

Editorial

Specific Service Rather Than Vague Religious Sentiment

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Following Jesus Christ involves nitty-gritty, everyday living. Decisions. Ethics. Money. Work. Evangelistic witness. Family. Responsibilities. Education. Relationships. Food. Prayer. Society. Politics. Media. Community. Worship. Play. Health. Environment... Christianity must not be understood as unique among religious traditions in its focus on specifics. At the same time, neither should the Christian faith be mischaracterized or brushed aside as an irrelevant panacea for next-world security or as an emotional “crutch” for the faint of heart.

Two obvious caveats: (1) Following Jesus Christ cannot be reduced to concrete, tangible, this-worldly realities: the Creator-Redeemer, triune God is beyond “nitty-gritty, everyday” affairs; unseen, spiritual forces are real; Christians—consciously or not—interrelate with transcendent and other-worldly beings. (2) Christianity has not always navigated concrete involvements in the most responsible fashion: churches and individuals have allowed themselves to be co-opted by worldly forces—political, economic, and otherwise—for non- or even anti-Christian purposes; strands of Christianity have drifted into pre-occupations with conceptual nuance, ritualistic precision, or personal peace at the expense of engaging the hard-knocks of daily discipleship in following the crucified-risen-ascended Jesus.

This issue’s articles provide examples of specific challenges faced by Christian participants in God’s mission. “Disciple Making Movements” (DMMs) have both skeptical critics and enthusiastic promoters. The differing viewpoints hinge on several particular matters, but a central difference concerns how God is building his Church in new settings today: does he still primarily use “traditional” cross-cultural missionary approaches, or is he now accelerating growth through rapidly multiplying movements? Readers have the opportunity to work through their own reactions to Keener’s and Foster’s readable presentation of their “Mathematically Based Model” of DMMs.

So-called parachurch agencies—even those begun and operated with the most earnest Christ-centered intentions—face social, political, and financial pressures to drift from their central mission. Those agencies committed to holistic gospel service face particularly acute challenges. Kombaté’s careful study sifts through specific ways that such agencies’ mission drift can occur. Cuartas’s article discusses the struggles that many Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) face on an ongoing, daily basis. Just as the original recipients of I Peter faced persecution and obstacles in their life contexts, so do many MBBs—and hence they follow Jesus in making what are often life-and-death decisions about work, family, witness, location, and other concrete matters.

Missiological discussions about “Honor-Shame” contexts have gained increasing traction in evangelical circles. The gist of the interactions touches on the heart of the Christian gospel: what is “good” about “the Good News” concerning Jesus of Nazareth? Frequent mention of an assumed “gospel” can unwittingly slip into vague religious jargon that does not communicate with people who share the speaker’s own cultural setting, much less with those who have been culturally hard-wired with legitimate albeit different values. Concrete developments leading up to today’s vibrant

honor-shame discussions and their applications are presented in Flanders's carefully combined piece.

Even though *Global Missiology – English* has never placed major emphasis on book reviews, thankfully they do appear regularly, and remarkably this issue carries five. All five books reviewed deal very specifically with arguably concrete Christian topics. One addresses how Christians are to relate evangelistically with adherents of other religious traditions, i.e., interfaith apologetics. Another explores the relational and missiological necessity of intergenerational leadership, including in relation to such contemporary realities as diasporas and technologies. A third delves into the missional character of I Peter, challenging readers to rethink how they have read and understand Peter's first epistle. The book on India presents all kinds of specific historical and missiological matters. Finally, a detailed framework for sustained DMMs is provided in a newly published fifth volume.

Much of humanity has been deeply shaped by a scientific worldview. Per that instinctive framework, the "real" world consists of tangible cause-and-effect progressions. Weather patterns and sunrises develop from complex collisions of particles and waves, with a winking nod given to an imaginary role of "Mother Nature." Religion gets relegated to an ethereal realm of psychology and emotion.

In actuality, the triune God is redeeming the multifaceted world he created. All of life, including every small bit of daily life, is involved with serving this great and loving God. This issue's articles and reviews ring out a clarion call to be specific, even concrete, in how to think about, discuss, live, and serve as Jesus's followers. After all, the triune God—while transcendent and beyond full human understanding—is not some sort of vague religious "higher power." God is the Creator and Redeemer of his world. He lived in his world as that specific human being, Jesus of Nazareth. That divine-human person suffered the curses of the broken covenant of creation that we human beings deserved to suffer. Trusting in the crucified, risen, ascended, and reigning Jesus the Christ frees people to engage life's specific opportunities and challenges.

May God help his people not to settle for a worldly vague religiosity but to live robustly in tackling specific aspects of gospel service.