

## MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS OF DAVID HESSELGRAVE

### Jesus Christ – Views from Multiple Cultural Lenses<sup>1</sup>

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It seems that there has always been more than one view of the story of Jesus. This was true in the first century. From the point of view of early agnostics, Jesus' humble beginning was fable and little more. From the point of view of early believers, it was through Jesus' humble beginning and poverty that his followers are made rich (II Cor. 8:9).

Everywhere missionaries have gone with the gospel of Christ, people have responded in different ways. Some have believed in him, some have not believed. But it has been more complicated than that. Many Indians have remade Jesus into some kind of avatar or Hindu incarnation. Many Japanese have remade Jesus into some kind of bodhisattva or Buddhist savior.

And it is now even more complex than that. In his book, *The DaVinci Code*, Dan Brown says that Jesus was viewed by many of his own disciples as a mortal prophet and that his deity was decided "by a close vote" several centuries later. Sadly, Brown's book has been translated into as many as 45 or 50 languages and has sold millions of copies all around the world! The truth is that all of this tells us more about people other than Jesus than it tells us about Jesus himself! All people everywhere, including ourselves, are sinful, fallen creatures given to rebellion as concerns the Creator and skepticism as concerns the Redeemer. The manuscript and historical evidence clearly favors the validity of the New Testament story. But by nature and

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choice, the world's peoples are inclined toward unbelief and idolatry--toward remaking both God the Father and God the Son into their own image.

The truth is that, like Jesus himself, true faith has a humble origin. People need to hear and read the true gospel "on their knees," asking God to speak by his Spirit to their hearts and minds through his written Word and living Son. We who send missionaries to tell story of Jesus should pray that God will send the Holy Spirit to reveal who Jesus really is to those who hear!

I recall the Sunday fifty years ago when a prominent Japanese medical doctor, Dr. Sakakida, came to me and, "out of the blue," inquired as to whether or not he had to believe in the virgin birth of Christ in order to become a Christian. When I said, "Why do you ask such a question?" he replied, "Well, I'm a medical doctor. If I have to believe in the virgin birth, I'm afraid that I can never become a Christian."

Now for me that constituted what logicians term a "black and black dilemma." Were I to answer, "No, you don't have to believe in the virgin birth," then every time he came upon some supernatural aspect of the biblical gospel that he did not like or could not explain, he would either reject it or explain it away. We already had a sufficient number of that kind of "Christians" in Japan. So I said, "Dr. Sakakida. Please just continue to study the Bible with us. If and when you come to see who Jesus Christ really was and is, the virgin birth will not be a problem for you."

Months later, Dr. Oswald Smith of Toronto, Canada, was speaking in a special service in our city. His message was very simple and the invitation even more so. But by then Dr. Sakakida's heart and mind had been prepared by the Holy Spirit. He repented of his unbelief and became a Christian believer that night. For fifty years now he has believed in, and witnessed for,

the virgin born, crucified, resurrected and ascended Christ. Along with some Japanese medical books he published his Christian testimony entitled, "I Love to Tell the Story of Jesus!"