots of wonderful things in church planting, these female workers grappled with many frustrating challenges.

This article is intended to paint a picture of the useful roles single women have in church planting among Muslims, the challenges they face in playing those roles, and how they can be helped to navigate these challenges so that their work is not hindered.

I want to also encourage single women that singlehood is not a disadvantage but a blessing to a church planting team. Equally, I hope that teams with singles will learn more ideas in the art of helping, supporting,

honoring, and building the capacities of single women on their teams, and how to incorporate single women better into the ministry of that team while navigating through those unique challenges.

A Diverse Group with Diverse Assignments

Our church planting team from 1993-2011 was dynamic, heterogenous, and multinational, drawing workers from Arab-speaking, Francophone, and Anglophone regions of Africa, who banded together in a church planting mission in a local Arab community. These local Arabs (Shuwa Arabs) are situated in the extreme northeastern border region of Nigeria, Cameroon, The Republic of Chad, and up to the Darfur region of Sudan. Team members were included married couples, families and singles (men and women), from different countries, professions, tribes, and cultures. Our lingua franca on the team varied; most of the time it was Arabic, other times English. Despite this incredible diversity, we were all heartily committed to church planting in a 100% Muslim Arabs community.

To be articulate and organized in our church planting pursuits among our target tribe, we divided our church planting tasks along three main lines. Our first focus of ministry was to religious clerics. Second, we focused on the Arab women. In this area, we divided our work into two main groups according to natural social divisions. The married women/mothers on our team focused on the Arab women/mothers, while newlywed and single women focused on young wives and the unmarried Arab girls. Finally, the men focused on household heads, including community and political leaders.

Each team member was assigned to and clearly engaged one of the aforementioned groups. Over the years, about ninety-five percent of team members worked in a cottage hospital established by the team to meet the felt needs of the community and to give residency status and employment to our workers. Local Arab women staffed the clinic, and it was this health center that became the hub from which all our church planting activities took their bearings.

Many team members also engaged other parts of the community with different skills, but we made sure to keep our whole team neatly connected. This allowed the influence of our ministry to span across three countries bordering each other as our target people were spread across those countries, and beyond.

The Impact of Female Team Members in Church Planting

In the Muslim world, female team members need extraordinary support to thrive. By giving this strong focus in our team, our team members had great ministry impact among our target group. Female team members learned colloquial Arabic well, as they combined vigorous language learning with other responsibilities. The women on our team built friendships with local women as they became part of robust, existing social networks; so great was their impact the husbands of their friends became friends with the husbands on the team. For example, as the field leader, quite a few of my friendships started through the influence of my wife. I wrote about her impact as a medical doctor in one of my books:

> Her practice opened unimaginable doors into diverse people and places, and the title of the practice put on me by the Arabs themselves (some said that the husband of a doctor is also a doctor) gave me the honor and leverage I needed to harness the open doors for the advancement of the kingdom of God. She was the practicing doctor, while I was the known "doctor" at the gate.[1]

The women on our team identified with people deeply as they attended culturally important ceremonies: weddings, namings, and burials were platforms where meaningful interactions took place that

1 Yahya, Abdul-Haliq. 2016. *Life Behind the Veil: Ministry to Arab Women*. Jos, Nigeria: Cedar Tree Publishing.

were beneficial for ministry. The clinics at the cottage hospital were always full of Arab women and their children from all walks of local society because of our team nurses and other healthcare providers. Our Wednesday ante-natal clinic was a creative and colorful day for immunizations, consultations, and health talks which were deliberately chosen to educate on physical health and spiritual matters.

The female team members were the living color of hospitality on the team. Among Arabs, hospitality is not only a culture, but also a prized virtue, driven only by the woman or women of a house. To enable our team to be seen as highly hospitable in the community, and so we could explore diverse ministry opportunities embedded in hospitality, the women on our team rose to the occasion; with sparkling cheerfulness and godly decorum, they always welcomed visitors into our homes, attended patients in the clinic with culturally sensitive professional styles, and adapted their way of life, dressing, cooking, and child rearing into Arabic styles. These adaptations endeared them to the local Arab women, their husbands, and the entire community.

This good-naturedness brought numerous challenges to the single women because it made them especially interesting to Arab men for wives! They were seen as holy and respected women who follow *Isa Almasih*, and who were compassionate "doctors" in Hayat's clinic. Because of their honor, every woman in the community, and even those from the neighboring countries wanted to come to the clinic. It became a common saying in the community that if anyone needed to know the exact truth of their health conditions without any tincture of lies, they should go to Hayat's clinic.

The female workers, beyond being professionals, were excellent missionary evangelists. We developed a strategy for effective evangelism by working out a list of women who mattered in the community, which we called the "high-hanging fruits." The women set goals to visit these particular women, to build and deepen relationships with them, and preach the gospel to them. As I have written previously, "There was a year we set the goal to reach and evangelize fifty women. The women on

the team rose up to that challenge with a singular and joyful heart. At the end of the year, they had evangelized seventy women!"[2]

The women of the team kept a good reputation for our team by being good homemakers. This is one of the many areas where they made immeasurable contributions to church planting—on the home front. The home front is where female team members gave countless counsel to local women as they came in daily with a myriad of life struggles and needing help. It is at the home front that they received visitors and discipled female converts; all the while these women loved their husbands and raised their children in full view of Arab society. In every way they demonstrated, by their example, good family life to the local people. My wife once put it this way, women on a church planting team "are the hinges that bear the door of the base.... As a result, the home is also at peace to receive and accommodate enquirers and disciples."[3]

Challenges Faced by Female Workers

Significant ministry impact did not come without challenges for the single women on our team. I will only mention a few cases that provide a glimpse of these challenges because of space.

Stigma

Being unmarried as an adult female is a stigma among our focus people; a single woman is looked down upon and regarded as an outcast. One of the single women on the team narrated her challenge this way:

> When I joined the team in 2008, I was 47 years old. By their standard, I was already a great-great-grandmother. You can imagine how they looked at me from their own worldview. There were so many questions: "Where is your husband?" "You mean you don't have a husband?"

2 Ibid., 214.

3 Ibid., 215.

> "Where are your children?" "Are you traveling to bring your husband?" The questions were usually directed to me by the women folk and children. And honestly, sometimes these questions got very wearisome.[4]

In a culture where early marriage is the norm, girls are married as early as age twelve; so living as a single adult female worker was a wearisome thing to deal with.

Advances from Men

A daily challenge female workers faced, particularly the singles, were romantic or sexual advances from men. Harassment came in the form of obscene language and gestures, even physical harassment. Because of their dignity and piousness, a lot of Arab men expressed a desire to marry them. This challenge constantly wearied these female workers and the entire team.

One of the single women, a nurse, and midwife told of her experiences of subtle harassment in this way:

> A man who was supposed to be a friend of the team had asked me how I was able to stay alone without a man when my colleagues were out of the base. At another time, he asked if I was not feeling lonely, being alone in the house. A man is not supposed to ask a woman such questions unless the woman is a prostitute. So, because I was not married, I was not different from a prostitute.[5]

She recounted the challenges with yet another man in the book, *Life Behind the Veil: Ministry to Arab Women*:

> On yet another occasion, still inside the dispensary, in the pretense of showing me the place that was hurting

4 Ibid., 178.

5 Ibid.

> him, he touched my arm, almost touching my breast. It was then I realized that the man had been taking advantage of me. I was filled with rage and would have slapped him on the face with the sole of my slippers [the height of insult to a man in their culture], but something held me back. I remembered the relationship the team had built with him and his entire family, and how my action would have destroyed any chance of winning any of them to Christ.[6]

Embarrassing Stares from Men

As I sat in the company of men in our community, I often observed that each time a woman passed by a pocket of men, they would stare at the woman until she was out of sight. This was not aimed at only the local women but also at women on our team. I recall a day I was sitting with men in our neighborhood, and my wife was passing by. As a sign of respect for the men, she stooped down, removed her shoes, and carried them in her hands, walking barefooted. After she had passed by, she dropped them, stepped into them, and moved on. The eyes of the men were fixed on her, and it was apparent they did not know she was my wife. Finally, another man spoke up and said that she was my wife.

To women, such staring from men can be embarrassing. The awareness that you are being stared at can even make one's step clumsy. Unfortunately, this kind of embarrassment caused by Muslim men is quite common in many Muslim communities.

Marriage Proposals

As alluded to before, one other area of challenge that faced single female church planters was Arab men expressing a desire to marry them.

6 Ibid., 179.

Once I was visiting a team leader in the Republic of Chad and we were checking on some of his workers in various locations. He told me how a woman on his team, whom we had visited, was seeking to evangelize a high government official. She visited the official in his office to give him materials, and to discuss the gospel with him. The man mistook her visits to mean she was chasing him for marriage. He proposed to her and became seriously bent on marrying her, so much so that it became very embarrassing! The team leader and another local believer had to wade into the matter to douse the fire before it got out of control.

Another situation involved a female from Kenya on my team who worked in the clinic and a Muslim sheikh who was a good friend of mine. Any time the sheikh came to the clinic for treatment, he would cast a look on her in a way that we knew what he was thinking, then one day, he approached me to say that he would like to marry her. After some thought, I gave him a condition for that to happen. I told him that for marriage to even be discussed, he had to move into the Light. Since the woman he was interested in was in the Light and he was in Darkness, it would not be possible unless he moved into the Light—only then could we discuss this possibility. Since Light and Darkness have no fellowship together, it would not be possible for him and our team member to have any fellowship of that sort. He could not proceed any further because he was not willing to move into the Light. But it gave an opportunity to explain the Light to him.

Another time, something similar happened while I sat with elders in the community. For a church planter like myself to be given a spot in such *majlis* was the height of respect, honor, progress, and acceptance; therefore, I always attended. During this time, one of the men spoke out in front of all the other men that he wanted to marry my sister (this is what the locals called all my female teammates). Having experienced such a thing before, I did not react. I told him plainly in the presence of all the elders that he should go and propose to her, if she agreed, I would allow him to marry her. He paused for a while and said, "I won't go because she's educated and I am not." We all laughed, and I told

them that since he knew she was educated and he wasn't, why was he even trying?

Navigating through the Challenges Together as a Team

Let me be clear, these single women did not go through these challenges alone; it was a team challenge. As a team, we gladly helped these women navigate their way through issues, and we turned the challenge into opportunities to share the gospel. Here are some of the measures we took as a team.

1. At orientation and onboarding of new single women into the team, we would explain these challenges to them and teach them how to respond. We focused on how they could turn the challenges into opportunities, rather than reacting or feeling hurt by them. We told them to expect marriage proposals by the men, even when they appeared to be interested in the gospel or to have even become followers of Christ. In that way, they were not shocked when it did happen.

2. As the team leader, and one who was well respected in the community and beyond, I took responsibility to act as a father to all the single women on the team, whether they were older than me or not. As a team, we all agreed that by me taking on the responsibility and role of guardian/father that this would give the single women respect in the community. As you may already know, in an Arab community, a woman's identity is attached to a male family member. She is either the daughter of somebody, the wife of somebody, the sister of somebody, the mother of somebody, the widow of somebody, or the *ajuz* (old woman) of somebody. So, if the single women on our team were identified in the community as daughters or sisters of Yahya (my name in the community), they would be accorded respect and could go in and out freely; as such, all the men who were desirous of marrying them had to come to me privately to express their desires. No man dared bypass me as the *rais ul bayt* (head of the house) or the *rais-ul-daish* (leader or head of the army [team]).

3. We discussed these issues regularly as they came up. When a man made his intention known to me about a female team member, I would go home to that person and inform her that I have found a husband for her and have permitted him to come to propose to her. We would laugh about it, and discuss it as a team, arming her with what to say, how to say it, and the expression to maintain, should the man come.

4. We ensured that single women were embedded into team stations in such a way that they did not do church planting alone but under the 'protection' of married couples. This improved the community's view of them and provided extra moral and physical protection.

Conclusion

Singleness is not a disadvantage but a blessing to church planting, but it is challenging for women in the Arab world. Growing in the art of helping these women navigate hiccups that come their way is a needed skill in church planting teams among Muslims.

Without any sense of flattery, I can say I admired and valued the commitments, labors, sacrifices, attitudes, and spirits of all the women, single and married alike, that I have worked with in our company. Our team was forced to end due to local violence, but a good number of them are still engaging Arab women in other countries. As a team we sought to motivate them and sought to provide what they needed to do their work with excitement.

Many times I sought to encourage them by buying them useful books such as *Ministry to Muslim Women: Longing to Call them Sisters*; *Miniskirts, Mothers, and Muslims: A Christian Woman in a Muslim Land*, *Screams in the Desert: Hope and Humor for Women in Cross-Cultural Ministry*, *Daughters of Islam: Building Bridges with Muslim Women*. These books and others added value to their lives and enabled them to have fellowship with other women of like passion facing similar challenges in other locations.

Without these dedicated and resolute women, our church planting work would not be as robust. Some years ago, I authored a book (from which sections were quoted in this article) as a garland to decorate and adorn the necks of these gallant, brilliant women who have dedicated their lives and professional skills to serve God's purpose in church planting in Muslim contexts. These precious sisters are numbered among the many women who have risked their lives for the sake of unreached peoples across the world.

Questions for Conversation

- How are the challenges faced by single women in Mr. Idoko's team context similar or dissimilar to challenges faced by single women in your context?
- How can we cultivate a team environment which enables single women to thrive?
- What are the unique obstacles and the unique opportunities faced by workers of different life stages? How can a team effectively address the obstacles and steward the opportunities?

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Dealing with Theological Differences on Church-Planting Teams

By Andrew Hope

Andrew Hope (pseudonym) has been on the field since 2003, and has lived in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. He and his wife have served on three different church-planting teams as well as in wider organizational leadership roles.

Rarely in Christian circles do believers engage in long-term ministry together across denominational lines. One notable exception to this trend is frontline missionary work. For many who are called to the mission field, there is a real appeal in joining an organization that is not tied to their own denomination. Whether it is a sending organization's ministry focus, their regional focus, their ministry philosophy, or something else, most cross-cultural workers choose to work among the unreached through interdenominational organizations.

The interdenominational missionary sending organization is truly a rare bird. Thousands of us on the field find ourselves working in organizations alongside people with common calling, common convictions on the "big stuff," and yet very divergent convictions on secondary issues. There is also the added dynamic that we usually minister on teams where there are expectations to develop a unified vision and CP strategy. The potential for disagreement about, and division over, secondary issues is very real.

First, let me clarify some terms. When I say the "big stuff," I am referring to what I will call *primary convictions*. Most evangelical churches and sending organizations agree upon certain core beliefs: the doctrines of the Trinity, original sin, salvation through Christ alone, the inerrancy

of scripture, etc. Everyone joining a sending organization must agree and adhere to certain foundational beliefs such as these.

What I am calling *secondary convictions* are those organizations may not have a specific stance on: the mode of baptism (immersion or sprinkling), the miraculous gifts, the role of women in church leadership—to name a few. Within evangelicalism there is diversity of conviction on such issues, and we usually find that same breadth of conviction on CP teams.

To make matters more complicated, most of us find ourselves working in organizations that are increasingly multi-ethnic. Whether you are Baptist, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God, or non-denominational, Nigerian, Thai, Peruvian, or American, your secondary theological views do not preclude you from being a member of many sending organizations. The denominational and cultural diversity in many organizations inherently requires joining a body of believers who have a variety of perspectives.

Unity in the body of Christ, a primary conviction in our organizations, is not achieved in uniformity of perspective, but in the unity of calling and purpose: bringing God's Kingdom among the unreached. Our organizations champion the belief that it is better to work together amid differences, and to focus on the commonality of our primary convictions to fulfill Christ's commission to His church.

Of course, agreeing to work in an interdenominational and multi-cultural team is different than not having personal convictions about some of those secondary issues. It is likely that most of us have some strong convictions about several of them.

A question to consider in this context, then, is: *how do we interact with one another, considering these differences, so that we do not impose our own convictions on others while still holding true to our own?* And perhaps even more important is the question: *how will the churches we are planting form convictions about these secondary issues?* What

follows is a proposal for how to approach these two questions on diverse, interdenominational church-planting teams.

A Narrow Approach to Secondary Issues: Two Inadequate Approaches

While we all likely champion the belief in the unity of the body of Christ across denominational and cultural lines, not all of us may be keen on being part of a CP team whose secondary convictions are as wide as those of the organization. In fact, many would argue that narrowing those secondary convictions on a CP team can be helpful for two reasons: it helps avoid unnecessary controversy for the team as well as with the existing local church. Full disclosure, I will be arguing for the opposite. Let us look first at two inadequate ways of dealing with secondary issues—a theologically uniform team, and full submission to the national church.

Theological Uniformity on a CP Team

Some CP teams have decided to define and make uniform their stances on some secondary theological convictions. In recruiting, these teams look for people who share the same convictions as they do about those secondary issues. While this is a path for achieving theological unity on a team and what is taught to new believers, it can also be problematic to team and church-planting movements (CPM).

Suppose you were just accepted by your organization, and you felt a particular call to a specific people group or area. At first you receive great news: there is a team already there for you to join! Then you find out that this team has particular stances on secondary issues, some of which differ from those of you and your church. The team's requirement for agreement on those issues effectively prevents you from joining the team and therefore becomes a roadblock for following what you sense is the Lord's leading to this people or part of the world.

Fast forward five years, and it is possible (even likely) this team has lost some of its members and could need new workers. Working in hard-to-reach places makes recruiting team members difficult enough. This additional theological filter can make it almost impossible to find others who fit the team's criteria to join them. This well-intentioned stance can result in the dwindling or even death of a team.

This team may also find it a challenge to partner with local believers as well, since they may not find anyone who shares their same set of views on the field. Ironically, requiring theological uniformity on a CP team can directly result in disunity among the body of Christ.

When a team in an interdenominational organization narrows its theological convictions beyond its organization's own statement of beliefs, those theological restrictions effectively disqualify some members in the organization who have already been theologically vetted and have been deemed theologically fit to the task of working on a CP team. While a denomination's mission typically encourages their workers to hold and teach the same secondary views as the sending church, interdenominational organizations are uniquely suited to teams which are shaped by multiple perspectives from diverse parts of the body of Christ. If a unit or units on a team feel strongly that the team should have a uniform stance on some secondary issues not already stated in the organization's statement of beliefs, it could be an indicator that they might be better served if they were sent out by their own denomination's mission rather than by a multi-denominational organization.

Submission to the National Church's Theology

Another avenue some CP teams have taken on this issue is to partner with a local church, and then submit to the local church's interpretation on secondary issues. At first, this approach will likely strengthen the bond between the CP team and the local church on the field. However, a CP worker's personal convictions that may not align with the partner church could cause friction. More importantly, though, if the CP team is

expected to encourage new believers to adopt that local church's stance on those issues, it may cause problems.

While this approach may feel like the godlier path in submitting to the local church and finding unity in this way, it can inadvertently perpetuate extra-biblical secondary convictions. Take for example convictions about dress (what is and is not acceptable according to the Bible), stances on alcohol (either abused or taboo), worship (dancing, drums, etc.), the role of women in the church, and more. These secondary convictions often carry moral value in one culture, and therefore are not directly applicable when the local church is from a very different cultural background from the new believing church (for example, think of an animist-background partner church with a CP team who is church planting among Muslims). At worst, asking new believers to adopt these views can teach legalism and misinterpretation of Scripture, adding foreign cultural shackles to the gospel of Christ. Doing so also takes away the opportunity for the new believers to wrestle with biblical truths in the context of their own culture.

Unity Versus Uniformity in the Body of Christ

It is worth us taking a moment to reflect on how the theology of the body of Christ challenges us to take a different way forward than the aforementioned approaches. All evangelical sending organizations agree that there is only one body of Christ, only one Church. Unity is a primary conviction. Where we often get tripped up as believers in how we live this out is when we confuse unity for uniformity. Uniformity dictates that everyone must believe, think, and behave in an agreed upon way to be part of the group. The desire for theological uniformity is the impetus for the creation of many denominations.

Unity, however, is marked by common identification and fellowship. Yes, there is a foundation of common understanding and belief, but there is tolerance for different convictions on secondary issues for the sake of

maintaining that identification and fellowship. In short, it keeps the main thing *the main thing*.

The letters in the New Testament are filled with exhortations for unity amid massive differences. Most churches which received these epistles were diverse in culture, religious background, secondary convictions, and, likely, language. What is the advice from the apostle Paul to these explosively diverse churches— find the people you agree with, and "do" church with them? Not at all. Instead, Paul exhorts these bodies of Christ to be unified, while giving us windows into the eternal brilliance and purpose for doing so:

> *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.* (Rom. 12: 4-5, ESV)

> *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews and Greeks, slaves or free— and all were made to drink of one Spirit.* (1 Cor. 12:12-13, ESV)

> *As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.* (1 Cor. 12:20)

These are just a few verses which Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to teach and exhort us. There is no option in terms of Christian identification. Even though we may strongly disagree with people on secondary convictions, they are no less part of who we are. Our identity is found both in Christ, and in Christ's body, the church. As much as we may cringe at the secondary convictions held by a fellow believer, they are no less part of our own identity. In this way, because of Christ through the Holy Spirit, believers in the body of Christ are inseparable.

What is at stake if we refuse to work or fellowship with part of the body of Christ for the sake of preserving good doctrine as we see it? At least in part, it is the sacrifice of a primary doctrine, the unity of the

body. Unity is not merely a theological conclusion we agree on. It also requires action— fellowship, common work, disagreements, arguments, and finding the higher purpose in Christ. In so doing we continue to persevere. The very act of striving for unity with people we disagree with is deeply biblical, as the process honors the Lord and points us toward the future. It proclaims that Christ has woven us together, that He is sufficient, that all brothers and sisters in Christ are part of our own identity and will continue to be so as we live together with the Lord for all eternity.

A Path Forward

Most CP teams in interdenominational organizations have members from multiple church backgrounds and denominations. There are a couple of ways to deal with the issue of secondary theological issues on a team. The first way is simply to not talk about those issues. Avoidance can be a way to keep team harmony for a while.

The rubber really meets the road, however, when people start coming to faith. Say, for example, two teammates are discipling a new believer. These two teammates each hold a differing conviction on baptism (one believes in baptism by immersion of believers only, the other believes in sprinkling or pouring for the new believer and their children). Both stances are permissible in their organization. In this case, what should they teach the new believer about baptism, and who should decide the mode of baptism when the time comes to do it? Avoidance, if a team sees people come to the Lord, will lead to confusion and eventual disagreement. It is not an effective CPM strategy.

The potentially harder road, at least at first, is to talk about secondary theological issues as a team rather than ignoring them or acting as if they do not exist. Talking about these issues with new potential teammates is also key, as it sets expectations with them from the beginning. But how a team has this conversation is crucial.

Starting The Conversation on Team

Having the conversation about secondary issues on a CP team can be a very sensitive topic for many of us. With potential recruits, sharing one's own secondary convictions and asking for theirs is a conversation that may require more trust than is present when a person is looking for a team to join.

Rather than asking what a recruit or teammate thinks about specific secondary theological issues, another approach is to ask the question, "Would you have a problem working on a team with someone if they held a differing conviction about any of the following secondary issues:

- prophecy
- speaking in tongues
- baptism (believer baptism by immersion only, sprinkling believers and children of believers)
- predestination
- church-planting philosophy (DMM, Proclamation, etc.)
- spiritual warfare (generational sins, curses, demonization of believers)
- women in Christian leadership positions over men
- women preaching, teaching men
- covenant theology, dispensationalism
- eschatology
- something else?

If the answer is "no," then the conversation is straightforward from there. Teammates can agree to disagree, while still honoring one another in the team and outside of it. Those secondary theological conversations are no longer off limits, nor are they considered unimportant. The team leader has laid a foundation of trust that encourages unity, listening, consideration of differing views, and humility. When uniformity is not necessary, the need for agreement is no longer necessary. No one needs to feel that they must hide their personal convictions either, even to

a new believer. That said, the team must agree to not condemn other teammates or their convictions to the new believers or other teammates. Above all, they agree to point those new brothers and sisters in Christ to the word, encouraging them to ask the Lord for help by his Holy Spirit.

If there is a "yes" in the answer to the question above (meaning a person would take issue working with someone who has a different conviction to their own), then it is an opportunity to unpack that in an additional conversation. After adequate discussion, a firm "yes" may indicate that the person is not a good fit for the team or, potentially, the organization.

Putting the Onus Back on God

In looking for a path forward, it's also useful to remember the end goal: the churches we are hoping to see planted by God's grace. Let us return to that second question: how will the churches we are planting form convictions about these secondary issues? The answer to this question has bearing on how a CP team approaches the conversation.

If members of a CP team do not fully agree with one another or the local church on these secondary issues, then how does the team counsel new believers? Again, one of the solutions is simply to integrate the new believers into a local denomination (if present). But as previously discussed, that is likely to introduce significant culture-laden problems. Is there another option?

Whether you are the church planter, a local Christian, or a new believer from a UPG, we are all on a spiritual journey of knowing God more and being transformed increasingly into the likeness of his Son, Jesus (Rom. 12:2). The process for every Christian should have the same elements present: the word, the Holy Spirit, and the body of Christ. Pointing the new believers to God's word and exhorting them to ask the Holy Spirit to help them as they wrestle with these secondary issues is a simple and God-honoring alternative to forced uniformity. In doing so the

church planter models Christ-like humility, as they too ask the Lord—by the help of his Holy Spirit—to better understand his word as they study it, consider church traditions, use reason, and consider personal experiences that influence their understanding.

The freedom to wrestle with what the Bible says on these secondary topics is a gift for new believers of the CPM, as the process (not just the outcome) reinforces that the Lord is their ultimate leader, that the Holy Spirit wants to speak to them, that God's word is our authoritative guide, and that church traditions and our own experiences are important but not the ultimate authority. In this way, the church planter can model Paul's observation:

> *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual*. (1 Cor. 2:12-13, ESV)

There is certainly a responsibility of the church planter and the local church to teach God's word to new believers. In the same breath, may the way we teach be from the Spirit and not from human wisdom.

In this whole process, there is a common ground of core truths that the body of Christ can agree upon: the sufficiency of God, His word, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. New believers must develop these spiritual muscles, as they are crucial to the health and growth of the new church plant.

In this approach, a CP team is free to disagree on secondary convictions. It is even fine to share with the new believers that there are different opinions on secondary convictions among believers (they will find out sooner or later). It models to them that the team keeps the main thing the main thing (those primary convictions), and that unity in the body of Christ can be found even when uniformity of conviction on

secondary issues cannot be achieved. It is a God-honoring process that exalts the Lord, and not any particular brand of church, be it local (on the field) or foreign (from the CP team).

Hypotheticals Versus Reality: Examples from the Field

It is worth noting that many of the theoretical disagreements CP teams have over secondary convictions do not actually result in controversy as things eventually play out on the field. On one CP team we led, there were teammates who had very divergent convictions about CP strategy as well as the mode of baptism. In one sense these views were irreconcilable, as some of the convictions held among the team members fell on opposite ends of the spectrum.

Had we gone our separate ways due to those conflicting convictions, it is likely the CP team would have fallen apart, and the unreached people group we were ministering among would have become unengaged, with no known believers. That would have been a win for the enemy, and a loss for the Kingdom.

Instead, we agreed to disagree, to honor one another in the process, and to stay unified for the sake of God's mission to this unreached tribe. By God's grace, we participated in the first family from this tribe coming to Christ. As it turns out, the theoretical CP strategy impasses did not prove to be an issue in reality, as the Lord had His own way of calling this family to himself that did not fit neatly into any of our methodological approaches.

When it was time for us to baptize the new family, we had already agreed as a team to present both convictions, and to leave the decision to them. I imagine you also would have liked to have such theological complexities explained to you so that you could make your own decision according to your understanding of the word and the Lord's leading, if you had been in this family's shoes.

So, what we anticipated would have been two very contentious issues that perhaps were reason enough to go our separate ways early on, turned out to be non-issues in practice. Each one of those teammates wound up ministering to this new believing family in unique ways. In short, it was better to work together than to separate over those differences of conviction. I am convinced the Lord was honored in the process.

On another team we led, I was discipling a new believer with help from three other workers, two from different organizations. While we were not on the same team, we all agreed to keep the main thing the main thing, to encourage this new believer in his understanding of the word, to be bold in his faith, and to rely on the Holy Spirit and the word in times of decision and crisis. Again, the mode of baptism was a secondary issue that we church planters had differing convictions on. As best we could, we presented our different perspectives. He chose one mode of baptism. As he led others to the Lord, he also presented both modes and shared as best he could the differences with the new believers. As it turned out, he wound up baptizing most of these people by a different mode than he was baptized. There were also people from different religious backgrounds that came to the Lord and worshipped together.

What we lost in theological uniformity we gained in abundance through our unity. The discipling we provided as a group was far superior to just one of us doing it alone. The bond that was created amongst us church planters is also one of the greatest gifts I have received from the Lord in ministry to date. In my estimation, the new church and the workers were all better for it.

Conclusion

It is always easier in the short-term to ask people to agree to a particular view that is already clearly spelled out. While this approach may work in a denominational organization, it has some important downsides for an interdenominational organization seeking to mobilize people from the international body of Christ to difficult places.

The benefits of a multi-denominational team can far outweigh the messiness. New believers are challenged to seek the word for answers and to rely on God to speak to them, building those spiritual muscles in the process.

There is also a benefit for the CP team members themselves. Assuming we all want to continue to grow and learn from one another, having teammates from other denominations inevitably gives us windows into views of Scripture and the body of Christ that our own individual experience never has. It is an invaluable gift from the Lord to the CP worker to be theologically stretched and grown in the process of planting His church among the unreached.

In my own life I have been ministered to by believers from very different faith and cultural backgrounds to my own. These experiences have grown my theological understanding of several secondary issues because the church background in which I grew up was comparatively theologically underdeveloped. My understanding of spiritual warfare, for example, was massively influenced by people from Pentecostal backgrounds from places like Brazil, Ghana, the United States, and the United Kingdom. While I have not become a Pentecostal myself, I have learned lessons from those believers that the faith tradition I grew up in could not teach me. These brothers and sisters also greatly blessed me in the process!

When it comes to discipling a new church, the process of allowing them to form their own secondary theological convictions is very messy. Sinful, finite humans, even with the help of God's word and the Holy Spirit, will inevitably come to decisions and convictions that we CP workers may disapprove of. And yet this is the patient process of sanctification that the Lord endures with each one of us every day.

Take a moment to reflect on your own faith journey. What do you understand better about God's word today than when you first came to

the field? What convictions do you now hold that may be a bit different than the faith traditions you grew up in or the church that sent you out?

The Lord does not condemn us for misunderstanding parts of his word the first or second time around. He is patient, wanting to reveal himself further to us. Inevitably our own sin and limited life experience impedes our understanding of his word. Only by his grace does he grow us in our understanding of him over the years as we gain more life experiences and greater understanding of who we are and embrace the process of becoming more like Jesus. God's word is living, active, and perfect. We are also living and active, but imperfect! May we give grace to new believers as they work out their salvation with fear and trembling, just as we have received that grace, from the Lord and others.

Perhaps most of all, embracing unity in diversity glorifies God in the process. Even though the body of Christ is not unified by total agreement on secondary issues, it is still united by Jesus. Despite differences of conviction on important secondary issues, the Church can agree that the King is worthy of our partnership with those we disagree with for the sake of His Bride whom He is calling from among the unreached.

Questions for Conversation

- What theological backgrounds are represented on your team and in your context?
- Do you agree with Mr. Hope's proposal for embracing theological diversity on secondary convictions on church-planting teams?
- How can we engage in healthy conversation on secondary convictions with those we disagree with?

Book Reviews

Leading Multicultural Teams

by Evelyn and Richard Hibbert

William Carey Library, 2014. 235 pages.

Reviewed by Richard Kronk

Richard Kronk, PhD, is a Scholar-Practitioner with Christar Inc. and Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies at Toccoa Falls College, Toccoa Falls, GA. Richard and his wife spent 16 years in cross-cultural ministry among North African Muslim immigrants, in France before assuming an academic role. His publications include Dreams and Visions: Muslims' Miraculous Journey to Jesus *(Destiny Image, 2010) and* Not Called: Recovering the Biblical Framework of Divine Guidance *(Wipf & Stock, 2022).*

In *Leading Multicultural Teams*, Evelyn and Richard Hibbert add to the growing volume of materials intent on addressing the challenges associated with leading teams that are comprised of people from multiple cultures. The authors bring over 25 years of experience with multicultural teams, initially as team members of such teams, and more recently as coaches for multicultural teams that serve globally. The authors argue early in the book that cultural diversity is God's design and therefore something that needs to be embraced. Nevertheless, the authors note that the challenges in recruiting and leading members of a multicultural team are fraught with potential difficulties. These difficulties are related to the core essentials of what it means to be and work as a team as well as how leadership is defined and functions.

Summary of Content

Leading Multicultural Teams provides an honest assessment of the potential benefits and challenges associated with serving on and leading multicultural teams. Through a collection of personal anecdotes, cultural theory, and team-specific research, the authors weave real-life experience with theoretical and biblical principles to establish a framework for successful multicultural teams.

The book begins with an overview of multicultural teams and the cultural challenges of forming and realizing multicultural team success. The overview is followed by two chapters which address developing a vision for a multicultural community, the mechanics of building a healthy multi-cultural team community, and the necessity of clarifying the team's purpose and approach. The book continues by addressing the difficulties of managing team conflict, the essential character qualities which foster team harmony and productivity, and several skills to acquire which contribute to a healthy multicultural team. The authors close the book with a chapter on how organizations can support team leaders in multicultural team contexts.

In addition to the main content, the authors have included some helpful tools associated with the formation and leadership of multicultural teams. These tools include leadership discussion questions, a process for individual team members to identify assumptions and expectations associated with working on a team, and a multicultural team leader inventory designed to highlight the expectations team members have of prospective team leaders.

Evaluation

The authors bring a wealth of experience with multicultural teams, which allows them to dispense firsthand and anecdotal insight which informs their assessment of the challenges and suggested means of forming and leading successful multicultural teams. As they do this, the authors introduce relevant Scripture passages relating to the evaluation

of multicultural team dynamics, leadership, conflict resolution, and defining team purpose and function.

Fundamentally, the authors express a conviction that despite their inherent challenges, multicultural teams are the "normal" and expected outcome of living in a multicultural world. Without entering the debate over the necessity of multicultural teams as opposed to monocultural teams, the authors appeal to the argument that cultural differences are part of God's design; hence, multicultural teams provide an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate those differences.

Of note in particular is their assessment that every team member inevitably brings to the team not only their experience and ideas, but a host of cultural values which shape how they perceive the definition of a team, the function of a team, the role of individual members of a team, who is suited to lead, and what is expected of the leader. The authors note, "One of the most powerful functions of culture is that it defines for the members of each cultural group what is right and acceptable and how things should be done" (3). So, cultural differences do not simply define how something is done, but the "right way" to do it.

Refreshingly, the authors acknowledge that much of the literature on issues of leadership and teamwork are not only written in English, but "reflect English/Dutch/German-speaking background (EDG) cultural values. These values include individualism, efficiency, task orientation, an emphasis on written team agreements, and relatively little emphasis on relationships except as an instrumental factor in achieving tasks" (21). Inherent in their admission is the reality that the very concern expressed even by a book of this nature is an expression of EDG values of the authors' themselves!

The most helpful content in the book addresses strategies for forming multicultural teams that have the potential for relational harmony and the capacity to accomplish the task(s) for which the team was formed. To this end, the authors begin by describing three ways of approaching the multicultural community (assimilation, cultural pluralism and multicultur-

alism).[1] The authors argue that multiculturalism, as a means of viewing a team, "describes a society where everyone feels valued, whatever their culture" (63).

Having proposed a philosophy of multiculturalism, the authors describe how to build a multicultural team community which offers a "safe climate" for all (73), establishes the guidelines by which the team members will function (76), and develops an effective team communication process which works for all (77). To this end, the authors argue that the glue which holds the team together in the midst of its cultural differences is interpersonal trust (81-84), which has both a biblical foundation related to honesty, clarity, grace, and forgiveness; it also has a practical application related to culturally appropriate expression. It is this accumulated pool of trust which will allow the team as a whole and individual members to be able to resolve conflict and endure misunderstandings when they occur (139).

The authors spend a good deal of time discussing issues surrounding managing and resolving conflict on multicultural teams. They acknowledge their own experience with team conflict has partly shaped how they understand and address team conflict now. Of note is the observation that people from different cultures will not only experience conflict differently, but will also have differing expectations as to how conflict is resolved. The authors describe a conflict escalation scale by which one can assess to what level a particular conflict has evolved, as well as a series of suggested approaches to addressing and resolving conflict given its stage of evolution (142-143).

The challenge of authoring a book like this is that, despite the skill inherent in identifying cultural differences and the challenges associated

1 *Assimilation* is described as the process of adopting the cultural values and expressions of the culturally different host or dominant culture at the expense of one's cultural of origin. *Cultural pluralism* is the freedom to express one's culture of origin within the boundaries of the cultural values and norms of a culturally different host or dominant culture. *Multiculturalism* is the cultural dynamic which blends cultural expression from two or more cultural groups who inhabit the same cultural space (61-63).

with forming and leading a successful multicultural team, no one – not even the authors – can live as non-cultural persons. Despite their efforts to embrace a respect for cultural neutrality and step back from imposing an EDG cultural perspective as the preferred one, at times it comes through. When the authors suggest that "the team leader should encourage the team members (who are in conflict with one another) to talk with each other" (162), they are espousing a practice which is arguably oriented towards cultural values which are associated with EDG values (independence, directness, etc.) and not cultures which embrace collectivity and indirectness. Once again, the authors' bias comes through when they argue that "good team leaders include each team member in the decision-making process, making a decision based on what everyone has said" (177). Such an approach is highly valued in a low, power-distance context which values a democratic approach, but not so much in cultures which value high power-distance and expect the leader to decide for them.

While not shying away from acknowledging challenges to successful multicultural teams, the authors never imply that it is somehow more work than it is worth. However, they do admit more than once that sometimes the cultural divide among team members is such that the successful functioning of the team may not be possible, and it may need to be restructured or dissolved (5, 146).

In summary, the main strengths of this work include a helpful treatment of understanding the roots of common conflict of multicultural teams and approaches to mitigating conflict, an unapologetic acknowledgment that multicultural teams reflect the cultural diversity of the people of God, and hands-on resources (provided in the appendices) to help individuals on multicultural teams identify and assess important aspects of leadership, purpose, and conflict resolution.

Relevance/Importance

Evelyn and Richard Hibbert have made a helpful contribution to the body of literature seeking to address the practical side of forming and leading multicultural teams. Their honest assessment of the challenges, their practical suggestions, and the hope they offer for the possibility of forming and leading successful multicultural teams is both encouraging and realistic.

One helpful but sobering note in the wake of the discussion of how to form and lead successful multicultural teams is the honest assessment that it may not always be possible. "We will not always be able to work harmoniously with other Christians who have different cultural values. Some people may not be able to make the compromises necessary to becoming part of an effective multicultural team" (5). With this honest admission, the authors have anchored their text in the reality of the human condition – even for those who are Christians.

Though the authors do not make this connection, it seems apparent for two reasons that the necessity of multicultural teams is an essential component of the realization of the Missio Dei. First, because of global migration and the globalization of the Church, the cultural make-up of the missionary force is increasingly multi-cultural. This fact alone implies the increased opportunity and necessity of multicultural teams. Second, the nature of the remaining unreached requires cultural skills that are underrepresented in historically Western, European cultural contexts. The benefits of non-Western cultural values and norms on team function and leadership are yet to be fully realized and appreciated with regard to the advance of the gospel.

Recommendation

As someone who served many years on a number of formal and informal multicultural teams, I would have benefited greatly from the discussion, tools, and approaches offered by Evelyn and Richard Hibbert had I had the chance to read and interact with their ideas prior to

my experiences in multicultural team contexts. I heartily recommend this text, especially for newly forming or recently formed multicultural teams. I think the maximum benefit from the book could be realized if it was read and discussed by all team members. Because of the cultural differences which the authors reference, the impact of the book may vary depending on the culture of origin of the readers. In particular, those of us from historically dominant cultural contexts with regard to missions will need to take seriously the challenge to assuming that our way is the right way and find ways to not only acknowledge cultural differences but seek to value and honor others in the way that we serve as members of multicultural teams.

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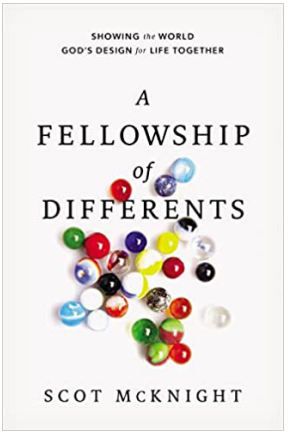
A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together



by Scot McKnight

Zondervan, 2014. 265 pages.

Reviewed by William Jackson

William Jackson (pseudonym) has been engaged in church planting among Muslims in South Asia since 2012. He and his family live in a restricted-access country. William taught English to college-age students and is now working in a creative-access business. William is passionate about evangelism, church formation, vision, strategy, and the development of people around him.

If you want to read a book about healthy church without the latest church planting methodologies and lingo, then *A Fellowship of Differents* by Scot McKnight is the book for you. McKnight emphasizes the importance of the local church and how the church should shape the people within it (12). Throughout the book he asks, "What is the church supposed to be?" and, "If the church is what it is supposed to be, what does the Christian life look like?" (12). The goal of this book is to persuade the reader that the local church is meant to be comprised of a variety of people from different social backgrounds who are enthusiastic about loving one another and fulfilling Christ's mission in the Spirit's power (14).

McKnight is a world-renowned New Testament scholar and seminary professor at Northern Seminary in the United States.[1] His writing style is engaging, humorous, biblical, and deeply practical. McKnight has a passion for local churches being comprised of different peoples and viewpoints, something many American churches sorely miss out on (20). This is a goal which church planters could agree with wholeheartedly.

Summary of Content

McKnight introduces the book by sharing from his personal church experience as a child and teenager. He shares that his church primarily instructed its members on what not to do or believe in (12).

In contrast to his experience growing up, McKnight suggests the church should be like a perfect salad—full of different "toppings" thoroughly mixed together (14).[2] The apostle Paul's typical house church would have had around 30 people from diverse backgrounds (skilled, non-skilled workers, slaves, owners, homeless people, women, men, young, old, migrants, and so forth; 14-15).

The following six parts describe ways the local church can be a successful fellowship of "differents."

Part One: Grace

McKnight highlights that God the Father loves the Son and sent the Spirit to help us love one another (33). Romans 8:31–39 clearly states that God is for his people and that this social experiment called "the church" will be supported by God (36). Grace places us in the "mixed salad" with others and encourages us to live "in Christ" together (39), knowing that transformation is the slow work of grace spreading in his

1 https://www.seminary.edu/faculty/scot-mcknight/

2 This analogy will either confuse people or be entirely new to people who are not familiar with a lettuce-based salad common in America. In South Asia, this example would not be helpful, since "salad" typically means one to three cut up vegetables as a side dish alongside a main meal.

body (40). Believers must rely on this grace in order for the "fellowship of differents" to thrive and be a shining testimony to others (40).

Part Two: Love

In typical McKnight fashion, he says that love is a great idea until you are put into a position to love someone unlike you (52). He highlights the fact that love is a rugged commitment which does not deny emotions but reorders them (53). Because God wants his church to be a fellowship of differents, we must regularly love people unlike us (63). Paul demonstrated such love as he worked and labored with diverse types of people in planting churches (Rom. 16). Lastly, love shares resources with others. We are to serve the church generously not only through our finances but also through our time, emotions, and talents (79).

Part Three: Table

Jesus prayed his disciples would live in unity and be known for this by outsiders (John 17:21). McKnight highlights the fact that the American church deeply struggles with individualism which flows into the life of the church. We commonly ask, "What are MY gifts?" and "What is God teaching ME?" rather than asking collectively "What are OUR gifts?" and "What is God teaching US?" (91).

When we sit down at the table for a meal, we ought to accept each other's differences and dwell upon our collective nature instead of our individual rights (95). In my time in South Asia, I have seen people eating at the same table as a display of honor to one's guest as well as a symbol of peace between parties. Believers who previously have conflict will not eat together, but when the conflict is resolved between them, they are ready to partake in a meal together.

Table fellowship is seen in the Eucharist, the meal commemorating Christ's death for our sins (99). In the Eucharist, McKnight points out, we worship God as we reflect upon the gospel, which should lead us to unity (103). This unity is something all believers need to be reminded of regularly.

Part Four: Holiness

Believers in this fellowship of differents also pursue holy lives together. In the same way McKnight believes church members should be free from the bondage of sin, he believes all should be free from the oppression of discrimination against gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (141-142). He longs for the church to be a holy community that encourages each member to freely practice their God-given gifts. McKnight believes that if the church does not allow people to use their spiritual gifts within the church, such people are living in bondage. If we do not want people in bondage to sin, why should we ourselves put them in bondage?

Part Five: Newness

In the fifth section of the book, McKnight reminds us the church is to love our neighbor well while being free from cultural expectations placed on us (156). Distinctives of faithful churches include the following: they are Scripture-led (169), Spirit-led (170), mission-led (173), and lay-led (175). These kinds of churches are to be different from the governments in the countries they live in. They are to speak up in times of need and follow the rules of the land, and yet their main allegiance is to King Jesus. From my observations of churches in America and South Asia, such churches do exist. They are often resolute in their commitment to Jesus but gentle in their demeanor and influential among their neighbors.

Part 6: Flourishing

The concluding section seeks to encourage the church to flourish in a "salad bowl" fellowship of differents (191). The only way to do this is to live by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit (192-193). One of my favorite chapters is "Pete the Mechanic," where McKnight talks about flourishing in the jobs God has given us (211). Too often people believe "real ministry" takes place only within the church, but that is not true. McKnight reminds us that through the tentmaking examples of Paul and others, the church was built. In a line that should be oft repeated,

McKnight says, "We are called to flourish in the life we're given, not in the life we're not given" (213).

Evaluation

McKnight's book on the church is filled with simplicity and beauty. His calling to be a flourishing fellowship of differents is one a polarized world needs to hear regularly. There are many areas where this fellowship of differents could be especially challenging for church planters serving in contexts different from McKnight's American church context.

Muslim / Hindu Mixed Fellowship

McKnight's ideas might face challenges in contexts where Muslims and Hindus co-exist. For example, in the country of Bangladesh, most Christians are from a Hindu background and choose to use religious language Hindus feel comfortable with. For Muslims entering into such a church, this feels uncomfortable to them. Ideally, such Hindu Background Believers (HBBs) would recognize this and seek to live out Paul's methods of contextualization in 1 Cor. 9:19-23. If one is church planting in this context, he or she should expect significant challenges integrating former Muslims and Hindus together. They would need extra prayer and thoughtfulness to see this flourish, especially in areas where one religion is the clear majority and persecution of other religious groups has been a norm. Building trust between the two groups will take considerable time.

High Power-Distance Cultures

It is true the early church saw a mixture of socio-economic groups worshipping together, but this does not mean it is not a challenge in high power-distance cultures today. Power distance makes it difficult for people to be emotionally and relationally close to one another if there are perceived distances between them (Hofstede 2010, 54). In South Asian MBB (Muslim Background Believers) churches I know, the poor and low-to-middle class people integrate more than the overall broader culture, which is more segregated. However, we often see leaders

in these mixed-class churches cling to power and fail to empower others "below" them. Often their followers do not have the freedom to question the leader's decision, causing frustration among lay members in churches. Teaching on servant leadership and encouraging multiple leaders from diverse backgrounds in high power-distance cultures is necessary.

Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP)

Church Growth theorists such as Donald McGavran have used the HUP as a term to describe church planting as most effective when working within one ethno-linguistic people group. This principle carries a lot of weight in missiological circles, but within the last decade, missiologists have argued for a more heterogenous approach to church planting (Corwin 2014), which McKnight tacitly approves of throughout this book. Because all ethnicities can fall into the sinful trap of believing they are better than others, a heterogeneous church could aid in ensuring no one ethnicity is the dominating group within a church. I think there is a biblical basis for church planters to work towards the type of heterogenous church McKnight describes (Rev. 5:5-7). If we should only focus on planting churches that are purely homogeneous, then it is ironic that missiologists sometimes emphasize multi-ethnic church planting teams. If we advocate for the latter, perhaps we should seek to plant heterogenous churches as well.

Relevance for the Practitioner

Church planters need to remember the basics of healthy church, and this book encourages us in that direction. Fellowship of Differents is useful for those seeking to be reinvigorated by a large vision for what the church can be. For those serving in areas where there are few to no believers, this book might have less immediate relevance. However, such frontier situations inherently require missionaries to build the kind of discipleship community McKnight encourages, one where people from different genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds

can feel equally welcomed. Throughout the book, McKnight focuses on encouraging the lay person to love the diverse people(s) among them. In countries where one's social status carries significant weight, they will need to work especially hard to implement the lessons McKnight writes about. Thankfully, such a diverse group of fellow Christ-worshippers existed within the first few decades after Christ's departure to heaven (15).

People who are looking for either a church polity or the latest church-planting practices might be disappointed with this book. However, *Fellowship of Differents* is not meant to teach people how to run a perfect worship service on Sundays, what church government structure should be in place in a local church, or the roles of men and women in ministry. Instead, McKnight urges local churches themselves to work out these issues rather than prescribe them for all churches. This is a tremendously important lesson for church planters to teach those they are discipling and mentoring as they learn to lead their own local church.

Recommendation

I recommend this book as a source of refreshment for those who may be accustomed to reading "how to" church-planting books. It paints a simple picture of the beauty and simplicity of the gospel and the local church. Living a life of grace, love, and fellowship amid different people is a powerful testimony to the world.

One personal takeaway from this book is the importance of table fellowship—enjoying hospitality with others as a means of building relationship and bonds within Christ's body. A second takeaway is the need to empower others in the church, especially women and those in less privileged positions economically. Church planters need reminders to live out such biblical and practical principles in the various contexts they find themselves living in. Books like these remind me anew of the beauty of God's church, a community where different people gather to worship the living Lord Jesus.

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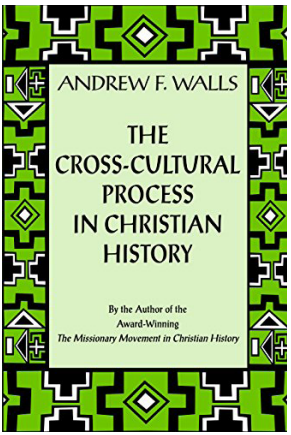
The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith



by Andrew F. Walls

Orbis Books, 2002. 284 pages.

Reviewed by Drew I.

Drew I. (M.Div. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is an American who has served in Northern Africa for eight years in various roles: entrepreneur, teacher, and translator. He and his wife co-lead a team and co-shepherd a family.

Last year, Andrew Walls finished his race, and the tributes poured in from all over the world. He was a "Christian Scholar, mentor, teacher, friend and inspiration," who "embodied World Christianity."[1] His long career gave the church eyes to see what God was doing in our time and also shaped our response. Walls was one of the first to draw attention to the fact that the center of gravity of world Christianity had shifted to the global south, and much of his writing was devoted to helping us understand the implications of such a shift.

1 https://brill.com/view/journals/mist/38/3/article-p319_3.xml?ebody=pdf-49903 Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. Obituary for Andrew Finlay Walls (21 April 1928–12 August 2021). Mission Studies 38 (2021) 319–320. Published online 15 Dec 2021.

In addition to showing us what's been happening in our generation, Walls identified themes and principles relevant for every age of cross-cultural ministry. He gave us the memorable image of the "pilgrim principle" and the "indigenous principle,"[2] and used an imagined "scholarly space visitor" to illustrate the fact that the Christian faith has moved to different heartlands and has taken on widely differing forms over space and time.[3] His "conversion principle"[4] and "translation principle"[5] helped us understand and appreciate what happens as Christians "turn what was already there" in our home cultures toward Christ. While most of what Walls wrote was for academic audiences, practitioners can benefit from much of his writing. When we understand how God has worked in the past, and see how our moment in history is unique, we are more equipped to join God in what his doing today.

The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History is Walls' second of three published books. Like his other books (*The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (1996) and *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity* (2017)), *The Cross-Cultural Process* is an anthology of Walls' articles and lectures. As such, we find essays addressing big themes about how God works in the cross-cultural process (part 1) and careful historical studies of particular people and moments in World Christianity (part 3). As an anthology, there is no one unifying argument which carries the book. Rather there are certain themes repeated throughout the book.

Part one brings the themes to light through a discussion of the cross-cultural expansion of Christianity both in the past and in our generation. In "A History of the Expansion of Christianity Reconsidered," Walls looks back on mission history to propose certain tests to measure the impact of Christ on a society. "Christianity in the Non-Western World"

2 Walls 1996, 7-9.

3 Walls 1996, 3-6.

4 Walls 2019. See Chapter 3, "Worldviews and Christian Conversion."

5 Walls 1996, 26-35.

illustrates the "built-in fragility" of Christian influence by noting the serial nature of the church (26) — the advance and retreat of Christianity. This means there are no lasting heartlands of the faith on earth, but always moving "centres of gravity" (30).

Chapter three concludes that the participants in Edinburgh 1910 conference saw their goal accomplished: the expansion of Christianity into the non-western world, "though not in the ways, or by the means, or at the times, or even in the places that they had expected, and so quietly that the Western church, caught up in its own affairs, has still not noticed that it has taken place" (70). In chapter four, Walls proposes that we find ourselves in an "Ephesian Moment:" Christians of various cultures are like the Jews and Gentiles who experienced a dividing wall of hostility and yet were called to come together in order to reach "the very height of Christ's full stature" (Eph 4:13). While most of Walls' arguments are historical rather than scriptural, in this chapter Walls reveals his gifts as a Methodist lay preacher, calling contemporary Christians to recognize our culture-specific versions of Christian faith as incomplete and in need of each other to reflect the fullness of Christ (79).

Part two considers Africa (where Walls devoted much of his life and ministry) in Christian history. In Chapter five, he argues that 21st century Christianity will be shaped by the global south, and above all by Africa (85). "African Christianity in the History of Religions" discusses how African traditional worldviews are reordered by Christianity—and how African Christianity is reshaping World Christianity. Chapter seven marks a shift in the book from the "big ideas" toward the particulars of historical studies. Of special note for practitioners is the discussion of Samuel Adjai Crowther's engagement with Islam in Africa. Chapter eight considers Crowther's legacy, and chapter nine does the same for Harry Sawyerr, an under-appreciated Sierra Leonean theologian.

Part three consists of "vignettes" of the missionary movement from the West. These include a study of British imperial religion and its ties to colonialism and the missionary movement, as well as a historical argument that the modern missionary movement began in Europe well

before William Carey. Another chapter explores reasons why missionaries have often been laypeople, illustrating Walls' theme of movements arising from the periphery. Walls also sets forth the career of Timothy Richard, a 19th century missionary, as paradigmatic of missionary experience, investigates the Scottish missionary diaspora, and concludes with a short reflection on the contribution of David Bosch.

In each of these particularized historical studies, Walls' big themes crop up again and again. Even if they are not spelled out, they are often between the lines. The church in a particular place is *fragile*, meaning that there have been a number of "Christian heartlands" in history, and none have lasted beyond a few generations. Christian expansion is *serial*: while the church weakens in its "heartland," it is advancing in surprising new places, often with little fanfare. Finally, the church in a given place is *incomplete*, one version of the faith, a segment of the body. Completion, or wholeness in the church, is only possible when various cultural expressions of Christianity "correct, enlarge, and focus" (79) each other.

Walls' style rewards multiple readings and reflection toward synthesis. Through it all, the many sides of Andrew Walls come through: far-sighted historical summary paired with painstaking archival details, courageous predictions, wit and creativity, a generosity of spirit, and even some measured preaching. Reading Walls has given me an affection for him, and I was not surprised at the unabashed outpouring of highly personal tributes to him from all corners (especially Africa) at his death last year.[6]

Some readers might be hindered by the stylistic extremes of Walls' various chapters. The "big idea" chapters in part one contain wide-ranging summaries and conclusions without footnotes, so some readers may remain unconvinced. The more particular chapters can feel idiosyncratic and overly detailed, leaving the reader to wonder what a particular article has to do with missions today. Certainly, some chapters are more applicable for us than others. Among the more

6 https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/august/andrew-walls-world-christianity-edinburgh-yale-tributes.html

detailed chapters (7-15), I'd recommended only chapters 8 and 13 for time-pressed practitioners.

So, what does Walls have to say to us practitioners as we seek to obey Jesus by making disciples among the nations? One of the themes that comes up in multiple chapters is the idea that "living on terms set by someone else" is at the heart of missionary experience (Walls, 199). In contrast to what Walls calls a "Christendom" idea of expanding the faith through territory by means of power, missionaries should adopt more fragile means. We "must adapt [our]selves to the modes of life of another people, acquire another language at a fundamental level, and find a niche in another society that enabled [us] to function within it" (199).

For my wife and me, "living on terms set by someone else" has become a phrase that helps us make sense of our experience in North Africa and has given our daily failures and anxieties new significance. In our first few years we often found ourselves thinking and saying that we need to "just get through this (whatever the mini-crisis of the week) and then we'll be able to do what we're called to do." Or "If I could just solve this problem, then I'll be able to really thrive." Somewhere along the way we realized that these "problems" weren't going away. Instead, these problems were not distractions from the work God has for us, but *were* the work God had for us.

A lot of voices tell us that thriving happens when we take control of our environment. But in our line of work we'll never be able to control our environment. In fact, Walls tells us that trying to live on our own terms actually works against us in the long run. Paul described his life on mission this way: when he was afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, Jesus was revealed to others, resulting in grace extending to more people for the glory of God (2 Cor 4:7-15). Walls' study of mission history illustrates that God is very pleased to bear fruit through his people as we "live on terms set by someone else."

Much more can be said about other applications. Walls' description of Christian expansion as serial in nature in contrast to other world religions

has given me another apologetic argument for the faith when talking with my Muslim friends. I can say, "Isn't it beautiful that Christianity does not require people to take on a foreign culture or learn a new language, but finds a home in many different cultures and languages?"

I also find deep motivation from the idea that the North Africans we're serving among today will one day enable other parts of the church find fresh meaning and significance in Christ. Not *new* meaning, but meaning that has always been there, yet has been forgotten or unnoticed. In this way, Christ will be glorified and the church will be helped to reach "the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13). And Walls' chapters on Africa's Christian past and future makes me want to lift my hands in praise and throw my support behind African brothers and sisters who are forming a new Christian heartland and reshaping world Christianity.[7]

Finally, in frontier church planting, we find ourselves in our own "Ephesian moment" as practitioners from Asia, Africa, and Latin America work alongside those from "traditional" sending countries. We should expect that practitioners from diverse cultural backgrounds will "correct, enlarge, and focus" the church's mission among the unreached. But this will only happen if we actually get to know and minister alongside each other. Multicultural church planting teams face unique challenges, but offer incredible potential to show "the full stature of Christ" where he has not yet been named.

I recommend this book to practitioners and mission leaders who long to see God worshipped in new places as they live on terms set by someone else. For them, chapters one to four are must reads, enabling more effective service by showing how God has worked in the past and what he's doing in our generation. Chapters five to nine are also recommend for those serving on the African continent, those who work alongside African believers, and those who want greater understanding on how the African story is becoming the world Christian

7 See, for example Perbi, Yaw and Ngugi, Sam. *Africa to the Rest: From Mission Field to Mission Force (Again)*. Xulon Press. 2022

story. Practitioners with historical interest will find insights to apply in part three. Andrew Walls has completed his race, but "by faith" he "still speaks" (Heb 11:4). Let's listen!

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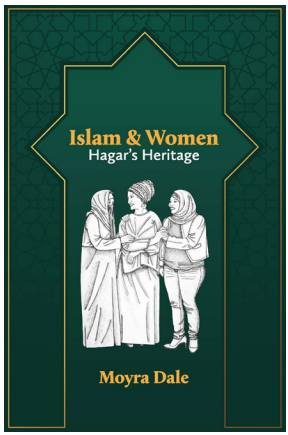
Islam and Women: Hagar's Heritage



by Moyra Dale

Regnum Books, 2022. 402 pages.

Reviewed by V. Phillips

V. Phillips is an American who has served with AWM/Pioneers in North Africa for over twenty-five years as a health and development consultant. She finished her doctoral studies at Biola in Intercultural Education. She continues to serve in church planting and ministry to Muslim women in teaching, mentoring, and resourcing roles. She has been a part of the Lilias Trotter Center team since 2021.

The Twelve Percent: Often Talked About but Rarely Listened To

"Muslim women comprise about 12% of the world's population," yet many mission organizations overlook the importance of addressing their special needs in planning their program strategies (2). In her newly published book, *Islam and Women: Hagar's Heritage*, Moyra Dale challenges us to consider the unique world of Muslim women if we desire to reach them with the hope of the gospel message and bring them into the body of Christ.

Looking through my bookshelves and the resources available to me on Islam over the years, I note as Dale does that many of the teaching voices are men – even a few of those focused on women's ministry. I am

grateful for the valuable insight into the Islamic worldview these materials offer. I agree with the author, however, that most writers miss the female perspective that is important for understanding a Muslim woman's "frame of reference" for daily life and faith.

Just last weekend, I attended a ministry training in a popular strategy method promoted for reaching Muslims. All the examples and information presented by the male workshop facilitator as convincing evidence of this method's effectiveness were with men. When I raised the question to him about Muslim women and their reactions to this method of gospel presentation, his response was to simply assure me that it worked well—an answer that left me more frustrated than convinced.

The insights of women scholars and practitioners grounded in personal experience provide an invaluable resource that can help our relationships with Muslim friends to grow and increase our knowledge of how to create safe places to share Christ with them. In order to reach this beloved and precious twelve percent of the world's population needing to hear the gospel, the voices of women working with Muslim women are important additions to any discussion on mission planning and strategy.

"Binocular" vision

Dale, a scholar herself and co-founder of the excellent web-based resource, *"When Women Speak...,"* has served with Interserve Australia in the Middle East for many years. Her book reflects her own rich experiences and ethnographic research into the social spaces of her Muslim friends. I found I could relate well with Dale's descriptions of her two decades on the field discovering concerns and issues that influence women's everyday lives.

She starts each chapter with a short anecdotal story to introduce a theme, a lived experience that will resonate with field workers. The stories remind us that conversations with women are framed by real,

day-to-day life events and issues and rarely by apologetic arguments over religious scriptures. Conversations happen in the context of relationships where discussions can open doors for heart-level dialogue and deeper discovery of truth.

In order to gain and understand a balanced perspective of a Muslim woman's life and have these heart-level types of conversations, Dale encourages going beyond traditional viewpoints and stereotypes to see how these women objectively perceive their own lives. Women working in the Muslim world can all testify to the privilege of spending time with our friends, listening to them, and learning from them as they describe their cultural and religious values. Dale takes us on her own journey of listening to and learning from her Muslim friends.

Women workers in the Muslim world generally find that relational methods are more useful than using direct approaches that involve dialogue on a gospel presentation or comparing and arguing about religious beliefs. Over the years, I have adopted approaches that feel more holistic and incorporate oral methods as a bridge to deeper conversations and opportunities to share the good news of Christ. Having familiarity with a lot of Islamic scripture has not always seemed important in my experience, but I appreciate how Dale includes so much insight on the Qur'an and Hadith in order to understand a Muslim woman's worldview.

From her experiences, Dale recognizes several themes that she organizes into 18 chapters relevant to a Muslim woman's social and religious worldview. Her goal in these chapters is to provide a balanced, or "binocular" as she calls it, view of Muslim women in order to form a better overall perspective of their world. The chapter titles reflect two significant areas in the lives and faith of Muslim women, the first section covering more general and common themes across the Muslim world, and a second section with more practical subjects that look at everyday life.

In her discussion of each chapter topic, Dale mixes Islamic scriptures (Qur'an and Hadith), historical influences, and socio-cultural dynamics with the issues relevant to a Muslim woman's religious and daily life. Her approach is both unique and helpful – showing how a Muslim woman would understand and apply particular scriptural texts in her day-to-day existence. Dale then introduces biblical texts related to the issues for comparison and contrast with Islamic teachings. Her non-critical approach is a positive guide for disciple making and for helping new believers develop a Christian worldview.

I found the chapter breakdown to be fascinating and beneficial in thinking through issues of significance to women. Surprisingly (for me at least), Folk Islam was not addressed as a subject on its own but was found in the chapters on "Power" and "Life Cycles and Life Rituals." Dale compares power as a means of dealing with "failure-biased forces" such as envy and the evil eye versus "success-biased powers" like baraka/blessing (92-94). The influence of the belief in "limited good" and the need to find advantage through manipulating the unseen and uncontrollable spirit world with charms or a hand of Fatima helped me interpret this as a more protective purpose rather than an overtly negative association of a draw to occult power. Even more importantly, the success-biased focus on blessing offers us a chance to share a message of our hope in Christ, the ultimate blessing.

In a similar way, I found the chapter on reciprocity and patronage to be revealing and helpful, seeing it in a much more positive light than I have before. Dale describes patronage as foundational to maintaining communal relationships, and therefore providing women areas of influence and power that we as Westerners are quick to misinterpret in a negative light. Her explanation of patronage and grace with God as our righteous patron is lovely (108-109), again reminding us that the Bible shows that the Lord puts high value on relationships and generosity.

Each chapter ends with a set of practical questions as a simple means of personal reflection on your own worldview and as an aid for use in observation and/or in conversation with your Muslim friends. Dale

encourages looking and listening, being aware of social implications or expectations, finding commonalities as well as differences, and examining our own attitudes and responses. Being able to take content that is informative and interesting—for personal application in our relationships—is a great asset of the book.

Good Reading for Women...and Men

Since we have already noted the need for more female voices to be added (and Dale would emphasize adding and not replacing) to the world of mission teaching, planning, and strategizing for Muslim women, it is not surprising that this book would be highly recommended. Dale's blend of the academic with the practical makes the book a great reference for information related to understanding Muslim women. I appreciate her heart for meaningful themes that touch on the larger context for many working in the Muslim world (including diaspora areas) and to see those themes within the practical issues of daily life. From cultural realities like honor/shame to the everyday significance of wearing or not wearing the veil, Dale provides an excellent overview of the world of Muslim women.

Women working with Muslims will find Dale's book to be a great resource, for both those new to the field and for long termers processing their own experiences and conversations. Personally, I found the first section on culture and texts to be more helpful than the everyday life, probably because the focus is on what is common to all Muslims to some degree. Her examples from her cultural work contexts were good but not always comparable to my own. I think men would also benefit from reading it – many of Dale's thoughts on women reveal truths relevant to working with men and the Muslim worldview in general. One specific mission strategy Dale draws attention to is our team plans to reach heads of household, while failing to recognize that often it is the women who have the main influence within a home or over their children.

The Hagar Heritage

Many times, my Muslim friends have asked me whether God really hears their prayers or cares about their daily concerns or problems. They often feel their value is not much greater than that of the animals in their barns. They desperately need to know God loves them and does indeed hear and see them. Hagar's story is one they can relate to on many levels.

In her conclusion, Moyra Dale has us look at what we know about Hagar from Islamic and biblical texts. Her role as the mother of Ishmael is obvious, but Hagar's story has deeper points to draw out. In her most vulnerable moments, when she was powerless and alone with her young son, the Lord meets Hagar in the desert (twice). In her story, he is the God who sees and hears her oppression, rejection, struggles, and helplessness in the face of cultural patterns. The God who provides and blesses meets her in her moment of need. "Hagar invites women, whatever the cultural attitudesthat they encounter, to take up their role as co-image bearers of the Divine, called into relationship with God" (224).

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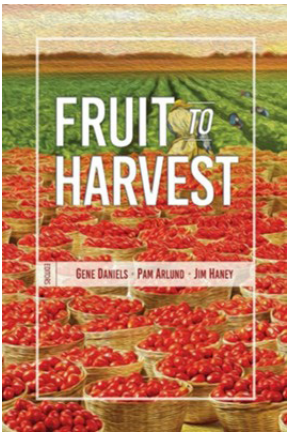
In Conclusion

Fruit to Harvest: Witness of God's Great Work Among Muslims



Edited by Gene Daniels, Pam Arlund, Jim Haney

William Carey Press, 2019. 469 pages.

Reviewed by Josh Abdel Fady

Josh (pseudonym) is a husband and father of two teens who, along with his amazing wife, have served in two countries in the Middle East over the last 9 years. Originally from the USA, he is a physician and team leader working among refugees. He finds himself constantly reflecting on how mercy ministries, storying, and discipleship can lead to church planting and worship of our triune God.

Too often, we workers come to the field with high expectations of what we will accomplish. But the realities of life—children's needs, busyness with our platform to maintain our visa, and the enormity of the task of multiplying churches planted among our people group—cause us to give up on that goal and settle for smaller goals. Fruit to Harvest—a compendium of essays from the Vision 5:9 Network—aims to restore the vision and define the pathway to see the main goal fulfilled.

Vision 5:9 is a global, diverse group of experienced church planters among Muslims who gathered together twice thus far to see the picture from Revelation 5:9 fulfilled—men and women from every tribe, nation, people and language redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. One of the main ways the Vision 5:9 network carries out this vision is by determining and disseminating best practices in church planting among Muslims.

Their first conference in 2007 resulted in the book *From Seed to Fruit* (previously reviewed in Seedbed). The second conference, held in 2017, produced Fruit to Harvest. The Vision 5:9 network and conferences have also led to the production and dissemination of "Fruitful Practices," both in written and video form, to be used by missions practitioners in the Muslim world to guide their approaches toward those deemed most effective.

The 2017 conference gathered together nearly 1000 practitioners from all over the world. The organizers recruited a diverse mix of participants with 25% Muslim background believers (MBBs), 25% women, and 50% from the Global South, all with an average of 20 years of experience. From this conference, a group of authors were chosen to write the 30 chapters in this book on a wide range of topics (16).

Summary of Content

Because of the large number of contributors writing about their areas of expertise (I counted 52 contributors), the book cannot be said to have a single thesis, although there are broad themes and organizing sections. The book is divided into four sections: Harvest Trends, Harvest Field, Harvest Force, and Harvest Pathways, with each ranging between 4 and 10 chapters.

One of the main themes of the conference that also runs through the book is that of abiding in Christ. The first message is not a secret strategy or a new approach that suddenly make us fruitful but it's the outworking of remaining deeply connected to our Savior.

Another major theme reflected in the make-up of the conference attenders is that source of workers who are carrying out the task of missions is changing. The Global South and MBBs are playing a more central role. At the conference, for instance, 74% of attending MBBs had successfully planted churches versus 33% of expatriate workers (279).

Because of this, new strategies and structures are needed to support and enable these non-Western workers. Equipping believers to reach the unreached in their own localities without the high expenses of sending them globally is one approach (chap. 23). Training Global South workers who are already in the Middle East for work is another. There is a strong emphasis that expatriate workers need to view their role as supportive, serving under MBB and national leaders (chap. 19). One chapter notes that workers from all backgrounds face an increased number of traumatic events. While traditional expat workers with large organizations are well supported through it, support structures are needed to help national workers and MBBs face trauma with resilience (chap. 14).

Evaluation

The lack of a single thesis and the diversity of authorship is a strength. For instance, you may be used to hearing a strong emphasis on a single CPM model, but in this book you will read very little about any one model. DMM is mentioned, but is the focus of only one chapter (chap. 27). Instead, you are exposed to many different topics and perspectives, some of which may be new to you.

This variety makes for engaging reading. Each writer does not have the opportunity to painstakingly build a case for a certain approach. Instead, each author goes directly from a summary of a principle of church planting to application and examples of how it worked out in real life.

This brevity of presentation keeps the book moving, but it also has a liability. Laying the scriptural foundation for the methods being espoused was not a strong emphasis of the book. This is a critique not simply of this book, but of a broader emphasis in missiology in general. Applying research and practitioner experience to our work is a helpful addition to share wisdom and hopefully improve results. However, this pragmatic focus on "what has worked" can sometimes become untethered from the foundational role of scripture in shaping our model(s).

This liability, however, does not mean the book is not an extremely helpful overview for shaping our work. It just makes me want to go back and forth between Scripture and the ideas shared, as I form a model to apply to my situation.

The Practitioner's Angle: Comments on Relevance

My most frequent time to read is the few minutes after getting into bed when I am winding down. A good boring book has me asleep in minutes. Fruit to Harvest is not one of those books! This book addresses the situations I face and the questions I am asking, and so I often found it gripping.

The book provides an excellent survey of many topics. This book played a diagnostic role in my own ministry by causing me to ask, "Am I doing this?" "Should I be considering this?" At a time of ministry focus transition, it was helpful for me to think through how I might improve my effectiveness. Our team has traditionally been more of a track team than a basketball team, with people focusing on different ministries. Recently, we began a discussion about how to narrow our vision enough that we can imagine and expect it to lead to churches being planted, by God's grace.

One topic that grabbed my attention was a discussion between African Inland Mission and Operation Mobilization leaders. Their organizations developed many complicated support structures to sustain many good ministries that did not ultimately lead to the end goal of seeing church planting movements among every people group with a special emphasis on the unengaged and unreached (chap. 8). The discussion focused on the process of deconstructing and reconstructing their organizations around that single focus.

I was also struck by the creativity and effectiveness of different approaches being adapted to fit challenging circumstances. In Nigeria, Christians from the North that have fled Boko Haram along with

numerous Muslims and are now living in shared living circumstances in the South and being discipled to reach their neighbors (chap. 13). Household workers from Africa and the Philippines who are serving in Middle Eastern households are being trained to reach their "masters" for Christ through constant prayer and power encounters that flow out of being present when the households go through crises (chap. 22).

Another encouraging topic that rang true to my experience was the benefit of whole families ministering to whole families (chap. 6). How often we have seen individuals come to faith only to be ostracized from their families. Instead, this chapter encourages workers to minister family-to-family so that all enter into the conversation about Jesus and the Bible together. This brings a greater hope that families will come to faith together and better weather persecution together.

Not only is this beneficial for those we to whom we minister, it benefits our own families. I remember a counselor of one of my children saying that my child had a strong desire to make a difference in the world, and that the more we involve the child in , the more satisfied the child would be with our calling and it's impact on them. We have seen that work itself out as we, as a family, visit one particular local family. The father is an MBB whom I disciple, my wife shares with his wife and daughter, and my son and daughter have befriended their children and come along to talk or play.

Finally, I found it helpful that the book placed a strong emphasis on communion with Christ as we carry out this work. Instead of simply being an information transfer, the book has a devotional character that calls our hearts into prayer and dependence on the Lord.

Recommendation

I strongly recommend this book to global Christian workers. It would be helpful in the pre-field stage as one tries to narrow down the key elements for a team or ministry that a worker would like to join. It would also be helpful for people coming to the end of language learning as they

make decisions about ministry focus and determine how their passions, giftings, vocational training, and experience line up with strategies shown to be effective in leading to CPMs. Finally, it would help seasoned team leaders reflect on and refine their current approaches to church planting.

If you don't have time to read the whole book, the table of contents is organized, detailed, and easy to choose the most relevant chapters for your situation. The chapter titles help you locate topics such as ministering to Muslim women, diaspora ministry, ministry in urban settings, ministering in the context of trauma, media ministry, etc. Also, it is well worth reviewing other material that resulted from these conferences on the Fruitful Practice website and the Fruitful Practice online course.

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No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions

by Matt Rhodes

Crossway, 2022. 270 pages.

Reviewed by J.R. Stevenson

J. R. Stevenson (pseudonym), from the United States, has been serving in the Arab world for a decade and is focused on starting reproducing churches among unreached Arab Muslims. He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America, with a background in both theology and applied linguistics. He has worked in educational leadership and entrepreneurship in the Arab world.

Mention of movements tends to evoke strong reactions among those working among unreached people groups. For some, they represent the most exciting thing that God is doing in missions today. For Matt Rhodes, movement-thinking represents a "shortcut," a bypassing of the hard work necessary to see the goal of missions accomplished.

Rhodes writes as a field worker who seeks to offer some correctives to current trends in missions. The target audience is those working on the field who are seeking to evaluate these contemporary methods, as well as leaders of sending churches who make decisions about missions efforts to support. It will be most relevant for those who have had some exposure to movement-thinking and are wanting to interact with a critique as they process missions strategy.

Summary

Driving *No Shortcut* is a passion for seeing unreached people groups come to faith in Christ, a passion shared certainly by those he critiques, as he acknowledges (70). Rhodes articulates the goal of missions in this way: "establishing Christ-centered churches that are sufficiently mature to multiply and endure among peoples who have had little or no access to Jesus's message" (116). His central argument is that on the way to that goal, modern missions methods (including CPM, DMM, T4T, Any3, and other "CPM-style methods") are pursuing shortcuts. What does this pursuit of shortcuts look like according to Rhodes?

These shortcuts involve, he claims, deemphasizing essential aspects of preparation for the missionary task: intensive language learning, deep cultural learning of the target people group, as well as robust biblical and theological preparation (35). Leaving those behind, he writes, bypasses the ordinary means God uses and replaces them with an overemphasis on speed (38), 'silver-bullet' strategies (38), short-term mission trips (39), and skepticism of intellectual preparation (40).

In Part One, he provides a brief overview of what he sees as problematic approaches to missions today. His critique of these approaches—which he refers to as "CPM-style methods" (67) — questions the numbers reported in movements along with the weight given to those numbers. He also questions key strategies and tactics of movements in light of the Scriptures.

In relation to the latter, he questions the strong emphasis on reproducibility present in movement approaches, arguing that it can make sociological structures the DNA of a healthy church rather than the gospel message itself (78). He also argues that teaching, including from missionary outsiders, lays the critical foundation for the church (90), a point which he claims 'discovery' approaches to the Bible leave behind. Rhodes takes aim at the oikos and person of peace constructs as going beyond what the Scriptures instruct workers to do and he sees obedience-based discipleship as an "error" (97) which will not lead to

true maturity (99). Additionally, he expresses deep concern over having unbelievers start Bible study groups (100-103). Ultimately, he sees movement approaches as "a failure of professional responsibility" in that there may be "exponentially explosive statistics" while what is "actually produced may be a burned-over district for the gospel, or, worse, a circus of heresies where a generation of people are now inoculated against the real gospel because they were fooled by a substitute" (106).

In Part Two, he seeks to describe the long approach to success, one which he sees as having more affinity with missionary heroes of the past such as Carey, Taylor, and Judson. Rhodes's call to missionaries is that they must "go in Christ's authority as ambassadors of his kingdom, to communicate his message to the nations" (106). He argues that movement approaches "markedly" differ from this, and that we must focus on clear gospel communication (127), which requires deep, intensive, language and culture learning. He questions the extent to which missionaries should be worried about bringing outside influence through their teaching, proposing that they should see themselves as "immigrants" rather than "outsiders" (186). He suggests that all of this is a slow process that will take time through using the ordinary means that God has given. Therefore, in his view, an inordinate focus on miracles and extraordinary prayer and fasting may lead workers away from the ordinary communication of the gospel in clear and bold ways (243).

Areas of Agreement

In order to evaluate *No Shortcut*, I will bring out several areas that appear of particular importance to me as someone who is on the field, seeking to utilize CPM principles and also stay committed to my Reformed theological convictions. First, I agree with Rhodes that those who cross cultures for the sake of the gospel should take seriously the acquisition of the skills which enable them to minister. I am not convinced that it is fair to link this problem to the non-residential approach, in which someone with only "market fluency" lives outside the people group and coordinates strategy from afar. In nearly a decade

in the Middle East, I have seen commitment to language learning and biblical-theological awareness equally varied between movement and non-movement advocates. Yet if these problems are present across diverse approaches to missions, then Rhodes's point deserves even more reflection. *For those crossing cultures to share the gospel*, I concur that expecting a high level of language proficiency and culture learning, along with adequate biblical grounding, is essential to the task.

Second, I agree that the way in which numbers are used to support specific CPM methods needs more careful consideration. I am unaware of a clear response to Rhodes's points about growth rates and selection bias (drawn from his background in population statistics). He argues that the Bhojpuri movement, for example, projects growth based on surviving churches without account for those that do not survive (63). However, even if Rhodes is wrong about the way assumed growth rates and selection bias affect reported numbers, his point that "numbers influence our thinking in ways that nothing else does" (49) rings true. Further, Rhodes questions the direct connections drawn at times between methodology and result. As a case in point, DBS as *an evangelistic tool* is at the center of Watson's methodology. Yet in the Bhojpuri movement, DBS is only used *as a discipleship tool with new believers* (John and Coles 2019, 218), not as an evangelistic tool. Other movements reporting high numbers do use DBS for evangelism; but this variation points to the need for care in attributing numbers to one specific method. Giving undue weight to number counting is hardly a *unique* problem with DMM, T4T, or other CPM approaches. But given that I can feel the tendency in my own heart to give undue weight to numbers, perhaps a good reflection question for field workers is in order: are we careful, precise, and humble in the claims we make about methods in relation to numbers? If we take greater care in connecting the *ought* of methodology with the is of movements, we will be able to balance between our desire to see "what works" and our desire to be driven by Scripture more than statistics.

Third, I agree with Rhodes that some of the most well-known advocates of movement approaches have communicated their ideas

in ways that have at times led to misunderstandings and worrisome practices downstream. I share concerns about topics such as teaching obedience-based discipleship, and the person of peace construct in several of the popular level books that Rhodes cites extensively. I would frame the issues differently than *No Shortcut* does, as do a variety of other movement advocates, but space does not allow for interaction on those topics.

I am, however, eager to add a caveat: the popular level books and the downstream articulation of movement principles by field workers are not always reflective of the phenomenological reality of movements nor of more thoughtful articulations of movement ideas. For that reason, I have concerns with the works Rhodes heavily relies on. I recognize that Rhodes cannot respond to everyone and that choosing the most popular works makes sense on the surface. However, if Rhodes had considered other sources—some more academic and less widely read, in addition to conversations with movement practitioners—perhaps his characterization of the issues would be different.

Areas of Disagreement

First, though Rhodes does acknowledge some positives of CPM methods, he does not identify how those positives can function within his paradigm. Rhodes acknowledges positives in CPM methods such as:

- Bold speaking in ever-widening circles (70)
- Avoiding unnecessary extraction (71)
- Helping people navigate Scripture on their own through inductive study groups (82)
- Utilizing preexisting relationships to see the gospel spread through them (173, 195)

My question is: *how* do you do all of that? If those are positive aims, then how do you achieve them without falling prey to the errors that he describes? When Rhodes seeks to "correct our course" in Part Two, he gives helpful reflection on communicating the gospel clearly, credibly,

and boldly, and yet he does not show how to do such proclamation and incorporate the benefits he highlights from CPM methods. On a practical level, field workers would benefit from reflecting on Rhodes's call to clear gospel communication while also asking how they, in their context, can avoid extraction, help people learn to read Scripture on their own, and see the gospel spread throughout their relational networks. Such careful, nuanced reflection will yield more benefit than painting all CPM-style methods with one brushstroke.

Third, Rhodes's evaluation of the principle of reproducibility in CPM is superficial and fails to advance the discussion around this critical area related to movements. I am highlighting this specific issue as it forms the heartbeat of *No Shortcut's* critique of CPM methods. Rhodes argues that making reproducibility an essential part of a Bible study group's DNA makes mission success dependent on sociological principles rather than the gospel and "strips ministry structures down until nothing is left but groups of people to whom the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit are available" (78). We do need to examine and reexamine whether we are building our strategies on Scripture or simply on sociological principles, but as my two responses below argue, Rhodes has not offered a clear path through the issue.

(1) Rhodes does not distinguish carefully between what is building on sociology and what is building on the gospel. To illustrate this point, consider the role of language learning. Why do we insist on learning Arabic on my team so that those initial Bible study groups can be done in the heart language of the people? This is for both biblical *and* practical reasons. If unbelievers are required to learn the language of the outside worker in order to access the gospel and share with their families, then it is unlikely that deep understanding, application, *or reproduction* develops. Therefore, we emphasize learning the heart language so that the gospel can be communicated more effectively. Would Rhodes consider this building on a "sociological principle" rather than the gospel message itself? When it comes to language learning, he would not characterize it that way, and neither would I.

My point in drawing out that obvious example is this: asking what will be reproducible by local believers is not necessarily prioritizing sociology. It is asking missionaries to think carefully about how non-negotiable Scriptural elements should take shape in cultures very different from their own, through questions such as: *What* are the biblical non-negotiables that must be reproducible in any given context? *How quickly* should each element be reproduced? *By whom* should it be reproduced? *What barriers* can genuinely exist to that reproduction? Struggling through these questions in our contexts will be more helpful than portraying a large, complex, and diverse set of "CPM-style methods" as elevating sociology over the gospel.

(2) Regarding the "stripping down" of ministry structures, it is simply not accurate to say that no ministry structures are left in movements except groups of people who have the Bible and the Spirit. Even within a source that Rhodes cites, *Bhojpuri Breakthrough*, multiple levels of leaders, various layers of leadership training, and up to hour-long teaching times are described as ministry structures which promote the development of the movement (John and Coles 2019, 190-191). This reflects an underlying weakness of *No Shortcut* in my opinion: he cites extensively regarding the early stages of CPM approaches but gives little attention to the rapidly growing discussions of topics such as leadership development and church formation that exist in the CPM literature and that are being implemented by CPM practitioners.

Recommendation

No Shortcut to Success flows easily, artfully weaving citations of other works, consideration of Scripture, and reflections on experience. In addition, given that so much of the rhetoric about movements has been in blog posts, podcasts, and other less fully articulate contexts, *No Shortcut* is an important book-length addition to the conversation. I recommend that those who are pro-CPM-methods read the book and consider the arguments carefully, in the spirit of iron sharpening iron, with a willingness to reconsider assumptions and go back to

Scripture. For those who are skeptical of or resistant to CPM methods, I also recommend reading the book, but with two consistent questions in mind: "Does this accurately represent the breadth of movement thinking?" and "How might a movement advocate respond to this?

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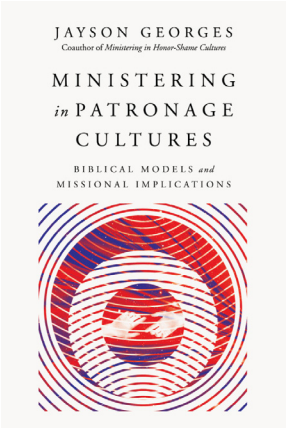
Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and Missional Implications



by Jayson Georges

IVP Academic, 2019. 176 pages.

Reviewed by Howard Bell

Howard Bell (pseudonym) has worked as a church planter among Muslim unreached people groups since 2010 and as a Church-Planting Movements coach since 2012. He and his family currently live in South Asia focusing on multiplying churches among one people group and geography.

Most cross-cultural workers and virtually all of those working in Eastern contexts will encounter patronage as they seek to form relationships and plant churches. The vast majority of these workers will find themselves subject to unspoken expectations from those around them. Whether they realize it or not, they will be part of the patronage system and expected to be patrons.

Jayson Georges's *Ministering in Patronage Cultures* introduces the reader to patronage—the reciprocal relationship between social "unequals," or patrons and clients—as central not only to many majority-world cultures but also to the world of the Bible. Emphasizing the biblical text and context, Georges attempts to explain and illustrate how patronage functions from broader cultural expectations to individual and cross-cultural relationships. He then moves on to a biblical evaluation

of patronage and a discussion of applications for those ministering in patronage cultures. Most of the book is spent exploring the Bible, its ancient Near Eastern context, and biblical scholarship. Georges approaches this as an accomplished missiologist and as someone who has served cross-culturally for fifteen years, the majority of that in Central Asia.[1]

Summary of Content

Georges opens the book with an introduction to patronage and some of the problems it poses for cross-cultural ministers and ministry, before moving into simple explanations of patronage in Chapter One, "The Meaning of Patronage." The chapter displays Georges's gifts as a writer who ably explains difficult concepts in clear and easy language. He deftly moves through defining patrons, clients, the reciprocal and asymmetrical relationship those categories create, as well as key aspects of patronage including social capital, brokers, honor, and shame. Each of these concepts is explored succinctly but with relevant examples from current cross-cultural ministry and the Bible. This first chapter stands out not only for its ability to cover a broad array of key concepts in an accessible manner, but also as the section of the book that most relies on anthropological research.

Georges goes on to look at examples or expressions of patronage from the Bible and the ancient world, prioritizing the ancient Near East. He then elucidates how Westerners misunderstand patronage in Chapter Three, gently reminding the reader that these cultural values are like unwritten rules and come with unwritten assumptions. His explanation of how patronage is misperceived anticipates those who will be itching for evaluation. Is patronage good or bad, right or wrong? Georges gets there quickly and without undue criticism of Western values.

1 Georges holds an MDiv from Talbot Theological Seminary, is a resident missiologist for an evangelical missions organization, the author of several books, and the founding editor of HonorShame.com.

The rest of the book examines patronage relationships and values from a biblical perspective. In chapter four, Georges explains the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a patron-client relationship. In chapter five, he discusses how Jesus interacted with patronage society and values as he preached and brought the kingdom. In chapter six, he addresses how Paul navigated patronage during early Christian mission. Each of these explains how the biblical text at times assumes patronage, endorses it, and corrects it. Georges also uses the biblical examples to tease out application. Yahweh both accepted and transformed patronage; Jesus did not dismantle but redefined core elements of patronage; and Paul followed Jesus' example leveraging patronage for the kingdom of God.

Having covered a wide range of biblical data, Georges uses the next section of the book to examine patronage as a theological reality. He divides this theology of patronage into three chapters titled "God as Patron," "Sin as Ingratitude," and "Salvation as Patronage." For many this will be an enthralling and eye-opening section, but it also may be the most controversial. Georges's theology of patronage in salvation cannot help but contrast forensic or legal categories of justification and atonement. Those seeking to see and present the gospel with fresh eyes in patronage cultures will be thrilled at the fruit of this study and the different ways this may relate to sharing the gospel. Georges concludes the section with a gospel summary of salvation-history from the perspective of patronage, and it remains the section of the book that I have returned to the most since I first read it at the time of its publication.

It is only after this long study of patronage in the Scriptures that Georges turns to missional applications. This includes recognizing the goodness of patronage while rejecting and transforming the negative aspects of patronage—no easy task and one that Georges approaches with appropriate humility. His main focus is on forming patronage relationships or forming relationships in patronage cultures, while giving practical reminders of how patronage can be misunderstood. Many of his

practical chapters discuss money and financial partnership as well as how patronage impacts work, teaching relationships, and peacemaking.

The final chapter examines how patronage impacts Christian life and spirituality. Georges concludes by giving broad pictures of mission, pastoral leadership, discipleship, and community as part of redeeming patronage. Finally, he exhorts his readers to fully engage in their patron relationship with God, redeem patronage in their context as the Spirit leads, and further the conversation on patronage and their own exploration of patronage in their context.

Evaluation

Jayson Georges has written a much-needed book. Many, perhaps even most, cross-cultural workers are immersed in patronage societies, and understanding patronage changes the way one sees the world forever. Georges's book is a short and highly accessible introduction that emphasizes what the Bible has to say about patronage. His writing style is accessible and easy to read, and he has a gift for introducing and illustrating these cultural concepts in ways that Westerners will understand.

Georges knows his aim in this book is a tall order, and he disarms potential criticism by acknowledging that in writing a short, introductory, and practical book he had to make compromises (4). One of those compromises is the choice to make this a very broad study. Transforming patronage is no an easy task, and Georges does not always present a clear vision of what that should look like. Some readers may be disappointed that the book does not explore more anthropological data or ethnographic studies to give a picture of what patronage looks like across modern cultures. Georges touches on this through illustrations and stories, but even though the book is titled *Ministering in Patronage Cultures*, most of the book is actually on biblical models of patronage (as the subtitle might suggest).

> This reviewer has only two significant criticisms of the book. One is that while Georges approaches many of the topics within the book with humility, he presents a strong case that understanding patronage is necessary to understand the Bible. As an example, he writes: The common English translations of "salvation," "grace," and "faith" carry subtly different meanings than their Greek counterparts. This impacts the meaning of Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith." A paraphrase with fresh terminology might better capture Paul's original intent: "God's generous benevolence has rescued you from peril, by means of steadfast loyalty to the relationship." (104)

This is a fascinating insight, but it is not a modest claim. When I look at the Greek text of the New Testament, I am skeptical that consistently translating *soteria*, *charis*, and *pistis* this way is sustainable, though I would be eager to read such an experiment. Georges is enamored with ancient Near Eastern studies, but many wonder if our insights into the ancient Near East have gained an oversized weight in our theological method and have de-emphasized other elements of exegesis and canonical context.[2]

This concern is minor compared to the practical concern I have over his recommendations on using money in ministry. Georges tells a story of a man who was meeting with him for discipleship (116). The young man asked Georges to pay his college tuition. Georges was not comfortable with mixing discipleship and money, so he declined. The young man stopped meeting with him shortly thereafter. It seems like Georges expresses regret that he did not pay the young man's tuition fees or use money more in discipleship. I am deeply concerned about this kind of recommendation—not because it is always wrong, but because I live in

2 These kinds of discussions invariably show up in debates over the *New Perspective on Paul* and methodology discussions between biblical theologians and systematic theologians.

a context saturated with the consequences of misusing Western money in ministry.

When I first arrived on the field where I currently serve, I accompanied an acquaintance on a trip to a church-planting training where he had paid each of the attendees a day's wage and travel expenses to attend. Eagerly expecting more patronage, each attendee filled out the reporting form he gave them saying that they had planted a number of churches. He later confided in me that virtually all of this reporting was false.

Similarly, I was once contacted by a stranger who claimed to lead a network of churches and wanted me to train him in Church-Planting Movements methodology. I wondered why this apparently successful church planter wanted a stranger to coach him. I asked some questions of colleagues and soon found that he had at least ten foreigners already coaching him, several of whom were funding him and all of whom thought they were his only coach.

Georges writes:

> Mixing discipleship and patronage can be dangerous, so one must be mindful and cautious. In the history of Christian missions, patronage dynamics have produced many "rice Christians"—people who profess to be Christian for material benefits rather than genuine spiritual reasons. Such nominal Christians agree to anything a patron says to get help, food, or medical benefits. Short-term mission trips are most vulnerable to this reality. Being oblivious to patronage dynamics, they misinterpret the response of the client-recipients. (148-49)

The more I learn about patronage, the more eager I am to be personally generous and the more grateful I am for the Father's generosity. But I feel the weight and reality of Georges's words of caution far greater than I do his recommendation to leverage financial patronage

in discipleship. Understanding patronage is important in understanding the use of money in ministry, but it may also mislead cross-cultural workers into seeing patron-status as a way to use money to achieve or motivate ministry objectives.

Recommendation

I enthusiastically recommend *Ministering in Patronage Cultures*, but not without some caution. I know of no better introduction to patronage. The book is short, easy to read, practical, and immensely relevant for practitioners. Understanding patronage on some level is necessary in order to maintain healthy relationships in patronage cultures; our cross-cultural discipleship, church-planting, and leadership development cannot be healthy if our cross-cultural relationships are not. Patronage can change how you see the gospel and how you proclaim it. It can change how you understand the role finances play in relationships and what your role is in the culture. All those things can change how you plant churches and help others plant churches. Georges's book is an important introduction to the world of patronage where those revelations and changes can occur. However, when it comes to issues of money in ministry, I would only recommend this book in conjunction with other books and articles that emphasize greater caution and give a picture of the consequences and potential issues that money can create. In spite of this concern, *Ministering in Patronage Cultures* would be on my short list of the most helpful books for cross-cultural workers to read.

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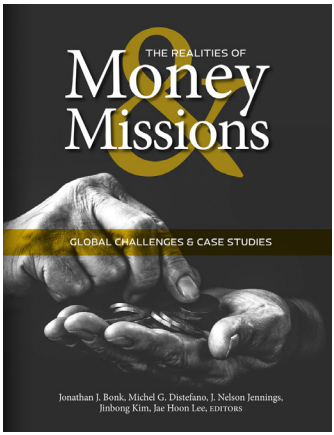
The Realities of Money & Missions: Global Challenges & Case Studies



Edited by Jonathan J. Bonk, Michel G. Distefano, J. Nelson Jennings, Jinbong Kim, and Jae Hoon Lee

William Carey Publishing, 2022. 276 pages.

Reviewed by William Jackson

William Jackson (pseudonym) has been engaged in church planting among Muslims in South Asia since 2012. He and his family live in a restricted access country where William taught English to college-age students and is now working in a creative access business. William is passionate about evangelism, church formation, vision, strategy, and the development of people around him.

The cross-cultural expectations and potential for the misuse of finances can lead to much tragedy within the Kingdom of God. Money is essential in missionary work, but the consequences of misuse lead to the misrepresentation of God and distortion of his kingdom (234). Because we live in a world where cross-cultural workers leave their homes, spend years among a people group, and seek to build the church, money is involved. *The Realities of Money & Missions*—the second book written and edited by Jonathan Bonk on the topic (cf. Bonk 2007)—helps those from rich and poor countries examine how they can better use their God-given money for the purposes of building his Kingdom.

This book was the fruit of the Korean Global Mission Leaders Forum (KGMLF) that took place in South Korea in November 2021 (ix). Bonk believes that money is the greatest challenge in missions today (ix). The Bible studies, case studies, workshops, responses, and testimonies within this book are primarily written by those who are either Korean or have experience working with Korean missionaries (xiii). Each story is deeply practical and filled with thoughtful biblical and missiological principles and concerns related to money. There is a wealth (pun intended) of information within each story that demonstrates love for the people for and about whom it is written—mainly cross-cultural workers and missiologists.

Summary of Content

The book is divided into five sections containing the thoughts and comments of more than 50 theologians and missionaries. Each case study and workshop article is followed by a short response by a distinguished individual. While there is a broad range of writers within the book, the overall content and themes remain consistent. The book concludes with several personal testimonies and some concluding thoughts on the subject. Those interested in the subject of money and missions could further read articles by several of the contributors and Bonk himself.

Bible Studies

Christopher J.H. Wright provides three Bible studies on several themes related to money and missions. As I read through these studies, I was reminded afresh of how good God is to include humanity in mission. Our God is not a poor god waiting for us to give him some spare change so he can build his Kingdom. Rather, he desires for us to use funds wisely to bless others and build his Kingdom. He invites us to participate as a privilege, not a duty. As we understand the generosity of God towards us, we are compelled to be generous toward him and his Kingdom.

The reminder to have accountability with finances was stressed in the apostle Paul's collecting of offerings for various churches throughout his ministry (10). Paul wanted people to plan ahead to give, whether gifts are one-time or ongoing (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 9:1-5). Transparency in accounting and auditing practices is crucial for people to trust that their money is used wisely. We all need to see accountability as a gift and not a burden (12).

Wright reminds us of the need to be righteous and holy in our ministry. One significant inappropriate action can lead to a ministry crumbling to the ground (15). We must use money wisely, but leave the results in his hands.

Section A: Case Studies

The editors of this book provide eight case studies and responses. One that stood out to me was the beautiful example of a "poor church" providing for thousands of missionaries sent from the Mizoram Presbyterian Church in India (Ch. 5). A common excuse for individuals and churches to not financially participate in missions is that they are too poor. Before conversion, the Mizos were known as headhunters to the outside world (32). However, in the 1890s several missionaries brought the gospel to the Mizos and mass conversion occurred within several years (33). Today, the population of Christians in Mizoram is around 90% (33).

Even though the average per capita income of Mizoram is $150 per year (34), the Mizoram Presbyterian Church encourages members to give their tithes to three ministries – pastoral, missions, and the local church (34). A creative idea which seems to be widely used is to collect non-money items like rice, food, firewood, chickens, etc. Then the weekly collection is sold and the funds are given to the church (35). Each member is also encouraged to support a specific missionary for the equivalent of $13 USD per month (35). The sacrifice that the Mizo Church practices are because they believe in the power of the gospel to change peoples' lives.

Section B: Workshops

Material from each of the 14 workshops was turned into articles which provide valuable insights by experienced practioners. Because of space I will highlight one example. "Mission, Power and Money" (Ch.17) reminds us of the power of relationships and money (138). When money is involved in relationships, it creates a complexity that should not be ignored. Missionaries are often the ones with more money (and potentially more power) than those who receive them, and it is necessary for missionaries to work and minister with humility. Most missionaries do not like to think they have power over locals, but this article encourages us to not ignore reality, but to steward that power well within our Christian relationships. In recent years the issue of power and abuse has been more openly discussed, particularly as it relates to ministry. If power is unchecked and used wrongly, much harm can be done.

Evaluation

The theological studies in the beginning of the book set the tone of being biblically centered, a foundation which I greatly appreciate. The case studies and workshops provide a smorgasbord of options for people to "feast" on in relation to this topic. I thought the book balanced both a macro and micro perspective, leaving the reader with the notion that finance and mission is a serious issue to be considered before one starts using foreign funds in missions.

I would like to highlight three challenges readers might encounter or disagree with while reading this book.

First, the book mainly reflects conservative views on missions and money. While most of the articles come from a conservative view on missions and money, there are other biblical ways to view this subject. One can read books like this and become paralyzed to not use foreign funds because of the enormous number of mistakes that happen in such complex scenarios. I believe caution and wisdom are needed, but not completely closed pockets.

The Nevius Method (independent, self-supported churches from the beginning) is presented as the "Gold Standard" *modus operandi* for missionaries to follow in their ministries. I wonder, however, if the Nevius Method is a model that uniquely fits the Korean church context and might not be able to be replicated globally.

That does not mean "free money for all," but rather something in the middle, as I previously wrote in *Seedbed* (Jackson 2022), and as advocated by Jayson Georges in *Ministering in Patronage Cultures* (also reviewed in this issue of *Seedbed*). A balanced approach should be sought, which I think happens for missionaries who have spent several years and decades on the field.

Second, the book features mainly Korean voices. Yes, this book is birthed from the KGMLF, and the articles in it are excellent. However, as an American who has not worked closely with Korean missionaries overseas, there were several times I did not understand the context of which the writer was describing, such as Korean missions history and their work overseas. Some articles do a better job than others in providing a larger historical context.

America too has many theological and missiological books that may be difficult for non-Americans to understand the context. Nonetheless, I think it is helpful for the reader, especially those from the West, to know that this book comes from a particular perspective based on a specific context. Furthermore, I found in my reading of the book that the Korean perspective on missions and money significantly differs on key points from perspectives in my own South Asian context.

Third, the book seemed to lack diversity of perspectives. While the responses after each case study and workshop were helpful, they mostly agreed with what was written in the previous section. Some responders added original thought to their section, but it would have been more robust to have stronger challenges and engagement with the content.

Relevance for the Practitioner

With such a broad range of case studies and workshops, it is a shame I was not able to attend this conference. The book reads well, but one cannot help wonder how much richer the experience would be discussing with attendees at the conference.

This topic of money and missions is essential for cross-cultural workers to discuss. I am thankful that our team in South Asia required us to read on this topic before joining (Bonk 2007). The topic of dependency and finances in missions can be quite broad with negative stories so detrimental that one can be paralyzed towards not using money in partnership with locals at all (Jackson 2022). This too can carry negative ramifications and views by locals towards the foreigner.

I was reminded afresh of the need to teach national believers about a theology of tithing. In my South Asian context, I regularly hear poorer believers reason that they are unable to give financially to the local church or meet the spiritual needs of others. Because we work with believers from a Muslim background (MBBs), and Islam allows for poor Muslims to forego paying *zakat* (Islamic tithe of 2.5% annually), most MBBs here contribute very little to a church's tithe. I believe that MBBs need clear teaching on biblical patterns of tithing, because Islam itself has taught that the poor do not have to financially give back to Allah. The Mizoram case study could be highly encouraging for people in poor contexts to find hope that they too can participate in contributing finances for gospel work.

I would encourage readers of this book to use this material to discuss with experienced missionaries in their field of service before drawing sharp conclusions on the matter. This book provides a wealth of knowledge and philosophy on the subject, but it is influenced by missions work in Korea and Korean involvement in global missions. In fact, it adds to Korean mission history as it describes several keys to Korean church growth and some of the mission work Koreans are involved in overseas. This context should be considered when implementing its ideas.

Recommendation

I would put this book on my reading list for any cross-cultural worker who uses finances in ministry; especially those living in the developing world. Along with Bonk's previous work, this book is very helpful to think theologically through a conservative view on finances in missions. There are awful stories of a too liberal approach in using finances overseas, and this book provides the missionary with grounded theological and missiological reasoning to be careful and wise when it comes to using finances in missions.

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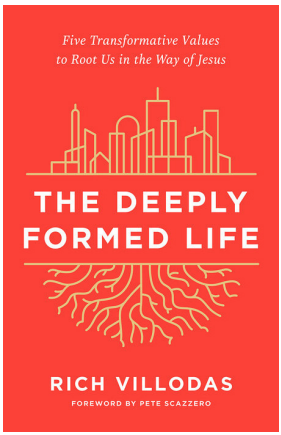
The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus



by Rich Villodas

Waterbrook, 2020. 250 pages.

Reviewed by M. James & D. Lemke

M. James (pseudonym) and his family have been serving for more than 25 years among the Gulf Arabs. Together, they co-labor to follow-up media inquiries, minister to seekers, disciple believers, and train workers through involvement in Fruitful Practices for church planting.

Dale Lemke has served in disciple-making and leadership development ministries as a pastor, missionary, and educator in the United States and in Japan. He currently serves as chair of Christian Ministries at University of Northwestern, St. Paul. His research interests include leadership development, vocational awareness, and intercultural competence.

It has been said that a church-based ministry team tends to have lower relational stress, but plants a fellowship similar to their home church. Conversely, a multicultural ministry team tends to have higher relational stress but establishes a church more relevant to the target culture.[1]

1 I heard this from a leader from another organization years back, though I cannot recall his name and context.

In the Arabian Gulf, diverse multinational ministry teams are the norm. At various times, we ministered alongside teammates from Canada, China, Germany, Korea, Lebanon, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and other nations. This experience aligned well with the 2016 Lausanne Global Analysis where a regional director stated, "Playing a healthy and contributing role on a multicultural team in cross-cultural Christian service is increasingly part and parcel of the normal requirements of serving Christ well" (Awuku 2016).

Though it is becoming the norm, a multicultural ministry team often struggles with the stress of miscommunication, misunderstanding, and feelings of partiality. The potentials and pitfalls of the multicultural ministry team have been studied for over 30 years, though it could be argued that the tradition goes back much further to the church planting team listed in Acts 20:1-6 (Mackin 1992; O'Donnell 2002; Webb 2019).

At the University of Northwestern (UNW) where I (Dale) teach, the strength of diversity in the context of ministry is highlighted in the course, "Leadership for Transformation"—a holistic exploration of the role of spiritual formation, intercultural awareness, and vocational clarity. An emphasis in the class is for students to articulate insights into their own cultural rules and biases, and to discuss diverse cultural perspectives. These skills are vital for members of a successful, multicultural church planting team.

The course textbook, *The Deeply Formed Life*, promotes practices for spiritual wholeness of the individual functioning in a multicultural, diverse world. Many spiritual formation books focus simply on spiritual disciplines that can help individual believers become more like Christ. This text's overall strength is the presentation of a holistic model for both personal and relational formation in Christ as applied to spheres of life not typically associated with spiritual formation, such as racial reconciliation, healthy sexuality, and service. It is through transformation in these spheres of life that readers can become better equipped for functioning in multi-cultural church planting teams.

The author, Rich Villodas, is an ordained minister in the Christian & Missionary Alliance church. He is lead pastor of New Life Fellowship in Queens, New York, which describes itself, *"as a multiracial community deeply transforming lives through Jesus for the sake of the world."*[2] *The Deeply Formed Life* is sourced from Villodas's personal experiences and written to those in the evangelical Christian community who are yearning for deeper communion with Christ and frustrated by superficial and fragmented lives. Villodas' personal experience is shaped by his Puerto Rican descent, his birthplace in Brooklyn, NY, and his role as a pastor of a large multi-ethnic church.

Villodas addresses a concern that Christians do not "take time to go deep down within because we have often been discipled into superficiality" (13). He notes that social media and the value systems of the world contribute to this focus on the superficial, and he suggests that conservative, progressive, and charismatic traditions tend to dichotomize faith by emphasizing "the outward at the expense of the inward" (14). According to Villodas, Christ seeks to transform his followers from the inside out, and Christ's inner work is both deep and broad.

As such, Villodas presents a holistic view of spiritual formation that focuses on five core values: contemplative rhythms, racial reconciliation, interior examination, sexual wholeness, and missional presence. The ten chapters of the book are grouped into pairs with the one chapter introducing the formational value and the other exploring spiritual formation practices related to that value.

There is a sense in which the spiritual practice of "listening" is a meta-theme that ties together the values in the book. Villodas explains, "The contemplative way is about listening deeply to God. The way of reconciliation entails listening deeply to each other. The way of interior examination is about deeply listening to ourselves" (98).

2 http://newlife.nyc/

The *Deeply Formed Life* presents a holistic model for both personal and relational elements of spiritual formation. Personal contemplation, prayer, and interior examination are typical features of spiritual formation. However, Villodas makes the case that spiritual growth is also connected to relational dynamics such as racial reconciliation, healthy sexuality, and vocation. As such, the text provides a framework for helping members of a multicultural ministry team benefit from life-long, deepening intimacy with God, sensitivity to God's calling, enhanced cross-cultural communication skills, intercultural competency, and integration of faith with profession.

Villodas' presentation of racism and illustration of deeper systemic issues of racism by an iceberg analogy is useful. When applied to the multicultural team, the text highlights the unequal treatment for teammates of different nationalities and cultures. This can be analogous to something we experienced in the Arab Gulf, when nationals sometimes treated our Filipino teammate as if she were a hired servant. Our team would intervene to curtail such unequal treatment of our Filipino sister.

At UNW, students often emphasize a believer's personal position "in Christ" at the expense of the relational dynamics between people in Christ. Yet Paul does not so clearly dichotomize the personal and relational elements of our "in-Christ" identity. Our personal relationship with Jesus is foundational, but Paul also indicates that this relationship will necessarily translate into certain ways of relating to other believers. The epistles to the Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians are filled with instruction related to this holistic perspective on what it means for the community of faith to live out their corporate identity in Christ.

The weakest section of Villodas' book are the two chapters on sexual wholeness. The reader may anticipate the chapters to specifically address sexuality, but instead the chapters are quite metaphorical and generally focus on intimate human relationships. While this is a worthwhile topic that fits with the holistic personal and relational emphasis in the book, the framing around notions of sexuality may not connect with all readers and cultural expectations.

Furthermore, though conversations of sex tend to be common in the Gulf, it is often difficult for people to comprehend the link between divine and human relations which Villodas makes in these chapters. For most Gulf Arabs, religious conversations about sexuality tend to focus on things like ritual purity. It is almost unthinkable for Gulf Arabs that a person's sexual life would have any connection with the larger context of an exclusive, caring, tender, and loving relationship with one's spouse.

Overall, we recommend the book if you serve on a multicultural church planting team and seek to deepen your individual and community life. In the Gulf, the default is for like cultures to congregate together. A multicultural church planting team has the strength of diversity, with each member highlighting an aspect of the Gospel.

For a time, an Australian teammate hosted a weekly *majlis* – a traditional Arabic evening gathering that involves food and conversation. As a medical doctor, he attracted many to the majlis because people wanted an opportunity to discuss a particular malady affecting themselves or a family member. Most found it surprising that the rest of our team, a mix of several nationalities, assisted in hosting by cutting up fruit and offering food. In local culture, these tasks were reserved for the family of the host and we were clearly not blood relatives. However, our familial connection and care for one another was readily apparent as we discussed passages in the Bible and prayed together at the majlis. The Arabian Gulf and other Muslim nations need to hear the truth of God's word from believers living deeply formed, holistic lives within a harmony of cultures and nations.

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