

## Book Review

### **Darren T. Duerksen, *Christ-Followers in Other Religions: The Global Witness of Insider Movements***

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Perhaps the greatest hindrance to people of other faiths being drawn to Christ in erstwhile colonies of the West is the perception that the gospel enterprise was a sub-set of the imperial “Christianizing” project and an assault on cherished ancestral cultural traditions, designed to undermine national identity. One of the greatest merits of Duerksen’s work is the awareness it raises regarding the potential of Christ-ward movements to draw people to Christ in the postcolonial era. Insider movements seek to circumvent deep-seated anti-colonial sentiments in their attempts to share the “pure” gospel, minus the colonial-era missionary “baggage,” so that people of other faiths are able to view Christ and his claims in all their simplicity and authenticity. This feature in itself makes this book an essential read for any thoughtful student of missions.

At the heart of Duerksen’s project is an attempt to help us investigate more closely the tension inherent in identity struggles of “insider Christ-followers”—people of other faiths who decide to follow Christ yet choose to remain within their religious communities instead of identifying with the mainstream established Church. While acknowledging the complexity of the challenge, Duerksen nonetheless feels the experiences and insights of insiders provide a valuable crucible for the discovery of what he calls “alternative missiological imaginaries.” This term, derived from the hermeneutic philosopher Charles Taylor’s “social imaginary” (denoting the way in which people imagine and work to maintain the society in which they live), is fundamental to Duerksen’s construct, which for him captures more accurately the distinctive contribution of insiders to the wider missiological discourse.

The author’s purpose is clearly stated in his introduction: “The argument of this book is that insider movements are shaping alternative missiological imaginaries from which other Christ-followers can learn, or re-learn, insights about God and his mission” (15). Critiquing insider missional approaches and methods is thus not his main concern. His posture rather is one of respectful listening and learning how God might be at work within these movements and how the understanding of “outsiders” regarding mission, revelation, and the gospel could be enriched. This rare posture of humility in academic enquiry is a refreshing and admirable quality of his approach and runs right through every stage of his treatment.

Duerksen’s approach is courageous in its attempt to tackle some extremely complex issues in inter-religious engagement impacting mission. In chapters 2 & 3, the nature of religion, religious tradition, and religiosity are all dealt with summarily, leading up to his main concern which is to make a case for the essential hybrid nature of all religion and religious tradition, including Christianity. Duerksen's case for the dynamic nature of religiosity is hard to dispute but lends itself to some questions. For instance, are there not elements especially within “prophetic” faiths such as Christianity and Islam which their adherents consider essential and non-negotiable—what

Andrew Walls would call the “pilgrim” strand in relation to Christian faith—that transcend space and time? Duerksen is clearly aware that there is a prescriptive dimension to Christ-followership: “it is certainly possible that such hybrid religiosity could dilute biblical revelation beyond recognition” (29). But one would have liked to see a careful scholar like Duerksen nuance his argument suitably in his explanation of hybrid religiosity. However, this lack of nuance is perhaps understandable given the extent and complexity of the terrain the author attempts to cover.

Duerksen’s discussion of religion and hybrid religiosity lays the foundation for a fascinating discourse on God’s activity in other religions. He draws from an impressive breadth of scholarship to support his case for the Spirit as a helpful starting point in understanding God’s work in other religious traditions. But the depth of treatment is marked by an overemphasis on the subjective dimension of revelation as an event which occurs “if and when God reveals himself through his Spirit” (37), and a corresponding tendency to dilute the notion of objective truth in the Word as Scripture. Duerksen is, however, careful to land on a well-rounded trinitarian understanding, affirming firmly his Christo-centric commitment: “Salvation occurs only through Christ ... and the Spirit’s work of re-creation finds its ultimate fulfilment through Christ” (43).

In chapters 4 and 5 [Section Two] we see Duerksen at his best, wanting his readers to understand insider movements on their own terms in his description and analysis of the experiences of insiders, past and present. We are introduced to some wonderful Christ-lovers as the journeys of select Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Native American figures are all in turn explored sensitively and fairly. His primary intent and interest is not so much to evaluate their thought and experience theologically, as much as to listen and learn from their struggle to integrate their ancestral community identity with their commitment to the Way of Christ. He sees the missiological imaginaries that emerge from these struggles as gifts to the wider body of Christ.

In the following chapters [Section Three] Duerksen probes more deeply into the content of these imaginaries, focusing on four key issues: how insiders view the scriptures of their ancestral traditions in relation to the Bible; how they relate their traditional notions of salvation to that offered in Christ; what change or movement conversion to Christ entails; and how their journey with Christ affects their relationship to their family. He devotes two chapters [6 & 7] to a well-informed and fairly detailed treatment of the critical theological question of religious revelations. Some may find his key premise that the Spirit is actively at work in revealing himself through the scriptures of other religions problematic, but Duerksen leaves us in no doubt that insiders seem to place the Bible clearly and consistently in a privileged position as authoritative for faith and life.

Duerksen’s treatment of how insiders view salvation and their journey to Christ is extremely helpful and a necessary corrective to traditional western expectations of conversion narratives in at least two key areas. Firstly, the experiences of the vast majority of people of other faiths who come to Christ are best understood in terms of a process—what Duerksen rightly refers to as a “journey.” Even in instances where individuals experience a climactic movement by way of a power-encounter, dramatic healing, or “revelatory” dream, a full appropriation of the gospel and realization of its implications is usually a gradual process.

Secondly, in Duerksen’s insightful explanation of the complex factors involved in the transformation process of conversion, most pertinent is his convincing case for discerning continuity within discontinuity in the conversion journeys of people of other faiths. In any individual’s quest for God, it is but natural that her search begins and is grounded in the tradition of her birth. When a person of another faith first turns to Christ, he at first tends to be negative

towards his past experience, but in most instances with time such individuals go through a re-visioning experience. They begin to “re-story” not just their own journey but often “their community’s past and tradition via their experiences and insights regarding Jesus” (137).

In his conclusion Duerksen summarizes the challenge of the missiological imaginaries of “insider movements” to traditional western “colonial” missiologies in terms of a mending, patient, and marginal missiology, reaffirming the original intent of his study: to inform, enrich, challenge, and even de-construct western “colonizing” missiologies. Duerksen’s scholarship is sophisticated, based as it is on thorough research and first-hand acquaintance with insider movements, and his argument is compelling if at times provocative. But whether or not one agrees with the conclusions of the author, this book is ground-breaking in its creative originality and will set the terms of future discourse for reflection on interreligious engagement. For this reason alone, apart from its wealth of scholarship, *Christ-Followers in Other Religions* is essential reading not just for those interested in insider movements, but for mission theologians, scholar-practitioners, and all those committed to sharing Christ authentically and respectfully with people of other faiths.