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This issue of Global Missiology - English takes up a theme of increasing importance and worldwide relevance, “Christian Persecution and Suffering.”

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Guest Editorial

Christian Persecution and Suffering

Prasad D. R. J. Phillips

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During a recent trip to Egypt, I had an interesting encounter that made me rethink how contexts or worldviews define our understanding as Christians of persecution and suffering. During our dinnertime, I saw a person serving food who had a tattoo mark of a cross just above his thumb on the outside of his hand. I later found out that most Christians have this same mark. Intrigued, I enquired of my friend about this practice of tattooing. The explanation even now continues to humble me. He explained that most Christians that he knew have this tattoo so that if they were to be martyred for their faith and identity, they could be identified and given a Christian burial. I have always understood that most Christians have a cross around their neck or have a tattoo of the cross on their body to identify themselves as Christians while they are still alive. However, when I heard this explanation I had to expand my understanding that "carrying" a cross is not a privileged fashion statement during a Christian's life. It is also something that needs to be "carried" until death—for, through, and with Christ.

The Indian Christian mystic Sadhu Sunder Singh once remarked, "It is easy to die but difficult to live for Christ." Singh's insight, coupled with my experience in Egypt, poses an interesting question: How do Christians living in various contexts perceive persecution and suffering? In answering that question, it is important to acknowledge that Christians' perspectives and worldviews concerning persecution and suffering due to Christian faith and identity differ depending on the country and context. I can identify three kinds of contexts that define a Christian's understanding of persecution and suffering for their faith. The first is those contexts in which Christians are a majority, where the Christian religion has a privileged position and anything less is never an option. The second type of context is where Christians live as a minority, have freedom that may be restricted, yet because of some constitutional provision they can practice, propagate, and profess their faith but face several internal and external challenges. The third category is where Christians are second-class citizens, are completely marginalized, may have some or no freedom to practice, and propagation is illegal. The articles published in this special issue to some extent have representation of these three types of contexts.

Related to their various contextual locations is how some Christians use freedom of religion as a means to protect and preserve the Christian population. In some nations where they are in a minority and suffer persecution, Christians perceive freedom of religion used as a weapon by agencies from other countries on theirs as a form of interfering in their internal affairs. In various other cases, Christians live in a minority mind-set and often see themselves as socially and politically disempowered. Along with how this issue's articles are situated in the various types of contexts described above is how they also reflect the different approaches that Christian communities take in dealing with their contextual status—whether perceived or actual. This array of approaches can also be instructive about how the theme of Christian persecution and suffering can be understood, practised, and articulated.

This special issue has five featured articles composed from various perspectives and contexts. The first article by John provides an honest first-hand reflection on the ongoing Hindutva agenda in the Northeast of India, especially in Manipur. The second article then transports us to another continent where Islamic terrorist groups have affected the lives, churches, and Christian witness in the Far North Region of Cameroon. In that article Bongoyok

provides an excellent historical and cultural background of this region where Christians have been the target because of their faith, leaving them in a crisis and resulting in the need for immediate intervention in the form of holistic community development. The third article, by Kin and Joseph, looks at how Uyghur people, particularly Christians, are doubly persecuted and pleads for love and reconciliation between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. The next article focuses on persecution in India but focuses from a different angle. George, as a diaspora Indian in America, brings out very useful insights on trans-national connections and how they respond to persecutions happening in India. He discusses how this process has resulted in the forging of a new connection between Indian Christians and the diaspora Indian Americans, especially Indian Christian youth in America. The final article by Maroney examines Paul's view of the persecution of believers for their faith, suggests three foundations, and draws out implications for today's global Church.

I hope and trust that as you read these articles you will be able to reflect on this issue's theme of Christian persecution and suffering in your own context. You may consider using these articles to equip Christians and churches for an era in which practising, professing, and sharing the Christian faith and beliefs with neighbours is becoming progressively challenging. On the one hand, most Western societies are decreasingly influenced by the Christian faith—often seeing it as irrelevant—and very often are quite hostile toward Christianity and its promoters. By contrast, in the Global South the Christian faith is increasing but in contexts of persecution and suffering as well as theological confusion, not just over matters of faith but also over challenging economic and socio-political issues. Moreover, most nations are increasingly becoming nationalistic, and we are beginning to see a multi-polar world within geo-politics. In the midst of such circumstances, may our triune God continue to strengthen, refine, and grow the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Hindutva Movement in Northeast India: Situating Manipur Christian Suffering in Context

John

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Abstract

The civil war that has broken out in Manipur since May 2023 is actually a calculated attack on minority Christian tribal people. Widespread destruction of churches, houses, communities, and tribal peoples' lives has inflicted deep, widespread, and ongoing suffering among Manipur's Christians. In addition to bringing relief and a peaceful and just resolution to the conflict, urgent needs include lessons that churches worldwide need to learn from indigenous Christian communities.

Key Words: indigenous, Kuki, land, Meitei, tribals

Introduction

Christian suffering in India is underreported, as many Christians have consciously decided to hide it for fear of death. In many cases, the suffering is designed in such a way that it appears otherwise. This is especially the case among Dalits and tribals, who are at the lowest strata of India's social hierarchical caste-structure. The rise of the assimilative ideology and vision for *Akhand Bharat* ("Undivided India") under the current Indian government has directly targeted tribal Christian communities of Northeast India for three reasons:

1. Those communities follow a religion that promotes human dignity, equality, and social emancipation.
2. They practice an egalitarian indigenous tradition that contradicts social hierarchy.
3. Perhaps most fundamentally, tribal people own land and resources that attract multinational corporations (MNCs) and others, including the state government, for control: the normal MNC approach is to first deal with the people's religion and culture and then give money to their leaders and grab their land and resources.

It is in this context that Christian suffering in Manipur needs to be understood. This article attempts to discuss the complex nature of Christian suffering in Manipur with the aim of advocating for space for indigenous communities in politics, in knowledge production, and in religion for sustainable community.

Manipur

Manipur is a tiny state in the extreme northeast corner of India. It is one of the eight states of Northeast India that is connected with the rest of India by a narrow corridor of a 12 mile-wide stretch of land flanked by Nepal and Bangladesh. The three main communities in Manipur are the Meiteis, the Kukis, and the Nagas. Besides their myths, the three communities have much to share in common including linguistic similarities particularly between the Kukis and the Meiteis (Grierson 1904). Historically, the dominant Meiteis occupied the most fertile part of the land, the valley, while the Kukis and the Nagas occupied the hills—most of which are unproductive.

By proportion, the valley/hill divide is 10/90 percent. With the conversion of Meiteis to Hinduism in the eighteenth century, the valley-hill divide incorporated the two additional elements of religious and social difference: the Meiteis adopted the Hindu caste system and looked down on tribal people as socially untouchables. Since the twentieth-century Christian

conversion of many Northeast Indian tribal peoples, Christianity is also considered the religion of low-caste communities. The valley-hill divide thus became more than simply a geographical divide. The divide became even more pronounced with the introduction of a different system of government after India's independence in 1947: 40 out of 60 State Assembly seats were reserved for the valley while only 20 seats were allotted to tribals. This disparity always puts minority communities in a disadvantaged position in obtaining development projects.

Background to the Ongoing Violence

Two further matters need to be noted here: national-level and state-level ideological movements. The rise of the Bharatia Janata Dal Party (BJP) with its "Undivided India" ideology has sought to assimilate minority cultures into the majority culture both nationally as well as in each state, including Manipur. The ideology became aggressive with the BJP's landslide victory in 2014, prompting the Hindu-nationalist Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) chief Ashok Singhal to declare, "Delhi is ruled by Hindus after 800 years" (Kumar 2014). Singhal's statement reflects the *Hindutva* ("Hindu-ness") view of Indian history that resents the combined eight centuries of first Muslim, then Christian, rule that was broken by India's 1947 independence (Sharma 2020).

The expansion of *Hindutva* ideology among some tribal communities of Northeast India through the paramilitary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS: "National Volunteer Organisation") and other organizations gradually became a home-grown movement under the current national government. The ideology has been presented in such a way that it has gradually and smoothly adjusted within majority Christian communities in Northeast India (Longkumer 2020). Northeast Indians, including many tribal Christians of Manipur, who were indoctrinated with the ideology in schools and hostels in different parts of the country since the 1980s played an important role in expanding the influence of *Hindutva* among their own people. Erasing certain tribal histories and conversion of their religious places of worship are only the beginning of the long-term *Hindutva* project. Tribal Northeast Indians' helplessness in the face of the project is well expressed by Sanjib Baruah when he writes, "India's prevailing governing philosophy is not conducive to fostering a climate of political innovation in the region. In the current scheme of things, it is hard to imagine the political space opening up for alternatives to the exclusionary politics of rightful shares to emerge in those parts of Northeast India where it has become the dominant form of claims-making" (Baruah 2020, 192). This *Hindutva* strategy is also beautifully expressed by a scholar and human rights defender, Dr. Angana P. Chatterji at the Centre for Race and Gender, University of California, when she writes, "Across India, experiments to forge the 'Hindu national community' are predicated on the breakage of minoritised Muslims and Christians, and Adivasis and Dalits. What's happening in Manipur is part of a plan operationalised by the Hindu Right decades ago" (Chatterji 2023).

Within the state of Manipur, since its merger into India in 1949 there have been several attempts to alienate the minority tribal Christian communities from their land and culture. The recent report of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (December 2022) highlights some of the problematic issues "faced by Scheduled Tribes in the State of Manipur" (National Commission for Scheduled Tribes 2022, 2-6):

1. Denial of bills that protect tribal people, their land, and their culture, in particular "The Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Council Bill 2021" recommended by the Hills Area Committee;
2. Demand of the majority Meitei for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to circumvent land purchase restrictions in order to grasp the tribal lands;

3. Infringement of tribal land and forest through enforcing incorrect, unilaterally imposed British era protected and reserve forest acts;
4. Encroachment into tribal land in the hills through manipulation of the 1960 Manipur Land Revenue & Reform Act;
5. Failure to fill ST backlog or shortfall of posts in all state departments and central institutions in Manipur;
6. Removal of Armed Forces (Special Power) Act (AFSPA) 1958 only from valley districts but remaining in the hills in discriminatory fashion;
7. Imposition of majority language on tribal people for recruitment for any post in Postal Services and Banking Institutions;
8. Disproportionate representation in the State Assembly in which 40 seats are reserved for the valley and only 19 out of the remaining 20 seats are for ST (more than a 2/1 ratio)—despite eligible voters being split approximately 60/40 (approximately 1.2 million to 800 thousand);
9. Bureaucratic manipulation by including many tribal hill villages under valley police jurisdiction in the name of "convenient administration" and by keeping land records of many villages of the hill districts in the custody of nearby valley districts.

On top of these problems, there has been a systematic attempt to demonize minority Kuki communities and segregate them from others with no interference whatsoever from the administration. Allegations of Kukis being illegal migrants, narco terrorists, and poppy cultivators need to be understood in light of this recent envisioned majoritarianism among the majority community. The aim of the majority-dominated state government is to protect the geographical integrity of Manipur (further explained below) by pacifying the demands of minority Kuki and Naga tribal communities. For the recently established *Meitei Lipun* ("Meitei Pride") and the revival of the *Arambai Tenggol* (traditional army of Meitei King) in particular, the geographical integrity of Manipur includes the revival of Sanamahism (the traditional Meitei ancestor-worshiping religion) and the promotion of a sense of common Meitei identity and stronger moral integration among all Meitei communities for firmer control of Manipur and its resources. On the other hand, for tribal people land, culture, and identity are inseparably connected, as Sitlhou beautifully expresses: "Changes in land relations lead to a redefinition of identity" (Sitlhou 2015, 70).

Details of the events immediately leading to the violence is given by the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum's "Countdown to 3rd May" (ITLF 2023).

The Infamous May 3rd Incident and the Complexity of Ensuing Christian Suffering

Considering it their last resort to address the state government's move against the minority tribals, both the Kukis and the Nagas—under the leadership of their student bodies, "All Tribal Manipur Students Union" (ATSUM)—organized a peaceful solidarity march on the 3rd of May in all the 10 tribal districts of Manipur. The immediate concern then was the announcement of the Manipur High Court endorsing the Meitei Scheduled Tribe demand. The peaceful march ended in the early afternoon, and actually many participants had already returned to their homes. However, after about half an hour, the burning of the gate of the 1917-1919 Anglo-Kuki War centenary monument near the Hill-Valley border area triggered the ongoing communal violence. (There is a different version from the Meiteis that it was the Kukis who started the violence, but there is evidence to show otherwise.) Of course, the struggle of tribal people for justice and peace started much earlier due to their systematic alienation by the Government highlighted above. It is also very important to note that the Government of India was to sign an agreement with Kuki leaders on May 4th to settle their demand for a Territorial Council—with which the majority community disagreed. Apparently the two-pronged purpose

of the ongoing violence is to interrupt the settlement process of the Kuki demand for constitutional protection of their land and identity and (as explained earlier) to "protect the geographical integrity of Manipur" (as intended by the radical Hindu-nationalist agenda and by the Meitei majority).

It is in such a context that the ongoing full-scale civil war is rooted and sustained. The following chronological account of the events of the first few days and three nights of the violence (ITLF 2023) reveals a premeditated religious element in the violence where the ideology of an "Undivided India" and the purpose of ostensibly protecting the geographical integrity of Manipur (for the sake of the majority community) merge.

3rd of May, 2023

The violence broke out around 4pm after the peaceful march, and the tribal people were caught totally unprepared. The first victim who was beaten to death by the Meitei mob wearing black T-shirts was a pastor who was defending his congregation by resisting the mob from attacking his church. His wife and mother called him to come home and at least have his dinner, but the pastor replied, "Mom, how can I leave my people and come in this grim situation?" The body of this pastor has still not been found. For their part, the Meitei mob, once the clash started in Churachandpur District (south-central Manipur) that evening, immediately and systematically attacked minority Kuki Christians in various districts: in Imphal city, 15 Kuki communities were attacked, and 183 houses and three churches were burned down; in Bishnupur district, 79 houses and five churches were burned down; in Churachandpur district, 195 houses and 10 churches were burned down; in Kangpokpi district, 187 houses, eight churches, and two synagogues were burned down, and in Thoubal and Tengnoupal districts 70 houses were burned down (ITLF 2023). In this strategic plan, none of the Kuki tribes—Hmar, Paite, Vaiphei, Thadou, Gangte, Simte, Mizo, and others—were spared. In all cases, the main target was the church because it is the symbol of tribal people's identity, strength, and hope. To win the sympathy of others in central India it was reported that the violence was due to attacks on Hindu temples in Christian dominated Churachandpur, and several national journalists came to verify those reports. After a few days Christian leaders were able to correct that false narrative by showing the journalists that the temples were still standing intact, and the journalists interviewed Hindu business community leaders in town. The Army camp in Imphal and other districts were not given any orders to act and stop the violence.

4th of May, 2023

Killings and the burning of churches and schools continue but the Army is still not given orders to intervene. In Imphal East District the burning of houses took place from around 7am to 9pm. All together there were 16 villages and their churches along with 524 houses that were burned down, schools and churches were attacked, and around 3430 people were displaced. In Kangpokpi District attacks began at 9am and went up to 12pm. Three villages with their churches were attacked and around 900 rendered homeless. At around 6pm three tribal villages under the district were attacked wherein around 58 houses, three churches, and two schools were all razed to the ground, and around 180 people were displaced. In various other districts 18 tribals were killed, many people were severely injured, and many people took shelter in the jungle. Three tribal daily wage labourers working at a construction site in Imphal were pulled from their rented accommodation and attacked mercilessly. Two of them were stoned to death in the middle of the main road. The third man, Mr. David Liansianmuan, son of Jimmy Khupminthang of Zoumunnuam Lamka, survived, although he was left to die in the middle of the road with a huge stone was tied to his leg to prevent him from running away.

5th of May, 2023

Additional Central Security Forces were airlifted to Imphal but were not given orders to act. Extreme communal violence continued unabated. In Imphal East District from 7am in the morning to 8pm, nine tribal villages under the district were attacked by the Arambai Tenggol, wherein around 295 houses were razed to the ground, along with six churches as well as five school buildings. A total of more than 1700 people were displaced. In Kangpokpi District from around 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm three tribal villages were attacked by the Arambai Tenggol: 75 houses were completely razed to the ground as well as three churches and one government-aided school, and more than 550 people were displaced. In another location, four persons were killed, including two women. One was a Miss Nianghoiching, age 33, a staff nurse in the district hospital. Another was a wife and a mother named Kimmalsawm, age 38. Another was a young man named Moikhenmung, age 19. The other is still unidentified. At that time, there were 12 dead bodies and more than 190 injured in Churachandpur District Hospital.

6th of May, 2023

The situation in Imphal remained extremely distressing with a further tragic development: by this fourth day of the attack, none of the minority Kuki Christians—including those who were receiving treatments in different hospitals in Imphal—could remain wherever they were but had to take shelter in Army camps. At the same time, many patients died in the hospitals and their bodies unclaimed as their caregivers had to flee for safety. In Kangpokpi district, particularly at the foothills of Imphal Valley, more than 20 villages including several churches were burned down despite the presence of Indian Army troops in the area. In most cases, the state police forces would come first and chase away all men from the village, then the mob could come and burn villages. On this day, six people were killed, including a mentally disabled woman named Thiandam, age 50, who was cut into pieces and burned along with her house.

During those first few days and nights, more than 300 churches of all kinds—including Catholic, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Believers Church, Church of the Nazarene, Salvation Army, Baptist, and Independent—were either burned or vandalized. Churches both of Meiteis in the valley and of the tribals were targeted. The churches were always the first targets during the attacks. There are two reasons for this. First, the church is the source of strength, hope, and identity of the tribal people. Second, to the Hindu Meitei, Christianity is considered the religion of low caste communities, hence eliminating it is part of the community integration process for national strength. In this process of destroying churches, the Government was absent to provide security to minority communities. Many observers were misled to suggest that the ongoing violence is an isolated case and has nothing to do with religion, but the experience on the ground shows otherwise.

The goal to attack the churches was achieved in the first few days of the violence, and what has come afterward are other issues, including land and resources which too are parts of the design. Having said that, in the case of Meitei Christians in Manipur valley until today, they are not allowed to meet together for public worship services, and in fact many of their leaders are still hiding in safer places. For fear of attack by their own people who are not Christians, Meitei Christians abstain from contacting Kukis for mutual support and cooperation. Meitei Christians thus have different elements than Kukis in their suffering.

Overall, as of mid-September , there were 137 confirmed deaths, 200 villages burned down, 7000-plus houses burned down, 360 churches and living quarters burned down, and 41,425 Internally displaced persons. Mob attacks, assisted gang rape, torture, looting of property, mutilation of dead bodies, and the delay or total failure of law and order are common in the ongoing attack on minority tribal Christians (ITLF 2023).

Some Implications

What else is gone when the church is burned down? For indigenous Kukis and other tribal Christians in Northeast India, when their church is destroyed the source of identity, strength, and hope as the nerve of their existence is attacked at the root. During the Sanskritization of the Meiteis in the valley, tribal people in the hills did not opt for that religion but instead believed in Christianity, because they found in it a liberating message. One must never forget that it is Christianity that made the Kukis who they are today, but unfortunately for the same reason, like Christians in Kandamal District of Oddisa in 2008, they are under attack partly because of their positions in the society that the gracious God brings them through Christianity after generations of deprivation and oppression as tribals under a hierarchical structure of India/Manipur. Managing the people's religion is given as an important strategy to control their world. Now, whether or not the Kukis will really abandon the source of their life and identity in Christ is a big question. In some cases, it works the other way round: some people have come to a deeper faith in Christ through seeing how God protected them in the midst of bomb shells and bullets during this violence. Kuki communities will face bigger tests of faith from both political and developmental forces in the post ethno-religious attack which currently is at its peak.

In a world that seems increasingly materialistic and godless, Christian persecution today can be so confusingly complex that often it does not look like Christian persecution. For contemporary Manipur, persecution is about an attack on the people's history, religion, culture, land, and resources in the wider context of the BJP's vision for an "Undivided India." The persecution has not been driven by the worship of any god as such but from a mammon worship that, in fact, has led some people to deny any religious element in the current persecution (Parratt 2023). Looking at the issue more deeply, the goal is material wealth for power in the name of nation building or territorial integrity, and the means is religion which is the nerve of a community. Religion, in this case Christianity, is considered important because it is that which provides holistic development of Kuki communities.

The Christian message was brought by a Welshman, Watkin Roberts, in 1910 under the "Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission," better known as the "1910 Kuki Mission." It was on that foundation that Kuki communities were founded and flourished in parts of current-day Northeast India, the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, and the Northwestern part of Myanmar (Haokip 2014). Besides the transforming impact of Christianity in the society, land and resources have been part of the reason behind the ongoing ethno-religious persecution in Manipur. Kuki communities have occupied the best part of Manipur's hill areas with vast untapped natural resources, hence in large part, like many indigenous communities across the world, the Kuki people suffer exploitation together with their land. This multidimensional nature of indigenous Christian suffering is a new frontier for twenty-first-century mission.

In addition to this multidimensional suffering, another important implication for world Christianity is the question of embracing indigenous people and the transforming values of their cultures. In India, Christian persecution takes place mostly among Dalits and tribal communities. Anti-conversion laws and constitutional reservation provisions are often used to control them. Similarly, in Christianity, no sufficient space has been given for indigenous people to represent their traditional wisdom in Christian belief and practice. The prospect of indigenous Christianity can be visualized in the way they see all reality as interconnected and interdependent. For the particular context addressed in this article, the issue of land becomes very important for the people's theology and life. Land, for indigenous people, is not merely an object or capital but a living being with which humans must relate with integrity and care.

This view of land is different from the way capitalists see it, and it is here that an alternative theology may be explored for peaceful and sustainable earth community.

The final implication is a call for a prophetic Christian message to our present generation. Both at local and global levels, the Church gradually becomes a mere spectator of the alarming rise of fascist ideologies globally in the name of national strength, stability, and security. In Northeast India, particularly Manipur during this time, the Church is unable to speak up prophetically and with a united voice against attacks on Christianity at the local level. The Church of Manipur as a whole—of the Nagas, Kuki, and Meiteis—has failed to see the issue from the perspective in which all concerns of faith, land, and politics are intertwined. Had the churches of all communities stood together to denounce the violence at the beginning, Manipur would not have witnessed this large scale of Christian suffering. The prophetic voice is the voice against ideologies and structures including tribalism that deny space for all, particularly minority communities, and that promotes justice and peace. This capacity for the Church to convey a prophetic message is a matter of urgency, at both local and global levels.

Conclusion

Christian suffering in Manipur has resulted from the vision for an "Undivided India," the protection of Manipur's geographic integrity for the majority community, and minority people's search for space within those other two aspirations. Three goals wrapped up in one complicated vision! In that vision, concerns for religion, politics, domination, and land grabbing are intertwined. Therefore, one must not overlook the dynamics of faith, power, and territory in the context of Manipur—a topic that needs to be further explored (Sookhdeo 2008). Sadly, often the bodies of innocent women are chosen as sites of violence for playing out the politics of majoritarianism. Christianity being the religion that enables the holistic transformation of tribal communities and liberating them from centuries of suppression has been the main target in this violence, but that reality has been obscured by other issues. The need is to embrace indigenous communities and their traditional values as equal participants in all knowledge productions including religion and politics for sustainable community. The twenty-first-century Christian missions in particular must seriously consider revisiting indigenous wisdom and knowledge through a creative and critical-Christian approach that is biblically sound, historically integrated, and contextually appropriated for a relevant mission theology and practices.

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Meeting the Needs of Internally Displaced Christian Boko Haram Victims: A Case Study of Mokolo in the Far North Region, Cameroon

Moussa Bongoyok

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Abstract

Since 2014, the Far North Region of Cameroon has experienced regular attacks from Boko Haram and, more recently, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). These attacks have affected followers of all three major religions in the region, but Christians have been hit the hardest. Many have been forced to abandon their churches, villages, farms, and businesses and seek refuge in Mokolo, where they feel safe. While nonprofits and churches have quickly provided urgent needs like food, medical assistance, and shelter, many other crucial needs are often overlooked. This study dives deeply into the Mayo Tsanaga division victims' needs, offering insights into a holistic and sustainable approach to relief and aid. The article also highlights the importance of critical strategic preventive measures in at-risk villages and cities.

Key Words: aid, Boko Haram, Cameroon, holistic, Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), Mokolo, persecution, relief, sustainable development, prevention

Introduction

Cameroon is a culturally and religiously diverse nation. This study focuses on the three northern regions of the country (Adamawa, North, and Far North) where Islam has impacted the populations the most. Of all three areas, the Far North was the very first to be exposed to Islam, and it is also the only one that has gone through severe attacks from Boko Haram (which means "foreign education is taboo" in the Hausa language) and, recently, the Islamic State of West Africa Region (ISWAP).

Three Far North divisions (or "departments"—what some English speakers might call "districts," "counties," or "divisions") suffered the most from recurrent terrorist attacks: Logone-et-Chari, Mayo Sava, and Mayo Tsanaga. Although Boko Haram also carried out deadly terrorist attacks in 2015 in the Far North's headquarters (capital) Maroua in the Diamaré division, thanks to God's protection and the joint efforts of the Cameroon army and police placed under the leadership of the very apt Police Commissioner Hayam Martin, Maroua has not been attacked again.

To enhance the quality of its research, this study focused on one division, Mayo Tsanaga, because it is the most populated division and the one that lost the most significant number of lives and churches. For data collection, a combination of participant observation, interviews, and focus groups were used. Data analysis consisted of content analysis and discourse analysis. Due to space limitations this article primarily focuses on describing the geographic context, the historical background, some of the root causes of the terrorist attacks, the impact on churches and Christians resulting from these attacks, and some of the key felt needs of the internally displaced Christians. The article also suggests a preliminary proposal for a holistic and sustainable strategy for the displaced to survive.

Geographic Context

Cameroon is a West African nation surrounded by Chad in the North, the Central African Republic in the East, Gabon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea in the South, and Nigeria in the West. Of all its neighbors, it shares the most extensive border with Nigeria, as seen on the Figure 1 map below.

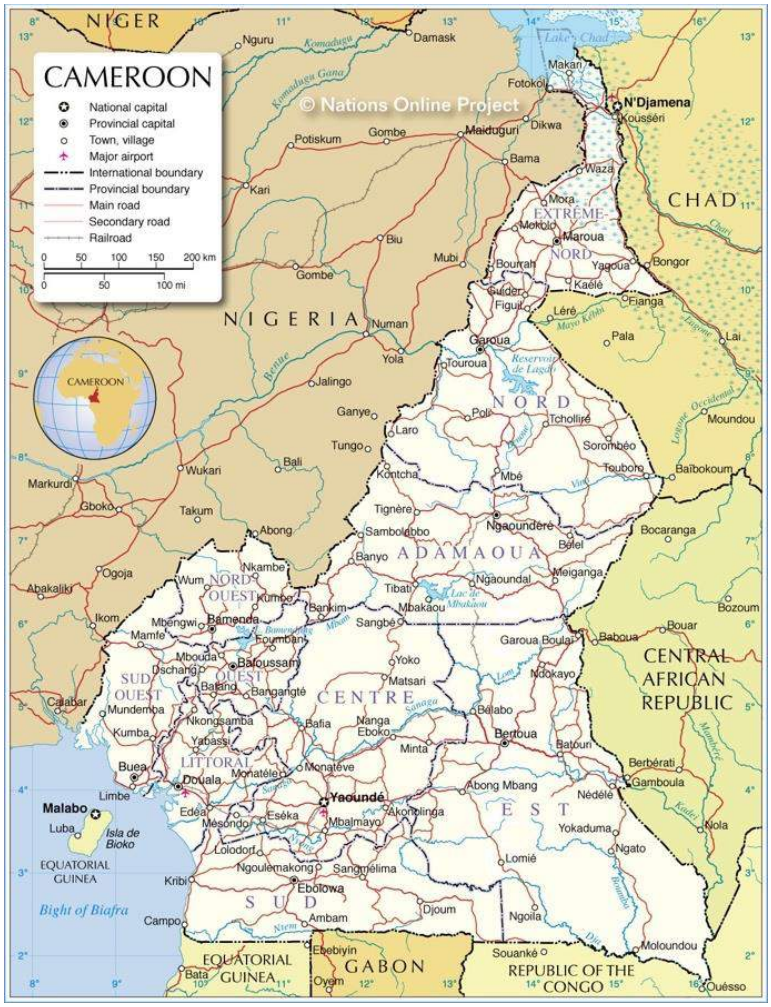

Figure 1: Administrative Map of Cameroon (Nations Online 2021)

Furthermore, in Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria—which shares a border with Mayo Sava—Muhammed Yusuf founded Boko Haram in 2002 (Thurston 2018). Maiduguri is predominantly the territory of the Kanuri people, who also live in Cameroon, which explains why the movement spread quickly on the Cameroonian side. Maiduguri is also home to a large Mafa population, the largest ethnic group in the Mayo Tsanaga division. This explains why many fighters are very familiar with the languages, cultures, and hiding places at the border between the two nations, making it more difficult to control their movements in the context of asymmetric war.

The Mayo Tsanaga department, seen on the map of Figure 2 below, has a Sahelian climate, with only three to four months annually of rain. The population relies on agriculture, but land is becoming scarce due to mountains, overpopulation, high illiteracy rate, and, to make the situation worse, overexploitation. Most of the population lives in abject poverty, which exposes the youth

to the temptation of joining the ranks of terrorists, hoping they will have a better socio-economic condition.

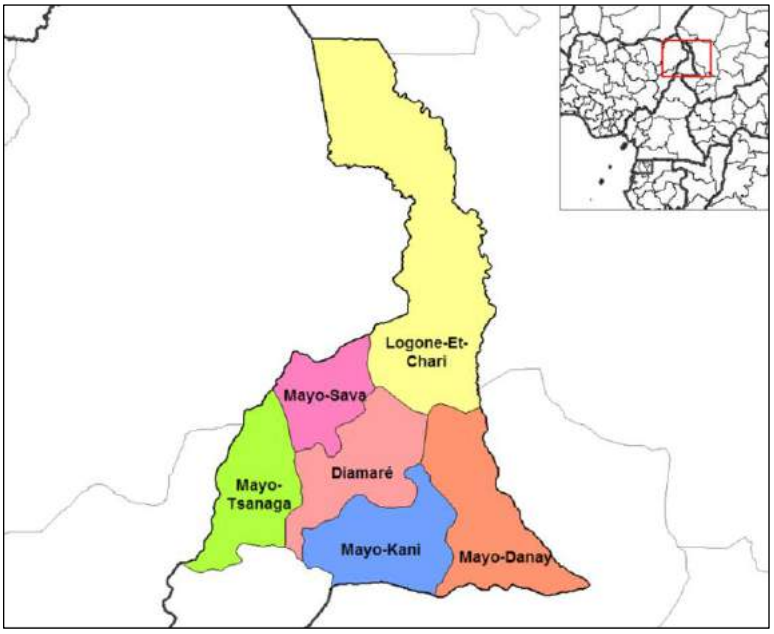

Figure 2: Departments of Far North Cameroon (Rarelibra 2006)

Religiously, Mayo Tsanaga is the first area in Cameroon where missionaries from the Sudan United Mission (SUM) settled and planted churches, primary and secondary schools, professional schools, Bible schools, and medical clinics. Under SUM leadership, the Bible was translated into the Mafa language and used by the SUM-birthed Union of Evangelical Churches in Cameroon as well as by other Protestant denominations, including the Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists. As a result, Mayo Tsanaga has one of the highest concentrations of churches in the whole of Northern Cameroon, and more Christians are in Mayo Tsanaga than followers of other religions. Historically, however, that was not the case.

Historical Background

The history of Cameroon is full of unexpected changes (Mveng 1984; 1985). In 1804, Usman dan Folio, a Pullo (Fulani), launched a jihad from neighboring Nigeria, significantly changing the northern regions of Cameroon. Predominantly inhabited by followers of African Traditional Religions before the jihad era, Islam was slowly but tactically imposed on rulers first and then the inhabitants of Cameroon's northern half (current regions of Adamawa, North, and Far North). In fact, today's Far North had been exposed to Islam much earlier through the Kanem Kingdom, which was formed in the seventh century and became Muslim in the eleventh century (Seignobos 2000, 44). Some sources date the Islamization of Kanem even earlier, in the ninth century (SOAS 2016.) In any case, Islam remained a minority religion, including in the Far North of Cameroon, until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

During the early nineteenth century jihad, even though Fulbe (Fulani) fighters took the leadership of most cities, rural areas remained closed to Islam. The dynamic started to change only when the German, British, and French colonial powers partnered with Muslim *laamiibe* (rulers) to

achieve their agendas (Nkili 1984). Islam then gained ground in the region. Independence in 1960 did not change the movement of Islamization for the simple reason that the first President, El Hadj Ahmadou Ahidjo, was a Northern Muslim. During his long leadership (1960-1982), Islam flourished. "Non-Fulbe political leaders were encouraged to convert to Islam, supporting the myth of a homogenous Islamic North" (Regis 2003, 16). Northern Christians even went through severe persecution in the 1970s, not because the President ordered it but because some rulers took advantage of the political circumstances to push their religious agendas. Eventually, Christians were progressively free to live their faith and even evangelize and plant churches because of answers to prayers. It must be observed that God used key Christian leaders like Pastor Hans Eichenberger, whose advice Ahidjo took seriously (the author's upcoming biography of Hans Eichenberger will provide more details).

If welcome change for Christians began during Ahidjo's reign, it is really under the leadership of President Paul Biya, who has ruled the nation since 1982, that the Christian community in the three northern regions has thrived. When the systematic evangelism outreach "Cameroon for Christ" started in the year 1996 with three denominations joining forces—the Union of Evangelical Churches in Cameroon, the Lutheran Brethren Churches of Cameroon, and the Union of Baptist Churches of Cameroon—Christians enjoyed freedom and peace. Hundreds of new churches were planted in the Far North Region alone between 1996 and 2014.

Spiritually speaking the church was flourishing, but the overall social conditions of the Far North Region were showing signs of weaknesses and danger since independence. As Saïbou Issa puts it,

> Since Cameroon's independence, the Far North has been the scene of arms, oil, drug trafficking, and various forms of violent banditry. This permanent insecurity is part of the long history of raids and pre-colonial and colonial wars in which this region has been the site, which still affects community relations. Community tensions were compounded around the 1980s by the phenomenon of highway robbers and hostage takers and land conflicts (Issa 2104, 581; my translation from the French original).

Unfortunately, the church became the first target of Bako Haram in 2014 and has given room to persecution, destruction, trauma, and chaos until now. The overall condition and future of the Sahel region are challenging, and there has been a rise in Islamism since the 1990s (Cincotta & Smith 2021, 9).

The Root Causes of Terrorist Attacks

In my PhD dissertation, I identify the major root causes of Islamism or Islamic fundamentalism in Northern Cameroon as historical, psychological, socioeconomic, doctrinal, ethical, and cultural (Bongoyok 2006, 38-50; cf. Ngassam 2020). The root causes of Islamic militantism in Borno State (Nigeria) and the Mayo Tsanaga division (Cameroon) are almost identical. This similarity leaves one wondering if the governments involved in the fight against religious terrorism in Cameroon, as well as the wider international community, have developed proper strategies in addition to and beyond the military responses that have been taken—in such a way that political, administrative, and religious leaders address all the leading root causes in an all-encompassing holistic strategy. Ignoring the other root causes of the current phenomenon besides those that have been dealt with by military means is a recipe for a disastrous failure. This understanding is particularly important in the city of Mokolo and its neighboring villages and towns.

The population of Mokolo, the headquarters of the Mayo Tsanaga division in the Far North Region of Cameroon, is about 300,000. Situated 80 km west of Maroua (headquarters of the Far North Region), the overall population of Mokolo and its environs is made up of Christians, Muslims, and followers of African Traditional Religions. The main local languages spoken in the area are Mafa and Fulfulde.

Mokolo is a hilly city, with agriculture being the area's main economic activity. Cash crops are cotton and soya beans, while the major food crops are millet, groundnuts, and maize. People also breed domestic animals as local economic savings. The area and other localities in northern Cameroon face severe land degradation due to the abusive use of chemical fertilizer, overuse of farmland, and deforestation from the uncontrollable destruction of trees for firewood. This land degradation causes soil erosion and soil fertility loss, crucial barriers to increasing agricultural yields. A decrease in agricultural products and the insufficiency of alternative sources of income are determinant factors for the perpetuation of poverty in this part of the country. It is worth noting that the Mayo Tsanaga division is one of the poorest areas in the poorest region (Far North) of Cameroon. The Far North has Sudano-Sahelian vegetation and climate and thus has little economic potential. A strong possibility is the exploitation of heretofore hidden natural resources.

Having noted such discouraging negatives, one can only salute the approach adopted towards the former Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters revolving around the following five key concepts: Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, Reinsertion, and Reintegration. However, is that laudable approach sufficient to impulse a dynamic of sustainable holistic transformation in the communities and eliminate, or at least minimize, the current and future impact of terrorist attacks?

The Impact of Terrorist Attacks on Churches and Christians

Terrorism is a tragedy even for the perpetrators, in this case Muslim terrorists. Most Muslims in the Far North Region, and in the Mayo Tsanaga division, are in fact peaceful. They would not fight their neighbors in the name of a religious conviction. For this reason, many of them became targets of militant Islam. Although Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters have attacked Christians, Muslims, and followers of indigenous religions, the first targets of Boko Haram were Christians, foreign missionaries, churches, and Christian institutions. That strategy aligns with the ideology of war against the West and its multiple sources of influence, which radical Muslims see as dangerous and contrary to Islamic values. Although technically Christianity originated in the Middle East (not Europe or America), because Western missionaries were the first to spread the Good News in most African nations, confusion still exists in many Africans' minds between Western civilization and the Christian faith. That confusion explains why churches and followers of Jesus suffered the most from terrorism in the Mayo Tsanaga division. The figures in Tables 1 and 2 below (Feubi 2021) show how more terrorist attacks have been directed against Mayo Tsanaga (and contiguous Mayo Sava) than any other division:

Division (Department)	Number of Attacks in 2020	Number of Attacks in 2021 (January to August)
1. Mayo Tsanaga	55	57
2. Mayo Sava	53	32
3. Logone-et-Chari	22	28

Table 1: Most Attacked Divisions (Departments)

Subdivision (with Its Division)	Number of Attacks in 2020	Number of Attacks in 2021 (January to August)
1. Mayo Moskota (Mayo Tsanaga)	41	32
2. Kolofata (Mayo Sava)	34	27
3. Mora (Mayo Sava)	19	20
4. Waza (Logone-et-Chari)	11	14

Table 2: Most Attacked Subdivisions

These repeated attacks, sometimes carried out with incredible violence, have added to the misery of populations already disadvantaged by the ambient and anemic poverty among them. This situation should not only awaken the empathy of other Christians not directly affected by the attacks but should compel us to know more about the impacts of the attacks, the aid and assistance received, and above all the prospects for 'the future. Many have lost their houses, businesses, church buildings, and loved ones. Many lost their lives near Moskota, Koza, and Tourou, to name only these locations. The study underlying this article has involved a focus group of key displaced Christians to understand better the condition of those internally displaced and fearful for their own lives because of direct attacks on their communities.

Felt Needs of Internally Displaced Christians

Only someone who has lived through a sudden and violent attack in the middle of the night can truly understand the range of emotions an individual goes through, even when they are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. In desperate conditions some believers panic, others question God's love and care, and others feel abandoned by their peers or neighbors. They leave their homes unprepared, traumatized, and empty-handed, sometimes leaving behind the elderly, handicapped, sick, weak, or sleeping family members. Those interviewed for this study were mostly internally displaced between 18 and 37 years old. It seems that many who were attacked were too young such that some did not realize the danger and simply escaped while others were killed or kidnapped to join the ranks of the fighters, become suicide bombers, or become the fighters' spouses against their will. Other victims were too old to run in the dark on a rocky and mountainous landscape, even when they were conscious of the deadly menace.

In their flight, some escapees went to Nigeria, Chad, Gabon, or major cities of Cameroon, mainly Maroua, Garoua, Touboro, Ngaoundéré, Bertoua, Yaoundé, and Douala. Others, too poor to travel far or obliged to care for family members left behind, stayed as close as possible to their villages or towns. Mokolo's population has thus tripled in less than ten years to the point where it is challenging to purchase a piece of land or a farm due to scarcity and cost.

Needs have varied from person to person. Needs have also changed depending on the scope of the attack and the nature of loss (family members, neighbors, friends, parts of their body, house, church, legal documents, job, source of income, goods, peace, joy, etc.), the level of trauma, and the capacity to connect with family members or friends in the new location. Many have struggled with basic needs like shelter, food, school fees for children, and medical care. Others have been victims of depression, trauma, and posttraumatic stress disorder, with no Christian mental care specialist around to meet their felt needs. Others have needed re-training (learning new trades), having been farmers, herders, or in businesses but who lost their employment or even everything during an attack. Some have been gifted entrepreneurs and in need of financial support to get

started and even create jobs for their fellow internally displaced. Even so, no bank would loan them money, and no Christian microfinance has met that specific felt need.

In this situation and others like it, the diversity of needs is such that a pastor or evangelist cannot fully help. It takes a team of believers with spiritual, social, professional, legal, medical, psychological, financial, logistic, and other relevant skills, expertise, and gifts to help the internally displaced. How does the church train and equip them for an intervention when needed? A robust contextual strategy is required.

Beyond Short-term Aid and Relief: A Holistic and Sustainable Development Strategy

While conducting individual interviews, our research team noted various situations. Here are what ten informants reported. Names and exact locations have been changed for security reasons.

1. John (male, age undisclosed)

Boko Haram fighters attacked his village eleven times between March 1 and June 27, 2022. They made an incursion on the village during the night and proceeded to loot the goods and food of the population. John lost clothes, food (millet, peanuts, and others), animals, and the property of the church, of which he is the pastor. The attacks did not impact him physically, but currently he is going through psychological trauma—including fear attacks that made him sick—from the stoppage in studies for his children and the loss of his property that made him dependent on aid. He has received no assistance to date. He is longing for spiritual and psychological comfort, securing the locality by strengthening the military presence, funding to restart his agricultural and pastoral activities, and emergency food aid.

2. Mary (female, age undisclosed)

The first attacks occurred in 2014. Since then, she has undergone multiple displacements that have led her to Mokolo. The attackers burst into the locality, burning houses, looting property, shooting civilians at point-blank range, and shelling women and girls. She lost everything. She left her village with only the clothes she had with her at the time of the attack. She had a month-old baby and was also pregnant. There was no physical impact but huge psychological impacts: fear and nightmares. She received one bag of millet. Apart from that, she has received nothing. She longs for a place to stay (family or house) and subsistence.

3. Peter (male, age undisclosed)

The first attacks took place in 2020 (two in total). The Boko Haram terrorists bombed a military camp. His neighbors were kidnapped. He lost his clothing and telephone. There was no physical impact on him, but huge psychological impacts: fear, nightmares, insomnia. The only assistance he received was one bag of millet in 2021. He is longing for food to eat (specifically millet), financial means to restart his economic activities, and clothing.

4. Adam (male, age undisclosed)

The first attacks took place in 2017 (twice), and another attack in 2022. In 2022 the Boko Haram attackers destroyed everything and burned down the village. He lost his house, food provision (millet), goats, lambs, and poultry. His family members only saved their lives. The attack had no physical impact but enormous psychological impacts: fear, nightmares, insomnia, his children dropping out of school, economic dependence, and lack of sustenance. Since that latest attack, he

has only received one bag of millet. He needs millet for subsistence and financial means to restart his economic activities (to buy another mill to grind cereals), and clothing.

5. Abel (male, 18 years old)

Boko Haram did not reach his village directly; however, when they learned that a neighboring village was attacked, all the inhabitants of his locality fled as a preventive measure. There was no looting or bombing, but the village was emptied of its inhabitants. He had to abandon his house, land, and certain objects. There was no physical impact but enormous psychological impacts: fear, nightmares, insomnia, his children dropping out of school, economic dependence, and lack of sustenance. He has not received any assistance. He is longing for army protection and food.

6. Sarah (female, 35 years old)

The first attacks occurred in 2014 (twice), and one in 2022. There was bombing, looting, and killing, including his uncle's wife. In addition to losing a relative, he lost livestock, a sewing machine, clothing, and all household affairs. He did not have a physical injury, but he had enormous psychological impacts: fear, nightmares, insomnia, her children dropping out of school, economic dependence, and lack of sustenance. She received food from the host church every year. She longs for the return of security subsistence and resuming her sewing activities by purchasing another sewing machine.

7. David (male, 38 years old)

The first attacks occurred in 2018 (more than ten have already been recorded). The Boko Haram and ISWAP fighters set fire to their houses and perpetrated heavy shooting, looting, and kidnapping. As a result, his house and all its contents were completely burned. He lost stored food, livestock, and official documents, including his National Identity Card. He was not physically injured, but the attackers chased him. This all left him with huge psychological impacts: fear, nightmares, insomnia, his children stopping studies for a school year, economic dependence, and lack of subsistence. He received only one bag of millet in 2021. He currently needs millet for subsistence and financial means to restart his economic activities that stopped because of attacks, including trading in animals.

8. Lea (female, 35 years old)

The first attacks took place in 2018. Jihadists attacked with weapons, killing and looting. Her uncle's throat was slit. She lost her clothing. She was physically injured and there were huge psychological impacts: fear, nightmares, and insomnia. She received one bag of millet. She needs more millet for subsistence.

9. Richard (male, 37 years old)

The first attacks occurred on 12 September 2017 (six attacks have already been recorded). Boko Haram attackers surrounded the village. They burned houses. They took a 13-year-old hostage and killed two people. They burned his house, and he lost everything (livestock and other household affairs). There was no personal injury but enormous psychological impacts: fear, nightmares, insomnia, disruption of children's studies, and cessation of economic activities, including trade and agriculture. He received support for his children's schooling, clothing, food, and psychological and spiritual accompaniment from NGOs and the church. He needs land for agriculture and funding to revive his business. He also needs training to learn an income-generating trade.

10. Samuel (male, age undisclosed)

The first attacks took place in June 2022. Two neighboring villages were attacked. All the villagers left the locality. They abandoned their fields at the beginning of the rainy season. There was no physical injury but huge trauma: economic losses, school closures, the church emptied. He received did not receive assistance.

Considering the felt needs of the ten internally displaced believers listed above, short-term aid or relief must be improved. Some did not receive any help, and most got one bag of millet. Only one man received full support for his mental health, while nine out of ten did not have any support for a problem more complex than physical need (cf. Gingrich & Gingrich, 2017). It is possible and even necessary to provide better help than that, but doing so requires much prayer, thinking, analysis, planning, prevention techniques, safety measures, management, follow-up, discernment, wisdom, and above all genuine love.

The school I serve as President, Institut Universitaire de Développement International (IUDI), has started an experiment in two of the poorest villages of the Mayo Tsanaga department since 2019. IUDI asked the community leaders to select 20 unemployed young men and women and send them for training and mentoring. Forty people received six months of theoretical training in holistic and sustainable development, including entrepreneurship. They also did an internship for two months to have hands-on experience. IUDI asked each student to submit a proposal for an income-generating project that could be conducted within their village with a budget of $200. Our faculty members guided them in the process, and we gave the amount mentioned above to each of them. Some have already fructified the seed money and quadrupled it. Others are struggling but learning life-transforming valuable lessons in the process. The next stage is to grant more funds to graduates who show outstanding entrepreneurship skills so that they can grow more and even employ other youth in the community. Our administrative and faculty team commits to providing coaching and mentoring for at least two years until the trainees can thrive and multiply without any external help. So far the experiment is successful and can be used in similar contexts.

There is no single strategy that applies to all contexts. Strategic severe planning is necessary in each location and social group. However, this study would like to suggest that each strategy has the following essential aspects, organized with the full involvement and ownership of the community around the acronym "PREPARE": Pray, Research, Elaborate, Partner, Act, Re-examine, and Equip.

Pray: It is necessary to ask God's wisdom as His guidance is always the best in any situation.
Research: Research must precede planning. A SWOT analysis conducted by local community leaders who identify challenges and opportunities is strongly recommended.
Elaborate: A strategic plan with a team of resource people must be made.
Partner: Find a team of like-minded, qualified, and faithful Christians to meet holistic felt needs.
Act: Move from theory to practice, in words and deeds, with integrity and respectful fear of God.
Re-examine: Wise leaders should evaluate actions regularly and make necessary changes.
Equip: Equipping people for a sustainable development movement is the secret for lasting impact.

Conclusion

A closer look at recent human history shows that, despite all the hopes that humanity puts in science and technology, there are more questions than answers, more problems than solutions,

more deadly rivalries than peaceful partnerships, more hatred than love, and more chaotic events than orderly ones. More religious persecutions will occur as society moves away from the only God and Creator. Christians should not be taken by surprise. The question is, how well are God's people prepared not only to meet the immediate and holistic felt needs of people who come under Islamist terrorist attacks but also to equip them to be enabled to take care of themselves and even sustainably help others?

This article does not pretend to cover all the aspects and depth of the needs, or how to meet those needs, of displaced Christian victims of religious attacks. The article mainly presents the status of those who are displaced because of religion based violence. However, the study of the group of Christians internally displaced due to Boko Haram and ISWAP attacks in the Mayo Tsanaga division shows that it is essential to move quickly beyond the emergency and to plan prevention and sustainable development strategies in contexts and at-risk communities under recurrent attacks. Such planning is hard work but can be done with genuine love for God and neighbors.

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Looking into the Sky: Hope for Han-Uyghur Reconciliation

Ari Kin and Abigail Joseph

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Abstract

The Uyghur people endure tremendous oppression. The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2, provides a framework for understanding both the cause and the solution to the Uyghur's oppression. One key event, the Urumqi riots of July 2009, significantly helps illuminate the Uyghurs' current situation, giving clarifying insight into mistreatment of the Uyghurs. Many of the underlying assumptions and stereotypes in the background of this event shape how Uyghurs have consistently been deprecated by the Han. Powerful personal testimonies demonstrate the pain of the Uyghurs and also highlight sacrificial—even persecution-invoking—steps Han Chinese Christians should take to love their Uyghur neighbors, ultimately, to achieve Han-Uyghur reconciliation.

Key Words: genocide, reconciliation, Urumqi, Uyghur, Xinjiang

Tale of Two Riots

"…the city was filled with…confusion, and they rushed together…, dragging with them …Paul's companions in travel. …for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" Acts 19:29, 34 ESV.

The description in Acts 19 introduces the "outcast" in Ephesians 2:11: unbelieving, pagan-god-worshiping Gentiles that, at least in the case of Acts 19, start riots. Paul does not criminalize these people, but rather, has compassion on them as he encourages the Christians in Ephesus to remember where they came from and what kind of life they had before being introduced to Jesus. Meaningful similarities exist between the Acts 19 riot and the 2009 riots in Urumqi, the capital city of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in northwestern China. Moreover, Paul's response to the rioting Ephesians holds vital relevance for Christians responding to the Uyghurs.

Ephesians 2:11-12 reads, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

The theological foundation Paul lays in Ephesians 2:11-12 explains what it was like for Gentiles who existed apart from the special covenant community of Old Covenant Israel. Paul elaborates by pointing out how the Gentiles were socially ostracized by Israel, separated from Israel's spiritual blessings, and covenantal strangers to Israel and their God. These ways in which Gentiles were excluded shed light on the Uyghur people, especially as they relate to Han Chinese in China. This scripture passage parallels the current state of Han-Uyghur relations, but it also looks forward to the kind of reconciliation that is possible in Ephesians 2:13-22.

Overview

The Uyghur people have experienced tremendous oppression for more than 70 years due to their ethnicity. Many of the underlying stereotypes in the background of the Urumqi riots of July 2009

have shaped how the Han treat Uyghurs over the last century, and further, have been fodder for the Chinese Community Party (CCP) to provoke Han hatred toward the Uyghurs. Additionally, several circumstances led to the Urumqi riots and subsequent killings, illumining the overall Uyghur situation. Finally, powerful personal testimonies demonstrate the pain of being Uyghur and also provide vision for Han Christians to sacrificially love their Uyghur neighbors, including even to enter into their persecution, and be truly set apart from the prevailing, Uyghur-deprecating culture of the Han.

Stereotypes Held by the Han Chinese People and Government toward the Uyghurs

Across the world, whenever there is extensive oppression of one people group, there are almost always systemic reasons. At the root of systemic discrimination are assumptions and stereotypes that drive unjust treatment of the marginalized (Anyabwile 2015; Cole 2020; Crossman 2019; Longley 2022).

Marco Cinnirella, in "Ethnic and National Stereotypes: A Social Identity Perspective," a chapter in C. Barfoot's 1997 volume *Beyond Pug's Tour*, contributes the following:

> …stereotypes are belief systems which associate attitudes, behaviors and personality characteristics with members of a particular social category or group. They may include 'active stereotypes' (circulating in society and endorsed by particular groups) and 'dormant stereotypes' (indirectly disseminated via the mass media)…. Where individuals have not 'shared' stereotypes with their peers, they often rely exclusively on dormant stereotypes, internalizing mass-mediated images that later come to influence face-to-face interactions. In extreme cases, social stereotypes can [Barfoot adds] 'numb our consciences and tempt us to succumb to violent and destructive impulses' (Finley 2013, 82).

Clearly Han Chinese hold such stereotypes regarding the Uyghurs.

The Han people and the CCP judge that the Uyghur way of life is "feudal." Over the years of ongoing Han occupation of Xinjiang (Urumqi in particular), Han people, along with Han policy makers, have developed assumptions about the Uyghur people as they compare Uyghur culture to Han ways and customs. As these comparisons have become more defined and repeated, one of the primary judgments of the Han that has surfaced toward the Uyghurs is that Uyghurs are backward, lazy, and too traditional. Rudelson puts it like this: "Among Hans, particularly those in Urumqi, 'feudal' is the Chinese equivalent of a curse and a pervasive conceptual category; it is comparable to such a negatively charged Western term as primitive, fanatical, and backward. Hans use the word 'feudal' to dismiss something *without critical evaluation*" (Rudelson 1997, 124, emphasis added).

Without critical evaluation is the key phrase here. Based on Rudelson, three broad categories capture the summary of the presumptuous evaluation of the Uyghurs by the Han: sex, Islam, and alcoholism. In Urumqi, Han men have often lamented the fact that Uyghur women—despite often being forced to do so because of genocide and "ethnic cleansing"—are unwilling to marry them (New 2017). They see this unwillingness as an archaic aspect of Islam. The situation is particularly difficult for Han men to accept because, according to Chinese lore, Uyghur women are seen as the most beautiful. Furthermore, Han men themselves believe that Uyghur women actually prefer Han men to Uyghur men because Han men do not drink heavily or beat their wives (Rudelson 1997). Also, the Han Chinese do not understand the religious reasons for why the Uyghurs abstain from

eating pork. Again, all of the particular beliefs about Uyghur women's sex and marriage preferences, Uyghur alcoholism, and Uyghur abstaining from pork held by the Han constitute an attitude toward the Uyghurs that assumes they are feudal and beneath the "superior" Han culture. The Han attitude that the Uyghur are inferior actually fueled much of the struggle with alcoholism that has existed among mostly young Uyghur men. Again, Rudelson offers the following analysis:

> The prevalence of these pejorative attitudes in Urumqi and throughout China undermines individual Uyghurs' self-worth and results in internalization of self-doubt and swallowed anger that occasionally becomes explosive… [I]ncrease in alcohol consumption among male Uyghurs is directly related to their marginalized sense of self-worth… (Rudelson 1997, 125).

Negative Han stereotypes about the Uyghurs contribute to a Uyghur backlash against the Han—understandably so. A joke that is often told by Uyghurs illustrates that point:

> There was an American, a Japanese, a Uyghur, and a Han Chinese on a train. The American had cash overflowing from all the pockets of his clothes. He said, 'I have way too much money. I don't need all this money,' so he threw some out of the window. The Japanese guy had dozens of valuable Rolex watches on each arm. He said, 'I have too many watches. I don't need all these watches,' so he threw half of them out the window. Then the Uyghur guy said, 'We have too many Han Chinese people in the world. We don't need any more,' so he threw the Han Chinese man out the window of the train (Longtime 2009).

That there is significant Uyghur resentment toward Han Chinese should come as no surprise. The Uyghur's bitterness comes from the pain of continually being labeled as inferior by the Han. The CCP has greatly encouraged the overarching Han belief that the Uyghurs are "feudal," leading to assumptions that the Uyghurs are, in almost every aspect of life, inferior. The correlating Uyghur heartache emanates from a portion of a poem written by. a Uyghur called, "We Can't Look into the Sky":

> The sky is far, so far from us,
> Desires are wet,
> Misery hasn't gone yet,
> We can't raise our head.
> The sky is near, so near to our soul,
> to the flowing blood
> deep inside deep in our heart (H. n.d.).

July 2009 Urumqi Riots and Causes

In July 2009, violence erupted on the streets of Urumqi. Vehicles were burned, and hundreds of people—Han and Uyghur—were killed. Many locals in Urumqi, both Han and Uyghur, describe this event as the turning point of the unjust treatment the Uyghurs have received for the last seven decades: Before the riots of 2009 the Uyghurs hated the Chinese, but the Chinese basically ignored the Uyghur. After the riots, the Uyghurs hated the Chinese and the Chinese hated the Uyghurs. More generally, in the minds of many Han Chinese and Uyghurs the July 2009 riots in Urumqi were a watershed moment.

What was the cause (or causes) of the July 2009 violence in Urumqi? How might all Christians, especially Han Christians, understand the event in light of Ephesians 2:11-12? And what can the global Church learn from wrestling with these and other related questions?

Most of the scholarship agrees that the riots were inevitable and identifies seven causes.

Cause 1: Economic Development Injustice

Over the years of ongoing Chinese occupation of the Xinjiang Province, the CCP has deployed various projects for the economic development of Xinjiang. However, the Uyghurs never see these developments as benefitting them but rather as a means to motivate more Han Chinese to move to the area, diluting Uyghur culture (Halliday 2013).

Cause 2: Employment Discrimination

With this Han influx, the CCP has favored placing the Han Chinese in any new and available jobs, not the Uyghurs (Halliday 2013). Even if this situation has improved in recent years the damage has been done; the Uyghur do not feel valued or needed in their own homeland. And whatever improvement is meaningless now given the ongoing genocide since 2016 (Halliday 2013).

Cause 3: Discrimination in Xinjiang's Education System

In the recent past, the formal education of the Uyghur community involved a difficult decision for every Uyghur student (Halliday 2013). *Minkaohan* are Uyghurs who chose to be educated in all-Mandarin classes for better job opportunities for their future in China. However, this decision excluded them from learning Uyghur heritage and culture like the *Minkaomin*, who stayed more directly connected to their Uyghur roots but sacrificed key job placement opportunities. This educational-economic system devalued Uyghur culture in that only Uyghurs willing to sacrifice learning about their heritage obtained better jobs. Moreover, this discriminatory system caused internal divisions in the Uyghur community, as many *Minkaomin* saw *Minkaohan* as sellouts. Furthermore, the CCP was given more motivation to practice job placement discrimination. It is important to note as well that presently there is no option to be educated in the Uyghur language. All Uyghur children are forced to be educated in Mandarin (Li 2019).

Cause 4: Religious Discrimination and Restrictions

Up to the time of the July 2009 riots the CCP had continually tightened its grip on the religious practice of Uyghurs. They allowed no outward expressions of faith in public work places or in private businesses (Halliday 2013). The CCP's motive in the restrictions was to suppress the possibility of Islamic extremism. Interestingly, even greater levels of restrictions on Islam exist now; many Uyghur mosques have been demolished or converted for another purpose (Moritsugu and Kang 2021).

Cause 5: The Ongoing "Strike Hard" Campaign

For the CCP the point of the "Strike Hard" campaign was to fight crime and terrorism. However, the effect it had on minorities, in particular Uyghurs, has furthered injustices, giving Han people excuses to profile Uyghurs as criminals (Halliday 2013).

Cause 6: Massive Shift in Population of Han People in Xinjiang

In 1949, Xinjiang had only a 7% Han Chinese population. By 2008, the population of Han Chinese had grown to a staggering 41% (Halliday 2013). This fact underscores the amount of jobs Han Chinese people have been getting in Xinjiang and how very few of those jobs have been going to the Uyghurs, formerly the majority ethnic group in that region.

Cause 7: Violent Event at the Xuri Toy Factory, Shaoguan, Guangdong

Six Uyghur men were falsely accused of raping a Han woman in the living quarters of the Xuri Toy Factory. After this false accusation, a huge fight broke out at the factory. Many of the Han Chinese workers ganged up on the Uyghur men. Official reports said that two Uyghur men died, but later eyewitnesses reported that several Uyghur men lost their lives in the brawl. Video cameras captured the fight, and the coverage went viral in Urumqi shortly after the attack. Indignation over the fight led to protests that eventually turned violent (Halliday 2013).

What compounded the anger and injustice felt by the Uyghur in this event was not just the killing of the Uyghur men but the fact that the Han workers reacted against the Uyghur without evidence that they did anything wrong. This reaction highlights the stereotypes and racial discrimination against the Uyghur people.

In sum, injustice in economic development, employment, education, religious expression, and the "Strike Hard" campaign, along with population shift and the events at the Xuri Toy Factory, all caused the riots of July 2009. Underlying racism against the Uyghurs clearly exists, but what are the underlying assumptions or stereotypes that have lead to such discriminatory policies?

Ephesians 2:11-12

Paul's words in Ephesians 2:11-12 shed light on assumptions and stereotypes that have fed racism and discriminatory practices against the Uyghurs. The passage reads, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles…were… separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

The Uyghurs are the "alienated," the "strangers," in their own homeland. Just as Paul writes about how the Gentiles were socially ostracized by Israel, and strangers to Israel's God, and thus strangers to his covenant blessings, by comparison the Uyghurs are alienated and made strangers in their own homeland. They are the dispossessed.

> What become of us?
> Distance is soaking wet,
> Eyes are complete blank
> That's why we can't bend our head.
> Are you the crescent? Is that your smile?
> Did you come to guide the dawn?
> Or do your eyes like ours
> full of frown?
> Don't look at us with distant fail
> Your gaze is a fairy tale.
> Please cry so that the drops
> let us know there are still hopes.
> We can't look into the sky (H. n.d.).

The Stories and Voices of Uyghur People—and Hope

Three personal Uyghur stories serve to underscore the current situation and how devastating July 2009 was in Urumqi.

A Han Play

Twenty years before Urumqi 2009, a play produced by Han Chinese celebrated the life of a particular Han person that purportedly helped the Uyghur tremendously in a small, poor town on the south side of XUAR. The play's actors were all Han Chinese people. They depicted a Han man who came to this town to become a teacher for Uyghur kids. Han Chinese people dressed up like Uyghurs and made their faces look like them. The Han man was praised as the savior of the town by the "Uyghur" people, and in the end, he died, and was basically sainted by the "Uyghur" people in the play. This depiction of an external "savior" of ostensibly less fortunate people is comparable to Jim Crow and his black face plays in the U.S-American South (Pilgrim 2012). While these caricatures may not be ill-intended, they can be incredibly painful and belittling (Longtime 2009).

Han Won't Learn Uyghurche

Throughout the years, both foreigners and Han Chinese settled among the Uyghurs in XUAR. Former XUAR expatriates explained that their Uyghur friends would ask them, "How is it that you foreigners have been here for such a short amount of time yet have learned to speak our language so well, but these Han Chinese who have been here forever can't even say one d- word!?" This question expresses how immensely devalued the Uyghurs feel living in their own land while having to share it with the Han. The Han expect the Uyghurs to learn Mandarin but rarely make an effort to learn Uyghurche, the Uyghur language (Longtime 2009).

Hostility from Cab Driver

A personal conversation between the author (Ari Kin) and a Uyghur XUAN resident highlights the racial wounds from Urumqi July 2009. After the riots happened, the Uyghur man came to Urumqi from Kashgar. He took a taxi from the airport to his family's house in Urumqi. The man spoke excellent Mandarin and was wearing a mask, so the cab driver (who was Han) did not know he was Uyghur. As the cab pulled up to the house, the man started speaking some Uyghur to people waiting outside for him. Immediately, the cab driver said to him, "What!? You're Uyghur? Had I known you were Uyghur I would have taken you to a place where I could have gotten rid of you!"

These three stories give insight into how much work still needs to be done in areas of racial reconciliation. However, two additional stories provide a ray of light searing through the devastation: Han Chinese Christians have begun to apply Ephesians 2:11-22. As the Han Chinese church leads the way, they will powerfully bring hope to the Uyghurs, hope that is only possible through the humility and justice the gospel brings.

"That's a Good Man"

The following event contrasts beautifully with the previous stories. A certain Uyghur man from Urumqi who was a nominal Christian had an ugly drinking habit. In his drunken state, he would ramble to the Uyghurs with him about Jesus. One night, his "evangelism" hotly angered a group of Uyghur men and they started beating him. It was a Han Chinese man who came to his rescue and influenced the other Uyghur men to stop beating him. His injuries required hospitalization but no Uyghur cab driver would take him; only a Han driver was willing to take him. Subsequently,

this same Uyghur man had many dreams about Jesus. In one of these dreams, as Jesus walked next to him, they came upon an American and Jesus said, "See that American man? That's a good man." Then they came upon a Japanese man, and again Jesus said, "See that Japanese man? That's a good man." Then they came upon a Han Chinese man, and Jesus said, "See that Han Chinese man? That's a good man."

Accordingly, while Han Chinese people do bear much of the burden of reconciliation with the Uyghur, this beautiful story shows that God is also working powerfully behind the scenes, preparing the marginalized Uyghurs eventually to forgive.

Han Christians' Love

One final story demonstrates courageous, sacrificial, and unconditional love by Han Chinese Christians. After July 2009, some Han believers in Urumqi caught the vision to love their Uyghur neighbors. These believers actually moved to the southern Uyghur part of the city in spite of the fact that many Han pastors were telling their congregations to stay away from the south side and its conflicts. These Han wanted to love their neighbor out of obedience to Christ and were willing to override their pastors' concerns to do so. When Uyghurs needed to go to the northern Han part of Urumqi for various reasons, these Han believers took it upon themselves to escort the Uyghurs, to shield and protect them and ensure they got there and back safely. One of these Han believers developed a close friendship with a Uyghur man whom he had helped. This Uyghur man invited his Han friend to go to his hometown and meet his family. Even though the men were good friends, the Uyghur's family did not like the Han friend and did not receive him well at all. The Uyghur family did not accept him and would not do anything nice for him; they hated him.

These Christ-honoring Han are beginning to understand the problem. As more Han understand, then, through a growing humility, the Han Church can take further steps towards applying Ephesians 2:13-22 for the great purpose of reconciliation with the Uyghurs for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility …So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God… (Ephesians 2:13-14,19).

God's grace is moving people to take righteous risks, yet this kind of work, especially involving racial pain, can be thankless. However, the love that God gives through Christ is the power Christians have to persevere in good works through suffering. The ability to love people sacrificially without needing to be thanked or acknowledged is a mark of true maturity, walking in the good works God has prepared (Eph. 2:10). While the wounds of the Uyghur people are very deep, the Han also have pain from their treatment by Uyghurs. As a result, for our Han brothers and sisters, living an Ephesians 2:11-22 life in front of Uyghurs will not be easy. The fruit may take a long time to develop. But the pursuit is immeasurably worthwhile. God's glory and strength will sustain his people as they move out into a broken world. Moreover, our Uyghur friends will see God's glory on display through the selfless, unconditional, holy—set apart, different—love of his Church.

Conclusion

The riots in Ephesus resulted from the advance of the gospel. The riots centuries later in Urumqi resulted from injustice. Because people outside of Christ do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide their response to evil against them, it is no surprise that the Ephesians of Acts 19 behaved as they did. Notwithstanding, Paul had compassion on the rioters in Ephesus, even though they were not victims of injustice but merely sinners who were resistant to the gospel. How much more then should Christians worldwide—including Han—have compassion on Uyghurs, the victims of severe injustice? Han Christians' compassion will surely subject them to persecution under the CCP. But obedience to Jesus Christ is radically worth the risk. Acts 9:15-16 states Paul's dual call clearly: to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles and also suffer for Christ's sake. Will Han brothers and sisters answer the call? Will Han brothers and sisters tenaciously believe Jesus's words in Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you…rejoice and be glad"? At this moment, as a result of ongoing mass imprisonment, every single Uyghur on the face of the planet is hurting. Every... single... one.

> We can't count the days.
> Prayers fell from the tongues,
> Pick them up, oh poor songs,
> We can't follow your croon,
> We can't distinguish the crescent
> or even the full moon
> from the deepening gloom.
> Have all the cocks been slaughtered?
> Why by the sun aren't we brightened?
> Do you have the crescent of today?
> We can't ask at the expense
> of our lives to pay.
> Try to gather all the griefs,
> that's how parting tastes.
> We can't look into the sky... (H. n.d.).

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Standing Up with the Persecuted Christians in India: Responses of Select Transnational Indian American Christians to the Christian Persecution in India

Geomon George

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Abstract

Stories of anti-Christian mobs assaulting ministry leaders and worshippers, burning Christian literature, and destroying houses of worship have become a great concern not only for Christians living in India but also for diaspora Indian Christians across the globe. The Indian American Christian community is closely watching, praying, supporting, and advocating for the rights of Christians in India. This article will focus on ways in which Indian American Christians living in the United States are mobilizing in different ways to respond to this crisis. The fieldwork consisted of interviews and participatory observation with members of the Indian American Christian community in the United States.

Key Words: Christianity in India, Indian American, prayer, religious persecution

Introduction

This article explores a select group of Indian American Christian responses to violence against Christians in India. The focus of this research emerged from my contextual realities as an Indian American pastor, scholar, and community leader. Among Indian American Christians there is an ongoing conversation about Christian persecution in India. This article contributes to understanding the multifaceted ways in which ministry leaders from various transnational churches located in New York Metro area, Christian organizations, and individuals are playing a significant role in addressing religious persecution. Using various technological platforms and gatherings, Indian American Christians are non-violently engaged in addressing this critical issue.

It was a forwarded video on one of my WhatsApp groups that showed radical Hindu mobs beating Christians. After a few seconds, I had to turn off the video as I was shocked and angry at the way in which these Christians were being treated (El Shaddai Prayer line, NY 2022). Another video was shared with the caption, "These are my church members at Bethlehem Bible Church (name changed for security reasons). They were taken to the police station…. Pastor James (name changed for security reasons) is visiting Deputy Inspector general. Please Pray" (Diaspora Talks 2022). As I watched, my heart sank as I quickly realized I knew those faces. I worshiped with them during my visit in 2022. Not all videos show victimization of Christians. In early 2023, a video was shared showing thousands of Christians, both male and female, young and old, gathering in a nonviolent way in Delhi, the capital of India, to protest violence against religious persecution. They were singing songs and holding banners advocating for a more tolerant India (El Shaddai Prayer Line 2023). In social media platforms such as Facebook, numerous images and videos of stories of nonviolent protest are being shared. These stories from different states and various languages of India share a common theme of harassment, discrimination, anti-conversion laws in many states, destruction of houses and churches, prayer gatherings, and protests. The stories are shared through various technologies and social media platforms, connecting to a global Indian Christian diaspora community.

Christianity in India is an integral part of the religious tapestry in India, tracing back to the first century with the arrival of the Apostle Thomas (Mundadan 1989, 9-115). According to Frykenberg (1999, 148), stories have been passed down orally from generation to generation about the origin and development of the Christian community. Over time, the Christian community took root in Indian soil, integrating India's cultural heritage while preserving its unique identity and practices. According to the PEW research center (Salazar 2021) 2.4% of the Indian population are Christians. Despite Indian Christianity's rich history, violence and religious intolerance against Christians in various regions in India are on the rise.

The diverse Indian American Christian community is deeply concerned about the religious freedom violations in India. This article will focus on ways in which Indian American Christians, living in the United States, are mobilizing in different ways to respond to this crisis. The first section deals with understanding Christian persecutions in India. The intent of this part is to briefly summarize the historical context of violence against Christians in India. Subsequent sections deal with the relationship between Indian American Christians and Christians in India, the role of social media in the dissemination of information, the areas of Christian persecution, and finally Indian American responses to violence against Christians in India.

Understanding Christians' Persecution in India

Even though the Indian constitution under Article 25-28 provides religious freedom to all her citizens the right to profess, practice, and propagate any religion, instances of violence against religious minorities and particularly against Christians are increasing. According to the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations, there were 1,198 cases of violence against Christians in India during 2022 (FIACONA 2023, 7). Open Doors US ranked India eleventh among countries where Christians are persecuted (Open Doors US 2023). Similarly organizations like the United Christian Forum (UCF), a human rights organization based in India, have also documented comparable incidents. According to Ramachandran (2019), Indian Christian women are a double minority (a term that typically refers to an individual or a group of people who belong to two distinct minority identities simultaneously) and are even more prone to discrimination, harassment, and violence. It must be noted that many persecuted Christians are choosing not to file cases against the perpetrators at the police station out of fear of further violence, marginalization, and discrimination. Violence against Christians ranges from denial of fundamental human rights (access to education, employment, and social services), physical attacks, mental abuse and psychological trauma, economic and social marginalization, church vandalism, and destruction of physical church buildings and Christian homes, creating insecurity among Christian communities. According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report of 2023, religious freedom in India continues to deteriorate, and as a result the USCIRF placed India on its list of "Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)" (USCIRF 2023, 24).

Christians' persecution in India arises from a complex web of socio-political origins, religious nationalism, and dominant "forced" conversion narratives (Bauman & Ponniah 2018; Bauman 2016; Melanchthon 2002). Herbert Hoefer, a former Lutheran missionary in India (Hoefer 2001, 9-10), posits that during the independence struggle few Christians in India joined the movement, thereby creating resentment from some Hindus. The emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu national political party, promotes a *Hindutva* ideology that "to be an Indian is to be a Hindu" (Mahendra 2016, 38). According to Mahendra, "Hindutva ideology sees Christianity as a foreign religion, a religion of the colonizers, and Christians have been seen as the agents of

colonization" (Mahendra 2016, 39). Furthermore, the growth of Christianity is creating a demographic shift that is making it more difficult for a "Hindu Nation" to be actualized. It is also generally accepted that many politicians have closed their eyes and are neglecting their responsibility to provide religious freedom. Instead, laws are being passed against anti-conversion laws. The irony is that this law does not apply to those converting to Hinduism. As a matter of fact, the re-conversion *ghar wapsi* "Home Coming" is celebrated publicly (Mahendra 2016, 40).

Despite the growing violence, on the whole Christians in India do not live in fear of persecution. According to one Christian leader (name withheld for security reasons) from a state in South India, "we are ready to give our life." He goes on to say that "we have identified our sufferings with the sufferings of Christ's disciples" (Anonymous Ministry Leader 2023). Biblical passages such as "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12), and "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (I Peter 4:12-14), give them strength to endure and to be resilient. Furthermore, the global Indian Christian community is supporting Christians in India by offering hope and assurance.

Indian American Christian Community and Transnational Connections to Homeland

According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report on the "Social Realities of Indian Americans: Results From the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey," there are more than 4 million Indian-origin residents in the United States (Badrinathan et al. 2021). Indian Americans are considered a "model community" because of their economic success and peaceful co-existence with larger communities. It must also be noted that the term "Indian American" is a contested one (George, G. 2022, 438). This article uses "Indian American" in reference to those US residents who trace their ethnic heritage to India.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014 found that 18% of the Indian American population are Christians (DeSilver 2014). The majority of Indian American Christians are from the Indian states of Andhra, Kerala, Telangana, and Nagaland. Churches from India that have been planted in the United States include Oriental Orthodox churches (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, and Malabar Independent Syrian Church), Catholic churches (Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church, and Syro-Malankara Catholic Church), Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, Church of South India, Church of North India, Pentecostal churches (Indian Pentecostal Church of God, Church of God, Assembly of God, Sharon Fellowship), and various independent churches. While Indian Christians are spread across the United States, the majority of Indian Christians live in California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Oklahoma, and Texas.

While the first wave of Indian Christians who emigrated to the United States were primarily students seeking theological education in the 1940s and 1950s, it was economic push factors that drove many Indians to look outside their country for better economic opportunities (George, G. 2022, 436). The unemployment shortage in the US medical sector in the 1960s offered an opportunity for those in the medical profession to emigrate to the United States on an employment-

based visa with the understanding that, upon their contract expirations, they would return to India. Since then, the high demand in the technology industry has created opportunities for Indians to come to the United States on an H-1B visa, which for many is a pathway to potentially obtaining permanent residency status in the United States. There are also many undocumented Indians that have left India for better economic opportunities or challenging circumstances.

During these immigration waves, Indian Christian women in particular have taken advantage of the opportunity to emigrate to the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1965 enabled them to continue their residency in the United States. Accordingly, the role of women in the formation of early "Indian American" Christian worship is undeniable. The US family reunification policy during the 1980s enabled Indian Americans to sponsor immediate family members such as parents, children, and siblings to the United States.

Despite being in the United States, Indian American Christians have a deep connection with Christians in India. They often have relatives and friends living in India. This connection provides a sense of identity and solidarity. As a result, there is a deep interest in knowing and engaging with issues that are facing Christians in India.

The Role of Technology and Social Media

Social media have been playing a crucial role in the dissemination of news about violence against Christians in India. Social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp are powerful tools that ordinary Indian citizens use to share news, bring awareness, and form public opinion. Through text, images, and videos, real-time "citizen journaling" has been bypassing both Indian and US mainline news media that are often reluctant to share such news. This documentation also enables an alternative narrative to the one propagated as the prevailing news by the Indian government. Many Indian American Christians are skeptical that the mainline news media adequately report, and that in fact they ignore, violence against Christians. As Pastor Babu Thomas (2023), a senior pastor in the Indian Pentecostal Church in Queens, NY notes, "We are skeptical about the mainline Indian press. Why are they so silent on this issue?" Social media have thus become a means of finding out what is happening at the grassroots level. Moreover, there is fact-checking to make sure that what is being shared is not misinformation or false narratives. For example, Pastor John Mammen (2023), one of the leaders of *Club House*, an internet Christian ministry, shared that they had invited a person who had personally visited Manipur (in northeast India) during the recent persecution against Christians there to report on events taking place in local communities.

Violence against Christians in India Uniting Indian American Young and Older Generations as well as Different Denominations

Generally speaking, there is a gulf in values between the first and next generations of Indian Americans. As a general observation, the first generation tends to embrace more conservative viewpoints and leans toward the Republican political party. However, the second generation is more progressive and are Democrats or Independents. Not only that, the first generation has a closer relationship to back home than the younger generations. The first generation often talks about life back in India, calling it "the good old days" or the "golden age" of their lives. Foreign affairs, including U.S.-India relations, is thus an important topic for first-generation Indian Americans. However, younger Indian Americans, born and brought up in the United States, have less of a shared connection with issues in India. Their concern is US domestic issues such as violence against Asian Americans and social justice.

Remarkably, young people's passion for social justice and the older generation's concern about their homeland have united them in the fight against religious persecution in India. At Bethel Worship Center (BWC), an Indian Pentecostal church in Yonkers, NY, the older and younger generations are working together on a writing campaign to influence US lawmakers. This is a unique phenomenon, as not all Diaspora Indian Churches in the United States are engaged in this practice. Senior Pastor Johnson Abraham (2023) explains: "Young people are passionate about fighting for justice everywhere. No one knows who's next. Today it could be me and tomorrow it could be you. So, we have to work together." BWC is working with young people in drafting a letter to US Senators. As youth leader Lydia George (2023) has noted, "The first generation are prayer warriors, and we can join with them in bringing our gift of advocacy." As another example, according to Jomy George (2023), the president of a united Indian American young people's organization called the Pentecostal Youth Fellowship of America (PYFA), "We want to create space for this important issue to be addressed. We want the parents to know that the young people are also concerned about this matter" (George, Jomy 2023). A youth leader from the PFYA, Jensen Abraham (2023), remarks, "Count me in. I will be there. We are concerned about all forms of religious violence against minorities in India, especially Christians." As an American of Indian heritage, Abraham is concerned about the growing Christian violence in India. Networking and collaborating with older generations, younger Indian American Christians are standing in unity and in solidarity to fight against religious persecution in India.

Despite lingering suspicions between some Indian American Christian denominations, the violence targeting Christians in India is bringing denominations together for a shared cause. There is a recognition that persecution of Christians goes beyond denominational distinctions. Therefore, despite the diversity of Christian doctrines and practices, there is a common concern. Along with this shared threat, there is also a shared value of love and justice. Members of different denominations are sharing texts, images, and videos that raise awareness and support. Through nonviolent methods, Indian American Christians are finding ways to respond to violence against the Christian community in India.

Prayer Services

Additionally, as a reaction to the violence against Christians in India, Indian American Christians are organizing and coordinating prayer gatherings both in person and virtually, for example through Zoom. It is common as well in weekly prayer services for there to be a time allocated for praying for persecuted Christians in India. These prayer meetings are for "intercessory prayers" that are offered on behalf of someone else. Those in the prayer groups take these meetings and prayers very seriously. As Annamma George (2023), a first-generation Indian American prayer leader, says, "I can't do much, but I can pray." At these meetings, there is a mix of men and women. These prayer times offer spaces for ordinary people to "call out" injustices, knowing that there is a God who will listen to their cry, with a conviction that God is actively involved in the life of his people.

All the prayers are spontaneous. Sometimes songs are sung to encourage the participants to persevere. The prayers offered in silence or shared in a community are not just for safety and protection of Christians, but also for perpetrators as well. Prayers are not for perpetrators to go to jail, but rather for their hearts to be transformed and turn to Christ. The biblical example that is often cited is how Saul, a persecutor of Christians, became a zealous missionary for Christ. The resilience of the persecuted Christians in India is encouraging Indian Americans to continue their

prayer services. Videos and images of persecuted Christians praying, singing songs, and resisting denouncing their Christian faith are often shared through different social media platforms as encouragement that their prayers are being answered. Through their prayers, then, Indian American Christians are both fervently appealing to God and conveying to the persecuted Christians in India that they are not alone in their sufferings.

Charitable Initiatives

Aware of the hardship, loss of livelihood, and trauma that persecuted Christians in India are suffering, many Indian American Christians are reaching out to them with charitable donations. A youth leader at Bethel Worship Center, Shawn Abraham (2023), wants to find out what Indian American Christians can do that can help suffering Indian Christians in their everyday lives: "We have lots of resources, but how do we get it to people in need?" This challenge is compounded by the fact that international financial transactions must be processed through a centralized bank.

Even so, Indian American Christians' empathy is finding ways to address Indian Christians' urgent needs for water, food, shelter, and medical care. While there are many NGO's trying to coordinate various charitable initiatives, the majority of Indian American Christians prefer to give individually to local organizations because of a fear of misuse of funds. During a conversation about sending charitable funds to India, Rojan Sam (2023), an Indian American Pentecostal leader said, "We have to make sure it reaches the people."

Charitable work is also tricky for Indian American Christians because of the fear of perpetuating the narrative that Christianity is being funded by the West. Moreover, financial improprieties within certain churches and among Christian workers have given rise to allegations of corruption. Abey Abraham (2023), board member of the Bethel Worship Center, explains, "We have to be careful as to how we do the charitable work because we don't want the current government or different organizations thinking we are making them Christians by offering money."

Advocacy

On July 25, 2023, with banners "united against hate" and holding US flags, hundreds of Indian Americans gathered together at the parking lot of a church in New Jersey (Abraham, R. 2023). Such gatherings are mushrooming in different Indian American Christian communities. The challenges facing persecuted Christians in India have prompted many Indians living in the United States to engage in advocacy efforts. However, such advocacy efforts take place primarily at the grassroots level, in coordination with other organizations and advocating through social media. Even though many first-generation Indian Americans do not use the word "advocacy," when asked if disseminating information through different social media platforms is a form of advocacy bringing awareness and mobilizing support, many that I have spoken to said "yes." Pastor Jacob George (2023) says that one of the reasons why he posts in his WhatsApp group is to "bring awareness and educate people. People shouldn't be ignorant of these issues that are happening back home."

However, there are a few organizations such as the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America (FIACONA) that are intentional about engaging with lawmakers, government agencies, and other organizations to garner broader awareness. Founded in 1999, FIACONA is one of the leading advocacy groups raising awareness, mobilizing support, and

promoting human rights for the Christian communities in India. Along with documenting incidents of violence and disseminating information through reports, FIACONA also engages lawmakers to advocate for policies that will protect human rights. The advocacy is paying off as on June 23, 2023, Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) introduced a resolution (Omar 2023) to "condemn human rights violations and violations of international religious freedom in India… including Christians." Other organizations, such as the Pentecostal Youth Fellowship of America, are engaged in writing letter campaigns to bring awareness to United States lawmakers and advocate for policies that protect the rights of persecuted Christians. By responding in different ways, Indian American Christians are actively engaged in bringing attention to violence against Christians in India.

Conclusion

While the Indian Constitution protects the rights of minority communities to practice and propagate their faith, the reality is more complex. The issue of violence against Christians in India has deeply unsettled Indian American Christians, and they have responded in diverse ways to stand up and raise their voices to mobilize support for persecuted Christians in India. They have responded through nonviolent means to raise awareness, pray, start charitable initiatives, and advocate in the hope of ending violence against Christian in India. Furthermore, by collaborating with other Christians, other denominations, policymakers, and other organizations, Indian American Christians have stimulated a collective effort to promote religious freedom in India. They are praying for peace and for transformation in the hearts of persecutors, spreading the word about actual conditions in India, and staying engaged in the hope that their labor is contributing to religious freedom and human dignity.

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Pauline Perspectives on Persecution

Nathan Maroney

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Abstract

This article examines Paul's view of persecution of believers for their faith. Three particular elements will be explored. First, Paul sees persecution as something negative that believers can rightly pray against, but also as a necessary aspect of Christian life and one that can actually have gospel benefits. Second, Paul sees solidarity as a crucial element of persecution, as believers who are persecuted enter into solidarity with Christ. Third, Paul sometimes reinterprets general suffering as persecution. The article also draws out implications for the global Church today.

Key Words: missions, New Testament, Paul, persecution, suffering

Introduction

Given the practical relevance of biblical perspectives on persecution, it is surprising that they are not discussed more. By some counts, global persecution of Christianity is at a record high. For those experiencing persecution, a biblical perspective is obviously vital. The New Testament speaks directly to the issue of Christian persecution, proving much needed guidance and encouragement.

Moreover, for at least three reasons such perspectives are also relevant to those of us who live in the United States and other settings where persecution is rare. First, biblical perspectives on persecution aid us in praying for the persecuted Church, as we seek to pray "as if we were there in jail with them," as Hebrews puts it (Hebrews 13:3). Second, we can receive guidance in interpreting growing opposition to Christianity in our own contexts. The third reason is that such perspectives help us with the question of how to think about how our contexts are very different from that of the earliest Christians.

In addition, in the West there is less and less acceptance of the Christian worldview. Some have interpreted this increased disavowal of Christianity as a return to normal. Some Western Christians have bemoaned and perhaps exaggerated their decreasing acceptance by their societies, prompting some to say Christians have a "persecution complex" (Castelli, 2008; sometimes colloquially referred to as a "persecution fetish"). There has even been a recent interest in theonomy as a potential solution to the growing divide between culture and Christianity. (For a review of some of the movements, see Carter, 2023.) As one author has put it, Americans do not know very well how to suffer, and learning how is a pressing issue (Lutjens, 2007, p. ix.). A biblical perspective on persecution can aid in navigating these issues.

This article limits its analysis to Paul's writings on suffering related to persecution for one's belief in Christ. (For the issue of the authorship of the Pauline epistles, see Andersen, 2016 and Capes, 2024. Davey, 2019, provides an overview of the study of suffering in Paul.) Granted it is sometimes difficult to differentiate whether suffering in general or suffering due to persecution is being discussed in a New Testament passage; and, the differentiation itself is somewhat of an external imposition on the text. Even so, there does seem to be some differentiation of the two within the New Testament, for instance in 1 Peter which differentiates between suffering for doing evil and suffering for doing good, and as a Christian (1 Peter 3:17-18, 4:15-16).

The ensuing discussion examines four elements of Paul's perspective on persecution: it is negative yet necessary, it is beneficial for the gospel, persecution provides solidarity, and general suffering can be interpreted as persecution.

Negative Yet Necessary

While it may seem to be an obvious point, it is important to note that Paul desires that persecution would not occur. Before examining Paul's various other interpretations of persecution, including what might be termed his "positive" views, it is vital to understand that Paul was not a masochist (contra Prokhorov, 2013, pp. 172-188) and desired that missionaries could work without threat of persecution.

Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for him that the word of the Lord would go forth and that he be delivered from wicked and evil men (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Paul asks the Romans to join him in praying that he be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea (Romans 15:30-31). Paul wants to be delivered not just for the sake of deliverance itself but for the sake of the gospel mission (Schreiner, 1998, p. 782).

In 1 Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy for the purpose of explaining how one is to "behave in the household of God" (1 Timothy 3:14-15). That which the Church is to do "first of all" is pray for "all people" and "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4). The Church's first priority is to pray against persecution and for the spread of the Gospel. Lack of persecution is desirable because it gives believers the freedom to share the gospel. In my own context in the United States, I hear many exhortations to pray for our country, including its leaders. Certainly, such prayers fulfill Paul's command in part, but Paul's emphasis is for believers to pray for the Church generally, especially the persecuted Church, and for all of the political and societal leaders where the worldwide Church lives and serves.

Additional support for the idea that lack of persecution is positive can be seen in 1 Corinthians 4:8-11, where Paul contrasts the prideful and at-ease Corinthians with his own suffering state:

> You are already full! You are already rich! You have begun to reign as kings without us – and I wish you did reign, so that we could also reign with you! For I think God has displayed us, the apostles in last place, like men condemned to die…we are fools in Christ, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! Up to the present hour we are…roughly treated….

While the passage is full of irony, and while Paul rebukes the Corinthians for the way their situation has led to pride, Paul does not suggest that the Corinthians begin to experience suffering.

It did not take long for some in the Early Church to take New Testament exhortations to steadfastness in suffering to the extreme of masochism (Prokhorov, 2013, points to the writings of Justin Martyr and Polycarp). Ignatius of Antioch (1st-2nd century) writes to the Ephesians of how he is "hoping that I might, thanks to your prayer, obtain the favor of fighting wild beasts at Rome and through this favor be able to become a disciple" (Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians 1:2, my translation of Lightfoot, 1992). Nevertheless, this masochistic idea is absent from Paul. Paul can speak of the glory that comes after and even through suffering, but that glory is desirable *precisely* because it brings an end to suffering (Schreiner, 1998, p. 255).

At the same time, Paul was no stranger to persecution. Paul's very body, scarred and marred as it was, would have been a constant reminder to himself and others of persecution (see for example 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Galatians 6:17). That he prays for deliverance from persecution in the passages above implies that it is already happening. And in each of these texts Paul's strategy for avoiding persecution is prayer, not defiance of government or taking up arms. Paul wanted to pray against persecution for the sake of freedom in sharing the gospel. But he also saw it as in some sense inevitable. To give one example, 2 Timothy 3:12 he states clearly, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (For a contemporary application, see Sookhdeo, 2005). Thus there is a real tension here. Paul accepted the unavoidable reality of persecution, but he saw it as negative and that it was legitimate to pray against it.

Gospel Benefits of Persecution

Paul thus desired a lack of persecution for the sake of freedom to share the gospel. However, when faced with persecution Paul interpreted it through the gospel—and saw his circumstances as beneficial for the gospel in a way that was not simply negative. This interpretive stance exemplifies the clear importance of the gospel in Paul's thought, particularly for how he could view diverse and even opposing scenarios through that same gospel: lack of persecution is beneficial for the gospel, but persecution can also be beneficial for the gospel.

Paul notes in Philippians that his imprisonment has led to opportunities to witness to the imperial guard in whose path he has been placed (Philippians 1:12). He also notes that some afflict him by preaching the gospel for the sake of rivalry and competition with him, but that he simply rejoices that the gospel is being preached (Philippians 1:15-18).

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul argues that his suffering actually gives people a picture of the gospel. The resurrection life of Christ is a treasure, and that treasure is located "in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (4:7). Gaffin writes, "It is in the suffering of believers in the mortal body that resurrection life of Jesus is manifested (not alongside, or in addition to or in spite of, but in)" (Gaffin, 2022, p. 404). Gaffin also points out in this passage an "important missiological principle," namely "The gospel at work in the church with its life-in-death implications of suffering and sacrificial giving of self—sacrificial suffering in the giving of self—is a decidedly effective means of bringing others into the church and under the saving and life-giving dominion of the Lord (Gaffin, 2022, p. 404)." Hafemann argues that in this passage Paul sees his suffering as proving the legitimacy of his gospel ministry to others (Hafemann, 2000).

Solidarity

Another recurring element in Paul's conception of persecution and suffering is that of solidarity. By solidarity we here mean simply shared experience. Though similar to the idea of "union with Christ," we here use a broader term in attempt to avoid reducing diverse pictures of shared experience into one picture, with a highly specific theological interpretation. In Romans 8:18, Paul states that the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared with the future glory that is to be revealed. That the suffering discussed in Romans includes persecution is clear from 8:35 where Paul mentions "persecution" and "the sword." As support for his claim that the future glory is greater than the present suffering, Paul introduces the idea of creation's solidarity with persecuted Christians. The future glory is so great that even creation longs for it. "All creation" longs for the revelation of the sons of God (Romans 8:19), as it was subjected to futility for the sake of one day being freed from this subjection when it experiences the freedom of the glory of the children of

God (Romans 8:20-21). Paul goes on to liken creation's pain to that of childbirth, noting that believers groan in a similar manner (Romans 8:22-23). Gaventa has pointed out that believers are included in—not distinct from—"all creation" which is groaning (Gaventa, 2007, pp. 55-56). Paul thus encourages persecuted believers with the reality that all creation is in some way going through the same kind of suffering. All creation in some sense recognizes that something is wrong with the world—and that the revelation of the children of God is the answer. The Holy Spirit is also in solidarity with persecuted Christians as he himself groans over the suffering with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26). God the Father and God the Son have shown their love for the people of God through the Cross, and so "If God is for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31; see also 32, 35). Suffering is not abnormal; instead, believers have solidarity with nature and creation itself.

Paul commends the Philippians for how they have expressed solidarity with him while he is in prison. Paul notes the fact that, since they had fellowship with him by supporting him financially (Philippians 4:14-18), they are "partakers with me of grace both in my imprisonment and in the defense of the gospel" (1:7). By their monetary gift reaching him in prison, it is as if they are in some sense there, suffering in prison with him. Such multifaceted solidarity has clear implications for believers today.

Turning to solidarity between believer and Christ, we might expect Paul to say something to the effect of, "know that when you are persecuted, Christ is with you. He was persecuted before you and knows what you are going through." This framework is taught elsewhere in Scripture (for instance, in Hebrews 2:17-18), and certainly Paul wouldn't disagree with it. But strikingly, in Paul's letters the solidarity runs in the opposite direction. It is the believer that joins Christ and enters into solidarity with him through persecution.

Christ has already suffered in history. Paul then enters into union with him in sharing with his sufferings. He writes that he counts all things as loss, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11).

Paul's view that in persecution the believer enters into solidarity with Christ is strikingly seen in Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." This is a notoriously difficult passage. Surely Paul is not stating that the atoning effect of Christ's sufferings are somehow lacking. Instead, a popular interpretation in scholarship has been to see this passage within the context of Jewish Apocalypticism. Apocalypticism was the idea that the present age was so marred by sin that it could not simply be fixed but needed to be replaced completely by the age to come, with the advent of the Messiah. Before the new age arrived, it was thought that the people of God would experience oppression, referred to as the "Messianic Woes," or "Messianic Tribulation." (For an important introduction to the concept and its importance in 1 Peter, see Dubis, 2002; for the Messianic Woes in Paul see Allison, 1985; for the woes in 2 Corinthians, see Barrett, 1973; in Colossians, Bauckham, 1974; in Revelation, Hamilton, 2013). A certain amount of suffering would thus need to be fulfilled (see Revelation 6:9-11) before the new age could be ushered in. In Colossians 1:24, then, Christ-sufferings (Messianic Tribulation) has already begun with Christ, and Paul enters into fellowship with it as he himself suffers. To his imprisonment Paul applies the theological reinterpretation that it is his entrance into the Messianic sufferings that

characterize the present age before Christ. His sufferings, then, are similar to those of Christ before him and those of other believers after him.

Solidarity between the believer and Christ is also seen in 2 Corinthians 1:5: "as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too." That the suffering discussed in 2 Corinthians includes persecution is clear from 4:8-9, 6:5, 8, 7:5, 11:23-24, 32. In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul adds that part of God's purpose in suffering is to enable believers to have solidarity with each other. Paul notes that God comforts him and Timothy "so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (1:4). Part of what qualifies Paul for his counseling ministry is the fact that he has experienced persecution—and thus can have solidarity with other believers who are likely to experience persecution as well. Paul experiences suffering so that he can comfort the Corinthians in their suffering (1:6). When the Corinthians share in suffering, then they can share in the Father's comfort as well (1:7). As Paul enters into solidarity with Christ through suffering, he is enabled to provide solidarity with other believers who are likely to suffer as well.

Elsewhere Paul notes to believers that to receive the gospel even amidst affliction is to imitate the Lord, Paul, and other churches (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2:14). He also draws a connection between the religious leadership that killed Jesus, killed the Old Testament prophets, and in his own day and age persecutes the Church and even "all men" (1 Thessalonians 2:15; the teaching that to be a prophet is to be persecuted is common and appears for example in Matthew 5:12, 23:29–31, 35, 37; Luke 11:47–51; 13:34; Acts 7:52; Romans 11:3; James 5:10). Morris helpfully points out, "This does not mean a conscious patterning of themselves on those churches, but rather that they had endured suffering in the same way" (Morris, 2009).

The previous section noted the centrality of the Church's mission to pray against persecution. In this section, understanding the theology of solidarity in persecution aids us in fulfilling Hebrews' command to pray specifically in such a way that we "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body" (13:30, for pastoral reflections on similar themes, see Fernando, 2008).

Interpreting General Suffering as Persecution

Thus far this study has examined persecution as synonymous with *religious* persecution. This section will argue that certain passages recast non-religious persecution as religious persecution. Acts reports that while in Philippi Paul casts a spirit out of a slave girl (Acts 16:18). This exorcism excites a response from the girl's owners, who drag Paul and Silas to the local magistrates to beat them and put them in prison (Acts 16:20-24). This persecution, however, is not a religious one. The locals are under the impression that Paul and Silas are Jews (a partial but incomplete truth), and their main concern is financial, as they made money from the actions the girl did while spirit-possessed (Acts 16:19). Thus, while the persecution gets in the way of Paul and Silas's evangelistic ministry, the persecution is driven by economic concerns—not by specifically religious opposition. However, Acts casts this persecution as parallel to the religious persecution elsewhere in the book. The very next story occurs in Thessalonica where Paul, Silas, and Jason are similarly persecuted, this time for religious reasons as Jewish locals seek to attack them (Acts 17:5). The stories of Philippi and Thessalonica are similar, and Luke composed the accounts in such a way that his readers would connect them. In both stories the persecutors take and drag (though different Greek words for dragging are used) the persecuted to authorities with the intent of beating them. Even in Thessalonica, the Jews who have religious reasons to persecute try to convince local authorities to

join the persecution for non-religious reasons—namely the claim that Paul and Silas are a *political* threat (17:6-7).

The connection between this non-religious persecution recorded in Acts 16 and religious persecution is even clearer in Paul's own recounting of these events. Paul writes Philippians from prison and notes that his imprisonment is "for Christ" (1:13), apparently meaning that preaching the gospel is what got him into prison. He then draws a parallel between his current imprisonment and the persecution he experienced when first in Philippi. Paul describes the Philippians' current struggle as "the same conflict that you saw I had [i.e. in Acts 16) and now hear that I still have" (1:30). In writing to the Thessalonians about when he first met them, he similarly parallels the trip to Philippi in Acts 16 and the trip to Thessalonica in Acts 17: "though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict" (1 Thessalonians 2:2). Thus in both Philippians and Thessalonians, the non-religious persecution experienced at Philippi in Acts 16 is reinterpreted as religious persecution.

In addition, the fact that Paul notes in Philippians that it has *become* known to the imperial guard that his imprisonment is "for Christ" (Philippians 1:13) implies that this interpretation was not self-evident before. (For a defense of this reading of the syntax, Hellerman writes that what has become evident is that "his imprisonment has to do with his Christian faith and missionary activities" (2015, p. 44). There could have been another reason Paul was in prison, but the spiritual (i.e., the real) meaning of his imprisonment was that he was in prison for Christ. Paul suffers "not as a political or civic wrongdoer," but for Christ (Martin, 1987).

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes to a community that he has neither founded nor visited (Colossians 2:1; Pao, 2012, p. 123). In Colossians 1:24 (discussed above), Paul claims that his entrance into the apocalyptic Messianic sufferings occurs *for the sake of* the Colossians, and *for the sake of* Christ's body (Pao, 2012, p. 135). It might seem strange to consider that the Colossians would be benefited by the actions of those unbelievers persecuting Paul. Nevertheless, through Paul's spiritual interpretation of his circumstances, any suffering Paul experiences for Gentiles generally, or for Christ's body, is a benefit to those he has not met at Colossae. Certainly, those imprisoning Paul have no intention of doing so for the benefit of the Church of Christ. But Paul reinterprets his circumstances in light of divine intention and spiritual result.

Ephesians 3 makes a similar statement to the one just discussed in Colossians. (The two letters share drastic similarities broadly). It is possible that in Ephesians also Paul writes to those he has not met. He refers to the fact that he has "heard" of the Ephesians' love (1:15), and they have "heard" of his ministry (3:2; for these and other elements, see Thielman, 2010, p. 15). Again, Paul makes the striking statement that his suffering somehow helps the Gentiles. Thielman writes that Paul's suffering is for people he has never met personally because it is "suffering for the whole body of Christ, which is the church, and…participation in the suffering of Christ himself." (Thielman, 2010, p. 222).

Why would Paul reinterpret non-religious persecution as religious persecution? Perhaps he realized his struggle was not with flesh and blood, and that therefore spiritual forces could influence humans to persecute Paul for any number of reasons. Thus, while the human agent might attack Paul for a non-religious reason, the ultimate force could still be attacking Paul because of his Christian faith and ministry.

This type of religious interpretation seems to give some license to Christians today to reinterpret their suffering in a similar manner. Certainly those of us in contexts of religious freedom should not claim that we are undergoing literal persecution, otherwise this might give credence to the secular claim of Christians having a persecution complex. Nevertheless, it is not altogether wrong to acknowledge that if we are Christians this world is against us, even if it attacks us for seemingly non-religious reasons. Gaffin points out that in Romans 8 Paul asserts that "all creation" experiences suffering. Thus, Christian suffering is not just martyrdom but also involves the mundane, unspectacular, and when things in general simply do not work. Paul wants believers to understand that all believers experience suffering and that their suffering is best labeled missiological (Gaffin, 2022, p. 411). Referring to non-persecution suffering in his comments on Philippians 3, Silva notes, "For the person whose life is committed in its totality to the service of Christ, every affliction and every frustration becomes an obstacle to fulfilling the goal of serving Christ" (Silva, 2005, p. 84). These observations go a long way in helping those of us in contexts that are religiously and politically free find relevance in Paul's persecution texts.

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"WEIRD" Psychology and Christian Leadership

David Lewis

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Abstract

The great variation between cultures makes it unlikely that 'one size fits all' when stipulating the qualities required of Christian leaders, including missionaries. Some attempts to define the character traits and skills needed by movement catalysts or other types of leaders have been based on psychological criteria formulated in Western cultures that may not be appropriate for non-Western cultures. Instead of using secular psychological criteria, it is better to use the qualities and lifestyle characteristics advocated in the New Testament.

Key Words: Christian leadership, culture, psychology, WEIRD societies

Leadership Traits and Cultural Variation: Does "One Size Fit All"?

Just as the Holy Spirit was the one who gave King David the plans for the temple (1 Chronicles 28:12), who endowed Samson with supernatural strength (Judges 14:19), and who spoke through the prophets (1 Peter 1:10-11), the real leader behind any work of God today is the Holy Spirit. This obvious fact is too often overlooked by those who seek to devise strategies for mission based on human principles of leadership, education, or communication. Even though these human insights are often helpful to some extent, there is a danger of attaching so much importance to a particular "method" that the key role of the Holy Spirit gets pushed out.

Contrasting with our human tendency to rely on our own abilities and to do things "our" way, God often chooses those who appear to lack the "right" qualities in the eyes of human society—those considered to be foolish, weak, or lowly (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). The same God was acting by the same principle when he chose leaders for Israel: in Ehud, God chose to use left-handedness; in Deborah he used a woman; Gideon was called while he was keeping out of sight of the Midianites—not an example of boldness—and was at times indecisive (Judges 6:11, 36-40; 7:9-15), but his trust in God meant that he became an example of courage and faith. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute and was driven out of his family (Judges 11:1-3), and Samson had a weakness for women—but God used these people for his purposes despite their being apparently "unsuitable" (in human terms). God's choice to use these apparently "unfit" leaders took place during the period before the Israelites chose to emulate the model of leadership prevalent among the nations around them.

Therefore, a question posed in a recent article about "Traits and Competencies of Movement Catalysts" (Daniels and Prinz 2023) seems weird. The authors, Gene Daniels and Emanuel Prinz, think it is necessary "to know the qualities, traits, and competencies that characterize effective pioneers who take the kingdom where it is not yet realized" (33), and they consider the current lack of consensus about such a list to be a problem (36). Implicit in such ways of thinking is an assumption that "one size fits all"—as if there should be a single stereotype applicable to every culture or sub-culture. However, is it reasonable to expect that the same traits that are appropriate for a Muslim context are also the best ones in a Hindu context? Even among Muslim communities there are considerable cultural differences, for example between the Hausa of Nigeria and the Hui of China. A range of cultural gradations from West Africa to Southeast Asia might be less obvious to outsiders who lump them together as "Muslims," but local people are aware of the differences. Even within a culture there are numerous sub-cultures—women versus men, younger versus older people, rural

versus urban, those with formal education versus the unschooled, and so on. Qualities (or "traits and competencies") more suited for ministry among one segment of society might not be so appropriate elsewhere.

More widely, is it reasonable to expect that the same traits and competencies that are appropriate for working in Afghanistan are also those required for Japan, Mongolia, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, or Venezuela? Just as there are a plethora of different cultures and sub-cultures, so those ministering in each local situation may need to have qualities appropriate for that specific context. Because each human being is unique, so each culture is unique. Therefore it is unlikely that "one size fits all" when it comes to stipulating what "ought" to be the "right" characteristics of movement leaders, missionaries, or other Christian leaders.

At the end of their article, Daniels and Prinz acknowledge the complexity in what they call "the multifarious and mysterious phenomena we call movements," and they express the hope that their article will stimulate more "study and dialog" (38). In responding to their invitation, my aim is to situate the discussion in a much wider context not only by recognising that different cultures may require different approaches but also by acknowledging that the ultimate movement catalyst is the Holy Spirit, who may choose to use "unexpected" people and "unusual" methods so that the glory goes to God, not human beings.

In their search for a "consensus" among missiologists, Daniels and Prinz cite various published works in English, all authored by people with *Western* names. This linguistic and regional limitation might simply mean that Daniels and Prinz are unaware of literature in other languages, but they might also unwittingly be influenced excessively by assumptions prevalent within so-called "Western" cultures of North America, Europe, and Australasia. One of these assumptions is that studies of leadership based on psychological theories developed in a secular and Western context are applicable universally.

Prinz (2022, 8) admits that the starting point for his earlier research was the findings from secular leadership studies, which had come up with a list of traits that, he claims, leaders "universally have in common" (18). One of the problems with this approach is the issue of whether or not secular leaders in business or politics are appropriate role models for Christian ministers—particularly in the light of Luke 22:25-26, where Jesus commented on the leadership model practised by Gentile kings and declared, "You are not to be like that."

It is likely that many missionaries (not only movement catalysts) would have qualities resembling or even surpassing those of business entrepreneurs. Missionaries are highly motivated, working long hours for low remuneration but being more committed to their jobs than many secular employees, including CEOs. Many missionaries see their "work" not in terms of contracted numbers of hours but as also including time spent in building relationships with people over meals, or time spent in intercession perhaps in the middle of the night or while walking outside. Whereas secular leaders often appear to be motivated by a desire for possessions, power or prestige, missionaries claim to be motivated by the love of God and a love for other people.

"WEIRD" Psychology

A further problem with adopting as normative the findings of secular psychological research on leadership is the fact that most experimental research on human psychology and behaviour has been conducted among respondents from Western societies (Henrich 2020, xii). This limitation applies also to studies of leadership traits. For example, Rovelli and Curnis (2021) note that most studies of narcissistic leadership have focussed on American firms; theirs is an exception because they studied Italian CEOs—but Italy is also a Western society. Noting this

limitation is not to say that studies of narcissistic leadership are therefore irrelevant to non-Westerners. At least in this instance, the research may potentially shed light on some of the negative behaviour of some movement catalysts, such as aggressiveness or over-assertiveness, which Daniels and Prinz (2023, 37) mention as characteristics noted by other authors. Narcissistic leaders with an inflated ego can be aggressive and bully their employees (Gauglitz et al., 2023)—a salutary warning for Christian ministries to appoint leaders with clear Christ-like humility.

Even so, Western societies are culturally and psychologically anomalous when compared with most other societies around the globe, both now and in the past (Henrich 2020). Individualism is characteristic of "WEIRD" (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) societies that assign importance to personal traits and competencies (Henrich 2020, 28). Moreover, "the immense importance assigned by the discipline of psychology to notions of self-esteem and positive self-views is probably a WEIRD phenomenon," as is "a tendency to see people's behavior as anchored in personal traits that influence their actions" (Henrich 2020, 33). In other words, stipulating that missionaries or movement catalysts operating in non-Western cultures should have psychological traits deemed to be important by Western psychologists runs the risk, albeit unintentionally, of becoming ethnocentric or neo-colonial. No doubt all involved in mentoring mission leaders agree that the aim is not to make others into our own image but rather to enable them to flourish according to the image of God that is already in them.

The value accorded to individualism in WEIRD societies might be one reason why Western leadership studies have focussed so much on the traits and competencies of individual leaders (or movement catalysts in the studies by Emanuel Prinz) rather than the dynamics of a leadership team. In practice, groups of people collectively enable an organization or movement to function. It is an advantage for team members to have different giftings (i.e., traits or competencies) to fulfil a variety of complementary roles. In a church planting movement with which I am familiar (Lewis 2022), the leaders have quite different personalities and giftings: it is this variety that imparts strength and flexibility to the whole. The New Testament refers to group leadership by "apostles and elders" (Acts 15:2, 4, 22-23), which may be closer to "polycentric" leadership (Handley 2022) involving collaboration (Handley 2023): such collaborative and shared leadership is less "WEIRD" than an individualistic focus on the person of the catalyst. Moreover, the term "elder" implies a respect for maturity and experience that is more characteristic of Asian and African traditional cultures than WEIRD ones.

Problems in Cross-Cultural Research

Trying to use WEIRD theories and methodologies derived from WEIRD cultural contexts when conducting research among non-WEIRD societies can open up a theoretical and methodological can of worms. One issue is the extent to which respondents themselves are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the thought processes common among WEIRD societies. For example, literacy—a fruit of formal education—produces various changes to the structure of the brain which means that literate people are poorer at facial recognition than oral learners (Henrich 2020, 3-4). However, most psychological research is among literate people who can fill in questionnaires and have received some degree of formal education. As the educational systems of most countries are dominated by curricula derived from WEIRD cultures, the more educated members of such non-WEIRD societies begin to behave more like WEIRD people.

With reference to movement catalysts, Prinz (2022, 44-45) acknowledges that 61% of his sample of 31 people whose psychological profiles he studied were from Western countries: 17 from the USA, plus one each from Australia and New Zealand. Hence it is not surprising that those in his sample show similarities with secular leaders from Western cultures. The predominance of Westerners in his sample might reflect the now somewhat outdated criteria by which Prinz (2022, 10) defined the "outside change agent" as someone from outside the culture. Moreover, the absence of Koreans is striking; Chinese are also absent. The seven participants from Indonesia and five from sub-Saharan African countries were presumably literate in English to participate in this study. They are comparable with the undergraduates in Nairobi whose psychological profiles were similar to people of WEIRD backgrounds elsewhere in the world, because the educational system had exposed them to WEIRD values and ways of thinking, as contrasted with labourers in Nairobi whose non-WEIRD psychological profiles were much more characteristic of the majority of cultures around the world (Henrich 2020, 25).

Because people from WEIRD backgrounds tend to overestimate their own valued talents, seek to make themselves look good, and love to make their own choices (Henrich 2020, 55), it is possible that such factors might have inflated some of the positive self-assessments reported to Prinz. Social desirability bias is a potential problem in many sociological and psychological surveys (Brace and Bolton 2022, 290-304): Christians are not exempt from such bias and may even be more prone to it if they are known to the researcher as Christian leaders. The questions asked by Prinz (2022, 120-176) show no evidence of being phrased in a way that might reduce social desirability bias. In view of the preponderance of WEIRD background respondents in his sample, resemblances with other Westerners from WEIRD cultures are highly likely to occur.

Henrich (2022, 31) notes that "global psychological variation is both continuous and multidimensional" rather than being a simple dichotomy of WEIRD versus non-WEIRD. Therefore there can be cultural bias from *any* culture—but this is especially relevant if there is an excessive number of people from any one culture in a multi-cultural sample. This was the case for a different survey in which 57% of the respondents (85 out of 147) "came from Victor John's network" in northern India (Prinz and Goldhor 2022a, 13), referring to a movement among speakers of the Bhojpuri language (John 2019). Therefore all their responses were referring to the same context—both external factors in the society and internal factors within the same movement. As Bhojpuri speakers, they were not responding to the questions in their "heart language" but presumably in Hindi; however, the presence of any interpreter further raises the possibility of social desirability bias. It is unlikely that a substantial group of people from the same social context would not have discussed the research and their answers among themselves. If there were convergence among their answers on account of mutual influence between respondents, it would invalidate all of the conclusions drawn by Prinz and Goldhor.

Prinz and Goldhor (2022a, 12) state that their survey was available in "Spanish, French, Swahili, Hindi, and Indonesian," implying that the primary local religious contexts varied from Islam and Hinduism to Roman Catholicism. It also shows a diversity of cultures and implies again an assumption that "one size fits all" without taking into account local cultural factors. Having a questionnaire available in several languages is in principle laudable but also opens up a linguistic minefield. Terms for visible, material entities are more likely to refer to the same concept in different languages, but as the referents become more abstract semantic fields become less directly comparable. Even the terms for colours in different languages focus on different segments of the electromagnetic spectrum (Kay 2011; Hardin and Maffi

1997), with some languages having only a few colour terms. For more abstract concepts, including personality characteristics, semantic fields become much more diffuse. Within any one language, the same character trait or behavioural pattern might be described by a variety of terms, but when translating such terms across different languages and cultures there is considerable scope for nuances becoming lost in translation. For example, in English words such as "resolute," "determined," "focussed," "obstinate," or "pig-headed" might be referring to the same perceived behaviour, but the choice of vocabulary reflects the speaker's evaluation of the trait rather than actual differences in conduct. The problem is compounded especially when translating between language families as different and unrelated to one another as Swahili, Hindi, and Indonesian. Hence a survey about psychological traits, when translated into multiple languages, might not be comparing like with like.

Biblical ("Non-WEIRD") Criteria for Leadership

Questionnaires are an imprecise tool when asking about inner states, attitudes, or ways of thinking. If the answers are then pigeon-holed into abstract categories such as "drive to achieve" or "internal locus of control," as was done by Prinz and Goldhor (2022b, 38-39), the analysis becomes even more remote from the realities of actual behaviour. By contrast, the New Testament criteria for Christian leaders set out in the pastoral epistles focus much more on real-life behaviour and lifestyles rather than abstract categories or self-assessments.

As Biblical criteria for Christian leadership are markedly different from characteristics advocated by secular writers on leadership, the criteria listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9 bear little resemblance to Prinz's lists of traits or competencies. Qualities such as being "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8, NIV) could be regarded as character traits, whereas other criteria, such as being spiritually mature (1 Timothy 3:6) or "hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money" (1 Timothy 3:2-3, NIV), are characteristics that can be observed by others and to some extent are amenable to testing: one can count the quantity of alcohol consumed or the number of bruises on a wife's face! Drunkenness, love of money, and "pursuing dishonest gain" (Titus 1:7, NIV) are observable behaviour patterns that indicate spiritual malaise. They reveal something of the person's values and might even be markers of a misplaced dependency—a seeking of "comfort" from alcohol or possessions rather than seeking after God himself. Not only the leader's character but also the person's *lifestyle* are very important factors (Lewis 2013, 261).

A person's conduct at home in relating both to his or her spouse and to any children is an acid test for suitability as a leader in the family of God: "If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Timothy 3:5, NIV). A male Christian leader should be "the husband of but one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6, NIV): this could refer not only to having multiple wives at one time but also include what anthropologists call "serial polygyny"—that is, marrying again after divorce or widowhood. This stipulation is in accord with the teachings of Jesus against divorce (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Divorce is usually the culmination of a process in which both parties are responsible for their own choices and the consequences of their own behaviour. If a person is willing to break the solemn commitments entered into at marriage, how will he or she respond to other situations of conflict or stress? Does it indicate problems in the person's willingness to forgive or seek reconciliation? As children are affected by the atmosphere in the home, their respect for a parent can also in some cases become a barometer of that parent's character.

Family members know a person's character through personal experience, and the same applies to some extent to guests within the home: actions speak louder than words. Lifestyle qualities including hospitality, a simpler, less materialistic lifestyle, and a high respect for the stability of marriage and family life are relatively weak in "WEIRD" societies as compared with many traditional cultures elsewhere in the world. However, these behaviour patterns and associated values often speak louder than words in cross-cultural contexts and may be more relevant for missionaries than psychological traits such as an "internal locus of control."

Reliance on human (albeit God-created) traits and competencies may be a hindrance, not an asset. It leads to pride and doing things in one's own strength rather than humility and relying on God's resources. Spiritual leaders in the Bible had to learn to depend on God rather than their own traits and competencies. Abraham had to learn not to try to manipulate God's promise of a son and to wait until Sarah's pregnancy was clearly a supernatural gift of grace. Moses learned to liberate the people by God's miraculous power rather than by human methods (murdering the Egyptian). David often sought God's guidance; Solomon recognised his need for wisdom, which comes from God. Joseph and Daniel both rose to leadership positions because of their spirituality, including the interpretation of dreams by insights that came not from human reasoning but from the Spirit of God. Although it was the Holy Spirit who empowered Samson, guided David, and gave wisdom, dream interpretation or prophetic revelations to many others, the Holy Spirit is often in the background because listening to his voice requires humility. Those who promote themselves as "leaders" on the basis of their own human character traits, or their training in "leadership" according to human standards, risk replacing the role of the Holy Spirit with their own human traits and competencies. Seeking glory for oneself is tantamount to making oneself into an idol.

By contrast, being filled with the Holy Spirit is one of the criteria for leadership in the New Testament (Acts 6:3, 5: 11:24). Part of what that criterion entails is listening to God and discerning his will. This is a skill that can develop over time if we are seeking God, but it cannot easily be assessed by survey questions that might try to measure broad categories such as "hunger for God." Prinz is right that the character of the person is important, but his categories are too superficial. Samuel had to learn that the external traits and competencies of seven of Jesse's sons were not the ones that God desired: rather, God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:6-13). To be a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14) is certainly linked with spirituality of some kind but is also related to purity of heart. A key quality of such people is holiness, which is listed by the Apostle Paul as a criterion for Christian leadership (Titus 1:8). If Psalm 15:2-5 can be regarded as listing some characteristics of holiness, then it includes not only having a blameless walk and speaking the truth from one's heart but also keeping promises even when it hurts, and not lending money at interest—qualities that demand some measure of sacrifice. Living a holy life in humility facilitates sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

A Concluding Hope

My hope is that this response to their invitation to dialogue will encourage Daniels and Prinz, along with others trying to discern mission leaders' qualities, to investigate further not only the variety of teachable and humble people recruited onto the Holy Spirit's team but also the ways in which such people learn to minister effectively in a range of cultural contexts.

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Can Muslims be Reached with the Gospel? Findings from Three Research Studies

Gordon Scott Bonham

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Abstract

Three research studies provide information on gospel broadcasts to the Muslim world, prayer promotion for Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and involvement with disciple making movements. Together they offer insights on reaching Muslims with the gospel. The studies are from research One Challenge (OC International) has conducted in the past 12 years in cooperation with mission organizations focused on reaching Muslims for Christ. They each relate to Jesus' statement about a plentiful harvest and instruction to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers.

Key Words: broadcast, MENA, movements, Muslim, prayer

Introduction

Aware of some research I had conducted, a group of Chinese church leaders asked me a few years ago for a presentation on ministering with Muslims. I decided that I could provide them with important findings by limiting details about the ministries, the sources of information, and the locations. I also conjectured that other ministries might also benefit from such a presentation.

This article comes out of that requested presentation and presents key findings from three research projects. The projects focus on ministries with Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and they represent three phases of the instructions Jesus gave his disciples in Matthew 9:37-38: "Then he said to his disciples, (1) 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. (2) Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to (3) send out workers into his harvest field.'"

Phase 1: "The Harvest is Plentiful"—Muslim Response to Gospel Broadcasts

The Global Response Management System (GRMS) included 17 ministries with evangelistic websites, radio broadcasts, television programs, and other electronic media between 2008 and 2013. It recorded responses to evangelistic presentations of the gospel directed to Muslims and other non-Christians in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Upon hearing that the GRMS was ending, One Challenge (OC International, henceforth OC) inquired if any analysis had been made of the data it had collected. None had been made and the GRMS data were transferred to OC. The GRMS contained three types of datafiles: Inquirer, Conversation, and Local Follow-up.

- The Inquirer file established a record with a unique inquirer identification number (ID) for each person who contacted the GRMS system in response to a gospel presentation.
- The Conversation file contained a record for each interchange between a ministry representative and an inquirer.
- The Local Follow-up file contained a record of each inquirer assigned to a local believer for follow-up.

The analysis linked records within and between the three files using the unique person ID. This resulted in a final response code for each contact grouped into three categories: 1) outcome of a

contact that did not result in a conversation, 2) outcome of the last conversation that did not result in a local contact request, and 3) outcome of the local contact request.

A total of 33,395 people contacted the GRMS in response to a gospel broadcast during the six years of the system (see Table 1). The information in the system was too incomplete for some people to identify an outcome. For those where an outcome could be identified, 54% contacted the system only to leave a comment, and 14% left no contact information for follow-up. All other contacts were automatically forwarded to a representative of the appropriate ministry for a response. The representative's response appeared sufficient for 17% of these, as they made no further contact with the system. Another 6% of these initial contacts with the system had a recorded outcome of waiting for representative, closed, or waiting for inquirer with no second contact by the inquirer. The gospel broadcasts engaged 9% of the people in multiple conversations: 3% who did not request a local contact and 6% who did. By the time the GRMS ended, 3% of the people who had responded to a broadcast of the gospel had either become part of a local fellowship of believers or were still interacting with a local contact.

Table 1. Outcomes of initial response

		Number	Percent determined
Total		33,595	
Outcome not determined		2,020	
Outcome determined		31,575	100%
	One inquirer response	28,561	90%
1	Inquirer left no contact information	4,287	14%
2	Comment only, no ministry replies	17,125	54%
3	Ministry reply, no additional conversation	5,239	17%
4	Other	1,910	6%
	Last of multiple inquirer responses	1,034	3%
5	Inquirer left no contact information	104	<1%
6	No ministry reply reported	479	2%
7	Ministry reply, no additional conversation	448	1%
8	Other	3	<1%
	Local contact requested	1,980	6%
9	Contact requested; disposition unknown	64	<1%
10	Local contact declined	1,135	4%
11	Local contact in process	520	2%
12	Local integration of inquirer in fellowship	261	1%

The GRMS system requested people who contacted the systems to provide their age, sex, country, and a statement about their faith in addition to their contact information. People from 185 countries responded to the broadcasts with 80% living in the 17 countries of the MENA region. The largest numbers came from Egypt (8,646) and Tunisia (4,701). Those from Egypt represent 10 per 100,000 population, while those from Tunisia represent 44 per 100,000 population. One-third of the inquirers were 18-25 years of age, and an additional third were 26-35 years of age. Three-fourths were male and one-fourth female. On average, males were three years older than females.

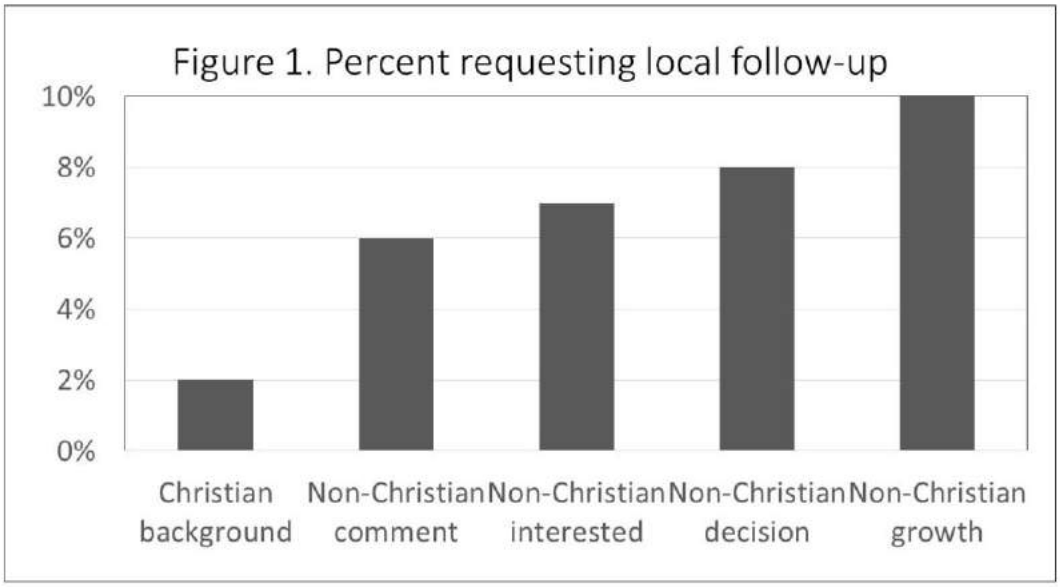
Based on their faith statement and reason for contacting the broadcaster:

- 40% had non-Christian backgrounds and wanted to make a comment.
- 21% had non-Christian backgrounds and wanted to learn about Jesus.
- 18% had non-Christian backgrounds and wanted to become a follower of Jesus or wanted to know more about the faith they had already chosen.
- 21% had Christian backgrounds and wanted to recommit to, or grow in, the faith into which they were born.

Age affected the reason people responded to the broadcast. Among children younger than 14 years of age, 53% had non-Christian backgrounds and wanted to make a comment, 32% had non-Christian backgrounds and wanted to learn about Jesus or become a follower, and 15% had Christian backgrounds. Almost half (47%) of those 26-35 years of age had non-Christian backgrounds and wanted to learn about or follow Jesus. Adults 60 years of age or older were the least likely to want to make a comment, 22% had a non-Christian background and wanted to learn about or follow Jesus, and 42% had a Christian background and wanted to recommit and grow in the faith.

Geography also affected their religious background and reason for responding to the broadcast. The majority from Libya and Saudi Arabia were non-Christians and wanted to make a comment. The majority from Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia, and Algeria had non-Christian backgrounds and were interested in learning about or following Jesus. Lebanon and Egypt had the largest percentages with Christian backgrounds who wanted to grow in the faith.

People's religious backgrounds and reasons for calling affected, but did not determine, the final outcomes (see Figure 1). Very few (2%) of the people with Christian backgrounds requested



local follow-up. Among those with non-Christian backgrounds who initially said they only wanted to make a comment, 6% became engaged with the ministry representative and subsequently expressed a desire to talk with a local representative. This figure increased to 10% when those with non-Christian backgrounds initially said they wanted to grow in faith in Jesus.

The GRMS data shows that the Lord has people in the Muslim world open to evangelistic presentations of the gospel through impersonal electronic and broadcast media. Some who encounter the good news this way will respond, particularly young adult men. Some of these may say they only want to comment, but interacting virtually with a Christian can lead to 6% requesting follow-up from a local Muslim background believer. In a Muslim environment, however, confidentiality and security are prominent issues. Connecting an inquirer with a local Muslim background believer must be pursued carefully, and only when the person is ready. However, a local contact is key for integrating Muslim inquirers into local Muslim-background fellowships. These GRMS findings are from a period just prior to the "Arab Spring" and may not reflect the current situation. However, the use and availability of technology has expanded since then, and many workers are being trained by the MTM (media to movements) Training Coalition (Preston and Bonham, 2021).

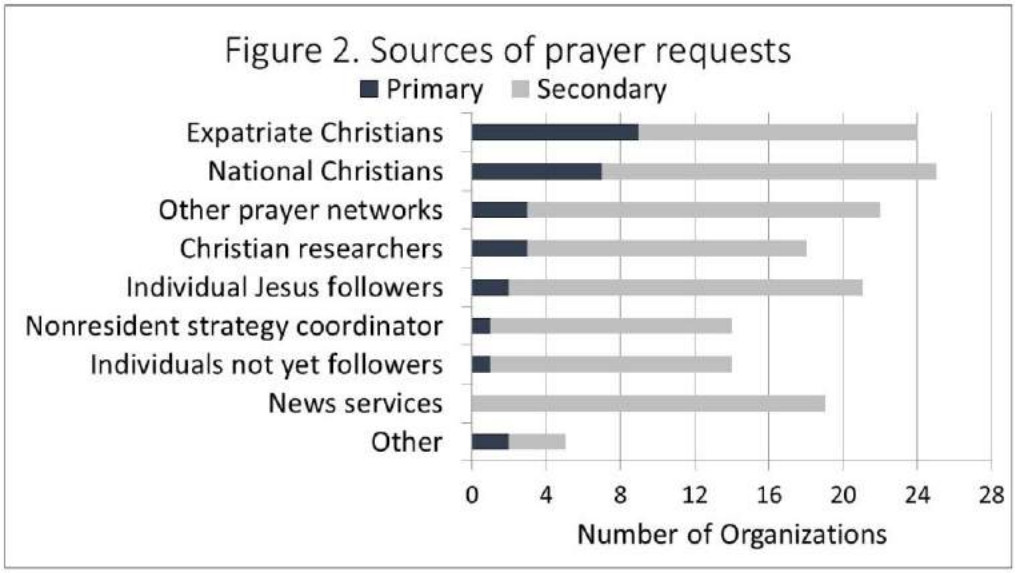
Phase 2: "Ask the Lord of the harvest"—MENA Prayer Promotion

The prayer promotion research was sponsored by a Christian networking organization in 2016 to discover and document the state of prayer promotion focused on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The objective was to identify ways that might increase prayer for the region. It sought to learn more about those who were leading and engaging in MENA-focused prayer and identify effective prayer approaches. The research identified 157 prayer network initiatives that included website home pages, focus pages within websites, social media accounts, and distribution lists. These initiatives focused on 40 topics such as specific countries, regions, or issues. They were produced or managed by 53 organizations and individuals. This project had three phases: Website Abstraction, Organization Survey, and Intercessor Survey.

The Website Abstraction phase showed that 61% of the sites offer the visitor two or more ways to get prayer information: 1) visiting the website or social media account (Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube) and 2) directly receiving the material (email, postal mail, text messages, and apps). The others offered prayer information only through the website (16%) or Facebook (23%). Two-thirds had a single focus on the MENA region. Of 69 websites, English was the only language that appeared available on 55 of them, Arabic was the only language on two, and Portuguese on one. The other 11 websites offered material in English and up to 100 other languages. Half of the websites updated prayer requests on their websites daily or weekly, and one-sixth sent out requests daily or weekly. The others updated them less frequently. Many of the websites also profiled countries, peoples, religions, or issues. Many also provided prayer guides. Half of the websites gave intercessors free access to prayer requests with no option for registration. Most of the others offered free access to prayer requests on the website and sent prayer requests to those who registered for them. A few sites (8) required registration prior to both viewing and receiving prayer requests. Most sites make no effort to report results of prayer or to indicate when they update their websites.

The Organization Survey included the distribution of a survey to 53 organizations, receiving responses from 33 of them. The survey collected information about the organizations and their MENA prayer initiatives not available on the websites. Most of the responders agreed that their organizations mobilized prayer (91%) and worked with other prayer initiatives (81%). They were less likely to agree that they had a dedicated staff person coordinating prayer requests (52%) or had adequate financial resources (43%). They indicated that distributing prayer requests through social media and email was the most effective method to mobilize prayer. Expatriate Christians

were the primary source for nine organizations and a secondary source for 15 more (see Figure 2). National Christians were the primary source for seven organizations and the secondary source for 18 more. Three organizations relied primarily on other prayer networks and three on Christian researchers for prayer requests. Nineteen organizations developed prayer requests from news services, but none used them as their primary source.



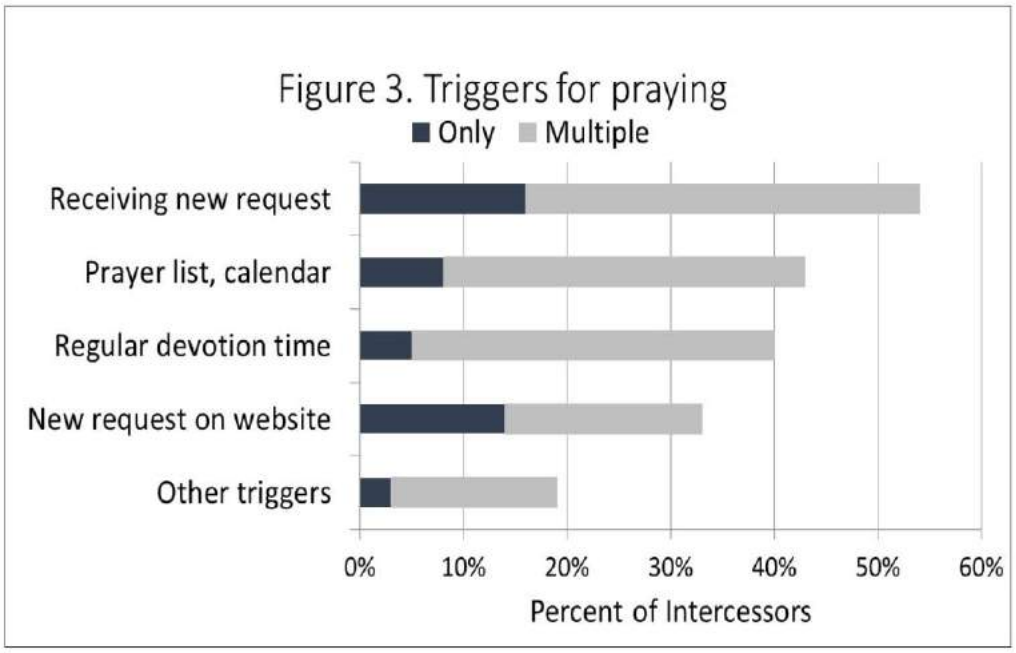
The reach of prayer networks varied among organizations and by methods of distributing prayer requests (see Table 2). Five of the 33 organizations reported sending out an average of 620,940 prayer alerts each month. This number of alerts was more than ten times the average number of monthly visits to prayer websites that seven organizations reported. Over half of the organizations email prayer requests that averaged 2,931 messages in a month. Nine organizations distributed prayer requests through Twitter and nine through Facebook, with about five times as many Twitter followers as active Facebook users in a month. Six organizations reported conference calls to distribute prayer requests with an average of 37 participants on each call.

Table 2. Reach of prayer networks

Media format	Number reporting	Monthly distribution
Prayer alerts	5	620,940
Website visits	7	54,999
Website unique visitors	8	25,291
Email messages sent	18	2,931
Twitter followers	9	2,344
Facebook users	9	533
Conference call participants	6	37

The Intercessor Survey phase requested help from the organizations to identify recipients of their prayer requests. Six organizations either provided email addresses or placed a link to the web survey on their website. Fifty people responded, many of whom were from a single organization. It is not possible to know how representative these 50 were, but they provide some insights. Most lived in the United States and Canada and were 45 years of age or older. Half were men and half women. One-third had obtained prayer requests from the website for three or more years. One-

fifth were paid church staff. About half had financial involvement in the MENA region, and about half had personal experience (ministry, travel, or planning a ministry) in the MENA region. They varied in the frequency with which they got prayer requests: 18% at least weekly, 35% several times a month, and 47% less than monthly. Half of the intercessors got prayer requests from more than one website. Receiving a new request from the website reminded 53% of them to pray and was the only trigger for prayers for 16% of them (see Figure 3). Fewer (33%) said that visiting the website and finding new requests triggered their prayers, although this was the only method for about half of them (14%). Many intercessors also used a prayer list or calendar to help trigger their prayers, but few said it was the only triggering event. When they pray, 62% pray for two or three requests at a time, 26% pray for only one request at a time, and 12% pray for four or more requests at a time.



So how can prayer for MENA be encouraged? The frequent sending out of two or three prayer requests to committed intercessors appears to trigger the most prayers by them. It also increases the likelihood that they share the prayer requests with others. Praying is also encouraged by experience and by financial commitments in the region. Stories, testimonies, and relaying answers to specific prayers also encourages prayer, as does having a regular devotional time.

Phase 3: "Send out workers into his harvest field"—Disciple Making Community of Practice Survey

This survey about experience with disciple making movements included 44 expatriate Christians and 12 local Christians working with one of the expatriates. Most respondents ministered in Muslim communities. The questions covered:

- Involvement and interest in advancing disciple making movements.
- Familiarity with specific methodologies.
- Challenges they see in advancing disciple making movements.

- Interaction with co-workers and ministry partners.
- What would help them in the future.

Invitations to complete the English-language web survey were sent to 62 members of an international alliance in 2014; 44 responded. An expatriate in Southeast Asia translated the survey into the local language and reported the responses of 12 collaborating national Christians. Among the 56 combined responses, 28% were from nationals in Southeast Asia, 30% from people in or sent from the United States and Canada, 30% from those in or sent from Brazil, Guatemala, Philippines, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom, and 18% with origin and location unknown.

Respondents were interested in disciple making movements for several reasons. More than one-fourth were learning about them as a productive way to follow the Lord's commission. About the same proportion had been trained in the methods but were not currently involved with a movement. About the same proportion were currently involved training others about movements and were involved with them. The remainder were involved with a movement only. Respondents used words like "effective evangelism," "transformation," "productive," and "fruitful" when asked about the method.

"Disciple making" was the undefined general term used in this 2014 survey. Different terms were used at the time to describe different strategies. This survey presented respondents with a list of six names and asked them to choose the one which "most closely represents your disciple making strategy." The three most frequently chosen names were the same as discussed in an article by Smith and Parks a year later (Smith and Parks, 2015):

- Thirty chose *DMM*, short for "Disciple Making Movements." This number includes 17 English survey respondents who selected the initials, and all 12 non-English speakers when the English translator identified this term as what they were doing. One respondent wrote in "Discovery Bible Study." According to Smith and Parks, DMM is one of the two major approaches to CPM as widely taught by David Watson, with Discovery Bible Study (or DBS) as its primary method.
- Seven selected *CPM*, short for "Church-Planting Movements," which Smith and Parks identify as the original term for disciple making movements from which the two major adaptations have resulted.
- Six selected *T4T*, short for "Training for Trainers" developed by Ying Kai, which is the other of the two major approaches to CPM.
- Three selected the term *Storying.*
- Two selected the term *Train and Multiply.*
- Two selected multiple methods.
- Three wrote in other terms for their method: *Dynamic Churches Intl*, *Ubabalo*, and *Urban DMM*.
- Three did not respond to the question.

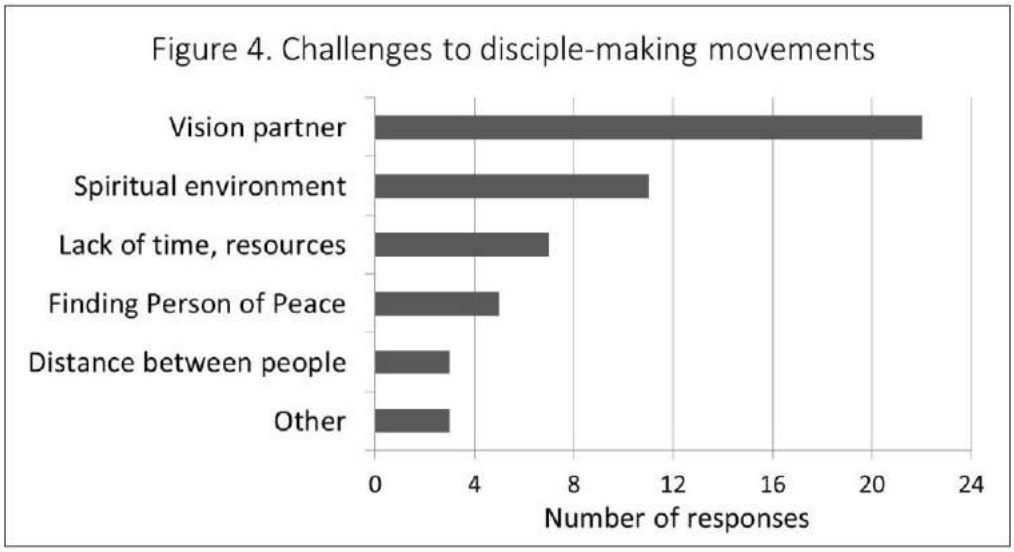
Disciple making movements are frequently discussed in terms of "generations." A generation is a group of unbelievers who regularly read, listen, and discuss the Bible together. Those in the "first generation" are often led directly by a Christian trainer from a different culture. Those in the "second generation" are then led by those in the first generation, with indirect guidance by the Christian trainer. Those in the "third generation" are led by those in the second generation, etc. Close to half (44%) of the survey respondents had relationships with first generation groups, 40%

had relationships with second generation groups, 26% had relationships with third generation groups, and 17% were involved with fourth or later generations. David Garrison defined a "movement" as "*a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches, planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment*" (Garrison, 1999, 7, emphasis original). Sometimes the "rapid multiplication" is measured by 500 or 1000 new believers baptized within a specified time such as one-to-three years (DMMs Frontier Missions, n.d.).

There appears to be a relationship between the method which respondents selected and the highest generational level of their involvement:

- 92% of the 13-person team that selected DMM (12 national Christians and the expatriate Christian who translated the survey for them) were involved with a fourth generation or beyond. The other person was involved with a first generation.
- 25% of the others who identified with DMM were involved with a fourth generation or beyond and none with a third generation.
- 17% of those who identified with T4T were involved with a fourth generation or beyond, and 50 % with a third generation.
- 14% of those who identified with CPM, were involved with a fourth generation or beyond, and none with a third generation.
- None of those identifying with other methods were involved with a fourth generation or beyond although 15% were involved with a third generation.

Respondents were asked about the specific challenges they see as they work to advance disciple making movements. The responses were classified into six groups (see Figure 4). The



most frequent group of reasons (22 respondents) involved having partners with the same vision for disciple making. Example statements are:

- *I'm lacking partners and a ministry platform….people are pretty satisfied with how things are.*
- *"Already believers"…just want to be fed and not reach out.*
- *The groups inclined to meet with Christians and not with unbelievers.*

- *It is hard for us to get national {church} leaders to embrace this method or receive specialists to mentor them.*
- *Getting pastors and denominations to cooperate.*
- *Leaders have mixed DMM up with cell churches.*

The spiritual environment was mentioned next most frequently (11 respondents) but only half as frequently as vision partners. The spiritual theme included statements like:

- *Most people in … are practicing Christianity by their cultural definitions*.
- *Blasphemy law, political unrest, belonging to a minority group*.
- *Infidelity in the community*.

Seven mentioned a lack of time and resources, five the challenge of finding a Person of Peace, and two the challenges of the distance between people for communication and follow-up.

The survey identified people in all regions of the world who were interested in learning about and assisting disciple making movements. They expressed at the end of the survey that having a community of disciple making practitioners with whom they could pray, share, and learn together would increase their ability to advance disciple making movements. The main purpose of the survey was to build community among English-speaking workers, but such a community would be most valuable if it could involve local practitioners who communicate best in languages other than English. The survey found the greatest experience with disciple making movements was among one team in Southeast Asia for whom an expatriate Christian translated the English survey so they could participate. This finding probably indicates the importance of translation capacity to learn best about movements. Alternatively, it could mean that this team, or Southeast Asia in general, has some special experience with movements which could be instructive to others.

Summary and Discussion of the Three Projects

The first research project included in this article partnered with a ministry that was ending. This article is the first place where the findings have been publicly available. The partners on the other two projects have made the findings available to those they think are interested in them, but this article makes the key findings more widely available. The main commonality among the three projects is that they relate to Jesus's instructions to look at the harvest field in the Muslim world and pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers. A second commonality is that the author conducted all three projects and can provide more detail within constraints of confidentiality. A third commonality is that these projects have shown me:

1. The Lord has prepared the Muslim harvest field. Some Muslims are ready to receive the gospel and follow Jesus, and some of them can be reached through hearing an evangelistic message broadcast through electronic media. However, it is important for them to have ways to get more information and connect with others who can help them understand and grow in faith.
2. Young Muslim adults are the most likely to respond to the gospel message as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Muslim men appear more likely than Muslim women to respond to an impersonal broadcast message.
3. Disciple making movements expand as believers with Muslim backgrounds share what they are learning with their Muslim friends and relatives as they themselves grow. These often develop into a fellowship of Muslim background believers.

4. Existing Christian churches may not meet the needs of Muslims within their community. Many focus on worship and caring for current members and do not have a vision of sharing the gospel with Muslims.
5. When churches and individuals have a vision, Scripture says *the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective (James 5: 16)*. Prayer can be promoted through websites, messages, and social media. The most effective prayer promotion is to frequently send two or three detailed prayer requests to people committed to being intercessors. Sharing answers to prayer whenever possible appears to encourage praying, as does personal involvement with the mission field.

These project findings may or may not be representative of the broader knowledge of sharing the gospel in the Muslim world. The projects had specific purposes for specific ministries at a specific time and have helped the author learn about the Muslim harvest field and the workers the Lord has sent. The intent of this article is to help others learn more about, and to help them reach, Muslims for Christ.

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Call for Papers

"Awakenings, Advances, and Revivals: Noteworthy Outpourings of God's Spirit"

For Publication in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, July 2024

The theme of the July 2024 issue of *Global Missiology - English* will be "Awakenings, Advances, and Revivals: Noteworthy Outpourings of God's Spirit." This issue will be contrasted by the ensuing October 2024 issue on "Recessions and Declines." The following topics are examples of requested articles:

- Review of Recent Literature on Awakenings, Advances, or Revivals
- Case Studies of Local, Regional, or Broader Spiritual Outpourings
- Contemporary Case Studies
- Historical Case Studies
- Biblical-theological Analyses
- Missiological Analyses

Proposed titles with approximately 100-word abstracts are due November 30, 2023. Full manuscripts of approved paper proposals will be due April 30, 2024. Manuscript guidelines can be found on the *Global Missiology* website at

http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/about/submissions#authorGuidelines.

Please address all submissions and questions to globalmissiologyenglish@gmail.com.

Call for Papers

"Recessions and Declines: Noteworthy Decreases of Christianity and Its Influence"

For Publication in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2024

The theme of the October 2024 issue of *Global Missiology* - *English* will be "Recessions and Declines: Noteworthy Decreases of Christianity and Its Influence." This issue will provide contrasts with the preceding July 2024 issue on "Awakenings, Advances, and Revivals." The following topics are examples of requested articles:

- Review of Recent Literature on Christian Recessions and Declines
- Case Studies of Local, Regional, or Broader Decreases in Christian Presence and Influence
- Contemporary Case Studies—including on so-called "Religious Nones"
- Historical Case Studies
- Biblical-theological Analyses
- Missiological Analyses

Proposed titles with approximately 100-word abstracts are due January 31, 2024. Full manuscripts of approved paper proposals will be due July 31, 2024. Manuscript guidelines can be found on the *Global Missiology* website at http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/about/submissions#authorGuidelines.

Please address all submissions and questions to globalmissiologyenglish@gmail.com.

Book Review

Arend van Dorp, *Ethnic Diversity and Reconciliation: A Missional Model for the Church in Myanmar*

Reviewed by Daniel P. Murphree

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2023

Van Dorp, Arend (2022). *Ethnic Diversity and Reconciliation: A Missional Model for the Church in Myanmar*. Langham Global Library, 124 pp., £12.99 / $19.99, paperback, ISBN: 978-1839736506.

Both authors and reviewers have their own contexts, and in this instance I should begin this review with a bit of my own background. I have been working as an expatriate in Myanmar and with its people since 2006. Some of that time was in the US, heavily engaged with diasporic communities of various Chin, Sgaw Karen, Kachin, and even some Myanmar Muslims. My work is philanthropic and attempts to walk the very fine line between "paying unto Caesar" and offering our services across a very wide spectrum of Myanmar Christians. I must state, however, that most of my work now is among the Chin of Myanmar, Mizo, Falam, and Tedim/Zomi especially.

I find this disclosure of positionality important because as I read *Ethnic Diversity and Reconciliation* I found myself bristling at every corner, even though I am very pleased that Van Dorp engaged with many scholastic sources that most Christian scholars ignore when writing about Christianity in Myanmar, especially Melford Spiro's inimitable *Buddhism and Society*. However, his overreliance on secondary source materials contributes to the limitations of this book.

Chapters 1 and 2 offer a very cursory outline of Myanmar. Chapter 1 (5-18) covers the legacy of post-colonialism, histories of the British encounter to the Bamar and then the Karen, the history of Buddhism in Myanmar, how Christianity interacted with Buddhism, Buddhist dogmas, Nat worship, worldview, Buddhist nationalism, racism, and inter-ethnic conflict—each of which deserves its own dissertations and publications. All this is covered in 13 pages and relies heavily on secondary source material.

Chapter 2 (19-34) attempts to outline "Ministry Context in Myanmar." Rather than focus on a particular denomination or a particular church, Van Dorp discusses how the arrival and interaction with Christian missionaries caused the Bamar to double-down on Buddhist nationalism, while minorities in Myanmar saw Christianity as a way to contest and distinguish themselves as non-Buddhists (20-21). While this analysis is sound, it does not deal with the ethnographic realities of tribalism within these tribal nomenclatures—namely that not only did *most* of the Karen *not* convert (even among the Sgaw), but they maintained their Buddhist identity (including, but not limited to, the Pwo). Van Dorp then assigns this motive (of religion as a "minority religion") to the other ethnic groups that claim a Christian identity—the Chin and the Kachin—who had very different interactions with the Bamar than did the Karen.

Chapter 2 continues with a discussion on how theological institutions and Christianity itself became overly associated with the West, such that "another weakness observed in theological education in Myanmar is a lack of contextualization" (28). Van Dorp also notes that this connection with the West was vital for maintaining orphanages while decrying that "It is unfortunate that the genuine concern from the international Christian community has helped to foster such

individualism and fragmentation" (24). He concludes the chapter by suggesting that Malaysia might offer a better model of Christianity for Myanmar Christians (30-34).

Chapter 3 (37-64) is a literature review that covers theology, Myanmar studies, ecclesiology, missiology, and multi-ethnic churches. There is a noticeable lack of Myanmar sources (only one: Samuel Ngun Ling). This lack, in my preliminary analysis, is the ongoing flaw of this work: an over-reliance on secondary source material.

Chapter 4 (65-88), in an odd departure, shifts into "Theological Reflection on the Church in a Pluralist Society." The first portion (65-75) is a New Testament exposition on the nature of the Church in which Van Dorp argues for a "Multiethnic Mosaic." Page 75 begins Van Dorp's remedy for Myanmar Christians to become missional. He identifies several barriers for Myanmar Christians to become missional—which are all different from the problems outlined in the first chapter. The first barrier set forth is "ethnically based denominations," a characteristic concerning which Van Dorp concludes "… is not particularly helpful for a church wanting to be missional" (77). The second problem he identifies is the "clergy-lay distinction" where he argues that, in a highly hierarchical society, it would be better if clergy trained all the church members to do the work ministry and adopt a more democratic model of ministry. The reasons Myanmar pastors do not do this, he suspects, are because pastors "might derive their identity from doing ministry," or they fear they will not be needed anymore (79). Finally, in a section that reads more like a sermon, Van Dorp concludes the chapter by suggesting that Myanmar Christians should work not only for reconciliation but also diversity (83-88). The discussion assumes they do not seek either.

Chapter 5 (91-96) is a very brief (only five pages) explanation of Van Dorp's recommendations. Those include moving away from a discipleship model that focuses on an individual's relationship with God to a more outward focused "life-changing conduct of Christians within their spheres of influence"—with the obvious implication that current discipleship programs are inept to accomplish this (92). He then argues that Christians should not focus on their ethnic identity and should eschew their languages in order to become more "outward looking" (93). He concludes the chapter by arguing the Myanmar church needs to do more contextualization (again, undefined) for a Buddhist Burmese context.

Chapter 6 (97-99) offers a conclusion where Van Dorp states the reason he wrote this book: to "inspire the church in Myanmar to expand beyond the confines of its historical boundaries and reach out to the communities around it" (97).

One aspect of Van Dorp's work that is admirable, as I already mentioned, is his use of secondary sources to get large overviews of the country, its history, and Buddhism. He also uses several Chin scholars and a few Karen to back up his claims. Utilizing these sources is important, but it ultimately does not go far enough, as he uses few primary sources.

The first major issue that is problematic for the book is its implied assumption that Myanmar is, was, or ever will be a nation-state. Rather, Myanmar should be viewed as a state-of-nations. Never have the Bamar had hegemony of the current political boundaries that comprise Myanmar. The Kachin, similarly, have been involved in centuries long contestations of "boundaries" with the Shan, Bamar, Yunanese, and, now, the Tatmadaw. Similar negotiations can be said of the Chin with India, Rakhine State, and Sagaing Division, as well as for the Karen with the Bamar and with their Thai and Lao neighbors. The assumption that all the ethnic groups and the Bamar are in close proximity to each other creates the "problem" (16-18; 24-34) for Van Dorp that there are not

enough interethnic or ministries to the Buddhist Bamar. In a country the size of Texas—but without highways and railways—Van Dorp's discussion assumes that those from Austin and those from El Paso ought to be in closer relationship with each other as well as those in Dallas.

This assumption about Myanmar being a single nation-state is closely related to the problem of the book's scope: it is unwieldy. Van Dorp presents Christianity in Myanmar as something ubiquitous that is not engaged in reconciliation *as he sees it*. One must *infer* when—or if—he is talking about churches in the city, churches in the village, or churches in their ethnic regions. He does not differentiate, at least explicitly. Furthermore, there is no acknowledgement that among these ethnic minorities there are several languages. So, an ethnically Chin church is missional if it uses Lai to reach Falam, Matu, and Haka parishioners. Even within most "ethnic" churches there are, in fact, significant reconciliation movements. The Christians with whom I interact have outreaches to Buddhist regions, laity/discipleship training, and engage with their local spheres. I thus kept wondering throughout the book, "Who exactly is he talking about?"

The second major issue I see in Van Dorp's overall presentation is one of positionality. Whereas his intended purpose is "to explore a model for churches in Myanmar, in order that they may become more diverse and welcoming to various ethnicities in the country" (98), he explores neither a model for reconciliation nor Myanmar Christianity itself to meet his claims. This book ultimately undermines Van Dorp's purpose in that it is (no doubt unintentionally and unwittingly) reductionist, paternalist, and inaccurate in its understanding and representation of Myanmar Christianity. For example, Malaysia is set forth as a model for Myanmar Christianity, but Van Dorp does not offer a case study or show how the situation in Malaysia is in any way like Christianity in Myanmar. He does not provide any rubric for his "contextualization" and ignores important ways the church in Myanmar has in fact indigenized Western ecclesial models. Fanny Crosby is beloved among most Burmese Christians I know as it has been over a generation since her introduction by the American Baptists. Her hymns are as much theirs as they were my father's. Moreover, a Western ecclesial model retains an important role in distinguishing what is Christian and what is Buddhist, Muslim, or Hindu in Myanmar. This differentiation is vital for burgeoning churches in Buddhist areas to give the Buddhist quartermasters a clearly distinguishable "Christian" church versus some perversion of Buddhism that refuses to participate with other Sangha events.

A third issue I have with the book lies in Van Dorp's theoretical framework. He apparently never once considers that the erasure of various groups' languages in worship or their cultural identities would lead to *Burmanization*, or that retaining the cultural identities is necessary for those moving from their ethnic regions into the city. This oversight was the final blow for me, for what the book is in fact arguing for is assimilation, especially when language, race, and religion are so closely intertwined for the Burmese. Van Dorp seems to assume that retaining a language other than Burmese is simply a gospel-inhibiting ethnic preference, and he never considers the numbers of ethnic minorities moving from the village to the city, often with little or no formal education in Burmese. This detail about Christians' actual lives in Myanmar is so significant that it ultimately leads me to wonder how much genuine exposure the author had to Myanmar during his years living there.

It is for these reasons, as well as others not mentioned here, that I have serious reservations about and indeed do not recommend this book. I struggle to see its value for theologians as it is not theology, even though I am partial to *every* book mentioned in his literature review. The author

has, in effect, created a caricature of Christianity in Myanmar which he was then able to analyze and critique. This caricature of "Christianity in Myanmar" is not accurate. If Van Dorp had instead limited his study of Christianity in Myanmar to a particular church or organization and used an ethnographic methodology, his claims may have been possible. Even if the book would have taken such an approach, it still would have faced the tedious tasks of finding both an analogous situation in Malaysia as well as closer ties between those books in the literature review and their relevance for Asia. I hope more accurate presentations than *Ethnic Diversity and Reconciliation* of Christian communities, challenges, and testimonies in Myanmar, as well as constructive comparisons with other Asian settings (and elsewhere), will emerge soon.