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Christian living necessarily involves specific challenges, beliefs, actions, and opportunities. While some might consider Christianity to be ethereal religious sentimentality, this issue's articles and book reviews offer examples of how followers of Jesus Christ must constantly engage particular struggles, questions, and blessings--all according to God's gracious supervision and care.

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Editorial

Specific Service Rather Than Vague Religious Sentiment

J. Nelson Jennings

DOCX PDF HTML

Contemporary Practice

A Mathematically Based Model of Disciple Making Movements

Chris Keener, Dave Foster

DOCX PDF HTML

Spiritual Dynamics

Theories and Spectrums: What Pressures Do Parachurch Agencies Face Toward Losing Their Founding Missions?

Israel K. Kombaté

DOCX PDF HTML

Diverse Ways in which Muslim Background Believers Are Living Out I Peter 4:12-14

Víctor Hugo Cuartas

DOCX PDF HTML

Missiological Paradigm

The Honor-Shame Conversation in Evangelical Missiology: Past, Present, and Future

Chris Flanders

DOCX PDF HTML

Review & Preview

Benno van den Toren and Kang-San Tan, Humble Confidence: A Model for Interfaith Apologetics

John Cheong

DOCX PDF HTML

Sadiri Joy Tira, ed., From Womb to Tomb: Generational Missiology in the 21st Century and Beyond

Sam George

DOCX PDF HTML

Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither, eds., Reading 1 Peter Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message and Methods of 1 Peter

J. Nelson Jennings

DOCX PDF HTML

Lalsangkima Pachuau and Allan Varghese Meloottu, eds., Christians and Christianity in India Today: Historical, Theological and Missiological Assessments

J. N. Manokaran

DOCX PDF HTML

Aychi B. R. with Dave Coles, Living Fire: Advancing God's Kingdom in Challenging Places

Mark Naylor

DOCX PDF HTML

View All Issues

Editorial

Specific Service Rather Than Vague Religious Sentiment

J. Nelson Jennings

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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.

A Mathematically Based Model of Disciple Making Movements

Chris Keener and Dave Foster

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Abstract

Although many practical resources are available to encourage and facilitate Disciple Making Movements (DMM), a quantitative theoretical framework to undergird the conclusions of authors and practitioners is currently unavailable. Such a model will be useful to assist in increasing the rate at which disciples are able to multiply and could help more slowly reproducing groups of disciples to transition over time into DMM's. We have developed a model of disciple multiplication that builds from the starting point of an individual disciple maker. This article provides conclusions and applications that are comprehensible to every practitioner, without delving into the underlying mathematics. A key conclusion comprises the twin necessities of investing significant time sowing the gospel among those who are yet far from God and of the mobilization of all (or most) disciples into the harvest (John 4:35). By focusing on disciples' most controllable factor—prioritization of time on more receptive individuals and on existing close relationships—rates of multiplication can be doubled in most contexts. Furthermore, the model explains how different optimization strategies are needed for different contexts as average receptivity and relational connectedness vary.

Key Words: Disciple Making Movements, disciple multiplication, Discovery Bible Study, mathematical model

Introduction

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. (Colossians 1:6)

Multiplication of Jesus's followers in Disciple Making Movements (DMM) is powerfully impacting global Christianity (Long 2020 & 2023). At the foundation of every DMM are disciples actively leading people who are far from God to become disciples of Jesus, who in turn reproduce more disciples. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of these movements, we have developed a mathematical model to describe the relationship of the micro—individual disciples making more disciples—to the macro—rapid multiplications of streams of disciples across any given region, continent, and even the globe. The model takes into account three factors: each disciple's relational network, receptivity of hearers to the gospel message, and time spent in gospel-related conversations and Bible study. In this article, we share some of the conclusions of the in-depth analysis of these three factors, details of which can be accessed online (Keener & Foster n.d.) or by contacting us, the authors, via this journal.

The gospel of Jesus is good news. It is proclaimed and received. In the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20), Jesus conveys clearly that the proclaimed gospel is received well by some but has little impact on others. Describing this variation quantitatively enables us as gospel messengers to adapt priorities and methodologies as we communicate the message. One message, the gospel, is transmitted, although the way that message is communicated is influenced by the messenger's own

background and relationship with Jesus. But what is received can be garbled by noise, suppressed by inattentiveness, distorted by misunderstanding, or outright rejected.

For the sake of God's glory, practitioners in Disciple Making Movements are seeking to maximize both the number of new followers of Jesus and their depth of relationship with the Lord. Because we the authors are using math as our tool, this article focuses on the quantitative aspect of DMM. However, this use of math does not equate people to numbers. Fundamentally, every disciple must rely upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, who empowers Jesus' followers for the purpose of witness (Acts 1:8). A DMM leader writes, "Disciple Making Movements are not a program, not a strategy or a curriculum. It is simply a movement of God. Without Him, there is nothing" (Sunshine *et al*. 2018). Jesus Himself makes clear that his disciples are absolutely dependent upon him (John 15:5), including dependent upon him to be his witnesses, as he commanded. Mathematical modeling is useful for general principles, but each specific movement and every human being is uniquely constructed by God. A model cannot solve every problem and certainly cannot replace the many valuable case studies and other research in missions literature (see, for example, Farrah 2021 and Larsen 2018).

Though theoretical, this model does have immediate practical implications. For example, we the authors are able to answer questions that have nagged us for decades, such as: If a practitioner considers two options to spend an equal amount of time and effort— 1) purely scattering the seed of the Gospel, and 2) spending more time developing a small group of people from nonbelievers into faithful followers of Jesus—which option will lead to more people ultimately coming into a deep relationship with Christ marked by a life of obedience and love? As we shall see, Option 2 will be far more effective, regardless of the practitioner's context. Although many applications of our model have already been naturally discovered by leaders, some Christian groups who are struggling to multiply may benefit by considering the sound logical reasoning that is available in a mathematical model.

The rate at which a group of disciples doubles depends on several factors. Using the common experience of disciple-making practitioners, we start from the assumption that the likelihood of a nonbeliever becoming a follower of Jesus depends on these three factors: 1) Among people who do not know God, receptivity to the gospel varies. 2) The more a person is exposed to gospel-related conversations and participates in Bible-related discussions, the more likely that person is to become a follower of Jesus. 3) A person is more likely to receive the gospel if the message comes from someone they know personally than if they hear from a stranger. In summary, making a disciple depends on the receptivity of the hearer, closeness of relationship between disciple and hearer, and amount of time spent talking about the gospel, God, and the Bible. For DMM to occur, new followers of Jesus must make disciples, following the example of the people who invested in them. From these three assumptions, we will discover many practical implications for disciple-makers.

Significantly, different strategies are appropriate for each different scenario. In most cases, optimizing the approach to the context can result in a movement multiplying up to twice as fast. For example, where receptivity is low, practitioners can be most effective by searching for the few people with higher receptivity. And where interpersonal relationships are slow-forming and few, followers of Jesus will want to capitalize as much as possible on their existing close relationships. Relevant to this conclusion, practitioners of one context should be sensitive to those in different

contexts and understanding that, while others' tools may not be fully applicable in one's own setting, the same tools could be quite useful in another setting.

Ingredients of the Model

Elements in the Rate of Multiplication: Sender Component

Even in the best case where the hearer of the gospel message is potentially completely receptive, if no disciple ever shares the gospel with that person, he or she will not become a follower of Jesus. Believers must share the good news as Jesus commanded, and Jesus declares that this command applies to anyone who is called his disciple (Mark 8:34-38). Equally vital is reliance upon the Holy Spirit Jesus gave for the purpose of witness (Acts 1:8). Further, a disciple's own personal relationship with Jesus influences and grounds his or her witness, and the Lord has uniquely placed each disciple in trusting relationships that facilitate this witness. One of the stated goals of DMM is that all disciples are equipped to penetrate their spheres with the gospel message (see, e.g., Smith & Kai 2011; Lim 2021).

Certain elements are essential in the "Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). A study of the gospel summaries in the book of Acts and other key Scripture passages shows that God created the world (Acts 17:24-26) and that everyone is bound in sin before they receive the gospel (Acts 17:30; see also John 3:18, Rom 11:32, Eph 2:13). In love, God sent Jesus into the world to sacrifice himself on the Cross as payment for human sin (John 3:16, Rom 3:25), and Jesus has risen from death to life as the living and glorified eternal Savior of all who receive him (I Cor 15:3-8, Acts 2:24-36). Therefore, all are called to repent and believe in the living Savior, upon which they receive forgiveness of their sins and the promised Holy Spirit, who is present in all followers of Jesus (Acts 2:38-39). These acts of God, corresponding invitation, and promise to people are what we the authors mean by the gospel. Also, it is generally fruitful to supplement this message with other narratives and teaching from both the Old and New Testaments.

Receiver Component

In reality, the response of unbelievers depends on many factors, such as the hearer's relationship to the disciple, the amount of time the sharer spends with the seeker discussing the Word of God, prior exposure to the gospel (or exposure to hypocrisy, a negative influence), the receiver's pride, hardship in his or her life, neighborhood, cultural predispositions toward or against Jesus, and financial income level. The likelihood of a hearer of the gospel becoming a disciple is specific to each hearer.

Receptivity is an aggregate of factors, many of which are also very important in themselves, such as life circumstances and personal disposition to the gospel. Although receptivity is largely a given, some aspects of receptivity may be influenced by a group of practitioners. Addressing poverty and genuine needs in a community is an integral part of DMM strategy in many cases (Kebreab 2021; John & Coles 2021: "Community Learning Centers"; Larsen 2018; Johnson 2017), with the goal of enhancing receptivity. This approach (often termed "access ministry") is a dimension of obedience for disciples (see, for example, Luke 16), in addition to sharing the gospel. In many cases, miraculous healings improve receptivity (Luke 10:9 and its continued application). Believers working with integrity to serve the Lord in their "secular" jobs may also improve receptivity. Of course, in terms of spiritual dynamics that support higher receptivity, prayer in faith-filled reliance upon the Lord is critical (Garrison 2004).

Practitioners often describe a process over time in which a person who is far from God comes to know Jesus. Jesus described a teacher of the Law in terms that could be interpreted similarly (Mark 12:34), "not far from the Kingdom of God," even though he defines only two states at Judgment Day (e.g., Matt 25). One of the most important factors is the amount of time that a hearer of the gospel spends in direct biblical or gospel-related discussion with one or more disciples of Jesus. This time refers to two-way interpersonal interaction with individuals or in small groups (in contrast to listening to sermons, which may also be valuable but is not considered here). The vital nature of this time is evident when considering the enormous fruitfulness of the Discovery Bible Study (DBS) approach around the world (Farrah 2021, chapters 1,2,3,7,10,12,13,16; Larsen 2018). Given sufficient time reading and discussing the Bible and how it applies to someone's life, the probability of becoming a follower of Jesus can be very high, albeit requiring patience.

This time factor is understandable. It takes time for the gospel to sink in. Why, for example, is sacrifice necessary? Understanding the Law of Moses needs to develop. What is repentance in practice, or what should loving one's neighbors actually look like? What is the clear distinction between light and darkness that makes the transmission of the gospel absolutely necessary? What does it mean practically for Jesus to be Lord? Many truths must be heard and demonstrated repeatedly to become clear to those who have no prior knowledge. And without clarity of understanding, it is difficult for seekers to hand over control of their entire lives to God. Patience is necessary as a seeker discovers truth about God and human sinfulness—even as God had been patient with disciple makers when they were still living without faith in Jesus.

Relational Connection

In many contexts, sharing the gospel through a relational network is much more effective than sharing with strangers (Shull 2021). Generally, trust and influence form over a period of time in relationships. Thus relational influence tends to increase with time spent together, although it also depends on personal preference and the positions of the disciple and the hearer within a group or relational network.

In some contexts, forming intimate relationships takes a long time, and each individual tends to have fewer close relationships. The time to form relationships can be significantly longer than the time needed to disciple someone. In this situation, sharing the gospel within a relational network has far more impact than the same amount of sharing with strangers, for whom it is difficult to quickly penetrate the hearer's defenses.

It is important to note that a new believer has already invested significant time in developing relationships *before* believing in the gospel and beginning to share with others. It is well known that new believers are often the most effective witnesses for Christ (Hayward 2002, 225-226). A new disciple already has close relationships and can find those with high receptivity among them, so that less time is necessary to lead a few others into relationship with Jesus. Likewise, Discovery Bible Studies are most effective when they gather people from pre-existing social relationships, rather than bringing together people who do not already know each other.

How the gospel is conveyed contributes to the credibility of the disciple with the people being reached. For example, rural areas with more homogeneous cultures may resonate with a particular method of evangelism and discipleship, whereas cities with more diversity will likely not exhibit a high response to any one method but will require more complex and varied approaches from practitioners. The ability to communicate effectively improves over the time the outsider spends

in a community, and those who grew up in a particular environment are generally better equipped to convey the gospel than the outsiders. Thus the outsider needs to be a good listener and quickly entrust gospel communication to new disciples.

Finally, although time spent focused on the Bible is more influential on disciple-making than other time spent with an individual, this time contributes to the total amount of time spent together thereby tending to enhance relational influence. The impact of DBS is enhanced by the strength of relationships formed through discussions focused on the Bible and its application to life.

Application to Various Contexts

Disciple Making in Various Contexts

Our discussion will now consider the cumulative impact of all the gospel sharing a believer does. Although disciples should not expect someone to believe every time they share the gospel, the impact of persistence adds up. Furthermore, efforts to share the gospel with certain individuals are more likely to pay off.

Potentially, a few receptive individuals may respond to the gospel quickly and thus strongly influence a disciple's reproduction rate. David Garrison's seminal booklet *Church Planting Movements* (Garrison 1999) employed the analogy of nets—broadcasting the gospel to many people—and filters—finding those with high responsiveness to the message. Effective practitioners share the gospel with many people, but they also filter by investing more time with those who respond positively to the initial declaration of the gospel. They realize that receptivity of any individual hearer is largely beyond their control but in the hands of the Lord, although they may collectively, gradually enhance average receptivity as their loving behavior contributes to a positive reputation of believers and Jesus in a community. On the other hand, after finding a responsive person, allocation of time is under the control of the disciple-maker. If Jesus only could do what he saw the Father doing (John 5:19), surely we who are his disciples must follow his example in all areas of life, including disciple making. By following the lead of the Holy Spirit to the people God is already working with, disciple-makers are able to multiply a little faster by investing time in them—especially if they find high receptivity in those who are already in closest relationship with them. In this way, they reap a harvest where God has been sowing. Likewise, for the same reason, trainers are wise to invest time in those who implement the training.

Returning to Relational Connection

Another example involves a U.S. urban context. Typically, ministry there that is focused on *oikos* (one's closest relationships) is more effective than solely seed-sowing among strangers (Shull 2021). Although sharing with *oikos* is important in all contexts, it appears to be more crucial in cities in Europe and the U.S. In this case, close interpersonal relationships are a scarce resource. By focusing time on those few available closest individuals, the disciple's rate of multiplying increases. This effect is further enhanced by the fact that a close friend or relative is more likely than a stranger to be willing to spend time in a DBS.

On the other hand, spending equal time developing all relationships in order to "earn the right" to share the Gospel is ineffective. First, doing so would be faulty worldly reasoning that is inconsistent with Jesus's statement that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to him (Matthew 28:18). With complete authority, he commanded his disciples to continue teaching obedience to all his commands (Matthew 28:19-20), in the power of God, the Holy Spirit (Acts

1:8, John 20:21-23)—himself being with us (Matthew 28:20). Surely, he granted authority to his disciples to obey him by proclaiming the gospel, and this authority is distinct from knowing that the gospel will be accepted. The proclamation should be done respectfully, but it can be done at an early phase of a relationship before relational closeness has grown. Second, it often takes a big investment of time to improve relational closeness with a few individuals, only to discover that most of them are not receptive to the Gospel (Smith & Kai 2011, 206). The best way to gauge receptivity is to observe the response to a presentation of the gospel or at least spiritual truths that prepare for understanding the gospel. Because of the time investment and lack of knowing an individual's receptivity, the result of delaying gospel presentation is disappointment and demotivation for the believer. It is more advantageous for the believer to self-identify as a follower of Jesus, and openly share at least some spiritual truths, from early in the relationship. If certain individuals respond negatively, those with low receptivity may self-select to keep a high relational distance from the believer, who can then invest more time intentionally in those who are interested. Because receptivity varies significantly among individuals, the rate of making disciples improves greatly when the practitioner filters for high receptivity prior to intense investment of time in *new* relationships, of course relying on the Holy Spirit for guidance to responsive people (John 6:44).

Prior exposure to the gospel often functions to shorten the time to make disciples. Effectively, time that a nonbeliever spends hearing the gospel and other biblical truth accumulates regardless of which believer is the source. A quick harvest frequently reflects prior exposure to the gospel and the word of God. Thus Jesus's observation that "one sows and another reaps" (John 4:37) applies to multiple contacts with believers as well as in the statement's original context. (Jesus was referring to increased receptivity where the Samaritan people group had been influenced by God's word preparing them for centuries.) Similarly, a believing community collectively has high leverage on multiplication. In the context of community, especially (but not limited to) a group DBS, the seeker is exposed to biblical discussion with multiple individuals, each contributing different perspectives that complement one another. The group effectively multiplies the amount of time hearing biblical truth and greatly enhances the rate of disciple making. Furthermore, the mutual responsibility to share the truth with others that is fostered in a group that practices healthy accountability is extremely important. Without this accountability, and just left to individuals, the degree of gospel and truth sharing will be much less.

Adjusting the Filter to Become More Efficient and Productive in Disciple-Making

When we believers get stuck and find it difficult to make disciples, often we have to adjust our net to cast more widely or adjust our filter one way or the other to spend our time more wisely. These adjustments are critical for launching a movement in any particular context. In our model for this article, we have considered a disciple's multiplication rate for two different kinds of context, described in Table 1. Population A has a low average receptivity and less prolific formation of close relationships, so that launching a DMM is more challenging in this context. Population B has higher average receptivity and higher prevalence of close relationships. In Population A, there are relatively few close relationships, and in Population B, typically people have many close relationships as well as more distant acquaintances. It turns out that a disciple's optimum prioritization of time in these two contexts is substantially different.

Assuming that a disciple has a certain number of hours per week available for gospel-related discussions, the amount of time spent with various hearers of the gospel has to be prioritized. For Population A, the optimum priorities involve exceptional patience with those closest in

relationship to the practitioner—doing everything possible that might lead to a DBS with them. The more distant the relationship, the more selective the practitioner will be, until with strangers the goal is to find those with exceptionally high receptivity. For Population B, in order to achieve the optimum rate of multiplication, the practitioner must be more selective and only extensively disciple those with highest receptivity and reasonably close relationship.

	Receptivity	Relational Connectedness
Population A	Low receptivity	Less relational
Population B	High receptivity	More relational

Table 1. Description of two distinct populations, A and B

The Critical Importance of Disciple-Makers' Commitment and Availability

One critical conclusion of our study is that DMM requires a great deal of hard work on the part of every disciple. If the average disciple puts only one hour per week into disciple-making, the disciple reproduction rate for Population A is probably not going to be able to keep up with attrition and population growth. Likewise, if a congregation relies on paid staff to do this work, growth will not result. For example, if one person for every 50 believers is a full-time professional disciple-maker, that person could potentially spend more time than the average disciple-maker, with a contribution equivalent to perhaps 3-4 unpaid workers. Nevertheless, without contribution from lay people, the rate would probably be too low to achieve any significant growth. Reliance upon a core team of active believers does not achieve multiplication, either. Pray for more laborers.

It is important to note that disciple multiplication must prioritize time focused explicitly on making disciples, although this time may be either planned or spontaneous sharing during normal life activities. As essential as they are, other priorities such as laying the groundwork with community service, discussions about church, or conversations about peripherally related spiritual topics cannot by themselves result in more disciples.

The Critical Importance of Disciple-Makers Prioritizing Their Valuable Time

Common to both populations described above is how time prioritization results in significantly faster reproduction. Without any filtering, i.e., spending equal small amounts of time explaining the gospel to anyone without regard to their receptivity, cuts the multiplication rate in half, regardless of the context. Listening well and accurately assessing the response to spiritual conversations is extremely important.

Another general conclusion is that the outsider, who initially has no close relationships, can achieve reasonable results by filtering more tightly on receptivity. Thus by filtering to the top 5% of receptive individuals, the outsider can reap a significantly greater harvest than by purely random engagement. The resulting multiplication rate increases by 80% for Population A as a result of this filtering, and by 30% for Population B. This strong filtering on receptivity describes what practitioners call a "Person of Peace" (POP) search (perhaps more biblically accurately described as a Fourth Soil Person search), and this approach is relevant to both populations. An insider may choose to practice a POP search as a means of gaining experience sharing the gospel in an environment of strangers—thus lowering the risk of offending close relations. However, for an outsider, a POP search is the best available approach.

A final general conclusion is that the optimum fraction of time spent in DBS or other long-term spiritual discussions is around 80%. If a practitioner spends ten hours/week actively sharing, about eight hours of that time will be in Bible study, after an initial period of searching for receptive individuals.

A Closer Look at the More Prolific Population B

There are significant practical implications for the *differences* between Population A and Population B. For Population B, the response rate is so high that the optimum can only be achieved by filtering on both receptivity and relational connectedness. Practitioners will find the best results by seeking above-average receptivity among close relatives and friends, which may be 30-50 people, due to the highly social nature of the culture. Among these close relationships, practitioners will find enough responsive and connected people to form DBS groups that will eventually develop into churches.

In the environment of Population B, if believers share with everyone without regard to receptivity and depth of personal relationship, their time is used up largely with people who ultimately will not become followers of Jesus. Practitioners can quickly spread themselves too thin. This lack of "intentionality" slows DMM growth. Even so, any diligent effort to make disciples will be rewarded with a multiplying movement, as long as most believers are actively spending time sharing their faith.

Strategies to Improve Reproduction Rates for Population A

For Population A, on the other hand, the practitioner cannot afford to filter heavily on either receptivity or relational connectedness. In order to focus on close relationships, it is not possible to filter strictly on receptivity. However, below a certain level of receptivity, hearers will not be interested to spend time with the practitioner discussing spiritual things (i.e., they self-filter). Therefore, the practitioner must expand beyond the closest relationships, such as family members, to include neighbors, friends, and colleagues, probing a larger number of people for their spiritual interest, until finding those who are interested in ongoing gospel-related dialogue.

For Population A, only with extensive time spent discipling a few people can the practitioner compensate for the scarcity of relationships and receptivity. And because discipling people into the Kingdom takes a longer period of time, it is beneficial to be continuously probing those who move in and out of one's relational networks, searching for receptive individuals. For some individuals, receptivity can increase during a time of crisis, and offering to pray for anyone who shares difficulties in life can be an avenue to simultaneously show love and probe for spiritual interest. Creative solutions, such as lighter discussions than DBS, and Stories of Hope (for example, see Sundell 2016), may enable increased time in spiritual discussions among those who are not prepared to commit to a DBS—perhaps leading to a DBS later. One approach is to have open discussions where the seeker is free to raise doubts and objections and has equal input with the believer to guide the topic of conversation—informally or formally. Optimally, by facilitating DBS with several people during the same period of time, the practitioner can have several individuals at various stages in the process of becoming disciples, potentially seeing new baptisms on a somewhat regular basis. For Population A, in the best case a new baptism would be, on average, every two years for each dedicated practitioner. If every follower of Jesus in this context is diligent, this process will lead to DMM, even though individual practitioners may feel that the growth is slow.

For Population A, there is no room to burn bridges in relationships. The parable of the Lost Sheep is especially relevant here. Rapid filtering is inappropriate to this context; because receptivity is not easily measured, disciple-makers need time to assess spiritual receptivity with wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Filtering on receptivity should be based on attitudes such as flagrant, persistent rejection of the gospel, consistent lack of interest, and deliberate choice to sin. Those who pursue relationship with disciples, knowing they are believers, and anyone who is sincerely seeking spiritual truth should be considered to have high receptivity. To maximize the disciple-maker's controllable portion of building closer relationships, it is important to be a good listener and learn to communicate compassion (Keener 2021). Each community of believers needs to be united around the gospel, never divided. A loving community is attractive and increases receptivity. And bodies of believers will do well to serve the surrounding community in ways that may enhance receptivity. On the other hand, they have to reserve sufficient time to have gospel-centered conversations, and especially DBS whenever the opportunity arises, because serving a community without sufficiently sharing the gospel results in a low number of gospel shares and cannot possibly lead to disciple-making.

Church leaders who serve Population A need to set an expectation that most hearers of the gospel will need extended experience in biblically-related discussions before they commit to follow Jesus and to be baptized, and some will need continued discipleship for a long time before they can reproduce. New disciples may need time to develop a relational network through which the gospel can travel; rebuilding damaged relationships through forgiveness and humble reconciliation will be fruitful. They may need to learn how to love their neighbors in order to have more meaningful and peaceful conversations. In some cases, they need the power of the Holy Spirit to break their addictions. The work of making a disciple is not complete until he or she is making more disciples apart from outside help.

Mature followers of Jesus must be patient and persevere even when they seem to lack fruit for several years. They have to be reminded not to give up spending time among the lost, in obedience to Christ, out of love for him and the lost, not demanding the reward of seeing frequent positive results. A team of believers should celebrate together whenever a new soul is welcomed into the Kingdom of God anywhere in the network. The reward of disciples' labor is in heaven, along with a closer walk with Jesus on earth through obedience and reliance upon him. Amidst Population B, persecution is often the norm. But with Population A, perseverance may be just as difficult. The believer needs to pray and commit to continue to do good (I Peter 4:19).

Alternatively, a believer living among Population A may sometimes seek out pockets of higher responsiveness—for example, among specific ethnic neighborhoods, or poor neighborhoods. This approach can be particularly helpful to encourage believers who have become discouraged by long periods without results. And some of the new believers emerging from minorities eventually may be encouraged to disciple the majority population. Long-term strategies for young believers to develop career paths in positions of societal influence will be helpful. Nevertheless, less responsive communities currently need a gospel witness. Perseverance has paid off historically. For example, investment of missions resources among Muslim peoples in the 1980's and 90's have resulted in a harvest in the last two decades (Garrison 2014). As Jesus said, "One sows and another reaps." We must faithfully persevere in the hard places.

Strategies in Cities

In most large cities, the population is very diverse. Thus a single approach to evangelism or engaging in spiritual conversations will not be effective with everyone. In order to enhance the probability of positive reception, the believer needs to listen carefully to each person, not only to gauge the level of receptivity but also to understand that individual's worldview. By personalizing a response to that individual, gospel-related communication will be clearer, and Jesus's love is more likely to be perceived. Asking probing questions and showing genuine interest in the answers, as well as making effort to share in others' interests, is very useful (Pollock 2010, Chapter 6 (65-74) and Chapter 11 (108-113)). Long-time followers of Jesus can remain challenged for many years learning about other worldviews and practicing good listening skills. New believers need encouragement to share fearlessly, so that they can bear fruit immediately and also begin learning. A related principle is expressed by one movement leader, "Keep doing what you're doing, and you'll get better at it" (Wood 2021). No one ever fully masters disciple-making; we are all equally learners, sitting at Jesus's feet.

Further scenarios, Populations C and D

Consider two other groups, described in Table 2: Population C with low average receptivity (like Population A) but where it is relatively easy to form relationships (like Population B), and Population D with high receptivity but where it is difficult to form relationships (receptivity like Population B and relationships like Population A).

	Receptivity	Relational Connectedness
Population C	Low receptivity	More relational
Population D	High receptivity	Less relational

Table 2. Description of populations C and D

Population C resembles much of the Muslim world in the 1980's, when a new agency advertised with the slogan, "Missionaries to Muslims: Literally 1 in a Million." After concerted effort, albeit only achieving 1 in 500,000 recently, God moved in ways far beyond human control, so that receptivity has increased in the twenty-first century (Garrison 2014). More than 30 years of prayer and sowing seems to have somewhat softened the soil.

For Population C, the optimum multiplication rate is achieved by filtering strongly to spend time discipling those with the highest receptivity (e.g., top tenth), but without discriminating as much on relationships (selecting roughly the half who are closest to the disciple maker). If such a community is not closed off to outsiders, strangers can function relatively well in this environment. On the other hand, for Population D, which is less relational, the best result occurs where time is focused on the closest relationships to the disciple maker (e.g., top tenth), with relatively loose filtering on receptivity (eliminating only the bottom half or so). Much of the U.S. is probably more nearly described by Population D (less relational but receptive) than by Population A (less relational and poor receptivity). The practitioner in this setting may want to initiate DBS starting with his or her closest relationships and working outward to the next closest relationships, until free time is filled up with DBS or similar groups, or DBS with individuals when necessary, in the case that willing participants don't know one another. In general, the discipler should filter most

strongly on the weakest characteristic of a people, whether that is receptivity or relational connectedness.

Summarizing the Reproduction Rates across the Different Contexts

This article has been referring to a rate of disciple reproduction, which is the average number of times in a year that each disciple in a movement makes another disciple. This rate can be less than one. If, for example, it takes two years, on average, to make a disciple, the rate is 0.5. Or the rate can be more than one, e.g., 2 if two disciples are made each year. A rate of 1 means that the number of disciples doubles annually. For a convenient abbreviation, this rate is referred to as "*r*." Figure 1 shows one of the outputs from our model, the dependency of *r* on context. Here, we have assumed that disciples generously contribute 16 hours/week for disciple making, thus these numbers are quantitatively optimistic. We note, however, that the range of *r* derived from the model with these optimistic assumptions is similar to that observed in actual DMM's, in which *r* ranges from 0.2 to 1.7 (Keener & Foster 2025).

In Figure 1, two different rates are described. The blue bar describes the rate that can be achieved through randomly spending a short amount of time sharing the gospel with people indiscriminately, i.e., with no intentional filtering. The full height of the bar (including both blue and orange portions, labeled "*r* =…") indicates the rate that can be achieved by optimizing filtering for each context. Optimization means that the disciple maker spends more time in DBS and in-depth spiritual conversations with relatively responsive individuals in already-existing closer interpersonal relationships. The optimum filtering may be based more on receptivity or more on relational closeness, depending on the context. What follows are the practical implications for disciple makers in each of the four contexts.

Populations A-D are labeled at the bottom of each bar in Figure 1. Population A, with low receptivity and weak relational ties, is the most difficult environment in which to launch movements. There, when casting seed broadly enough to find several individuals who are willing to participate in DBS, it should be possible to double a movement every two years (r =0.5), assuming all disciples are engaged with the same intensity. The rate *r* is directly proportional to the amount of time invested. Given people's busy work schedules and family responsibilities, devoted disciples may only be able to dedicate about 5 hours weekly to evangelism and DBS (instead of 16 hrs/wk); then, realistically, it might require 6-7 years to double (r =0.16), even if all followers of Jesus are active in disciple-making. Given enough time, a large number of Jesus followers will result even with this lower doubling rate. However, if the disciple maker is merely randomly engaging the lost in brief conversations without filtering, regardless of receptivity or depth of relationship, at 5 hrs/wk, doubling could take over 13 years (r =0.075), or much longer when considering attrition, which is significant in this case. If only a fraction of disciples is engaged in reproducing, it is not difficult to imagine a decline in the number of Jesus' followers over time.

In the other contexts (Populations B, C, D), rates are much higher. Movement is possible even without DBS, although the depth of discipleship would be lacking. In every case, attention to filtering approximately doubles the rate (from the length of the blue bar to the full length of the bar including both blue and orange portions).

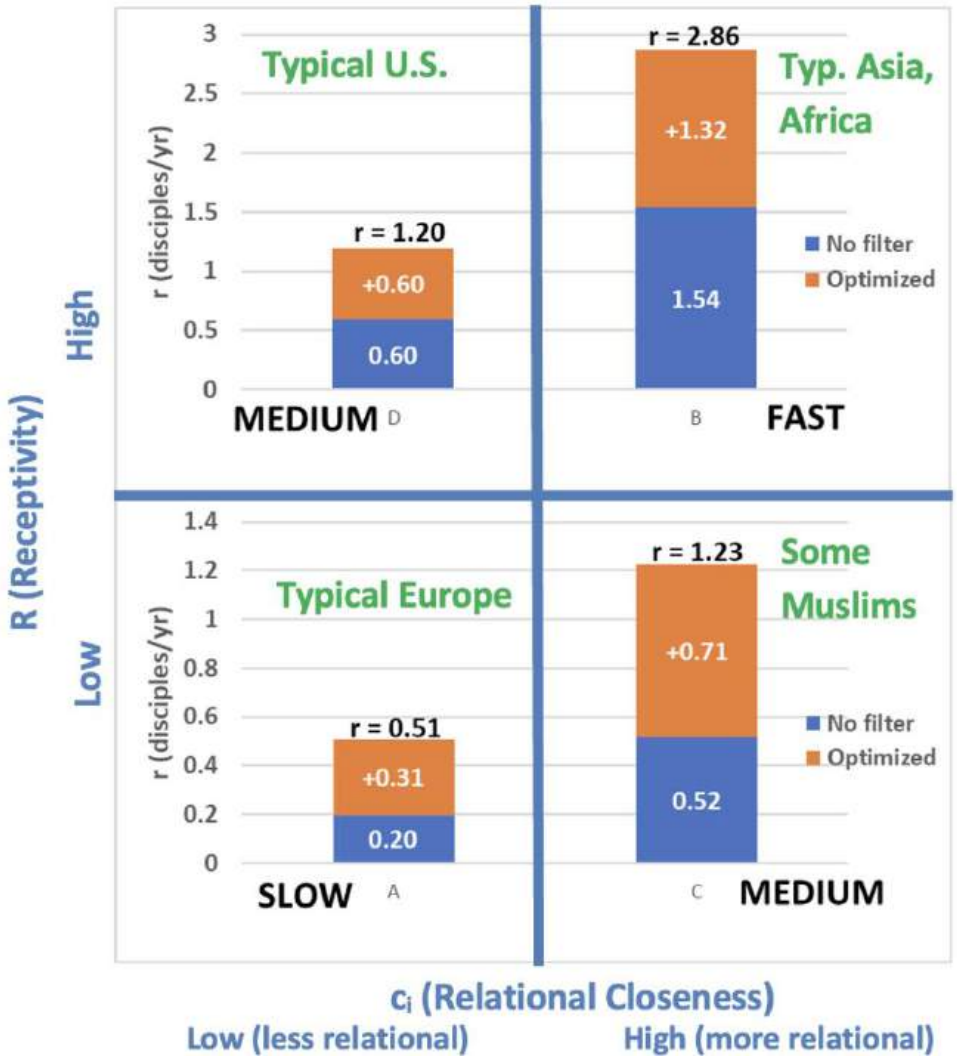

Figure 1. Summary of disciple reproduction doubling rates (r) by population and filtering. Populations A-D are labeled at the bottom of each bar. Blue bars are the rate that is achieved without any intentional filtering. The full height of the bar, labeled "r=…", is the rate that can be achieved with optimum filtering. Green text is the authors' best estimate of environments that approximate the four populations.

Table 3 summarizes the applications of this model to the four contexts. Each context requires different means to achieve the optimum rate of growth. Although expert practitioners with years of experience will intuitively arrive at these conclusions, often with more nuance, these guidelines may be helpful for the majority who need some direction or desire to see more results in their specific context.

Population	Receptivity	Relational	How to Optimize
A	Low	Less	• Probe relational network periodically for those who are willing to enter DBS. • Work outward from closest relationships. • Create low-commitment entry points into Gospel conversations. • Listen well and show genuine interest.
B	High	More	• Focus time selectively on friends and relatives with above-average receptivity. • Focus on groups, not individuals.
C	Low	More	• Focus time on those with highest receptivity. • Focus on groups, not individuals. • Respect authority of community leaders.
D	High	Less	• Focus time on closest relationships, and work outward as necessary. • May need to start DBS with individuals.

Table 3. Summary of suggestions to optimize the doubling rate for different contexts

Conclusion

This model of DMM points out essential focal areas for practitioners who are seeking DMM. In summary, for the reader's convenience, we have compiled some of the key practical recommendations from this article into the following list.

- Invest time in the Kingdom of God
  1. Maximize time in harvest.
  2. Spend time sharing the Gospel and in DBS.
  3. Share the Gospel abundantly.
  4. Do not depend solely on full-time workers.
- Prioritize time wisely
  1. Filter to use time wisely and appropriately for each context.
  2. Find connectedness in *oikos*, and encourage new disciples to reach their own *oikos*.
  3. Do not give equal time to all relationships.
  4. Spend enough time to be able to assess and filter for receptivity.
  5. Find people with high receptivity to the Gospel and invest time in them.
  6. Get to DBS asap to maximize exposure and connectedness.
  7. Live out loud: self-identify as a Jesus follower early in a relationship.
- Collaborate to enhance receptivity
  1. Serve the community, heal the sick, help the poor.
  2. Rural: resonate with the culture.
  3. Urban: listen attentively, and utilize a variety of tools.

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A Mathematically Based Model of Disciple Making Movements

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Abstract

Although many practical resources are available to encourage and facilitate Disciple Making Movements (DMM), a quantitative theoretical framework to undergird the conclusions of authors and practitioners is currently unavailable. Such a model will be useful to assist in increasing the rate at which disciples are able to multiply and could help more slowly reproducing groups of disciples to transition over time into DMM's. We have developed a model of disciple multiplication that builds from the starting point of an individual disciple maker. This article provides conclusions and applications that are comprehensible to every practitioner, without delving into the underlying mathematics. A key conclusion comprises the twin necessities of investing significant time sowing the gospel among those who are yet far from God and of the mobilization of all (or most) disciples into the harvest (John 4:35). By focusing on disciples' most controllable factor—prioritization of time on more receptive individuals and on existing close relationships—rates of multiplication can be doubled in most contexts. Furthermore, the model explains how different optimization strategies are needed for different contexts as average receptivity and relational connectedness vary.

Key Words: Disciple Making Movements, disciple multiplication, Discovery Bible Study, mathematical model

Introduction

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. (Colossians 1:6)

Multiplication of Jesus's followers in Disciple Making Movements (DMM) is powerfully impacting global Christianity (Long 2020 & 2023). At the foundation of every DMM are disciples actively leading people who are far from God to become disciples of Jesus, who in turn reproduce more disciples. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of these movements, we have developed a mathematical model to describe the relationship of the micro—individual disciples making more disciples—to the macro—rapid multiplications of streams of disciples across any given region, continent, and even the globe. The model takes into account three factors: each disciple's relational network, receptivity of hearers to the gospel message, and time spent in gospel-related conversations and Bible study. In this article, we share some of the conclusions of the in-depth analysis of these three factors, details of which can be accessed online (Keener & Foster n.d.) or by contacting us, the authors, via this journal.

The gospel of Jesus is good news. It is proclaimed and received. In the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20), Jesus conveys clearly that the proclaimed gospel is received well by some but has little impact on others. Describing this variation quantitatively enables us as gospel messengers to adapt priorities and methodologies as we communicate the message. One message, the gospel, is transmitted, although the way that message is communicated is influenced by the messenger's own

background and relationship with Jesus. But what is received can be garbled by noise, suppressed by inattentiveness, distorted by misunderstanding, or outright rejected.

For the sake of God's glory, practitioners in Disciple Making Movements are seeking to maximize both the number of new followers of Jesus and their depth of relationship with the Lord. Because we the authors are using math as our tool, this article focuses on the quantitative aspect of DMM. However, this use of math does not equate people to numbers. Fundamentally, every disciple must rely upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, who empowers Jesus' followers for the purpose of witness (Acts 1:8). A DMM leader writes, "Disciple Making Movements are not a program, not a strategy or a curriculum. It is simply a movement of God. Without Him, there is nothing" (Sunshine *et al*. 2018). Jesus Himself makes clear that his disciples are absolutely dependent upon him (John 15:5), including dependent upon him to be his witnesses, as he commanded. Mathematical modeling is useful for general principles, but each specific movement and every human being is uniquely constructed by God. A model cannot solve every problem and certainly cannot replace the many valuable case studies and other research in missions literature (see, for example, Farrah 2021 and Larsen 2018).

Though theoretical, this model does have immediate practical implications. For example, we the authors are able to answer questions that have nagged us for decades, such as: If a practitioner considers two options to spend an equal amount of time and effort— 1) purely scattering the seed of the Gospel, and 2) spending more time developing a small group of people from nonbelievers into faithful followers of Jesus—which option will lead to more people ultimately coming into a deep relationship with Christ marked by a life of obedience and love? As we shall see, Option 2 will be far more effective, regardless of the practitioner's context. Although many applications of our model have already been naturally discovered by leaders, some Christian groups who are struggling to multiply may benefit by considering the sound logical reasoning that is available in a mathematical model.

The rate at which a group of disciples doubles depends on several factors. Using the common experience of disciple-making practitioners, we start from the assumption that the likelihood of a nonbeliever becoming a follower of Jesus depends on these three factors: 1) Among people who do not know God, receptivity to the gospel varies. 2) The more a person is exposed to gospel-related conversations and participates in Bible-related discussions, the more likely that person is to become a follower of Jesus. 3) A person is more likely to receive the gospel if the message comes from someone they know personally than if they hear from a stranger. In summary, making a disciple depends on the receptivity of the hearer, closeness of relationship between disciple and hearer, and amount of time spent talking about the gospel, God, and the Bible. For DMM to occur, new followers of Jesus must make disciples, following the example of the people who invested in them. From these three assumptions, we will discover many practical implications for disciple-makers.

Significantly, different strategies are appropriate for each different scenario. In most cases, optimizing the approach to the context can result in a movement multiplying up to twice as fast. For example, where receptivity is low, practitioners can be most effective by searching for the few people with higher receptivity. And where interpersonal relationships are slow-forming and few, followers of Jesus will want to capitalize as much as possible on their existing close relationships. Relevant to this conclusion, practitioners of one context should be sensitive to those in different

contexts and understanding that, while others' tools may not be fully applicable in one's own setting, the same tools could be quite useful in another setting.

Ingredients of the Model

Elements in the Rate of Multiplication: Sender Component

Even in the best case where the hearer of the gospel message is potentially completely receptive, if no disciple ever shares the gospel with that person, he or she will not become a follower of Jesus. Believers must share the good news as Jesus commanded, and Jesus declares that this command applies to anyone who is called his disciple (Mark 8:34-38). Equally vital is reliance upon the Holy Spirit Jesus gave for the purpose of witness (Acts 1:8). Further, a disciple's own personal relationship with Jesus influences and grounds his or her witness, and the Lord has uniquely placed each disciple in trusting relationships that facilitate this witness. One of the stated goals of DMM is that all disciples are equipped to penetrate their spheres with the gospel message (see, e.g., Smith & Kai 2011; Lim 2021).

Certain elements are essential in the "Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). A study of the gospel summaries in the book of Acts and other key Scripture passages shows that God created the world (Acts 17:24-26) and that everyone is bound in sin before they receive the gospel (Acts 17:30; see also John 3:18, Rom 11:32, Eph 2:13). In love, God sent Jesus into the world to sacrifice himself on the Cross as payment for human sin (John 3:16, Rom 3:25), and Jesus has risen from death to life as the living and glorified eternal Savior of all who receive him (I Cor 15:3-8, Acts 2:24-36). Therefore, all are called to repent and believe in the living Savior, upon which they receive forgiveness of their sins and the promised Holy Spirit, who is present in all followers of Jesus (Acts 2:38-39). These acts of God, corresponding invitation, and promise to people are what we the authors mean by the gospel. Also, it is generally fruitful to supplement this message with other narratives and teaching from both the Old and New Testaments.

Receiver Component

In reality, the response of unbelievers depends on many factors, such as the hearer's relationship to the disciple, the amount of time the sharer spends with the seeker discussing the Word of God, prior exposure to the gospel (or exposure to hypocrisy, a negative influence), the receiver's pride, hardship in his or her life, neighborhood, cultural predispositions toward or against Jesus, and financial income level. The likelihood of a hearer of the gospel becoming a disciple is specific to each hearer.

Receptivity is an aggregate of factors, many of which are also very important in themselves, such as life circumstances and personal disposition to the gospel. Although receptivity is largely a given, some aspects of receptivity may be influenced by a group of practitioners. Addressing poverty and genuine needs in a community is an integral part of DMM strategy in many cases (Kebreab 2021; John & Coles 2021: "Community Learning Centers"; Larsen 2018; Johnson 2017), with the goal of enhancing receptivity. This approach (often termed "access ministry") is a dimension of obedience for disciples (see, for example, Luke 16), in addition to sharing the gospel. In many cases, miraculous healings improve receptivity (Luke 10:9 and its continued application). Believers working with integrity to serve the Lord in their "secular" jobs may also improve receptivity. Of course, in terms of spiritual dynamics that support higher receptivity, prayer in faith-filled reliance upon the Lord is critical (Garrison 2004).

Practitioners often describe a process over time in which a person who is far from God comes to know Jesus. Jesus described a teacher of the Law in terms that could be interpreted similarly (Mark 12:34), "not far from the Kingdom of God," even though he defines only two states at Judgment Day (e.g., Matt 25). One of the most important factors is the amount of time that a hearer of the gospel spends in direct biblical or gospel-related discussion with one or more disciples of Jesus. This time refers to two-way interpersonal interaction with individuals or in small groups (in contrast to listening to sermons, which may also be valuable but is not considered here). The vital nature of this time is evident when considering the enormous fruitfulness of the Discovery Bible Study (DBS) approach around the world (Farrah 2021, chapters 1,2,3,7,10,12,13,16; Larsen 2018). Given sufficient time reading and discussing the Bible and how it applies to someone's life, the probability of becoming a follower of Jesus can be very high, albeit requiring patience.

This time factor is understandable. It takes time for the gospel to sink in. Why, for example, is sacrifice necessary? Understanding the Law of Moses needs to develop. What is repentance in practice, or what should loving one's neighbors actually look like? What is the clear distinction between light and darkness that makes the transmission of the gospel absolutely necessary? What does it mean practically for Jesus to be Lord? Many truths must be heard and demonstrated repeatedly to become clear to those who have no prior knowledge. And without clarity of understanding, it is difficult for seekers to hand over control of their entire lives to God. Patience is necessary as a seeker discovers truth about God and human sinfulness—even as God had been patient with disciple makers when they were still living without faith in Jesus.

Relational Connection

In many contexts, sharing the gospel through a relational network is much more effective than sharing with strangers (Shull 2021). Generally, trust and influence form over a period of time in relationships. Thus relational influence tends to increase with time spent together, although it also depends on personal preference and the positions of the disciple and the hearer within a group or relational network.

In some contexts, forming intimate relationships takes a long time, and each individual tends to have fewer close relationships. The time to form relationships can be significantly longer than the time needed to disciple someone. In this situation, sharing the gospel within a relational network has far more impact than the same amount of sharing with strangers, for whom it is difficult to quickly penetrate the hearer's defenses.

It is important to note that a new believer has already invested significant time in developing relationships *before* believing in the gospel and beginning to share with others. It is well known that new believers are often the most effective witnesses for Christ (Hayward 2002, 225-226). A new disciple already has close relationships and can find those with high receptivity among them, so that less time is necessary to lead a few others into relationship with Jesus. Likewise, Discovery Bible Studies are most effective when they gather people from pre-existing social relationships, rather than bringing together people who do not already know each other.

How the gospel is conveyed contributes to the credibility of the disciple with the people being reached. For example, rural areas with more homogeneous cultures may resonate with a particular method of evangelism and discipleship, whereas cities with more diversity will likely not exhibit a high response to any one method but will require more complex and varied approaches from practitioners. The ability to communicate effectively improves over the time the outsider spends

in a community, and those who grew up in a particular environment are generally better equipped to convey the gospel than the outsiders. Thus the outsider needs to be a good listener and quickly entrust gospel communication to new disciples.

Finally, although time spent focused on the Bible is more influential on disciple-making than other time spent with an individual, this time contributes to the total amount of time spent together thereby tending to enhance relational influence. The impact of DBS is enhanced by the strength of relationships formed through discussions focused on the Bible and its application to life.

Application to Various Contexts

Disciple Making in Various Contexts

Our discussion will now consider the cumulative impact of all the gospel sharing a believer does. Although disciples should not expect someone to believe every time they share the gospel, the impact of persistence adds up. Furthermore, efforts to share the gospel with certain individuals are more likely to pay off.

Potentially, a few receptive individuals may respond to the gospel quickly and thus strongly influence a disciple's reproduction rate. David Garrison's seminal booklet *Church Planting Movements* (Garrison 1999) employed the analogy of nets—broadcasting the gospel to many people—and filters—finding those with high responsiveness to the message. Effective practitioners share the gospel with many people, but they also filter by investing more time with those who respond positively to the initial declaration of the gospel. They realize that receptivity of any individual hearer is largely beyond their control but in the hands of the Lord, although they may collectively, gradually enhance average receptivity as their loving behavior contributes to a positive reputation of believers and Jesus in a community. On the other hand, after finding a responsive person, allocation of time is under the control of the disciple-maker. If Jesus only could do what he saw the Father doing (John 5:19), surely we who are his disciples must follow his example in all areas of life, including disciple making. By following the lead of the Holy Spirit to the people God is already working with, disciple-makers are able to multiply a little faster by investing time in them—especially if they find high receptivity in those who are already in closest relationship with them. In this way, they reap a harvest where God has been sowing. Likewise, for the same reason, trainers are wise to invest time in those who implement the training.

Returning to Relational Connection

Another example involves a U.S. urban context. Typically, ministry there that is focused on *oikos* (one's closest relationships) is more effective than solely seed-sowing among strangers (Shull 2021). Although sharing with *oikos* is important in all contexts, it appears to be more crucial in cities in Europe and the U.S. In this case, close interpersonal relationships are a scarce resource. By focusing time on those few available closest individuals, the disciple's rate of multiplying increases. This effect is further enhanced by the fact that a close friend or relative is more likely than a stranger to be willing to spend time in a DBS.

On the other hand, spending equal time developing all relationships in order to "earn the right" to share the Gospel is ineffective. First, doing so would be faulty worldly reasoning that is inconsistent with Jesus's statement that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to him (Matthew 28:18). With complete authority, he commanded his disciples to continue teaching obedience to all his commands (Matthew 28:19-20), in the power of God, the Holy Spirit (Acts

1:8, John 20:21-23)—himself being with us (Matthew 28:20). Surely, he granted authority to his disciples to obey him by proclaiming the gospel, and this authority is distinct from knowing that the gospel will be accepted. The proclamation should be done respectfully, but it can be done at an early phase of a relationship before relational closeness has grown. Second, it often takes a big investment of time to improve relational closeness with a few individuals, only to discover that most of them are not receptive to the Gospel (Smith & Kai 2011, 206). The best way to gauge receptivity is to observe the response to a presentation of the gospel or at least spiritual truths that prepare for understanding the gospel. Because of the time investment and lack of knowing an individual's receptivity, the result of delaying gospel presentation is disappointment and demotivation for the believer. It is more advantageous for the believer to self-identify as a follower of Jesus, and openly share at least some spiritual truths, from early in the relationship. If certain individuals respond negatively, those with low receptivity may self-select to keep a high relational distance from the believer, who can then invest more time intentionally in those who are interested. Because receptivity varies significantly among individuals, the rate of making disciples improves greatly when the practitioner filters for high receptivity prior to intense investment of time in *new* relationships, of course relying on the Holy Spirit for guidance to responsive people (John 6:44).

Prior exposure to the gospel often functions to shorten the time to make disciples. Effectively, time that a nonbeliever spends hearing the gospel and other biblical truth accumulates regardless of which believer is the source. A quick harvest frequently reflects prior exposure to the gospel and the word of God. Thus Jesus's observation that "one sows and another reaps" (John 4:37) applies to multiple contacts with believers as well as in the statement's original context. (Jesus was referring to increased receptivity where the Samaritan people group had been influenced by God's word preparing them for centuries.) Similarly, a believing community collectively has high leverage on multiplication. In the context of community, especially (but not limited to) a group DBS, the seeker is exposed to biblical discussion with multiple individuals, each contributing different perspectives that complement one another. The group effectively multiplies the amount of time hearing biblical truth and greatly enhances the rate of disciple making. Furthermore, the mutual responsibility to share the truth with others that is fostered in a group that practices healthy accountability is extremely important. Without this accountability, and just left to individuals, the degree of gospel and truth sharing will be much less.

Adjusting the Filter to Become More Efficient and Productive in Disciple-Making

When we believers get stuck and find it difficult to make disciples, often we have to adjust our net to cast more widely or adjust our filter one way or the other to spend our time more wisely. These adjustments are critical for launching a movement in any particular context. In our model for this article, we have considered a disciple's multiplication rate for two different kinds of context, described in Table 1. Population A has a low average receptivity and less prolific formation of close relationships, so that launching a DMM is more challenging in this context. Population B has higher average receptivity and higher prevalence of close relationships. In Population A, there are relatively few close relationships, and in Population B, typically people have many close relationships as well as more distant acquaintances. It turns out that a disciple's optimum prioritization of time in these two contexts is substantially different.

Assuming that a disciple has a certain number of hours per week available for gospel-related discussions, the amount of time spent with various hearers of the gospel has to be prioritized. For Population A, the optimum priorities involve exceptional patience with those closest in

relationship to the practitioner—doing everything possible that might lead to a DBS with them. The more distant the relationship, the more selective the practitioner will be, until with strangers the goal is to find those with exceptionally high receptivity. For Population B, in order to achieve the optimum rate of multiplication, the practitioner must be more selective and only extensively disciple those with highest receptivity and reasonably close relationship.

	Receptivity	Relational Connectedness
Population A	Low receptivity	Less relational
Population B	High receptivity	More relational

Table 1. Description of two distinct populations, A and B

The Critical Importance of Disciple-Makers' Commitment and Availability

One critical conclusion of our study is that DMM requires a great deal of hard work on the part of every disciple. If the average disciple puts only one hour per week into disciple-making, the disciple reproduction rate for Population A is probably not going to be able to keep up with attrition and population growth. Likewise, if a congregation relies on paid staff to do this work, growth will not result. For example, if one person for every 50 believers is a full-time professional disciple-maker, that person could potentially spend more time than the average disciple-maker, with a contribution equivalent to perhaps 3-4 unpaid workers. Nevertheless, without contribution from lay people, the rate would probably be too low to achieve any significant growth. Reliance upon a core team of active believers does not achieve multiplication, either. Pray for more laborers.

It is important to note that disciple multiplication must prioritize time focused explicitly on making disciples, although this time may be either planned or spontaneous sharing during normal life activities. As essential as they are, other priorities such as laying the groundwork with community service, discussions about church, or conversations about peripherally related spiritual topics cannot by themselves result in more disciples.

The Critical Importance of Disciple-Makers Prioritizing Their Valuable Time

Common to both populations described above is how time prioritization results in significantly faster reproduction. Without any filtering, i.e., spending equal small amounts of time explaining the gospel to anyone without regard to their receptivity, cuts the multiplication rate in half, regardless of the context. Listening well and accurately assessing the response to spiritual conversations is extremely important.

Another general conclusion is that the outsider, who initially has no close relationships, can achieve reasonable results by filtering more tightly on receptivity. Thus by filtering to the top 5% of receptive individuals, the outsider can reap a significantly greater harvest than by purely random engagement. The resulting multiplication rate increases by 80% for Population A as a result of this filtering, and by 30% for Population B. This strong filtering on receptivity describes what practitioners call a "Person of Peace" (POP) search (perhaps more biblically accurately described as a Fourth Soil Person search), and this approach is relevant to both populations. An insider may choose to practice a POP search as a means of gaining experience sharing the gospel in an environment of strangers—thus lowering the risk of offending close relations. However, for an outsider, a POP search is the best available approach.

A final general conclusion is that the optimum fraction of time spent in DBS or other long-term spiritual discussions is around 80%. If a practitioner spends ten hours/week actively sharing, about eight hours of that time will be in Bible study, after an initial period of searching for receptive individuals.

A Closer Look at the More Prolific Population B

There are significant practical implications for the *differences* between Population A and Population B. For Population B, the response rate is so high that the optimum can only be achieved by filtering on both receptivity and relational connectedness. Practitioners will find the best results by seeking above-average receptivity among close relatives and friends, which may be 30-50 people, due to the highly social nature of the culture. Among these close relationships, practitioners will find enough responsive and connected people to form DBS groups that will eventually develop into churches.

In the environment of Population B, if believers share with everyone without regard to receptivity and depth of personal relationship, their time is used up largely with people who ultimately will not become followers of Jesus. Practitioners can quickly spread themselves too thin. This lack of "intentionality" slows DMM growth. Even so, any diligent effort to make disciples will be rewarded with a multiplying movement, as long as most believers are actively spending time sharing their faith.

Strategies to Improve Reproduction Rates for Population A

For Population A, on the other hand, the practitioner cannot afford to filter heavily on either receptivity or relational connectedness. In order to focus on close relationships, it is not possible to filter strictly on receptivity. However, below a certain level of receptivity, hearers will not be interested to spend time with the practitioner discussing spiritual things (i.e., they self-filter). Therefore, the practitioner must expand beyond the closest relationships, such as family members, to include neighbors, friends, and colleagues, probing a larger number of people for their spiritual interest, until finding those who are interested in ongoing gospel-related dialogue.

For Population A, only with extensive time spent discipling a few people can the practitioner compensate for the scarcity of relationships and receptivity. And because discipling people into the Kingdom takes a longer period of time, it is beneficial to be continuously probing those who move in and out of one's relational networks, searching for receptive individuals. For some individuals, receptivity can increase during a time of crisis, and offering to pray for anyone who shares difficulties in life can be an avenue to simultaneously show love and probe for spiritual interest. Creative solutions, such as lighter discussions than DBS, and Stories of Hope (for example, see Sundell 2016), may enable increased time in spiritual discussions among those who are not prepared to commit to a DBS—perhaps leading to a DBS later. One approach is to have open discussions where the seeker is free to raise doubts and objections and has equal input with the believer to guide the topic of conversation—informally or formally. Optimally, by facilitating DBS with several people during the same period of time, the practitioner can have several individuals at various stages in the process of becoming disciples, potentially seeing new baptisms on a somewhat regular basis. For Population A, in the best case a new baptism would be, on average, every two years for each dedicated practitioner. If every follower of Jesus in this context is diligent, this process will lead to DMM, even though individual practitioners may feel that the growth is slow.

For Population A, there is no room to burn bridges in relationships. The parable of the Lost Sheep is especially relevant here. Rapid filtering is inappropriate to this context; because receptivity is not easily measured, disciple-makers need time to assess spiritual receptivity with wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Filtering on receptivity should be based on attitudes such as flagrant, persistent rejection of the gospel, consistent lack of interest, and deliberate choice to sin. Those who pursue relationship with disciples, knowing they are believers, and anyone who is sincerely seeking spiritual truth should be considered to have high receptivity. To maximize the disciple-maker's controllable portion of building closer relationships, it is important to be a good listener and learn to communicate compassion (Keener 2021). Each community of believers needs to be united around the gospel, never divided. A loving community is attractive and increases receptivity. And bodies of believers will do well to serve the surrounding community in ways that may enhance receptivity. On the other hand, they have to reserve sufficient time to have gospel-centered conversations, and especially DBS whenever the opportunity arises, because serving a community without sufficiently sharing the gospel results in a low number of gospel shares and cannot possibly lead to disciple-making.

Church leaders who serve Population A need to set an expectation that most hearers of the gospel will need extended experience in biblically-related discussions before they commit to follow Jesus and to be baptized, and some will need continued discipleship for a long time before they can reproduce. New disciples may need time to develop a relational network through which the gospel can travel; rebuilding damaged relationships through forgiveness and humble reconciliation will be fruitful. They may need to learn how to love their neighbors in order to have more meaningful and peaceful conversations. In some cases, they need the power of the Holy Spirit to break their addictions. The work of making a disciple is not complete until he or she is making more disciples apart from outside help.

Mature followers of Jesus must be patient and persevere even when they seem to lack fruit for several years. They have to be reminded not to give up spending time among the lost, in obedience to Christ, out of love for him and the lost, not demanding the reward of seeing frequent positive results. A team of believers should celebrate together whenever a new soul is welcomed into the Kingdom of God anywhere in the network. The reward of disciples' labor is in heaven, along with a closer walk with Jesus on earth through obedience and reliance upon him. Amidst Population B, persecution is often the norm. But with Population A, perseverance may be just as difficult. The believer needs to pray and commit to continue to do good (I Peter 4:19).

Alternatively, a believer living among Population A may sometimes seek out pockets of higher responsiveness—for example, among specific ethnic neighborhoods, or poor neighborhoods. This approach can be particularly helpful to encourage believers who have become discouraged by long periods without results. And some of the new believers emerging from minorities eventually may be encouraged to disciple the majority population. Long-term strategies for young believers to develop career paths in positions of societal influence will be helpful. Nevertheless, less responsive communities currently need a gospel witness. Perseverance has paid off historically. For example, investment of missions resources among Muslim peoples in the 1980's and 90's have resulted in a harvest in the last two decades (Garrison 2014). As Jesus said, "One sows and another reaps." We must faithfully persevere in the hard places.

Strategies in Cities

In most large cities, the population is very diverse. Thus a single approach to evangelism or engaging in spiritual conversations will not be effective with everyone. In order to enhance the probability of positive reception, the believer needs to listen carefully to each person, not only to gauge the level of receptivity but also to understand that individual's worldview. By personalizing a response to that individual, gospel-related communication will be clearer, and Jesus's love is more likely to be perceived. Asking probing questions and showing genuine interest in the answers, as well as making effort to share in others' interests, is very useful (Pollock 2010, Chapter 6 (65-74) and Chapter 11 (108-113)). Long-time followers of Jesus can remain challenged for many years learning about other worldviews and practicing good listening skills. New believers need encouragement to share fearlessly, so that they can bear fruit immediately and also begin learning. A related principle is expressed by one movement leader, "Keep doing what you're doing, and you'll get better at it" (Wood 2021). No one ever fully masters disciple-making; we are all equally learners, sitting at Jesus's feet.

Further scenarios, Populations C and D

Consider two other groups, described in Table 2: Population C with low average receptivity (like Population A) but where it is relatively easy to form relationships (like Population B), and Population D with high receptivity but where it is difficult to form relationships (receptivity like Population B and relationships like Population A).

	Receptivity	**Relational Connectedness**
Population C	Low receptivity	More relational
Population D	High receptivity	Less relational

Table 2. Description of populations C and D

Population C resembles much of the Muslim world in the 1980's, when a new agency advertised with the slogan, "Missionaries to Muslims: Literally 1 in a Million." After concerted effort, albeit only achieving 1 in 500,000 recently, God moved in ways far beyond human control, so that receptivity has increased in the twenty-first century (Garrison 2014). More than 30 years of prayer and sowing seems to have somewhat softened the soil.

For Population C, the optimum multiplication rate is achieved by filtering strongly to spend time discipling those with the highest receptivity (e.g., top tenth), but without discriminating as much on relationships (selecting roughly the half who are closest to the disciple maker). If such a community is not closed off to outsiders, strangers can function relatively well in this environment. On the other hand, for Population D, which is less relational, the best result occurs where time is focused on the closest relationships to the disciple maker (e.g., top tenth), with relatively loose filtering on receptivity (eliminating only the bottom half or so). Much of the U.S. is probably more nearly described by Population D (less relational but receptive) than by Population A (less relational and poor receptivity). The practitioner in this setting may want to initiate DBS starting with his or her closest relationships and working outward to the next closest relationships, until free time is filled up with DBS or similar groups, or DBS with individuals when necessary, in the case that willing participants don't know one another. In general, the discipler should filter most strongly on the weakest characteristic of a people, whether that is receptivity or relational connectedness.

Summarizing the Reproduction Rates across the Different Contexts

This article has been referring to a rate of disciple reproduction, which is the average number of times in a year that each disciple in a movement makes another disciple. This rate can be less than one. If, for example, it takes two years, on average, to make a disciple, the rate is 0.5. Or the rate can be more than one, e.g., 2 if two disciples are made each year. A rate of 1 means that the number of disciples doubles annually. For a convenient abbreviation, this rate is referred to as "*r*." Figure 1 shows one of the outputs from our model, the dependency of *r* on context. Here, we have assumed that disciples generously contribute 16 hours/week for disciple making, thus these numbers are quantitatively optimistic. We note, however, that the range of *r* derived from the model with these optimistic assumptions is similar to that observed in actual DMM's, in which *r* ranges from 0.2 to 1.7 (Keener & Foster 2025).

In Figure 1, two different rates are described. The blue bar describes the rate that can be achieved through randomly spending a short amount of time sharing the gospel with people indiscriminately, i.e., with no intentional filtering. The full height of the bar (including both blue and orange portions, labeled "*r* =…") indicates the rate that can be achieved by optimizing filtering for each context. Optimization means that the disciple maker spends more time in DBS and in-depth spiritual conversations with relatively responsive individuals in already-existing closer interpersonal relationships. The optimum filtering may be based more on receptivity or more on relational closeness, depending on the context. What follows are the practical implications for disciple makers in each of the four contexts.

Populations A-D are labeled at the bottom of each bar in Figure 1. Population A, with low receptivity and weak relational ties, is the most difficult environment in which to launch movements. There, when casting seed broadly enough to find several individuals who are willing to participate in DBS, it should be possible to double a movement every two years (r =0.5), assuming all disciples are engaged with the same intensity. The rate *r* is directly proportional to the amount of time invested. Given people's busy work schedules and family responsibilities, devoted disciples may only be able to dedicate about 5 hours weekly to evangelism and DBS (instead of 16 hrs/wk); then, realistically, it might require 6-7 years to double (r =0.16), even if all followers of Jesus are active in disciple-making. Given enough time, a large number of Jesus followers will result even with this lower doubling rate. However, if the disciple maker is merely randomly engaging the lost in brief conversations without filtering, regardless of receptivity or depth of relationship, at 5 hrs/wk, doubling could take over 13 years (r =0.075), or much longer when considering attrition, which is significant in this case. If only a fraction of disciples is engaged in reproducing, it is not difficult to imagine a decline in the number of Jesus' followers over time.

In the other contexts (Populations B, C, D), rates are much higher. Movement is possible even without DBS, although the depth of discipleship would be lacking. In every case, attention to filtering approximately doubles the rate (from the length of the blue bar to the full length of the bar including both blue and orange portions).

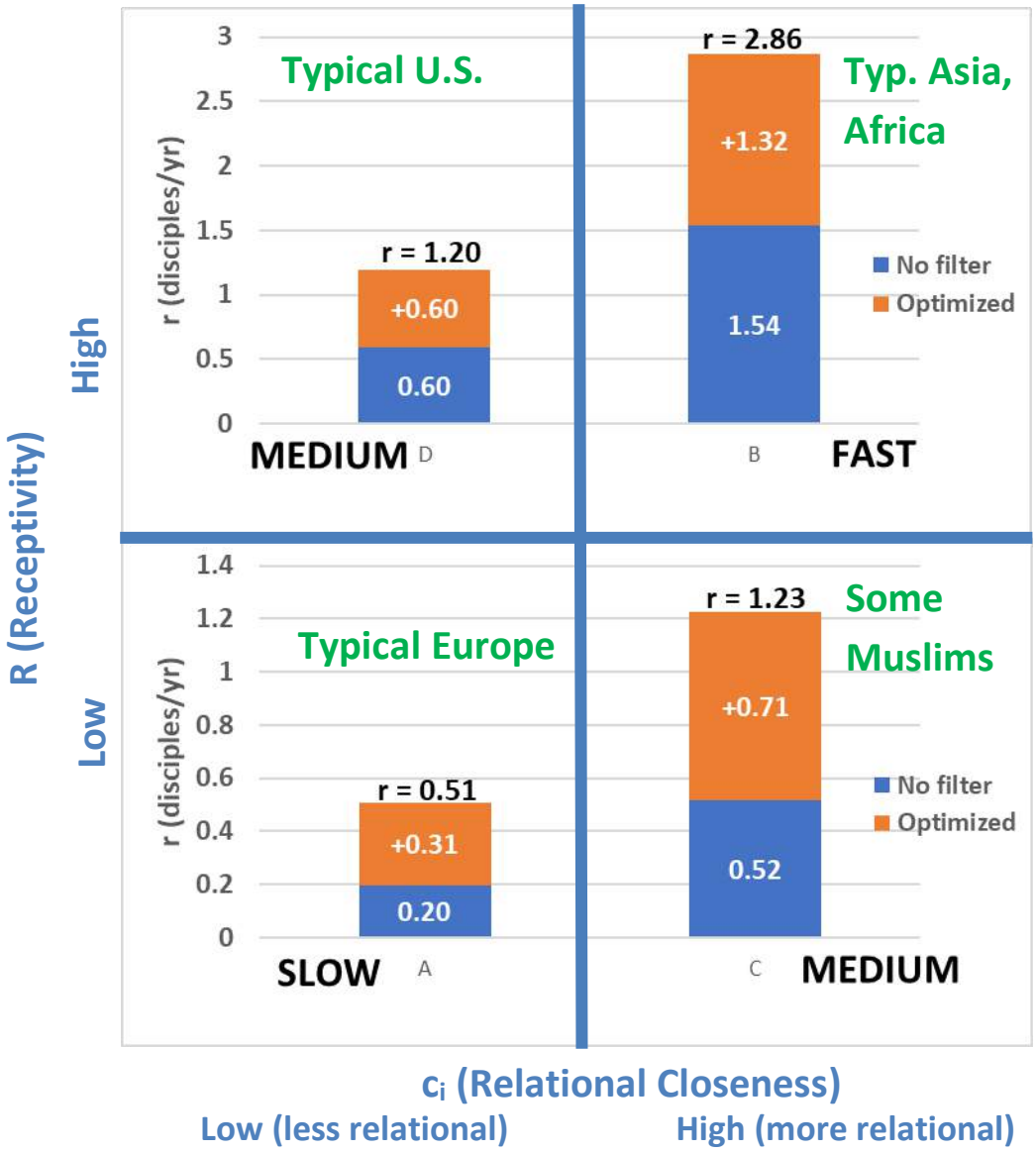

Figure 1. Summary of disciple reproduction doubling rates (r) by population and filtering. Populations A-D are labeled at the bottom of each bar. Blue bars are the rate that is achieved without any intentional filtering. The full height of the bar, labeled "r=…", is the rate that can be achieved with optimum filtering. Green text is the authors' best estimate of environments that approximate the four populations.

Table 3 summarizes the applications of this model to the four contexts. Each context requires different means to achieve the optimum rate of growth. Although expert practitioners with years of experience will intuitively arrive at these conclusions, often with more nuance, these guidelines may be helpful for the majority who need some direction or desire to see more results in their specific context.

Population	Receptivity	Relational	How to Optimize
A	Low	Less	• Probe relational network periodically for those who are willing to enter DBS. • Work outward from closest relationships. • Create low-commitment entry points into Gospel conversations. • Listen well and show genuine interest.
B	High	More	• Focus time selectively on friends and relatives with above-average receptivity. • Focus on groups, not individuals.
C	Low	More	• Focus time on those with highest receptivity. • Focus on groups, not individuals. • Respect authority of community leaders.
D	High	Less	• Focus time on closest relationships, and work outward as necessary. • May need to start DBS with individuals.

Table 3. Summary of suggestions to optimize the doubling rate for different contexts

Conclusion

This model of DMM points out essential focal areas for practitioners who are seeking DMM. In summary, for the reader's convenience, we have compiled some of the key practical recommendations from this article into the following list.

- Invest time in the Kingdom of God
  1. Maximize time in harvest.
  2. Spend time sharing the Gospel and in DBS.
  3. Share the Gospel abundantly.
  4. Do not depend solely on full-time workers.
- Prioritize time wisely
  1. Filter to use time wisely and appropriately for each context.
  2. Find connectedness in *oikos*, and encourage new disciples to reach their own *oikos*.
  3. Do not give equal time to all relationships.
  4. Spend enough time to be able to assess and filter for receptivity.
  5. Find people with high receptivity to the Gospel and invest time in them.
  6. Get to DBS asap to maximize exposure and connectedness.
  7. Live out loud: self-identify as a Jesus follower early in a relationship.
- Collaborate to enhance receptivity
  1. Serve the community, heal the sick, help the poor.
  2. Rural: resonate with the culture.

3. Urban: listen attentively, and utilize a variety of tools.

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Theories and Spectrums: What Pressures Do Parachurch Agencies Face Toward Losing Their Founding Missions?

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Abstract

This article investigates seven parachurch agencies that have a holistic approach to Christian mission, specifically in order to examine how certain theories and spectrums might explain mission drift. Organizational fields theory can help identify issues relating to institutional fields while focusing on how parachurch NGOs/NPOs are moulded by institutional rules. Parachurch organizations in the field of socio-humanitarianism are coerced into achieving the agenda of secular institutions and governments rather than that of the Church. These pressures and challenges constrain Christian agencies to drift away from their original holistic mission-objectives.

Key Words: holistic, mission drift, parachurch agencies, spectrums, theories

Introduction

This article examines the results that emerged from my empirical research in connection with existing theories and spectrums related to circumstantial factors propitious to the development of mission drift in parachurch agencies. The opening rationale of this research is based on the analysis of the interconnected theories and spectrums. I compare my findings with the results of previous hypothetical studies and publications. This entire process is related to the main question of the article: *In what ways do intitutional theories and spectoral challenges constrain parachurch agencies to face the crisis of mission drift in their mission activities?*

To answer this question, this study methodically uses a mix of bibliographic research approaches associated with interpretative and multiple case qualitative techniques in order to generate pertinent data contributing to knowledge. The research for this case study is drawn from a large population of seven Christian NGOs/NPOs. To collect empirical data, I referred to the respondents as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, etc., for the sake of anonymity. The verbatim quotes are put in *italics*, so that the research participants' *voices stand out*.

Circumstantial factors

Theory analysis predicts the events that affect the phenomenon of mission drift and the possible ways it can touch other phenomena. In this study, the theory is broken down into different parts that are then examined individually and as they relate to each other in terms of events affecting mission drift. Unlike theories, spectrums can be used in analysing the concept of mission drift in a parachurch organization as a circumstance. The term spectrum is mainly used in science, especially in optical physics, to study the reflecting rays of rainbow light and colour going through a prism by refraction or diffraction (Newton 1671/72, 3076). Such reflection is a process that has the potential to vary infinitely across a continuum. This spectrum underlies possible mechanisms that can change smoothly, generating similar disorders—in this case mission drift. Throughout the article, various theories and continua are elucidated, thus forming the philosophical part of this study's research.

Organization Theory

In this section, challenges that constrain the distinctiveness that a faith-based NGO/NPO can experience are further explored, such as those suggested by organization theory or institutional

theory. In this research analysis, organization theory is used to reveal external forces that challenge or put pressure on Christian holistic agencies. Lin (2019, 71), using her efficient categorization, argues that one of the known ways that these external pressures challenge Christian NGOs is through the environment of key regulatory agencies, resources, suppliers, stakeholders, and other institutions that produce similar services.

Church-related agencies sometimes develop relationships with organizations that are dissimilar to them and that might have a different understanding of Christian faith and of the meaning of holistic mission, and which therefore have a divergent impact upon the religious agency. On the one hand, parachurch agencies "have relations to their founding faith traditions. These can include church congregations, affiliates, organizations and individuals" (Lin 2019, 71). As Schneider argues, these Christian communities have a tremendous impact on the support structures of the agency as well as on the extent to which these Christian faith-based NGOs/NPOs reflect their mission objectives and values (2006, 517-518). On the other hand, these parachurch NGOs/NPOs "exist within society, and might consciously seek validation as legitimate members within their area of expertise" (Schneider 2006, 18). This form of challenge is what one respondent reported, then went on to say that many church-related organizations have drifted from their first mission, partnering with institutions and governments all over the world for the sake of legitimatization and validation (Interviewee 5, 25 April 2020). There is a need for "these faith-based organizations to connect to higher levels of decision-making as well as to share information with other established organizations," asserts Lin (2019, 71).

In addressing issues related to organizational field theory, Gallet (2016, 98) argues that institutional rules may be reinforced through public expectations arising as a result of legal requirements. These rules should be broadly disseminated to the point of becoming key patterns for various NGOs/NPOs operating within the same institutional/organizational field. Berger unambiguously states that the fact of "being too explicitly religious can result in the creation of legal obstacles when applying for public funding" (2003, 17). Interviewee 16 echoes these legal threats or opposition to funding in stating the following: *Our partners were very much against the term evangelize… If donors would hear that we want to convert people to Christ then they will stop supporting financially* (23 May 2020). Therefore, the success of these agencies is dependent on conforming to rules that are shaped by leading actors in the field, such as the dominant organisations, the governments involved, and/or the various professional associations operating in the same institutional environment. This perception has been put forward by Berger as one of the fundamental reasons why many Christian faith-based agencies try to seek formal recognition as 'NGOs/NPOs' (2003, 17, 20) in order to fit into the environment of international organizations.

There are potential major divergences relating to goals that can result in compromising the parachurch agency's mission in terms of what Ormerod calls a "free market competition model" (2000, 435). Cleary, commenting on these organizational issues, states that church-related agencies have been "seduced into the rhetoric of the market, they are seduced into the agenda of elite actors," and asks: "In whose image are we providing services? Are we providing services in the image of the gospel, and what we believe to be our mandate" (1999, 4)? Are parachurch NGOs/NPOs now simply the handmaiden of elite actors in the organizational field, providing the kinds of mission that 'they' believe is appropriate for people (Cleary 1999, 4)? In an attempt to answer this question, Interviewee 16 declares that *Jesus should be the centre of the church-related NGOs/NPOs' relief and development works in order to stand apart from the philanthropist clubs, the humanitarian organizations and UN agencies which operate on a secular and humanitarian basis* (8 May 2020). For parachurch holistic agencies, compromising the mission entrusted by God to the NGO/NPO is an environmental challenge or organizational field issue that may seriously constrain features that are distinctively Christian and lead to

mission drift. As a consequence, the impact of these working relationships with international organizations, challenges and puts pressures on the agencies that can lead to institutional isomorphism.

Isomorphic Theory

The theory of organizational isomorphism was first elaborated in an article entitled, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," by DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 147-160). These writers describe institutional isomorphism as the process by which church-related agencies lose their Christian distinctiveness and identity, and come to the point of resembling one another (1983, 147). This conformism happens because of isomorphic pressures that constrain Christian NGOs/NPOs to homogenize their purposes and to become more like other organizations that operate in the same field. A good example of an institution to which isomorphic theory can be applied is Harvard University. Greer and Horst (2014, 17-18) write that the university was established in New England as a Christian educational institution, but one that has slowly lost its Christian identity and basis. They (2014, 18) note that the motto of Harvard University at the start was, 'Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae' (Truth for Christ and the Church), that it employed professors who were exclusively Christian, and that it rooted all its policies and practices in a Christian worldview.

However, today—through the process of isomorphism—little is left of the institution's spiritual heritage, and the motto has been reduced simply to *Veritas* (Greer and Horst 2014, 16-18). The same history and spiritual heritage are true of Yale University, which has also significantly isomorphized. Another good example is that of the Christian Children's Fund founded in 1938 in China as a Christian child development agency to help relieve global poverty among children, instituted by the American missionary Calvitt Clarke. Lin observes that the charity "has since lost its Christian roots, and in 2009 changed its name to Childfund International" (2019, 72) in order to conform to current rules and practices for international NGOs and to gain legitimacy in that organizational field. Obviously, this isomorphic process improves the chances for the existential survival of Christian NGOs/NPOs, but in turn it may mean compromise involving demands that are difficult to satisfy without acting in a way that is inconsistent with their mission doctrine and belief. For parachurch agencies, there is a real danger of ignoring their Christian identity and missional understanding if they are in a regular relationship with agencies that do not share their faith. It is from this perspective that one participant in this study's empirical research goes on to unequivocally state that *some of the so-called parachurch holistic agencies have lost their Christian faith identity and mission values due to these organizational challenges* (Interviewee 16, 8 May 2020). Another participant reveals that *many parachurch agencies choose to partner with bigger institutions and governments for survival, consequently, drifting from their first holistic mission objectives* (Interviewee 5, 25 April 2020). In addressing these isomorphic issues, Interviewee 6 discloses that their *NPO experienced mission drift because they have partnered with a successful humanitarian NGO in training farmers, as their mission required significant fundraising that became time consuming* (19 January 2020). In the same vein, it should be noted that three other types of mechanism associated with isomorphism lead to similarity between agencies (normative theory, coercive theory, and mimetic theory).

Spectrum Analysis

The challenges faced by parachurch agencies in their holistic mission activities lie on the three spectra of bureaucratization, professionalization, and dechristianization.

Spectrum of Bureaucratization

Bureaucratization as a regulatory spectrum in parachurch NGOs/NPOs describes a process involving managing and administering an agency by increasing controls: opting for an increase in professional management, which involves hierarchical coordination and an adherence to rigid policies and procedures. Most church-related organizations are going through a long, slow, and yet steady drift towards more bureaucratization. This drift involves more controls: regulations and the apparatus of report filing are created for them and for the voluntary practitioners who aim to offer holistic service. The system is created to maximize efficiency but has the potential to trap and negate individual and organizational freedom to do mission (Künkler 2018, 195). Bureaucratization as a regulatory spectrum is essentially a centralized form of administration and operates in a different fashion from an *ad hoc* approach in which supervision is decentralized. Barnett and Finnemore (2004, 17-18) have defined bureaucratization as encompassing four features:

1) A hierarchy that clearly outlines the spheres of competence, expertise, and divisions of workforce with a strict chain of command;

2) A structural continuity where the administrators have a full-time paid job and an advanced position within the structure;

3) A system of impersonality and rationality which prescribes operating rules rather than arbitrary practices and actions for mission purposes; and,

4) A concept of expertise, which chooses practitioners according to professional merit and prefers trained officials who hold access to knowledge rather than, as is the present case, Christians with faith-based patrimonial, kinship, and charismatic authority.

Religious sociologists from the wider field of sociology consider faith-based NGOs as bureaucracies (Lin 2019, 56). Studies by Chapman (1991, 20), Samuel (2010, 134), and Ward (2015, 83) have looked at the impact of the spectrum of bureaucratization over time on the church and have argued that as church-related agencies become more bureaucratic, the focus of the church's mission will tend to concentrate more on functional aspects. In relation to the effects of this spectrum, Interviewee 22 attests that their *Christian faith-based NGO has revised its administrative policies and professional procedures in order to meet international institutional requirements* (30 April 2020). Consequently, bureaucratization has the propensity to generate incompatible mission practices. Policymakers tend to be more and more professional, and decisions are taken grounded on the value of their professional function. As a result, theology, the substance of Christian faith, as Lin argues, "Takes a back seat to the day-to-day operations dominated by the functional issues of bureaucracy" (2019, 56). Using a similar logic, Grint (2005, 108-09) maintains that the spectrum of bureaucratization leads to an increase in legality and rationality, in which reasonable actions (based on rational principles, expert knowledge, calculability and common sense) oppose affective traditional Christian actions (based on religious convictions and motives).

The establishment of bureaucratization in parachurch agencies may underlie the drift of Christian faith ideals through which their God-given objectives are left behind in favour of the progress of their organizations. Mangayi notes with pertinence that "instead of religious and moral ideals guiding our lives, we are governed and controlled by economic and bureaucratic principals, resulting in a sad decline in the fabric and cohesion of social life" (2016, 148). To this effect, this research shows that rationalization as a spectrum of bureaucratization causes

the increase of influence by a variety of investors. Mangayi's analysis explains why Christian identity is becoming less and less central to the processes of Christian faith-based NGOs/NPOs.

Spectrum of Professionalization

The spectrum of professionalization moves through a slow process that brings professional demarcation into the agency, along with an emphasis on high social status and conformity to knowledge-authorities. This creeping change in turn creates a hierarchical social system undermining the faith-based system. Thus, professionalization establishes within the parachurch agency a narrow elite who retain power, prestige, and privileges, and who are somehow cut off from the common staff because of their elevated station in the organization (Weeden 2002, 55). As a consequence of the operation of this spectrum, managers—in contrast to staff—are seen as professionals, and decisions are taken in line with their professional function and values. Following this train of thought, Interviewee 16 declares that their *church-related agency was paid and entrusted by the State to care for immigrants coming into the country*. Furthermore, this interview respondent added that, *regrettably, being accountable to the state meant that the NGO was required to hire professionals regardless of their spiritual background and, as a result, some of them (mainly atheists and Muslims) openly hindered the spiritual activities and opposed the sharing of the gospel* (23 May 2020).

Jochemsen argues that professional spectra set the *standards* of excellence which are meant to be "the rules of play as understood by the practice. They are the know how required to realize the *telos* of the practice. These rules are embodied in professional conduct consisting in the ability to act according to a rule and to assess the correctness of this application even without making the rule explicit" (2006, 104). The professionalization of church-related organizations arises not so much from the rising educational standards of mission workers as from the intertwining of religion-based and secular-oriented mission practices (Semple 2003, 191). The end result is a conflict involving social status and vision with radical change as a possible consequence.

From this consequential perspective, Interviewee 31 (5 May 2020) echoes this view, noting that *high professional managers who have proven their performance in the business sector will definitely engage workforce for the NGO with no consideration of their spiritual background, thus leading the agency down the road of dechristianization and secularization.* In this respect, Interviewee 32 affirms that their *board of directors and management have decided to hire non-religionists for strategic positions in the name of professionalism. As a result, this Christian holistic agency has become more and more a professional, humanitarian, international NGO—with little or no Christian values* (25 June 2020). In addressing these issues, Williams (2017, 464) suggest that the downside of professionalization is that it threatens to subordinate the agencies to its own large-scale mission objectives, thus also threatening the voluntary principles that have long been at the centre of Christian mission—a mission that involves both social and spiritual ministries. In line with this view, one analyst notes that Christianity must reject the institutionalization of Christian faith and work that leads to the professionalization of Christian holistic mission (Takashi, 2013, 93). Christian NGOs/NPOs need to professionalize their holistic mission without secularizing it. In summation, the spectrum of professionalization and its managerial model can be an immense social gift for parachurch agencies, because of its unprecedented ability to enlarge the boundaries of God's Kingdom, but this process necessitates detachment from its slow-moving and gradual controlling model that drifts these organizations from their God-given mission. Now, this research is focusing on the spectral impact of dechristianization on Christian agencies.

Spectrum of Dechristianization

The contemporary faith-crisis in Western societies is favourable to mission drift, as steady dechristianization increases the global secularization of Christian faith-based mission agencies. Speaking about dechristianization, one always thinks it is inevitably a European issue. When one speaks globally, Christianity appears to be the fastest-growing religion, while in the developed countries, the social significance of Christian faith seems to have decreased. However, Pasture (2013, 367) note that the social significance of Christianity in the United States appears to have increased. Despite the apparent worldwide growth of Christianity, dechristianization is evidenced by socio-cultural changes in the West.

To grasp the significance of dechristianization and the mission drift that has taken place in Christianity since the Second World War, one should look across Christian faith to analyse the whole religious spectrum. It becomes more and more obvious that one should assess major socio-cultural changes in relation to religion and to Christianity in particular. To this effect, one participant in this empirical research aptly states that *the economic-cultural context, coupled with the high bureaucratization and professionalization of institutions, the pursuit of higher levels of performance, and the obsession with growth for its own sake—without any spiritual considerations—has triggered the total dechristianization and secularization of their parachurch organization* (Interviewee 31, 5 May 2020).

Following this train of thought, Bailey points to the Orthodox Church's struggle against the reality of dechristianization in Russian society and its negative impact on Christian mission (2001, 156 & 216). In a further development of Bailey's view, van Luijk describes how, due to cultural and economic change in the West, dechristianization came to refer not only to the desertion of the Christian faith by a "growing number of individual Europeans and Americans, but also, and primarily, to the demolition of the traditional presence of the church in the public sphere" (2016, 247). Moreover, van Luijk argues that dechristianization also causes the abandonment of Christian faith, and that the mission of Christian institutions suffers as a result (2016, 247). Roy argues that dechristianization in Europe is associated with the abandonment of religiosity by the sophisticated and middle working classes (2020, 31-33). The speed at which this happens varies: in France it was sudden, but in Ireland the drop in commitment to faith was preceded by a long decline.

Dechristianization is a phenomenon characterized by a retreat from sacred mission, holistic mission involvement, Christian life and practice, the social obligations of Christians, and normative Christian values. This kind of spectrum can push holistic mission NGOs/NPOs into experiencing mission drift. Dechristianization sometimes results from sociological mutations such as modernization. Parachurch missionary agencies still endure in spite of dechristianization, but this does not guarantee their continuation in the future when their Bible-based mission may be relentlessly affected by modernization and globalized secularization.

Conclusion

The implications of this study's research are that church-related NGOs/NPOs and the Church must be able to collaboratively discover and respect their respective roles in God's mission of holistic transformation. Christianity needs holistic practitioners who have been professionally educated and trained to overcome modern worldviews (seen in the form of pressures and challenges, and explained by the theories and spectrums this article has explored) and to "use the Bible and theology, along with their understanding of spirituality, in order to infuse and shape their transformational development theory and practice. They must be able to think theologically about their holistic work and especially their actions: acting theologically is an important skill" Woolnough (2011, 200). Mission drift is a symmetric concept in the first place

before becoming a spiritual or a socio-humanitarian issue, which presumes that both aspects of the holistic nature of Christian faith-based mission are vital to the agency.

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Diverse Ways in which Muslim Background Believers Are Living Out I Peter 4:12-14

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Abstract

"Suffering" is a prominent motif in Peter's first letter. This article focuses on I Peter 4:12-14 and examines how Muslim background believers live out this passage. These three verses are relevant to believers of Muslim background because they face challenges like those experienced by first-century believers. The various ways in which Muslim background believers are living out I Peter 4:12-14 during difficult trials is instructive to believers from different contexts and backgrounds.

Key Words: believers, boldness, Christ, glory, persecution, perseverance, rejoice, suffering, trials

Introduction

This article studies the theme of "suffering" in Peter's first letter, focusing on I Peter 4:12-14. Missiological lessons on suffering can be drawn from this passage and applied to global missions. In particular, the article examines how Muslim background believers (MBBs) live out I Peter 4:12-14. Given the significant increase in Christian persecution in recent decades, I Peter 4:12-14 is highly relevant to MBBs, who face different challenges and dangers. Despite these trials, MBBs continue to persevere in their faith, demonstrating a willingness to pay the ultimate price to follow Jesus. Their steadfastness in creative access countries is an inspiring example to all believers.

Sharing The Love of Christ with His Muslim Persecutors

The following story exemplifies the complex situations MBBs face today:

> *As a member of Pakistan's tiny Christian minority, Hamid was treated poorly by Muslims in his community. By God's grace, however, today, Hamid loves and shares Christ with his persecutors.* Growing up, Hamid Banday had every reason to hate the Muslims in his Pakistani village. His Muslim classmates bullied him, and villagers harassed and discriminated against his family because of their Christian faith. Village authorities even denied them use of the local water well during peak summer heat. Hamid never saw a reason to show love to Muslims … until he realized God had told him to. With God's guidance and help, he now tries to see Muslims as God sees them, as people made in His image who are in need of a savior (The Voice of the Martyrs 2021; italics original).

The Current State of Persecuted Christians: A Call to Awareness and Action

In the past year, the persecution of Christians around the world has reached alarming levels, with nearly 5,000 believers killed for their faith. This tragic loss of life underscores the extreme risks that Christians face in many parts of the world, simply for their devotion to Christ. Additionally, almost 4,000 Christians were abducted, often subjected to violence, forced conversions, or exploitation. These figures, drawn from the 2024 Open Doors World Watch List (Open Doors 2023) as well as other accessible information (Global Christian Relief 2022; The Voice of the Martyrs 2024a; The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2022), highlight the severe and ongoing threats to religious freedom that many Christians endure daily.

Share the Sufferings of Christ

> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (I Peter 4:12-14, NASB 1995).

Elisabeth Elliot put the matter this way: "Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffering... The love of God did not protect His own Son... He will not necessarily protect us - not from anything it takes to make us like His Son. A lot of hammering and chiseling and purifying by fire will have to go into the process" (citation).

The Theme of Suffering in First Peter: Destination, Audience, and Purpose

Suffering is a major theme in the first epistle of Peter. Even though the focus of the article is on I Peter 4:12-14, it is important to highlight the continuity of the theme of suffering throughout the entire epistle, particularly in the following passages: 1:11; 2:19-20, 21-23; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 12-13; 5:1, 8-10.

It is important to give a brief introduction regarding the destination, audience, and purpose of I Peter. The letter was addressed to Christians (Jewish believers and converted pagans) who were in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (See 1 Peter 1:1). Peter H. Davids states that "these are Christians living in the northwest quadrant of Asia Minor bordering the Black Sea, an area that Luke reports Paul was not allowed to evangelize (Acts 16:6-10)" (Davids 1990, 7).

There are different points of view regarding when the letter was written. While some scholars have suggested a later date and pseudonymous author (Jobes 2005, 5; Elliott 2000, 127-130), most scholars agree with the traditional view that I Peter was written by the Apostle Peter between AD 62-67. I Peter was written from Rome, referred to historically as "Babylon" due to its moral decadency and idolatry--traits that had significant implications for the believers.

The purpose of the letter is to encourage believers in their faith amid suffering and trials. 1 Peter 4:12–19 is part of the larger section of 4:12–5:11. Scott McKnight states that Peter's letter is "an exhortation to holy endurance of suffering because these Christians have experienced the salvation of God and because salvation is promised to them in all fullness when the final day arrives" (McKnight 1996, 33; Hiebert 1984). The Apostle Peter also warns the believers about the trials and tribulations they will face and encourages them to persevere in the Lord.

Michaels suggests that we must look simultaneously at 4:12 and 5:1. Peter addresses his readers afresh as "Dear friends" (4:12) but delays his specific appeal to them (*parakalo*) until the beginning of the following section, focusing the appeal on one group among them, the "older ones" or "elders" (5:1) (Michaels 1988, 257). According to Peter H. Davids, "the elders were not the older people in the church, but the leaders of the community; it is the title of an officer rather than a description of seniority." (Davids 1990, 175).

The following section focuses on 1 Peter 4:12-14, viewing the passage through a missiological lens.

“Suffering” in I Peter 4:12-14

Suffering is a central theme throughout the I Peter, with a particularly strong emphasis in 4:12-14. In these verses, Peter addresses the reality of suffering as an integral part of the Christian experience, particularly for those who are committed to following Christ in a hostile world. The Greek term translated as “sufferings,” *pathēmasin*, is crucial for understanding Peter’s message. Derived from the word *pathéma*, this term carries a rich and multifaceted meaning, encompassing physical and emotional suffering and the broader experiences of passion, affliction, and endurance that come with being a follower of Christ.

The word *pathéma* is used in various contexts throughout the New Testament, each offering a different dimension of suffering as a Christian. In Galatians 5:24, for example, Paul writes about "the flesh with its passions and desires," linking the concept of *pathéma* to the internal struggles and desires that believers must crucify in their pursuit of holiness. *Pathéma r*efers to the passions and emotions that must be subdued in the Christian life, highlighting the internal aspect of suffering.

In Colossians 1:24, Paul offers another perspective: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." This verse presents *pathéma* as “suffering” that can be embraced with joy, especially when it is endured for the sake of others and for the gospel's advancement. Paul’s willingness to suffer on behalf of the Church reflects a deep understanding of the redemptive value of suffering—a theme that resonates with Peter’s message in his first epistle.

Finally, in 1 Peter 4:13, the Apostle directly connects the concept of *pathéma* to the sufferings of Christ: "that you share the sufferings of Christ." Here, suffering is not merely a consequence of following Christ but is portrayed as a means of participation in His own sufferings. Peter encourages believers to see their trials as a way to identify with Christ more deeply, sharing His pain and glory.

Expect Suffering and Trials (4:12)

I Peter 4:12 reads, “Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you” (emphasis mine). Peter’s use of “do not be surprised” urges his readers not to see suffering as strange or a sort of anomaly in the Christian life—but to understand the presence of pain and suffering as occurring under the watchful eye of God (Sproul 2019, 148). Indeed, Christians are to expect trials and tribulation. Peter uses the expression “fiery ordeal.” The historical significance of the burning of Rome helps us understand the context of persecution that believers from Asia Minor faced. Believers experienced trials and persecution in the first century. Christians were challenged to overcome trials and trust in the Lord amidst difficult times.

The "fiery ordeal" mentioned in 4:12 reflects the refining fire described in 1:7, and this theme reappears in 4:17-18. The idea of rejoicing during trials in 4:13, with a view toward the ultimate fulfillment of joy, picks up the same theme from 1:6-7 (Jobes 2005, 282-283).

Peter had experienced a paradigm shift regarding his perspective on suffering and trials. He once told Jesus to avoid suffering on the Cross (Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 8:32-33; Luke 9:21-22). Now, he realized that suffering is part of the life of every believer. He told the believers, “Do not be surprised” or consider “strange” if one experiences trials and difficulties. Peter reassures the believers that persecution is not something "strange" or “foreign” to their existence as Christians.

What is happening is exactly what Christ foretold (Matt. 5:11-12; 10:34; Mark 13:9-13; John 15:18-20) (Davids 1990, 164).

Rejoice Amid Suffering and Trials (4:13a)

"But to the degree that you share the *sufferings of Christ*, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation" (4:13, emphasis mine).

The contrasting conjunction "but" introduces an appropriate Christian response to suffering. "To the degree" or "to the extent" implies a measure. Those who have suffered more for the sake of the gospel and Christ will rejoice all the more at his glorious coming. Believers are called to partake in the sufferings of Christ. Jamieson et al. suggest that "we [who] are partakers of Christ's sufferings by faith enter into realizing fellowship with them; willingly for His sake suffering as He suffered. with exceeding joy—Greek, 'exulting joy'; now ye rejoice amidst sufferings; then ye shall exult, forever free from sufferings (1 Pe 1:6, 8). If we will not bear suffering for Christ now, we must bear eternal sufferings hereafter" (Jamieson et al. 1997, p. 511).

Only in Christ Jesus can believers rejoice continuously regardless of the circumstances. The Apostle Peter highlights the importance of "keep on rejoicing." Napuku states that "Peter's idea of rejoicing in suffering to share in the glory of Christ seems to draw from a Jewish worldview (Dan 7:20–23; Joel 2:2, and Rev 2:10). The future consummation of triumph and glory for Christians, just as Christ triumphed and was glorified, inspires reason for rejoicing in suffering" (Napuku 2022, 145). As believers, we can be assured that God is glorified through our trials and suffering. Jesus overcame all our suffering and pain on the Cross. If we suffer with Jesus, we will be glorified with him (Rom 8:17).

Believers "Share" the Sufferings of Christ (4:13b)

What a privilege for believers to be participants in the sufferings of Christ! Believers are refined and strengthened in the Lord:

> The believer's life is incorporated into Christ's; Christian existence is life "in Christ" (3:16; 5:10, 14). Without any "mystical" elaboration, and without developing it in explicit Pauline terms, 1 Peter has accepted this Pauline understanding and vocabulary, including the vocabulary of participating in Christ's sufferings by virtue of being "in Christ" (cf. Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:10; Phil 3:10; cf. 2 Tim 2:11-13; Heb 11:26; 13:13) (Boring 1999, 156; see also Penner 2004d and Wright 2011).

How can we as believers rejoice in the midst of suffering and trials?

Jesus has promised that he will be with us all the time. Because of what he has done for us on the Cross, we can have hope and strength in the midst of trials. Guzik explains that we can share the sufferings of Christ because he suffered first and understands our pain. "We can only partake of Jesus' sufferings because He partook of our humanity and sufferings. He became a man and suffered so that our suffering would not be meaningless. It is good to share *anything* with Jesus, even His suffering" (Guzik 2018, 5). According to Barclay, "Persecution is a sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. When people have to suffer for their Christianity, they are walking the way their Master walked and sharing the cross their Master carried" (Barclay 2003, 297).

The joy that comes from recognizing the sharing of suffering between Christ and believers is just a glimpse of the greater joy Christians will experience when Christ's glory is fully revealed (4:13), and their faith is finally vindicated (Jobes 2005, 166-167).

Rely on the Ministry of the Holy Spirit Amid Suffering (4:14)

The first epistle of Peter 4:14 states, "If you are *reviled* for the name of Christ [the Messiah], you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (emphasis mine).

When the Holy Spirit works in some individuals' lives to draw them to Christ by slowly breaking down their natural barriers, then God's glory is attractive to them (Baker et al. 2004, 157-158). Consider the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16: "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?"

Baker et al. propose that we "should realistically consider ourselves 'blessed' because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us. Realism tells us, in other words, that this is the natural result of a phenomenon of glory and its effect on those that, at that moment, at least, are resistant to God." (Baker et al. 2004, 164).

The next section examines how believers of Muslim backgrounds live out 1 Peter 4:12-14.

1 Peter 4:12-14 and Muslim Background Believers

I Peter 4:12-14 is relevant to believers of Muslim background because they face challenges like those experienced by first-century believers. Persecution has increased in recent decades in different regions in North Africa, the Middle East, and South and Central Asia. Amid the trials and persecution, Muslim background believers are persevering in their faith; they are willing to pay the price to follow Jesus. Muslim background believers in different contexts are an inspiring example for believers in general.

There are several similarities between first-century believers and MBBs. Early Christians experienced pressure and persecution from the authorities, families, and the local community. Believers met at house churches, and their faith was strengthened by prayer, worship, and teaching of the Scriptures. Today's believers have only partial access to the Word of God. That is why we need to continue praying for the translation of the Bible in different dialects and languages so that every people group can have access to the Word of God in their own language. Many believers were murdered for being Christians. In the last decades, there has been an increase in violence and kidnapping, and many Christians have been incarcerated for the sake of the Gospel.

To What Extent Are Muslim Background Believers Living Out 1 Peter 4:12-14?

Here are some of the ways Muslim background believers demonstrate living out 1 Peter 4:12-14:

1 Peter 4:12

"Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (4:12, emphasis mine).

1. MBBs expect suffering as part of their obedience to Christ by focusing on prayer, intercession, and facing the realities of spiritual warfare.

The power of prayer and intercession. Believers from Muslim backgrounds pray daily because they constantly deal with the consequences of spiritual warfare. They highly value the intercession of other believers on their behalf. They do not ask for persecution to stop or disappear; instead, they ask for boldness and perseverance in their faith and new opportunities to share the gospel with others without Christ. They do not complain about their sufferings and challenges. Instead, MBBs ask for endurance and perseverance amongst persecution. *Ali* shared with me the fact that "in their community of Muslim background believers, they are also interceding for believers in other contexts because they understand the cost of persecution and suffering." (These are stories from several believers from Muslim backgrounds from North Africa. I have used pseudonyms for confidentiality).

The reality of spiritual warfare. MBBs constantly face the realities of spiritual warfare as they exercise their faith in their communities. Persecuted believers become wiser in dealing with the attacks from the enemy. They start to think and then act because every action might be costly (Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

"When we think about the Great Commission and Global Mission (Matthew 28:18-20), we see the clash of two kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness (John 1:5; 2 Corinthians 4:6). There are still 42% of people groups in different contexts that need to have access to the gospel, and the enemy is actively working to prevent it. The spiritual resistance is real" (Cashin & Cuartas 2023, 25-26).

The following story reflects the power of prayer and intercession:

> One night, around two o'clock in the morning, *Baballah* was confronted. Two armed men forcefully pushed their way inside his home and tried to enter the room where he and a friend were praying. The gunmen shouted before opening fire through the closed door.
>
> *Baballah* prayed earnestly for safety and rescue. "I was praying seriously to God, lifting my hands and pointing to the door where the armed men were forcefully pushing," he recalled. God answered. "After opening my eyes, the armed men were nowhere to be found. I felt that God answered my prayer and did a miracle." It was the first time in his life that *Baballah* felt the power of prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. (*Global Christian Relief* 2023a).

1 Peter 4:13a

"But to the degree that you share the *sufferings of Christ…*" (emphasis mine).

2. MBBs walk boldly and confidently, experiencing God in powerful ways as they share Christ's sufferings.

Muslim background believers are bold in sharing their faith and are willing to follow Jesus regardless of persecution. Followers of Christ have the confidence to share the gospel with friends, neighbors, relatives, and authorities amidst persecution and trials. Some of them are already tired of hiding their faith in Christ. There is a very strong commitment to Christ. From the beginning of their conversion to Christ, new believers are challenged to follow Christ regardless of the social, economic, and religious consequences. The story of Hamid clearly illustrates the importance of sharing Christ even with our enemies. "As a member of Pakistan's tiny Christian minority, Hamid

was treated poorly by Muslims in his community. By God's grace, however, today Hamid loves and shares Christ with his persecutors (The Voice of the Martyrs 2021).

The testimonies of believers who live in Christian minority countries express the faithfulness of God and the strength to walk daily with a sense of hope (Romans 8:24; 12:12).

Perseverance and endurance during trials allow them to grow spiritually and encourage believers in other ministry contexts. "Adversity can become our best friend if we are willing to grow and learn in the process" (Cuartas 2009, 71-72).

The following is a testimony of a female believer from a Muslim background who experienced difficult challenges with the community leaders and her own husband, but despite the trials, she remained faithful in Christ. *Shamai*, suffered great persecution. The Imam gathered several local residents and demanded that she renounce her faith in Jesus. The sister's husband was frightened and demanded she renounce her faith in Christ. He threatened and beat his daughter. *Shamai* chose to remain faithful to Christ amid these challenges. Together with four children, she moved to another city. (One of our leaders shared the story via email on August 30, 2024).

1 Peter 4:13b

"*Keep on rejoicing*, so that also at the revelation of His glory *you may rejoice with exultation*" (emphases mine).

3. MBBs rejoice in God's promises and recognize the importance of studying the Word of God.

High value on the Word of God. MBBs treasure the opportunity to read and study the Word of God in their own language and dialects (Matthew 24:35; Hebrews 4:12). In most of these communities, the new believers are encouraged to spend time with the Word of God and memorize key Scriptures to share them with others without access to the Bible. The importance and power of the Word of God is illustrated in the following story:

> Sadou from Burkina Faso was raised from childhood to make and sell Islamic charms. One day, he read a Christian brochure in his native Fulani language and asked a Christian for a Bible. "I was so curious as a Muslim," he said. "What is this faith? And as I read it, I realized that Jesus is pure." He eventually came to faith in Christ. A Muslim offered him $6,000 to return to Islam, but Sadou refused. He now attends a school designed to help Fulani Christians grow in their faith (The Voice of the Martyrs 2024b).

1 Peter 4:14

"If you are *reviled* for the name of Christ [the Messiah], you are blessed, because the *Spirit of glory and of God rests on you* (emphases mine)."

4. MBBs experience different kinds of rejection but rely on the Holy Spirit.

Daily dependence on the Holy Spirit. Due to the constant persecution and pressure at different levels, MBBs acknowledge the need for daily dependence and direction from the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Some of the followers of Christ are often dealing with their persecutors.

This story shows us the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers:

> Michel grew up in a Muslim family in Burkina Faso, never having heard about the Christian God. But when his father became greatly sick, his family was willing to try anything to have him cured. They heard that if a Christian pastor prayed for him, he'd be healed. So, one Sunday, they went to church. During the service, the pastor preached about sin and how everyone is a sinner—that Jesus is the only One who can save from sin. Pastor Michel says, "The Holy Spirit convicted me, and I decided to give my life to Jesus." Days after Pastor Michel accepted Christ into his heart, his father was completely healed (*Global Christian Relief*, 2024a).

Concluding Remarks

This article has examined the motif of "suffering" in Peter's first letter, focusing on 1 Peter 4:12-14. Several missiological lessons regarding suffering amid challenges can be applied to global missions. The article also examined how Muslim background believers live out 1 Peter 4:12-14.

These three verses in I Peter are appropriate to MBBs because they experience challenges like those experienced by first-century believers. Amid trials and persecution, MBBs are persevering in their faith; they are willing to pay the price to follow Jesus. To overcome persecution and trials, MBBs emphasize the importance of prayer, memorizing the Scriptures, and depending daily on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

MBBs are a great example for Christians around the world. The following encouraging words of John Wesley are appropriate for concluding this study: "If we suffer persecution and affliction in a right manner, we attain a larger measure of conformity to Christ, by a due improvement of one of these occasions, than we could have done merely by imitating his mercy, in abundance of good works" (Emory 1853, 525).

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The Honor-Shame Conversation in Evangelical Missiology: Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract

The concepts of honor and shame, once peripheral to evangelical missiology, have become pivotal in mission practice, cross-cultural theology, and biblical interpretation. This article traces the evolution of honor-shame as a focal item of study in evangelical missiology, highlighting key moments, figures, and publications that brought these themes to prominence. Despite the growing body of resources, the conversation remains fluid, with challenges such as definitional ambiguity, overgeneralization, and a lack of cohesive frameworks. The article emphasizes the need for continued critical engagement, nuanced understanding, and integration of honor-shame perspectives into missiological training, thus ensuring these insights enrich global ministry without oversimplifying cultural dynamics.

Key Words: evangelical missiology, face, honor, honor-shame, shame

Introduction

There was a time when *honor* and *shame* barely registered on the radar of missiology—cultural notions with little practical weight, acknowledged but not at all connected to the field's heartbeat. Fast forward to today, and these important concepts have surged to the forefront, increasing in importance for evangelical missiology. This brief survey examines the evolution of the honor-shame conversation within evangelical missiology, tracing its ascent in English-language scholarship from a marginal idea to a critical framework of missional thought and practice.

What some refer to as the honor-shame "model" or "paradigm" is more accurately understood as an ongoing conversation. This dialogue, while rich in insight, is often marked by a lack of coherent structure, overgeneralization, definitional ambiguity, and apriorism that limit its clarity. Rather than crafting a formal, systematic model, the evangelical missiological community has embraced a more fluid dialogue, where contributors explore these themes without consistent boundaries or shared definitions. Despite this absence of a unified framework, there is consensus on two key points: categories such as *honor*, *face*, and *shame*—along with related dynamics like *patronage*—should be critically important in missiological reflection, and Western missiology has largely neglected these categories' significance.

Over the past several decades, however, there has been a noteworthy increase in interest in honor-shame issues. For example, a search on the research website academia.com for "honor shame culture" yields 6,454 followers of that topic, while an "honor shame missions" search shows 21,370 full text papers. A Google search for "honor shame missions" currently yields 8,090,000 hits; the same search that sets differential time parameters for a search yields the following results:

1980-1989 769 hits
1990-1999 2,820 hits
2000-2009 27,200 hits
2010-2019 218,000 hits
2020-September 23, 2024 2,300,000 hits

A YouTube.com search for "honor-shame missions" yields a similarly impressive number of diverse honor-shame resources (church-based, various organizations, academic, etc.) related explicitly to mission engagement.

The Research

This current flourishing interest, however, can mask the fact that the missiological conversation regarding honor-shame issues has not existed for long. While acknowledging the rich contributions of German and Scandinavian missiological literature, this study focused on resources available in English. This research traced honor-shame references or discussions in several prominent mission journals, including all issues of *Acta Missiologiae*, *Asian Missions Advance* (Asia Mission Association), *Asian Missiology*, *British and Irish Association for Mission Studies-Occasional Newsletter*, *Chinese Theological Review* (English), *Currents in Theology and Mission*, *Dharma Deepika: A South Asian Journal of Missiological Research*, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, *Global Missiology* (English), *International Bulletin of Missionary/Mission Research*, *International Journal of Frontier Missiology, International Review of Mission*, *Journal of Asian Mission*, *Journal of World Christianity*, *Missio Dei Journal*, *Missio Apostolica* (Lutheran Mission Matters), *Missiology*, *Mission Frontiers*, *Mission Studies*, *Practical Anthropology*, and *The South East Asian Journal of Theology*. Also, 45 mission texts dating back to the 1950s and continuing through the early 2000s were reviewed; these texts can be considered major missiological works utilized broadly in Western educational institutions that have taught missions. Finally, this study consulted all mission-related dictionaries and encyclopedias that could be located. Each resource was read closely with an eye toward any discussion of honor, face, and shame. While this study does not here claim comprehensiveness, but the sources consulted represent the major missiological journals and key works for evangelical missiology in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Admittedly, there are likely holes in what was reviewed, hence help in finding more discussions of honor-shame that might have been missed are welcome via a specially created free online database (Flanders n.d.a.).

The results of the just-described research were surprising. Some key resources did indeed mention honor and shame issues. For example, Hwa Yung, the Chinese Malaysian church leader and theologian, in his exceptional book, *Mangos or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, discusses guilt and shame briefly (Yung 1997, 70-71). Later, he poses the provocative question, "How are we to teach the idea of sin and guilt in Asian cultures where often the primary concern with wrong-doing is shame?" (Yung 1997, 198). Even so, Yung does not engage the issue in an extensive fashion. David Hesselgrave's magisterial *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* mentions shame in particular (Hesselgrave 1991, 591-592, 603, 610-612.). Also, in *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, Hesselgrave includes a very brief discussion of the guilt-shame distinction (Hesselgrave 2000, 273). Finally, in Harvey Conn's edited volume *The Urban Face of Mission*, there appears an entire chapter, "African Theology from the Perspective of Honor and Shame," by Andrew Mbuvi (Mbuvi 2002, 279-339). These appearances of honor and shame themes, however, were the exceptions.

More typically, major missiological works did not mention honor, face, or shame. In missions journal articles, major missiological texts, mission-related dictionaries and encyclopedias, anthropology texts written for missionaries, and those texts that surveyed contemporary missiological issues, most of twentieth-century evangelical missiology did not grant issues of honor and shame a primary seat of importance at the missiological table.

The Emergence of Honor-Shame in Missiology

When did evangelical missiology begin to pay attention to honor-shame issues? Arthur H. Smith, an ABCFM missionary to China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, authored an important book, *Chinese Characteristics* (Smith 1894). This work was not a mission text but was intended for broader public consumption. Even so, Smith's book represented perhaps the very first English language cross-cultural discussion of shame and face. As it came from the pen of an experienced missionary, the book deserves mention here. Also, some Catholic mission discussions engaged honor-shame issues. For example, in 1929 Joseph Rutten wrote an article, "Christian Conversion in China: Source of Shame of Pride," on how missionary communication often created unnecessary shame for new Chinese believers (Rutten 1965). Rutten advocated a contextualized theology that elevated honor as a basic component of reaching the Chinese heart and mind.

It was not until the work of Eugene Nida, however, that the honor-shame conversation in evangelical missiology formally began. Most today are quite familiar with Nida's tripartite schema of fear, guilt, and shame he proposes in his influential book *Customs and Cultures*: "We have to reckon with three different types of reactions to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: fear, shame, and guilt. (Nida 1975, 150). In mentioning these three codes, Nida does not argue that they represent different *types of cultures* (merely noting them as three responses to transgression). With this configuration, Nida's influential voice formally introduced shame into the missiological conversation, with many subsequent early authors referring specifically to Nida and this tripartite notion as basic to their understanding of honor and shame. Unfortunately, despite Nida's anthropological acumen, he misunderstands shame in his discussions and incorrectly defines guilt and shame, defining guilt as an "inner feeling of failure for not having lived up to what the society or the deity expects" (150), which is ironically a definition of shame. Interestingly, Nida's mistake remains common in much Western literature, where authors frequently conflate or confuse guilt with shame. He also insinuates that guilt is morally superior to shame, noting incorrectly, in this author's opinion, that it is rarer to find people who experience guilt because "irrespective of whether one is caught or not…fear and shame are much more convenient attitudes for self-centered people" (150). Though responsible for introducing the honor-shame related terms into missiology, Nida still represents several misunderstandings of shame.

In the 1960's, the earliest missiological conversations of honor-shame issues began to appear in the *Journal of Practical Anthropology* (later the journal *Missiology*). Though sporadic and typically not extensive, these missiological discussions in the journal represented the earliest extended attempts to address these issues. The first of these was from Walter Trobisch, who engaged in a very brief discussion of shame in his 1961 article on church discipline in Africa:

> Finally, we must not forget that African culture is not concerned with guilt but with shame. The practical conduct of the African is not the result of inner deliberation but is conditioned by external control. A deed only becomes a wrong when it is discovered, branded as such, and punished by the surrounding society-be it the tribe or the congregation. One's guilt before God is not feared, but the shame in the eyes of men surely is. Thus, conduct can only be influenced by means of this fear (Trobisch 1961, 201).

Trobisch suggested that defective discipline, due to shame considerations, which allowed members to continue in sin yet remain in fellowship and continue to take the Lord's Supper might result in the "first really significant heresy which African churches" might produce (206).

The first article that dealt focally with issues of honor-shame was that of missionary to Thailand David Filbeck. In "Concepts of Sin and Atonement among the Thin," Filbeck argued for a contextualized soteriology and hamartiology, as he noted how the Thin (often termed T'in or Lua, a minority indigenous tribe in northern Thailand and parts of Laos) did not experience guilt in strong forms like many Westerners. Filbeck suggested that missionaries should reframe sin as "offending God" (shame-based) rather than simply the breaking of God's law (guilt-based) (Filbeck 1964, 182). In his estimation, such a reframing would make better sense of the T'in common experience of shame in response to moral failure.

Another early engagement was that from F. B. Welbourn, an ardent Christian and noted Africanist who spent nearly 20 years as chaplain and lecturer at Makerere College in Uganda. In the published proceedings from a conference held at the University of Ghana in 1965, Welbourn contributed a chapter entitled, "Some Problems of African Christianity: Guilt and Shame" (Welbourn 1968). In that study, Welbourn investigated "whether Protestant Christianity—preached largely in terms of salvation from guilt—could be understood by members of traditional African societies: or whether they had first to undergo an Anglo-Saxon type of education before they could appreciate the fundamental assumptions either of the missionaries or of colonial administrators" (192). The chapter, as well as other parts of the scholarly dialog published in the book, offered a sophisticated investigation of "whether men must pass through a 'natural' transition from shame to guilt before they can be open to grace" (130-131).

Lowell Noble: Naked and Not Ashamed

It would not be until 1975 that a major work on honor-shame would finally emerge. Anthropologist and sociologist Lowell Noble self-published the very first extensive treatise that discussed honor, shame, and face as significant missiological and theological issues (Noble 1975a). Noble's work follows his MA thesis from the University of Western Michigan, "Preparing Christian Missionaries to Work in Shame Oriented Cultures" (Noble 1975b). He queries, "How does a person preach a guilt oriented gospel to a shame oriented culture? Is the gospel of Jesus Christ as guilt oriented as we Westerners tend to think it is? …I had assumed that guilt was a universal phenomenon. After all, the Bible declares that all men are sinners. Are not sin and guilt inseparable?" (viii). Noble acknowledges that it was the writing of Nida that sparked his curiosity in this important area.

Profoundly biblical, Noble's work devotes a significant portion to discussing honor and shame in the biblical text. Noble's was the first missiological voice that made the claim (novel at the time, though now routinely expressed) that there existed more in scripture about the experiences of shame and honor than that of guilt and innocence. He argued that the experience of shame tends to be deeper and more personal than that of guilt and noted how shame is not univocal but could be quite varied in differing cultural contexts. The book gained a positive *Christianity Today* review from Dr. Kenneth Pike, the eminent bible translator and missiologist, alerting the public of the growing conversation about honor and shame (Pike 1976). Noble's work was truly significant precisely for how many early voices (e.g., Pike, Wayne Dye, Robert Priest, and Rolland Muller) referenced *Naked and Not Ashamed* as an inspiration for their discussions about sin, guilt, conscience, honor, and shame. Though often forgotten in the honor-shame conversation, there is likely no more seminal early work in this area than that of Noble.

Norman Kraus

In 1987, C. Norman Kraus, a Mennonite missionary in Japan, wrote another significant evangelical work addressing issues of honor-shame. Kraus argued that the Japanese mind simply did not track with his Western theological and communication approaches. His book *Jesus Christ Our Lord* grapples with issues of honor, shame, sin, and soteriology (Kraus 1987). As one of the first to do contextual theology with honor and shame as a primary focus, Kraus labors to show how the cross of Jesus deals with both guilt and shame, discussing Jesus' vicarious solidarity and identification with humanity to remove the shame that sin brings and the new honor that Jesus' death and resurrection grant. Along with Noble's book, the volume by Kraus represented a watershed resource in the emerging development of the honor-shame conversation.

Roland Muller

In 2000, Roland Muller wrote his now well-known *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Muller 2001). Perhaps the most referenced honor-shame work during the first decade of the 2000s, Muller's book gained popularity due to its accessibility (it is just over 100 pages in length), his memorable designation of "The Eden Effect" (that the sin of Adam brings fear, guilt, *and* shame), and his generalizing of honor-shame issues broadly. Though written for a Muslim context, his emphasis on how most of the 10/40 window world lived in "shame cultures" made the book eminently usable by missionaries outside Islamic contexts. Muller drew explicitly on Noble's earlier work and highlighted the need to make honor and shame salient to cross-cultural attempts to communicate atonement and models of salvation. This 2000 publication refocused and injected new energy into the global honor-shame conversation.

Dictionaries

Besides the publication of Muller's work, another major event occurred in 2000. The actual publication itself was modest but symbolically important. Early dictionaries of mission did not have entries on honor or shame (e.g., Neill et al. 1971, Müller et al. 1999). However, in 2000 the Baker *Evangelical Dictionary for Missions* became the first missions dictionary or encyclopedia to contain an entry on shame (Priest 2000). Then, in 2008, the *Global Dictionary of Theology* included entries for both face and shame, though it did not include an entry for honor (Flanders 2008a; 2008b). The symbolic importance of these inclusions signaled how honor-shame issues had "arrived" in an even more official way.

Conferences

Another way to mark the growth of the honor-shame conversation is to look at conferences. On September 19-22, 2013, nearly 100 participants gathered at Andrews University for a conference dealing with the challenge of presenting biblical themes in honor-shame contexts (Andrews University 2024). This was the first conference to focus exclusively on honor-shame issues. Though denominationally based, with mostly those from the Adventist Church participating, it represented a truly watershed moment, i.e., a conference focused on honor-shame issues. A book of conference proceedings was published the following year (Bauer 2014) A year later, at Houston Baptist University, the International Orality Network (ION) brought 65 leaders together during July 7–10, 2014 for a conference, "Beyond Literate Western Contexts: Honor and Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference." Several attendees had begun writing and blogging about honor-shame. This serendipitous meeting of various leaders resulted in a new structure, the Honor-Shame

Network, which hosted the first-ever global conference on honor-shame, held at Wheaton College in June of 2017. Nearly 300 participants gathered to hear lectures, attend workshops, and network around issues of honor-shame. The focus on the various topics was multi-dimensional, i.e., presenters discussed honor-shame issues from pastoral, strategic, theological, hermeneutical, and biblical perspectives. Many of the presentations from the conference were subsequently published as *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel: Reframing Our Message and Ministry* (Flanders & Mischke 2020). This 2017 conference, a direct result of connections and conversation from the 2014 ION consultation, indicated a critical mass and established momentum for the global honor-shame conversation within evangelical missiology. Sadly, the 2020 Global Conference on Honor and Shame was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic (though the planned schedule on the website testifies to the extremely broad array of topics, workshops, and lectures (HonorShame 2024). Additionally, another first of its kind was the global symposium organized and led by leaders outside North America. In conjunction with the School of Theology at Singapore Bible College, Dr. Samuel Law organized a three-day symposium, "Contextual Issues of Honor & Shame in Spiritual Formation: Helix-SOTE Conference 2023," (Singapore Bible College 2024). This event, in particular, testifies to the emergence of honor-shame conversations as a critical issue that Evangelicals worldwide are taking seriously.

A New Surge of Honor-Shame Resources

Since 2014, honor-shame resources have steadily increased. Four books have especially fueled this recent uptick: Jackson Wu's *Saving God's Face* (Wu 2012), Jayson Georges's *The 3D Gospel* (Georges 2013), Werner Mischke's *The Global Gospel* (Mischke 2015), and Georges and Baker's *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures* (Georges & Baker 2016). Many other helpful resources have emerged as well. CRU (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) has developed an evangelistic tool that focuses on honor-shame: *Honor Restored*, a part of their auto-translatable *GodTools* app, reconfigures the classic *4 Spiritual Laws* with honor-shame in mind (Cru 2024). Many high-quality evangelistic resources are available on YouTube, such as "Back to God's Village" (HonorShame n.d.). *The Father's Love*, available online in multiple languages, is an evangelistic tract explaining the father and two sons parable from Luke 15 with special attention to honor-shame dimensions (Mischke 2012). Honorshame.com has become the de facto clearinghouse for global honor-shame resources, housing an exceptional amount of missiologically significant resources. Dr. Timothy Tennant, former president of Asbury Seminary and leading Western missiological voice, devoted an entire chapter in his *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* to honor-shame issues (Tennant 2007, 77-104). Jackson Wu's book, *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes*, which received *Christianity Today's* 2020 Book of the Year Award of Merit for Biblical Studies, examines prevalent honor-shame themes in Paul (Wu 2019).

Another important development has been the emergence of voices engaging the often overlooked yet key area of face and facework studies. A recent volume by Dr. Jolene Kinser takes narratives of Chinese Christians and carefully engages issues of face, honor, and reconciliation (Kinser 2023). Missiological engagement with the issue of face has come exclusively from Western authors, but Dr. Mano Emmanuel, a Sri Lankan seminary professor, in her groundbreaking work on reconciliation, shame, and face, marks the first Majority World scholar to publish a significant volume in the area of face. Emmanuel's volume presents a model for culturally specific, missiological engagement in face and facework (Emmanuel 2020).

Academic Resources

An additional gauge to assess the importance of an issue in missiology is academic research from institutions of higher learning. In the mid-1980s, researchers began to focus theses and dissertations on honor-shame issues. The first of these (not counting Noble's earlier MA thesis) was the 1985 Fuller dissertation by Dr. Evertt Huffard, a contextualized theology of honor for the Muslim-Christian context (Huffard 1985). Paul Matsumoto, also at Fuller, quickly followed Huffard with a Th.M. thesis on "The Missiological Implications of Shame in the Japanese World" (Matsumoto 1985). As of 2024, this study counts 42 missiological theses and dissertations focusing on honor-shame issues (details are available in a specially created free online bibliography of academic these and dissertations on honor-shame issues (Flanders n.d.b.).

Honor-shame perspectives have also begun to work their way into missiological training in higher education. Missiological anthropologist Dr. Robert Priest has, starting in the early 1990s, taught a course (first at Columbia Biblical Seminary and Graduate School of Missions and subsequently at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) titled "Sin, Shame, and Guilt," using both Noble's *Naked and Not Ashamed* and Muller's *Honor and Shame* as texts. Dr. Tom Steffen has taught graduate courses at the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University and in differing contexts around the world titled "Honor and Shame in Scripture & Service" and "Honor & Shame Themes in Scripture & Ministry." These courses focus on honor-shame issues as they relate to global ministry and theology. More recently, at the East Asia School of Theology, Dr. Raymond Song has taught a course entitled "Honor, Shame, Guilt, and Sin." It remains to be seen which visionary institution will be the first to create a certificate, or full degree, in honor-shame studies for missions and ministry.

Future Directions for the Honor-Shame Conversation

As important as this growing global conversation is, it is imperative to remember that understanding the issues of honor, face, and shame is not a missiological "silver bullet." It is common for those committed to an emerging set of new lenses to overstate the value of the particular approach they advocate. Critical for helping this conversation move forward is the commitment that, though an increased understanding of honor, face, and shame is a powerful addition to the missiological "toolkit," it must never be viewed as a missiological panacea. Moreover, voices that remind us of this important truth and bring a critical eye to this missiological conversion (Dunaetz 2021, Merz 2020, Ochs & Cozen 2019, Whiteman 2018) are welcomed, pushing the missiological community to greater precision and depth.

Those who teach or occupy positions of organizational leadership in the English-speaking missiological world must continue encouraging this conversation, extending and mainstreaming honor-shame ideas and frameworks. Professors and teachers should include in their course syllabi sections on these issues and include in their bibliographies and recommended reading important sources that deal with issues of honor, face, and shame. Similarly, those who work in organizational leadership should sponsor seminars that tackle these issues and include in training materials biblical and cultural perspectives on honor-face-shame issues.

Researchers and writers in this area should labor to bring about greater clarity in missiology's theoretical understandings and definitions. Scholars often speak past one another, using similar terms with different meanings. Greater definitional agreement about these topics is needed. Another critical issue is that of essentializing and generalizing concepts. That is, univocal or

essentialized understandings need to shift to more nuanced and multivalent definitions and approaches. Even the convenient shorthand labeling of cultures as "honor cultures," "shame cultures," "face cultures," "guilt cultures," etc., conceals and misleads as much as it reveals. It is certainly true that all human cultures "do honor," "do shame," and "do face," and all function with notions of "guilt" and "guiltiness." However, key cultural differences exist in areas of valence, motivation, and the weighting of diverse forms of these dynamics for individuals and communities. The habit of categorizing large cultural units in terms of these over-generalized labels should give way to investigating each unique cultural configuration of honor, face, and shame dynamics.

In addition, missiologists must update their working notions of anthropology. Theories from earlier anthropologists (e.g., Mead, Benedict, and the categorization schema from the anthropology of honor and shame in the 1960s and 1970s) are now rejected by contemporary anthropology (Flanders 2019, Merz 2020). Members of the missions community, who desire above all things to understand the world and people truthfully, must become conversant with contemporary changes in anthropological and social scientific theories.

Finally, this growing honor-shame conversation, which in the understanding of this study has progressed primarily in the English-speaking Western world, must continue to globalize. It must extend more deeply into the cultural frameworks and local languages of churches worldwide. Those invested in this conversation should use existing resources to cultivate the developing perspectives on honor, face, and shame, especially among emerging Majority World voices. Current participants in the conversation need to intentionally recruit and assist local leaders and scholars to extend related insights into their own linguistic and cultural contexts.

The honor-shame conversation has evolved from a neglected to a pivotal dimension of evangelical missiology. The potential of this conversation lies in a global collaboration across cultures and languages. By fostering networks of thinkers, leaders, and practitioners who engage deeply with culturally specific expressions of honor and shame, churches around the world can articulate their identities in Christ with authenticity and integrity, using the lenses of honor, face, and shame. Advancing the conversation will require humility, advocacy, and a commitment to empowering local leaders to exert their theological voices. The challenge ahead is great, but so is the opportunity to transform honor, face, and shame in evangelical missiology into a truly global conversation. The future awaits all relevant parties' faithful participation.

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Book Review

Benno van den Toren and Kang-San Tan,
Humble Confidence: A Model for Interfaith Apologetics

Reviewed by John Cheong

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, January 2025

Van den Toren, B. and Kang-San Tan (2022). *Humble Confidence: A Model for Interfaith Apologetics.* IVP Academic, Downers Grove, CA, 296 pp., $32.99 paperback, ISBN: 9780830852949.

What is the best way to conduct apologetics in our religiously plural and globalized world today? Are logical or propositional-based arguments still effective, or should we now explore other approaches? In *Humble Confidence*, Van den Toren and Tan argue that "many of the dominant approaches to apologetics are ill-equipped for the cosmopolitan, multireligious, and multicultural environments in which we find ourselves today [because] Western Christian apologetics is too often insufficiently contextual [and] too insufficiently Christian" (1-2).

The authors (who both have lived and worked in the U.S. and Europe, with experience in different religious and secular contexts) seek an apologetics that is contextually effective to engage today's diverse environments. For Van den Toren and Tan, apologetics is an "art," not "a science or technique but "an individual and communal journey" to understand non-Christians and their beliefs with "increasing sensitivity to particular needs and barriers" to attractively present Christ (2).

They term their approach "apologetic witness, apologetic dialogue, and holistic apologetics"; the last especially addresses "the entire person with their emotions, commitments, and attachments" (3). Moreover, apologetics is to be the task of the entire Christian community, not only the professional apologist.

Van den Toren and Tan's model has both practical and theoretical aspects for interreligious apologetic witness and dialogue. The model builds on a trinitarian theology of religions and the world, philosophical insights in epistemology, and recent developments in missiology (5). Christian conversion testimonies are also stressed to bridge the foundationalist model of apologetics (that omits personal Christian stories) with postmodern religiosity that prefers human experiences that are socio-culturally embodied in a community (5). Part 1 (chs. 1-7) explains the nature and type of their apologetic approach, while part 2 (chs. 8-13) are case studies of religious groups and beliefs that illustrate their model.

Chapter 1 critiques universal foundationalism by showing how the four Gospels were crafted differently for different audiences. Additionally, Paul's apologetics toward the Jews and Greeks used different entry points and arguments to appeal to each audience's culture and affections (16-22). That Paul was fully and bodily present in each encounter demonstrates how apologetics "should be holistic, addressing not just free-floating minds, but dialoguing with real human beings as integrated personalities … all embedded in their histories, relationships, communities and societies" (28). Thus, any apologetics must engage with different communication styles and trust-building with specific audiences (38-40); in evangelistic encounters, Christians' knowledge and style of persuasion and argumentation are culturally conditioned (78-79).

To avoid relativism, relying on a trinitarian theology of religions shows God's diverse ways of revelation among various peoples and the Spirit's work to relate to particular witnessing points in their contexts (60-67, 72-75). Such trinitarian theology as a foundation for apologetics is better than foundationalist approaches because Christianity has no other basis than Christ. However, the "particularity of this starting point [is] deeply problematic for Western modernity which supposes that trustworthy knowledge can only be based on a universally accessible or acceptable foundation" other than Christ (78).

Additionally, "predispositions" (at the level of the will or emotion) affect how the apologetic witness is received (93). Consequently, trust in the Spirit to discern and "heal deep hurts and overcome human resistance" is key (94).

However, because Christian faith is not based on a universally accessible type of knowledge "but on the self-revelation of God in … Christ, [the] basis for trustworthy religious knowledge differs among different religions [whether] it [is] revelation, wisdom or enlightenment and how should each of these be understood" (78-79).

In addition, "a growing openness to truth … does not demand neutrality and disengagement [but] the development of appropriate desires and attitudes, [and] healthy virtues of the mind" (119). Thus, deploying biblical narratives or personal testimonies "appeals to our emotions and desires" and makes such a world "emotionally credible and even appealing" (122). Naturally, the messenger's life or story must be credible so that the story comes across as true.

A final key discussion advances the triangular nature (or three points) of interreligious dialogue and persuasion (97-98): (1) God's revelation is a reality independent of our interpretation. (2) This revelation is transmitted and received in Christian witnesses' own perspectives. (3) It is also transmitted and received in *other* people's perspectives. Thus, rather than convincing others to understand and receive Christ through our *own* perspective (point 2), we as Christian witnesses should invite others to explore divinely revealed reality (point 1) via their own perspectives (point 3) while we continually interact with their reflections.

As we interact with others in the manner just described, the authors argue, we Christians can be enriched in the insights that followers of other religious traditions bring from their own religious understandings (125, 163-164). With Buddhists, dialoguing with their concern for search to realize their "no-self" (or non-self) with Christianity's view of losing oneself gives new insight to both parties about desiring God as the object of our true desires that Christ liberates us from (187). With Muslims, grappling with Islam's claim as the "natural, rational and sensible religion" uncovers shared tensions within Christianity of how Islamic (and Christian) rationality explains many features of life but not of the many ways God reveals himself to humanity (195-202).

Van den Toren and Tan assert that secularism's idols are more complex; secular modernity's idols are akin to a pseudo monotheistic religion—replacing the one true God with another that is "the highest authority to be obeyed, the greatest good to be sought after, and the most secure source of help in trouble" (213). Conversely secular *post*modernity resembles a polytheism where no god is the ultimate authority or truth, but there are simply regional deities for different peoples (214). Engaging postmodernity uncovers similarities to the Greco-Roman worldview: behind their polytheism was a "highest authority" that assigned regional gods and beliefs to their people and place, so long as the Roman Empire's rule and worldview remained unchallenged (214-215).

Van den Toren and Tan also discuss how, while secularism's beliefs ultimately fail as human constructs, they are in fact another form of belief. However, secularism diminishes humans to live in earth-bound goals, whereas Christian faith turns human desires toward a transcendence that only a real God can satisfy (216-219).

Overall, *Humble Confidence* showcases a kind of apologetics that is dynamically relational and listening, context-sensitive, and holistically focused. The book's approach succeeds by modeling how "to take these religious and secular traditions seriously, as culturally embedded and embodied attitudes to life in which worldview, values, deep quests, and the emotive layers of existence are intertwined," to "communicate, bridges [and] be reminded of the inadequacy of our own views and attitudes toward life" (241). In this way, apologetics becomes "a dialogue that is attentive to others and a witness to a truth that we do not own" (242), yet bears that truth by the grace revealed to us in Christ.

Even as the book takes seriously a trinitarian theology of religions and the Spirit's witness in encounters, the authors curiously neglect discussing prayer and trust in the Spirit's power and presence to protect our apologetic witness from demonic (not just human, sociocultural, or emotional) opposition. Because the god of this world has blinded unbelievers from seeing the gospel, prayer for breakthroughs is needed (2 Cor 3:17 – 4:4)!

Notwithstanding this oversight, the book is a watershed development in apologetics for better engagements with all non-Christians. It rewards Western readers by expanding the horizons of apologetics to be greatly contextual and humble, and it aids non-Westerners with a non-confrontational and relational approach that are relevant where Christians live as minorities. Students and teachers in particular will profit from well-crafted study questions and further readings at the back of the book (243-252).

Book Review

Sadiri Joy Tira, ed., *From Womb to Tomb: Generational Missiology in the 21st Century and Beyond*

Reviewed by Sam George

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, January 2025

Tira, Sadiri Joy, ed. (2024). *From Womb to Tomb: Generational Missiology in the 21st Century and Beyond*. Edmonton, Canada: Sadiri Joy Tira/PageMaster Publishing, ISBN: 978-1-77354-585-1 (paperback) pp. 184, $13.04, ISBN: 978-1-77354-586-8 (ebook) $5.79.

The editor of this book, Dr. Sadiri Joy Tira, was my predecessor as a Catalyst of Diasporas for the Lausanne Movement. I was privileged to pick up the baton from him and run this race over the last ten years. I have known Dr. Tira in diverse settings, as our roles overlapped for a couple of years. Now as I am in the process of transitioning to the next band of leaders, I found that perusing this volume was timely and served well to remind me of the essential ethos of Christian leadership: develop the next generation of leaders.

This book is about intergenerational dynamics in mission leadership. It begins with biblical foundations of several Old and New Testament characters modeling generational transitions. Next the book explores missiological dimensions of intergenerational missions before showcasing a set of case studies spanning many generations and distinct struggles facing each. The book concludes with pastoral exhortations to pass on the legacy of faith and mission passion to others.

The central thrust of this volume is intergenerational missions—described as missions at the intersection of global intercultural, hybrid diasporas, and new technologies. Each generation must pass on the great heritage of faith they have inherited and avoid the mistakes of past generations. All Christian leaders must develop a lifelong perspective on leadership and be cognizant of generational discontinuities that will allow divergent styles and modes to serve God's greater purposes for every generation. Such a posture requires leaders to honor the past, embrace change, and focus on passing the baton of vibrant faith to the future, which will be leaders' greatest legacy.

The first section of the book brings out several intergenerational insights from biblical characters such as Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Ruth and Noami, Paul and Timothy, and others—insights that are always pertinent to all leaders. One point that stood out for me is the aging of Christian institutions and models in the West along with the pressing need to train more leaders in the majority world, besides the generational diversity in organizations and the many challenges and opportunities that diversity offers. Learning and growing are no longer one-directional, from older to younger, but a two-way street. Older leaders must find mentors from younger generations and remain curious and teachable, even as they nurture other leaders.

Do not misinterpret the title of the book. Leaders are not in their positions of influence from the womb all the way to their tombs. Christian leaders do not cling to any chair or title for life. When a leader's identity and funding get wrapped up in a particular position or title, giving it away can be hard and create insecurity and uncertainty. Leaders are called to continually nurture other leaders and pass on the mantel of leadership to others, who will in turn do the same. In Lausanne circles, we joke around that our number one job is to replace ourselves—and we have five years to do that. We all serve voluntarily in leadership roles for a five-year term and can only serve a maximum of two terms.

This book reminds all Christian leaders of the importance of passing on the baton of faith and multiplying their efforts to nurture godly leaders who will be their greatest legacy. May we who are

blessed and tasked to be Christian leaders cry out with the Psalmistt, “Do no forsake me, O God until I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.” (71:18).

Book Review

Abeneazer G. Urga, Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither, eds., *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message and Methods of 1 Peter*

Reviewed by J. Nelson Jennings

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, January 2025

Urga, Abeneazer G., Udall, Jessica A., and Smither, Edward L., eds. (2024). *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message and Methods of 1 Peter*. Littleton, CO, USA: William Carey Publishing, 264 pp., $23.99, paperback, ISBN: 9781645085850, $13.99, ebook.

Reading 1 Peter Missiologically follows its 2023 precursor, *Reading Hebrews Missiologically* (Urga et al. 2023). A similar volume on James is soon to follow. These volumes (and presumably others like them to come) are intended to fill the gap left by New Testament missiological scholarship's oversight of the general epistles.

This volume on 1 Peter has an instructive preface by the three editors, 15 chapters, a contributors list (of four women and 12 men), and a scripture index. As with the Hebrews volume, the chapters in *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically* are divided into three sections, the titles of which are spelled out in each book's subtitle: The Missionary Motive, Message and Methods of 1 Peter (or Hebrews). The book's structure makes for clear navigation of the volume as a whole.

A major strength of *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically* is the "diverse array of biblical scholars and missiologists hailing from and living in countries all over the world" (8). Chapters sparked by insights most particularly from African, Western, and Chinese contexts result. Such diversity embodies the Bible's—and in particular I Peter's—missional character of speaking the one gospel message appropriately in all settings.

Along that same multi-contextual vein, the authors' international experiences enhance their contributions. For example, the Norwegian Sigurd Grindheim, with years in both Ethiopia and in the USA, tackles the "Missional Implications of Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits" in 1 Peter 3:18-22 (329-354). Grindheim notes (no doubt in part autobiographically), "Perhaps because this worldview is so alien to modern, Western readers, the missional implications of this passage have largely gone unnoticed" (329). The Canadian Grant LeMarquand, in his chapter entitled "Eschatology and Mission in 1 Peter" (134-163), articulates a "fuller understanding of mission" that emphasizes both the primarily divine character of mission and a holistic approach (135). LeMarquand's sojourns in Northeast Africa and in the USA, along with international ecclesiastical and scholarly involvements, surely helped to shape his robust sensibilities about mission.

LeMarquand's explanation of "mission" is one of the volumes' few attempts at spelling out what "mission(s)" entails. The editors offer the disclaimer that no single definition of "mission" is given for the volume. Instead, each contributor is free to explain their own understanding of "this complex concept," with the intended result that "this book as a whole makes the idea of mission shine…." Readers will have to decide if indeed they gain insights into mission's "multi-faceted aspects in unique and edifying ways" (8-9) or if they are distracted by wondering what unexplained notions of mission drive each chapter's presentation.

On top of the book's attempt to allow for uncharted undercurrents of mission's "multi-faceted aspects," like most multi-authored (and multi-edited) volumes *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically* can at times feel a bit disjointed. Viewed positively, the editors' choice not to confine contributors to a single framework exemplifies the inherent diversity of worldwide Christianity and of the Christian mission(s) movement. At least as importantly, the complex and missional character of 1 Peter, and of the other New Testament general epistles, can be appreciated more fully. Bible teachers, mission scholars, theology/missiology students, and mission practitioners can all benefit, with thanksgiving, *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically* and its companion volumes.

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Urga, Abeneazer G., Udall, Jessica A., and Smither, Edward L., eds. (2023). *Reading Hebrews Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message and Methods of Hebrews*. Littleton, CO, USA: William Carey Publishing.

Book Review

Lalsangkima Pachuau and Allan Varghese Meloottu, eds.,
Christians and Christianity in India Today:
Historical, Theological and Missiological Assessments

Reviewed by J. N. Manokaran

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, January 2025

Pachuau, Lalsangkima and Meloottu, Allan Varghese, eds. (2024). *Christians and Christianity in India Today: Historical, Theological and Missiological Assessments*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, ISBN: 9781506493473 (paperback) pp. 306, $44, ISBN: 9781506493480 (ebook) $40.99.

This book is a collection of articles by different authors and edited by Lalsangkima Pachuau and Allan Varghese Meloottu. As the title states, the book is an attempt to assess the status of Christians and Christianity today. The book has 17 articles arranged in four sections: Historical Dimensions, Theological Dimensions, Social and Cultural Dimensions, and Missional Challenges.

Part 1: Historical Dimensions

The history of Christianity in India could be divided into four springs: 1) Thomas and Syrian Christianity, 2) Portuguese Catholics of the fifteenth century, 3) European Protestant missions, and 4) Charismatic movements. Available evidence of maritime trade routes between West Asia and South India explains the arrival of Thomas, one of the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, coming to India in 52 CE. While some, centuries later, were converted by administrative pressures of Portuguese Catholics, later many were converted by conviction by the preaching of the gospel by Franciscans from 1517 to 1539. "Francis Xavier's presence among the Paravas of Tamil Nadu (who were considered as low caste) is one of the early missionary examples of attempting to truly inform the natives of the catholic beliefs and practices beyond mere colonial impositions" (12). Francis Xavier worked with the lowest, and Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) worked among Brahmins, the highest. European Protestant missions began on 9 July 1706, when Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau arrived in Tranquebar. They established churches in Cuddalore (1717), Chennai (1726), and Tanjore (1728). "For the Protestant missionaries, education and church planting went hand in hand" (15). Dalits were given access by the Protestant missionaries to study in the schools. As the Bible became readily available in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam, a wave of reformations and revivals emerged. Those developments laid a strong foundation for an indigenous church in India.

Three matters deserve special attention when considering North India. First, that region is India's most challenging mission field. Second, North India is home to the most persecuted Christians. Third, it is home to vibrant and growing forms of Christianity today. Archaeological evidence shows the presence of the Church in North India centuries ago: Udaypur (a small village in Madhya Pradesh) had a church in the eleventh century. Akbar welcomed Christians, listened, but did not take baptism. Christian mission in Agra flourished, and Jesuits reached up to Lahore. Later Mughals like Shah Jahan (1628) persecuted Christians. Shivraj Mahendra makes an interesting observation regarding caste within the church: "This was in sharp contrast to missions in the South where a lenient attitude toward the caste system existed." Perhaps, the better growth of the church in South India has been partly due to accommodating the caste system within the church. Regarding persecution in North India: "Most police officers belong to anti-Christian

groups affiliated with the Sangh family. They just watch while the Christians are beaten, violated, and their properties vandalized. Being a Christian in North India has never been so difficult in history" (38-39). As in the missionary era when the persecuted believers were relocated to the mission compounds, today they should be temporarily relocated into theological seminaries. He asserts: "In most villages, there is at least one pastor and a small Christian fellowship or a house church" (41).

There is a brief history of Christianity in Northeast India from the perspective of identity and transformation. Lalsangkima writes: "Their worldviews have been Christianized so much that most of them have closely related Christianity with their sense of ethnic identity" (50). Out of envy non-Christians make allegations that Christians have corrupted the culture, as converted Christians are more educated and economically developed. The author states that, among all people groups, the first converts diligently evangelized their own people.

Robert Eric Frykenberg comments about Christians in Kerala: "Hindu in culture, Christian in faith, Persian or Syrian (orthodox) in doctrine, ecclesiology, and ritual" (64). Protestant missions emphasized the equality of all humans and education as a means of mission. There are many IICs—Indian Initiated Churches. "The missionaries believed that every Indigenous Christian should be able to read the Scripture in their tongue" (87). The contribution of Bible women has been enormous. Many mass movements from lower castes were a quest for a new identity.

Part II: Theological Dimensions

There is a move from contextualization of Christian theology to theologizing in context. There are many highly anthropocentric theologies: Dalit theology, Tribal theology, Feminine theology, etc. These theologies created a paradigm shift from victimhood to active assertion of rights. Hermeneutics continues to adapt itself to meet the needs of the readers and hearers by drawing meaning for a particular context, for example interpreting texts grounded on the existential realities of the tribal people, land, society, culture, belief system, polity, economic psyche, and so on. Inadequacies of, and dissatisfaction with, the historical-critical approach led to the development of new hermeneutical methods.

Jose Philip writes, "Apologetics for the most part is understood as rationally establishing the veracity of the Christian faith" (135). He speaks of four aspects of apologetics: context, canon, community, and Christ. New Testament apologetics consist of miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and personal testimony of eyewitnesses. At the same time, Jesus did not appeal to a faith devoid of knowledge: "The goal of Christian apologetics, then, is the glory of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, its resources are the Word and the Spirit, and its reward is the salvation of souls" (145).

There have been hymns translated from English and German. The singing of Psalms could be seen in a few languages. The Church in India has used four kinds of songs: Western, classical, folk or tribal, and light music. Many missionaries organized singing bands and mass movements. One globally popular song actually originated in Meghalaya: "I have decided to follow Jesus."

Part III: Social and Cultural Dimensions

One pioneer of Indian nationalism was a Christian: Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee. There were several others listed by the author including Krishtodas Pal. In 1888 women attended the Indian National Congress. Of the ten delegates, three were women: Pandit Ramabai, Mesdames

Triumbuck, and Shevantibai M. Nikambe. Anti-Christian propaganda seeks to eradicate the contribution of Christians to the nation, but Christians being patriotic will continue doing good.

One chapter is on identity and talks about social duality. By self-definition, self-perception, and self-consciousness, some Christians self-present themselves as Hindu followers of Christ. On the other hand, the lower-caste converts see themselves as liberated. Yet there are Dalit converts who have several disadvantages: belonging to a minority religion; discrimination in the church; discrimination in society; and, detachment from their caste because of a change of faith.

Part IV: Missional Challenges

In this section, four missional challenges are addressed: gender inequality and domestic violence, human trafficking, disability discourse, and a mental health crisis. Domestic violence in Christian homes is not acknowledged by Christian leaders in India. The church should escalate teaching, training, and counseling to address the issue in the church and society. Human trafficking has to be handled by three approaches: protection, prosecution, and prevention. The church could offer to the disability discourse the following: the gospel; mutuality, friendship, and acceptance as characterized by the triune God; service and advocacy, using connections at local, regional, and global levels; and, mobilize resources and expertise. There is a concern regarding the cultural beliefs, stigma, and existence of non-medical models of engaging with mental health. Indian Christians simply think it is a lack of intimacy with God, a specific sin, or demonic influence. The model of walking alongside is for creating space to engage: creating safety, entering, engaging, acknowledging, validating, recapturing the role of emotions, and making meaning and redirection.

Conclusion

In this book, all the contributors have done their best to focus on the status of Christians and Christianity in India today. There are noteworthy articles with keen insights, analysis, and interpretation. The book has some constructive historical information about the contribution of Christians to the nation, but the discussion needs more elaboration with interpretive analysis, not just description. Regarding the missional challenges, only four social issues are addressed; several areas, including the challenge of reaching contemporary India, are neglected. In general, *Christians and Christianity in India Today* is a valuable book for Christian leaders in India and those interested in India.

Book Review

Aychi B. R. with Dave Coles, *Living Fire: Advancing God's Kingdom in Challenging Places*

Reviewed by Mark Naylor

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Aychi B. R. with Dave Coles (2025). *Living Fire: Advancing God's Kingdom in Challenging Places*. Richardson, TX, USA: Beyond, 240 pp., $12.99, paperback, ISBN: 979-8-9870207-5-3, $7.99, ebook.

Abstract

Living Fire: Advancing God's Kingdom in Challenging Places presents a detailed framework for initiating and sustaining Disciple Making Movements (DMM) among Unreached People Groups (UPG) in African contexts. The work builds upon themes introduced in Aychi B. R.'s previous article "Factors that Multiply Movements" in *Fruit to Harvest* (2019), while offering fresh insights into movement sustainability and leadership development. The book expounds on key factors for successful disciple-making movements. It provides both biblical foundations and practical implementations, supported by real life examples.

Key Words: church planting, disciple-making, DMM, indigenous leadership, movement dynamics, multiplication, sustainability

Introduction

Unlike Dave Coles' previous collaboration with Aila Tasse in *Cabbages in the Desert*, which focused on case studies (reviewed in *Global Missiology*: Naylor 2024), *Living Fire* presents a systematic analysis of DMM principles and practices as revealed through a family of disciple-making movements initiated by Aychi B. R. in Africa. The book provides a description of processes, principles, and practices illustrated by numerous impacting examples of ministry development over years of field experience. While many of these principles have been explained elsewhere, what distinguishes this book is its demonstration of how these principles and practices have been employed for effective disciple-making multiplication. Valuable lessons are offered about both successful movements and potential failure points.

Content Analysis

The book's three sections—"Ignite," "Accelerate," and "Sustain"—develop fundamental elements of successful disciple-making movements, beginning with the author's (Aychi) own spiritual journey and calling to DMM ministry. At its core, the work emphasizes the essential nature of conviction and commitment in DMM ministry. This commitment manifests through dedicated prayer, access ministry, and significant engagements with communities.

Aychi stresses the importance of maintaining a healthy dissatisfaction with the condition of a lost world—a dissatisfaction that leads to a God-sized vision, coupled with passionate perseverance and love in the face of persecution. Such faith is often generated and strengthened through supernatural experiences, leading believers to bold proclamation and selfless service. These DMM principles are not merely theoretical constructs but are demonstrated through real-life examples of sacrificial dedication to the cause of Christ despite personal loss and opposition.

The chapter organization follows a logical progression from foundational concepts through implementation and sustainability. Beginning with healthy dissatisfaction and extraordinary prayer, the text moves through relationship-focused ministry approaches and access strategies before addressing more complex topics such as indigenous incarnation of the gospel and multiplication strategies. The delineation of the concepts is not an algorithm for ministry promising a guaranteed outcome, but a challenge for all DMM practitioners to evaluate their own priorities and values in disciple-making—what to adopt and what to avoid.

Implementation and Practice

The real-life descriptions demonstrate which practices lead to spiritual fruit, multiplication, and the ongoing establishment of churches. In discussing obedient relationship to Christ, Chapter 17 explores the indigenous incarnation of the gospel, emphasizing how Discovery Bible Studies (described in Chapter 13 and Appendix B) keep people "rooted in Scripture," leading the groups towards practical application of biblical discoveries. This approach prioritizes divine guidance over personal or cultural preferences, creating a framework for authentic spiritual growth.

The concept of sacrificial servanthood receives particular attention in Chapter 23, "Every Believer Active." Here, the author explores "the power of prayer, the power of obedience, the power of listening to God, the power of courage to go wherever he leads, and the power of relationship—going to serve with no title" (161). This chapter includes powerful testimonies of perseverance through persecution, illustrating the practical costs and rewards of committed discipleship.

Miracles, healings, dreams, and deliverance are all experiences that have been a bridge to the gospel. Aychi explains in Chapter 16, "Supernatural Manifestations," how these "occur quite commonly in these movements" (109) and are interpreted as God confirming his truth. It may be that this dimension of God's revealed power is a key condition in the establishment of disciple-making movements, emphasizing the moving of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to faith.

Ecclesiological Framework

Chapter 24, "Church Redefined," presents Aychi's ecclesiological framework and defines church as "a local group of baptized believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who gather regularly for worship, nurturing, and fellowship. Then they depart the gathering, seeking to obey all the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ" (166). This definition intentionally emphasizes function over form, advocating for small group sizes (averaging 25 people or two families) and focusing on movement DNA rather than structural elements.

The essential elements of a biblical church are not specifically listed, but there are hints that reliance on the Bible and the Holy Spirit for ecclesiology leads to a move away from the authority of established church structures and practices. The Holy Spirit guided the first believers "to acknowledge that believing in Jesus and obeying the word of God, with cultural sensitivity, was sufficient. This way, all can grow within their cultural context as part of the larger body of Christ" (167).

This ecclesiology contrasts with the practices and assumptions of traditional churches, raising the question of how these emerging "groups of baptized believers" relate to the existing traditional churches. Aychi suggests that developing relationships in a spirit of love with local traditional churches on the level of a kingdom vision of the great commission will create goodwill. Because

the DMM focus is to reach the unreached, the existing local churches do not feel threatened. The goal is to establish shared definitions of "church" and "disciple" that will encourage the traditional churches to support the movement of disciples making disciples. Strategic partnership with traditional churches allows for "freedom [for DMM practitioners] to minister contextually while still offering oversight [by traditional churches], ensuring both boundaries and permission are in place" (171).

The collaboration with a wide variety of church traditions to plant new groups among the unreached outside of those traditions seems fraught with potential tensions. I speculate from my own experience in Southeast Asia that cultural distinctions hamper assimilation and so allow for comfort with ecclesial separation, while permitting affirmation and support between the communities. Whatever the case, the fact that many traditional churches in the region have embraced this disciple-making vision and set apart leaders to play a key role in the establishment of DMM groups indicates that the impact of this multiplication methodology has, to a large extent, outweighed the demands of traditional practices. Nonetheless, it does raise the question about the nature of current and potential tensions with traditional churches that can hinder movements.

Leadership Development

The leadership development model presented in the Chapter 24, "Church Redefined," creates a clear hierarchical structure for Aychi's DMM model while maintaining flexibility and local autonomy. From Area Managers through to Church Planters/Disciple Makers, each level serves specific functions in maintaining movement health and multiplication of both groups and leaders. This structure is complemented by the Strategy Coordinator Leaders' Training (SCLT) framework, which emphasizes peer-to-peer interaction and the sharing of fruitful practices. What is notable is the stress on a non-hierarchical dynamic—a "shared priesthood circle"—that eschews personal power dynamics and encourages participants to ask questions, challenge concepts, correct problems, and offer suggestions. The focus is on the content because of a common commitment to the mission, not on personalities.

Sustainability and Financial Independence

Chapter 28 of Living Fire offers essential insights into fostering financial sustainability for thriving movements. The author emphasizes the importance of community ownership rooted in biblical generosity, firmly rejecting dependency on external funding. This approach does not mean completely rejecting outside support but recognizing that dependence on external wealth and influence can undermine a movement's vitality. Aychi's approach encourages local responsibility and ownership through practical guidelines that discourage fully funding initiatives from external sources, ensuring participants actively contribute to the movement's sustainability.

One important contribution this chapter makes is the insistence on teaching biblical generosity. This approach helps participants develop a sense of ownership and accountability before God as they discover their role in his mission. The chapter also provides a valuable collection of biblical principles and verses that can be used to guide disciple-making groups and leaders in cultivating a practice of generosity that aligns with God's will, character, and mission.

Critical Evaluation

Living Fire has many strengths for guiding DMM practitioners, such as clear practical guidance for starting and leading movements and a strong leadership development framework. However, there are some areas that call for further elaboration.

Contextual adaptation: The book describes an African ministry context where the Bible is deeply respected as a holy book, religion and spirituality are taken seriously, miracles are not seen as unusual, and there is a strong reverence for God. Such spiritual openness creates a fertile ground for disciple-making movements. However, these principles and practices may not directly apply in more secular societies. While there may be less opposition and greater freedom for ministry, receptivity and resonance are often much less. Practitioners using this book as a guide will need to adapt its principles and practices to fit their specific cultural and spiritual contexts.

Theological bases for DBS: The discussion of Discovery Bible Study (DBS) in chapter 17 and Appendix B is practical and aligns well with DMM practices in other parts of the world. However, the discussion would be even stronger with a deeper exploration of the theological foundations of DBS. These include a high view of the Holy Spirit's role to guide the process (rather than a teacher), confidence in the Bible's clarity and accessibility (the perspicuity of Scripture), and a hermeneutic that views the Bible as a revelation of God's character, will, and mission. The discovery dynamic ensures that the Bible is not treated as a religious icon, a manual of instructions, or an inaccessible source of wisdom. Instead, it is to be embraced as a call and pathway to pursue a relation with God through Christ.

Conflict resolution: The book acknowledges potential tensions in working with traditional churches, but including more detailed case studies on conflict resolution would make the presentation even more practical. The book would also benefit from additional examples of leadership development challenges, especially around balancing oversight and autonomy, and how these issues are being addressed. These added details would be valuable for other practitioners involved in disciple-making movements.

Conclusion

Living Fire is a valuable resource for understanding and applying a Disciple Making Movement (DMM) approach to church planting in difficult settings. Its systematic approach to DMM implementation, supported by extensive field experience and concrete examples, makes it valuable for both practitioners and scholars. Some aspects would benefit from deeper exploration, particularly regarding contextual adaptability and conflict resolution. Nevertheless, the principles and practices presented provide essential guidance for those engaged in or considering DMM ministry. The book successfully bridges theoretical frameworks with practical application, offering a robust foundation for DMM initiatives in contexts where traditional church planting approaches have proven ineffective.

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