

**Review**  
Christian Witness in Pluralistic Contexts in the Twenty-First Century

Ed. Enoch Wan  
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Evangelicals have always had to work within a pluralistic context in the so-called Southern and Eastern worlds. However, in the last fifty years world religious pluralism has increasingly come home to the West. This cutting edge collection of essays, concerning evangelical witness to various world religions, addresses both contexts.

Islam, the religion which receives the most attention by the press in North America, is the focus of the first four chapters. Contributors also discuss an evangelical response to contemporary, revitalized religious and political Hinduism in India. Next are two chapters giving an historical survey of Christian encounter with Buddhism and an excellent discussion of twelve fundamental theological disparities between it and biblical Christianity. Finally, there are chapters on Chinese folk religion, African traditional religion, and the relationship between nominal Christianity and the development of syncretistic, new, religious movements. The last chapter is an excellent survey of various inadequate evangelical responses to these new movements, together with a proposed new approach to a more effective evangelistic engagement with them.

Each of the chapters gives very valuable information and asks probing questions for further research. The major articles on Islam by J. Dudley Woodberry and Timothy C. Tennent cover some of the same ground. Both discuss Qur'anic misunderstanding of the biblical teaching of the Trinity as a carnal trinity of Allah, Mary, and Jesus and hence its rejection of Jesus as a physical son of Allah and Mary. Any Christian can rightly agree with the Qur'anic condemnation at this point. Furthermore, both especially deal with a complete discussion of whether the Qur'an actually denies the past death and resurrection of 'Isa as Surah 4:157 seems to indicate. Both Tennent and Woodbury, citing ancient and modern Islamic commentators, agree that it does not, a contention which most contemporary Muslims deny. They cover material dealt with extensively in a previous generation by G. Parrinder's scholarly *Jesus and the Qur'an*. However, such a reminder is necessary in this generation that needs to be reminded of the need for a positive engagement with Islam instead of a violent reaction against it. One feature of Woodbury's article is an excellent comparison chart between formal and folk Islam that draws our attention to the religious reality of how the vast majority of Muslims live.

Paul Hiebert's outstanding article on Hinduism gives an analysis of the various movements within Hinduism and the Indian church, using the social science concepts of conversion, accommodation, and revitalization movements. He shows how both Hinduism and the Indian church are dealing with opposing forces of globalization and

localism at the same time. Hiebert's one weakness is that he gives no antidote to the unconscious individualism of typical Western rejection of the Hindu caste system. Possibly this is because of Hiebert's Anabaptist background which lacks focus upon a covenantal understanding of family and people. I discuss this type of theology extensively in my dissertation, *Towards a Covenantal Understanding of Ethnicity*.

Alex G. Smith's, "A Christian Response to Buddhism," makes a strong plea for the church to begin to pray for the Buddhist world, just as it has begun to earnestly pray for Muslim world. Buddhist peoples are the most neglected of the major blocks of unreached peoples in the world. Smith makes several superb recommendations based on a sensitive, missiological understanding of these shame-based cultures. He recommends again the so-often forgotten Nevius Principles, which worked so dynamically in Korea but which were not accepted in most other Buddhist lands.

Gailyn Van Rheenen's discussion of why folk religion is growing rapidly in postmodern and post-Christian America is timely. The evangelical church's primary emphasis, he states, is upon a privatized, conversionist religion, not a kingdom theology. Actually, it seems to me that this is the result of an almost exclusive emphasis upon a dispensational, decisional theology in American evangelicalism. The antidote is a wholistic, kingdom-oriented, covenantal theology.

Van Rheenen introduces Enoch Wan's fascinating compendium of many key insights he has developed over the years for evangelizing folk religionists. Most notable are his antidotes to dualistic theological concepts. His insights on demonization, the model of culture based in the Trinity, and a contextualized, relational Christology are outstanding.

Tite Tiénou exposes the shallowness of much of the power encounter and *Prayer of Jabez* prayer fads in Africa. The primary focus of folk religion in that region has always been man centered, with a great emphasis upon health, prosperity, honor, and progeny. These traditional themes, Tiénou contends, have been fostered rather than challenged by the power encounter and *Jabez* fads. These American teachings, he implies, are a rejection of the knowledge of the true God and His suffering servant Son. I strongly agree. At the same time, however, it is impossible to deny that there are real spiritual needs being met by the *Jabez* and power encounter movements.

The last two articles are a plea for the missiological and counter-cult communities to mutually develop contextualized, church planting approaches to the new religions of the world. One of these approaches, John Morehead suggests, is to understand these new movements as religion-centered cultures, rather than as Christian cults dealt with by anathemas. For centuries, the medieval church utilized this older approach in dealing with Islam. Ramon Lull and other solitary voices disagreed. It wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that we have begun a more contextualized and culturally sensitive approach.

Both individually and collectively these articles provide timely and much needed insight. I intend to use the volume in my comparative religions class next semester.