Current Issue

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The articles in this July issue of Global Missiology - English explore one or more aspects of understanding, practicing, and communicating the gospel in relevant and biblically faithful ways. The articles take up the ongoing challenges of contexts that Jesus's followers face every day.

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Editorial

The Ongoing Challenges of Contexts

J. Nelson Jennings

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"Contextualization" has been taking place ever since long before the last half-century, when Protestants started using the term (all the while discussing what it meant). The Christian faith on this earth is inherently contextual. Jesus of Nazareth was literally God "enfleshed" and "embodied": "contextualized." The Old Covenant Patriarchs and Israel lived in their historical contexts, as have Christian communities for two millennia.

When thinking about "contextualization," Evangelicals have focused their attention on the task of cross-cultural communicators (missionaries) of making the gospel understandable to culturally different people. That task is of course very important. However, just as important (if not more so) is the contextualizing task of gospel recipients to understand, live out, and in turn spread that gospel. That task entails biblical faithfulness and real-life relevance: "contextualization." All Christian communities are gospel recipients, whether initially or across generations. The Holy Spirit continually works with all Christians to live faithfully to the Scriptures and relevant to their particular times, places, and surroundings, i.e., to their contexts. Along with cross-cultural communication, "contextualization" involves the ongoing challenges of understanding, living out, and spreading the Christian gospel in and across the ever-changing contexts in which God has us.

In our tasks of contextualization, we gospel recipients face the ongoing challenges of our changing, unredeemed contexts. One pull is towards irrelevance, usually through clinging to bygone contextualized practices and mindsets of our ancestors, e.g., insisting on using only organ music or "King James English." Another pull is towards relevance at the expense of Scripture, e.g., mindlessly conforming to economic injustices or to contemporary sexual norms. Both pulls, whether toward "quarantine" or toward "syncretism," lead to bad contextualizing. Biblical faithfulness and relevance cannot be pulled apart: one-sided coins have no currency value.

All of the articles in this July issue of *Global Missiology - English* explore one facet or perhaps several aspects of understanding, practicing, and communicating the gospel in relevant and biblically faithful ways. The articles take up the ongoing challenges of contexts that Jesus's followers face every day. What frameworks best help Christians understand cultural contexts, both our own and others', as well as the particular social challenges that Muslim converts to Christianity face? What is actually happening contextually when Muslim converts to Christianity revert to Islamic faith and practice? How can missionaries from contexts that are wealthier than where they serve best understand, practice, and convey the Christian gospel? Does the Bible convey different gospels to different types of cultural contexts? How can missionaries from different contexts work together? How can Christian communities know that they are bringing about holistic transformation in their own and in others' societies? All of these acute questions are tackled by this issue's studies.

People the world over have been dealing recently with challenges foisted upon us both by the COVID-19 pandemic and heightened awareness of racial injustice. These two matters are also contextualization challenges. There are concerns related to COVID-19 and racial injustice that are common to various contexts, but people (including Christians) must also understand, act, and speak in our own particular settings. Life on this earth faces the ongoing challenge of contexts, both for Christian mission and for all aspects of our daily existence. May God's Spirit grant us the wisdom, strength, humility, and courage to understand, live out, and convey to others the message of Jesus of Nazareth, both faithfully and in relevant fashion.

The Gospel for All Peoples and *Pistis Christou*:
A Doctrine Only for Healing the Troubled Consciences
of Western Guilt-Oriented Peoples? Part 1

Mark R. Kreitzer

Abstract

Does *pistis Christou*, in crucial contexts in Paul's letters, mean "faith *in* Christ," "faithfulness *of* Christ, or "steadfast-faith *of* Christ"? I choose the third of these alternatives. It correlates well with the biblical doctrine of the active and suffering obedience of Christ. Moreover, the "steadfast-faith of Christ" is not merely for guilt-oriented peoples (Rom 3:29-31). It is essential to Paul's "gospel" and is paradigmatic for all nations (Rom 2:16). Paul was Christ's chosen emissary and was given a message and power to proclaim that divine gospel to idol worshippers. Consequently, anyone proclaiming another gospel must be cursed (Gal 1:6-9, 2:7-8).

Key Words: Christ's steadfast-faith, conscience, contextualization, guilt-innocence cultures, justification, Pauline gospel

Introduction

Does *pistis Christou*, which appears in crucial contexts in Paul's letters, mean "faith *in* Christ," "faithfulness *of* Christ, or "steadfast faith *of* Christ"? Is this doctrine only for Western guilt-oriented people-groups but not for all peoples (Rom 3:29-31)? Is it an essential aspect of what Paul calls "my gospel" for both the Jews and idolatrous peoples (ta ethnē) (Rom 2:16)?

Many have weighed into this debate about what Paul's phrase actually means, particularly the genitive *Christou* (Bird and Sprinkle 2010; Easter 2010). Some exegetes argue that the phrase teaches that we are to put our complete confidence *in* the Lord (the objective-genitive). Others assert that Paul means Christ's faithfulness to his Father, which is the first of the two subjective genitive views. The second subjective genitive view is that Christ's completed righteousness was his steadfast-faith, and because of it our Father resurrected Christ to ever live to guarantee our eternal life (Heb 7:25; Rom 4:25, 5:1, 9-10, 8:34). This last view is my own persuasion, and this article responds point-by-point to Dr. Trevin Wax's opposite conclusions in one of his blog articles (Wax 2011).

I was introduced to the overall debate over Paul's use of *pistis Christou*, and in particular the subjective view, in the early 1980's in a class on Romans at Talbot Seminary taught by Prof. W. Bingham Hunter, now at Phoenix Seminary. As I studied about the active work of Christ, I learned to trust the finished faith-obedience of Christ to the legal covenant of the Garden, and my roller-coaster faith was stabilized. Christ released my over-active, accusing conscience from a heavy load of worthless works. I learned that he had already cleansed my conscience once and for all from these "dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14 NASB, ESV, 10:1-17). Christ's finished obedience constituted me righteous (Rom 5:17-19; 1 Cor 1:30; Heb 9-10). The translation of *pistis Christou* as "steadfast faith of Christ" helped bring theological and emotional stability to my then troubled spirit.

Over the decades, I have been studying three passages that have substantiated this "steadfast-fast" perspective and have brought continued comfort (Rom 3:20-26; Gal 2:15-17, 19-21; Phil

3:8-9). Each passage juxtaposes the righteousness that our Lord gained by his steadfast-faith with the self-righteousness of external obedience. Paul characterizes the first as "Spirit," good works done in the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and contrasts "Spirit" with "letter": "But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in [*the freshness*] of the Spirit and not in [*obsolescence*] of the [*external*] letter" (Rom 7:6 NASB; see also 2:29 and 2 Cor 3:4-7). These "letter" works always spring from powerless and hostile human "flesh," devoid of the Spirit (see Rom 8:3, 7-9).

Paul's Informing Theology of Justification and Peace

Furthermore, the translation "steadfast-faith of Christ" should have prima facie acceptability based upon Paul's paradigmatic statements in both Romans 1:16-17 and Galatians 3:11 where he cites Habakkuk 2:4: "The righteous — *ek pisteōs* will live." This is the *Crux Interpretum* according to Douglas A. Campbell's classic article (Campbell 1994). That passage and its precursor, Genesis 15:6, provide the informing theology behind Paul's teaching on justification before our kind and just God, who forbids "justifying the wicked" (e.g., Ex 23:7; Prov 17:15).

Campbell further states that "the rather extraordinary statistical profile" of phrases combining "through" or "by" with the genitive of "faith" are always within a context contrasting "[*pistis Christou*] (whatever that means) with [*erga nomou*] (whatever that means)," yet always in a "'sloganizing' fashion." Paul's "dominant phrase" is "*ek pisteōs*" though "*dia* [through]" plus the genitive is a synonym. "Both are most often translated "by" or "through faith" (e.g., Rom 3:22 and 26)," even though the grammatical construction is derived from the LXX of Habakkuk. "The occurrence of this phrase correlates perfectly with Paul's citation of Hab 2:4," Campbell explains. "Paul uses [*ek pisteōs*] twenty-one times in his extant letters, but only in those two that also cite the scriptural text containing that exact phrase (*in fact, a scriptural text trimmed by Paul to that exact phrase*). This cannot be mere coincidence – there is almost certainly some causal connection." This correlation includes a connection with Paul's use of the disputed phrase *pisteōs Christou* as well (Campbell 1994:268).

In other words, when Paul speaks about "by/through trust/faith," he is trimming down the paradigmatic wording of Habakkuk 2:4. Paul means in short-hand that we who were absolutely faithless and unable to please God (Rom 8:9; Heb 11:6), are justified by the gift of the "steadfast-faith of Christ" given to those who trust him. The complete trustworthy-trusting summarizes Christ's righteousness. The result is that we who are thus justified by faith in union with Christ can continually live by faith just like he did. O. Palmer Robertson's exegesis is correct: "'The Justified (by Faith) Shall Live by His Steadfast Trust' – Habakkuk 2:4" (see parallel Ps 112:6-7). He translates the Hebrew as follows:

> Behold!
> The proud—
>   his soul is not upright in him;
> But the justified—
>   by his steadfast trust he shall live (Robertson 1983:60).

Ultimately, then, "my righteous one," as the LXX and the writer of the book of Hebrews render the passage, is a person who lives by his steadfast-faith. Citing several others, Campbell states: "Our suggestion concerning [Rom 1:]17a therefore necessarily involves reading Hab 2:4 as a messianic proof-text" (Campbell 2011:281; see Robertson 1983:60). Only Christ's never-

failing trust produced his justifying righteousness before the Father, warranting his resurrection, which is the fruitfruits of the resurrection of all the just/righteous in him (Rom 4:24-25; 1 Cor 15:20; see, Col 3:1-4). In other words, to corollate other passages, the Father developed Christ's always-righteous heart so that he learned steadfast faith-obedience (see e.g., Rom 1:5) through being tested in the fire of suffering up to and including the cross. His listening and always trusting heart never failed to follow the will of his beloved Father (Heb 5:8; Rom 5:18-19; Phil 2:8). Because he passed the probationary test, God justified him (Rom 4:24-25; Is 53:10-11; perhaps 1 Tim 3:16).

Now contrary to what some interpreters may assert, Christ is called the "Righteous One" in other NT passages (e.g., Acts 3:14, 7:52; 1 Jn 2:1). He *alone* is the Righteous One, who lived by steadfast, never-failing, righteousness-revealing faith (Hab 2:4; Heb 10:36-39). We are justified by the gift of the Righteous One's steadfast-faith-gained righteousness. That faith is a free gift to those in rebellion, received *in* the righteousness [en dikaiosunē … Iēsuou Christou] of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:1b Greek; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:13, 2:25; Eph 2:8). The result is that now justified believers will be living in righteousness by means of the gift of persevering faith found only in Christ (Rom 8:4; 2 Pet 1:3-5). "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back" (see Heb 10:36-39).

Some interpreters may object that we are justified by Christ's blood and his active obedience, not by his steadfast-faith (e.g., Rom 5:9; 18-19) (see Taylor 2012; McMahon n.d.). However, significantly, the root meaning of obedience in both Hebrew and Greek [*shama*, *hupakoē*] is "listen" or "listen intently to." Our Lord, "born under the law," the legal covenant, completely "listened to" that law by never failing to trust and follow his Abba (Gal 4:4-6). The Second Adam came into the human world to redeem us both from the curse of and the obligation to perfectly fulfill the original legal covenant, which demanded perfect obedience (Gal 4:5, 3:13): "Here am I … I have come to do your will, [O] my God" (Heb 10:7 NIV; see Jn 5:56, 14:31, 17:4).

In this initial discussion, I find then the translation "steadfast-faith" and not "faithfulness of Christ" or "faith in Christ" peace-bringing and conscience-stilling in the Holy Spirit, just as Paul states (Rom 9:1; see Heb 9:14 ESV, 10:2 NIV). "My Righteous One" [Jesus] thus lived by faith and the Father declared him righteous when he raised him from the dead: "He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:25 NASB; see, Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38). Our "peace with God" (Rom 5:1), "peace belonging to God" (Phil 4:7) and the "peace of Christ" serve as the ultimate arbitrator or umpire in our hearts as we exegetically seek to discern valid insights (Col 3:15).

Further Exegetical Answers to Common Objections

Further reasons for the "steadfast-faith" view are similar to those Wax finds wanting, and some are those he missed. First, the notes for the *New English Translation* (NET) explain the translators' reasons for rendering the phrase "faithfulness of Christ." They are substantially correct except that they make little distinction between "Christ's faith" and "Christ's faithfulness." Few would disagree that our Lord was "*pistos*" [faithful] (Heb 3:2). Yet, "*pistis*" with a genitive of a human person is most likely always a subjective genitive. Wax neglects to take account of this grammatical point. The NET Bible notes provide the following justification: "An increasing number of NT scholars are arguing that [*pistis Christou*] … and similar phrases in Paul … involve a *subjective* genitive and mean 'Christ's faith' or 'Christ's faithfulness'." The note then gives the decisive argument for the subjective genitive view: "Noteworthy among the arguments

for the subjective genitive view is that when [*pistis*, faith or trust] takes a personal genitive it is almost never an objective genitive (cf. Matt 9:2, 22, 29; Mark 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Luke 5:20; 7:50; 8:25, 48; 17:19; 18:42; 22:32; Rom 1:8; 12; 3:3; 4:5, 12, 16; 1 Cor 2:5; 15:14, 17; 2 Cor 10:15; Phil 2:17; Col 1:4; 2:5; 1 Thess 1:8; 3:2, 5, 10; 2 Thess 1:3; Titus 1:1; Phlm 6; 1 Pet 1:9, 21; 2 Pet 1:5) (NET, nt. 27, Romans 3:22).

Second, a crucial parallel passage with respect to this issue is Romans 4, which unmistakably speaks about the "faith of Abraham." The parallelism in this passage is between those who are "of the circumcision" and those who are "of the faith of … Abraham." The passage compares self-oriented, external works to dependent trust in another: "So that [Abraham] might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised" (Rom 4:11-12, see 16, NASB).

Here plainly "of the faith of Abraham" [*tēs pisteōs tou … Abraám*] means the steps of steadfast-faith that Abraham possessed in his life beginning with at least his justification (Gen 15:6) and perhaps even before (e.g., Heb 11:8). The meaning of this subjective genitive construction is not that someone is to put faith *in* Abraham, but they are to follow the steps *of* Abraham's faith. "In [*Spirit-given*] hope against [*natural*] hope, he trusted" (Rom 4:18). If the "faith of Abraham" is his trust in God and his promises, then "the faith of Jesus" means our Lord's absolutely unwavering faith. Since, first, if he never sinned and always listened intently with complete trust in his Father (he obeyed), and, second, if to lack trust is sin (Rom 14:23; Heb 11:6), then our Lord's faith was a completed steadfast-faith from birth up to and including his crucifixion and death (Phil 2:8).

Consequently, we who put our trust in Christ alone are declared righteous *because of* his steadfast-faith-obedience to his Father (Rom 3:22, 5:18-19; Gal 2:16). Paul agrees: "One completed-righteousness brought justification of life …, also through the listening-obedience of the one man the many will be [constituted] righteous" (Rom 5:18-19, my translation). C.E.B Cranfield also agrees: "Since [*henos*, one] is masculine in its three occurrences in v. 17 and also in its two occurrences in v. 19, and since the whole subsection is concerned with the relation of the one man Adam and one Man Christ to the many... it is surely better to take [*henos*] here as masculine," therefore, referring to the completed righteousness of the one man, Jesus Christ. (see Cranfield 2004:289).

In the context, Christ's "intense listening" (trusting-obedience) had to be to every aspect of his Father's tôranic instruction. This was his lived-out righteousness (see Rom 5:12-21; Gal 4:1-6; Ps 112:1, 5-7). Receiving Christ's faith-filled righteousness is God's only biblically ordained means to come to peace of conscience before the God of all peoples (Rom 2:16, 3:28-31). Who can now accuse in God's court? Who can condemn? The Father has justified us and the Son now intercedes for us. Who can then separate us from God's love (Rom 8:33-35, see NLT, CSB)?

Therefore, when people in, for example, honor-shame cultures come into contact with the law of God either through conscience or Scripture, and *they will eventually do so if they read the whole Bible*, Scripture also teaches them to never let Satan and his demons accuse within their spirit (Rev 12:10). Nor should conscience be allowed to accuse any more (Rom 2:16), nor should "Moses" (Jn 5:45). God has justified-and-forgiven us (Rom 4:6-8, 5:1) and will work change by the Spirit's grief (Eph 4:30; Is 63:10), the sorrow leading to repentance (2 Cor 7:10). He does not

use fear of man (Prov 29:25), honor or shame before a social group, nor a condemning conscience but Christ's Spirit alone. For example, serving another god, whether Islam's Allah, self, money, or one's belly, dishonors the Creator and excites his just-zeal (wrath) against those who suppress his truth (Rom 1:18, 25). It is both a guilt *and* dishonor issue. However, if this issue is not addressed, a legal conscience leads to a crushing legalism, despair, or antinomianism.

A second reason for holding a subjective view is that the rendering "steadfast-faith of Christ" avoids unnecessary repetition in key passages. For example, the best translation of Romans 1:17b could well be "out of [Christ's] steadfast-faith to [our persevering] trust." On the other hand, the alternative translation "faithfulness of Christ" propounded by N T Wright and others is ambiguous. It leaves the door ajar for a man-centered covenant nomism to break in, a doctrine similar to the Pharisee's Second Temple Judaism that Jesus condemned (Lk 10:28-37, 16:14, 18:9-14; Mt 15:1-9, 23:1-39), Tridentine Roman Catholicism, and similar religious expressions as, perhaps, some forms of Islam. D. A. Carson agrees: "In dominant Jewish understanding, God's justifying of Abraham is entirely appropriate: Abraham deserved it, for he was 'faithful'" (Carson 2010). To hold the view "faithfulness of Christ" leads to the Galatian error. The crucial passages listed in the first section would all include extraneous words, which, because of the cost of materials in Paul's day, he could very well have been reticent to use. For example, note Paul's extreme parsimony of words in Romans 5:12-21. The superfluity evaporates with a subjective genitive: "We have trusted in King Jesus so that we might be justified by the steadfast-faith of Christ and not by works of the law" (Gal 2:16).

Third, translating *pistis Christou* as "steadfast-faith of Christ" is theologically attractive. I agree with most of Trevin Wax's original positive sentiments for a subjective genitive, though I substitute steadfast-faith for faithfulness: 1) The subjective genitive and "the theme of 'union with Christ'" make better sense of many passages, even Galatians 2:20. 2) "When incorporated into Reformation categories of theology, '[steadfast-faith] of Christ' bolsters support for the doctrine of imputation. "We are justified by [Christ's] … perfect [trusting] obedience to the Father's will, his faithfulness unto death on behalf of his covenant people." 3) "Philippians 3:9 seems to put more emphasis on Christ's [steadfast-faith], rather than our faith, as the means of supplying our needed righteousness." (In other words, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but one that is through Christ's *[steadfast-faith]* – the righteousness from God based on that faith" would be the best rendering of the verse.) Wax concludes: "Anything that appears to give more glory to Christ is attractive to me" (Wax 2011). I agree.

Consequently, when Paul places *pistis Christou* in contrast with the "works of the law," he juxtaposes our faithful King's steadfast-faith over against the absolutely powerless and faithless human flesh that attempts to keep external obligations of the "letter" (e.g., Rom 7:6). Yet, the "mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set upon the Spirit is life and peace." A mind depending upon the flesh is "hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*," and hence cannot please God by steadfastly trusting and following his instruction (Rom 8:2-9 NASB; Gal 3:12-14; Heb 11:6).

Counsel Against "Steadfast-Faith" View

So then what about the reasons that swayed Dr. Wax in the opposite direction? First is an argument from silence: "None of the early church fathers provide a possessive or subjective genitive reading of *pistis Christou*" (Wax 2011). However, arguments from silence are notoriously weak and could very well be based upon the logical error of appeal to authority over the actual mean-

ing of the text as intended by the author. Furthermore, tradition and a surrounding cultural worldview create a myopia that genuinely blinded both the early and Medieval church, who left behind the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith by grace solely on the ground of Christ's obedient-faith. With scarcely any discussion of these topics, it is not surprising that they were silent about this exegetically derived doctrine.

Second, Wax believes the "repetition" problem is not as big a problem as it first appears. The problem remains, however, even though in Romans 3:21-22, "Paul probably intends to place the emphasis on the 'all,'" as Wax explains (Wax 2011). In other words, the "righteousness of God," won by our Lord's steadfast-faith, is genuinely open for all people-groups as a gift by grace on the basis of Christ's blood. No distinction exists among humans because all have sinned [in Adam] and presently all lack his glory. Consequently, any human is able to be declared righteous only upon trust in the the finished, faith-wrought righteousness of our now indwelling King. His redemption and satisfaction of his Father's just wrath are complete (Rom 1:18-2:16, 3:22-27).

In other words, the best translation of Romans 3:22 is, "even God's righteousness through Jesus Christ's steadfast-trust, [given] to [any and] *all* who trust [in him]." The righteous only live by persevering faith. "All" is indeed important but not for the reason Wax gives. Certainly, it is true that "Paul uses repetition intentionally. In an oral culture, this is a common technique at getting across one's point" (Wax 2011). However, the context of the paragraph, chapter, section, book, and biblical theology in general must govern the meaning. Here the repetition of faith twice is redundant and not necessary.

Third, it is accurate that "grammatically, there are other places where the genitive refers to Christ as the object." Wax lists one (Phil 3:8) (Wax 2011). I have no doubt that several other examples of an objective genitive with Christ as object can be discovered. Again, context, including the overarching theological and intertextual contexts, determine the meaning of *pistis Christou*. Plus, in Pauline contexts *pistis* with a personal genitive "is almost never an objective genitive."

Fourth, Wax correctly states that we should not do exegesis with a bias toward "what is theologically attractive." Most of us can agree that "the key issue is 'what did the author intend to communicate?'" and not "how does this boost what I already believe?" (Wax 2011). On the other hand, I would like to emphasize two points. First, all of us exegete from a worldview that predisposes us to see data in a certain way. Second, there are three tests of truth: a) Does one's perspective of the data correspond to what the author originally intended, information that can be discovered in the grammar and syntax? b) Does one's perspective cohere to the whole system of teaching that God has given us in Scripture? If not, perhaps the system is incorrect and the Spirit can lead into a complete paradigm shift. By entering into such a shift, one can discover more of the mind of Christ than in the previous system. Believers already possess a new mind in him and, if the new systemic Scripture-view is correct, one can discover fresh insights by applying the new lenses as led by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:16). c) Does one's perspective work to actually produce the stable fruit of the Spirit in one's life? This is a form of the Hermeneutical Spiral that can help us refine what we believe as it can here.

Conclusion

This doctrine of justification through the imputed *faith-wrought* righteousness of Christ is pervasive throughout Paul's gospel-oriented corpus. I affirm what T. Wax rejects. Over the years, I

have become more persuaded that *pistis Christou* should be rendered the "steadfast-faith" or "persevering-trust" *of* Christ. Again, Paul juxtaposes Israel's lack of faith and their reliance upon the strength of the flesh ["letter"] over against their King's complete trust in the strength of the Spirit up to his death on the cross (e.g., Phil 2:9-10; Heb 9:14). The Mosaic covenant *now* is totally devoid of the Spirit (Rom 7:5-6, 13-18), so that the Spirit *now* is always connected to Christ's steadfast-faith-wrought righteousness, as he lives "in us" and we "in him" (Gal 3:1-14; Rom 8:2). The Torah *now* is external "letter" *only*, but Christ's Spirit works from the inside out to accomplish all the righteous requirements of the tôranic-instruction as believers walk *in steadfast-trust* by the Spirit in union with Christ (Rom 7:6, 8:4-7; Col 2:14; Heb 7:18, 10:1-4; Gal 3:12-14, 4:1-7, 9; 2 Cor 3:3-7). A faith-walk always works its way out into works of love as it did with our Lord (Gal 5:5-6; Eph 2:10).

This teaching that all true righteousness is a trust-wrought righteousness is necessary for anyone's long-term growth in grace in any tribe, people, and language. Only Paul's gospel honors God and delivers from shame – "I am rejected" (see part 2). It also rescues from eternal guilt – "I have done wrong," *and* from our experience of guilt-and-obligation motivation. He saves from fear of man (part 2), *and* our terrifying fear of his wrath, death, and Satan (Heb 2:14, see part 3). All must stand before an absolutely just Creator, whose justice is satisfied *only* in Christ (Rom 1:18-2:16; Jn 16:8-11). Trust-wrought righteousness provides an essential foundation to experience the long-term resurrection power and saving-life of the indwelling Christ for growth in holiness. This good news is for all ethno-cultural groups, not just "guilt" oriented Westerners (Rom 6:15-23, 8:1-17). If our King's universal community fails to stand on this rock, it has lost an essential key for her existence. The sole authority we possess is not the consensus of scholars – this is an illicit appeal to authority – but the revealed gospel itself.

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The Culture Tree:
A Powerful Tool for Mission Research and Training

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Abstract

This article introduces a model of cultural analysis based upon the organic nature of a culture, called the "Culture Tree." Culture is an integrated system of ideas, actions, authorities, and unseen presuppositions. These elements of people groups work together to create patterns that can be analyzed and understood with the appropriate tools. Just like cultures, trees have different elements that are integrated into a living, growing organism. The "Culture Tree" model seeks to provide a tool to demonstrate the integrated nature of cultural elements similar to integration within a living organism.

Mission training and mission strategy both benefit from models of patterned interactions that occur within people groups. Thus, the model seeks to accurately reflect the structure, organic nature, and complexity of cultures. This article will also demonstrate the accuracy of the model and its usefulness to culture training and mission planning.

Key Words: culture, Culture Tree, model

Introduction

Mission training and mission strategy both benefit from models of patterned interactions that occur within a group of people. The closer the model reflects reality, the more effective it can be in providing guidance for ministry.

This article is an introduction to a model of culture that we call the "Culture Tree."[1] The model is based on the physical characteristics of a tree and is an analogy that proves to be quite powerful and accurate when applied to various aspects of culture. The article is designed around a simple outline that will describe why modeling is important, compare other models of culture that are used in ministry situations, and then explain in detail the Culture Tree as we use it in our training organization (CultureBound n.d.). After that explanation, we will consider the accuracy and usefulness of the model. Our intention in this article is to provide a new and highly effective model for teachers, trainers, and mission strategists to use in their analytical and educational programs.

We will begin with some important definitions. Enoch Wan and Mark Hedinger define "culture" as the patterned interaction between Beings/beings (Wan and Hedinger 2017). This definition reminds us that people groups are affected by interactions with God, and that the triune God also has patterns of interaction.

We will base this article on what Wan and Hedinger call "horizontal relationships" (Wan and Hedinger 2017). Horizontal relationships exist between created beings – for the purposes of this article, between people. Horizontal relationships are different from vertical relationships which include both created beings and the three Persons of the triune Creator.

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[1] Culture Tree is a registered trademark of the CultureBound organization.

The Culture Tree, then, is a model for understanding the patterns of relationships that exist within and between human communities. Though God is certainly present in these relational patterns, we are limiting our discussion to the human members of any given group in order to simplify the introduction of this model.

The Importance of Models

Culture is a heuristic concept. That is, it is a concept only; it does not exist in any physical, measurable sense. One cannot go to the store to buy a pound of culture. One cannot measure the amount of "culture" *per se.* One can only create analogies and models that represent the factors that make the concept salient.

A further complication for understanding culture is that culture represents the patterns of a people group that are enculturated from generation to generation. Intergenerational teaching is aimed at the youngest members of the group: at the people who have no point of reference with which to compare the patterns of their own people with patterns of any other people. The result is that the patterns that one learns as a child become standards by which all of life's expectations are measured. The patterns are learned by trial and error at such a young age that they become deeply ingrained habits. One does not need to think about how to respond to a given situation. These "intuitive" responses have been learned through the trial and error of childhood and adolescence.

The very nature of culture, both seen and unseen, makes it necessary to use models or analogies in order to understand the structure and function of culture. The challenge is that an analogy is only helpful to the extent that it reflects the nature of actual reality. In the case of an analogy or model of culture, we believe that the Culture Tree can significantly contribute to the understanding of the structure and function of culture.

Contemporary Models of Culture

There are three primary models currently used to represent the nature of culture. The first is the anthropological model (Hofstede 1997; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2014) that divides culture into numerous components and then describes each of those components. For instance, a culture may be analyzed in terms of achieved status or ascribed status, as well as in terms of individualist focus rather than collectivist. Those traits (achievement/ascription dominance and individualism/collectivism) are clearly important in culture studies, and this model is beneficial in examining how varying degrees of explicit and implicit culture patterns represent important patterns of behavior and thought. At the same time, the anthropological model is limited to understanding culture as a series of binary characteristics and, if used as the sole model of culture, can lead to under-discussing other important characteristics. The anthropological model is limited as it does not express the fluidity and interconnectedness of culture.

A second model of culture is the iceberg (Hall 1989). The iceberg shows that there is more to culture "under the water" than just what is observed "above the water." The patterns of a culture, in other words, include both visible actions and events and, at the same time, invisible elements that undergird those visible parts. This model illustrates that many of the patterns of behavior of a people group are based on invisible traits such as values or beliefs. Those invisible yet massive components are key to understanding what is visible. The iceberg model graphically demonstrates that important parts of a culture rest below the surface. However, the model's

weakness is that it does not illustrate the various layers of culture that lay both above and below the surface.

A third model is the onion (Smith 1992). According to this model, culture has an invisible core outside of which are other layers that are influenced by that core. This model has the ability to subdivide a culture into components such as organizational administration, values, beliefs, and views of history. The onion model of culture, along with similar layered models (Hiebert 1985; Schein 1985), excel as tools for analysis of culture in a stable, static form. Notably, however, onions are inert once harvested. The onion model is thus limited in effectively illustrating a strong sense of life and connection to other objects.

Important Characteristics of an Accurate and Useful Culture Model

What then should be included in a model of human cultures? We would suggest that an accurate and useful model of human culture will both incorporate general traits that all cultures share and allow for particular values, beliefs, and behaviors that various cultures exhibit. The model will also illustrate the complexity of relationships and social structures within a culture as well as the process of growth and change within culture. Finally, an accurate and useful model of culture will be able to illustrate the potential interactions between distinct cultures.
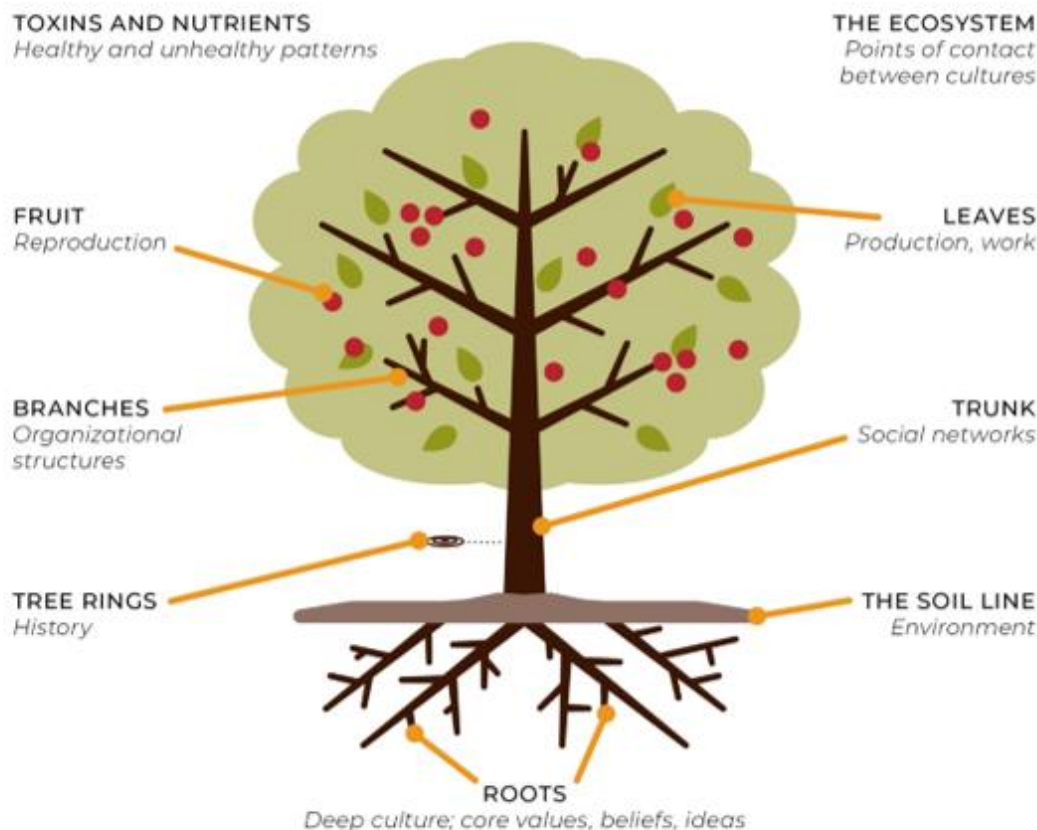
The Culture Tree Model

This article suggests then that the Culture Tree Model exhibits the characteristics needed for an accurate and useful model of human culture.

General Traits of the Culture Tree

The diagram below shows nine aspects of physical trees that represent cultural patterns, as described further below.

The Culture Tree- A Culture-Learning Model

TOXINS AND NUTRIENTS
Healthy and unhealthy patterns

THE ECOSYSTEM
Points of contact between cultures

FRUIT
Reproduction

LEAVES
Production, work

BRANCHES
Organizational structures

TRUNK
Social networks

TREE RINGS
History

THE SOIL LINE
Environment

ROOTS
Deep culture; core values, beliefs, ideas

Roots – values, beliefs and expectations that are not in plain sight.

Arguably the most important aspect of cultures (as noted by both the iceberg and the onion) is that cultural patterns are not random. The patterns we observe in the life habits of any people group can be seen in the invisible truth statements, beliefs, values, and expectations that the people share. The roots of a tree provide this analogy.

In a recent study done in the rain forests of Panama (Sinacore 2017), scientists measured the biomass of root systems in a forest. The invisible, buried roots accounted for a full 28% of the total tree biomass. The root system extended, on average, to a distance as great as the distance from the trunk at ground level to the crown of the branches. Roots, in short, contribute extensively to the mass of a tree. In a tree, those roots provide support, nutrition, and hydration.

In a culture, the invisible beliefs (what is true), values (what is important), and expectations (what is normal) are represented by the roots. When an outsider is learning an unfamiliar culture, an important part of the process is to discover the "worldview" of values, beliefs, and

expectations. When those invisible traits are understood, it is more likely that existing structures and habits will make sense, and it is also more likely that changes or introductions to the culture can be presented in acceptable ways. For example, when an U.S.-American university student seeks to build a relationship with a Chinese colleague it is helpful to understand U.S.-American individualism and Chinese collectivism, and that U.S.-Americans tend to make friends one at a time while Chinese tend to make friends in groups.

The Soil Line

Trees have an invisible part and a visible part. The soil line is where that break is. The soil line is also where contact with the physical and living environment is the most noteworthy. The soil line is also a place where pests and disease can intrude.

Cultures come in contact with the greater context in many places, but it is always helpful to recognize the places where a culture interacts with its environment. Patterns of life in desert cultures will be different from patterns of life in a sea-going people. The physical environment is one critical element to analyze when we think of a group of people, since climate affects the necessary activities and resources that are available to a people group.

Branches and Organizational Patterns

Rising from the soil line we find a main trunk that has branches which come directly off of that trunk. Any culture will have the need for organizational patterns. Those are represented by the branching that we see on the Culture Tree. For example, there are culturally acceptable ways to organize the workplace: perhaps it is under the direction of a chief or boss, perhaps it is more independent and individual. The organizational patterns will overlap so that schools, medical facilities, and businesses all demonstrate largely the same sort of organizational preferences. The values and beliefs of the roots will give shape to the branches and trunks that are visible, "above ground."

Interaction with Other Cultures – Ecosystem

One of the interesting characteristics of trees is the variation possible in how much they interact with their surroundings. Trees in a savannah grassland may be very far from other trees and in fact might be surrounded by a relatively small number of other organisms. On the other hand, in forest situations trees interact with their environment and with other trees at many levels: roots intertwine, branches touch, and animals can jump from one tree to another. In human terms, the isolated cultures may have relatively few encroachments from other human groups. In more densely populated parts of the world, though, the patterns of one group of people will be influenced by and interact with the patterns of nearby neighboring cultures. In large cities, populations from many cultural groups may literally be on the same block. While the patterns of each group will be distinct, there is also a relative ease for interaction.

Leaves – The Production of the Culture

The photosynthesis that takes water and CO2 from the atmosphere and generates sugars for the energy needs of the tree takes place in the leaves. The shape of those leaves varies from the needles on pine trees to the differing leaves found on deciduous species. The important point is that trees interact with the environment which leads to the production of nutrition that sustains life. Geert Hofstede speaks of the cultural values that he calls "masculine and feminine"

(Hofstede 2010). The difference is what sort of value those differing cultures place on differing kinds of production. Masculine cultures focus their energy on factory output and military expenditures, while feminine cultures prefer medical and educational production for the wellbeing of their population. The point is that there are values involved in the production that takes place within a culture.

Fruit – What Is Prepared and Passed to the Next Generation

Trees also are involved in replication. Some tree species can start new life all alone (monecious); other species require two trees to produce fruit and viable seeds (dioicous). At any rate, tree species that survive have ways for each generation to give rise to another. Human cultures have the same need. Some of those cultures can meet all of the needs for advancing the next generation by themselves. Other cultures end up "exporting" and "importing" people in order to survive from generation to generation.

Besides the analogy of how flowers and fruits are produced, there is also the important issue of values that can be seen when we talk about cultural reproduction. The values of a people are probably most strongly seen in what they teach to their young. The stories, corrections, truth statements, and other carriers of values are informally but very carefully passed from generation to generation. When a younger generation refuses to carry out the traditions of the elders, great cultural strife can result.

Pathways within the Culture– Water and Nutrient Conduction

Within a plant, there is a series of specialized tissues that draw water and other material from the roots to the highest points of the leaves, then allow the descent back to storage tissues. It is not a system that can be mapped easily. There is movement within the tree, but it is not a simple matter to view how that movement takes place.

Cultures are similar. Communication, decision-making, leadership, parenting, and teaching patterns are just a few examples of the pathways that vary greatly from one culture to another. The Culture Tree gives an analogy of complex pathways that exist within the living organism. Cultures, too, have complex pathways through which important resources flow.

Environmental Sensitivity – Toxins and Nutrients

Trees have a level of health or illness that may have to do with internal issues (genetics, for example) but also is highly influenced by the environment. Small amounts of trace minerals can make the difference between a healthy plant and an unhealthy plant. Toxic materials in the soil or water can create harm. Nutrients like nitrogen can provide sudden growth.

The cultural patterns of a people are also impacted by even small amounts of social toxins or social nutrients. As an example, within some cultures people teach and lead one another on the basis of a set standard of right and wrong – they see the world through guilt/innocence. Imagine a neighboring nation that teaches and leads on the basis of shame/honor. The guilt/innocence nation can easily say things or make gestures that would bring shame to their neighbor. One nation feels it deeply; the other is not aware that any offense has taken place. What is a "non-issue" to one is a toxin to the other.

Differing susceptibilities to economic ups and downs are also part of this environmental sensitivity. Worldwide economic difficulties will have more impact in some cultures and less

impact in others. The variations have to do with many factors, including level of economic connection with other nations and cultures. Those that are more isolated may weather the storm of economic ups and downs more easily than economic systems that are tied tightly to international markets.

Growth, Change, and Adaptability – Tree Rings

The last of the Culture Tree components has to do with the fact that trees have a life cycle. Though much longer, in general, than the life cycle of people, a healthy tree will grow, slow in its growth, senesce, and eventually die.

The life cycle of a tree is recorded in its tree rings: over the years there is a change in the girth of the tree. That growth can be seen in what we commonly call the "grain" of the wood. Alternating layers of tissue permit the nutrient capacity of the tree to expand as the physical size also expands. The history of the tree is "written" into those bands that we call "tree rings."

Cultural patterns of people groups are constantly growing and changing rapidly throughout their lifespan. Models of culture that reflect this growth pattern are able to show the organic patterns of a people group. Knowing how a given group of people pattern their corporate changes and how they permit for the growth of new initiatives is a significant part of cultural analysis.

The Accuracy of the Model

Earlier in this article we suggested that a healthy model of culture will be able to exhibit that, while cultures differ in values, beliefs and behaviors, all cultures share general traits. A helpful model will also illustrate the complexity of relationships and social structures within a culture as well as the process of growth and change within culture. Finally, an accurate and useful model of human culture will illustrate the potential interactions between distinct cultures. The model in other words must demonstrate unity, diversity, complexity of relationships, growth and change, and interactions with other cultures.

Unity: The Culture Tree allows us to see interaction between cultures even as we see the varying ways that cultures take care of needs that are common to all humanity. All peoples need food, water, and a means for reproduction. The Culture Tree lets us see how those universal needs are met through individual patterns within a given cultural group.

Diversity: The Culture Tree is based on the idea that, just as there are diverse kinds of trees that still are properly called "trees," there are also many cultural approaches to meeting human needs. There is great diversity in how cultures meet human needs.

Complexity of Relationships and Social Structures: There are few direct lines between such realties as government patterns, economic structures, and religious organizations. Yet those and many other subsections of a culture are clearly interactive. The Culture Tree allows us to see the complexity of social structures within a given culture, while also noting the patterns that are part of that culture.

Growth and Change: Human cultures are not static. The Culture Tree model allows for shifts and changes: there is a root system that brings stability and nutrition, and yet that root structure also permits growing and changing both at the root level and in the visible, upper level.

Interactions between Cultures: What happens in one culture will impact other cultures. Globalization has increased market interactions as well as the spread of illnesses and the diffusion of technology. Nations are in contact with many other nations, and somehow the model we choose for understanding human cultures needs to allow for that interaction while at the same time understanding the characteristics of the culture itself. The Culture Tree model allows for that perspective of cultural interaction.

The Usefulness of the Model

The CultureBound training program has used the Culture Tree as a model for training for several years now. We find that it has a number of strengths:

It permits us to talk about the sociological elements that are regularly recognized as part of a culture. We can talk about history, organizational structures, invisible values and beliefs, production, and reproduction. The tree allows us to see the complicated patterns of a culture in light of common but flexible elements.

The Culture Tree provides us a tool for learning about a new culture. If one is sent to minister and/or work in an unfamiliar culture, the Culture Tree can be a helpful guide to analysis and discovery. At times we have used the phrase "culture map" to talk about simple discovery of the common elements found in the layers of our Culture Tree. Seeing those cultural elements graphically represented across the outline of a tree helps to recognize how the organizational patterns, history, education, productivity standards, desires for future generations, and other cultural realities all attach to the invisible roots.

It also permits us to create teaching and discipleship tools that deepen biblical impact on people's norms, standards, and experiences of the people. In short, the Culture Tree is more than just an analytical tool: it also facilitates discernment of the Holy Spirit's work among people groups. At CultureBound we use the Culture Tree every time we have a training. The Culture Tree allows culture learners to gain experience in training contexts that they later carry to their intercultural situations.

One of the most flexible parts of the Culture Tree is that it can be used successfully by children as well as adults. In fact, CultureBound began using this model after a children's book on the Culture Tree was published by one of the authors of this article (Wells 2018). As families transition from one culture to another, one of the great strengths we see for using the Culture Tree is that parents and children can together explore a new way of life using the culture tree as their guide. For young children, that exploration may involve just the invisible and the visible (roots and leaves). For older teens, it may include analysis and culture mapping much like we have suggested for adults. The model allows for use at many different levels.

Conclusion and Findings

This article has presented a tool for culture learning that we have found to be very effective. While no model is as complete and accurate as the actual reality being depicted , in the case of a concept as complex as the heuristic we call "culture," it is very helpful to have a model that shows unity, diversity, internal complexity, contextual sensitivity, and the possibility of generational growth. We would recommend the use of the Culture Tree for course work in missions, anthropology, sociology, and many subsets of those disciplines.

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Spiritual Capital: How the Kingdom Spreads through Communities

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Abstract

Just as a speech community can best understand its language use practices in terms of *social capital* investment, so the community's progress towards holistic transformation can be understood, analogously, in terms of its *spiritual capital*. Using the same set of research tools provides a unified conceptual framework and promotes synergy between translation and church growth.

Speakers can scope what their "heart language(s)" are by identifying those speech communities in whose *social capital* they are investing. This process includes ongoing study, ideally led by communities themselves, of their

a) social networks;

b) norms and reciprocal obligations; and,

c) shared narratives.

They can assess their *spiritual capital* in a similar way, if that concept is reoriented to make God both the agent and goal of its growth. This assessment requires study of

a) the various spiritual identities of the individuals and groups with which people network; and, the extent to which

b) core norms and obligations are Church-based and

c) shared narratives are biblically concordant.

The integrated study of social and spiritual capital helps communities to hold linguistic identity issues and Scripture engagement needs in tandem, so that their churches can be established, equipped, and expanding. To identify practical ways forward, this article considers two language communities in West Asia.

Key Words: Bible translation, heart language, holistic transformation, identity, Scripture engagement, social networks

Introduction

Human beings collaborating in complex processes need to know how their individual tasks contribute to the whole. Vision statements are vitally important, such as the SIL 2019 Vision Statement: "We long to see people flourishing in community using the languages they value most." Alongside these are more explicitly spiritual statements, such as that "God uses the translated Word as a foundational means for holistic transformation. At their core, Bible translation programs facilitate the process of the "indwelling" of God's Word in the lives of the speakers of a language community" (Wycliffe Global Alliance 2019).

These high-level statements need breaking down into meaningful parts. What exactly is the goal of such "holistic transformation"? What connections are there between linguistic and sociolinguistic work on the one hand, and Scripture engagement and Bible translation on the other, as they all seek to contribute holistically to transformation?

This article argues that, just as a speech community can best understand its language use practices in terms of *social capital* investment (Paul 2019), so the community's progress towards holistic transformation can be understood, analogously, in terms of its *spiritual capital*. These parallel concepts of social and spiritual capital:

- are easy to conceptualize;

- handle the multifarious activities involved in Bible translation and language development;

- account for multilingual communities; and,

- are quantifiable.

Social Capital as a Measure of a Community's Sociolinguistic Situation

The concept of social capital entered mainstream thinking with the book *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam (2000). Putnam had initially defined social capital as "features of social life—networks, norms and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1996:56).

Social capital is key in motivating a community to cohere in groups larger than their own kinship systems, which is crucial if the gospel is to spread across extended family boundaries. It has three core dimensions, as arranged in the table below entitled "Components of Social Capital":

1. the structural dimension of social *networks*: when we explore how dense and how multiplex the links are between individuals, we can understand how communities are socially structured and predict which languages they will use and when.

2. the relational dimension of *norms* in society: how should people in a community behave? What obligations do they have? Whom should they trust? With whom do they identify?

3. the cognitive dimension of *narratives* and systems of meaning: what stories do people tell each other, or assume implicitly, and how do these drive community motivations and aspirations?

Networks	Structural Dimension Social network ties Social network configuration
Norms	Relational Dimension Trust Norms and Obligations Identity
Narratives	Cognitive Dimension Language Cultural heritage Knowledge bases

Components of Social Capital

As depicted in Figure 1 below, a community with strong, *bonding* social capital is likely to be close-knit and may well maintain its vernacular language to maintain community solidarity.

A community with strong, *bridging* social capital may have social networks which reflect a more outward-looking orientation and is more likely to value a language of wider communication, whether alongside their own vernacular or not.
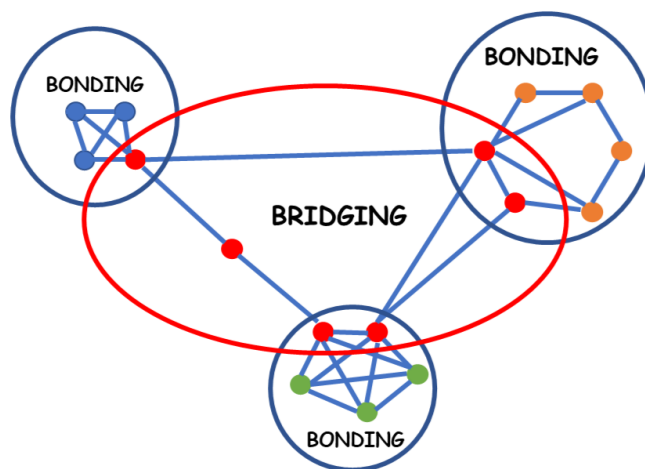

Figure 1: Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

Further below, the article will also consider *linking* capital: access to institutional power.

The crucial insight here for understanding the sociolinguistic situation of a community is that its heart language(s) can be identified as those speech varieties in which community members are investing their social capital. This investment can be measured by looking at whether their social networks are intra- or inter-group; what groups they emulate to establish their norms in all spheres; and, from where they find their defining narratives.

Spiritual Capital

Establishing where a community's social capital is invested identifies which speech varieties will communicate to them best – their so-called "heart languages." This identification answers the part of the vision statement cited above concerning "the languages [people in any given community] value most." But what does it mean to "see people flourishing in community" or "experiencing transformation"?

Christians can agree with sociologists that social capital is both a useful concept and a valuable resource for communities to accumulate. If this is so, why could there not be a spiritual equivalent: a set of networks which inform communities' spiritual norms and provide the narratives which drive them towards or away from the divine? Bishop Stephen Neill wrote in the mid-twentieth century: "It is on Europe that the glance of the observer falls with gravest anxiety. We seem to be watching a steady diminution of the *spiritual capital* of Europe, the disappearance of the old European synthesis of religion and culture, and a desiccation of the human spirit" (Neill 1964:564-5 – my emphasis).

The term "spiritual capital" was first coined by Adam Müller (1809), an economist who meant to Romanticism what Adam Smith meant to classical economics (Noghiu 2015:50). Müller rejected Smith's idea that self-interest should be the guiding principle of economic life, arguing that social contracts covered more than just the relationships of stipulated parties; they included obligations to mankind at large and relationships of man to God (Waetford 2007:9). Alongside the classical notions of land, labour, and physical capital, Müller therefore included spiritual capital as the central element around which the other three revolved and from which they should derive their meaning. Müller's formulation enabled a holistic perspective ahead of its time, preferring community over individual and engaging

with crucial economic questions such as agency and value far in advance of modern scholars (Noghiu 2015:50).

Recent applications of spiritual capital in secular literature have focused on "what religion can do for you"; for example, Berger and Redding define spiritual capital in functional terms, as a "set of resources stemming from religion and available for use in economic and political development" (Berger and Redding 2010:2). However, this article asserts that the concept is ripe for reorientation in terms of the *missio Dei*. God must be given his rightful place as both the growth agent, by his Holy Spirit, and the goal of spiritual capital. An analysis of a community's spiritual networks, norms, and narratives can then effectively triangulate what spiritual capital it has. Furthermore, as spiritual capital is calculated in terms analogous to how social capital is analysed, multilingualism is simultaneously accounted for. As Figure 2 indicates, the community's networks show how united and widespread the local church is; its norms, how much it loves God and neighbour; and, its narratives, how deeply the gospel drives its ambitions, hopes and dreams.
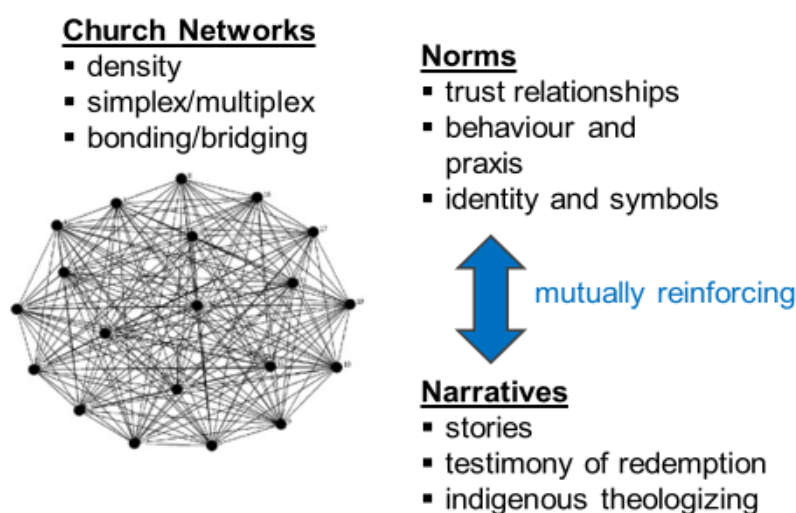

Church Networks
- density
- simplex/multiplex
- bonding/bridging

Norms
- trust relationships
- behaviour and praxis
- identity and symbols

mutually reinforcing

Narratives
- stories
- testimony of redemption
- indigenous theologizing

Figure 2: Components of Spiritual Capital

Networks

Definition: The phrase 'social network' refers to the entirety of the inter-personal relationships formed by an individual or group, viewed in structural terms. Milroy established that "dense, close-knit network structures function as important mechanisms of vernacular maintenance, with a powerful capacity to resist the social pressures associated with the standard language" (Milroy 1987:169). Networks are 'dense' when a high proportion of any given individual's network contacts are also contacts of each other; networks are 'multiplex' when many of the links between contacts consist of more than one kind of relationship.

The spiritual capital of a community will be higher as the social networks strengthen within and between local churches. Specifically, such heightened spiritual capital occurs when:

- the proportion of Jesus-following contacts in a typical community member's network increases (though retaining relationships with community members who do not follow Jesus is also vital);

- the density of contact between Jesus-following community members increases; and

- the links between Jesus-following community members are multiplex, signalling that they are deepening their relationships with each other beyond, say, meeting for a single weekly religious event.

How to Analyse: Social networks can be analysed using demographic inventories and social network questionnaires. These were used to good effect in, for example, Tajikistan by Abbess et al. (2010), who developed earlier work by Schooling (1990). A simple method was used at a recent mini-workshop: each of the three local participants wrote on a flipchart one non-believing friend in each of the age-brackets 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70-plus, and the group prayed for each of these (3x6 = 18) people together. The following day each participant returned to the six friends they had listed, and wrote on the flipchart how many people are currently influenced by each of those friends. They were amazed and inspired to discover that between them they had identified 517 people. Like the day before, the group prayed for these influenced people together.

Implications for Practice: How do the insights gleaned from social network analysis inform translation and Scripture engagement work? Some suggestions are listed here, categorised by four key social network dimensions (Abbess et al. 2010):

- Geographical location: Showing a film can draw a crowd in a village; likewise, event-based engagement methodologies such as storying work well in contexts where homogeneous groups often gather. Platt (2019:4) argues for applying the label "unreached" to places as much as to people. It is harder to achieve strong networks in cities when speech community members may be isolated in a sea of people from other communities – but all the more important to do so if their language and culture are to survive. Creating urban social contexts where community members can gather and speak their language together is an act of love in itself and can create wonderful opportunities for engagement.

- Occupation: In their study of Tajikistan, Murakimi and Yamada (2020) noted the significance of Tajiks working in Russia. In 2018, 41% of households in Tajikistan contained at least one migrant worker, while their remittances to family members in Tajikistan have constituted as much as 43% to the country's GDP in recent years. This societal theme has implications for both product and distribution strategies. Fruitful Scripture-based products should include audio dramas based around migrant workers as well as take account of the distress such lifestyles can cause to separated families. As for distribution, appropriate materials in the mother tongue may be particularly appreciated by workers in a foreign country, far from home.

- Kinship: Children's Bibles can encourage older family members to use the home language with children, and many testimonies exist of adults who have made a faith decision in response to such material. Meanwhile, proverbs promoting healthy marriage and wise upbringing of children strengthen family bonds. Scriptural proverbs can be produced in calendar, booklet, or Scripture app form, with or without parallel examples from the community's own store of vernacular proverbs.

- Friendship: These kinds of networks can be leveraged and enhanced by producing digital materials which are shareable on social media. Also, a beautifully presented book with culturally appropriate style and decoration can make a special gift between friends.

Norms

Definition: "Norms" is shorthand for the relational dimension of a community. The key facets of this dimension include trust and trustworthiness, norms and sanctions, obligations and expectations, and identity and identification (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:244). Regarding identity and identification, Myers notes: "I … articulate the twin goals of transformational development as changed people and just and peaceful relationships. By 'changed people' I mean people who have discovered their true identity as children of God and who have recovered their true vocation as faithful and productive stewards of gifts from God for the well-being of all" (Myers 2011:17).

Wright (1992) identifies praxis and symbol as two core components of any community's worldview. Both connect to the relational dimension, whilst also feeding into the stories a community tells (see next section). A Christian community's praxis will include how it conducts its missionary activity, its sacraments, and its worship. That praxis will also aim to develop a strong, clear ethical code which is based on Scripture. As for symbols, Wright (1992:366ff) observes that Cross, Church and creed were three key cultural symbols of the early New Testament Church.

How to Analyse: The challenges of discovering a community's praxis and symbols illustrate the important role of anthropological research and reflection. At an early stage in the life of a community's church, such praxis and symbols should be studied. Consideration should also be given to the bridges and barriers (Hill and Hill 2008) created by the similarities and differences between local and biblically sanctioned practices.

Implications for Practice: With regard to bridges, Escobar observes that "Protestants have emphasised true doctrine as a mark of the church, but at the expense of understanding the value of ritual and symbol" (Escobar 2000:38). Pikkert notes the importance for Muslim-background Jesus followers of simple spiritual disciplines such as *lectio divina*, chanting, and fasting as they adjust from a "clear and direct religion" to a "more spiritually-oriented faith system" (Pikkert 2008:207). Both of these observations argue for project work which intentionally catalyses the development of culturally appropriate, Christian praxis, and symbols in the community. Whether the church grows in large numbers or not, it is certainly called to be a witness for Christ to the community that surrounds it (Matthew 5:14-16).

Narratives

Definition: "Narratives" allude to a community's cognitive dimension. From a Christian perspective, they may include the community's story of redemption, as well as the extent to which they engage in indigenous theologizing in their local language. DeLoach argues for Bible translation always to be considered part of a larger process of experiencing God through the creation of local theologies (DeLoach 2016:225ff). Wright notes that human life "can be seen as grounded in and constituted by the implicit or explicit stories which humans tell themselves and one another" (Wright 1992:38). He goes on to note that stories also provide a means by which views of the world may be challenged.

Freire highlights the importance of culture; of remembering community history (hence the value of trauma healing and its effect on perception); and, of generative themes, which connect to worldviews and shared narratives (Freire 1970:95ff). When Paul told the Roman, Gentile Christians that they had been grafted into the Jewish olive tree (Romans 11:17ff), he was including an invitation to participate in the story of Israel. A parallel process of joining a new narrative occurs whenever members of any community find themselves being incorporated into the worldwide Church.

How to Analyse: Franklin (2012) observes:

When engaging with contemporary culture the important factor, according to Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk (2006:181) is, 'learning to communicate the biblical stories that connect with the underlying cultural narratives that dominate' most people's lives. This provides a discovery in 'how to indwell the Scriptures… with the narrative presence of God, who invites us into a story that reads and shapes us' (2006:34).

Again, anthropological research is crucial: What are the stories parents tell their children? Who are the community's heroes, and what did they do? In multilingual communities, it will be important to differentiate the various core narratives in each of the cultures that the multiple languages spoken represent, particularly for the sake of identifying which narratives have emotive power and truly define identity and motivate behaviour. Earlier, the importance of identifying cultural bridges that can facilitate comprehension and acceptance of the gospel was mentioned. Richardson's (1974) story of the *Peace Child* concept amongst the Sawi people is a classic example.

Implications for Practice: Padilla has observed that "Latin America is a continent of people who have been baptized but not evangelized" (Padilla 1985:118). It is no good having the norms without the narrative!

Jore (2018) points out that a complete Bible does not meet the complete product need of the church in any given speech community (what he terms "the lingual church"). If their spiritual needs are to be fully met by resources in that speech variety, a Bible dictionary, commentaries, and other study tools will eventually be required to reinforce the gospel narrative that Scripture provides.

As for the style of the narrative, Pikkert cites Meral (2005:213) to note that

the Middle Eastern mind is not exclusively linear like the Western or cyclical like the Indian.… Knowledge is not processed at the practical level but at the ideological or heart level. Thus a Middle Eastern theology … will use poetry, heart-felt stories and spiritual reflections. Instead of being systematic, it will be a romantic theology written in the tradition of the Confessions of St. Augustine (Pikkert 2008:207).

Bridging and Bonding

For a long time, the Bible translation movement posited a one-to-one relationship between a language community and its vernacular. It assumed that the network ties in a community without effective access to the whole counsel of God were bonding ties by default. Now the movement is realising that factors such as multilingualism, urbanisation, and migration mean that many communities have multiple identities and speech varieties. Much of their social capital investment may be of the bridging kind.

Padilla points out that

The New Testament contains no example of a local church with a membership that had been taken by the apostles from a single homogeneous unit, unless the term homogeneous unit means no more than a group of people with a common language. By contrast, it provides plenty of examples of how the barriers had been abolished in the new humanity (Padilla 1985:147).

He goes on:

Eradicating boundaries between races, and between slaves and free men, enables the Church to be not a quotation mark that simply reflects society, but an embodied

question-mark that challenges the values of the world. This will build up the kind of church which is the firstfruits of a new humanity made up of persons from every tribe, tongue, people and nation who will sing in unison a new song to the Lamb (Padilla 1985:150).

Although the gospel must be preached to every nation, and perhaps even to every clan (Piper 1993:208), this does not imply that there must be a church consisting exclusively of members of each nation/clan/language. Some stable multilingual churches will be happy using different languages in different domains, even for different parts of a church meeting.

Watters (2000) makes a case for Scriptures in diglot or triglot form, which would certainly help in such multilingual situations. The non-vernacular language(s) might even include a modern language of wider communication and/or an interlinearized biblical language text.

On the question of whether portions can automatically be assumed sufficient, Jore demurs: "It is rare for lingual church leaders to decide for themselves that they do not need a translation of the whole Bible in their language and in multiple formats. They consider it extremely important that their people group also be among the ones who understand the 'whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27)" (Jore 2018:11)

Linking

Social "linking capital" (an innovation of Woolcock 2001) describes those social networks with access to institutional power. To posit a spiritual analogy: in the divine economy linking capital constitutes access to God's power, one facet of which is the support local congregations can receive from the worldwide Church (see especially Jore 2018:26f). Such support must have two characteristics. One is *humility*, helped wherever mission agencies embrace a servant posture. Campbell (2006) points out that humility is at the heart of redemption, and cross-cultural workers must be broken if they are to see a release of divine blessing. Similarly, Freire (1970) contains dire warnings for those external to the community who seek to help "the oppressed".

Escobar perceived how Stott shifted attention in 1966 from the Great Commission to the

… almost forgotten text of John 20:21. Here we have not only a mandate for mission, but also a model of mission style: in obedience to the loving design of the Father, patterned by the example of Jesus Christ, and driven by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the cross, Jesus Christ died for our salvation and also left a pattern for our missionary life.… Mission requires orthopraxis as well as orthodoxy (Escobar 2000:44).

The second necessary characteristic of support from the worldwide church is that it be *localized*, consisting of "prayerful, physically present people." Padilla goes on to state, "Any attempt to communicate the gospel without an initial profound identification of the communicator with the receiving culture is sub-Christian. Consider the anthropomorphic language of the Bible: God walks in the garden in the cool of the day. The Logos pitched his tent in a definite spot in time and space" (Padilla 1985:87).

Likewise, Jesus sent out his message by means of disciples, the leaders in Acts 15 sent believers to accompany their letter, and Paul sent messengers. Dayton and Fraser observe:

More and more we are inserting technology between us and those we seek to evangelize. Our contacts are increasingly more impersonal and fleeting. Yet all our studies indicate that the nature and length of contact is the single most important

element in evangelism. … There is something contradictory about trying to create an indigenous church by using nonindigenous methods (Dayton and Fraser 1980:259-60).

These observations should inform any attempt by Christians in the northern hemisphere to serve the Church in other parts of the world.

Application to Two Communities in West Asia

This section sketches out some brief examples of how these spiritual capital principles apply to two languages in West Asia: a national language and a local language, referred to here as Davlati and Mahali respectively.

Davlati has a young church with dense, multiplex Christian *social networks* which are mostly urban. The church is growing only very slowly in most rural contexts. "Social capital" networks include a number which use Russian through family, education, or work connections, again especially in the cities, where the church happens to be strongest. This prevalence of Russian speakers is reflected in a primarily Russian-speaking, urban church. But in rural areas Russian is fading, so whole-Bible access for the country as a whole must be in Davlati. As noted above, the high number of work migrants in Russia has significant Scripture engagement implications for both product choice and distribution mechanisms.

The Mahali church is very small, and most Christian networks are in the diaspora community outside the heartland. There is therefore an urgent need for believers to reach across their networks with the good news. They need portions of Scripture in an accessible format which are easily shareable.

The Mahali church exhibits heavy bridging social capital investment in Russian but high bonding social capital in the vernacular. Bilingual proficiency is high, but the emotions are engaged mainly by the local language, which also helps define community identity. (One speaker exhibited no interest in vernacular Scripture products until that person heard a psalm in the vernacular, sung in the local style. Suddenly, as the emotions were engaged, the formerly disinterested attitude radically changed.) A key sociolinguistic implication is the value of language development, to guard against language shift by stabilising and even increasing the number of domains in which the vernacular is widely used. As for Scripture engagement, it would seem wise to do Bible translation with an emphasis on the kinds of materials that can establish what Ralph Winter termed "an indigenous beachhead" (Winter 1984:136), while also complementing for believers what they already have in Russian, e.g. giving them the option to sing and to preach in either language. Some of the ideas for Scripture engagement delineated above on kinship and geographical location are also relevant here.

As for *norms*, one example springs from the Muslim background of both groups and the questions such a background raised about the appropriate place to worship. Pikkert points out that the house church movement has not really taken off in the Middle East, where people are more comfortable worshipping in a place designated for worship than in a home: "This is partly because the state tends to view secret religious meetings with suspicion, and partly because, traditionally, the mosque … as opposed to the home, is the place of worship as well as for communal activities on behalf of the larger body of believers" (Pikkert 2008:205). Materials to facilitate corporate prayer, as well as songbooks, recordings, and Scripture-based songs, will all help to support worship together.

Regarding *narratives*, these communities' shared cultural knowledge suggests that lives of the prophets anthologies and stories connected with migration and return (see above), or which relate to farming or mountain cultures, would all be helpful. The Mahali are Ismaili, and they have signalled that symbolic literature (e.g. the Gospel of John with its seven signs) is of particular interest. Meanwhile, the history of literature in the region has created a dichotomy between Scripture, which should be written and in a high register, and Scripture-based stories, which can be audio-visual. Alongside the fashion for storying and the repackaging of Scripture, the many testimonies of the impact of written biblical books in their own right, such as the Gospels and the books of Genesis and Exodus should not be overlooked. Abridgements may help catch an audience's attention initially, because they are shorter; however, sooner or later, interested audiences will need more.

Conclusions

Bandy (2019) highlights the critical importance of language program planning, to establish the *skopos* of any translation work and achieve community buy-in to Scripture and Scripture engagement activities.

Such planning must be collaborative, owned and led as much as possible by the community, perhaps through participatory methods. Language surveyors, Scripture engagement specialists, and generalist language team members can together facilitate this work to research and monitor spiritual capital dimensions alongside social capital ones.

Research questions, alongside analysis of the "Eight Conditions for Scripture Engagement" (Dye 2009), will include:

- What is the nature of the community's (bonding and bridging) social and spiritual networks?
- How can these be leveraged to spread the Good News?
- What are the community's core religious practices and symbols?
- What are the community's stories?
- How can Scripture best intersect with and reshape these practices, symbols and stories?

For the Church to reach maturity requires a richly networked community, infused with a shared narrative (DNA is a metaphor, the gospel is the story) and existing in relationships of love with God, each other, and the world.

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Friendship and Identification on Multicultural Fields

Fred Lewis

Abstract

American missionaries assume that friendship is the relational basis of a multicultural field (MCF). Field is preferable to team because the metaphor of team privileges an American conception of the group above how field members from the Global South may conceive of it. Given the inherent diversity of a MCF, it is unlikely the individual identities and interests of U.S.-Americans will overlap extensively with the collective identities and interests of MCF members from the Global South, making identification problematic. Identification is possible through application of the Social Identity Approach (SIA): All field members share a common social identity as believers.

Key Words: collectivists, friendship, identification, identity, individualists, Social Identity Approach

Introduction

A friend is someone who gets you, who understands you better than others. We have old friends, best friends, church friends, baseball friends, and other types of friends. Perhaps you realize an acquaintance is your kind of person – a new friend – when you agree that finding the perfect dessert is a quest worth the cost! Friends have things in common.

Friends identify with each other. *To identify with* means to put in the same category or be in the same class. U.S.-Americans generally make friends when there's an overlap of one or more aspects of each other's identities (Brewer and Gardner 1996:86). Although identity is conceptualized in many ways (Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmert 2007:S3), we conceive of identity as personal or individual, expressed as statements or convictions in answer to the question, Who am I? For U.S.-Americans, an answer usually comes out of a sense of each person's unique, inner distinctiveness, her attributes, traits, preferences, attitudes, and thoughts (Markus and Kitayama 1991:226).

Metaphors Matter

Which brings us to multicultural fields. In this article, I treat multicultural and intercultural as full synonyms, stipulating that at least three cultures must be represented on a field for it to be labeled multicultural. I prefer using field instead of team because team is an American metaphor, when by definition a multicultural team *isn't* and *can't* be an American group. In addition, using the metaphor of team privileges an American conception of a multicultural field (MCF) above how fellow field members of the Global South may conceive of it.

Several years ago I visited a field that was composed of three kinds of North Americans: missionaries from Puerto Rico, from Canada, and from the U.S. A relative of the Puerto Rican couple visited them on the field. The Puerto Rican missionaries naturally assumed that their visiting relative was a full field member. An inference was that the Puerto Rican couple conceived of the field as an extended family. Their relative was everybody else's relative, too. Canadian and U.S. missionaries naturally objected to the inclusion of a relative as a field

member. She didn't qualify, because she hadn't jumped through the hoops necessary to be considered a field member. The underlying metaphors of the Puerto Rican missionaries and their U.S. and Canadian counterparts of what the field really was were different. Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2002:4-5) explain that the metaphor employed to describe a group of people frames both how individuals think about the group and the role expectations group members have of each other.

Consequences of Individualistic Cultural Assumptions

Previously I noted our (U.S.-American) individualistic conception of identity. We also have an individualistic conception of group. John Turner (1984) writes that for individualists "'group' is merely a convenient label for the individuals that comprise it and nothing more" (519). Obviously, then, a group can't have its own, distinctive identity. Moreover, we believe that individual needs and interests are more important than group needs and interests. Individualists look after themselves and ignore "group interests when they conflict with personal desires" (Gundlach, Zivnuska, and Stoner 2006:1608). However, working with others towards the achievement of group goals is fine, as long as doing so furthers one's own, personal self-interest (Chen, Chen, and Meindl 1998:290).

I find these descriptions uncomfortable and chilling. It is also disheartening to read (Gundlach et al. 2006) that an extensive "body of research has shown that, even when other team-related variables are taken into consideration, individualism–collectivism has a significant and unique influence on team performance, and that *individualistic team members negatively influence team performance*" (emphasis added) (1604).

Several years ago I was included in a Skype conversation with an agency's leaders. There was general agreement that their missionaries were failing to identify with their MCTs, and that their lack of identification was the source of many problems. The purpose of this article is to help American missionaries identify with their MCFs. An aid to identification includes gaining a better understanding of collectivists' viewpoint to promote more realistic expectations in intercultural encounters. The Bible also has a contribution to make towards identification, as does the Social Identity Approach.

Culture, Friendship, Group, and Identity

As a step forward, we return to friendship. U.S.-Americans want to make individual friends with other field members. Thus, it came as a surprise when I learned that the Russian word for friend (*drūg*) meant life-long friend, the kind of friend you can call at 3 a.m., and it's ok. Russian has another word (*znakomy*) that means acquaintance. I served as a missionary in Ukraine and Russia for eight years. It was more likely I could be a *znakomy* (acquaintance) than a *drūg* to a Russian man. Ukrainians and Russians were inevitably disappointed by innocent U.S.-Americans who failed to meet the high expectations they unwittingly raised by presumptuously calling acquaintances *friends*. On a MCF, if friendship is to be the basis of relationships – which is our American assumption – whose definition of *drūg* do we use?

Collectivistic Assumptions about Group and Identity

In contrast to our individualistic, pop-in-and-out style of friendships, Chen et al. (1998) write that collectivists "are more likely to form and stay in a few, stable, and closely knit groups" (298). Like my Russian example of friendship, a collectivist's friends are usually people she's

known a long time. It is noteworthy, then, that the U.S. scores perhaps the highest on individualism of any country in the world. Comparing online country information is a simple, accessible way of verifying the pervasive character of U.S. individualism (Hofstede Insights 2020).

Rather than our U.S. culturally based assumption that the individual is primary – our individualistic assumptions about life aren't written into the fabric of the universe – a collectivist's culturally based assumption is that the group is primary. A collectivist asks, Who are we? Identity is conceived of socially or collectively (Ellmers 2004:461; Gundlach et al. 1996:1609-1610). Thus, a group has its own identity distinct from the individuals who comprise it (Hogg et al. 2004:251). The needs and interests of the group outweigh the needs and interests of the individual (Chen et al. 1998:289). A true collectivist monitors and adjusts her inner desires, emotions, and goals to maintain the harmony of the group (Markus and Kitayama 1991:227). Similarly, while individualists tend to conceive of teamwork as simply the sum of individual efforts, collectivists see it as an expression of the natural interdependence of persons and of interpersonal relationships (Gundlach et al. 1996:1614). Individualists want to receive individual recognition; a collectivist wants the group to shine (Gundlach et al. 1996:1610).

Can We Be Friends?

Therefore, given the inherent diversity of a MCF, it is unlikely the individual identities and interests of U.S.-Americans will overlap extensively with the collective identities and interests of MCF members from the Global South. It will probably be harder for the latter to find very many individuals on a MCF who are ready-made to become their friends.

Does this mean that U.S.-Americans can't have any friends at all among collectivists on a MCF? No. However, it is unrealistic for U.S.-American missionaries to think they will *quickly* make friends with MCF members from the Global South, nearly all of whom are collectivists. Indeed, it may take longer to develop a friendship with a MCF member from the Global South than most are accustomed to or expect. While a friendship may be forming, it would be prudent not to mistake friendliness for friendship. Over a period of time, friendship with a collectivist can be built on shared experiences *after* arrival on the field and on newly created shared interests.

What is the Relational Basis of a MCF?

Previously I asserted that U.S.-Americans assume that friendship is the basis of relationships. It follows that we view friendship as the basis of community, also. In my experience with U.S.-American believers, when meeting a new person we make overtures to friendship first, and then later talk about Christ or Christian things. It seems we implicitly believe that a group is formed, maintained, and grows through the interpersonal attraction of one individual to another. As Turner (1984) says, the unity or cohesiveness of a group "tends to be equated with interpersonal attraction, i.e. attraction to individual members" (519).

Yet the basis of a MCF conceived of as a *Christian* community cannot be friendship. Why? There are just too many differences in personal histories, identity concepts, and cultural assumptions between collectivists and individualists.

Scripture provides a way forward. Paul's ministry certainly brought different people groups into close and repeated contact with each other in local churches. To simplify, his rhetorical strategy to overcome differences was to call attention to what they had in common in Christ: all believers

have Abraham as their father (Gal. 3:6-7); Jesus is elder brother of us all, and all believers are siblings (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11, 17a); we all are parts of the one Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5); we all have equal standing in Christ (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). God in Christ is bringing about the reunion of humanity, whose disunity God decreed in response to sin at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7-9; Eph. 2:14-15). Perhaps Paul's argument in Rom. 14:1-15:13 was a call for *Jews and Gentiles* conceived of as two distinct groups in the church in Rome to stop judging each other? "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.... Christ has become a servant of the Jews ... to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God" (Rom. 15:7a, 8, 9a). Old Testament quotations about Gentiles and Messiah follow in Rom. 15:9b-12.

Observe that in the third sentence of the above paragraph *before* the colon ("... strategy to overcome differences was to call attention to what they had in common in Christ") I referred to people groups, while what *follows* the colon ("all believers...") individualists would naturally understand in an individualistic way. Yet none of the peoples who were living in the Eastern Mediterranean region in the first century C.E. were culturally Westerners in any sense of the word, and none of them were individualistic U.S.-Americans. Malina (2001) speaks of "the nonindividualistic, strongly group-oriented, collectivistic self-awareness that seems to have been typical of the first-century people in our New Testament" (60). David deSilva (2000) writes that a "conception of people of God as kin takes a particularly Christ-centered focus [and] gives the early church *a sense of shared identity* and binds the members together *in the solidarity of the kinship bond*" (emphasis added) (200).

What Paul says is obviously true, but there's a catch. Although his words resonated with collectivistically-minded members of people groups in the Eastern Mediterranean in the first century CE, often enough they do not resonate with individualists. As individualists, our first identity move is to separate ourselves from others. We rarely go looking for a sense of *shared* identity with anyone or any group. We accept Paul's statements as true in a formal sense but may not allow his words to disturb our sense of individual identity. It is not that we never feel a sense of group or shared identity with believers of other cultural, ethnic, and theological traditions; it is just not the norm.

Although Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not thinking about a MCF when he wrote *Life Together* (1954), his words are helpful here: "I am a brother to another person through what Jesus Christ did for me and to me.... Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community.... Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us" (25).

What a man is in himself sounds a lot like how we conceive of individual identity, for example our unique, internal traits and interests. Such assumed individualism, however – if we apply what Bonhoeffer says to a MCF – is *not* what constitutes the basis of community for a MCF. Yet that is exactly what many U.S.-American missionaries who serve on a MCF try to do – and it doesn't work, can't work.

What seems to happen is that we – probably with little or no reflection – try to build community on other bases and values. To build a "real team," must we first all agree to be guided by the Western values of egalitarianism and efficiency? Must we first affirm commitment to the same philosophy of ministry? Agree on the proper role of women? Agree on how money should and should not be used in field ministries? Must we first agree on a common set of procedures and

priorities? If the answer in practice is yes, then Christian community is not built on Jesus but on agreement regarding those other things *and* Jesus or *instead of* Jesus.

It might be that some at this point may object. Aren't I misunderstanding or perhaps even mischaracterizing the purpose of getting agreement when a group forms regarding the issues I just named? Isn't the goal of getting agreement about those and similar matters one of avoiding or at least minimizing conflict? Doesn't a community have to agree on how to go about various activities? Aren't we talking about believers who are already committed to Christ? Well, yes.

However, I am not talking about the development of a MCF nor how they may jell as a group. I am not talking about group cohesiveness, nor am I talking about how a MCF may function in its ministries. I am talking about the basis of a special kind of Christian community, a MCF. What every MCF member has in common with all other MCF members is *Jesus*. *He* is the basis of community, and everything else is secondary. Jesus through His Spirit binds us together, not similar philosophies of ministry, not similar backgrounds or interests, not theological agreement on the finer points of doctrine, not a common language or culture – although any one or many of these elements may be included in a person's individual identity and may be very important for a whole MCF.

For a MCF to work, it is not enough that *individual* believers are committed to Christ. Saying it that way merely repeats an individualistic bias that groups are no more than a collection of individuals. Although we know intellectually that Jesus connects us to each other (Rom. 12:5b), our socialization as U.S.-Americans predisposes us to base relationships on shared secondary characteristics, a practice that works against identification.

Identification through Application of the Social Identity Approach

What might help us to resonate with the truth of Rom. 12:5b? What can be done so that we may become a positive influence on a MCF instead of a negative one? The Social Identity Approach (SIA) offers a way forward. SIA consists of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT). SIT says that individuals have social identities as well as individual identities.

What might it mean for U.S.-Americans to have *social* identities? About ten years ago my wife first attended the International Congress on Language Learning in Colorado. When she came home, she told everyone that she had found her people group! That is, she met a group of people who like her ate, breathed, talked, and dreamed language learning. Her missionary experience was wrapped up in learning Lukonjo (the language of the tribe we worked with in Uganda) and Russian, spoken where we lived in Ukraine and Russia. Merely learning those languages led to teaching others how to learn any language for missionary service, as well as coaching language coaches to better help their language learners. One of my wife's social identities is that of ICLL member.

The fact is, we belong to several groups at the same time, and not all of them are professional associations. Church member and mission agency member are social identities, even if the sending agency is a local church. Perhaps 20 years ago my wife and I were visiting a supporting church. A member of that church said that conservative theology and conservative politics go together. In 2016 an estimated 80% of evangelicals voted for Trump. For many U.S.-American evangelicals, their political identity grows out of or is attached to a theological, social, and perhaps denominational identity. All of these are examples of social identities.

U.S.-American social psychology has typically focused on the individual, while European social psychology has been more interested in how people interact with each other in groups (Hogg 2006:114). SIT "attempts to explain large-scale, shared uniformities in social behavior" (Turner and Oakes 1986:240), recognizing that individuals "derive a part of their self-concept from the social groups and categories they belong to" (Hogg and Reid 2006:9). The social identities of U.S.-Americans are real and influential (Reicher et al. 2010:12), even though they are not a primary source of identity like they are for collectivists. Our social identities do not erase or supplant our individual identities: rather, *we add them to* our individual identities (Hogg 2006:115).

Where SIT studies social identities, Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) focuses on how individuals come to consider themselves to be group members. Turner and Oakes (2006) say that reckoning yourself as a member of a group is "a cognitive grouping of the self" with others perceived to be like or similar to yourself (240). The similarities between the self and existing group members are overlapping *social* identities, which may or may not include overlapping individual identities.

While we tend to assume that friendship with an existing member of a group precedes joining it, SCT recognizes that at least sometimes friendship among group members may be a result of group membership. SCT says that categorizing yourself as a member of a group is a conscious choice (Hogg and Reid 2006:12), while individualists believe that people join groups as a result of interpersonal attraction, or liking. If joining a group really comes out of liking someone already in a group, then it is an emotional process or decision, not a deliberate or cognitive one.

Emotions and Identification

At this point, implicit beliefs about emotions become relevant. For example, if I am not naturally drawn to others on a MCF, then it is not my fault if I am repelled by them. After all, "I can't help how I feel." If identification with a MCF is governed by emotions – which I may implicitly believe to be beyond my control – then I am not obliged to identify. When I recognize that my individual identity overlaps very little with the social identities of those from the Global South, then I do not have to continue trying. I can, instead, make friends with fellow Westerners, if not among fellow U.S.-Americans only.

Recent findings of cognitive neuroscientists offer a more accurate picture, clearly indicating that thinking and feeling, cognition and affect, work together in the brain (Barrett 2017:17-22; Damasio 1999:xv-xvii;). In other words, there is more emotional content in a decision to categorize oneself as a member of a group than SCT may seem to suppose. There is also more cognitive content in a decision to join a group than we U.S.-Americans may characteristically perceive. What is needed is the practice of emotion regulation, which is not a matter of controlling or subduing unruly or irrational emotional impulses. Emotion regulation recognizes that we can indirectly modify how we feel by changing how we think (Elliott 2006:38; Linehan 2015:318-415).

Application

We can change how we feel about social identities by changing how we think about them. Becoming aware that we already have multiple, already-existing social identities *that matter to us* in addition to our individual identities is a first step. One of those social identities is as a

member of Christ's Body or of God's Family. MCF members from the Global South share these social identities with us. In fact, those social identities in fact existed between U.S.-American believers and those from the Global South from the time they came to Christ.

So then, ask new U.S.-American missionaries to add MCF member to their current list of social identities. It is a choice. Ask American missionaries to name which social identities are in fact more important than others. Who does the asking? Agency leaders in the States, field leaders, field members. Individualists and collectivists can identify with each other, based on the reality of a shared social identity in Christ. That is a solid basis for a Christian community. These truths or realities need to be repeated and alluded to at appropriate times for feelings to change.

In addition, although many U.S.-Americans do not place a high value on ceremonies as such, a simple ceremony of welcome and inclusion – "now you are one of us" – may encourage new missionaries to identify with their MCF. Instead of waiting for new missionaries to make the first move to include themselves in the group, reach out repeatedly to include them. Talk about who everyone on the MCF already had in common before they even met.

Sometimes saying things out loud prompts emotions to accompany the words. Perhaps we might modify Ruth's words to Naomi in Ruth 1:16 as an aid to identification?

> *Where these people go, I will go,*
> *Where they stay, I will stay.*
> *These people will be (or are) my people,*
> *Their God is my God.*

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Reversion:
Why do 'Christian Converts' from Islam Return to their Old Religion?
What Can Be Done to Prevent It?

John Span

Abstract

There is much to celebrate worldwide in terms of unprecedented numbers of Muslims coming to know the Lord Jesus as their Savior. The global church has the welcome challenge of discipling these new worshippers of the biblical Jesus and to integrate them into the life of the church. These are wonderful challenges to face.

At the same time, just as there are encouraging statistics of growing numbers of ex-Muslims now in Christ (xMnCs), there is a statistic that few missionaries want to talk about. It is the worrisome number of so-called converts who return to Islam. Patrick Johnstone's engaging question below sets the tone for this study, which establishes the need for this research, briefly examines biblical and qur'anic terms for apostasy, considers a number of historical examples, identifies common themes, and then proposes some antidotes. Concerning those who fall away, Johnstone (2008:12) asks: "How many of those who find the pressures too hard, the Christians around them too unwelcoming, or the replacement for the close-knit societal and family network such large hurdles that they leave their new faith in Christ and return to Islam?"

Key Words: antidotes, apostasy, Parable of the Sower, reversion

Introduction

In 1991, a veteran missionary, Ken Wycherley, who had planted churches in several Muslim-majority cities, reported that between 80 to 90% of the so-called converts from Islam returned to Islam in a short time. His observation was that the cause of this phenomenon was "incomplete conversion" and what he called "premature births" (Wycherley as cited by Greenlee 1996:26). Erich Bridges reported a similar statistic in a 1997 article, in which he interviewed a long-term missionary with the Southern Baptist Convention, working in the Middle East. This person reported that frequently these converts are alone and "don't have fellowship with other believers. Most of them revert to Islam after a short time. Some say 90 percent of the Muslim converts in the Middle East have reverted to Islam—if not to agnosticism—within the first year after they decide to follow Christ" (Bridges 1997:1).

In 2004, Nik Ripken reported on a global study on the persecution of Christians. He noted an alarming number of Christian women who had come out of Islam returning to their former religion when their husbands died or where martyred (Ripken 2004). Further details are below.

In 2005, Thomas Walsh conducted a study of British ex-Muslims and their integration into the church. He interviewed people from varied backgrounds, including 'Paul' of Punjabi background and 'Deborah' of Iranian background (Walsh 2005:48). Both had been Christians for over 20 years, and they suggested that reversion to Islam often occurs when the church does not address "the totality of life" among ex-Muslim converts. Paul cited a statistic of 70 to 90% who return to Islam when the "social, cultural, political and also spiritual raison d'être" of Islam are not addressed by the church.

Two different doctoral dissertations by Craig Dunning and Kathryn Kraft, both of which document conversions by Muslims to Christianity, acknowledge the need for further study on the phenomenon of reversions (Dunning 2014:291; Kraft 2007:214).

These studies, albeit with somewhat limited data, suggest that reversions are occurring, and perhaps at a much higher rate than has been admitted by the Christian mission enterprise before.

Apostasy and "Double Apostasy"

A study of both the Bible and the Qur'an shows that they are aware of the possibility of adherents of a religion to depart from it. Both of these texts describe this process as apostasy. The Old Testament uses Hebrew terms derived from the root *sh-b* or "'to turn/return'," also translated as "backsliding" [Heb. *mᵉšûbâ*] (Jer 2:19; 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 22; 5:6; 8:5; 14:7; Hos 14:5). In the New Testament, two main words are used to describe the phenomenon of "falling away": *aphístēmi* is used in Jesus' parable of the Sower describing the seed that had no root (also I Tim 4:1), and *parapíptōto* describes those who had tasted "the heavenly gift" and then had "fallen away" (Heb 6:4–6). Elsewhere, apostasy could apply to the action of one who puts his "hand to the plow and looks back" (Lk 9:62), to Demas (2 Tim 4:10) whom the apostle Paul described as a deserter who "loved the world," and to descriptions of false teachers who were once part of a local body of believers (Acts 20:29).

The Qur'an uses the *r-d-d* word stem which contains the idea of turning back/returning/denial/refusal (Q.2:217; 5:54; 47:25). The terms *radd* (apostasy) or *murtadd* (apostate/renegade/turncoat) are derived from that r-d-d stem.

In this study, we will focus strictly on reversions back to Islam [Muslim→Christian→Muslim]. We will see that the first part of the progression, (M→C), as well as the response of Islam to this stage, have a large influence on the second part (C→M).

Prior to proceeding further with this investigation, we must define a few terms. We are using the term "reversions" to mean a return back to a former state; in this case, it is used to describe the action of Muslims who claimed a Christian profession and then returned to Islam. Others have called these "reconversions," "deconversions," "relapses," or "attrition." At times, Muslims have stated that their movement away from a religion to Islam is not a conversion, but a reversion, because they suggest that Islam is the original primordial religion, and thus they say that a person is simply returning to its source. When we speak of conversion, we use it to describe M→C as the process whereby a person consciously becomes an informed worshipper of the biblical Jesus, via true repentance and faith, and has a conscious identity of being a new creation in Christ and a part of his body of worldwide believers.

If we combine Islamic and Christian points of view, these persons could be said to be "double apostates" as they have apostatized both in the eyes of Islam and Christianity. It is outside of the scope of this paper to delineate the schools of thought in Islam on the punishment for apostasy, but suffice it to say that an Islamic attitude is always that the apostate is a polluting element in the Muslim community and must be persuaded to return to the *ummah* in this life, also with the threat of eternal punishment in the next life. These dynamics appear in some of the anecdotes below.

Pressures to Return to Islam

The following accounts are of men and women who left Islam to follow Christ and who encountered various pressures to return to Islam. These accounts are from India, Indonesia, Canada, Bangladesh, North Africa, Egypt, South Africa, and the Middle East.

The Story of Former Muslim Women

In her study of conversion experiences in Israel/Palestine, Kathryn Kraft observed the pressures to revert back to Islam, and one case of actual reversion among the women she interviewed. In the first case, a woman became a Christian a few months after her husband and her family used various inducements to facilitate her return to Islam. Fortunately, she rejected them. Kraft's first-hand report reads, "My brother called my family [in our home country] and told them. They started talking to and about me. They would send gifts, nice gifts (sweets, flowers...) with Quranic verses slipped in them, to try to call me back to Islam. …To this day, they think my faith is really [my husband's] fault and they don't even really blame me in some ways" (Kraft 2007:140).

Kraft also reported that, after assembling all of the data of her interviews, she learned that one of the interviewees had returned to Islam, even though she presented herself as a bona fide Christian during the interview process. Kraft learned from some of her Christian friends that this person may have been pretending to be a Christian (Kraft 2007:84-85).

Nik Ripken, who worked for many years in the Horn of Africa, collaborated with a number of researchers to conduct worldwide interviews of Christians enduring persecution (Ripken 2004). Data from 48 countries, involving 450 interviews, was collated and the results published. The study found that eight out of ten or 80% of xMnCs were male and 20% were female. Frequently these men had a three-to-five-year journey to Christian faith. They led their wives to the same faith, but over the course of only three-to-six months. The study also showed that "most" of these women "cannot describe a Christ-centered faith experience apart from her husband's" nor "articulate how to share her Christian faith with another woman." The section concludes with the sobering words, "many women reported to be MBBs [Muslim background believers] returned to Islam immediately following the death or martyrdom of their husbands" (Ripken, 2004:20).

Ripken's data raises questions about the quality of discipleship of these women, how much of an Islamic ethos is still in their homes, and how the local body of Christ engages these women. Similarly, Kraft's data shows the pressures on women to revert to Islam and the way that Islamic society ascribes a linkage of a woman's faith to that of her husband.

The Story of Nathaniel Sabat

Henry Martyn, famed missionary to India, had a translation helper with the Christian name Nathaniel Sabat. Sabat, whose given name was Jabal, arrived in India with a profession of faith due to witnessing the martyrdom of one of his friends and to reading the Bible. Local missionaries quickly baptized him. They sent him with a salary to Martyn, and in 1807 he began to help translating portions of the Bible into Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. In 1814, Sabat formally renounced Christianity and wrote a defense of Islam with the title, *The Sabatian Proofs which support the pillars of Muhammadan religion, and subvert the columns of the abrogated Christian faith* (Wali 1925). He printed 600 copies at his own expense and distributed them widely. Sabat stated that he had become a so-called Christian "only to comprehend and expose the doctrines of

Christianity." Later it was suggested that he had turned back to Christianity, but Islamic accounts of his life call that into question.

The Story of a 'Batak': A Man from Sumatra

In his account of 11 years of working among the Batak people of Sumatra, Gottfried Simon relates the challenges of the new life for converts out of Islam. He relates a letter that he had received from a fellow missionary detailing a Batak's own admission of a dual-life.

> The sorrow God has sent upon me is too great, and the temptation too severe. I cannot endure. I have become a Mohammedan that I may again have a wife. I have received my portion from God, like the Prodigal Son. I will consume it with riotous living. The good seed has fallen with me among thorns and been choked by them. I am now a lost sheep, which is lost in the wilderness. May other Christians not imitate my conduct. I have not become a Mohammedan because I really consider the religion of the Mohammedan a good one. I know that the Lord Jesus is alive and sitting at the right hand of God in heaven. Five of my people have already died as Christians. My purpose used to be never to be parted from them. My prayer now is that master (the missionary) and his wife would help me to lead my wife over to Christianity, so that I, like the Prodigal, may return from the far country to God our Father (Simon 1912:323-324).

Two Students

In his documentation of the process of conversions to Islam and to Christianity in South Africa, Andreas Maurer acknowledged the phenomenon of reversions back to Islam (Maurer 1999:161). Maurer's analysis shows that material inducements can be the cause of so-called conversions and that when they are removed, the person reverts. He relates the story of 'C2's' friend who came to South Africa to "find a better life," a job, and was attracted by the love of Christians and their witness. He attended Bible college for three months (just long enough to obtain a residency visa), was baptized, and made all the motions of "accepting" Christ prior to his return to Islam. Maurer observes that he simply used Christians for material advantage but doubts that he was a true convert at all.

A student of West African Muslim descent came to a Canadian Bible college (Eyewitness 2019). He came as a Christian and enrolled in the Bachelor's program. According to a fellow student, his story as the son of a village chief, his ethnic background, and his sports ability accorded him a "rock-star" status. At the Bible college, there were two groups of students: those who were serious about discipleship, and those who took alcohol consumption, bar hopping, and dancing as something to be flirted with. Diallo associated with the latter group during his stay. As much as Diallo showed healthy signs of respect for the book of the Bible and strongly objected to its use as a doorstop, worldly attractions and ties to his former identity as a Muslim of nobility exerted strong pulls on his life. Eventually, he left the Bible college and returned to Islam.

A Southeast Asian

Peter Kwang-Hee Yun relates a poignant story in his comprehensive study of converts to Christianity in Bangladesh. This narrative (with the pseudonym 'YO4') details responses to persecution by a former Muslim who became a Christian, the advice of the person who introduced this man to Christ, and the convert's self-preservation technique.

My friends were calling me a *guru* [leader or teacher]. But, after several days of the news being spread of my family's religious change, our village religious leaders called a social judgment meeting. They asked my family, "Did you become Christians?" I replied honestly "Yes." After listening to my answer, they decided to make us *ek ghore* [family which is banned]. They forbade us to get water for drinking and washing, communication with other neighbors, shopping at the local markets for foods.… After that, during the nights, they threw stones to my house and sometimes put excrement in my house. The son of a religious leader spit on my body. After suffering for one month, my father had had brain stroke. And, my body became very skinny. People said that Allah gave his punishment to the betrayer, meaning me. I called my gospel introducer, a pastor of my *Jama'at*. He said to me, "You have to endure these kinds of persecutions." With help of one Hindu family, we could survive for one year.

Next year, our village religious leaders called for another bigger meeting where they forced my family members to come back to Islam. They warned us, "Leave this village tonight if you want to keep Christians. Or you can *touba* [repent] your false and go back to being a Muslim." I thought that we don't have any land out of this house. We can't live outside of this place. That time, I called my pastor and he advised me to maintain Islam outside, but continue to have fellowship with our *Jama'at* and keep faith as followers of *'Isa*. They brought me to a field at night without my family and beat me. By persuasion of my father, we came back to Muslim family publicly. But, I do not attend any Muslim religious meetings. They had another idea to keep me a Muslim by marrying a Muslim woman. Being forced by community pressure, I married a Muslim woman without willing agreement of my parents and me. But, I still continued to present at my *Jama'at* from time to time without informing my family members and kept my faith in *'Isa* (Kwang-Hee Yun 2015:132).

Two Men from North Africa

Known as the first Egyptian convert to ask for an official change of religious status from Muslim to Christian, Mohammed Hegazy (b. 1982) converted in 1996 (Winer 2010:96). His conversion and his request to the authorities in 2007 invoked the wrath of his family, who eventually reported him to the authorities as an apostate. In 2008 his father openly stated, "I am going to try to talk to my son and convince him to return to Islam. If he refuses, I am going to kill him with my own hands." At that time Hegazy responded,

I would like to send a message to my dad. I saw what you said in the newspapers. You say you want to kill me; to shed my blood in public. But I love you so much because you are my dad and because Jesus taught me to love. I accepted Jesus Christ willingly and nobody forced me. I forgive you. No matter what decision you make. No matter what you do. To my dad and mom, I say Jesus Christ died to save me.

On July 30, 2016, however, Hegazy made a YouTube video in which he said the Islamic confession of faith, the shahadah, and announced that he left Christianity and returned to Islam. What are some of the factors that led to this reversion?

After his conversion, due to threats from family members, Hegazy and his family had to go into hiding. At this time he also documented abuses that Egyptian Christians were suffering and appeared on a US television channel, al-Hayat. Eventually, his wife and daughter fled to

Germany where they received asylum status. In 2009, a group of Islamists called for the charge of blasphemy against him, as they alleged that his departure from Islam cast it into a bad light.

In June 2014 he was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for his filming—without official authorization—the suffering of Christians in the Minya area, at the hands of local Muslims. Hegazy's lawyer, Kharam Ghobrial, states that during his imprisonment the authorities did everything possible to break his spirit, including physical and psychological abuse with Hegazy eventually becoming suicidal. His lawyer is convinced that Hegazy's YouTube video was scripted, done under pressure, and a self-survival tactic on his part. After his prompt release, Hegazy stated, "…But praise be to God who strengthens me in Islam. I am not coming today to talk about specific things, because it was a personal thing between a person and God. But I am coming today because I hurt a lot of people in my family and my friends and caused them a lot of problems" (Morning Star News 2016).

In his account of life and ministry in North Africa, Don Little relates the story of 'Mostafa,' a 23-year-old who had become a Christian and was discipled by his colleagues. Little observed that this young man was highly enthusiastic and was entrusted with a cell group of four new believers which he had helped to start. After a two-year absence, Little returned to find Mostafa struggling with his faith due to a "number of bad experiences with expatriate workers and fellow believers" (Little 2009:1). Mostafa's struggles persisted for three years, after which time he left the area, found a good job, married a Muslim wife, returned to Islam, and cut off all ties with his former house church. Little observed that seven years after a "brief stint" as a Christian believer Mostafa had completely returned to Islam.

Observations about These Stories

These stories show that there is an interplay between responses to persecution, to the motives of the convert, to the examples of surrounding Christians [whether nominal or committed], to missionaries, to the presentation of the gospel, and to subsequent discipleship. Several stories illustrate what Roland Miller described as the Islamic community's response to someone's apostasy:

> The essence of the blasphemous act [of conversion to Christianity] is the rupture of the fabric of the sacred community that God has chosen and graced. So serious is the sin considered to be that traditional Islam has even pre-empted the eschatological judgment of God by turning it into a case for immediate communal action against the erring person, ranging from social ostracism to death (Miller 2002:229).

Here are some more particular observations:

1. In the case of Christian women of a Muslim background, the study by Ripken would indicate that much training needs to be done for their Christian husbands and their churches to insist that they are deeply trained in the ways of the Lord. It appears that the Islamic idea that a woman is saved by her allegiance to her husband might still play a role in the fact that she might not have known her own identity in Christ.

2. Conversion to Christianity is very difficult and involves significant persecution from surrounding Muslims at the social, physical, economic and spiritual levels. One could say that the conversions of 'YO4' and Hegazy caused what could be described as a virulent autoimmune rejection reaction by local Muslims. Some writers have compared this reaction to transplant

rejection. It appears that Batak and Mostafa encountered much less overt persecution, but the temptation to compromise came through other avenues.

3. The first advice of the pastor of the worship gathering (*Jama'at*) to 'YO4' was to endure persecution even in the face of being called a "betrayer" and of having invoked the wrath of Allah. The second piece of advice (assuming it was the same pastor) as a response to increased persecution was to become a hybrid or chameleon Muslim-Christian.

4. The threats of the larger Islamic community of expulsion from his land were enough to cause 'YO4' to make concessions to their demands, including marrying a Muslim woman—something that Mostafa might have done willingly. In Batak's case, it was his desire to marry that caused him to present himself as a Muslim. 'YO4's' yielding to his father's urging also caused him to make concessions, going as far as to declare publicly his allegiance to his Muslim family. Hegazy also succumbed to family pressure and eventually moved in with his parents after his public declaration that he had left Christianity.

5. In the case of Diallo, the lures of earthly accolades and pleasures were very strong. Diallo thus maintained a "rock-star" status. For Hegazy, it is possible that the publicity and appearances on television caused him to have incurred the wrath of the authorities, and it is an open question as to whether this was wise in his local context. It is possible that the economic rewards of Mostafa's new job contributed to his departure from Christianity.

6. All interviewees gave appearances of having converted to Christianity. Some seemed genuine, and others spurious. Some were rushed into baptism (e.g. Sabat, women interviewees in Ripken's study) or received material benefits (e.g., Sabat, C2's friend).

7. 'YO4' was encouraged to maintain two identities, namely that of a Muslim and that of a follower of Jesus. It is possible that Sabat maintained a dual identity as a type of espionage, while Batak appears to be more of a crypto-Christian, and it is possible that Hegazy is the same.

8. It is unknown if 'YO4' had children, but we know that Hegazy has a daughter. A critical research need is to examine the second and third generation of xMnCs to see if they are still walking in the Christian faith.

9. Conflict with both expatriate and local believers played a role in the decline of Mostafa's Christian fervor.

Categories Influencing Reversions

An analysis of these stories suggests that six major areas of influence on reversions are possible. These areas do not operate independently but more as facets of a unified whole.

The first are what we will call "missionary induced" reversions. In these stories, one can see the effects of expatriates promising and delivering jobs, visas, and money, as well as putting some of these new converts on a pedestal. Part of the back-story, as Wycherley and others have observed, are the effects of preaching a shallow gospel and shallow sense of sin, allowing spurious repentance/conversions, and of a failure to outline the cost of discipleship. Conflict between missionaries and nationals also came into play.

A second area includes the motivations of converts [or so-called converts]. As much as the heart-motivation of a person is hard to know, it would appear that a few cases exhibited mixed

motives, as some sought to use Christians' kindness and largesse for their own personal gain. At times, the hidden goal was to gain better status via employment or acceptance into Bible schools. Sabat's own words would indicate that he was a type of "double-agent," pretending to learn about Christianity but using this knowledge to subvert Christianity.

Thirdly, persecution dynamics came into play. Some appeared to have had some preparation for the eventuality of suffering, but others seemed poorly prepared. Ripken observes that the degree to which missionaries have a solid biblical theology of suffering plays a vital role in their understudies. The degree to which a person was enfolded and upheld by a group of local Christians also played a role.

Theological dynamics that come into play include preaching and teaching on regeneration, repentance, conversion, the substance of the gospel, the sinfulness of sin, the cost of discipleship, and suffering.

Mission agency and sending church factors also seem to come into play. For example, if a mission agency acquiesces to the demands for success stories from sending churches, likely it will develop ways and means to return with a message such as "baptisms are booming." Also, these institutions have an eschatology of hastening the coming of Jesus and will likely develop outreach methods with a focus on "need for speed" and seek out methodologies that promise rapid multiplication (Wu 2014).

Finally, we consider church dynamics. The story from Ripken shows a need for discipleship programs that contain a healthy critique of local cultures and their influence. In this case, it appears that women and their husbands maintained a rather Islamic view of marriage, with women seen as less than valuable and, likely, the women maintaining a less than healthy dependence on their husbands for their salvation. In the case of Diallo, a factor that came into play was the quality of disciples who surrounded him. As much as Mostafa had other believers around him, his conflicts with them and other pressures caused him to drift. There have also been frequent reports of national established churches refusing to enfold new converts from Islam, and some ex-Muslims report that they are lonely and cut off both from their former Islamic social networks and now from Christian fellowship.

Ten Antidotes to Reversion

There is a growing body of literature that stresses the need for deep and healthy discipleship in converts from Islam. Most of these authors are painfully aware of the reality of reversion. Don Little and Nik Ripken have gone on to publish texts on suffering and discipleship (Little 2015; Ripken 2008). Others, such as Johnny Elbitar in his dissertation, "From Conversion to Assimilation: Developing a Missional Ecclesiology to Retain Converted Muslims to Christ in North America," see the need to accentuate retention strategies rather than increasing rates of conversion (Elbitar 2017). Sarah Yoon stresses the need for better discipleship methods among women (Yoon 2015).

What follows are highlights, rather than extensive treatments, of ten areas that could be implemented to prevent reversions.

a. Follow Wycherley's advice that acts of "costly discipleship" are important. Insist on a clear presentation of the cost of discipleship to seekers, along with highlighting stories of those who resisted the pressure to return to Islam (such as Kraft's interviewee).

b. Follow Wycherley and Ripken's advice that long rather than short, and deep rather than shallow, discipleship prior to baptism is critical.

c. Follow the advice of Thomas Walsh's interviewees that the enfolding of new believers out of Islam is critical, and have this enfolding address the "totality" of the old Islamic worldview as Ripken noted. The former Muslim Nur Armagan, echoed elsewhere, suggests that most reversions happen within two years of conversion, while rarely after five years (Armagan 2010; Meral 2006). He suggests three "safety nets" which can prevent reversions: relevant theology, the conscious integration of new believers into a Christian community, and a holistic discipleship strategy. This is very much a church-based approach. Similarly, James Pursley stresses that barriers to discipleship for those who have left Islam include theology, biblical narratives, spiritual disciplines, church attendance/discipline, finances, ethics, relationships, family, marriage, childrearing, and folk practices, as well as "residual influences of their former Muslim worldview and primary sources (Qur'an, *Hadith*, *Sirat*)". He recommends, "Muslim primary sources and worldviews must be intentionally deconstructed and reconstructed upon the Bible and the Christian worldview for the BMB to grow spiritually" (Pursley 2019:iv).

d. Examine the missionaries' motivations and whether the idol of success drives their efforts. Do the same for mission agencies and ask hard questions whether their lionizing of new converts from Islam has hindered more than helped.

e. Depend on local believers, as Ripken and others have observed, to look for telltale signs of spurious conversions, as well as to entrust discipleship to mature local believers.

f. Utilize methods of gospel presentation that preach the whole counsel of God, along with the need for conviction of sin, genuine repentance, and genuine conversion. Consider the material by Will Metzger in his *Tell the Truth* (2012) which compares and contrasts the approaches and results of human vs. God-centered evangelism.

g. Take into account that Islam engenders spiritual bondages that new converts will need to reckon with. Mark Durie's work *Liberty to the Captives* (2013) addresses this dynamic.

h. Refuse to adopt insider movement paradigms which engender the phenomenon of chameleon or dual-identity "Christians" who ultimately, as one former Muslim privately observed, "are neither good for Christianity nor good for Islam."

i. Pray for crypto-Christians who live a conflicted life, such as is possible with Hegazy, and definitely the case for Batak, the man from Sumatra.

j. Stress that adoption of a theology of suffering is not an option for missionaries, mission agencies, churches, and new converts. It is part of discipleship.

Conclusion

The stark reality of reversions back to Islam calls for much more honesty on the part of Christians to recognize their existence. There is also a critical need for a rigorous theological analysis of the motivations and methods of missionaries, mission agencies, and churches, along with much greater dependence on the wisdom of national believers, especially mature ones, who have come out of Islam. The weak or non-existent ecclesiology of some missionary methods must come under scrutiny, and viable alternatives must be proposed.

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An Investigation of the Social Identity of
Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Bangladesh in Light of the
Set Theory, Critical Contextualization, and Self-Theologizing Teachings of Paul Hiebert
(Part I)

Peter Kwang-Hee Yun

Abstract

This article investigates the social identity of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Bangladesh. The author narrates the historical context of MBBs in Bangladesh up to the present day with a particular emphasis on four MBB social identity groups in Bangladesh taken from Tim Green's writings: Christian, *Isai*, *Isai* Muslim, and Muslim. Through using the qualitative case study method, the author selected three MBBs whose cases provide significant representation across each social identity. He deals with questions in three areas: new social identity formation, social integration, and Four-self dynamics in Bangladeshi *Jamaat* (house church or a small gathering of MBBs). Each subject interacts with Paul Hiebert's three well-known theories: Set theory, Critical contextualization, and Self-theologizing. Through using simple figures and tables, the author tries to explain and incorporate various viewpoints of contextualization in a real context. The findings and implications of this research call for understanding and cooperation between each social identity group and between foreigners and Bangladeshis to foster a healthier future for the MBB community in Bangladesh.

Key Words: contextualization, insider movements, MBBs (Muslim Born Believers), Paul Hiebert's theories, social identity

Introduction

To start with my personal journey, holistic poverty alleviation was the concept and motivation that drew me to come to Bangladesh. Since my initial short-term visit in 2008, the vision to fulfill both the physical needs of one of the poorest countries in Asia and the people's spiritual needs (90% Muslims, 9% Hindu, and 0.3% Christian) has made me eager to learn and travel throughout this country. During several years in Bangladesh as a cultural learner and researcher, I have been focused on friendship and participation in the realities of life of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) here. The context of spiritual hardship from the Muslim majority's pressure and of physical needs is the starting place in the contextualization discussion in Bangladesh, one of the most fruitful but also controversial fields among Muslim majority countries. Edward Ayub, one of the MBB leaders in Bangladesh, reveals his unpleasant feeling that Bangladesh has been used as "the laboratory and parade ground" of insider ideology (Ayub 2009: 21).

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14, NIV). Since Jesus's Incarnation and Pentecost, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been delivered across cultures. The gospel, which is transcultural and not culturally relative, also "must be expressed from within culture" (Gililand 1989:28; Hiebert 2009:31). Due to two key characteristics of the gospel—translatability (across cultures) and indigeniety (within cultures)—the tension between the universal truth of the gospel and these two characteristics has always existed up to the current globalized mission era. The term "contextualization" reveals this tension as well as the effort for the gospel to break through across cultural boundaries (Moreau 2005:321). For understanding

and developing modern missiology and mission work, contextualization has become one of the most significant concepts and practices in current missions.

Contextualization as both concept and practice brings to the surface many kinds of questions from different contexts. In considering Darrell Whiteman's three functions of contextualization—communicating cross-culturally, criticizing cultures, and creating community (Whiteman 1997), we must consider how to determine what is appropriate contextualization. In practical current missions, "the need for contextualization" by Muslim background believers, inquirers, and mission practitioners has been recognized and discussed (Woodberry 1989:283). There are reports of growing numbers of Muslims who have been drawn to faith in Christ worldwide by Bible reading (sometimes by reading the Qur'an as well), a dream or vision, faithful friends' witness, or the power of prayer in the name of *Isa* (Jesus). As diverse as the ways and means through which MBBs have dedicated their lives to Christ, there is an equally great range in varying expressions of their faith.

Due to the diverse ranges of MBBs' expressions of faith, as is now widely known John Travis, a Christian mission scholar and practitioner, published a wide range of perspectives on Christ-centered communities in the Muslim context called the C1-C6 spectrum (1998:407-408; Travis and Woodberry 2010:30):

C1 – Believers in traditional Christian fellowships where worship is not in the mother tongue;
C2 – Same as C1, but worship is in the believers' mother tongue;
C3 – Believers in culturally indigenous Christian fellowships that avoid Islamic forms;
C4 – Believers in culturally indigenous fellowships that retain biblically permissible Islamic forms, but not identifying as Muslims;
C5 – Muslim followers of Jesus in fellowships within the Muslim community, continuing to identify culturally and/or officially as Muslims, though a special kind;
C6 – Muslim followers of Jesus in limited, underground fellowship.

The spectrum tries to address diversity differentiated by language, culture, and religious identity. Among the six categories, the characteristics between C4 and C5 have proven to be the most controversial; and, among the three factors distinguishing C4 and C5, the religious identity issue has been seen as the most crucial (Parshall 2003:71-73; Green 2013b:62).

However, this article wishes to assert that "contextualization" is not the most appropriate category to understand the struggle facing local MBBs, even though it is for foreign practitioners seeking to understand indigenous believers and their community. "Social identity" is a more accurate and practical phrase for describing the complex reality MBBs confront in their actual life as a religio-social minority. Their minority status includes MBBs' efforts to contextualize both foreign practitioners' and Bangladeshis' Christian teaching in Bangladesh.

In order to examine Bangladeshi MBBs' challenge of social identity, this article interacts with paradigms and theories developed by Paul Hiebert to help understand and diagnose this reality, especially biblically. Three theories proposed by Paul Hiebert are employed for engaging several alternative paradigms as well as for understanding the reality of the social identity of Bangladeshi MBBs. The three theories are set theory, critical contextualization, and self-theologizing. Hiebert (1994) provides three frameworks in "Set Theory" — Well-formed sets

[Bounded sets], Fuzzy sets, and Centered sets that are helpful for analyzing the situation and phenomenon of MBBs in Bangladesh:

> *Well-formed sets [Bounded sets]* have a sharp boundary. Things either belong to the set or they do not. The result is a clear boundary between things that are inside and things that are outside the category.
> *Fuzzy sets* have no sharp boundaries. Categories flow into one another. For example, day becomes night, and a mountain turns into a plain without a clear transition.
> *Centered sets* [are] created by defining a center… [and] have two types of change inherent in their structure: entry or exit from the set (based on relationship to the center), and movement toward or away from the center (Yoder, Lee, Ro, Priest 2009:180).

With these three "sets" concepts, Hiebert's two other concepts (1985) are used for this article's analysis of the data:, "critical contextualization" enables interaction between the text of Scripture with a particular context in order critically to move forward to new contextualized practices; and, self-theologizing allows younger churches to interpret the Bible for themselves and in their own contexts.

The article consists of three parts. The first part explains the historical context of Bangladeshi MBBs' problems of social identity. Three research questions explore social identity on both personal and community levels. The second part of the article presents a theory of social identity and its interaction with Bangladeshi contexts based primarily on some recent research by Tim Green. The third part details the research data analysis along with three selected MBBs' case studies, all the while focusing on the three central concepts of new social identity formation, social integration with the majority, and social identity with their own believers' community. The findings will be examined in light of Paul Hiebert's ideas and theories. The conclusion will deal with missiological implications for mission practitioners and indigenous believers.

The Historical Context of Bangladeshi MBBs

In the context of Bangladesh, there were very few Muslim converts to Christianity until the 1970s. This was because Christians came mostly from a Hindu background under the influence of William Carey's outreach and Bible translation for Bengali Hindus. These converts had a strong adhesion to their former religion and culture (Croft 2014:39). Because the initial formation of Christian identity in Bangladesh took on a distinctly Hindu cultural shape, Muslim converts were sometimes required to adopt Hindu cultural forms and regulations as verification of genuine conversions, such as changing their names, using Hindu-dialect Christian terminology, and even eating pork (Taher 2014). These kinds of behaviors by Muslim convert Christians met a hostile reception from their family and community and often resulted in expulsion. Those 'exiles' wandered among churches and foreign missionaries for their survival (Johnson 1999:25).

This pattern has diminished since the 1970s due to a few local converts resisting the pressure to follow previous examples and several foreign missionary organizations passionately reaching out to Muslims outside of the existing traditional Christian churches. Despite their goal to build culturally relevant and spiritually sincere communities, the gap between cultures of the existing churches and Muslim converts was too great. For this reason, several foreign mission agencies have tried to build an MBB community separate from traditional churches so as to allow Islamic

cultural forms and to encourage the MBBs to remain within the boundaries of family and community (Johnson 1999:27-31).

Another crucial reason for the formation of separate communities between traditional Hindu-background Christians and MBBs was the birth of a new Bible translation in *Mussolmani* ("Muslim's") *Bangla*, the *Kitabul Mokaddos* (*Kitab*) ("the Holy Books"). This new version has been published and distributed since the late 1970s with the assistance of a foreign organization passionate to reach out to Muslims in their heart language (Jennings 2007:24). Along with the use of the Muslim friendly Bible, *Jamaats* (house or small church gatherings of MBBs) have been started from the mid-1970s. However, because of the lack of knowledge and experience of the leaders of *Jamaats*, these groups have not been built up to maturity (Taher 2009:1)

Additionally, another turning point in Muslim evangelism has been the initiative of local MBBs outside of the direct involvement of foreigners. After realizing the influence of foreign missionaries' outreach, the government has started to restrict their outreach toward local Muslims by minimizing the direct evangelistic activities of foreigners and limiting developmental work through registered NGOs. Conversely, these restrictions on foreigners helped local MBBs own their responsibility to reach out to their Muslim neighbors. The situation has made them more proactive in thinking about how locals and foreigners can work together (Johnson 1999:27-31).

However, after the last 30 years of history in the Bangladeshi MBB community, things have not all gone smoothly for two major reasons. Firstly, MBBs have been struggling with their social/cultural positioning/identity in the local Muslim majority society. Some Muslim converts shifted directly to the established Christian church by changing to Christian names and following existing Christian cultures. Some other Muslims wanted to keep staying in the majority community, retaining their religious identity for fear of persecution and sometimes for continued ability to reach out to their Muslim neighbors, whether by their own choice or foreigners' encouragement. Others are located somewhere between these two margins (Taher 2009:1). All of these MBBs have strived to find appropriate social positions and cultural behaviors such as the use of religious language, religious forms, and participating in important social activities and festivals according to their new faith and identity. Therefore, the issue of social identity is directly connected with contextually interpreting the gospel by deeply considering the religious and cultural forms and context. For them, social identity regarding contextualization has become a significant issue.

Secondly, considering the relatively poor economic situation in Bangladesh, financial factors have always been "a stumbling block" for the MBB society developing maturity. In their daily lives, MBBs have had economic disadvantages, such as finding it hard to get a job and facing difficulties gaining promotions, or losing customers when their conversions are revealed. More importantly, indigenous MBB evangelists have had a tendency to depend on the financial support of foreign missionaries and organizations for their livelihood (Jennings 2007:59). However, funds from outside are not always certain, consistent, or stable. For example, if a church (or several house churches) is (are) planted and a pastor is supported by foreign funding and then the funds stop suddenly, not only does the pastor lose support for livelihood but local MBBs also lose their shepherd. From time to time disputes among local organizations have occurred regarding financial support in evangelistic work. For MBBs, being a self-sustaining faith community is another significant issue.

In several decades of history of the Bangladeshi MBB community, practitioners generally agree that several situational realities exist in which MBBs are immersed. In his presentation for new practitioners, one veteran worker in Bangladesh describes the situation of MBBs in Bangladesh as follows:

1. Evangelism: The gospel has normally been spread first to rural and lower class people rather than to urban and upper-middle class people.
2. Livelihood: Most local MBB pastors and evangelists are dependent on foreign funds.
3. Leadership: There is very little organized biblical training for building up the new generation of leaders.
4. Conflict: Conflict frequently occurs over the extent of contextualization and differing amounts of foreign funds received.
5. Community: It is very hard to find self-sustaining communities and leadership.
6. Network and Partnership: Indigenous partnerships and networks often stop or are severely hampered after only a few gatherings due to conflict (Lee 2014).

This description of the situation of MBBs in Bangladesh can be categorized into four areas: evangelism, funding, leadership, and application of the Bible individually and communally.

These four areas connect directly with the social application of Four-self dynamics: self-propagating (evangelism), self-supporting (funding), self-governing (leadership), and self-theologizing (application of the Word of God in the culture). Researching these Four-self dynamics in the context of Bangladeshi MBBs can be a measure of social dynamics and the future development of their faith community. Researching MBBs' intention and understanding of the self-propagating (generating) dynamic helps establish the possibility of enhancing the gospel movement continuing beyond the life of paid evangelism. The self-supporting (sustaining) and self-governing (organizing) dynamics connect to the continuity of the next generation of MBBs' community by minimizing the effect of the uncertain continued involvement of missionaries but maximizing the local initiative of the movement. The self-theologizing (reflecting) dynamic demonstrates how MBBs take the initiative to apply their understanding of Scripture to their own particular Muslim majority society and culture.

As mentioned above, the major problems of social identity and self-sustaining faith communities that Bangladeshi MBBs face are ongoing and not-easily solved. However, these two problems cannot be considered separately. These are interwoven by historical and situational factors in this specific context. The research informing this article incorporates these two issues under the theme of social identity in terms of the individual and community through three areas of questioning: new social identity formation, social integration with the majority, and social identity at a collective level (four-self). The three research questions are as follows:

1. What factors were involved in MBBs coming to identify themselves as followers of '*Isa*? Have the ways in which MBBs identify themselves religiously changed since their conversion?
2. To what extent and in what ways are MBBs integrated into the social and cultural fabric of the broader Muslim community life?
3. To what extent and in what ways do MBBs think their views are different from majority Muslims? Do their views affect whether, or how, they share the gospel with Muslims and their self-standing (four-self) faith community in the long run?

Social Identity Theory and Practice

There is no universal definition of identity among the extensive relevant social science literature (Green 2013a:43). One authoritative resource defines "identity" as having two levels: personal—"the fact of being whom or what a person or thing is"; and, communal—"a close similarity or affinity" (Lexico 2020). Within such a framework, identity cannot be defined only by either selfness or otherness. These personal and social characteristics of identity interact dependently and in conflict with each other (Mol 1976:59). In this sense, most scholars agree that identity has multiple levels.

One identity researcher on MBBs, Tim Green, cites psychologist Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi's book about three levels of identity: collective, social, and ego-identity:

> At the top I would place *collective identity*, i.e. identity as defined by the group… In the middle I would place *social identity* labels as used by the individual and by others to identify him(self). At the bottom or deepest level I would place *ego-identity*, which is privately or even unconsciously experienced by the individual (Beit-Hallahmi 1989:96-97; Green 2013a:44).

After synthesizing identity theories and considering the contribution of practitioners, Green presents three layers of identity as core, social, and collective identity (see Figure 1 below) after changing Beit-Hallahmi's terminology from 'ego-identity' to 'core-identity.'
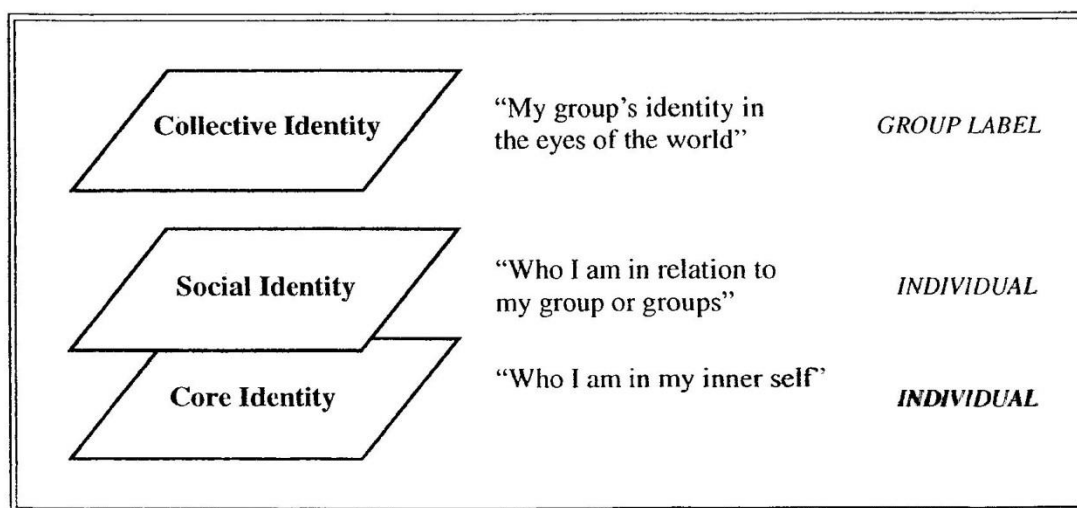

Figure 1. Identity at Three Levels (Green 2013a:44)

Firstly, 'core identity' is an individual level of identity: "Who I am in my inner self?" One example would be a self-identified follower of *Isa*, who has belief in *Isa* as Lord and Savior. Secondly, 'social identity' is also an individual level of identity but includes the influence of community, family, and friends: "Who I am in relation to my group or groups?" The social identity of MBBs therefore connects to each one's belonging to either Muslims, Christians, or somewhere in between in relation to their acquaintance with the specific social group. Lastly, 'collective identity' relates to how others, for example the majority Muslim community, recognize the groups of believers: as 'Christian', 'Muslim', or somewhere in between (Green 2013a:45-47).

In another article, Green introduces two circles of identity showing two religious boundaries of identity deeply related to the social community and cultural activities (Figure 2):
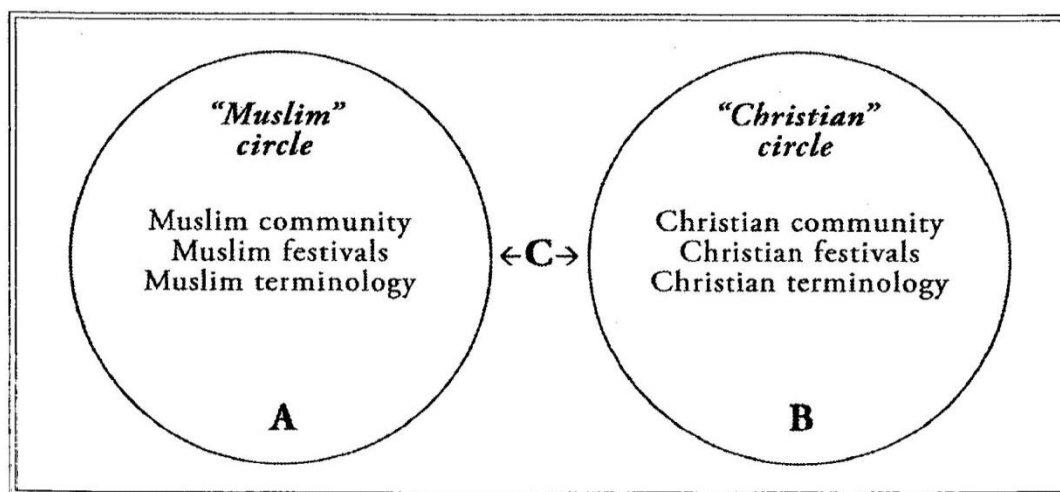

Figure 2. Circles of Identity (Green 2013b:54)

Figure 2 illustrates two different religious backgrounds including community, festivals, and terminology. Historically in Bangladesh, these two religious communities have hardly shared religious festivals and terminology. Muslims in Bangladesh who came to faith in Christ inevitably experienced a crossing from their former boundary (position A) to the other (B). In the practical situation of new MBBs, however, many are hard to place exactly in one circle or the other. Rather, they say they are somewhere in between (C). Also, MBBs might switch their behaviors and socio-religious identity depending on their surroundings, where they are and who they are with, such as *namaz* (five times formal prayer daily) and celebrating *Eids* (two big religious festivals such as fasting and sacrifice)*,* or Christmas and Easter with their two different groups of religious friends. This switching can sometimes be done openly or secretly (Green 2013b:54).

Due to the social and religious complexity of MBBs' identity in contexts like Bangladesh, Green suggests an alternative categorization with a major focus on 'social identity'. With the help of a local MBB leader in Bangladesh, Abu Taher, Green has created a diagram advancing discussions of Christ-centered community spectrum called the 'C-Spectrum' for the Bangladeshi context. Because of the differences between the historical and social situations of Pakistan and Bangladesh, Green explains that Bangladesh has a more matured MBB community than Pakistan (2013b:62). The diagram below (Figure 3) reflects the "multi-dimensional realities of the situation" and reflects a matured community situation in Bangladesh in contrast with other Muslim majority countries such as Pakistan or Middle-Eastern countries.
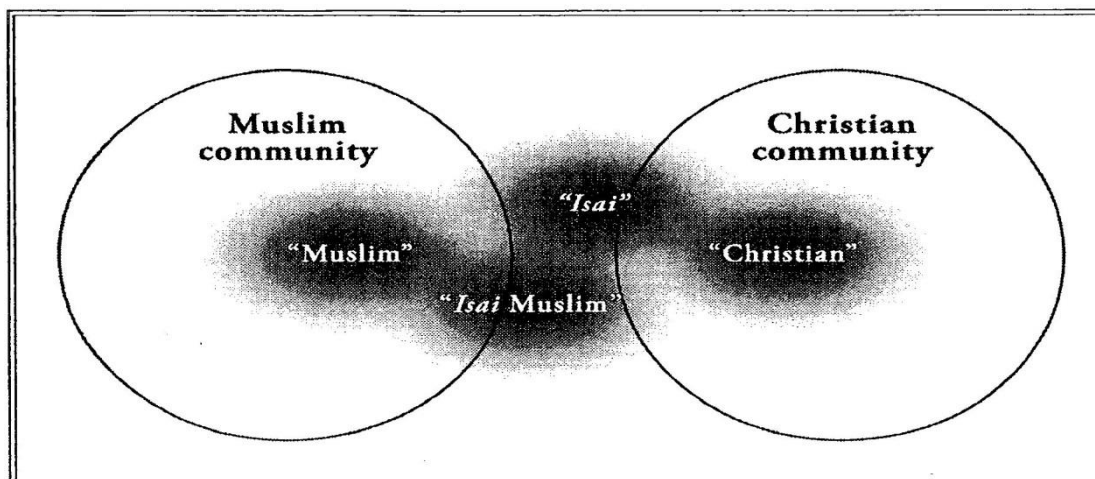
Figure 3. Groups of Believers from a Muslim Background in Bangladesh (Green 2013b:60)

Using Paul Hiebert's concept of "bounded sets," Green describes the Bangladeshi MBB community as having "more ambiguous social identities and more permeable boundaries" than a "long-established religious community." All four "fuzzy" groups of MBBs in Bangladesh sometimes "merge and overlap with each other and with the traditional communities" (Green 2013b:61-62). Green's description of the four groups of MBBs in Bangladesh is detailed in Table 1 below.

Christian	*Isai*	*Isai* Muslim	Muslim
Completely assimilated in the traditional church	Close to Christians, but some contacts with Muslims. Switching Christian and Muslim terminology.	Mostly with Muslims, but little contact with Christians. Most use of Muslim terminology.	Remain within the Muslim community and follow customs. Two groups: one is cultural; the other is practicing Muslims.

Table 1. Summarized Characteristics of Four Groups of Bangladeshi MBBs (full version in Appendix A)

The first "Christian" group, who are excluded by their Muslim relatives, incorporates the traditional Christian community and religious activities. The second and third groups, "*Isai*" and "*Isai* Muslim," have varying amounts of contact with Christians and Muslims, with the later more accommodating to terminology and acceptance of the majority Muslim community than the former. The "Muslim" group identifies themselves and others as Muslims regardless of their attendance at Mosque and *Eid* sacrifice. Interestingly, it is possible to compare Travis' C-Spectrum with Green's alternative categorization: C2 – Christian; C3 – *Isai*; C4 – *Isai* Muslim; and C5 – Muslim. These two scales are similar, but Green's view in consultation with an indigenous leader moves one step forward in terms of reflecting contextual details and providing a visual representation.

Research Setting and Three Case Interviews: Interacting with Paul Hiebert

This article employed a qualitative field research method to investigate social identity and social integration of MBBs, using the two research tools of observation and interview. Specifically, the article focuses on three interviews with Bangladeshi MBBs from a wide range of social identity

among 48 local interviews and 10 foreigners. Per Paul Hiebert's guidance, the researcher gave the respondents "considerable freedom to wander" (Hiebert 2009:167) from the questions during the interview and, as a foreign researcher through long-term friendship and observation in past three years, tried not to omit insider (*emic*) perspectives. Based on Tim Green's previous research and my research about four (fuzzy) social identities of Bangladeshi MBBs, each research question dealt with Paul Hiebert's three theories: set theory, critical contextualization, and self-theologizing.

New Social Identity Formation with Paul Hiebert's Set Theory (RQ1)

The three people in Table 2 came to faith in *Isa* (Jesus) from different gospel proclaimers and methods. Hasan heard the gospel from a Hindu background Christian using the traditional Christian language Bible adapted from Hindu terminology (Hasan 2014). Ahmed was curious about the *Inzil Sharif* (Gospels or New Testament) when he found a copy in a burning suitcase, but he received teaching about *Isa* in a one-week seminar that first looks at *Isa* in the Qur'an, then later in the *Kitab* (Holy Book) (Ahmed 2014). In Rana's case, after believing *Isa* through the guidance of traditional Christians from non-Muslim background and foreigners, he was associating within both boundaries, Christian and Muslim, differently at work and at home (Rana 2014). Concerning simultaneous dual belonging in two communities, Tim Green introduced three strategies: switch, suppress, and synthesis (2013b:56).

	Hasan	Ahmed	Rana
Social Identity	Christian/*Isai*	*Isai* Muslim/Muslim	Christian/*Isai* in *Jamaat* *Isai* Muslim/Muslim at work

Table 2. Three Cases of New Social Identity Formation (full version in Appendix B)

In Bangladesh, a Muslim converted to Christianity oftentimes lives in a state of social confusion and emotional fatigue. In addition, the cultural power of shame in their Muslim society causes these converts to have constant pressure from being labeled as betrayers or enemies of their nation (Meral 2006:510). Both negative effects — extraction and anomie — are interwoven in both personal and public levels, because a Muslim's conversion is not only a matter of the individual but affects the entire family and community within the culture. Moreover, converts might find it difficult to adjust to their new lives due to negative reactions from the Christian community (Baig 2013:71). It has been for the sake of avoiding the negative effects of extraction that so-called "insider movements" have been taking place. An "insider movement" tries not to "extract believers from their families and pre-existing networks of relationships, significantly harming these relationships" (as happens with the Western "aggregate-church" model) and retain their Muslim identity (Lewis 2007:75).

In his article "Should Muslims Become 'Christian'," Bernard Dutch (2000) investigates self-identity issues among MBBs. Dutch argues that Western Christians have a tendency to overemphasize the MBBs' self-identity and to judge the issue too easily without considering the context. One of the main reasons for avoiding the term "Christian" is that the term, in the place where he served, means "Animist background Christian." For the people in the village, "Christian" means a practitioner of "the polytheistic path of animism" and a betrayer of family and community. Dutch actually categorizes seven types of believers:

1. Animist background Christians;
2. Christians with Muslim culture (most receive outside funding);
3. Neither Christian nor Muslim (there is no supporting community);
4. Jesus Muslims (Muslims regard it as a disguise for Christianity);
5. Mystical Muslims (Sufi background: regard Jesus as a mediator before God);
6. Muslims with non-mainstream beliefs and practices (compromise several rituals);
7. Full Muslims (remove any trace of difference between themselves and an orthodox Muslim identity) (Dutch 2000:18-19).

Contrary to "Animist background Christians," "Full Muslims try to fulfill all the pillars of Islam, as they did before coming to faith in Christ. This approach is considered by other believers as syncretistic and undermines any effective witness. Finally, Dutch suggests low profile approaches, which involve "remaining in society; identifying those who are open; appropriately arousing people's interest; and wooing them toward Christ" as bearing a sensitive witness toward potential believers and maintaining good relationships with family and community (Dutch 2000:19, 21).

When we apply these findings to Hiebert's Set Theory (Hiebert 1994), displayed in Figures 2 and 3 above, it is hard to put Bangladeshi MBBs' current situation into the Muslim and Christian boundaries. Historically, there has existed a clear boundary between Christian communities and Muslim communities, but since Muslims started to come to faith, several "fuzzy" groups have emerged. Phenomenologically, MBB groups in Bangladesh are like a "Fuzzy set community" rather than a well-formed set, because they lack clear boundaries and static characteristics, plus the groups are rather frequently changing. Also, it is very difficult for *Isai* Muslims/Muslims (left side in Figure 4 below), whose community has been formed over a long period of time, to move to the *Isai* Christian/Christian (right side) in a short amount of time. *Isai* Muslims/Muslims groups are also provided social benefits, such as social security, because they aren't known as an apostate, plus they have the opportunity to draw Muslims to *Isa* in a relatively less offensive manner. By contrast, the Christian/*Isai* group has such benefits as a clear converted identity from a Muslim background and the possibility to focus on the Bible and spiritual matters. However, the actual reality of daily life is not very optimistic. The Christian converts feel drained emotionally and financially damaged because of social isolation from family and society, so they have a tendency to find alternative (foreign) supporters. These difficulties and tendencies hinder Christian/*Isai* groups from continuing to focus on *Isa* and grow in him. In this sense, centered sets with fuzzy groups can be a possible alternative to encourage people to move toward *Isa* in the Bible and follow his way beyond strictly bounded sets (Figure 4).
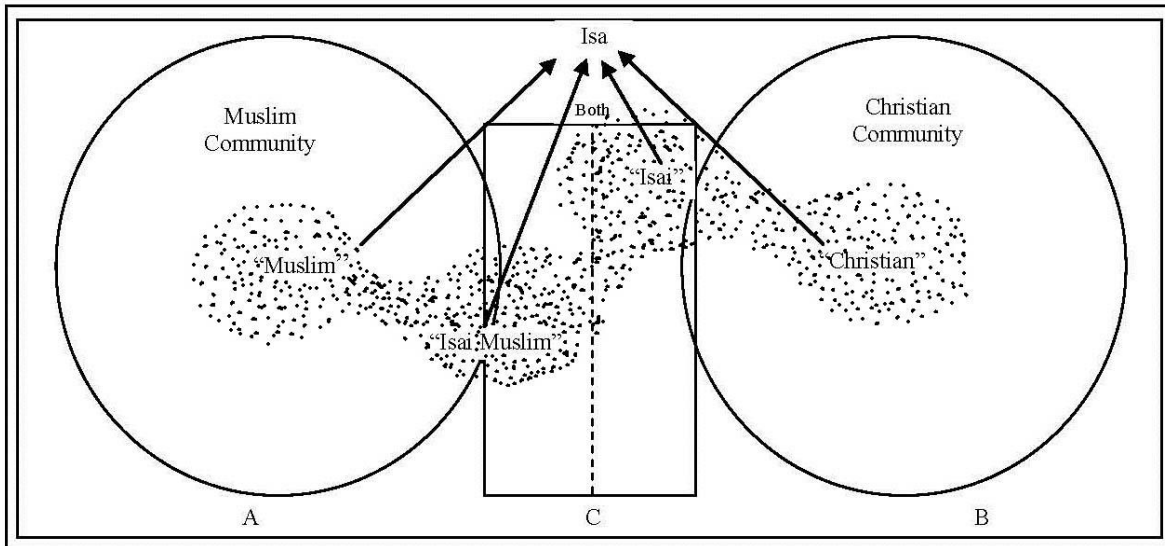
Figure 4. Groups of MBBs in Bangladesh with Centered and Fuzzy Set

In Figure 4, it is more important for each MBB group to have a relationship with *Isa* than "monitoring and maintaining the boundaries" (Yoder et al. 2009:182). As this article's case studies have shown, Hasan can be in the Christian/*Isai* Fuzzy group between B and C; Ahmed is located in the Muslim/*Isai* Muslim Fuzzy group between A and C; Rana is mostly situated around C — both *Isai* and *Isai* Muslim, but he comes and goes between all areas depending on the situation. Rather than flippantly assigning a person to a particular location, the first step should be to show *Isa* (Jesus) as the center, with everyone moving toward him from every direction. Each group needs to follow "*theo*-centered directionality" (Baeq 2010:204) or *Isa*-centered directionality by the word of God rather than focus on certain religious dogmas and regulations. The issue of whether a certain position such as position A is permissible will be dealt with in RQ2 with Paul Hiebert's Critical Contextualization.

Appendix A – Four Groups of Muslim Background Believers in Bangladesh (Green 2013:59)

Christian	*Isai*	*Isai* Muslim	Muslim
Completely assimilated in the traditional church with its festivals, language, and social relationships. They no longer have any contact with their	Mostly live in the Christian community but preserve a little contact with their Muslim relatives, visit them at *Eid* and so on. They switch between Christian and Muslim terminology according to the group they are with. Christian tend to understand the need of *Isais* to compromise in	Mostly in the Muslim community but they preserve a little contact with Christians. They use Muslim terminology. Many in the Christian community view them as "fake Christians." Muslims view them as an odd kind of	Remain within the Muslim community, follow Muslim customs, celebrate Muslim festivals, and use only Muslim terminology. They have no contact with Christians. They are considered Muslim by the Muslim community and also by the Christian community. There are two kinds in the group: one is Muslim but does not attend the mosque or carry out the *Eid* sacrifice. They keep full contact

| Muslim relatives | this way; their Muslim relatives view them as heretical but not beyond the bounds of social contact. | Muslim, but acceptable within the range of Muslim sects. | with their Muslim relatives, who would regard them as religiously slack but nevertheless Muslim. Believers in this group meet for fellowship with each other. The other is observing Muslims including prayer at the mosque and the sacrifice at *Eid*. Others around them do not know they are followers of Jesus. And they do not meet up with other Jesus-followers either. |

Appendix B – Three Cases of New Social Identity Formation

	Hasan	Ahmed	Rana
Family Background	Muslim who worked making *lungis* (male comfortable skirt). Followed most of the Islamic laws.	Muslim whose grandfather was a Haji (one who was Mecca pilgrim) and father was Imam.	Muslim family whose mother was working for a Christian pastor's house as a housemaid
Background Of Change (Conversion)	Feeling of uncertainty and doubt about the Islamic way of salvation. Small book purchase but did not understand due to Hindu-background Bible languages. After 10 years, he met an evangelist as his customer and bought one Bible from him. In his expression, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he could understand most of the languages and believe in Jesus. Afterward, he began to open one spot of his shop to gather together as a *Jamaat* even before taking Baptism.	In class seven, bought a book at a cheap price and learned something about *Isa Moshi* from the Bible and Qur'an verses. When a house was burnt down, found an *Inzil sharif* in a suitcase. From that time, the desire to know more has grown. Next year, joined a one-week training course teaching about *Isa* as the Savior through the Qur'an. Trainers were satisfied with his positive response. After coming back from the training, he and several others were baptized in his home town.	As a child boy, he joined the house worship and sometimes learned biblical teaching. Not allowed to go to church by mother as a Muslim. He tried to be baptized but was denied and asked to wait because he was a Muslim. Also, after uncovering a false report culture and struggling for several years, came to city and worked with foreigners. Through discipleship with them, confessed sins and felt some changes in his inner being even to outside circumstance

Family & Community Response	Expelled from family. Persecuted verbally and physically by the Muslim majority in the village. Some Muslims took his goods on purpose or did not pay for their purchases. Thus, he decided to get a Baptism certificate to prove that he was a Christian because the police can protect him and his family from unreasonable persecution.	Because his father was Imam and he had completed requirements to be an Imam from childhood. He started work in Mosque as a local Imam to preach about *Isa* for 5 years. Three times social judgment, but no harm because of being self-dependent. Now a free preacher sometimes in Mosque, or in church.	Because of the good reputation of Christians in his hometown such as caring the poor and working Christian NGO several years, not too much persecution.
The motive of present social Identity	In order to communicate with the majority of Muslims, he uses *Kitabul Mokaddos* (*Mussolmani* Bible) and he also identifies as *Isai*.	*Isai* Muslim, but someone sees him as a Muslim in his local area, but some others also see him as a Christian when preaches the Bible to the other town tribe of Christians	Was encouraged to be identified as an *Isai* Muslim following the organization's heart to reach out to Muslim neighbors. When he goes to the village where the organization works, sometimes introduce himself as a Muslim because of dealing mostly with village Muslims and not falling trouble.
Social Identity	Christian/*Isai*	*Isai* Muslim/Muslim (mainly) (sometimes considered Christian)	Christian/*Isai* and *Isai* Muslim/Muslim

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Overcoming "Domination": A Vulnerable Approach to Inter-cultural Mission and Translation in Africa

Jim Harries

Abstract

This article considers how the African mission field can be a level playing field for Westerners and locals. Mission presenting of the gospel must be contextually appropriate. Choice of language is a part of this. Use of English as global language today is different from use of Greek in New Testament times. This article shows how terms can travel between cultures with or without their 'cultural roots'. Local cultural characteristics, such as the prominence of witchcraft in much of Africa, should not be ignored. Africa in the 1970s called for a moratorium on Western mission. This article considers the implications of this not having happened. Western education is found to create an 'island' of knowledge in Africa. Vulnerable mission is proposed as the way forward, keeping Western missionaries on the ground.

Key Words: Africa, contextualisation, education, globalization, mission

Introduction

This article uses insights from pragmatics, which considers the meaning of language as derived from its context (Harries 2007:32), to address issues of financial and linguistic domination by the 'West' in the African Christian mission field. It shows how contextual issues are being ignored in widespread processes of translation. A careful consideration of contextual translation issues in the light of the current global context and culture leads to certain suggestions for ways to reform missionary practice. Missionary practice as here advocated is to be transformed from one in which the role of the West is primarily that of a donor and expert translator into one in which some Western missionaries can join non-Western Christian ministers in furthering their God-given tasks 'hand-in-hand' on a level playing field.

Choice of Language

A rapidly globalising world is bringing new challenges to inter-cultural translation in, amongst other places, the church. This article examines the nature, needs, and shortfalls of this communication process and proposes necessary changes to how it is to be engaged in the days ahead.

Missions scholars do well to note peculiarities of Paul's contexts that may not apply today. Peoples of the Mediterranean basin under the Roman Empire, about which Paul moved, had a long history of trade, contact, and interaction. Human aspirations and disputes had caused numerous wars and skirmishes between them over many centuries. All this resulted in similarities in 'culture' from one part of the region to another. This situation is unlike, I suggest, much of intercultural mission today. While the impact of activities in the Mediterranean basin and Middle East had a profound effect on the people of Western Europe, and in turn the American continent (all of 'the Americas'), the same cannot necessarily be said for the entire globe. The Far East took a different direction. Latin America was found to have diverse and varied cultures on the arrival of the Spaniards and Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Australian Aborigines, so called Primal peoples in other parts of the world and especially the people of sub-Saharan Africa, had remained largely 'cut-off' from developments in the so-called 'civilised' world until recent history. As a result, cultural chasms being crossed by inter-cultural missionaries today are vast by comparison to those faced by Paul and his companions in New Testament times.

If Paul's sermons varied according to the nature of his audience, and his audience was less varied than are 'audiences' today, then presumably today's sermons should be more varied than were Paul's. Paul realised that there was no point in citing endless Old Testament texts when speaking to the gentiles in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), and he did not make reference to unknown Greek gods when speaking in Jewish synagogues (for example see Acts 13:16-41). Paul was able to make such adjustments to ways in which he translated his messages to the degree that he was familiar with both 'worlds'. He clearly could not have spoken intelligently to Athenians if he had no clue about Athenian ways of life and philosophies.

Similarly, presumably, missionaries today need to direct what they say according to the contexts into which they speak. This suggests the need for theological texts (written as well as spoken) that are suited to a context. It suggests the need for locally rooted rather than universal syllabi for theological education programmes and preachers / teachers. These needs seem to run contrary to recent trends in which U.S.-American theological content is prescribed internationally, without translation.

Parallels are often drawn between the role of English as 'global language' today and Greek as international language in New Testament times. Similarities are indeed evident; Alexandria's expansive occupations ensured a widespread adoption of Greek, which also served to carry Hellenism around the known world of the time. The Roman Empire added Latin to the mix but took advantage of Greek as well. This process is in some senses comparable to the way that the USA's global ambitions take advantage of the wide spread of English that was brought about by the prior spread of the British Empire.

The differences between the way that Greek was spread and used in New Testament times and the way that English spreads and is used today are less often considered. These differences are many, diverse, and I believe of critical importance in looking at inter-cultural translation. Many of these differences arise from 'advances' in technology that have occurred since the days of the Greeks. Literacy was in New Testament times very limited. Communication was therefore predominantly oral. Even where written documents were circulated, the communication of those documents and the reception of their contents would have been mostly oral. Oral communication was limited to face-to-face contact situations. There were no electronic loud-speakers. There was no radio, television, or telecommunications network. There was no formal universal educational system. Even for written communication; there were no photocopiers, and there was no printing press, never mind fax machines, telegrams, postal service (except perhaps of a very basic nature) and certainly no Internet. That is to say, there was no digital or printed means of written communication whatsoever. Hand-written documents were carried and copied by hand.

I believe that the above constraints to the spread of a language are very significant. Greek was spread by word of mouth, by real people who were actually present in flesh and blood, typically to individuals or small groups of people, or occasionally one supposes through means of amphitheatres to crowds of a few thousand. Why am I emphasising this point? Because whereas the Greek language in biblical times was spread in connection with Greek (or non-Greek) cultures and ways of life, English has in more recent generations, particularly through developments in communication technologies, in a way that is less connected to any culture or way of life.

It is clear that languages usually have cultural roots attached; in addition to 'simple meanings', words also carry connotations, known in the field of pragmatics as *implicatures* (Leech 1983:153). Recent studies in linguistics no longer consider implicatures to be the fuzzy edges of words, like static interfering in a radio broadcast or the difficulty one may have at identifying people who are walking at a distance until they draw nearer. Rather, implicatures are seen as being the very essence of communication. (For an example in

relevance theory, see Sperber and Wilson (1995).) This recognition of the central role that implicatures play in communication raises many questions for the process of translation.

Options in translation can be illustrated with some very simple diagrams. Take the word 'table' and its translation into the German *Tisch.* Figure 1 illustrates the English word table in comparison with the German word *Tisch before* the process of translation has occurred. While in a sense it is true that *Tisch* is a translation of table, it is also true that the roots of these two terms are different. They have some very different implicatures in usage. For example, the apparently compound German *Nachtisch* would seem to translate into English as 'after-table', but in fact the English equivalent is 'pudding' (dessert). In one sense, then, for Germans tables are a part of their conceptualising of pudding in a sense that is not at all the case in English.
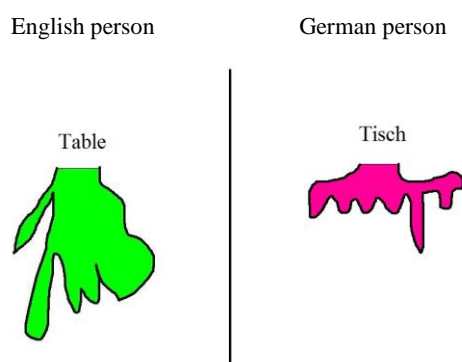
English person　　　　German person

Table　　　　　　　Tisch

Figure 1: Table and *Tisch* and their Roots, illustrating differences between words that translate each other

Note that the implicatures of the term 'table' (illustrated by its 'roots') in Figure 1 are different in shape from those of the word *Tisch*. Below, Figure 2 demonstrates an example of a German person who learns English *with* the roots of the words learned:

English person　　　　German person
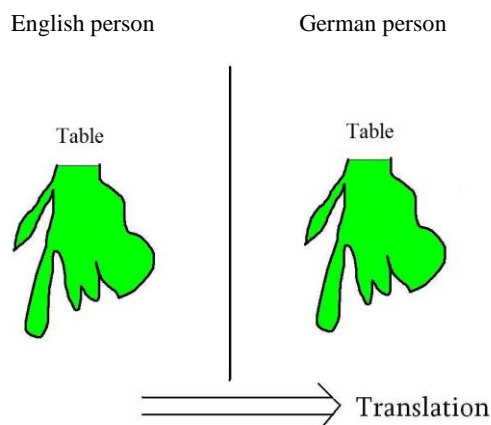
Table　　　　　　　Table

Translation

Figure 2: Translation of a Word *and* its Roots

This German person knows that the English word for *Tisch* is table and also comprehends the roots of that English word. This is, I suggest, the way someone is able to learn a language 'holistically'. This is a way of learning from someone face to face or, even more importantly, while able to observe the life of the person from whom one is learning the language. A German person who came to live in England and learn English in interaction with English people would learn English in this way. That person would acquire the contextual roots (and the context here could be far and wide – including linguistic context, physical context, social context etc. etc.) at the same time as learning the 'phonetic-translation' of the German word

Tisch as being 'table'. This is the kind of language learning that would have gone on in New Testament times with Greek.

Figure 3 below illustrates an alternative option for language learning:
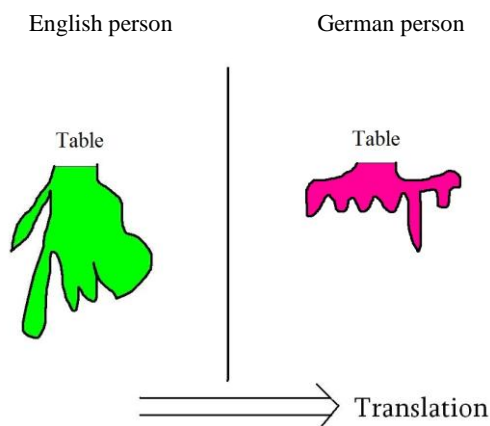

Figure 3: Learning the Translation of a Word *without* its Roots

In this case, the German person has heard or been told that 'table' is the English word for *Tisch*. Yet, all the roots of the English term table, as assumed by the German, are actually the very roots as were there for the German word *Tisch*. This kind of learning is what occurs from a textbook, through the Internet, through a radio programme – in order words, at an impersonal distance. Such learning of a language is not being able to observe the way of life of the owner of the language from whom one is learning. This process results in super-imposing a foreign grammar and phonetics over the roots of the language being learned.

Although the diagrams above are clearly simplified, they do graphically illustrate two different ways of understanding a translation, namely with or without implicatures. For the purposes of this article, the latter means of translation to or from English (Figure 3) is especially widespread and common in today's world, whereas the former (Figure 2) was common for translating Greek in New Testament times. This difference has arisen for some of the reasons mentioned earlier, especially in terms of the technology available for communication. Furthermore, today's common means of translation have many and serious implications for functionality and mutual understanding between the peoples concerned. The epitome of the translation in which roots are not carried in translation is, of course, the use by a country (or church) of a language other than its own for its own purposes. Once, for example, an East African country begins to make use of English for its own affairs, its people will inevitably use English words as translations of their own terms, i.e., on the basis of the assumption that the English words have 'indigenous' (African) roots.

Here is another example to try to illustrate this point. Let us imagine that a U.S.-American preacher illustrates his message through reference to a *barbecue*. This U.S.-American was cooking sausages so as to give his friends hot dogs on a winter evening at a party celebrating his birthday. A translator into the African context with which I am familiar would have a difficult task in the following areas:

1. Why is he (the preacher is a man) cooking, when cooking is a task for the ladies?
2. What is a sausage?
3. Why are people being given dogs, and in what sense are the dogs hot?
4. What is winter?

5. How were the friends going to get back to their homes when it is too dangerous to walk around in the dark?
6. Why are Christians having a party and not a worship service?
7. What is a birthday, and why is it being celebrated?

Because of these points of confusion, a translator might say, "The American's wife was cooking meat for people to eat, and this was extraordinary because one does not usually eat outside at the time of year when it is so cold that (this cannot really be explained), and these people would later get home as they all – though you might find this difficult to believe –had their own cars, and they were celebrating the anniversary of the day the man's mother gave birth to him (which is a strange American custom)." (The advent of the smartphone and recent spread of the Internet has resulted in a much greater global awareness of American ways of life than used to be there. The principles being put forward here however still apply.)

Here is a question worth considering: what would happen if the above were *not* translated? Clearly, on the assumption that the visiting preacher is a man of God, the people's understanding of the above would have to be such as to fit within their context of what a godly preacher should do. Because men do not cook, the meaning of cooking could be 'purchased'. Giving people hot dogs – well, Americans are known for their habit of giving out money, so 'hot dogs' is presumably a strange way of talking about money. A winter evening – probably he meant to say 'Wednesday' and not 'winter' but was misunderstood. His birthday obviously refers to Christmas, known to be the day on which we commemorate the birth of Jesus. In this instance, English is being appropriated into an African cultural context. If we were then to create a dictionary, we would conclude that:

'Cook' is used to mean 'purchase',
'hot dogs' is a name for 'money',
'winter' is another name for 'Wednesday', and
'birthday' is a way of referring to 'Christmas'.

This is the kind of English that many African people nowadays use, once the official language of a country has become English. Such use of English makes it difficult for foreigners (to Africa, i.e., in the present discussion native English speakers) to 'make sense' of what is going on. They will not know that 'hot dog' is a way of talking about 'money', for example.

In today's globalised world, foreigners (i.e., native English speakers) come to have more and more of a say in the way that English is used in Anglophone Africa. This is especially the case in countries whose educational systems are based on 'foreign (British) English', i.e., in most if not all of Anglophone Africa (Kanyoro 1991:403). This imposition of "native English" can force local people to use a language that is less and less integrated into their own context.

Amongst the assumptions made by the Western world in its relationship with Africa is that the economic system in Africa runs similarly to that in the West. If this were the case, then indeed it would make sense to give (i.e., to translate) the same economic 'advice' in Africa as one does in the West. But do African economies work in the same way? Not according to several authors (Harries 2008:23-40; Maranz 2001).

One feature of many African economies that distinguishes them from Western ones can be illustrated as follows. Many African people are amazed at how oblivious Westerners often are to witchcraft. Indeed, many Western missionaries do not even acknowledge the presence of witchcraft, which is a position that bewilders African Christian brothers and sisters, who labour daily under the influence of witchcraft. As to what witchcraft actually is, a reality that Westerners say they are not aware of, a simplified but helpful description is that the

powerhouse of witchcraft is envy that has an inter-personal force (Harries 2012). The fear of envy, Maranz points out (in slightly different words), is rampant on the continent of Africa (Maranz 2001:139). One outcome of the fear of the envy of others is that people are reluctant to accumulate wealth unless everyone else is doing so at the same time. An instance of a time when 'everyone' (e.g. all farmers) acquire wealth simultaneously is at crop harvest. At other times, though, many people are very wary of acquiring wealth. Contrary to widely held assumptions of profit maximisation, African people may prefer to minimise profit to avoid having wealth when others do not have it, and so to avoid becoming the victims of envy, i.e. witchcraft attack.

One prerequisite for economic development on the African continent, according to the explanation above, is a reduction in envy, i.e., a reduction in witchcraft. However, such an analysis begs the question of how Western texts that are related, even obscurely, to economics, are to be translated. If witchcraft is compared to a brick wall preventing progress down a road of economic prosperity, then the direct translation of a text on economics from the West into an African setting is like instructions to keep driving down the road regardless of any brick walls barring the way.

In order to advocate indigenous advance, how a reduction in witchcraft can be achieved is needed. Such a reduction can be achieved when people have faith in God. This is one key reason why promotion of faith in God is a key prerequisite to African development. Should such a 'key prerequisite' be included in the process of translation of Western texts as a kind of inevitable addition? In other words; shouldn't then the translation into African contexts of economic textbooks from the West include instruction on how to overcome witchcraft? This point will be further explored below.

African churches have long laboured under some of the kinds of misunderstandings illustrated above. Westerners have had expectations of African Christians that have been highly impractical, and these Africans have been obliged to use languages that make little sense to them. At the same time, they are constantly being plied by money and gifts of various types from the West; these 'gifts' come with various strings attached that represent conditions that frequently make little sense and may be impossible to fulfil.

Churches in Africa have responded to the pressure of working with such 'strings' in different ways. To classify these responses in perhaps over-simplistic terms, mission churches (founded by missionaries who are not Pentecostal) persist in giving the appearance of following directives from the West and keep other important activities going on 'the side'. Pentecostal churches follow traditional African means of acquiring their needs through spiritual means but using such Western symbols as clothing and language. AICs (African Indigenous Churches) reject much Western symbolism and understand the use of such physical items as robes, candles, water, oil, and crosses to be means of getting the power to satisfy their needs. Put differently, mission churches attempt to take translations of theological texts from the West as they are, Pentecostal churches appropriate them, whereas indigenous churches reject them.

The next section considers ways in which Western mission efforts have attempted to adjust to the issues just described, albeit unclear about the roots of those issues.

Why Mission from the West has become Short-term and Money Focused

Two trends are particularly noticeable in mission from the West to Africa in recent decades. One is that mission has become increasingly donor-focused. Another is that Western mission has withdrawn from the front-line, often by becoming short-term. (Short-term missions have been much discussed. For how they make missionaries less vulnerable, see Henry 2014).

Both of these trends have contributed to there being reduced contextual-sensitivity in Christian mission in recent years.

The end of the British Empire was marked by a growing wave of independence of African states from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. This marking of the end of Empire clearly also caused missionaries to re-consider their position. Part of this 'reconsideration' resulted from an African call, led by Gatu in Kenya, for a moratorium for mission in the early 1970s (Kendall 1978:86-107). The Africans concerned with this moratorium were calling for Western missionaries to 'go home'. In many ways, historians tell us, that call did not succeed. Western missionaries did not all get up and go. The fact that such a call was made, however, and that it received such wide acclaim is surely significant, and the call must have been cause-for-thought for many a missionary on the field. Presumably also, because the moratorium was not fulfilled, some of the problems in African churches that were being anticipated by those who called for the moratorium may now be coming to pass.

There has been and still is a widespread feeling that the mission task of Westerners in Africa has been completed (Kendall 1978). Many missiologists are guided on this point by the practice of the apostle Paul. Paul's practice appears to have been to start a church, appoint leaders, and then move on (Acts 19:21-22). The Bible and more specifically the book of Acts closes with churches apparently 'growing by themselves'; new churches seem to be 'left alone'. So there is one missiological school of thought that says that recently planted churches should be 'left alone'.

In reality, however, they were never 'left alone' in Paul's day, and they should not intentionally be 'left alone' today. Churches planted by Paul continued to interact with other churches and Christians, and certainly in today's world intercultural international church relationships continue apace.

The 1960s that saw the end of empire in much of Africa coincided with a great deal of missions activity. Much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century missions experience, being in the context of empire, was an experience of domination. When domination was no longer possible in that classical sense, mission was in need of new direction. That new direction – doing mission from a position of vulnerability and weakness – has been hard to find. This article is seeking to point to that way of conducting mission.

With the end of colonialism has come the end of 'colonial adventure'. Dreams of 'conquer and exploration' have lost their pertinence. European populations have moved on to other things. One of those things seems to be, more than in any other era, comfort. The West has developed its own comfort, e.g., health care, longevity, safety, and wants to share such with others. As a result, the missionary message has recently been re-interpreted or retranslated in many ways so as to become a message of 'how to live a long and comfortable life'. While such a description may seem unnecessarily provocative, that way of stating the matter accurately portrays one aspect of the recent trend of trying to combine 'development work' with mission, sometimes even to the exclusion of the latter. This contentious issue, often considered as 'evangelism verses social action', is of course much debated and need not be pursued further here.

The decline in 'religious belief' besetting the West extends its effects to those who remain active in churches. That is, the orientation of Christian believers can be 'less religious' than that of believers in previous generations whose neighbours and colleagues were less hostile to the very foundations of Christianity. Christian belief in the West generally has come to be of a lower intensity, or "...diluted modern versions of Christianity..." (Larner 1984:114). The tenets of historical materialism, and more generally rational rather than spiritual causation, are given the most prominent roles. Missionaries are less inclined to sacrifice their lives for

'spiritual principles' when apathy and doubt with respect to the same have a high profile even in their own communities.

A rise in the prominence of material values (or a decline in faith in the spiritual) has contributed to the emergence and prominence of holistic or integral mission. Unheard of until recent decades, advocates of the above have through re-interpreting the Scriptures come to insist that 'gospel preaching' go hand in hand with economic development, health care, and other material benefits. The gospel alone is no longer considered sufficient (Harries 2011:83). This reconfiguration of what constitutes "mission is more of a change in terminology and justification rather than a change in practice, as mission from the West to Africa has always gone hand in hand with education and health services.

Another important factor in the decline of Western mission is the 'guilt' of the capitalist West. Guilt and implied guilt result in increased donor activity, but the desire not to be seen as imperialistic or authoritarian has brought a preference for being 'hands-off'. That is, an increasing 'withdrawal' of Westerners from the front line of mission into support and donor roles enables people to feel (presumably) less responsible for any negative impacts of their activities. Delegating more power into indigenous hands presumably can result in a minimisation of some otherwise offensive or deleterious impacts of outsiders – but not without other implications, as explored in this article.

The Changing Nature of 'Received' Mission

Changes in the practice of mission combine with changes in the lived context of mission recipients. The non-actualisation of the 1970s moratorium marked the beginning of a new era for African churches. Outsiders had made it clear that they were *not* going to allow the whim of African people to force them into an exodus. Missionaries from the West were not going to ascribe their hosts with the authority to refuse their approaches. This was not only a refusal of Westerners to give up membership of and participation in African churches. It was rather, in effect, a refusal to give up on having a controlling power over churches in Africa, and beyond.

This situation coincided with a revolution in communication and with an enormous historically-unprecedented expansion in Western economies. The influences of contexts from which the moratorium sought relief have, as a result, been increasing geometrically. Direct links between African churches and individuals in the West, outstripping traditional relationships brokered by mission-agency professionals with wide inter-cultural experience, have added to the tendency to engage in mission short-term from a position of relatively little understanding. Additional factors, such as the widespread knowledge of Western languages in Africa that bypass traditional translation processes, have resulted in a general amateurisation of mission. Misunderstandings often put money flows, that have become a much larger part of basic survival in a fast developing world, at risk. Strategies continue to be developed in Africa that are designed to enhance the lucrativeness of relationships with the West. Corruption and lies have by this stage become the norm – even though these are hardly even noticed by the more pragmatic amongst donors of funds.

As a result of the above scenario, African Christians have been forced to consider how to co-exist with their determined foreign bed-fellows. They could not refuse their influence, but how was the influence of a paying-guest to your home who refuses to leave when asked to be handled? The money received can of course be useful. The answer on how to handle the donating foreigners thus becomes, in order to ensure the continuation of funding, to exclude donor-visitors from more sensitive contexts that they could otherwise misunderstand.

When, as at present, money is 'pushed' onto Africa without translation by a people who have a limited grasp of local contexts, something really has 'got to give'. That which 'gives'

is often truth. When there is a growing band of ready takers, as is assured by booming African educational systems in Western languages, the avoidance of truth, should there be a risk of its interfering with ongoing money flows, has become more and more of a norm.

The type and scale of translation confusion described earlier unfortunately aggravates the mis-communications that are already happening as a result of the position with finance just described. For the article to consolidate its several different points, it is important to comprehend the overall impact of the particular matters that have been taking place.

One 'overall impact' of the multitude of inputs coming from the West to African Christians can be termed the creation of an 'island of knowledge'. This island constitutes knowledge from the West that is valuable because of the relationship that it engenders with the West, but that knowledge is relatively disconnected from associated indigenous bodies of knowledge. That is, African people are creating an island of understanding that is separated from their innate life comprehension by an intermediary space (represented here by water) that is navigated with some difficulty. Such an 'island of knowledge' is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 4 below:
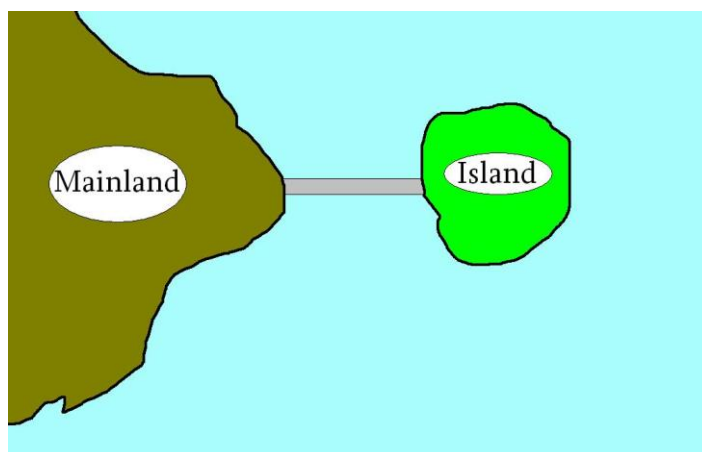

Figure 4: Depiction of an Island of Knowledge

The 'mainland' in this illustration refers to African people's implicit understanding of life, themselves, and the world, i.e., an African worldview. This worldview is a kind of unity of thought that has arisen and been passed on through many generations. The 'island', on the other hand, represents understanding acquired as a result of formal education and Western missionary teaching. The water in-between illustrates that, while the two are clearly cognizant of each other, the indigenous African worldview and Western-acquired knowledge are at the same time also distinct and separate. It is that distinction and separation that is both very interesting and very problematic. Conceptually, many African people can choose to function either on 'the mainland' or on 'the island', and those two bodies of thought are largely disconnected.

Language-translation does not necessarily aid, and certainly does not resolve, this issue. The current basis on which translation from one language to another occurs is the substitution of new words for original ones, as discussed earlier and illustrated in Figures 1 to 3 above. In short, translation that should be a process of communication between different contexts is these days frequently treated as a substitution of different words in an attempt at reproducing the original text. (While it could be argued that the above is appropriate for Bible translation, it does not follow that it is appropriate for the translation of all other texts.)

The dream of the West, as well as some Africans, is that Africans should abandon the 'mainland' – or at most keep some its 'interesting' and 'exotic' features - and develop only the 'island' (abandon their traditions and become Westernised). In reality, however, such a dream does not materialize. An alternative analogy that could help us better to understand this situation would be that of two liquids, e.g., a blue liquid (the West) entering a yellow liquid (Africa). If blue liquid mixes with the yellow liquid, then the outcome will not be bits of blue liquid in yellow liquid. It will rather be a green liquid! No matter how much blue liquid is gradually added, the colour of liquid in the glass will *never* be truly blue (Harries 2010:373-386). Africa will never lose its African character so as to become identical to the West. Instead, Western inputs into Africa will always be transformed on entry. Such transformations may well work against the originally intended functions of the Western inputs. Translation is called for, but is it actually happening?

Therefore, this article arrives is a three-part interim conclusion. One, for African people, Western understandings can resemble an island with minimal links to most of the thought-world that makes up their innate way of life. Two, the 'island' will never be purely 'Western' but will be influenced by African people's innate ways of thinking. Three, while the island is made up of conceptual materials that are translations from the Western 'mainland', it will never replace the African-thinking-mainland. The mainland will be influenced by the West but will never lose all its African flavour.

Vulnerable Mission

I believe that God knows how he will 'rescue' African churches from the dilemmas mentioned above that they currently face. God will do it using his people from various ethnicities. The major role is surely to be played by the African people themselves. I pray indeed that their searching of the Scriptures be guided by God's Spirit and result in the glorification of God's name. But I also believe that the foreigner has a role in God's church and that churches should all be open to receive Christians from other parts of the world.

Because there is a role for foreigners, I believe that there is a place for Western mission in Africa, as well as for international and inter-cultural churches. I believe that there is a role that can be played by Western missionaries in Africa, even today. I believe that this role must be a 'post-colonial role'. Such an appropriate role can be described as 'vulnerable mission'. That is, I suggest that some Western missionaries engage their key ministries, or at least a key ministry outside of the West, using local resources and local languages (Vulnerable Mission n.d.).

I do not believe that the African missionary task is complete, or that the era during which missionaries can be sent to Africa is over. I believe that the role of sending people should always be there, and that the task of encouraging and challenging the church will not end until the return of Christ. This sending role requires, amongst other things, the movement of Christian believers from churches in the West to the rest of the world.

Western Christians who so travel need to realise that the days of empire are over. Empire talked about domination. It is sometimes forgotten that people can appreciate being dominated if the 'dominated' as a result acquire an income. A vulnerable missionary avoids domination through controlling purse strings or linguistic privilege. Those things were, I believe, the real 'problem' that led to the 1970s moratorium call. If this is the case then a missionary does not have to stay away to avoid all the problems that the moratorium was trying to solve. But he or she should avoid using foreign money and foreign languages. The reason African people did not advocate that for foreign missionaries was – I believe – that they did not believe that Westerners could minister in such a vulnerable way. Can they be proved wrong?

To fulfil the conditions of VM (Vulnerable Mission) in ministry is no easy challenge. It requires a stepping outside of the traditional missionary 'comfort zone'. But help is at hand! VM talks about one's ministry and not about one's lifestyle. It does not dictate what the nature of a missionary's home-life ought to be. It only says how he or she ought to minister. Sometimes nationals of poor countries have been unhappy with missionaries who have served them while maintaining a standard of living way beyond their local one. The AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) asks that such people set aside their jealousy and be content with the missionary's *working with them* on the same level. Jealousy, after all, is not a virtue but a sin that should not be practiced by true believers (see Exodus 20:17). While a Western missionary in a poor land ought to and will be challenged to live simply, the outworking of that challenge should be left to the missionary, God, and the, missionary's supporters – and not dictated to them by the AVM (alliance for VM).

Overcoming the West's predilection to faith in historical materialism, or the implicit belief that effective social change results from the investment of money and use of resources, is another challenge. The 'fact' of material cause and effect has so firmly captivated many in the West such that it is extremely hard to escape from it. But 'escape' is a must. The solving of problems is never as simple as providing whatever is overtly missing. Alternatives to the provision of 'material' are invariably there and must be sought. Translations of texts from the West should presumably allow for such. Here are some examples:

1. A girl's father throws her out of her home because she has become a Christian. It might seem that a foreign missionary ought to provide a house for her. The best option, however, could be for her to go and beg her father to be allowed to return (Jack 2010:110).
2. Hungry-season food shortages in Africa may appear to require the provision of outside food aid. Realising that people intentionally produce less so as to avoid the witchcraft that arises if they have a surplus while their neighbour is hungry shows that a lasting solution is more likely to consist in undermining the power of witchcraft.
3. An old lady being neglected and hungry may be as a result of her children intentionally avoiding her because they are not ready to forgive her for previous injustices she committed. It is forgiveness and not handouts of food that are here required.

Solutions that advocate non-material provision should be priority for Christian missionaries. Encouraging people to ignore such solutions by simply translating texts that arise from a materialist community into a monistic one is a way of generating and perpetuating misunderstandings and often very unhealthy dependence on outside funds.

If 'integral mission' means that a Christian minister should be concerned for the physical as well as the spiritual needs of his flock, it is bang on target. If 'on the other hand' it means (which in practice is often the case) that mission efforts must be accompanied by funds from the West in order to be considered legitimate, then such 'integral mission' is misleading and potentially harmful. Supplementing evangelism with handouts from Western donors can very soon lead to evangelism being difficult or even impossible without such handouts. The latter hinders (or even prevents) true evangelism from local initiative.

Once again, the important factor of 'guilt' must be considered. There is little doubt that guilt currently underlies much activity from 'the West to the rest'. Guilt seems to be at the root of the widespread supposition that a Westerner living in the poor world must be active in alleviating poverty by sharing resources from the West. This approach continues to be advocated even if introduced resources undercut local markets, create dependency, and cause strife, division, and endless disputes.

Guilt, however, should not dictate Western missionaries' relationships with those who are poor. Why should people's relocating themselves geographically automatically add guilt, or the obligation to 'help the poor', that was not there before they went there? If there is such an obligation to help the poor when one has moved, then this implies that there is also an obligation to move to where the poor are. If indeed there is an obligation to help the poor, surely that obligation applies equally to all who have the means to help. Does an obligation to help the poor mean that every worker in the poor world must be giving out handouts? Or could it mean, as an alternative, that a portion of the missions' taskforce can fulfil the bulk of this role on behalf of their colleagues? If an individual missionary can fulfil his/her obligation to help the poor through material handouts by delegation to another missionary, then the former is enabled to interrelate in a way that is more comparable to that of local people, and so to give a life-example that can be imitated by local people.

To re-iterate the above paragraph, what I am proposing is not necessarily that any less money reach the African continent from the West (although that option might be preferable in many cases), but that this money be concentrated in fewer hands. If, for example, there are two missionaries who each raise $100,000 to give to the poor in Africa, one of the missionaries could give that money to the other to give out so that he/she be left free of an identity as 'donor' and thus be enabled to relate to African people much more 'on the level'. Such identity 'on the level' enables missionaries to translate implicatures and impacts rather than only words and meanings of texts.

To return to the imagery in Figure 4 above, the process just outlined is a way of concentrating activity on the 'mainland' instead of doing it all on the 'island'. The 'mainland', amongst indigenous people according to their indigenous way of life and principles, is the natural arena in which Christian ministry should take hold. This approach is in effect a way, and perhaps the best way, of contextualising the Gospel. This is not a contextualisation worked out theoretically in an ivory tower for later application on the field. Rather, it is contextualisation guided by God that occurs when the gospel is translated so as to be able to meet a particular way of life of a particular people.

The Challenge

The Western church has put itself into a trap in terms of its relationship with churches in the Global South. The trap is essentially a grip on power: the Western Church frequently only knows how to relate to the church in the Majority World from a position of power – which is really a position of domination. Many churches, in Africa at least, are ready to work on that basis, as long as they stand to benefit materially from such an agreement. 'Passive resistance' to such domination frequently takes the form of the corrupt misappropriation of funds for non-designated purposes. The failure to engage in contextual translation perpetuates these issues.

One response of the Western church in the light of today's post-colonial scenario is to withdraw from mission. Another has been to change the shape of mission – from being long term involvement to short-term trips and offering of funds with fewer strings so that 'misappropriation' not be visible (and in that sense cease to be a problem for the donors). In terms of translation, the mechanical nature of Scripture translation has been extended to other forms of translation. Or the translation step has apparently been bypassed as a result of African people being taught to engage using the languages of their ex-colonial masters. The above have resulted in today's scenario whereby African churches remain dominated (in some ways) by ignorant (of local contexts) and absent (largely) benefactors. Such blind domination - since it is impossible actually to do away with strings attached to funds or to translate impacts from one cultural context into another without a close knowledge of the latter culture - bodes badly for the future of the church internationally.

This article's suggested alternative is a continuation of close involvement through relationship that avoids unhelpful obligations to share materially and thus enables 'translation' in the holistic sense of translating implicatures and impacts as well as 'meanings'. That is, relationship from the West that does not have to be backed up either by material donations or oversimplified translation processes, and relationship from the South (Africa) does not need to include pleading poverty or ignorance. The resulting approach is 'vulnerable mission' (Vulnerable Mission n.d.). An important way forward for inter-cultural mission is for some to be engaged using the resources and languages of the people to whom they are reaching in ministry.

Conclusion

Among globalisation's surprises are some little-explored complexities in inter-lingual relationships. The taking of Greek in New Testament times and English today as comparable international languages for use in church and society is questionable, since Greek tended to be spread orally by 'real' people, whereas English is today spread in textual form and using diverse types of technology. Hence the Greek language in those days carried more of its original cultural meaning as it spread than does English today. This article points out how assumptions about the context of the use of words can transform their perceived meanings until they are so different from the original as to be inappropriate for use by people coming from the original context, whether they realise this transformed meaning or not.

The moratorium on mission in Africa that was proposed in the early 1970s not having taken place presumably means, at least in the view of its promoters, that the damage to the African church that was to have been avoided by the moratorium is nowadays occurring. The 'problems' that resulted in the moratorium call arise, it is here suggested, not from the very presence of Western missionaries itself, but through their being financially over-endowed and linguistically naïve.

Missionary teaching these days, increasingly rooted as it is in issues concerning 'development' communicated through Western languages, has resulted in 'islands' of knowledge in people's minds, that are largely disconnected from their daily lives. An escalating rate of partnerships being developed with African churches, in which Westerners invariably take the role of donor, is these days accelerating the development of these islands; and, because of their disconnect with the rest of life, these islands appear as if they will never fully meet the needs of African people. The temptation to enter the power-trap of rooting ministry in financial donations and simplified translations, often motivated by guilt on the part of Westerners for consuming an over-large proportion of global resources, must be addressed by having some Western missionaries operate on the basis of vulnerable mission principles. In conclusion, at least some Western missionaries must carry out their ministries in the 'poor world' using local languages and resources.

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Johnson, Todd M. and Zuro, Gina A. (2019). *World Christian Encyclopedia, Third Edition*. Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1000 pp., ISBN: 978-1474403238.

Few global Christianity publications offer in one place information that is as helpful and broad based as the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. A continuing project on the social scientific study of religion pioneered by David Barrett, this third edition assembles a large amount of unique material about religious belonging from around the globe. It benefits from extensive experience and a comprehensive information database built over the years by Gordon-Conwell's Centre for the Study of Global Christianity. This is the first edition without Barrett as one of its editors. Its launch comes at a time when World Christianity has grown to be an important field of study in many universities around the world.

The Thesis of the Project

The *World Christian Encyclopedia, Third Edition* (WCE3) presents the membership of Christianity around the world within its social, environmental, and political contexts. WCE3's substantial analysis and thoughtful presentations serve well the publication's implicit thesis that it is possible to present the state of global Christianity in one, albeit large, tome. Attention to visual presentation of data and the carefully written narratives allow readers to gain a clear understanding of adherents of the Christian faith around the world. This edition is more comprehensive than the previous two, providing much more data communicated efficiently through graphics. This edition is the first to pay particular attention to the crucial but poorly documented role of women in the growth of Christianity around the world. While admitting that this emphasis is just a beginning, this edition's welcome engagement with the contribution of women in World Christianity goes much further than many other accounts do.

The nature of church affiliations has changed dramatically since the first edition was published in 1982. Both the structure and nature of denominations around the world make this kind of demographic research all the more difficult. This offering attempts to come to terms with these complex patterns of church membership that are found in the world. The *Encyclopedia* admits these difficulties and where possible tries to account for them. Such a task faces the dual challenges of communication and credible research data from places like Africa and Oceania. In all, the document succeeds in demonstrating through statistical data the demographic shift over the last 50 years of the centre of Christianity to the Global South.

The Team

WCE3 brings together the insights of about 700 collaborators and contributors who together provide the data for 234 countries of the world. Some of these come from the countries themselves, and many are in-country experts. The enormity of this editorial feat is evident in the breadth and depth of the resulting publication. The editors are well suited for the task. Todd M.

Johnson brings to bear his decades of experience in demographic studies of religion around the world. In addition to his involvement with the second edition and the highly acclaimed PEW forum projects on religious demography, Johnson has published encyclopedias, atlases, monographs, and numerous articles. He leads the *World Christian Database* project at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He also leads the *World Religion Database* project at Boston University's Institute for Culture, Religion and World affairs. Johnson was a co-editor in the WCE second edition, published in 2001. Gina Zurlo, also from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, is the new co-editor for the work. A renowned researcher in the field, she has been involved in major projects about counting religious adherents, such as *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Her work can be found in numerous articles on religious demography. If the earlier editions are anything to go by, this edition of the *Encyclopedia* will likely cement the place of these researchers as the shapers of Christian religious demography for years, possibly decades to come.

A Summary of the Contents

Two distinctive features that immediately stand out to the reader are the size of this volume and its heavily illustrated presentation. The 1000-page tome makes for a lively reading experience with over 2000 illustrations, 1500 tables, 234 maps, and over 64 pages of colour drawings. The graphics offer creative, space-efficient ways of delivering copious amounts of useful data. The first illustration, for instance, is entitled "The World As 100 Christians" (3) and depicts 18 pieces of comparative information as percentages all on the same diagram. Together with the illustrations and tables, readers will also see photos of Christians from the countries to give a sense of what their lived Christianity looks like. One cannot fail to see from the descriptions and supporting data the gradual growth in strength of Christianity in the Global South over a period of 120 years.

WCE3 begins by giving a fairly concise summary of the state of Christianity in the world. In the opening pages the editors cover important, wide-ranging themes in the lives of Christians, such as infant mortality, malaria prevalence, access to doctors, and availability of internet. Here the editors establish the definitions of the Global South and Global North. The segment issues a helpful corrective about the prevailing narrative of Christianity, demonstrating that Christians in Africa and Asia were, for most of the first millennium, greater in number than in what we now call the Global North. WCE3 defines and makes use of "Christian Families," a new categorization of Christianity that is likely to be increasingly useful in describing the diverse Christianities around the world. WCE3 defines these Christian Families as "groupings of autonomous churches or denominations that are linked by similar ecclesiastical tradition, history and name" (7). The overview does not abandon the more well-known groupings of Christians by tradition. The Christian traditions explored in the overview are Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and Independents. Evangelicals and Pentecostals/Charismatics are variously addressed within the country narratives. The opening summary also paints in broad strokes Christianity on the continents of the world, treated alphabetically: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Northern America, and Oceania. Various themes featured include women, mission, ethnic groupings, and the religions of the world. What follows is the substance of the publication - a country by country treatment of Christian demographic data.

This extensive section forms the bulk of the content through which this book, similar to the previous editions, more than adequately delivers its promise as a reference work. Each country section is a complete unit supplying in an easily comparable format all the data relevant to the development of Christianity. The country data contains geographical information on a map, standard population statistics, as well as economic, health, and gender data. Tables show the change of religious demographics from 1900 to 2050 and the rate of growth for various religions from 1900 to 2020. This data is supported by supplementary notes which address context-specific issues for each country.

Two elements stand out in these country synopses. The first of these bears David Barrett's distinctive trademark first seen in his 1973 compendium, the *Kenya Churches Handbook*. Like in Barrett's handbook, each country section in WCE3 contains a list of churches and denominations. Through this list, the reader can quickly obtain a reasonably accurate grasp of the Christian communities and their relative strength within the demographic context of the country. In keeping true to its mission-focussed roots, WCE3 accompanies this list of denominations with information about missionaries and indigenous (national) workers.

The other important element is the "main narrative" of each country section. This is a story of the development of Christianity within the country, outlining the key features of Christian growth. After a short introduction, each narrative typically reflects on the development of Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Independents, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals/Charismatics, as appropriate for each country. Issues such as outreach, media, mission, women, megachurches, and ecumenism are also covered within this section. At the end of the narrative comes a helpful bibliography which interested readers can visit to find in order to augment their knowledge.

A small call-out box on "Religious freedom" provides information about the ways in which the state interacts with religion. This is an important piece which enhances the readers' understanding of the context within which Christianity (or the lack thereof) operates. The country narratives also include colour and black-and-white pictures which convey to the reader a visual representation of lived-out Christianity in these contexts.

At the end of WCE3 is an article on methodology that provides the conceptual framework around which the book is built. This section pays attention to the sources of data and the development of databases. The essay points readers to the *World Christian Database*, which built upon Barrett's meticulous collections of data on the Christian denominations of the world. WCE3 relies on the 2015 edition of this data. The data is interpreted primarily on the principle of self-identification. Whether the data is from government statistics, local membership information, or surveys, the researchers paid attention to what the religious groups said about their own numbers. While this perspective may have its own difficulties, it has the important distinction of putting the Christian communities' narratives at the centre of the global story of Christianity. We will return to this topic shortly.

Strengths and Observations

If an encyclopedia is meant to gather in one place essential information about different aspects of a subject, then WCE3 has succeeded in its purpose, as far as World Christianity is concerned. The all-encompassing data delivered creatively, simply, and efficiently is a primary strength of this publication. Furthermore, while the previous edition spread the data over two volumes amounting to 1700 pages, this one volume format is appealing because of the convenience of

thumbing through one 1000-page book to search or compare different pieces of data. One other strength worth noting is the methodological decision to employ self-identification as the organizing principle. Having come from a majority world context where local data has historically been subject to foreign researcher biases, I find the privileging of local narratives a welcome perspective that will in time lead to more accurate and better nuanced information, especially on the Global South. Self-identification is not without its challenges, but the benefits of a correctly nuanced, indigenously originated picture, in my view, outweigh these potential problems.

WCE3 acknowledges the challenge of obtaining reliable data from some places, especially in the Global South. For these areas the editors relied on available data, researchers, and mostly foreign, in-country experts. According to the list given (vii-viii), WCE3 does not feature indigenous collaborators for some countries in the Global South. The emergence of native missiologists and World Christianity scholars and researchers since the late 1990s affords the possibility of more representation of the Global South on the list of collaborators and contributors. This will be worth taking into account going forward.

The information contained in this volume makes it an essential document for personal libraries and, very importantly, reference sections of any university serving students of religion. For a project this comprehensive, the book is reasonably priced at around US$238 for a hard-cover edition. That said, from my knowledge of the context, I would venture to say that this price is beyond reach for many potential individual and library users in the Global South. One could argue that institutions, for instance, could subscribe to the world databases on religion or Christianity. However, these databases sit behind a price wall which stands in the way of knowledge distribution, further exacerbating the well-known global inequalities. Aspects of these inequalities are well illustrated within the publication's own data. Distribution of such knowledge to the Global South is thus a discussion which the project leaders, publisher, and others can explore to come up with viable mechanisms to address the issue in the future.

Conclusion

The editors have, in putting together this data, assembled a document that will likely be the benchmark for reference books on Christian religious demography for the foreseeable future. This formidable effort negotiated substantial difficulties of communication, data collection, and researcher availability to present a sound, credible reference work. The highly skilled editorial team's success in obtaining, collating, and creatively presenting highly complex data eloquently articulates the story of one of the most remarkable centuries in the growth of Christianity. I commend this book to scholars and missionaries alike, who will find this an indispensable asset for their work.